Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: Abraham Lincoln as an Adult Learner

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INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION: ABRAHAM LINCOLN AS AN ADULT LEARNER

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Master of Arts of Education

By
Warren Greer

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INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION:
ABRAHAM LINCOLN AS AN ADULT LEARNER

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Over the last two decades, research has identified factors that foster versus undermine human motivation and wellbeing with important implications for learning and performance. Much of the research is concerned with intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation and autonomous versus non-autonomous learning environments. The data suggests that learning and performance are often significantly enhanced in autonomy-supportive environments that foster intrinsic motivational perspectives. This study examines the lived experience of Abraham Lincoln in the context of his adult learning motivation, forming a qualitative narrative around his adult educational experiences. It was hypothesized that Abraham Lincoln benefited from learning experiences with high levels of both intrinsic motivation and autonomy-supportive contexts. Results indicate that Abraham Lincoln experienced near total autonomy in his learning activities and that most of his adult learning activities were intrinsically-motivated. A discussion section explores the relevance of the findings to select topics in adult education.

Keywords: Intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, autonomy.
INTRODUCTION

Despite an array of literature interpreting almost every facet the sixteenth president’s life, Abraham Lincoln’s educational experiences remain largely unexamined. With less than two years of formal schooling, Lincoln rose to improbable intellectual heights. Few researchers have examined his education fully, and none have done so in the context of research on education and learning. As curators at the Smithsonian Institution (2012) put it, “In the two-hundredth year since his birth, Abraham Lincoln remains as much a puzzle as he was to his contemporaries. That he came from nothing and was an obscure figure, almost to the moment of his nomination for the presidency, only adds to his mystery.”

In contrast to the dearth of interpretative analysis of Lincoln’s educational experiences, an abundance of research has emerged over the last two decades identifying factors that foster versus undermine learning motivation and performance (Lai, 2011). Much of the research is concerned with intrinsic versus extrinsic perspectives and autonomous vs. non-autonomous learning environments. The data suggests that learning and performance are enhanced in autonomy-supportive environments that foster intrinsic motivational perspectives (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Lai, 2011, Stipek, 1996).

This thesis presents a case study of Lincoln’s adult educational experiences in the context of theories on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. By understanding the educational experiences of individuals such as Lincoln, it is possible to gain insights that can aid modern adults and adult educators in their pursuit of effective educational practices. As psychologist Abraham Maslow (1971) noted, “If we want to know how tall
the human species can grow, then obviously it is well to pick out the ones who are already tallest and study them” (p. 7).

In researching Lincoln’s adult learning activities, the following questions were used:

1) To what extent did Lincoln engage in learning activities as an adult?

2) Did Lincoln engage in adult learning activities for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons?

3) To what extent were Lincoln’s educational activities autonomous and self-directed?

During the research process, extensive primary source material was gathered along with limited secondary source material. This evidence was analyzed in the context of definitions for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is doing an activity because it is novel, fun, or challenging, whereas extrinsic motivation is doing something because of external pressures or outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Lai, 2011, Stipek, 1996). In analyzing Lincoln’s adult learning activities, the following operational definitions for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were applied:

**Intrinsic:**

1) The activity is engaged in autonomously by the learner without outside prods or pressures.

2) The activity is novel, challenging, fun, or fulfilling from the perspective of the learner.

3) The activity leads to no direct tangible rewards that are separable from the satisfaction inherent in the activity.

**Extrinsic:**

1) The activity is non-autonomous and controlled.

2) The activity arises from an external prod or pressure.

3) The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards.
For adult educators, learning motivation is an important consideration (Houde, 2006). Raymond J. Wlodkowski, author of Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults (2011), states that “motivation is important not only because it apparently improves learning but also because it mediates learning and is a consequence of learning as well” (p. 5). Intrinsic motivation, in particular, is viewed as an important ingredient of educational flourishing. Researcher Emily Lai writes that “traditionally, educators consider intrinsic motivation to be more desirable and to result in better learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation” (Lai, 2011, p. 2). An abundance of research suggests that intrinsic motivation results more dynamic learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation. As Ryan and Deci (2000b) note:

Comparisons between people whose motivation is authentic (literally, self-authored or endorsed) and those who are merely externally controlled for an action typically reveal that the former, relative to the latter, have more interest, excitement, and confidence, which in turn is manifest both as enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity and as heightened vitality, self-esteem, and general well-being (p.69).

Abraham Lincoln’s educational experiences present fascinating questions about the nature of effective education. How did a rough-hewn westerner from the backwoods attain such a remarkable understanding of the world? This study seeks to shed light on the educational experiences of one of America’s greatest presidents. The findings of this case study are presented in the section titled Results, and a discussion section relates the findings to specific topics in adult education.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review explores literature on Lincoln’s educational experiences and literature on human motivation. Although the subject of Lincoln has notoriously generated more writing and analysis than almost any other historical topic, relatively little focus has been devoted to interpreting his learning experiences. Literature on Lincoln’s educational experiences is divided into three time periods: 1860-1930; 1930-1975; and 1975-present. This is followed by a review of literature on human motivation from the early twentieth century to the present. Over this sustained period, psychologists have come to distinguish between two broad categories of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Over the last thirty years, researchers have increasingly applied motivation theory to learning environments, shedding new light on the factors that foster versus undermine student performance.

1. Literature on Lincoln’s Educational Experiences

Although the subject of Lincoln has notoriously generated more writing and analysis than almost any other historical topic, relatively little focus has been devoted to interpreting his learning experiences. One can point to hundreds of specialized works on Lincoln—Lincoln and the Press (1941); Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream (1978); Lincoln’s Melancholy (2005)—but in-depth studies devoted to his learning experiences can be difficult to find. The literature presented here is divided into three time periods: 1860-1930; 1930-1975; and 1975-present.
Concerted study of Lincoln’s life began soon after his nomination as the Republican candidate for president in 1860. From that time forward, a steady stream Lincoln-related literature has poured forth. Many of the early works on Abraham Lincoln appeared prior to the emergence of a disciplined field of academic history in the United States. During this period, historical research was largely a “gentlemanly endeavor,” and, although far from fruitless, these early works lacked the precision and documentation that has defined the field of academic history since (Peterson, 1995, p. 118). As might be expected, most of the early interpretations of Lincoln’s life generally suffer from lack of source material in comparison to modern works that have benefited from the ongoing discovery of lost and forgotten Lincoln-related documents. Also lacking in these early works is interpretation of Lincoln’s adult learning experiences, which were seen as superfluous by many of his lay biographers.

Amongst the early interpreters of the sixteenth president’s educational experiences, Lincoln himself is an important source of information. Asked to provide information for campaign biographies, Lincoln wrote two autobiographical sketches just prior to his 1860 election in which he interpreted his education with calculated humility. “There were some schools, so called,” he described in reference to his childhood, “but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond ‘readin, writin, and cipherin’ to the rule of three.” Therefore, he lamented, “when I came of age I did not know much… The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity” (Lincoln, 1859). In another auto-biographical sketch, written in the 3rd person, Lincoln confessed that “the aggregate of all his schooling did
not amount to one year,” and that he “was never in a college or academy as a student.”
The learning that he was able to accomplish, he simply “picked up” (Lincoln, 1860a, p. 62). Some scholars have asserted that Lincoln purposefully downplayed his educational advancement in order to bolster his appearance as a humble, self-made man.

One of the earliest and most popular Lincoln biographies was William M. Thayer’s The Pioneer Boy and How He Became President (1863). Thayer asserted that the foundations of Lincoln’s educational success were principles such as perseverance, because, he writes, successful people “do what they undertake.” This, says Thayer, was how Lincoln “mastered every book put into his hand” (p. 136). Like other authors to come, Thayer elevated Lincoln’s early reading materials to an ideal catalog of useful and informative books. “The small library he enjoyed in his early years was exactly suited to make him the man that he is” (p. 309). Like most of the early biographies on Lincoln, Thayer’s effort suffered from lack of historical research and relied upon a plethora of fabricated anecdotes.

Another important early biography of Lincoln was written by his law partner William Herndon, who could call upon sixteen years of close work with Lincoln to bolster his material. In addition to personal experiences, Herndon scoured the countryside in Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky, documenting personal recollections about the sixteenth president. Herndon’s work, co-authored with editor Jesse Weik, first appeared in 1889 as Herndon’s Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life. The book had much to say about Lincoln’s child and adult learning experiences, and it continues to stand as one of the most important interpretations of Lincoln’s life. Herndon offers ample evidence of Lincoln’s fondness for reading, quoting numerous friends and
neighbors who attest to Lincoln’s love of books. Lincoln read so much, reported Herndon, he developed a reputation for laziness in a frontier culture that placed a premium on physical labor. Unable to attend school regularly, Lincoln engaged in self-directed learning activities such as writing on boards to enhance his math and writing skills. In early adulthood, Lincoln continued to educate himself, reading Shakespeare and natural history in his spare time. Lincoln also “read law,” which in frontier Illinois meant that he was preparing to become a lawyer. This type of self-education seemed to work for Lincoln. Lincoln also taught himself the art of surveying and mastered Euclidean geometry (Herndon, 1921).

Lincoln’s White House secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay, published a multi-volume biography decades after Lincoln’s presidency. Abraham Lincoln: A History; Vols. 1-10 (1891-1909) focused mostly on political issues but also offered interpretations of Lincoln’s learning experiences. Hay and Nicolay described the culture of Lincoln’s youth as intellectually destitute. Lincoln was a “great-spirited child… wasting his ingenuity” in crude circumstances. Lincoln’s “high intelligence,” was “starving for want of the simple appliances of education.” Like many biographers to come, Nicolay and Hay paid scant attention to the ways in which Lincoln’s educational experiences differed from others’ and attributed Lincoln’s intellectual rise to uncanny natural gifts.

Many of the early literary efforts on Lincoln focused on benefiting young people, who were encouraged to use the sixteenth president as a model that they could emulate. The popular rags-to-riches author Horatio Alger was among those who wrote in this mold. “I venture to say,” wrote Alger in The Backwoods Boy (1883), “that among our
public men there is not one whose life can be studied with more interest and profit by American youth than that of Abraham Lincoln.” An important part of that life, says Alger, was education, and he portrayed Lincoln’s learning experiences as conscious choices that were instrumental in his success. By reading books and honing his writing skills, Lincoln was “laying the foundation of his future eminence,” and slowly developing “his mind and character.”

The renowned “muck-raking” author Ida Tarbell made a life-long effort to research and write about Abraham Lincoln. The culmination of these efforts was her book, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1900), which included a plethora of new research that Tarbell personally conducted. Although Tarbell characterized Lincoln’s education as disorganized, she held his lack of formal schooling as unimportant compared to his love of reading. “More or less of a school-room is a matter of small importance,” she wrote, especially “if a boy has learned to read, and to think of what he reads” (p. 29). By engaging in “curious work,” as opposed to assigned readings, Lincoln brought “profound seriousness” to his learning, which contrasted with children of Tarbell’s era, who “would hardly be expected” to do the same (p. 30)

One of the most interesting early interpretations of Lincoln’s learning experiences came from the pre-presidential Woodrow Wilson, whose academic background offered new perspectives on both Lincoln and American education (Peterson, 1995). While president of Princeton University, Wilson used Lincoln to bolster his critique of American higher education. Would Lincoln “have been of more or less service to his country,” he asked his audiences, “had he attended one of our universities” (p. 166)? The answer, for Wilson, was an implied ‘no’ due to the alleged shortcomings in post-
secondary education at the time. Wilson believed that post-secondary institutions were shunning traditional liberal arts curricula in favor of professional specialization, a shift he deemed to be ruinous.

In 1917, British author Lord Charnwood produced a full-length biography titled *Abraham Lincoln* that included interesting interpretations of his adult learning experiences. Charnwood made note of Lincoln’s love of poetry, citing it as evidence that he was a well-rounded individual. Charnwood challenged Herndon’s viewpoint that Lincoln was intellectually uncurious, pointing to Lincoln’s fondness for Burns and Shakespeare as evidence to the contrary. Also noted is Lincoln’s concerted study of the Bible and Euclidian geometry, which Charnwood sees in his later speeches and writings. “Passages abound in these speeches which to almost any literate taste are arresting for their simple beauty of their English, a beauty characteristic of one who had learned to reason with Euclid and learned to feel and to speak with the authors of the Bible” (p. 132).

Another of Lincoln’s major non-academic biographers was William Barton, who published the first of four planned volumes titled *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* in 1925. Barton’s interpretation of Lincoln’s education was different than most, arguing that his formal schooling—while rudimentary and crude—provided valuable, even critical, learning. “I know the kind of schools Lincoln attended,” Barton boasted, “and in spite of their grave limitations I have a high sense of their value” (p. 120). Similarly, if Lincoln’s access to books was lacking, the books he is known to have read and enjoyed were an ideal selection. The books Lincoln read “would be a profit for any American boy,” even
“if he were shut up with these half-dozen books and no others until he thoroughly mastered them” (p. 121).

*Academic Historians Enter Lincoln Studies: 1925-1975*

The 1930’s marked a turning point in Lincoln studies, as academic historians began to enter the field. Assessing the Lincoln record until that time, James G. Randall (1936) lamented that “the hand of the amateur has rested heavily upon Lincoln studies.” Although an exhaustive array of literature had been written on Lincoln to date, the “careful scholar need not go far to discover gaps, doubts, prevalent misconceptions, unsupported interpretations, and erroneous assumptions,” he wrote (p. 270). Fueled in part by Randall’s call to action, the field of Lincoln studies was soon bolstered by a new breed of academics, who insisted that thorough documentation and verifiable evidence be the foundations credible interpretations.

Renowned statesman and historian Albert J. Beveridge produced a critically acclaimed Lincoln biography in 1928, offering new interpretations of Lincoln’s learning experiences. Beveridge overlooked Lincoln’s meager formal education, stating that his experiences in frontier culture were “of far greater value than any premature schooling could have been” (p. 37). Many of Lincoln’s teachers, he noted, were only semi-literate themselves, so Lincoln’s self-directed learning activities were more important in his development. Lincoln’s love of reading and his diligent practice of grammar and math were important aspects of his young adulthood. Once Lincoln exhausted his meager supply of books at home, he scoured the countryside for more books, and became “an
intellectual prowler for the sustenance of the printed page” (p. 67). “Thus,” concludes Beveridge, “by reading, listening, [and] absorbing, Abraham’s knowledge grew” (p. 68).

James J. Randall was among the first academic historians to write a full-length study of Lincoln. *Mr. Lincoln* (1945) focused on Lincoln’s personal life as opposed to his political and professional affairs. Commenting on Lincoln’s learning experiences, Randall noted that “self-education” was “Lincoln’s way,” which put him in contact with a few “serviceable classics” (p. 8). Lincoln also gained much from the frontier communities in which he lived, which “offered much that wasn’t in books” (p. 9). The men and women who peopled these communities, Randall noted, were distinguished for their common sense, keen observations, and quick wits. Randall made cursory references to Lincoln’s adult learning experiences, but he largely overlooked these important aspects of Lincoln’s adult development.

Appearing in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Charles H. Coleman’s article, “Spelling Bothered Lincoln, Too” (1956), offered unique interpretation of Lincoln’s education. Acknowledging that “Lincoln had little formal schooling,” Coleman characterized Lincoln’s education as “progressive,” meaning that it took place over a longer sustained period than most of his contemporaries (p. 407). Lincoln’s learning was the result of “felt need” and “necessity,” which Coleman thought was helpful because it improved his “student motivation” (p. 410). Lincoln was a “voracious” yet “highly selective” reader, and his deep understanding of a handful of important works shaped his style and gave him an impressive vocabulary (p. 414).

As part of the Lincoln Sesquicentennial observance, James T. Hickey penned “Three R’s in Lincoln’s Education: Rogers, Riggin, and Rankin.” Although lacking in
corroborating evidence, Hickey proposes that the Rogers, Riggin, and Rankin families had a marked impact on Lincoln’s education during his stay in New Salem Illinois. Lincoln is known, for example, to have visited the Rogers family in search of books, and Hickey presents new information on that family’s collection, suggesting possible influences on Lincoln. Hickey suggests that the other families of Riggin and Rankin—being highly educated and in close proximity to Lincoln—likely influence his learning as well.

In 1959, Louis A. Warren published, *Lincoln’s Youth*, offering interesting new interpretations of Lincoln’s early learning. Asserting that Lincoln could both read and write by age seven, Warren wondered whether he was “gifted” in displaying this rare ability on the western frontier (p. 29). Warren chronicles Lincoln’s reading in detail, noting the high quality of much of the material. For Warren, Lincoln’s catalog of popular classics was an ideal education of sorts. Another factor, thought Warren, was “the helpful and sympathetic attitude of his parents,” who provided “an atmosphere congenial to study” (p. 33). Rather than portray Lincoln’s parents as uneducated backwoods people, Warren cites their willingness to send Lincoln to school and their tolerance of his heavy reading as evidence of their support.

*Modern interpretations: 1975- Present*

Among the most substantial recent work on Lincoln’s educational experiences has been conducted by authors analyzing his writing. Paul M. Angle’s *Lincoln’s Power with Words* (1981) is an example. Of all the “paradoxical” elements in Lincoln’s career, Angle states, most striking is “the fact that with less than a year of formal schooling... he
became one of the great masters of the English language” (p. 9). Although Angle offers a credible and thoughtful sketch of Lincoln’s educational experiences, he concludes that “Lincoln's mastery of the language is not explained by the education which he enjoyed” (p. 10). This paradox of Lincoln’s life also extended to his reading. For Angle, if “the bare facts of Lincoln's education are insufficient to explain his capacity for expression, so too are his reading habits” (p. 12). After dismissing Lincoln’s education and reading habits as explanations for his remarkable speeches and writings, Angle cites his constant political campaigning and speech making as more likely contributors to his mastery of the English language. In the end, Angle concludes that Lincoln’s “own great qualities—his ruggedness, his tenderness, his tolerance, his humility” are the only plausible explanation for his linguistic greatness, as they are “mirrored in what he wrote that his words will live as long as the English tongue” (p. 27).

Fred Kaplan’s *Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer* (2008) offers another examination of the foundations of Lincoln’s writing. Kaplan argues with effect that Lincoln’s early reading significantly impacted his worldview, finding its way not only into his political speeches but into his conduct as well. An example is Thomas Dilworth’s *New Guide to the English Tongue*, which offered Lincoln advice that he seemingly adopted in later life: “Personal merit is all a man can call his own,” writes Dilworth. “Whoever strictly adheres to honesty and truth, and leads a regular and virtuous life, is more truly noble than a debauched abandoned profligate...” (p. 10). Kaplan also cites Lincoln’s love of Shakespeare and poetry as important factors in his development as writer. The play, *Hamlet*, for example, “became a permanent part of [Lincoln’s] consciousness” (p. 42). The lessons he learned from these and other authors
affirmed Lincoln’s “sustained faith in man’s reasoning faculty” and humankind’s “power to advance good works” (p. 43).

Author Marshall Myers supplies yet another credible analysis of Lincoln’s writing with his work, “Rugged Grandeur: A Study of the Influences on the Writing Style of Abraham Lincoln and a Brief Study of his Writing Habits” (2004). Myers acknowledges that Lincoln’s reading was a “major influence on his speaking and writing,” but, he asserts, there are “five other important influences” that have largely been ignored (p. 350). Among these are Lincoln’s self-education, his embrace of a “plain style,” and his disuse of the gushing sentimentality that was common in the 19th century. These factors, Myers argues, Help us better understand Lincoln “as a man and… as a writer” (p. 351).

Focus upon Lincoln’s reading experiences has also emerged in the last few decades. Robert Bray’s Reading with Lincoln (2010) is a biographical account of the works Lincoln read, seeking to explain the improbability of Lincoln’s intellectual rise. Bray—a self-described liberal arts professor—marvels that Lincoln accomplished on his own the very objective Bray has struggled to achieve with his college students: “better reading, better thinking, and better writing.” In drawing his account, Bray explores the books that Lincoln is known to have “assimilated him into his being” so as to uncover the foundations of his “liberal arts education” (p. ix). Lincoln, says Bray, was a selective reader who had difficulty reading broadly simply for the sake of comprehensiveness. More discriminating, Lincoln achieved a profound understanding and appreciation of a number of significant works, which, says Bray, was a contributing factor in his intellectual ascendance.
The amateurish *Abraham Lincoln and the Structure of Reason* by David Hirsch and Dan Van Haften was published in 2010, arguing that Lincoln’s study of Euclidian geometry was the essential factor in his education. For Hirsch and Haften, analysis of Lincoln’s most remarkable speeches and writings can be boiled down to Euclidian principles for effective argumentation. This was “the bone upon which Lincoln laid his muscle of reason,” they write, transforming “geometry into speech.” Thus, the authors claim to “discover” for the first time Lincoln’s “simple but powerful technique” using “the ancient Greek elements of a geometric proposition in an entirely new context: oratory” (p. xvii).

Of particular interest in interpreting Lincoln’s learning experiences is Kenneth Winkle’s “Abraham Lincoln: Self-Made Man” (2000), which explores the frontier culture in which Lincoln was raised. Winkle points out that self-reliance and self-improvement were cardinal virtues of mid-western society in the nineteenth century. Young men were encouraged to better themselves with industry, sobriety, and honesty, and Lincoln sought to fit into this mold. Under this premise, Lincoln’s education was typical for the time, including formal, cultural, and self-directed educational experiences. Lincoln’s attentiveness to learning, however, was unusual and resulted in him being branded him as lazy by a frontier society that relied upon manual labor for its survival. Lincoln’s upward mobility, Winkle notes, was remarkable and far outstripped that of his Illinois peers. Thus, it was Lincoln’s self-education that allowed him to “rise “from manual to mental labor,” a feat that separated Lincoln from most of his family and peers (p.14).

Many authors have examined Lincoln’s legal training as a factor in his success as a politician and president. Brian Dircks’ 2009 article, “Abraham Lincoln: An American
Lawyer-President,” points out that Lincoln held more legal experience than any other American president. There are “tangible connections,” says Dircks, “between the duties and dispositions of lawyers and presidents” (p. 23). Lincoln’s legal practice offered important foundations for public office such as networking, constituent relations, and communications skills.

A critical analysis Lincoln’s legal training was presented by Thomas Green and William Pederson in their work, “The Behavior of Lawyer Presidents: A ‘Barberian’ Link” (1985). Noting that “lawyer-politicians are a predominant force in American politics,” Green and Pederson assert that lawyer-presidents have committed many “gross violations of civil liberties” in American history (p. 344). They cite Lincoln’s war-time suspension of habeas corpus as a primary example and conclude that the gradual fall in percentages of lawyer-presidents in the twentieth century “may be seen as an optimistic trend” (p. 352).

Among the works aimed directly at Lincoln’s educational experiences is Myron Marty’s “Schooling in Lincoln’s America” (2008). Lincoln’s education, Marty demonstrates, was not substantially different than most others in the American west at the time. The few schools that were available suffered from sparse attendance, poor resources, and minimally educated instructors:

“The brief history of schooling in the first half of the nineteenth century confirms that, for his times, Lincoln’s schooling was much like that of other children in similar circumstances. How then to explain his extraordinary learning? Honest teachers are aware that, if teaching means making students learn something, it is nearly impossible for one person to
teach another anything. Perhaps Lincoln benefited from not having ineffective teachers stand in his way… Facing this reality, what teachers can do is to make it possible for their students to learn in the modes best suited to them and to provide inspiration, discipline, examples, and learning materials. When students’ intrinsic inspiration and discipline move them to learn, and when learning materials are available, they can do as Lincoln did after his childhood years, that is, educate themselves” (p. 60).

Another author who aims directly at Lincoln’s educational experiences is Allen Guelzo, whose essay “The Unlikely Intellectual Biography of Abraham Lincoln” (2004) preceded his book-length study, Abraham Lincoln: Man of Ideas (2009). In these works, Guelzo argues that of all the popular visions of the sixteenth president, Lincoln as a man of philosophy and ideas is overlooked. Instead, Lincoln is known primarily as a politician or lawyer. This, says Guelzo, does a discredit to the profound intellectual and philosophical perspectives that were a fundamental part of his nature. Lincoln’s exploration of Enlightenment ideals, rational thought, and political history can be seen as important, even distinguished, attributes of his development.

There have been a numerous major biographies of Lincoln since 1975, many of which were written by distinguished historians. Among the most lauded biographies is Lincoln (1995) by two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, David Herbert Donald. Donald’s well-rounded biography faithfully chronicled Lincoln’s youth and adult learning experiences, pointing out that Lincoln’s early reading ability distinguished him in a frontier setting. “Once he got the hang of [reading],” said Donald, “he could never get enough” (p. 30).
Lincoln, he noted, was a deep rather than broad reader, practically memorizing whole books such as *Aesop’s Fables*, the echoes of which could be seen in some of Lincoln’s greatest speeches. Donald also addressed some of Lincoln’s adult learning experiences, such as his love of Shakespeare, whose “wit delighted him” and left him “enchanted by the magic of his language” (p. 133).

Perhaps the most thorough, if controversial, recent biography of Lincoln is Michael Burlingame’s *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, Vols. 1 & 2 (2008). Drawing on exhaustive research, Burlingame explores Lincoln’s youth and adult learning experiences in remarkable detail. Burlingame notes that Lincoln’s schooling was typical for the frontier. Classes were taught by “scarcely educated” teachers in “rough” cabins that had “a scant supply of rudimentary books” (Vol. 1, p. 19). Burlingame focuses on Lincoln’s self-directed learning, asserting Lincoln’s belief in man’s capacity for self-improvement. As a young man, he began a vigorous study of English grammar because, says Burlingame, “he did not want to look like an uneducated bumpkin” (Vol. 1, p. 62). Lincoln “devoured” newspapers, and began a life-long study of Shakespeare and poetry (Vol. 1, p. 63). These factors were important parts of Lincoln’s educational development.

2. Literature on Extrinsic Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, and Learning Motivation

*Extrinsic Motivation*

Early research on motivation began in the late-19th and early-20th centuries and developed around reinforcement models whereby behavior was seen as a function of outside inputs. This “behaviorist” philosophy saw human action through a stimulus-response paradigm whereby individuals are motivated by acting and reacting to the world around them (Stipek, 1996, p. 86) A seminal contribution to behaviorist philosophy was
John B. Watson’s article, “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It” (1913) and his book, 
*Behaviorism* (1924). These works sought to connect research on lower animals, 
children, and human development around a science of predictability. Watson asserted 
that human personality is “the result of what we start with and what we have lived 
through,” and a person’s life experience can be reduced to a “reaction mass” (Watson, 
1924, p. 158.)

Another proponent of the behaviorist theory was Burrhus Frederic “B.F.” Skinner, 
who’s *Verbal Behavior* (1957) argued that a person’s linguistic behavior is a function of 
other people’s input and the natural world. The context or environment in which a person 
finds themself, argued Skinner, drives their verbal activities. Skinner’s *About 
Behaviorism* (1974) explored the concept of “radical behaviorism.” Radical behaviorism, 
said Skinner, “takes a different line,” from conventional behaviorism, not denying “the 
possibility of self-observation or self-knowledge” but asserting that “the environment 
affects an organism after, as well as before, it responds” (p. 16). Behaviorist theories 
advanced the study of learning psychology by establishing research-based models that 
could be tested, verified, and applied. Thus, behaviorism did much to influence 
American education in the twentieth century (Svinicki, 1999). According to researcher 
Emily Lai (2011), in the behaviorist model “the teacher’s job is clear: to use good grades 
and praise to reward desired behavior and bad grades or loss of privileges as punishment” 
(p. 5).

Beginning in the 1960’s, research on motivation began to move away from 
behaviorism toward subject-based perspectives that explored human abilities such as 
recognition, processing, and choice (Stipek ,1996; Svinicki, 1999). Initial research led to
a theory known as cognitive behavior modification (CBM), which asserted students’ abilities to regulate their own behavior in relation to external input (Lai, 2011).

According to psychologist Marilla D. Stipek (1996), CBM represented a theoretical advance, asserting that “learners were still somewhat at the mercy of environmental input, but at this point, the influence of the learner began to be considered” (p. 8).

Donald Meichenbaum’s book *Cognitive-behavior Modification: An Integrative Approach* (1977) is an example of how CBM proponents viewed their role. Meichenbaum viewed CBM as a “bridge connecting two ostensibly different therapy approaches, behavior therapy, and cognitive-semantic therapy” (p. 261). Thus, CBM viewed students as influenced by outside stimuli but capable of using cognitive skills to engage and even direct their learning. Although CBM represented important advances in learner-based research, problems were cited with the practical application of the theory. Some studies identified the propensity for students to manipulate certain aspects of the learning parameters to gain advantages in task completion and assessment (Lai, 2011). These issues spurred even greater focus on learner-based research, which began to explore issues such as learner beliefs, perceived value of educational activities, and self-efficacy (Stipek, 1996).

In the 1980’s and 1990’s researchers increasingly focused on subject-based motivational perspectives such as student cognition, beliefs, and needs. Moving away from Behaviorism toward a re--embrace of Constructivism, researchers explored hypotheses that viewed learning as the creation of meaning based on experience, cognitive ability, and individual constructs (Stipek, 1996). Catherine W. Fosnot’s 1996 work, *Constructivism. Theory, Perspectives, and Practice*, presented new perspectives on
education theory, introducing thirteen essays about applied constructivism in teaching and learning. According to Fosnot:

“Constructivism is fundamentally nonpositivist and as such it stands on completely new ground... Rather than behaviors or skills as the goal of instruction, concept development and deep understanding are the foci; rather than stages being the result of maturation, they are understood as constructions of active learner reorganization” (p. 10).

As a learning theory, Constructivism has taken different directions. Psychologist David Moshman (1982) formulated three theoretical models for Constructivism: exogeneous, endogenous, and dialectical, which described external reality, internal cognition, and social interaction. Some Constructivist researchers such as Applefield, Huber, and Mahnaz (2000) cited evidence that student motivation is increased when student-based learning addresses problems that relate to the real world using collaborative activities. Other researchers explored the issues of autonomy, control, and self-regulation in the classroom, which in turn, helped demonstrate that education can be contingent on issues of learner independence, motivation, and self-deterministic perspectives (Stipek, 1996).

Behaviorist and Constructivist theories led to additional research on extrinsic motivational perspectives, especially as it relates to students’ acceptance and internalization of mandated tasks. Extrinsic motivation, researchers have found, can vary greatly according to a student’s willingness to assimilate to the extrinsic instructional inputs (Deci and Ryan, 2000a). In other words, a student may be coerced to perform an activity that they find boring and unstimulating, but the degree to which he or she accepts
and internalizes the activity says much about the quality of their motivation, performance, and persistence. According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), since most of the activities students are tasked with performing are extrinsic in nature, internalization and integration of the learning task by the student can be a key factor in educational outcomes. They define internalization as “the process of taking in a value or regulation,” and integration as “the process by which individuals more fully transform the regulation into their own so that it will emanate from their sense of self” (p. 60). Higher levels of internalization and integration, they note, are associated with increased motivation, performance, and persistence and represent a movement toward autonomous self-regulation on the part of the student.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

The concept of intrinsic motivation originated with research on animal behavior in the 1950’s. In some respects, research on intrinsic motivation was a reaction to behaviorist theories that characterized all actions as motivated by external prods, pressures, and rewards. Robert White’s “Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence” (1959), argued that “theories of motivation built upon primary drives [Behaviorism] cannot account for playful and exploratory behavior” (p. 297). Humans and many animals, he noted, display natural tendencies toward curiosity, inquisitiveness, and active exploration, and these characteristics represent intrinsic motivational tendencies (from within), as opposed to extrinsic (from without). White also cited evidence that people engage in this type of activity naturally without respect to external rewards or punishments. Richard deCharms’s 1976 book, *Enhancing Motivation: Change in the Classroom*, drew similar conclusions, suggesting that humans prefer
autonomous origination of their behavior as opposed to being manipulated by others. DeCharms suggested that increases in students’ feelings of personal control tends to increase motivation and performance in the classroom.

Research on intrinsic motivation increased in the 1980’s and 1990’s, as researchers increasingly found connections between intrinsic perspectives and human performance. In 1990, Ryan, Connell, and Plant published “Emotions in Nondirected Text Learning,” finding that student interest-enjoyment in reading activities was correlated to increased comprehension, but that external pressures had the opposite effect. Similar findings were published by Deci, Koestner, and Ryan in the journal *Psychological Bulletin* in 1999, which concluded that “intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfactions inherent in effective volitional action,” but that extrinsic pressures and prods tended to reduce both motivation and performance (p. 658).

An important factor in extrinsic and intrinsic motivational perspectives is autonomy versus control. In a 1981 study titled “Characteristics of the Rewarder and Intrinsic Motivation of the Rewardee,” authors Deci, Nezlek and Sheinman, concluded that students with highly controlling teachers showed less intrinsic motivation and lower self esteem. A subsequent study by Ryan and Grolnic (1986) found that higher perceptions of autonomy amongst students was associated with higher self-esteem, improved cognitive competence, and increased mastery motivation.

In 2000, psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci introduced a new theory of optimal human performance in an article titled “Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.” Self-
Determination Theory (SDT) associates intrinsic perspectives such as curiosity, spontaneity, and autonomy with distinct human needs. “The fullest representations of humanity,” they write, “show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated… Yet, it is also clear that the human spirit can be diminished or crushed and that individuals sometimes reject growth and responsibility” (Deci & Ryan, 2000b, p. 68). These human characteristics, they concluded, were common to developmentally normal people, who have natural inclinations to learn and master their environment. Numerous studies have continued to associate intrinsic motivation with increased performance and functioning across a wide array of activities (Lai, 2011).

Given the positive performance outcomes associated with intrinsic motivation, researchers have been keenly interested in factors which foster versus undermine it. Intrinsic motivation, write Ryan and Deci (2000a), “can be systematically catalyzed or undermined by parent and teacher practices” (p. 55). Perhaps the biggest factor, they note, relates to autonomy versus control. It turns out that non-autonomous intervention in intrinsically-motivated activities usually results in decreased motivation, performance, and persistence. Recent research has focused on choice versus control in assessing human performance outcomes. In 2010, psychologists at Rutgers University published the article, “Born to Choose: The Origins and Value of the Need for Control,” which asserted that humans have a biological need for choice in their environment and that the desire to choose is connected to man’s survival instincts:

“Belief in one’s ability to exert control over the environment and to produce desired results is essential for an individual’s well being…

Converging evidence from animal research, clinical studies, and
neuroimaging work suggest that the need for control is a biological imperative for survival…The desire for control is not something we acquire through learning, but rather, is inate, and thus likely biologically motivated. We are born to choose” (p. 457).

Similar conclusions were drawn by Shapiro, Schwartz, and Astin in their 1996 work, “Controlling Ourselves, Controlling our World. Psychology’s Role in Understanding Positive and Negative Consequences of Seeking and Gaining Control.” Denying humans control and choice in their environment, they found, is associated with various negative outcomes including psychological and behavioral disorders as well as high risk behaviors. These findings were consistent with a prior review of educational literature that analyzed more than seventy studies on the effect of rewards on task engagement and persistence. The study, titled “Reward-Induced Decrements and Increments in Intrinsic Motivation” (1984), concluded that external rewards- especially when they are perceived as controlling- negatively impact intrinsic interest.

*Learning Motivation*

Among the first authors to apply motivation theory to learning environments were Bandura and Schunk, whose “Cultivating Competence, Self-Efficacy, and Intrinsic Interest Through Proximal Self-Motivation” was published in 1981. The study tested the effects of self-direction and self-motivation on students who demonstrated low levels of interest and performance in mathematical tasks. Findings indicated that student self-direction substantially improved performance and self-efficacy.
Writing in the journal *Educational Psychologist* in 1991, another group of researchers found motivational perspectives to be essential to positive educational outcomes. Their article, “Motivation and Education: The Self-Determination Perspective,” asserted that high-quality learning can be contingent on environments that foster both intrinsic motivation and acceptance of extrinsic-oriented learning tasks. The most effective schools, they argue, capitalize on students’ natural propensity to learn and grow. This propensity, however, can be largely contingent on student perceptions of self-determined as opposed to controlled experiences (Deci, Vallerand, & Pelletier, 1991).

Deborah J. Stipek’s *Motivation to Learn: From Theory to Practice* (1993) sought to integrate research, theory, and practical application. Designed as a text for teachers, Stipek’s work explores an array of classroom issues from student motivational problems to achievement anxiety. Using many real world examples, Stipek provides an array of resources such as checklists and diagnostic tools for teachers to use in diagnosing and correcting motivational issues in the classroom. Stipek was amongst the first to translate motivational theories into practical classroom environments.

*Motivation in Education: Theory, Research, and Applications* (2008) is another textbook designed for educators. In it, the authors review various motivational theories such as efficacy beliefs, social cognitive theory, and intrinsic motivation. The book focuses on recent advances in motivation theory and applies them to the classroom, arguing that student expectancy and efficacy are central factors in enhancing motivated learning.

Research on motivation and adult learners has become more prevalent in recent years. In *Beyond Fragments: Adults, Motivation and Higher Education* (1996), author
Lindin West explores the complex reasons why adult attend college and their experiences in doing so. The book features case studies of individuals engaged in post-secondary education, often revealing difficult circumstances and experiences from the perspective of learners. West decries the fragmentary evidence on student motivation that often contributes erroneous assumptions about what motivates students to attend college. These fragments often point to utilitarian motives, which “are then used to reinforce the ideologically driven notion that higher education should serve primarily vocational and instrumentalist ends” (p. 2). The reality, West asserts, shows a remarkable diversity in student aspirations, which are often tied to social and personal issues as opposed to economic.

The article “Motivation in Adult Education: From engagement to performance” (Carré, 2000) evaluated adult motivation in a socio-cognitive framework and attempted to identify fundamental orientations that can lead to ten hypothesized motives. Among these motives are epistemic, social-affective, and professional operational. Surveying 345 adults, the author distinguished between motivational processes, which include perceived competence, self-determination, and project formulation. These processes were evaluated using qualitative and quantitative instruments on adult populations. The researcher had difficulty establishing his hypothesized “link between initial motivation and final performance,” but held that a number of theoretical models and instruments were produced as a result of the study (Carré, 2000).

Raymond J. Wlodkowski’s Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults (2008) stands as the most direct contribution to the adult learning motivation theory. Wlodkowski asserts that all adults
have powerful natural tendencies to learn, grow, and find meaning in their lives and work. Thus, his book emphasizes “how to continually enhance intrinsic motivation among all learners as part of the instructional process.” The key, he insists, is to “evoke and encourage” the natural desire in all adults to “be competent in the matters they hold to be important” (p. x). The book is aimed at instructors, trainers, faculty, and others who engage in the teaching of adults.

Laurent Daloz’s Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realizing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning Experiences (1986) observes adult education through a lens of growth and change. Daloz asserts that a key motivational construct relates to the phases of development in which adults find themselves during their lifespans. For many adults, old conclusions and ways of thinking become irrelevant as they transition to new circumstance, demands, and pressures. This often leads adults into new educational activities, especially post-secondary learning. Daloz sees the effective adult education practitioners as a potential mentors who can play pivotal roles in helping adults change and adapt to new challenges.
MATERIAL AND METHODS

This case study analyzes Abraham Lincoln’s educational experiences in the context of psychological theories on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Merriam (1988), this type of cross-disciplinary approach is common in educational research, as “case studies in education tend to draw from other disciplines” such as “anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history” (p. 22). At the beginning stages of the research process, extensive primary source evidence was compiled relating to Lincoln’s adult learning experiences. This evidence was sifted and categorized to highlight Lincoln’s most distinct and well-documented learning experiences. The resulting data was then evaluated according to operational definitions for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

In selecting primary source material for this study, an operational definition for an adult learning activity was established. Most adult education practitioners have preferred a broad definition for adult learning. Merriam and Brockett (2007) define adult learning as “a cognitive process internal to the learner” (p. 6). Houle (1996) defined adult learning as “the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness” (p. 41). Courtney (1989) referenced “an intervention into the ordinary business of life— an intervention whose immediate goal is change, in knowledge or in competence” (p. 24). For this study, Houle’s definition of adult learning was adopted: The process by which men and women seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness.
Evidence concerning Lincoln’s adult learning experiences comes from diverse sources, beginning with his early adulthood and lasting through his presidency. Lincoln himself left abundant evidence of his adult learning activities in his campaign biographies, letters, and speeches, which are now compiled in exhaustive reference books such as *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Basler, 1954). Extensive primary source material from his early adulthood was collected by his law partner, William Herndon, who personally interviewed dozens of Lincoln’s friends, associates, neighbors, and family members soon after Lincoln’s death in 1865. In addition, dozens of people who knew Abraham Lincoln also published first-hand accounts of their observations of him, including law partners and associates, White House secretaries, friends, political allies, military subordinates, and foreign dignitaries. As such, the primary source record on Lincoln stands as one of the most complete compilations of historical evidence on one person in the human record. Even though Lincoln stands as one of the most written about figures in history, evidence of his lived experience continues to be ripe for analysis and interpretation.

As primary source evidence of Lincoln’s learning activities was assembled for this study, six distinct learning activities emerged: 1) Learning the art of surveying; 2) studying English grammar; 3) learning to become an attorney; 4) studying Euclid’s *Elements*; 5) reading poetry and Shakespeare; 6) and studying the *Bible*. Extensive primary source supporting evidence was assembled for each of the selected learning activities, and each activity was then evaluated according to criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
Evaluating each of Lincoln’s learning activities essentially entailed determining the reasons that Lincoln engaged in his adult learning activities and assessing that evidence against criteria for intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. According to psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation “refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable,” while extrinsic motivation “refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome” (p. 55). Intrinsically-motivated activities, they write, “have the appeal of novelty, challenge, or aesthetic value for that individual” (p. 60). Extrinsicily-motivated activities, however, are done by an individual because of “external prods, pressures, or rewards” (p. 56). According to researcher Emily Lai (2011), “Intrinsic motivation is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure, whereas extrinsic motivation is governed by reinforcement contingencies” (p. 2). Therefore, according to these definitions, if Lincoln engaged in learning simply because it was interesting, challenging, or fulfilling, he was intrinsically-motivated. If, on the other hand, Lincoln engaged in learning because he was compelled to do so by some external pressure or reward, the experience was extrinsically-motivated.

Autonomy is also an important factor in student motivation. As Deci and Ryan (2000) note, “the significance of autonomy versus control for the maintenance of intrinsic motivation has been clearly observed in studies of classroom learning” (p. 59). Controlling environments, on the other hand, tend to have a comparatively negative effect on student motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000a; Stipek, 1989). Increasing elements of choice and autonomy in student tends to increase motivation and performance in student activities (Lai, 2011).
For this case study, the following criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic learning activities were identified based on the above definitions and were applied to each of Lincoln’s adult learning activities:

**Intrinsic:**
1) The activity is engaged in autonomously by the learner without outside prods or pressures.
2) The activity is novel, challenging, fun, or fulfilling from the perspective of the learner.
3) The activity leads to no direct tangible rewards that are separable from the satisfaction inherent in the activity.

**Extrinsic:**
1) The activity is non-autonomous and controlled.
2) The activity arises from an external prod or pressure.
3) The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards.

For the presentation of the case study data and analysis, Lincoln’s learning experiences were arranged chronologically. Tables summarizing analytical conclusions are included in each section. A discussion section follows the presentation reviewing the findings in relation to the adult education topics including suggestions for additional research.
RESULTS

This following presentation explores six educational activities of Abraham Lincoln’s adulthood and analyzes them on the basis of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It was hypothesized that Abraham Lincoln benefited from learning experiences that featured high levels of intrinsic motivation and autonomy-supportive contexts. Results suggest that Abraham Lincoln experienced near total autonomy in his learning activities, and that most of his adult learning activities were intrinsically-motivated. Among the six educational activities that were selected for study, four were determined to be intrinsically motivated while two were determined to be extrinsically motivated.

1. Studying English Grammar

One of Lincoln’s first documented adult learning activities was his study of English grammar, which he engaged upon at the age of twenty-three while living in New Salem, Illinois. Writing in the third person, Lincoln later referred to this effort in one of his self-authored campaign biographies in 1860. “After he was twentythree,” Lincoln wrote, “and had separated from his father, he studied English grammar, imperfectly of course, but so as to speak and write as well as he does now” (Lincoln, 1860, p. 63). The testimony about this learning activity comes from a number of different sources, most of whom recorded their observations years after they occurred. The corroborative strength of the material including testimony from Lincoln himself lends credibility to the source material. Lincoln apparently sought and obtained some level of assistance, but conducted most of the activities on his own. An assessment of Lincoln’s motivational orientation for this learning activity deems that it meets the criteria for intrinsic motivation.
Mentor Graham was a New Salem friend and advisor to Lincoln who encouraged him in his study of grammar. “In the month of February, 1833,” Graham wrote, “Mr. Lincoln came and lived with me… It was here that he commenced to study the English grammar” (p. 10). Graham reported that Lincoln first introduced the idea of studying grammar to him, and knowing that Lincoln was considering running for public office, Graham encouraged him. “If you ever expect to go before the public in any capacity,” Graham told Lincoln “I think it is the best thing you can do” (Graham, 1865, p. 10).

A coworker of Lincoln’s in New Salem also documented Lincoln’s efforts to learn grammar. “Soon after he landed and commenced clerking,” wrote William G. Greene, “he took a notion to study grammar.” Greene noted that Lincoln conducted his studies “privately” and worked "by himself alone as I recollect it, though others may have explained special problems… that he could not easily master.” Through diligent effort, reported Greene, Lincoln “soon mastered his grammar” (Greene, 1865, p. 18).

Numerous other friends and associates of Lincoln also left record of his effort to study grammar. Robert B. Rutledge (1866) noted that “Lincoln studied Kirkham’s Grammar,” and even claimed to possess the copy that Lincoln used (p.384). Caleb Carman (1866), Lynn McNulty Greene (1865), J. Rowan Herndon (1865), and David Davis (1866) also made reference to Lincoln studying grammar as a young adult.

Although Lincoln was largely self-directed in this learning activity, he benefited from the help of others. Not having a textbook from which to study, Lincoln borrowed one from a local doctor named John Vance (Graham, 1865). He also may have obtained some basic tutoring from New Salem doctor Jason Duncan, who recorded his remembrances in 1866:
“Abraham requested me to assist him in the study of English Grammar, which I consented to do... His application through the winter was assiduous, and untiring, his intuitive faculties were surprising, he seemed to master the construction of the English language and apply the rules for the same in a most astonishing manner” (p. 539).

John McNamar (1866) claimed to have assisted Lincoln with grammar in preparing his first public address in 1832. “I corrected at his request,” wrote McNamar, “some of the grammatical errors in his first address to the voters of Sangamon County” (p. 253).

Lincoln’s struggle to learn proper English became a life-long pursuit. As president, he would sometimes make light of his difficulty with spelling some words. As he confessed to one visitor during the White House years:

"When I write an official letter, I want to be sure it is correct, and I find I am sometimes puzzled to know how to spell the most common word... I found about twenty years ago, that I had been spelling one word wrong all my life up to that time... It is very. I used always to spell it with two r’s v-e-r-r-y” (Burlingame, 2008, p. 33).

On another occasion, in front of a room full of visitors in the White House, Lincoln asked those present how to spell the word “missile.” This astonished one official who was present, who wondered whether “there is one man in this whole Union who, being President, would have done that?” The official thought that is showed Lincoln’s “perfect honesty and simplicity” (Burlingame, 2008, p. 32).

In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying English grammar, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest it was intrinsic in nature. Lincoln chose to
engage in the activity freely with no documented prods or pressures. The activity led to no tangible rewards. The activity was conducted autonomously with minor assistance from others.

### Table 1: Lincoln’s study of English grammar and criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrinsic Motivation</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The learning activity is engaged in autonomously by the learner without outside prods or pressures</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The activity is novel, challenging, fun, or fulfilling from the perspective of the learner</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The activity leads to no direct tangible rewards that are separable from the satisfaction inherent in the activity.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<th>Extrinsic Motivation</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The activity is non-autonomous and controlled</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The activity is undertaken because of an external prod or pressure.</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards.</td>
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2. The Art of Surveying

While living in New Salem as a young adult, Lincoln encountered difficult financial circumstances. After an ill-fated bid to become a local merchant, he acquired a substantial debt that took him years to pay off. To help make ends meet, Lincoln took up surveying. As in the case with his study of English grammar, evidence of Lincoln’s effort to learn surveying is abundant, coming both from himself and from friends and neighbors who witnessed his activities. Lincoln conducted most of the learning on his own, but some evidence suggests that he received tutoring from others. The available source material suggests that Lincoln was successful in this learning effort and practiced surveying for about three years from 1833-1836. Analysis of the evidence suggests that
Lincoln engaged in this activity autonomously for the most part and that his motivation was extrinsic in nature.

Numerous people attest to Lincoln’s study of surveying, and Lincoln himself offers in his autobiography to John Scripps (1860):

“The surveyor of Sangamon offered to depute to Abraham that portion of his work which was within his part of the county. He accepted, procured a compass and chain, studied Flint and Gibson a little, and went at it. This procured bread, and kept soul and body together” (p. 62).

Many friends and associates in New Salem also attested to this learning activity. Lincoln’s former co-worker, William G. Greene, noted that “Lincoln studied the grammar & surveying privately” and soon mastered “the general practical rules of surveying” (p. 18). Robert B. Rutledge (1866a) noted that soon after failing as a store owner, Lincoln “was employed in surveying, he having learned the science, and being engaged in a good business in the profession” (p.384). Many other neighbors from New Salem also testified as to Lincoln studying surveying including Abner Ellis (1866), Hardin Bale (1865), and James Short (1865),

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Lincoln received tutoring from Mentor Graham as he learned surveying. In 1865, Graham noted Lincoln’s effort to learn surveying and asserting that he tutored Lincoln in the process. “I taught him the rules of surveying,” boasted Graham, “especially so of geometry & trigonometry.” Graham went on to say that Lincoln “was his scholar” and he “was his teacher” (Graham, 1865, p. 10). Graham’s daughter, Elizabeth Herndon Bell, corroborates her father’s story in testimony given in 1887, albeit more than fifty years after the fact:
“Mr. Lincoln knew nothing much originally about surveying. After he had surveyed a piece of land… he would call at our house and get my father to calculate the figures, etc., and get the number of acres. My father and Lincoln would sit till midnight calculating” (p. 606).

Caleb Carmen (1866) also testified as to Lincoln being tutored in survey, stating that “Graham aided him in surveying” (p. 374).

A neighbor of Lincoln’s, Henry McHenry, gave testimony regarding Lincoln’s study of surveying and offered evidence that his efforts were successful. “During the latter part of the year 1832,” stated McHenry 1865, “he studied surveying and went at surveying practically during the same year” (p. 14). After moving a short distance from New Salem, McHenry had a land dispute with other neighbors regarding the exact location of a property corner. Remembering Lincoln’s honesty and surveying ability, McHenry called upon Lincoln to settle the matter:

We agreed to send for Lincoln & to abide by his decision as surveyor & judge: he came down with compass — flag staff — chain, etc., and stopped with me 3 or 4 days and surveyed the whole section. When the disputed corner arrived at by actual survey, Lincoln then struck down his staff and said — “Gentlemen — here is the Corner.” We then went to work and dug down in the ground — & found about 6 or 8 inches of the original stake… put there by Rector — who [previously] surveyed the whole County (McHenry, 1865, pp. 14-15).

In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying surveying, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest that the activity was extrinsic in nature. Corroborative evidence suggests that Lincoln engaged in the activity as a way to make much-needed
money in hard times. An example comes from Lincoln’s 1860 autobiography, in which, Lincoln lamented his business failures. As he described it, he and his partner “opened as merchant…did nothing but get deeper and deeper in debt,” and their store “winked out” (p. 66). Therefore, as he continued to note, he went to surveying, which brought in much needed income for basic necessities (Lincoln, 1860a). Even after Lincoln was elected to the state legislature, he noted, “he still mixed in the surveying to pay board and clothing bills” (p. 66).

Other sources also attest that Lincoln learning surveying as a result of failing as a store owner and acquiring debt. As William Greene (1865) noted, “Lincoln and Berry kept store about 6 or 9 months,” noted Greene, and even though the two men were honest, “the store was broken up.” “After this,” Greene continued, “and being out of business, Mr. Lincoln…studied surveying and practiced it” (p. 20).

There is even surviving fragmentary evidence of Lincoln’s gainful employment as a surveyor. “I herewith enclose my bill for surveying,” stated a note from Lincoln that was sold at an auction house in 1914. The note referenced a $12.00 fee for surveying and a .50 cent fee for drawing a map. The note was signed with Lincoln’s trademark style, “A. Lincoln.” (Lincoln, 1833).

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<th>Table 2: Lincoln’s study of surveying and criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.</th>
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<td><strong>Intrinsic Motivation</strong></td>
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3. Reading Law

The most intensive learning activity that Lincoln engaged in as a young adult was studying law, which he did in New Salem and Springfield, Illinois, from approximately 1831 to 1836. During this period in the American West, lawyers were typically trained by “reading law,” which meant that they studied with an established attorney as opposed to the modern practice of going to law school. As is typical of Lincoln’s learning experiences, he studied on his own rather than with an established attorney, later noting in the third person that “he studied with nobody” (Lincoln, 1860, p. 66). The evidence of Lincoln’s learning to become an attorney is abundant, coming from Lincoln himself and many friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Multiple sources attest that Lincoln labored hard in this effort. In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying law, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest it was extrinsic in nature. The evidence suggests that it was motivated by factors relating to gaining employment and developing a profession.

Evidence of Lincoln studying law is abundant, and Lincoln included a description of his efforts in the autobiography that he provided to John L. Scripps (1860). Once again writing in the third person:

The election of 1834 came, and he was then elected to the legislature by the highest vote cast for any candidate. Major John T. Stuart, then in full practice of

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<tr>
<th>Extrinsic Motivation</th>
<th>1. The activity is non-autonomous and controlled</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2. The activity results from an external prod or pressure.</td>
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<td>3. The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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the law, was also elected. During the canvass, in a private conversation he
encouraged Abraham [to] study law. After the election he borrowed books of
Stuart, took them home with him, and went at it in good earnest. He studied with
nobody. He still mixed in the surveying to pay board and clothing bills. When the
legislature met, the lawbooks were dropped, but were taken up again at the end of
the session. He was reelected in 1836, 1838, and 1840. In the autumn of 1836 he
obtained a law license, and on April 15, 1837, removed to Springfield, and
commenced the practice (p. 66).

William G. Greene (1865) remembered that after losing his first election in 1832,
Lincoln “read law… read the newspapers, wrote deeds — contracts and general
business…” (p. 20). Mentor Graham (1865) remembered that around 1832 Lincoln
“turned his attention to the law” and read the legal text “Blackstone” (p. 9). Henry
McHenry (1865) reported that Lincoln “commenced reading law in 1832-33” and “read
in the mornings and evenings” (p. 13). Isaac Cogdale (1865-66) stated that he “knew
Lincoln in 1832” and he “was then reading Blackstone. Additional references to
Lincoln’s study of law come from Hardin Bale (1865), Russell Godbey (1865-66), and
Robert Rutledge (1866).

A number of sources suggest that Lincoln’s study of law was particularly
laborious. McHenry (1865) noted Lincoln’s extreme study habits while in New Salem:

He still continued reading law at the same time: he read so much – was so
studious – took so little physical exercise – was so laborious in his studies that he
became emaciated, and his best friends were afraid that he would craze himself,
make himself deranged from his habits of study, which were incessant (p. 14).
Others also recorded observations of Lincoln’s extreme habits of study. Mentor Graham (1865) noted that Lincoln “was so studious, so much so that he somewhat injured his health and constitution.” Lincoln’s continual “thought and study,” noted Graham, contributed to “partial and momentary derangement” (p. 11). Isaac Cogdal, remembered that Lincoln “read hard, day and night, terribly hard” (Cogdal, 1865-66, p. 441). Robert B. Rutledge testified that Lincoln “never appeared to be a hard student… until he commenced the study of law.” Lincoln would become “engrossed” as he “retired to the woods to read and study” (Rutledge, 1866b, p. 426).

There is sufficient evidence that Lincoln studied law on his own without the help of others. Writing to prospective lawyer, Isham Reavis, in 1855, Lincoln offered advice about preparing for a legal career:

If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself, the thing is more than half done already. It is but a small matter whether you read with any body or not. I did not read with any one. Get the books, and read and study them till you understand them in their principal features; and that is the main thing. It is of no consequence to be in a large town while you are reading. I read at New-Salem, which never had three hundred people living in it. The books, and your capacity for understanding them, are just the same in all places (p. 328).

Lincoln gave similar advice to other would-be lawyers. “If you wish to be a lawyer,” Lincoln wrote to William Grigsby, “get books, sit down anywhere, and go to reading for yourself” (Lincoln, 1858a, p. 536). He advised James Thornton to read “for himself without an instructor” because that was the way Lincoln “came to the law” (Lincoln, 1858b, p. 344). To John Brockman’s inquiry regarding “the best mode of obtaining a
thorough knowledge of the law,” Lincoln replied that “the mode is very simple, though laborious and tedious.” Brockman should “get the books, and read, and study them carefully” (Lincoln, 1860c, p. 122).

In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying law, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest that the activity was extrinsic in nature. Rather engaging in the study of law for curious, joyful reasons, the activity was a means to an end. By becoming an attorney Lincoln would have steady work, a consistent income, and increased status in his community. Numerous sources, including Lincoln, also attest to the tedium and drudgery that Lincoln perceived in his legal studies, which also suggests extrinsic motives.

| Table 3: Lincoln’s study of law and criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| Intrinsic Motivation                  |       |
| 1. The learning activity is engaged in autonomously by the learner without outside prods or pressures | Yes   |
| 2. The activity is novel, challenging, fun, or fulfilling from the perspective of the learner | No    |
| 3. The activity leads to no direct tangible rewards that are separable from the satisfaction inherent in the activity. | No    |
| Extrinsic Motivation                  |       |
| 1. The activity is non-autonomous and controlled | No    |
| 2. The activity results from an external prod or pressure. | Yes   |
| 3. The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards. | Yes   |

4. Studying Euclid’s *Elements*

One of the most interesting and distinct learning activities that Lincoln engaged in as an adult was his study of Euclidean geometry. The evidence for this learning effort is abundant, and Lincoln referenced it many times throughout his life. As Lincoln stated in one of his campaign autobiographies, “He studied and nearly mastered the six books of
Euclid, since he was a member of Congress” (Lincoln, 1960, p. 63). In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying Euclid, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest that the activity was intrinsic in nature. Lincoln engaged in the effort freely with no outside prods or pressures, and it appears to have been a novel, challenging learning activity that contained elements of personal growth.

One of Lincoln’s fellow attorneys documented Lincoln’s study of Euclid on the legal circuit in Illinois. “Lincoln was not a well read man,” opined David Davis, as he “read no histories, novels, biographies, etc.” Instead, Lincoln “studied Euclid, the exact sciences” (Davis, 1866, p. 350). Another legal colleague, John Todd Stuart, also referenced this learning activity of Lincoln’s. “Lincoln used to carry around in the circuit court tramp with me say from 1846 to 1855, Euclid’s geometry,” he noted. “Lincoln was an educated man in 1860,” Stuart concluded, “but he dug it out himself” (Stuart, 1865, p. 64). Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, described Lincoln’s study of Euclid in his biography of the slain president:

On the circuit in this way he studied Euclid until he could with ease demonstrate all the propositions in the six books. How he could maintain his mental equilibrium or concentrate his thought on an abstract mathematical proposition, while Davis, Logan, Swett, Edwards, and I so industriously and volubly filled the air with our interminable snoring was a problem none of us could ever solve (Herndon & Weik, 1900, p. 308).

Lincoln utilized his understanding of Euclidian principles on various occasions later in his career. Once during his famous series of debates with Stephen A. Douglas in 1858, Lincoln used Euclidian principles to illustrate a point:
If you have ever studied geometry, you remember that by a course of reasoning, Euclid proves that all the angles in a triangle are equal to two right angles. Euclid has shown you how to work it out. Now, if you undertake to disprove that proposition, and to show that it is erroneous, would you prove it to be false by calling Euclid a liar (Neely, 1984, p. 122).

Later, in 1859 in Columbus, Ohio, Lincoln referenced Euclid again during a speech in which he argued for limiting the expansion of slavery:

Now, if Judge Douglas will demonstrate somehow that this is popular sovereignty—the right of one man to make a slave of another, without any right in that other, or any one else, to object—demonstrate it as Euclid demonstrated propositions - there is no objection. But when he comes forward, seeking to carry a principle by bringing to it the authority of men who themselves utterly repudiate that principle, I ask that he shall not be permitted to do it (Lincoln, 1920, p. 551).

In 1864, J.P. Gulliver reported a conversation he had with Lincoln in 1860 in which the two discussed Euclid’s influence on Lincoln’s speeches. Gulliver told Lincoln that his success was “no longer a marvel,” but “the legitimate result of adequate causes.” Gulliver then suggested that if the public would read Euclid as Lincoln did, then “it would be a means of grace” and “would free the world of half its calamities.” Lincoln agreed with this assertion, Gulliver reported, and replied laughingly, “I think so… I vote for Euclid” (p. 1).

In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying Euclidian geometry, the evidence suggests that the activity was intrinsic in nature. Lincoln was not compelled to engage in the study of Euclid, and it brought no distinct tangible rewards. From Lincoln’s
perspective, the activity was likely novel and challenging. Although he may have envisioned using the fruits of this learning activity in future endeavors, it represents learning for the sake of personal growth as opposed to personal gain.

| Table 4: Lincoln’s study of Euclid and criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| **Intrinsic Motivation**        |                               |
| 1. The learning activity is engaged in autonomously by the learner without outside prods or pressures | Yes |
| 2. The activity is novel, challenging, fun, or fulfilling from the perspective of the learner | Yes |
| 3. The activity leads to no direct tangible rewards that are separable from the satisfaction inherent in the activity. | Yes |
| **Extrinsic Motivation**        |                               |
| 1. The activity is non-autonomous and controlled | No |
| 2. The activity results from an external prod or pressure. | No |
| 3. The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards. | No |

5. Poetry and Shakespeare

The most consistent and prolonged of Lincoln’s adult learning activities was his study of poetry and Shakespeare. The evidence of these activities is abundant and continuous, beginning in early adulthood and lasting until the end of his presidency. Friends, relatives, associates, soldiers, and even reporters commented on these learning activities. As Lincoln biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin wrote in 2005, these learning activities were “his academy, his college.” By reading poetry and Shakespeare, Lincoln “traveled with Byron’s Childe Harold to Spain and Portugal, the Middle East and Italy; accompanied Robert Burns to Edinburgh, and followed the English kings into battle with Shakespeare” (p. 51). An analysis of the evidence suggests that Lincoln engaged in these
learning activities for intrinsic motivational reasons, displaying a deep reverence and appreciation for the wisdom therein and gaining no tangible rewards as a result.

The evidence of Lincoln’s enjoyment of poetry and Shakespeare is abundant, beginning with his early adulthood in Illinois. A friend, Abner Ellis reported that while he “lived in New Salem in the summer and fall of 1833,” Lincoln “read Shakespeare and Burns” at night (Ellis, 1866, p. 179). Another friend from early adulthood, William Greene, noted that Lincoln “read history, Shakespeare [and] Burns” and they “were his favorite books.” Greene also testified that Lincoln “nearly knew Shakespeare by heart” (1865, p. 21). Caleb Carmen (1866) noted that Lincoln “loved Burns’ poetry, Shakespeare, and some few other books” in his early adulthood (p. 373).

Lincoln’s reading of poetry and Shakespeare continued into his middle years. Joshua Speed, a close friend that Lincoln met in Springfield, noted that Lincoln read “Burns, Byron, Milton, and Shakespeare… and retained them all about as well as an ordinary man would any one of them” (Speed, 1866, p. 499). John Todd Stuart (1866) remembered that when Lincoln was a travelling the legal circuit from 1844 to 1853, he “commenced carrying around with him on the Circuit … books such as Shakespeare [and] Euclid.” (p. 519).

Lincoln’s study of Shakespeare continued well into his White House years. Lincoln’s brother-in-law, Ninian Edwards, visited Washington in 1861 and 1862 and reported that “Lincoln read Shakespeare every evening” (Edwards, 1865-66, p. 466). On one of Lincoln’s visits to the Soldiers Home near Washington, D.C., his secretary, John Hay, reported that Lincoln read aloud from Henry VI and Richard III until “my heavy eye-lids caught his considerable notice & he sent me to bed” (Hay, 1863, p. 75). Hay
later noted that Lincoln “read Shakespeare more than all other writers together” (Hay, 1890, p. 36).

An army staff officer, Legrand B. Cannon, had the occasion to spend a few days with Lincoln in 1861 and was surprised when Lincoln asked if he had “a Bible or a copy of Shakespeare.” As Cannon recorded the event years later:

I replied that I had a Bible and the general Shakespeare and … he never missed a night without reading it… The following day he read by himself in one of my offices some two hours or more, entirely alone. I being engaged in a connecting room on duty. He interrupted and wished me to rest, and he would read to me. He read from MacBeth, Lear, & finally King John…” (Cannon, 1889, p. 679).

Lincoln enjoyed Shakespeare so much, he even corresponded with a few Shakespearian actors of the era. One of these actors, James Hackett, visited the White House in 1863, and Lincoln wrote to Hacket shortly thereafter:

Some of Shakespeare's plays I have never read; while others I have gone over perhaps as frequently as any unprofessional reader. Among the latter are Lear, Richard Third, Henry Eighth, Hamlet, and especially Macbeth. I think nothing equals Macbeth. It is wonderful. Unlike you gentlemen of the profession, I think the soliloquy in Hamlet commencing "O, my offence is rank” surpasses that commencing, “To be, or not to be.” But pardon this small attempt at criticism (Lincoln, 1863, p. 393).

A short time after Hackett’s visit to the White House, a Congressman brought another Shakespearean actor by the name of McDonough to visit Lincoln. “I am very glad to meet you,” Lincoln told McDonough, “for I want you to tell me something about
Shakespeare’s plays as they are constructed for the stage.” After describing some of his discourse with Hackett, Lincoln expressed dissatisfaction with Hackett’s seeming misunderstanding of Shakespeare. Picking up a full-length copy of *Henry VI*, Lincoln inquired to his guest: “Mr. McDonough, can you tell me why those lines are omitted from the acting play? There is nothing I have read in Shakespeare… that surpasses its wit and humor” (Tarbell, 1896, p. 163).

Lincoln’s love of poetry is also well-documented. As Lincoln’s friend Lawrence Weldon noted in 1865, “Tasteful composition either of prose or poetry which faithfully contrasted the realities of eternity with the unstable and fickle fortunes of time made a strong impression on his mind” (p. 88). According to numerous sources, Lincoln’s favorite poet was Robert Burns, with whom he identified deeply. According to author Ference Morton Szasz (2008), “it seems clear that Abraham Lincoln’s world was shaped not only by the verse of Robert Burns but also by the activities and ideas of his fellow Scots” (p. 115).

Many of Lincoln’s friends and associates from early adulthood referenced Lincoln’s appreciation for Burns. According to Lincoln’s legal associate, Milton Hay, Lincoln “could quote Burns by the hour.” Hay remembered being in Lincoln’s law office in Springfield, Ill., and hearing him “recite with the greatest admiration and zest Burns’ ballads and quant things” (Wilson, R.R., 1945, p. 48). Lincoln’s own testimony confirmed this point. “Burns never touched a sentiment,” Lincoln said late in his presidency, “without carrying it to its ultimate expression and leaving nothing further to be said” (Hay, 1890, p. 36).
Lincoln’s taste for poetry was decidedly melancholy. He was a fan of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Raven*, and according to John Todd Stuart (1866), he “read and loved” the piece, repeating it “over and over” (p. 519). Lincoln could remember long passages of poems because he pondered them so frequently. A poem that he recited perhaps more than any other was William Knox’s “Mortality,” which is typical of the sad verses that Lincoln (1846a) preferred:

Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

Like a swift-fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,

A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave

He passeth from life to his rest in the grave (p. 367).

Lincoln’s associate, Lawrence Weldon (1865), documented one of Lincoln’s frequent recitations of “Mortality” soon after his nomination for president in 1860. According to Weldon, Lincoln quoted the poem “aloud and at length” and proclaimed that “it sounded as much like true poetry as any thing he had ever heard” (p. 89).

Yet another melancholy favorite of Lincoln’s was “The Last Leaf” by the Oliver Wendell Holmes:

The mossy marbles rest

On the lips that he has pressed

In their bloom,

And the names he loved to hear

Have been carved for many a year

On the tomb (Hay, 1890, p. 36).
Lincoln used poetry as a source of wisdom and introspection. As Lincoln biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin noted, Lincoln “rarely spoke of his inner feelings,” but “often expressed emotions through the poetry he read” (Goodwin, p. 102). An example of this comes from LeGrand B. Cannon’s recollections (1889) of Lincoln during the Civil War. During a brief attachment as aide to Lincoln, Cannon recorded the following incident that occurred while the two men were working:

He interrupted me and wished me to rest… He read from MacBeth, Lear, and finally King John, and in reading the passage where Constance bewails the loss of her child to the King, I noticed he was deeply move[d], his voice trembling, laying the book on the table, he said, did you ever dream of a lost friend and feel that you were having a direct communication with that friend and yet conscious that it was not a reality[?] My reply was yes, I think all may have had such an experience. He replied, so do I dream of my boy Willey [sic]. He was utterly overcome. His great frame shook and bowing down on the table he wept as only such a man in the breaking down of a great sorrow could weep (p. 679).

Lincoln gave some effort toward publishing his own poetical works and some of his most important speeches contain elements of poetry. His most substantive effort at writing poetry was over a thousand words in length, referencing a return to his childhood home in Indiana. The poem begins with the following stanzas:

---

* Lincoln’s son Willie, whom he cherished, died in 1862 at the age of eleven, probably of typhoid fever.
My childhood's home I see again, And sadden with the view; And still, as 
memory crowds my brain, There's pleasure in it too. O Memory! thou midway
world 'Twixt earth and paradise, Where things decayed and loved ones lost
In dreamy shadows rise…” (Lincoln, 1846a, p. 368).

As Lincoln scholar James A. Stephenson writes (1994), "it is largely owing to the reading
and writing of poetry that Lincoln acquired the competence to write his mature prose with
the rhythm, alliteration, imagery, economy of words, and flexibility of structure that so
distinguish it” (p 71). Lincoln’s appreciation for poetry found its way into some of his
most important speeches. His first inaugural address offers an example of the poetic flare
he sometimes used. Calling for national reconciliation, Lincoln pleaded that “The mystic
chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart
and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when
again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature” (Lincoln, 1861,
p. 271).

Lincoln’s annual address to Congress in 1862 also closes with a poetic finish:

The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to
the latest generation… In **giving** freedom to the **slave**, we **assure** freedom to
the **free**---honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly
save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth.

Lincoln’s second inaugural address (1865) offers another compelling example of his
poetic verse, given as the terrible Civil War was winding down:

Fondly do we hope---fervently do we pray---that this mighty scourge of
war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the
wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether” (p. 333).

In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for reading poetry and Shakespeare, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest that it was intrinsic in nature. Lincoln delighted in studying these materials and perceived that they contained truth and wisdom that could be found in few other places. Poetry and Shakespeare were enjoyable and fulfilling, giving him perspective on the triumphs and tragedies of his life and career. There were no tangible rewards such as money or status associated with these learning activities. Likewise, there were in general no external prods or pressures that compelled Lincoln into the activities, save the tragedies that sometimes compelled Lincoln to reflect upon his favorite melancholy poems and moving passages of Shakespeare.

| Table 5: Lincoln’s study of poetry and Shakespeare and criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Intrinsic Motivation**                          | **Extrinsic Motivation**                         |
| 1. The learning activity is engaged in autonomously by the learner without outside prods or pressures | 1. The activity is non-autonomous and controlled |
| 2. The activity is novel, challenging, fun, or fulfilling from the perspective of the learner | 2. The activity results from an external prod or pressure. |
| 3. The activity leads to no direct tangible rewards that are separable from the satisfaction inherent in the activity. | 3. The activity leads to a distinct separable outcome such as money, status, or other external rewards. |
| Yes | No |
| No | Yes |
| No | Yes |
6. Reading the Bible

Although Lincoln was a religious skeptic in early adulthood, he was a consistent student of The Bible throughout his life and came to rely on it heavily in his presidential years for guidance and spiritual perspective. As Lincoln biographer William E. Barton noted, “Lincoln read the Bible, honored it, quoted it freely and it became so much a part of him as visibly and permanently to give shape to his literary style and to his habits of thought” (Barton, 1920, 275). Numerous sources attest to Lincoln’s reading of the Bible, and Lincoln increasingly referenced Biblical scripture in his writings and speeches as his career progressed. As Lincoln’s Springfield neighbor, James Gourly, noted, “Lincoln was religious in his way, not as others generally” (Gourly, 1855-56, p. 451). In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for studying the Bible, the criteria for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest that the activity was intrinsic in nature. Lincoln engaged in the activity freely, there were no distinct tangible rewards, and even though social pressure to read the scriptures was present, Lincoln maintained a fierce independence on spiritual matters.

Lincoln was a religious skeptic in early adulthood, and he made comparatively infrequent use of the Bible as a learning resource during that period. Lincoln’s stepmother, Sarah, noted that as a young person “Abe read the Bible some, though not as much as said: he sought more congenial books” (Johnston, 1865, p. 107). According to New Salem acquaintance, James H. Matheny (1870), “I knew Lincoln as early as 1834-37 [and] know he was an infidel.” Matheny partly ascribed Lincoln’s skepticism to his appreciation of Burns’ poetry. “Burns helped Lincoln to be an infidel,” as “he found in Burns a like thinker and feeler” (p. 576). This evidence of religious skepticism was
echoed by Lincoln’s New Salem friend, William Greene (1865), who noted that
Lincoln’s “mind was skeptical and hence his deep humanity and skeptical tinge of mind
made him to love Burns” (p. 21). Another legal associate of Lincoln’s in Springfield,
James H. Matheny, stated “that Lincoln, when all were idle and nothing to do, would talk
about Religion, pick up the Bible, read a passage, and then comment on it… show its
falsity and its follies on the grounds of reason” (Matheny, 1865-66, 472).

Once during Lincoln’s Congressional campaign in 1846, Lincoln was compelled
to defend himself against his opponent’s charge that he ridiculed the Bible:

A charge having got into circulation in some of the neighborhoods of this
District, in substance that I am an open scoffer at Christianity, I have by
the advice of some friends concluded to notice the subject in this form.
That I am not a member of any Christian Church, is true; but I have never
denied the truth of the scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional
disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in
particular. It is true that in early life I was inclined to believe in what I
understand is called the “Doctrine of Necessity”… and I have sometimes
(with one, two or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in
argument. The habit of arguing thus however, I have, entirely left off for
more than five years. (Lincoln, 1846b, p. 383).

Like many things in Lincoln’s life his sense of spirituality evolved over his
lifetime. During the White House years Lincoln increasingly turned to religion and the
Bible, especially after his son, Willie, died in 1862. Lincoln’s best friend, Joshua Speed,
spoke of this transition as he recounted a story from a visit to Washington, D.C.:
As I entered the room, near night, he was sitting near a window intently reading his Bible. Approaching him I said: "I am glad to see you so profitably engaged."

“Yes,” said he, "I am profitably engaged." “Well,” said I, “if you have recovered from your skepticism, I am sorry to say that I have not.” Looking me earnestly in the face and placing his hand on my shoulder, he said: “You are wrong, Speed. Take all of this book upon reason that you can and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man” (Barton, 1920, p. 93).

Lincoln’s wife, Mary, also attested to Lincoln’s increasing reliance on scripture during the White House years. Although Lincoln “was a religious man always,” he “was not a technical Christian.” As the war progressed, however, Lincoln “felt religious more than ever” and “read the Bible a good deal about 1864” (Lincoln, M., 1866, p. 360). That year Lincoln received a Bible from a White House delegation and made the following reply:

“In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man’s welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it” (Lincoln, 1864, p. 543).

In assessing Lincoln’s motivation for reading the Bible, the evidence suggests that the activity was intrinsic in nature. Lincoln was not compelled to engage in the activity, and it brought no distinct tangible rewards. From Lincoln’s perspective, the activity was likely novel and joyful, representing personal growth as opposed to personal gain.
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DISCUSSION

This case study analyzed Abraham Lincoln’s adult learning experiences in the context of theories on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The results indicate that Lincoln engaged in abundant learning activities from early adulthood through his presidency. Most of Lincoln’s adult learning activities were intrinsically-motivated, while extrinsic activities served important career functions. Almost all of Lincoln’s adult learning activities were self-directed, and he experienced near total autonomy in his learning. Among the six educational activities that were selected for study, four were determined to be intrinsically-motivated while two were determined to be extrinsically-motivated. These findings offer a perspective on adult learning topics, especially motivation and self-directed learning. Suggestions for additional research are also provided.

1. Lincoln, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, and Adult Learning

Theories on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have become increasingly important in adult education. As Houde (2006) notes, “research in motivation corresponds to andragogy in many ways” (p. 90). A growing body of research distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, revealing that the former relative to the latter generally results in increased performance in a range of human activities including education. Lincoln’s educational experiences tend to reflect these findings, but extrinsic motivation was also important to his development such as his career training. Adult educators increasingly acknowledge that intrinsic motivation is an important construct in andragogy. Knowles (1989) states that “while adults are responsive to some extrinsic motivators (better jobs, promotions, salary increases, and the
like) the more potent motivators are intrinsic motivators” (p. 84). Lincoln’s adult educational experiences are consistent with this statement. In general, Lincoln did not force himself into educational activities except when necessity compelled him, and the bulk of his adult learning experiences were done for the inherent joy or satisfaction of the activities themselves. As a friend from his early adulthood remembered, Lincoln was “a close student in this way,” who “read slowly, carefully, and thought much” (Matheny, 1866, p. 432).

Lincoln relied heavily on his sense of curiosity, novelty, and challenge in his adult learning activities. One of Lincoln’s legal associates, Milton Hay, remembered that “Lincoln did not read many books, but those he fancied took strong possession of him” (Wilson, R.R., 1945, p. 48). These experiences are consistent with intrinsic motivation, which is “a natural wellspring of learning and achievement” that results in “high-quality learning and creativity” (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, p. 55). It is apparent that Lincoln enjoyed high levels of intrinsic motivation in his learning experiences throughout his adulthood as evidenced by his consistent and intense reading activities.

In many cases, such as Lincoln’s fascination with poetry and Shakespeare, Lincoln displayed the characteristics of a curious, joyful learner, and he apparently engaged in the activities for pleasure rather than for some separable outcome. According to Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, Lincoln stated the following during the 1840’s:

"I cannot read generally. I never read text books for I have no particular motive to drive and whip me to it. As I am constituted I don't love to read generally, and as I do not love to read I feel no interest in what is thus read. I don't, & can't
remember such reading. When I have a particular case in hand I have that motive, and feel an interest in the case- feel an interest in ferriting out the questions to the bottom- love to dig up the question by the roots and hold it up and dry it before the fires of the mind” (Donald, 1995, p. 99).

By focusing on literature he found fascinating and compelling, Lincoln delved deeply into enduring human issues relating to life, spirituality, love, and loss. As one Lincoln admirer, Walt Whitman, noted in 1886, “What Shakespeare did in poetic expression, Abraham Lincoln essentially did in personal and political life” (p. 473).

Like most adults, Lincoln engaged in career-oriented learning activities such as learning how to survey land and “reading law.” These learning efforts led to stable long-term employment that lasted throughout his adult life, which was important to his development. Adult educators acknowledge the importance of these extrinsically-motivated activities to adult learning and development. As Merriam and Brockett (2007) note, there is “strong evidence that participation in formal adult education is most often tied to career or job motives” (p. 132). There is also compelling evidence that most adults make career choices primarily for extrinsic reasons such as money, status, or peer pressure. As Rynes et al note (2009), “Money is not the only motivator and it is not the primary motivator for everyone”, but “there is overwhelming evidence that money is an important factor for most people” (p. 391.) Lincoln’s career-oriented educational experiences had similar financial motivations. His study of land surveying and preparation for work as an attorney represent activities that were done with strong economic incentives. In these instances, Lincoln was engaging in the learning activities not because of natural enjoyment but rather for external pressures and rewards.
2. Lincoln and Self-Directed Adult Learning

Self-directed learning is an important construct in adult education, and Lincoln’s adult learning activities were almost entirely self-directed. As Knowles (1989) states, “Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own lives,” and “they develop a deep psychological need to be seen and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (p. 83). Lincoln’s example tends to corroborate this assertion, supporting andragogy’s traditional respect the unique needs and attributes of adult learners.

According to Gibbons (2002), self-directed learning is “any increase in knowledge, skill, accomplishment, or personal development that an individual selects and brings about by his or her own efforts using any method in any circumstances at any time” (p.2). Knowles (1975) defined self-directed learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes” (p.18). Lincoln’s adult learning experiences embody each of these definitions. In many of his learning activities, Lincoln diagnosed his learning needs, selected resources and activities to fulfill those needs, and evaluated results. This was true of both his study to learn surveying and his effort to become a lawyer. Lincoln’s advice to aspiring lawyers is an indication of his comfort with self-directed learning as well as his belief that others were capable of similar activities.

Andrologogical educators acknowledge that adult students have needs for autonomy and choice in their learning environments, and Abraham Lincoln’s educational experiences are consistent with those principles. As adult educator Dr. Gary Kuhne
notes, “Adults generally like to take more control over their learning than youth” (Kuhne, 2000, p.1). Numerous studies have demonstrated that higher levels of perceived autonomy in educational environments relate to increased motivation and performance outcomes in adult learners. In a 1981 study titled “Characteristics of the Rewarder and Intrinsic Motivation of the Rewardee,” authors Deci, Nezlek and Sheinman, found that students with highly controlling instructors showed less intrinsic motivation and lower self esteem. A similar study by Ryan and Grolnic (1986) found that higher perceptions of autonomy amongst students was associated with higher self-esteem, improved cognitive competence, and increased mastery motivation. Autonomy and choice were consistent factors in Lincoln’s adult educational experiences. According to Lincoln’s neighbor, William G. Greene, Lincoln conducted his studies “privately” and worked “by himself alone as I recollect it” (Green, 1865, p. 18). In Lincoln’s own words (1860), “he studied with nobody” (p. 66).

An important construct in self-directed learning is the concept of choice versus control. As Kuhne (2000) notes, “Adulthood brings an increasing sense of the need to take responsibility for our lives, and adults strongly resent it when others take away their rights to choose” (p. 1). Additional research confirms the effectiveness of this kind of autonomous learning. In 2010, psychologists at Rutgers University published the article, “Born to Choose: The Origins and Value of the Need for Control,” which asserted that humans have a biological need for choice in their environment:

“Belief in one’s ability to exert control over the environment and to produce desired results is essential for an individual’s well being…”

Converging evidence from animal research, clinical studies, and
neuroimaging work suggest that the need for control is a biological imperative for survival…The desire for control is not something we acquire through learning, but rather, is innate, and thus likely biologically motivated.

We are born to choose” (Leotti, Iyengar, & Ochsner, 2010, p. 457). Lincoln’s experiences are consistent with these findings, and research shows that educators can enhance student motivation by allowing more choice in educational activities. As Lai (2011) notes, instructors “should attempt to give students more autonomy or control over their own learning by allowing them to make choices” in their learning (p. 2). Throughout his adult learning, Lincoln was in control of his learning activities, freely choosing the initiation, direction, and content of his education. It is therefore likely that choice and control were important factors in Lincoln’s adult education.

3. Suggestions for Additional Research

The field of andragogy stands to benefit from additional research on the educational motivation of historic individuals. For the purposes of understanding educational flourishing, the historical record contains an immense reservoir of data that remains largely unexamined. Merriam (1988) notes that historical case studies “have tended to be description of institutions, programs, and practices as they have evolved over time” (p. 24). The opportunity exists to delve deeper into the educational experiences of noteworthy historic individuals to better understand their rise to significance.

In particular, intrinsically-motivated learning seems to have been important for many distinguished individuals. “From my infancy,” wrote Benjamin Franklin in his
autobiography, “I was passionately fond of reading, and all the money that came into my hands was laid out in the purchasing of books” (Franklin, 1921, p. 11). After gaining access to a small library as a young adult, Andrew Carnegie (1920) stated that “the treasures of the world which books contain were opened to me at the right moment” (p. 47). Early in Harry Truman’s adulthood, writes historian David McCullough, “books became his life more and more,” and anyone passing by the Truman house “could see him in the window, sitting with a book under his reading lamp” (McCullough, 2003, p. 1165.) Perhaps not coincidentally, Abraham Lincoln shared this passion for reading.

Further research and analysis into the educational motivation of historic individuals may yield insights that can aid modern adults in their pursuit of effective education. Specific avenues of research could include individuals such as Steve Jobs, Mahatmas Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Despite a wealth of literature on these individuals, their educational motivation remains largely unexamined. Additional research into the learning motivation and experiences of historic individuals may offer new avenues of interpretation and insight, further informing theories on adult educational flourishing.

When Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, was writing his landmark biography of the slain president, he pleaded with his partner in the project, Jesse Wiek, to open the book with the following verses from Lord Byron, which, said Herndon, were “just the thing for Lincoln’s life:”

> Between two worlds Life hovers like a star,
> ‘Twixt Night and Morn, upon the horizon’s verge.
> How little do we know that which we are!
How less what we may be! (Wilson, D.L., 1998, p. 293)
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