The Elaboration Likelihood Model: Implications for the Practice of School Psychology

Richard E. Petty
Ohio State University

Martin Heesacker
University of Florida

Jan N. Hughes
Texas A & M University

Understanding the formation and change of attitudes is important to the practice of school psychology. We review a contemporary theory of attitude change, the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986), and address its relevance to school psychology. The ELM provides an integrative framework for understanding the antecedents and consequences of attitude change and specifies the various processes by which source, message, recipient, channel, and context variables have an impact on attitudes. A key postulate in the ELM is that attitude change can result from relatively thoughtful (central route) or nontoughtful (peripheral route) processes. The ELM also holds that the more thoughtful the change, the more likely the new attitude is to persist, resist counterpersuasion, and influence behavior. Illustrations of the utility of the ELM for school psychology are presented along with some caveats and research suggestions. © 1997 Society for the Study of School Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Recently, a number of school psychologists have noted the importance of attitudes to the practice of school psychology. For example, Cafferty (1992) noted that:

Schools, like all complex organizations, are attitude arenas .... (The) public, parents, teachers, students, administration, and staff — develop and maintain attitudes toward each other and toward policies and practices relevant to school functioning. (p. 25)

Received February 21, 1994; accepted June 22, 1995.
Address correspondence and reprint requests to Richard E. Petty, Department of Psychology, Ohio State University, 1885 Neil Avenue Mall, Columbus, OH 43210-1222. E-mail address: petty.1@osu.edu
Attitudes refer to peoples’ global evaluations of various objects, issues, and people (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For example, is the study of math viewed positively or negatively by students? Is a new teaching method evaluated favorably or unfavorably by teachers? Does the public support or oppose the new school tax levy? Perhaps the most important reason attitudes are thought to be important is that they are presumed to guide people’s actions (see Fazio, 1990; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Thus, students who have racist attitudes tend to engage in prejudiced behavior in schools. Students who don’t like school are more likely to be truant. Parents who have unfavorable attitudes toward school counseling are less likely to want their children to participate, and so forth. By changing undesirable attitudes such as these, more desirable behavioral outcomes can be achieved.

Of course, attitudes are not the only factors that determine people’s behavior. Some of the other factors shown to influence a person’s behavior are: perceptions of the attitudes of others (i.e., norms; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), feelings of self-efficacy and actual competence (Bandura, 1986), and prior behaviors and habits (Triandis, 1980). However, each of these factors is also related to attitudes. For example, if the attitudes of many individuals change, then group and societal norms will presumably change as well. In addition, producing changes in attitudes can motivate people to acquire new skills and break old habits. Thus, not only is attitude change an important determinant of behavior change on its own, but attitude change can also foster change in the other factors that contribute to behavior.\(^1\) In the first part of this paper we provide an overview of a contemporary theory of attitude change called the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986), and in the second part of this paper we explore the utility of the ELM for the practice of school psychology.

THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL OF PERSUASION

The Elaboration Likelihood Model is an information processing theory of persuasion and attempts to provide an integrative framework for understanding the antecedents and consequences of attitude change. At its most rudimentary level, the ELM suggests that the many theories of persuasion that have developed over the years typically focus on one of just two relatively distinct routes to persuasion.

\(^1\)It is also important to note that changes in these other factors can also produce changes in an individual’s attitudes. For example, people may become more favorable toward something as their behavioral skills are improved, and some people may come to like things more when they learn that others like them also. Thus, the determinants of behavior have a reciprocal relationship with each other.
Central Route

One route to persuasion, the central route, involves effortful cognitive activity in which the message recipient draws upon prior experience and knowledge to scrutinize and evaluate carefully all of the information presented in support of the advocated position. Under the central route, the target of the influence attempt is thinking about the message and actively generating favorable and/or unfavorable thoughts in response to it. In order for this effortful cognitive activity to occur, the recipient must possess sufficient motivation and ability to think about the merits of the information provided. Many variables can influence a person’s motivation to think about a message such as whether the message is perceived to be personally relevant (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b) or whether the person is the kind of individual who enjoys thinking (Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983). In addition, many variables can influence a person’s ability to think about a message such as how much distraction is present in the persuasion context (Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976) and whether the recipient has sufficient knowledge to understand the communication (e.g., Wood, Kallgren, & Priesler, 1985). If a person is both motivated and able to think about the underlying arguments in a message, the end result of this careful processing is an attitude that is well articulated, readily accessible, and integrated into the person’s belief structure (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Peripheral Route

In stark contrast to the central route approach, some theories of persuasion do not place much credence on the substantive information (arguments) in a message or on issue-relevant thinking.

Instead, they postulate a “peripheral route,” whereby simple cues in the persuasion context either elicit an affective state (such as happiness) that becomes associated with the advocated position (as in classical conditioning; Staats & Staats, 1958), or trigger a relatively simple inference or heuristic that a person can use to judge the validity of the message. For example, a message from an expert can be judged by the heuristic, “experts are generally correct,” without the person devoting much effort to assessing the actual merits and implications of the information provided (Chaiken, 1987). Similarly, a message with many arguments can be accepted if a person thinks that “more is better,” without the need to evaluate carefully the true merits of those arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Peripheral route persuasion occurs, for example, when a client agrees with a school psychologist because the psychologist is assumed to know best, and not because the client has internalized and accepted the message. It is important to note that peripheral approaches to persuasion can be quite effective, at least in the short term.
It is also important to note at this point that although for didactic purposes, we will talk of two distinct routes to persuasion, the ELM actually posits an elaboration likelihood continuum. At the low end of this thinking continuum, peripheral route processes (such as the reliance on heuristics or identification with the source) are primarily responsible for attitude change, but at the high end of the continuum, central route processes are primarily responsible. At most points along the continuum, of course, attitudes are influenced in part by both central and peripheral processes (see Petty, 1994).

Evidence for Two Routes

Evidence for the utility of the central and peripheral conceptualization comes from a large number of studies (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1997, for reviews). As just one example, consider the results of one experiment in which the quality of the arguments in a persuasive message was manipulated, along with a peripheral cue (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981).

Specifically, college students were presented with one of four persuasive messages: (a) a message with very strong and compelling arguments presented by an expert source, (b) a message with weak and specious arguments presented by an expert source, (c) a message with compelling arguments presented by a nonexpert source, or (d) a message with weak arguments presented by a nonexpert source. All of the messages were relatively simple to understand and were presented without any distractions. Thus, all of the recipients were able to think about the message if they so desired. However, the motivation of the college student subjects to think about the message they received was manipulated by leading some of them to believe that the proposal (which advocated a change in an important university regulation) would take effect next year, whereas others were led to believe that the proposal would not take effect for 10 years. In the former case, the proposal would have an impact on all current students, but in the latter case, the proposal would have no implications for current students. When the message was highly relevant to the students, their attitudes toward the proposal were based mostly on the quality of the arguments in the message. Expertise of the source made little difference. That is, when the message was highly relevant to the students, they followed the central route to persuasion and carefully considered the merits of the evidence. However, when the message was irrelevant, attitudes were not influenced by message quality, but were instead influenced only by the salient expertise cue. Thus, low-involvement subjects followed the peripheral route to persuasion. Many such simple cues have been shown to be highly effective in changing attitudes when people are either unmotivated or unable to think about the message. These cues have included factors such as the expertise and
Table 1  
Motivational and Ability Factors Influencing the Extent and Direction of Message Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivational Factors</th>
<th>Ability Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of Processing</td>
<td>Distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induced Personal Relevance</td>
<td>Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Cognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Processing</td>
<td>Open/Closed Mindedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forewarning of Intent to Persuade</td>
<td>Instructed Head Movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open/Closed Mindedness</td>
<td>Attitude-Congruent Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


attractiveness of the message source, the mere number of arguments in the message, and the message recipient's current mood state (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1997; for reviews).

**VARIABLES INFLUENCING THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD**

The accumulated research on the ELM has shown that a number of variables can have an impact on persuasion by influencing a message recipients' motivation or ability to think about the communication. For example, when a teacher is personally accountable for some decision, motivation to think will be high, but if under severe time pressure, ability to think will be low. Also, some variables that influence thinking are part of the persuasion *situation*, whereas others are part of the *person*. For example, as noted above, ability to think about a message can be reduced by time pressure — a situational variable — or lack of knowledge about the issue — a person variable. Finally, some variables affect mostly the *extent* of thinking (i.e., the overall amount of thinking a person does), whereas others tend to influence the *direction* of whatever thinking is taking place (i.e., whether the thoughts elicited are relatively favorable or unfavorable). For example, as noted earlier, making a message personally relevant to an audience increases the amount of thinking, but telling a highly involved audience that the message is specifically attempting to persuade them tends to motivates active resistance and counterarguing rather than objective processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979a). On the other hand, when people are motivated to think, but are in a pleasant mood, they are biased in favor of generating favorable rather than unfavorable thoughts because a positive mood increases the likelihood that positive thoughts come to mind (Petty, Schumann, Richman, & Strathman, 1993). Table 1 provides examples of variables falling into each cell of this 2 (Motivation vs. Ability) \( \times 2 \) (Situ-
ation vs. Person) × 2 (Extent vs. Direction of Thinking) matrix. The figure provides a potentially useful way to think about variables that might be controlled in order to increase the likelihood of high elaboration (central) rather than low elaboration (peripheral) persuasion, and both individual and situational factors that influence whether the elaboration is likely to be relatively objective or biased.

**Consequences of the Route to Persuasion**

Why does it matter if a particular variable has brought about attitude change by the central route (i.e., by increasing the likelihood of thinking about the substantive merits of a particular position) or by the peripheral route (e.g., by serving as a simple acceptance cue)? The ELM holds that the route to persuasion is important because attitudes formed or changed by the central route tend to have different consequences and properties than attitudes modified by the peripheral route (see Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995, for a review). First, central route attitudes are more accessible than peripheral route attitudes — that is, they come to mind more quickly. Because these attitudes come to mind easily and are typically spontaneously accessible upon the mere presentation of the relevant attitude object, they are more likely to influence behavior (Fazio, 1990). For example, if a student’s anti-drug attitude comes to mind spontaneously on appropriate occasions, drugs are more likely to be avoided than if the negative attitude requires considerable cognitive effort to be retrieved (Petty, Baker, & Gleicher, 1991).

In fact, studies have shown that attitudes formed or changed as a result of effortful thinking are more predictive of behavioral intentions and actions than are attitudes formed or changed with little thinking. For example, Brown (1974) assessed the attitudes of high school students toward breaking various laws such as using drugs, obeying traffic laws, and so forth. He found greater attitude-behavior consistency for students who reported giving the issues much rather than little thought. Research on the “need for cognition” (a measure of the extent to which people enjoy thinking; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), has also supported this proposition. For example, Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, and Rodriguez (1986) found that the attitudes toward the presidential candidates of individuals who enjoy thinking were more predictive of their votes than the attitudes of individuals who do not enjoy thinking (see Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996, for a thorough review of work on need for cognition).

In these studies, existing attitudes that were presumed to be thoughtful or not were examined. In other studies, new attitudes were created and their ability to predict behavior was assessed. In one study, for example, (Sivacek & Crano, 1982; Experiment 2) undergraduate students were informed that their university was exploring the possibility of implement-
ing senior comprehensive exams (a previously unfamiliar issue), and they then read a message describing these exams. Following message exposure, students reported their attitudes toward the proposal and were given the opportunity to sign petitions opposing the exams and to volunteer their services to a group that opposed the exams.

Sivacek and Crano divided their sample into high and low relevance groups on the basis of the students’ self-reports of whether the issue was high or low in perceived personal relevance (i.e., would affect them or not). Correlations between the students’ attitudes toward senior comprehensive exams and their relevant behaviors (petition-signing/volunteering) were larger in the high relevance group. That is, students for whom the message was more personally relevant demonstrated higher attitude-behavior consistency than students who considered the message less relevant. If students in the high relevance group engaged in greater issue-relevant thought when forming their attitudes toward the new issue than students in the low relevance group (as would be expected based on numerous experiments; Petty & Cacioppo, 1990), this study supports the notion that thoughtful attitudes are more predictive of behavior than unthoughtful attitudes. Other studies that have changed attitudes to a similar degree under conditions of high or low elaboration have also shown that thoughtful attitude changes are more predictive of behavioral intentions and actions than unthoughtful attitude changes (e.g., Leippe & Elkin, 1987; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Verplanken, 1991).

In addition to greater attitude-behavior consistency, research suggests that attitudes formed by the central route are more persistent over time and more resistant to counterpersuasive attempts than attitudes formed by the peripheral route. For example, in two studies (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992) similar attitude changes were produced in individuals who differed in their need for cognition. In each study, college students were presented with a message containing strong arguments presented by a credible source. Both high and low need for cognition individuals became more favorable toward the position taken in the message, but for different reasons. That is, students who characteristically enjoy thinking changed because of their careful thinking about the high quality arguments that were presented. Low need for cognition students, who act as cognitive misers, changed to the same extent, but because of the positive source cue. In one of the studies, when attitudes toward the issue were examined just 2 days after the persuasive message, recipients low in need for cognition had returned to their initial positions, but high need for cognition students persisted in their new attitudes. In a second study, the students’ new attitudes were challenged just a few minutes after they were created. High need for cognition students resisted the attacking message to a greater extent than low need for cognition individuals.
Attitude change is not particularly valuable if the new attitude does not come to mind easily, persist over time, resist countervailing pressures, and predict behavior. Thus, although central route attitude changes are typically more difficult to produce than peripheral route changes, the benefits are considerable. A key contribution of the ELM is the finding that it is insufficient to know simply what a person's attitude is, or how much change in attitudes was produced. It is also important to know if a person's existing attitude or a newly changed attitude was produced by the central or the peripheral routes. Attitudes that are identical in valence and similar amounts of attitude change can be quite different in terms of their underlying psychological antecedents and consequences (see Petty & Krosnick, 1995, for a review of issues relevant to the strength of attitudes).

**Multiple Roles for Variables in the ELM**

The final feature of the ELM that is important to consider is the fact that any one variable, such as the credibility of the message source, or the mood a person is in, can influence persuasion in a number of ways. That is, a variable can influence attitudes by different processes in different situations. The fact that the ELM proposes that any one variable can have the same impact on judgments by different processes in different situations helps us understand how even such simple variables as the credibility of the source can produce complex outcomes. It also makes it essential that we identify the conditions under which a variable influences attitudes by one process rather than another. That is, it is important, for example, to know if appearing more expert will make someone agree because of the use of a simple expertise heuristic (peripheral route change), or because appearing to have greater expertise makes people think more carefully about what is said (central route change).

In brief, the ELM says that under conditions of relatively low elaboration likelihood, when people are unmotivated or unable to devote the cognitive effort necessary to scrutinize the issue-relevant information presented (such as when personal relevance is low, distraction is high, etc.), persuasion-relevant variables such as a person's mood or the expertise of the source, to the extent that they have any impact at all, influence attitudes mostly by peripheral route processes. When the elaboration likelihood is low, people know that they do not want to or are not able to evaluate the merits of the arguments presented (or they do not even consider exerting effort to process the message). Thus, if any evaluation is formed, it is likely to be the result of a relatively simple association or inference process that can occur without much cognitive effort (e.g., "experts are correct").

When the elaboration likelihood is high, however, people know that they want to evaluate the merits of the arguments presented and that they are
able to do so. In these high elaboration situations, persuasion-relevant variables have relatively little impact by serving as simple cues. Instead the variable can be scrutinized just as are the message arguments and produce attitude change if the variable provides information relevant to the merits of the attitude object (e.g., an emotional factor such as how much you “love” someone is central to the merits of selecting a spouse and can serve as an argument in favor of marriage). Alternatively, even if the variable is not of central relevance to the merits of the advocacy, it could still influence attitudes under high processing conditions by biasing the thinking that is taking place. For example, people might be motivated to generate mostly favorable thoughts about the message if the source is credible (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994).

Finally, another role for variables, and the one emphasized earlier, is that variables can influence the amount of thinking that takes place. When the elaboration likelihood is moderate, such as when the message is of uncertain personal relevance, people have moderate knowledge on the issue, and so forth, people might be unsure as to whether or not they should devote effort to processing the message. In these situations, they might examine the persuasion context for guidance as to whether the message is worth thinking about. For example, some people might be more motivated to pay attention to and think about the message if the source is perceived to be an expert (Hesacker, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1983). When an expert source increases thinking about a message, more persuasion is produced in the presence of the expert when the arguments are strong, but less persuasion is produced in the presence of the expert when the arguments are weak.

**Variables Under High and Low Elaboration Conditions.** In order to understand the complex ways in which any one variable can influence attitudes according to the ELM, it might be useful to examine the multiple roles for one variable in some detail. Specifically, consider how a student who is in a particularly good mood one day might react to a persuasive message from a school psychologist. As explained earlier, according to the ELM, a person’s mood should serve as a peripheral cue mostly when the likelihood of issue-relevant thinking is low. That is, when thinking is low, such as when a message is very low in personal relevance, positive mood should produce more favorable attitudes than being in a neutral mood. This could occur either because of a relatively simple affect transfer process, such as postulated by classical conditioning theory, or because people generate a simple inference based on their mood (e.g., “I feel good, so I must agree with you”). Both of these peripheral processes assume that mood can influence attitudes without much issue-relevant thinking.

When the elaboration likelihood is high, however, such as when a message is of very high personal relevance, and people are processing the
message arguments already, the ELM holds that mood states can influence attitudes by serving as central information if relevant (as in the marriage example previously) or biasing the nature of the thoughts that come to mind. Positive mood can bias ongoing information processing by selectively facilitating the retrieval of positive and/or inhibiting the retrieval of negative material from memory (see Blaney, 1986). Under high elaboration conditions, positive mood should make the content of thoughts more positive, and these positive thoughts should induce favorable attitudes.

Research supports the view that mood can influence attitudes in different ways under high and low elaboration conditions. In one study, for instance (Petty, Schumann, Richman, & Strathman, 1993), college students were exposed to a commercial for a new pen in the context of a popular television comedy show or they saw the same commercial in the context of a more neutral informational program. The results of this study revealed that positive mood had an impact on the thoughts and attitudes of students who were highly likely to be thinking about the ad (i.e., because the participants were told that they would be asked to select one brand of pen as a take-home gift), but mood influenced attitudes without affecting thoughts when the elaboration likelihood was low (i.e., when people thought their take-home gift was an alternative product). Furthermore, under high elaboration conditions, statistical analyses were consistent with the idea that mood influenced attitudes because of its biasing influence on thoughts, but in low elaboration conditions, mood had a direct impact on attitudes that was unmediated by thoughts. That is, under low elaboration conditions, positive mood influenced attitudes by the peripheral route, but under high elaboration conditions, positive mood influenced attitudes by the central route.

Recent research has focused on the question of how mood biases thoughts when people are highly motivated to think. A typical persuasive message points to the good consequences that will occur if a person adopts a recommendation, or the bad consequences that will occur if the recommended position is ignored (Petty & Wegener, 1991). When people evaluate a message, they typically consider how good or bad the postulated consequences are, and how likely or unlikely these consequences are to occur (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Mood has been shown to influence both the desirability and the likelihood of consequences. For example, a good mood makes good consequences seem both more desirable and more likely than when the same consequence is considered in a neutral mood. Thus, when such an argument is thought about in a positive mood, it will seem stronger because the positive consequence will seem more desirable and more likely than when in a neutral mood (Wegener, Petty, & Klein, 1994).

The important point is that positive mood can produce more favorable attitudes by a simple association or heuristic process if people are unmotivated or unable to think about the message arguments (peripheral route
attitude change), but can produce more favorable attitudes by biasing an
effortful evaluation process when people are highly motivated and able to
think about the message. Although the attitudinal outcome of mood is the
same in each case — in both cases the message recipient in a positive mood is
more favorable toward the position advocated — according to the ELM, the
attitudes influenced by mood under high elaboration conditions are likely to
be more accessible, persistent, resistant, and predictive of behavior than are
the attitudes influenced by mood under low elaboration conditions.

Variables Under Moderate Elaboration Conditions. What effect would a
person's mood have if a person's motivation to think was not so clearly low
that the person was totally uninterested in thinking or so clearly high that
people were very eager to think? In these "moderate" elaboration likeli-
hood conditions, the ELM holds that mood would be most likely to
influence the amount of thinking the person does about the message. In
general, research has shown that people in a positive mood tend to engage
in less thinking about the merits of the advocated position than people in
a negative or neutral mood (e.g., Mackie & Worth, 1989). This is true
especially when the message advocates or is expected to advocate some-
thing unpleasant (e.g., raising tuition at the students' university). When
the message advocates or is expected to advocate something pleasant,
however, positive mood has produced increased message processing over
negative mood (Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). This suggests that positive
mood influences message processing, at least in part, due to mood man-
agement concerns (Isen & Simmonds, 1978). That is, people in a positive
mood tend to avoid message processing when they think it might disrupt
their mood (e.g., an unpleasant or counterattitudinal message), but en-
gage in message processing when it will maintain or enhance their mood
(e.g., a pleasant or proattitudinal message). People in negative moods tend
to process regardless of the anticipated content of the message. Schwarz
(1990) suggests that people in negative moods adopt a problem-solving
orientation and this motivates message processing (see Wegener & Petty,
1996, for a review of research on mood and persuasion).

Summary

Figure 1 presents a schematic depiction of the Elaboration Likelihood
Model of persuasion and highlights the major features of the model. In the
simplest sense, the ELM does three things. First, the ELM points to two
routes to persuasion — a thoughtful and cognitively effortful route that
occurs when the person is both motivated and able to think about the
merits of the issue under consideration, and a less thoughtful route that
occurs when motivation or ability are low. Second, the model points to the
consequences of these two routes. Thoughtful attitude changes are postu-
Figure 1. The Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM). The figure depicts the central and peripheral routes to attitude change. Adapted from Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986).
lated to be more accessible in memory, persistent over time, resistant to counterpersuasive attempts, and predictive of behavior. Third, the model specifies how variables have an impact on persuasion. That is, the model specifies certain roles that a variable can play in the persuasion process. Variables can influence a person’s motivation to think, ability to think, the nature of the thoughts generated, or variables can serve as simple cues and change attitudes by one of several peripheral processes (e.g., identification with the source, invocation of decision heuristics). With these features of the ELM in mind, we turn to the potential relevance of this model to school psychology.

**RELEVANCE OF THE ELM TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY**

The ELM is relevant to practicing school psychologists because school psychologists often attempt to influence or persuade adults to engage in new behaviors, or to adopt different attitudes that bear on children’s learning and emotional and behavioral adjustment. For example, a school psychologist might strive to persuade a teacher to implement a contracting system for a student, persuade an administrator to support primary prevention mental health programming in the elementary grades, or persuade a parent to interact with her child in a less harsh manner. School psychologists have their greatest impact on children through working with adults who have care-giving responsibilities to children (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). Although child socialization undoubtedly results from a reciprocal influence process, we recognize that children have relatively little control over those aspects of their environment that are critically important to their healthy adjustment, such as the quality of the instruction they receive from teachers, the safety of their schools, or the responsiveness of the parenting they receive. Thus, we focus on the interactions of school psychologists with various adults that play important roles in the lives of children.

This paper emphasizes applications of the ELM to the school psychologist in the consultant role with teachers, parents, and administrators. Of course, some psychologists might balk at viewing school psychologists as engaged in persuasion. Nevertheless, we posit that when school psychologists attempt to bring about behavioral or attitudinal change, they are often engaged in persuasive attempts (Hughes, 1992; Meyers, Parsons, & Martin, 1979). This view does not imply that the consultant has a “hidden agenda” from the start of the consultation or that the consultant knows at the beginning of the consultation what specific belief or behavior might be targeted for change. Indeed, how a problem is defined and what information is brought to bear on the problem is often controlled, in large part, by the consultee. The consultant and the consultee engage in a deliberative, problem-solving process that has as one of its goals selection of a plan for addressing the concern that is the focus of consultation. Furthermore, the
goal of developing a more accurate and helpful understanding of the problem and developing a plan for solving the problem are explicit goals for consultation, despite the specific consultation model used. Thus, facilitating new behaviors and changed perspectives on the problem are part of the consultant’s role, and in that sense, the psychologist is involved in an interpersonal influence attempt. Because the consultant is usually interested in attitude and behavioral change that is enduring, the consultant wants to engage the consultee in an effortful analysis of the merits of various alternatives. Attempting to engage the consultee in an effortful scrutiny of the true merits of a recommended action (i.e., the central route to influence) is consistent with valuing consultee autonomy and freedom to choose.

The behavioral changes that a school psychologist strives to produce are usually personally salient to the recipients of the influence attempt and are often supported by relatively enduring and coherent beliefs and attitudes. In such persuasive encounters, behavioral change that is persistent over time, generalizes to new situations, and is resistant to counterarguments may require that the recipient of influence engage in considerable cognitive activity in order to translate the new information into personally meaningful units and integrate the new information into existing cognitive structures (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to the ELM, when a person diligently considers how the presented information bears on the recommended attitude or behavior, the new attitude is more likely to be integrated into an idiosyncratic belief system that has the potential to influence behavior over a wide range of relevant situations. The dual challenge for the school psychologist is to elicit the type of effortful processing of persuasive messages characteristic of the central route, and to ensure that thoughts favorable to the recommendation predominate. The ELM can be useful in meeting this challenge.

According to the ELM, assuming that clients are motivated and able to think about the topic that is discussed in consultation, the success of the persuasive attempt is primarily a result of the nature of the thoughts that the recipient generates about the communication. How the consultee thinks about an issue, including the arguments and counter-arguments they generate in response to a message, is determined by the perceived quality of the arguments presented. The perceived quality of the message is determined in part by a recipient’s relatively objective processing of the arguments, but also various biases that stem from existing knowledge and attitudes and other factors, such as specific goals that the person has (e.g., Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). The emphasis in central route change on consultee thinking, both biased and objective, underscores the importance of the consultant devoting considerable attention to the consultee’s cognitive processing of the information presented.

Existing literature on persuasion in consultation has emphasized consultant skills and traits (e.g., Bergan & Tombari, 1976; Curtis & Zins, 1981;
Erchul & Chewning, 1990) and characteristics of the consultees (e.g., Alpert, Ballantyne, & Griffiths, 1981; Gutkin & Ajchenbaum, 1984; Hughes, Grossman, & Barker, 1990). The ELM encourages an emphasis on the consultee as a thinking individual who is actively attempting to make sense out of the message and integrating the message into existing belief structures. Thus, the application of the ELM to consultation calls for an increased emphasis on the quality of the consultant’s arguments, the conditions that foster careful and effortful thinking, and on the consultee’s attitudes, knowledge, and goals.

As explained in our description of the ELM, elaboration of a persuasive message is essential to central route attitude change. Elaboration is likely when the recipient is both motivated and able to think about the issue. Next, we discuss strategies the school psychologist can use to increase client motivation and ability to think, and thus, the likelihood of central route attitude change. Special emphasis is given to managing the direction of processing by tailoring the persuasive message to the recipient’s existing cognitive structures. ELM principles are illustrated with case examples representative of school psychologists’ attempts to influence the adults in children’s lives. We conclude with caveats in applying the ELM to school psychology and a suggested research agenda for assessing the utility of the ELM to school psychology.

Enhancing Consultee Motivation to Elaborate

As noted previously, the central route to attitude change requires effortful processing of the message. Because people tend to conserve their cognitive energies and do not give equal effort to consideration of every message they receive, many persuasive messages do not receive careful and thoughtful consideration. If attitude change occurs in such low cognitive effort situations, it is probably the result of simple associations with positive or negative cues in the environment, such as the expert status of the communicator or the attractiveness of the setting. Such attitudes are expected to be relatively short-lived, susceptible to counter-persuasion, and unpredictable of behavior across situations (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, in such situations, the consultee might engage in the advocated behavior because of factors other than attitude change. For example, people might engage in behavioral compliance based on social norms (e.g., peer pressure) or impression management concerns rather than as a result of personal attitude change.

The danger of nontoughtful (i.e., peripheral) or norm-based acquiescence in consultation is particularly relevant given results of studies on verbal interactions in consultation (Erchul & Chewning, 1990; Witt, Erchul, McKee, Pardue, & Wickstrom, 1991). The results of these studies have been interpreted as supporting the view that teacher–consultees adopt
cooperative and submissive roles in consultation and challenge the assumption that consultees are co-equal collaborators. If this view is accurate, the agreement obtained is less likely to be the result of thoughtful scrutiny of the issue than the result of such factors as reliance on heuristics (e.g., the consultant knows best) or social norms. The frequent complaint expressed by consultants that teachers express verbal agreement with consultation but then do not carry out the recommendation (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990) may be a result of failure on the part of consultants to engage consultees in actively evaluating the recommendation in terms of the consultee's knowledge, experience, attitudes, and goals. Such personal translation of the message is necessary for assimilation of the information into the consultee's existing cognitive structures. Thus, the consultant's goal should be fostering issue-relevant thinking on the part of consultees that favors the recommendation rather than mere acceptance of the recommendation. The goal is to produce internalized change rather than mere compliance (cf., Kelman, 1961).

The level of consultee motivation to elaborate the message varies in different situations. In individual consultation in which teachers or administrators request the consultant's assistance with a work-related issue, the topic is, by definition, personally involving to the consultee, and elaboration is likely. In situations in which the school psychologist is engaged in program promotion (e.g., making a presentation to a group of administrators regarding the advantages of a particular program, such as peer mediation), the likelihood of elaboration may be much less. A number of strategies are possible to increase a consultee's motivation to engage in issue-relevant thinking. The consultation literature emphasizes the importance of consultee ego-investment in, or ownership of decisions reached in consultation (Brown, Pryzwansky, & Schulte, 1987; Caplan, 1970; Conoley & Conoley, 1992). This often-repeated recommendation in consultation can be theoretically supported by ELM tenets. According to ELM, a sense of personal responsibility and involvement is expected to enhance issue-relevant thinking and increase the likelihood of central route attitude change (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b; Petty, Harkins, & Williams, 1980).

In addition to explicitly stating that responsibility for the decision rests with the consultee, the consultant should act as though the consultee is responsible for decisions reached in consultation by actively engaging the consultee in bringing his or her opinions, knowledge, and assumptions to bear on the topic. Eliciting counterarguments is important because the consultant has the opportunity to correct misperceptions or to tailor arguments to counter-arguments. For example, if the consultee is reluctant to implement a recommended intervention because of concerns about the amount of effort the intervention might take, the consultant might draw the consultee's attention to the amount of energy currently directed to the problem and suggest that the intervention will free up energies over the
long haul. The consultant might suggest to a teacher who believes positive reinforcement is a type of bribe, that positive reinforcement teaches a child to learn that responsible behavior results in desirable outcomes. Of course, one does not want to put the consultee on the defensive. In fact, it might be desirable to elicit counter-arguments in an initial session, and address them in a subsequent session.

Consultees may be reluctant to share thoughts openly for fear of exposing erroneous beliefs or displeasing the consultant. The consultant can encourage open discussion of the topic by assuming a nonjudgmental stance, working with consultees’ ideas rather than rejecting them, emphasizing brainstorming and the suspension of evaluation of ideas, and directly asking for counterarguments (e.g., by asking why this intervention might not work). Presenting and refuting counter-arguments (inoculation) can increase resistance to subsequent information that is contradictory to the new attitude (McGuire, 1964).

In behavioral consultation, the emphasis, at least in early interviews, is on eliciting facts from the consultee, such as specifics of the behavior and the setting in which behaviors occur (Kratochwill & Bergan, 1990). This emphasis on obtaining facts from the consultee may diminish consultees’ sense of responsibility for problem solving and, thus, reduce the likelihood consultees will offer their own interpretations or beliefs about the problem or the recommended intervention. Studies on teachers’ preferences for different models of consultation indicate that consultees want to assume active, collaborative roles. In an analogue study, Martens, Lewandowski, and Houk (1989) found that consultants who elicited consultee opinions about the topic were evaluated more favorably than consultants who elicited fewer opinions, or inferences, about the problem. Furthermore, consultees were more likely to share their thinking about the topic when consultants agreed with their perceptions of the problem (Martens et al., 1989). Understanding how a consultee thinks aids tremendously in constructing a persuasive message that will elicit favorable thoughts rather than counterarguments.

Motivating consultees to engage in thoughtful thinking about the message topic may be more difficult in a group presentation situation, where recipients may experience a diminished responsibility for forming a correct attitude toward the topic. The consultant might increase perceived responsibility by informing participants of the opportunity to advocate for or against the topic. For example, participants might be told at the beginning of a presentation that they will be asked to discuss the relevance of the advocated position to their working situations in small groups that will report back to the larger group. If this is not feasible, participants can be asked to write their thoughts for later examination by the consultant.

Many other strategies for motivating increased thinking have been uncovered and are beyond the scope of this paper (but see Petty & Wegener,
1997, for a review). One that is relatively simple to use in the school context is conveying one’s expert status. The consultee’s perception of the expertness of the consultant may increase elaboration in situations in which the elaboration likelihood is normally moderate (Heesacker et al., 1983), as may be the case in a workshop or presentation persons are required to attend. Similarly, using multiple sources who represent different perspectives increases people’s likelihood of attending to the merits of the issue above that of having the same information presented by a single source or by multiple sources representing a single perspective (Harkins & Petty, 1987). For example, if the psychologist is advocating a ban of corporal punishment, the presentation might include a pediatrician, psychologist, clergy person, parent, and police officer rather than several persons representing a single perspective (e.g., several pediatricians). Finally, presenting an unexpected position can also increase elaboration of the message (Baker & Petty, 1994). For example, if consultees are led to believe that the consultant will take one position, but the opposite point of view is espoused, greater thinking about the message can occur than if the expected position is endorsed.

Enhancing Consultee Ability to Elaborate

The psychologist can increase the consultee’s ability to elaborate the message by using non-technical language and presenting arguments in an organized, clear manner. The ELM suggests an explanation for the inconsistent results regarding the effect of technical language on consultees’ reactions to consultation (Witt, Moe, Gutkin, & Andrews, 1984; Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1979).

Rhoades and Kratochwill (1992) investigated the effects of language (technical or non-technical) and level of teacher involvement in consultation (high or low) on teachers’ attitudes toward the consultant’s recommendation in videotaped scenarios. They found an interaction between language and involvement, such that only under conditions of low involvement did technical language result in higher ratings of acceptability of the recommendation. Low involvement by the teacher indicates little investment in the issue and, thus, little elaboration of issue-relevant arguments. Under such conditions, technical language may serve as a simple cue (perhaps suggesting expertise), resulting in peripheral route attitude change. However, under conditions of high teacher investment, where individuals wanted to think about the message, technical language interferes with comprehension and processing of the message and, thus, results in less favorable evaluation.

Ability can also be enhanced by reducing distractions (Petty et al., 1976). Sometimes, catching teachers in the hallway may be practically necessary.
However, such chance encounters militate against careful, thoughtful consideration of the issues. Moderate repetition of the message also enhances consultee ability to assimilate the arguments into one’s own underlying beliefs, or cognitive structures (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979). This repetition can be achieved through a written correspondence that summarizes the rationale for the recommendation. Because face-to-face interaction may interfere with processing issue-relevant arguments (because of the inability to self-pacing presentation of the message or because of distraction due to concerns about impression management), written communication that follow the face-to-face meeting may enable closer scrutiny of the arguments than possible during the face-to-face interaction (see also Chaiken & Eagly, 1976).

**Direction of Elaboration**

In addition to motivating and enabling people to engage in high amounts of thinking, by such tactics as making the message appear personally relevant, making the recipients personally accountable for an impending decision, using nontechnical language, repeating the message, and so forth, it is also important to ensure that the thinking that occurs is favorable. One effective strategy that we noted earlier involved eliciting potential counterarguments from the audience so that effective responses could be constructed. Another strategy for eliciting favorable reactions to a message is to generate message arguments that are compatible with the consultee’s existing cognitive schema on the issue (e.g., Snyder & DeBono, 1985). For example, in one study on the effect of self-schemas on message evaluation, Cacioppo, Petty, and Sidera (1982) identified individuals who thought about an issue (e.g., capital punishment) in religious or in legalistic terms. Messages were then developed that used either a religious or a legalistic line of argument. Message recipients were more positively disposed toward the advocacy when they were exposed to arguments that matched their schema. Interestingly, even weak schema-congruent arguments were evaluated more positively than were weak arguments that did not match the recipients’ self-schemas. Thus, schema-congruency appears to produce a favorable bias to message processing. That is, people are more accepting of arguments when they seem to fit the way they view the world.

Thus, if the school psychologist matches the rationale for a recommendation to consultees’ self-schemas, the consultee is more likely to generate favorable thoughts, assuming that the likelihood of elaboration is high. For example, with consultees who view themselves as “scientific, data-driven problem solvers,” the consultant should provide arguments congruent with this perspective, whereas with consultees who view themselves as “humanistic and intuitive,” the consultant would relate the advocated position to these values. When addressing a self-styled “hard headed empiricist,” the psychologist might emphasize research findings that dem-
onstrate negative effects of the use of corporal punishment on children’s behavior and learning. When addressing the humanist, the psychologist would present arguments based on children’s self-esteem and right to be treated with dignity and respect.

The ELM accounts for the empirical finding that consultant recommendations that are supported by rationales that match teachers’ perspectives on a problem result in greater acceptance of the recommendation than do recommendations that are supported by mismatched rationales. For example, in one analogue study (Conoley, Conoley, Ivey, & Scheel, 1991), teachers were presented with a problem situation followed by an intervention recommendation. After being presented with the problem situation, teachers completed a questionnaire that elicited their beliefs about the definition and causes of the child’s problem, the teacher’s theory of change, as well as the teacher’s self-assessment of his or her strengths as a teacher. One week later, all teachers were presented with the intervention recommendation. However, teachers received a unique rationale for the recommendation designed either to match or not to match the teacher’s beliefs about the problem and self-perceptions of strengths. Some teachers received only the recommended intervention with no accompanying rationale. Teachers receiving matched rationales rated the intervention as more acceptable than did teachers receiving the mismatched rationale. Whereas these findings were not explained in terms of ELM concepts, the authors’ discussion of results is highly compatible with the ELM: “Systematically matching rationales may help consultees with the reconceptualization of interventions so that the interventions seem more compatible with their worldviews” (p. 548). The authors emphasized that a given intervention can be supported by more than one rationale and that the correctness of the consultee’s beliefs about the problems (e.g., attributions for the problem) is less important than the match between recommendation and the consultee’s assumptions. Of course, the rationale must be viewed as credible by the consultee in order to elicit favorable thoughts.

It is important to note that a consultant can provide a matched rationale in one of three general ways. First, the psychologist can frame a rationale for his or her recommendation that matches the consultee’s preexisting beliefs, as was done in the Conoley et al. (1991) study. Second, the consultant can activate an alternative frame of reference for viewing the situation or problem, such that the problem is cast in a new light (Hughes & DeForest, 1993). For example, the consultant might suggest that the child described by the teacher as “unmotivated” and “not caring” is protecting a fragile self-concept by not risking failure. An activated perspective might be related to the consultee’s self-schema (e.g., level-headed, compassionate, democratic). Even bogus personality feedback embedded in a credible context affects people’s tendency to process information in a manner consistent with that feedback (Petty & Brock, 1979).
Third, the psychologist can select an intervention that fits with the consultee's thinking about the problem. Just as single interventions can be supported by different rationales, different interventions can bring about desired behavior change. Both approaches, however, require that the psychologist carefully attend to the consultee's beliefs, goals, values, and informational bases in suggesting and supporting an intervention. The psychologist can also influence the direction of elaboration by managing the discrepancy between their advocated position and the beliefs of consultees. When recipients perceive a large discrepancy between their beliefs and the advocated position, they are more likely to engage in counterarguing (Brock, 1967; Lord et al., 1979), presumably in the interest of defending existing beliefs. In such a situation, the persuasive attempt may result in a boomerang effect, such that the recipient is less favorable to the recommended behavior or attitude.

The psychologist can reduce counterarguing by not forewarning the consultee of an intent to persuade (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979a). People tend to reject a message that is perceived as threatening their freedom to think or act in a particular way (i.e., psychological reactance, Brehm, 1966). In such situations, the psychologist should attempt to decrease the perception of an intent to persuade by emphasizing consultee freedom to accept or to reject any recommendations offered, eliciting and respecting consultees' beliefs about the problem, and attempting to build upon, and "fine-tune" consultees' ideas rather than presenting one's own ideas.

Case Example

The following case study illustrates the use of some ELM notions for developing and leading an in-service professional development program for staff. Change resulting from in-service programs is often disappointing, perhaps because the attitudinal commitment to engage in the new behaviors advocated in the in-service presentation is often absent. Participants may not be motivated to evaluate carefully the information provided, or their readiness to counterargue (reject the message) may be high due to their perception of the intent of the presenter to influence them to adopt new behaviors or attitudes. Prior to designing in-service programs, psychologists should assess general attitudes toward the recommended approach as well as the basis for these attitudes, and then tailor the message to these attitudes. The assessment of preexisting attitudes can be conducted with formal questionnaires (Cafferty, 1992) or through less formal means, such as focus groups with persons representative of the target audience.

Case Study. The psychologist has decided to make a presentation to teachers advocating a conflict resolution curriculum. The curriculum has been approved by the principal, and all teachers are expected to imple-
ment the curriculum. Because the psychologist realizes that teacher attitudinal commitment to the curriculum will predict the fidelity of implementation, the psychologist wants to influence participants to positively evaluate the curriculum.

First, the psychologist meets with two or three small but representative samples of teachers to discuss their initial thoughts about teaching conflict resolution skills in the classroom. In addition to the discussion, teachers list all of their thoughts about the proposed program. Based on these discussions and analyses of the thought-listings (see Cacioppo & Petty, 1981), the psychologist develops more formal scales to assess teachers’ general attitudes and specific beliefs regarding teaching conflict resolution skills. This questionnaire is administrated to a larger sample of teachers. Results of the questionnaire indicate that teachers are slightly negative toward the topic. An analysis of questionnaire items reveals that teachers have three major concerns, or negative thoughts related to the curriculum: (a) The curriculum will take away from instructional time in core academic areas; yet, teachers will still be held accountable for students’ performance on standardized tests. (b) Teachers doubt they will have the skills to successfully implement the curriculum. (c) Teaching conflict resolution skills is not the teacher’s role. Favorable thoughts included the priority placed on reducing violence in schools and the belief that children are ill-prepared to resolve conflict on their own without resorting to aggression. Very few teachers had direct experience with conflict resolution training.

The psychologist develops specific arguments to counter each nonsupportive belief. These strategies include the following: (a) providing empirical evidence that aggression and learning are related and that a similar curriculum resulted in improved performance on standardized tests of achievement; (b) addressing self-efficacy for implementing the curriculum by including testimony from a teacher trained in the curriculum that she mastered the knowledge and skills and by including role plays that enable participants to practice the essential skills; (c) addressing teacher role by emphasizing how much teacher time is currently spent in managing students’ conflict and helping children solve interpersonal problems.

Prior to making the presentation, the psychologist pre-tests these arguments with small sample of teachers and makes modifications based on their reactions to the message. Next, the psychologist makes the presentation, incorporating methods to enhance motivation and ability to process the message, and administers the attitude questionnaire a second time to assess the degree to which the presentation succeeded in changing attitudes toward the curriculum. The results of the second assessment would determine the next step, which might include further persuasive attempts, implementation of the curriculum, or a decision not to implement the curriculum due to lack of favorable attitudes on the part of those responsible for implementing it.
Caveats

The ELM has been very thoroughly evaluated in basic research settings and has been applied to a lesser degree for such purposes as psychotherapy (Cacioppo, Claiborn, Petty, & Heesacker, 1991) and counseling (Gilbert, Heesacker, & Gannon, 1991; Heesacker, 1986; McNeill & Stoltenberg, 1989) interventions, drug (Petty, Baker, & Gleich, 1991) and HIV (Petty, Gleich, & Jarvis, 1993) education programs, and understanding advertising (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983) and consumer behavior (Petty, Unnava, & Strathman, 1991). The utility of the ELM in these settings has led us and others (e.g., Andrews & Gutkin, 1994; Medway & Cafferty, 1990) to suggest that the ELM could be a useful conceptual tool for school psychologists. However, the generalizability of ELM findings to school psychology settings has yet to be determined. In addition, there are some special considerations involved in making school psychology applications of the ELM.

For example, school psychologists are usually involved in ongoing relationships with those persons whom they wish to influence. Thus, the school psychologist is concerned not only with the effect of a particular persuasive attempt but also with the consultee’s attitude toward the psychologist. When engaging in attempts to influence others’ attitudes, the psychologist must be wary of the possible negative outcomes if persuasion is viewed as “manipulation.” These risks include decreased credibility (especially if the persuasive attempt is unsuccessful), an increased likelihood on the part of consultees to counterargue in the future, a decreased willingness to meet with the psychologist and, thereby, expose one’s self to a persuasive attempt, and a reduced liking for the psychologist. Consultees’ liking for the psychologist and specific beliefs about the psychologist will predict consultees’ willingness to approach the psychologist, discuss problems with the psychologist, and support the psychologist’s activities. Several studies have demonstrated the importance of consultees’ attitudes toward the consultant (i.e., liking for the consultant) on consultees’ evaluation of the consultation (Gutkin, 1986; Silverman, 1974).

The ELM posits that attitudinal and behavioral change are the result of a complex interaction of task, individual differences, and contextual variables. Adding to the complexity of applying ELM tenets to a particular persuasive endeavor is the fact that the same variable (e.g., mood, expert status, or number of sources) can serve different functions under different specified combinations of individual, task, and setting variables. As we noted previously, sometimes (i.e., low elaboration likelihood settings) a psychologist’s expert status or the consultee’s mood can serve as peripheral cues. At other times (i.e., moderate elaboration likelihood conditions) these variables can motivate issue-relevant thinking. At still other times (i.e., high elaboration likelihood conditions) these variables can impart a positive bias to the ongoing information processing activity (Chaiken &
Maheswaran, 1994; Petty, Schumann, Richman, & Strathman, 1993). Clearly, successful application of the ELM to consultation requires a thorough understanding of the intricacies of the theory. Research demonstrating the operation of ELM concepts in consultation, under task and contextual variables unique to consultation, is likely to contribute to the knowledge base on effective consultation practice.

It is important to note that some existing empirical studies on consultation can easily be interpreted from an ELM framework (e.g., see Conoley et al., 1991; Martens, et al., 1989). However, studies employing research designs and hypotheses explicitly based on application of ELM principles to consultation are needed. Researchers applying the ELM to consultation will need to attend carefully to operationalization of ELM constructs, such as message quality and degree of elaboration (Cacioppo et al., 1991). Critics of consultation research acknowledge the dearth of empirical research to guide consultation practice (Gresham & Kendall, 1987; Gutkin, 1993). Research based on the ELM and other theories of interpersonal influence that defines, measures, and manipulates theoretically relevant variables and assess the effects of these manipulations has a high probability of increasing the empirical basis for what is said and done in consultation. An improved theoretical and empirical basis for consultation practice will increase the quality of the services that are provided.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most important issue raised in our review of the ELM and its utility for school psychology is that although some attitudes are based on a careful reasoning process in which the issue-relevant information is related to oneself and integrated into a coherent knowledge structure, other attitudes are formed as a result of relatively simple cues in the persuasion environment. Although both types of processes can lead to attitudes similar in their valence (how favorable or unfavorable they are), there are important consequences of the manner of attitude change. Because the goal of most school psychologists who deliver persuasive communications is to produce long-lasting changes in attitudes with behavioral consequences, the central route to persuasion appears to be the preferred influence strategy. Unfortunately, this is not simple. First, the recipient of the new information must have the motivation and ability to process the new information. As noted previously, one of the most important determinants of motivation to think about a message is the perceived personal relevance of that message. When personal relevance is high, people are motivated to scrutinize the information presented and integrate it with their existing beliefs, but when perceived relevance is low, messages may be ignored or processed for peripheral cues. Many of the messages generated by school psychologists may not be seen as highly relevant or important to the people
who receive them. It is also important to note that even if people can be motivated to attend to and think about the persuasive message, it is critical that they respond to these messages with favorable cognitive and affective reactions. It is likely that different types of information will be responded to favorably by different types of consultees. Framing arguments in terms of people’s existing beliefs, values, and ways of thinking, enhances the likelihood of favorable thoughts and persuasion success.

Research on social influence has come a long way from the early notion that providing factual information alone was sufficient to influence attitudes and behavior. Social influence is a complex, though explicable process. We now know that the extent and nature of a person’s cognitive responses to external information may be more important than the information itself. We know that attitudes can be changed in different ways (central vs. peripheral routes), and that some attitude changes are more stable, resistant, and predictive of behavior than others. We also know that even apparently simple variables (such as a person’s mood or the expertise of the message source) can produce persuasion by very different processes in different situations. Understanding these processes will likely lead to their effective use by school psychologists.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Jennifer Sager for her assistance in preparing this article. Preparation of the article was supported in part by NSF Grant SBR 9520854.

REFERENCES


