MOTIVATION IN THE CLASSROOM – EXPERIENCES FROM WALDORF PEDAGOGY

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November 2008

Abstract

This paper investigates the factor of motivation, as a key element in a learning process. It focuses on the role of teachers, who as facilitators of learning, have an important role in motivating pupils for the learning process.
Class teachers and subject teachers of two primary classes were interviewed about their approaches, experiences and challenges as regards motivating their pupils. Classroom observations of each teacher were then conducted.
An analysis of the data thus gathered pointed to several principles seen by these teachers as crucial to the understanding of classroom motivation in Waldorf education
Despite the relatively small scale of the research project, it presents a variety of findings, mainly centred on responding to each pupil's individual needs and on the sources of inspiration the teacher utilises to remain motivated him- or herself.
In our South African context many teachers feel de-motivated by administrative burdens from the curriculum as well as by failing disciplinary systems in schools. The suggestions offered in this paper have the potential to re-awaken teachers for their main task, and to provide guidance as to how disciplinary pressure in schools can be replaced with real motivation for learning.

Introduction

At a time when the demoralisation of teachers is recognised as a pervasive feature of South African schooling, this paper revisits the issue of classroom motivation. We take the view that learner motivation cannot be seen in isolation from teacher motivation; that motivation is to be seen as intrinsic to the practice of education (extrinsic motivation is a contradiction in terms); and that motivation needs to be seen as pervading the entire teaching and learning process rather than skills or techniques, important as these might be).

Considering the coherent and practical approach to classroom motivation that Waldorf pedagogy aims to practise, this paper draws on the views of teachers in Waldorf schools, complemented with brief explanations of various aspects of this approach.

The paper falls into two sections. The first is a short review of conceptions of motivation as found in the literature. The second is an account of classroom practice drawing on interviews with and observations of four experienced Waldorf teachers in Cape Town primary schools.

For reasons of brevity the teachers' grasp of aspects of pedagogy that hold major implications for motivation are presented in synthesised form. Fuller accounts of each teacher's understanding of his or her practice are to be found in Rios (2007).

Conceptions of motivation

The importance of motivation in education has been widely recognised. The topic appears in most teacher education textbooks and it has been the focus of various research activities. Yet, one cannot escape the impression that the importance of motivation is still undervalued, as the amount of attention given in this respect is generally overshadowed by the emphasis on other aspects of the teacher's profession, such as curriculum, teaching methods, classroom management and discipline.

True, some educationalists have made poignant statements confirming the vital role of motivation as a factor for success in teaching and learning. According to Pretorius (1998) 'motivation is not only a prerequisite for adequate learning achievement, but motivating his pupils should also be the teacher's educational objective'. Fraser (2004) says that 'a mediator of learning who is not enthusiastic and motivated himself will not succeed in motivating his learners or making the work interesting for them'. Coetzee (2008) adds that 'educators may be very knowledgeable about subject matter and teaching techniques, but if they don't know how to get learners involved in learning, their efforts are wasted'.

However, after observing the vital role of motivation, few authors appear to do justice to their own statements and only briefly highlight some of the factors that contribute to the level motivation among learners, while hardly touching the motivation the teacher needs himself (please note that in this paper 'him' and 'he' will refer to both genders). Pretorius (1998) uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs in describing the factors that motivate pupils:

- Physical needs
- Need for security, which includes predictable and non-threatening teaching approaches
- Need to belong, i.e. feeling at home in the classroom
- Need for self-worth, for which the learning experience needs to be a tool, and
- Need for self-actualisation, i.e. inner motivation to learn

Fraser (2004) observes that 'the right class atmosphere will determine whether or not learners enjoy learning'. Pienaar (2004) lists qualities needed in educators to provide pupils with the motivation to learn (quoted from McCombs & Pope 1994):

- Knowledge
- Interest
- Firmness and consistency
- Democratic treatment
- Warmth
- Respect
- Enjoyment
- Discipline without humiliation
- Encouragement

- Moderation
- Sense of humour
- Persistence

Yet, despite the above attempts to provide a level of understanding of how good teachers succeed in motivating their pupils, the descriptions seem to remain broad and superficial. Little guidance is offered to address questions about the role of different personality types among teachers. How can we understand what makes some people good teachers and others bad teachers, and what can be done to increase skills for motivating learners, in the personal and professional development of the teachers?

Extrinsic vs. intrinsic factors in motivation

Theories about motivation all clearly distinguish the dichotomy between external factors (such as rewards or punishments) and internal levels of motivation (such as self-actualisation). Despite the recognition both elements of motivation receive, Coetzee (2008) observes that in most schools the external factors still largely determine the educational practices. He is hopeful that this emphasis will swing towards pupils' intrinsic motivation, and trusts that this process is being supported by Outcomes Based Education, which 'has increased learners' responsibility for own learning' (Coetzee, 2008, p 103).

The benefit of moving from extrinsic to intrinsic motivational goals is widely supported. Wallace (2008) describes 12 success schools in England where students achieved well due to students' own levels of self-worth and participation in curriculum and school organisation. Pretorius (1998) says that 'the most important motivation is self-motivation'. Coetzee (2008, p 21) states that people have the best chance to succeed to meet challenges, if 'believing that one has control over what happens to oneself, and think they determine the rewards and punishments they receive in life'.

Different views are expressed on the question whether all learners are (or can become) motivated to learn. Fraser (2004, p 18) states that 'very few learners are really intrinsically motivated to learn. The educator therefore has an enormous task in this regard and must learn to mediate in such a way that the learner is motivated'. Pienaar (2004, pp 169-170) on the other hand, states that 'modern theories of motivation state that all learners are naturally motivated to learn if they are in a positive frame of mind and have a supportive learning environment' (quoting McCombs & Pope 1994). Pretorius (1998, pp 210-216) is also quite optimistic, saying that 'every pupil can be motivated through stimulating learning material', which still acknowledges a condition relating to the teacher's input.

Optimistic or not, educationalists support with consensus the need to put more emphasis on the development of inner motivation for learning. The challenge for the teaching profession, therefore, is to provide pupils with the circumstances within which their own motivation will have the best chance to develop. Pretorius (1998, pp 210-216) says that 'pupils must experience surprise, amazement, healthy doubt, puzzlement, disparity, a questioning attitude, uncertainty, contradiction, challenge, lack of knowledge, curiosity, the unusual, the unexpected, newness, interest, eagerness, etc. to be stimulated and motivated'. Wallace (2008) stresses the need for

students to be able to make choices and to use their own initiative. They need to become 'confident risk-takers'.

Pastoll (2002) has fully chosen the intrinsic source of motivation for learning as the one that should be followed. He argues that the typical aspects of our Western schooling (e.g. examinations and tests, grading of results, passing and failing) are detrimental to the motivation to learn (pp 18-19). He continues by offering an interesting and useful range of strategies to enhance the intrinsic motivation of learners, including 'hands-on learning: learning by doing', where doing the real thing is most effective (pp 128-133) and 'exposure to motivated people', a reminder that pupils' motivation depends on the teacher's motivation to start with (pp 176-179).

Motivation among teachers

The need for the teacher to be motivated himself is widely recognised. Carroll (2005) states that in order to be an effective teacher, one needs to:

- Have subject knowledge
- Have knowledge of teaching methods. And
- Have supportive emotions, such as confidence, enjoyment and enough challenge
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There are also several motivational elements in Marais's list (2004, p 60) of the teacher's leadership responsibilities:

- Must have a holistic perspective
- Bringing core values to life
- Encouraging a vision because classroom management requires imagination.
- Inspiring learners and their parents to participate in developing a vision.
- Building a learning environment
- Understanding and acknowledging needs
- Flexible responses
- Working with balance, rhythm and workflow
- Acknowledging creative complexity and controversy
- Finding the path of integrity
- Modelling the way

Pienaar (2004, pp 169-170) adds to this that 'we as educators must find ways to get past negative ideas and feelings in order to keep our learners positive in the classroom'.

Yet, these lists of what is needed in a teacher do not say much about how these qualities could be achieved. Motivating teachers who lack motivation is one of the biggest challenges for educational managers. Unable to do much about teachers' intrinsic motivation, the only tools in hand appear to be external factors, such IQMS systems and incentives. As observed by Mabogoane & Patel (2006) 'the issue of employee incentives in an education system is quite complex. Some incentives may not only be effective but have the support of the teachers. Incentives are better than coercion'.

Coetzee (2008, p 21) comes closest to intrinsic aspects of personal development in a teacher, when he says that one should try to motivate oneself by managing thoughts: positive thinking, focus on

future, not on past failures, accept limitations and focus on strengths. In addition to this he advises teachers to focus on own inner control, and to reject a culture of blaming others, the system, the department, etc. (Coetzee, 2008). He concludes that the teacher should attempt to 'satisfy one's calling, committed and focussed effort, involving all physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of the self'.

All in all, the literature does not appear to have many answers to the question of what motivates the teacher.

Investigating motivation in Waldorf pedagogy

Based on the many questions and issues discussed above, a case study was conducted, consisting of interviews with primary teachers as well as observations of their classroom practices. Two of the teachers were class teachers, and in addition two subject teachers were interviewed and observed. The interviews and observations took place in two Waldorf schools in Cape Town, a choice based on the nature of the teacher education programme within which the research was conducted. The interviews and observations were documented and analysed (see: Rios, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to make further connections between the responses from the teachers and the observations made in class, and the educational principles and practices within the Centre for Creative Education. Where these principles are quite specific for the Waldorf approach, within which the institution is rooted, a brief description of core aspects of such principles will be included, for the benefit of those readers who are unfamiliar with the Waldorf background and practices.

The authors clearly understand the limitations of this research project, due to its small scale and specific setting within a Waldorf-based environment. The question of motivation, however, appears to be one of the major hurdles in mainstream education at present, both on the side of pupils and among teachers. Many de-motivating factors affecting pupils (broken homes, violence, poverty and the passiveness caused by television) and affecting teachers (pupils' educational backlogs, their lack or respect, large classes and huge administrative pressure) have swung the balance to a critical low, and many educationalists seem to have run out of inspiration to turn the tide. In this situation of grave concern, the relatively easy-going practices within Waldorf Education, both regarding pupil behaviour and teacher motivation, confirmed to a great extent in the outcomes of the case study, may well be a helpful hand to those who need sources of renewed inspiration.

The teacher's personal interest in each child

One of the most significant findings of the case study has been that all participating teachers highlighted the personal relationship between a teacher (especially the class teacher) and the child as a key factor determining the level of motivation the pupil will be able to maintain for the school work. Only if a teacher is genuinely interested in each individual pupil and shows this interest to him, will each pupil feel an inner connection that lays the foundation on which the pupil's level of interest and co-operation will be based. Primary pupils (and with differences, pre-primary and high school pupils are no exception) need to feel a personal warmth and connection, which gives them reason to adhere to rules and things that need to happen as part of the school routine. Many teachers refer to

this as a teacher's 'Love' for his children. Some teachers hesitate to use that term, but whatever the term chosen, there need to be high levels of reverence, respect and kindness from the teacher for the pupils. Interestingly, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003) has introduced the now commonly used term 'learners' instead of 'pupils' or 'children', which sounds unnecessarily cold and instrumental and does not contribute towards the warmth that is needed between a teacher and the children.

It is an established practice in Waldorf education that class teachers welcome their pupils at the door of the classroom with a handshake each day. This is a good moment to share something personal with each child and to pick any signs of extra needs or particular circumstances which the child brings along into the classroom.

Personal continuity

The next observation is that a personal relationship needs time to develop and bear fruit. For children, it really matters who stands in front of them, and in some schools where the tendency is "could you take that class today?" children clearly respond with restlessness and lack of discipline.

The Waldorf principle that teachers become a class "guardian" for a number of years (primary teachers normally taking a grade 1 through to grade 7) is a far-reaching application of the concept of an ongoing relationship between a teacher and his children. The effect of this practice is overwhelmingly positive, with a very low number of exceptions. The often heard comment "but what if a pupil and teacher don't get along" appears to be merely theoretical, as once teachers and pupils have commenced the journey, they mutually find ways of making it work, because they want to make it work. There is no room for the consolation 'If I hold on for this year, my colleague in the next grade will try to find a way with this child'.

A curriculum to match developmental stages

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003) has a very linear structure. Many Learning Outcomes are the same for many years of learning, with the increasing expectations defined as Assessment Standards as the only difference from year to year. This linear approach, however, does not do much justice to the great differences between the various primary years and the stages of development shown by the pupils in each year.

In the curriculum used by Waldorf schools, much emphasis is placed on matching the child's stage of development with curriculum content and teaching methodology. The uniqueness of each year of a child's development is expressed through different learning content for each year of primary education. This applies to the story themes on which each year of Waldorf Education is based, and affects which subjects or topics will be introduced and all further curriculum choices for each year. The teachers who participated in the research project responded that this way of meeting the child at his developmental level works highly effectively on the level of motivation shown by the children in return.

Integration of the RNCS and the above Waldorf principles can well be achieved. The RNCS being outcomes-based, without prescribing much of the process leading to the achievement of these outcomes, leaves it for schools and teachers to decide on the content and the methodology of their choice. The Waldorf principles around choosing content and topics may well be applied, while still meeting the expected RNCS outcomes by the end of the day. In mainstream schools, however, thorough studies of developmental stages in primary children will have to be undertaken, to make informed decisions about shaping a school or teacher-specific curriculum for each primary year.

Integrating cognitive, emotional and activity-based learning

Mentioned by most interviewed teachers in the case study, a holistic approach to teaching and learning is also seen as highly effective in motivating pupils for the learning process. In Waldorf terms the *Three-Fold approach* of interconnecting activities for cognitive, affective/emotional, and senso-motor development contributes much to pupils' wellbeing and interest.

Moving away from purely cognitive learning in schools has been widely recognised as important, and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003) also attempts to speak in active terms. In practice, however, little integration between these three levels of human existence has been achieved, and the RNCS verbs still refer predominantly to cognitive skills (e.g. 'demonstrate' understanding).

A truly integrated approach to learning means that no matter which subject, pupils are offered not only elements of cognitive learning, which are usually defined with ease, but also elements of learning that arouse interest and personal connection (e.g. artistic work) as well as elements of active learning which include gross and fine motor skills..

Waldorf Education expresses the above principle through active, hands-on and artistic moments of teaching and learning, such as painting or modelling landscapes while learning Geography, writing poems or dramatising events of the past while learning History, and moving to the rhythms of the number world (e.g. multiples) while learning Maths.

Compared to the short life-span of our memory of cognitive information, physical movements, once mastered, are not easily forgotten. An active approach to primary education is therefore a very efficient way to go. The level of interest shown by children for activities that are not bound to their desk and chair also contributes very positively to their motivation to practise skills without getting bored.

Moving step by step towards a known goal

Children who are aware of the goal of their learning, although the level of awareness will of course differ between grade 1 and grade 7 pupils, show a higher level of motivation than in the case of the teacher who leaves the pupils in the dark about the aims and just expects them to do certain things. This principle, too often forgotten by teachers, can help resolve many situations where motivation is lacking.

Equally important is the need for the learning (whatever the nature) to progress step by step, whilst providing sufficient time for pupils to acquire the skills needed to take the next step. Still many teachers make the mistake of waiting for the moment that some children in class appear to know what to do, after which the teacher assumes that he can move on, forgetting that a few bright children do not represent the general level of understanding and skills achieved by the group as a whole. Most classes need more practice before their teacher moves on to something more difficult.

Enjoyable approaches to teaching and learning

As a final factor to increase motivation among all pupils, participating teachers mentioned the need for learning opportunities to be enjoyable and interesting for the children. Too often, children still have to participate in a process of learning that is hardly interesting. Many teachers still have to develop ways to make learning enjoyable, to add fun and to allow for some humour. A variety of activities is needed and, yes, a teacher has to have some entertaining skills to fulfil his task of motivating the pupils to embark on the learning process, as much as a chef puts effort in arranging and decorating the food, to motivate the guests to eat it.

Engaging with different pupil needs

One of the Waldorf principles mentioned by several participating teachers is the teacher's awareness of various temperaments among the pupils, and his ability to work with these differences accordingly. The teacher's studies of children's temperaments and approaches to work with these, appear to be very beneficial within the classroom situation. It gives the teacher the tools to motivate each pupil in the way that works best for him, in situations where the general, class-wise attempts to motivate pupils need individual tweaking. For the pupil, experiencing an approach that matches his temperament, means an experience of being recognised and met at the level of individual needs. This contributes to the personal relationship with the teacher and leads to a higher level of motivation for the learning.

Knowledge of the temperaments also assists the teacher to bring higher levels of liveliness and variety to his lessons, as various parts of lessons, especially during story-telling and dramatising, become alive with aspects of different personalities and habits. Pupils eagerly connect to these different emotional aspects, whether it represents humour or sadness, greed or forgiveness, and they participate in the lesson with a high level of interest. Experienced teachers are able to address particular pupils with their individual temperaments, within a class activity, to boost their level of interest at times when a little help is needed.

For the professional development of the teacher, it is important to know one's own temperament and to work actively to avoid one-sidedness in this regard. Achieving a balance, especially achieving the ability to express oneself through various temperaments, is an important professional aim for the teacher. It provides one with self-esteem and confidence, thus contributing to the teacher's own professional motivation.

Pupils with motivational challenges

Most interviewed teachers mentioned the polarities of highly skilled pupils and slow learners. Both extremes are seen as challenges when it comes to remaining motivated for a learning process. The advanced pupils are in constant danger of getting bored, and the slow learners lack the confidence they need to enjoy their learning. Both categories of pupils respond in turn with disruptive behaviour or withdrawal.

The teacher who wants to motivate these different groups of pupils needs to constantly ask himself what each pupil really asks him. Finding answers to these pupil-specific questions is the first step to working more successfully with each pupil. Including the pupil in this process of investigation, and making him a participant in any decisions taken, will contribute to the relationship with the teacher and provide a highly motivating element for making a change. Again, the teacher's personal interest in each of his children is a key to making progress.

The power of rhythm

While children's motivation relies on having confidence and seeing the purpose of what is happening, it is important that this is supported structurally in a predictable manner in which children's days at school unfold. Unexpected changes in daily routines these have a devastating effect on children's behaviour and motivation.

As it is healthier to eat at set, regular intervals than it is to eat haphazardly, education also needs to be offered in a structure that offers the children a balanced variety of different learning activities, and that is predictable in the sense that pupils know what will be happening next. This principle first of all applies to a single lesson, where it is better for the children to know from the start which activities they can expect, than to be surprised every time something new is about to happen. Too many teachers still have the habit of suddenly announcing things, such as "and now we are all going outside", only to explain the purpose of this once the children have finally formed a line on the playground.

The rhythm of a child's day at school needs to be planned with equal care. Waldorf teachers start the day with at least half an hour of movements, games and other active ways of learning. This enables the children to settle within the classroom routines from the various home situations they have just left behind, in an enjoyable way, before changing to more intellectually-based challenges. These activities bond the group socially and assist the children to connect to the school rhythm. Similarly, other moments of the day have specific events such as the daily story, and the healthy rhythm of moving from one learning activity to the next becomes a good habit for the pupils that supports their well-being and therefore their behaviour and motivation.

Furthermore, a year also has a rhythm, induced by the change of the seasons in nature, and followed in school terms and holidays. Waldorf schools celebrate a major festival each term, to enhance the children's experience of this yearly rhythm and to give further meaning and connection to this healthy aspect of human life. The festivals give the children something to look forward to and to be involved in, thus contributing positively to the child's motivation to come to school.

The power of being positive

Most of the teachers who participated in the research mentioned that disciplining children by being harsh on them and punishing them for incorrect behaviour is the least effective approach possible, and they reverted to it only as a last resort. Using negativity for disciplining children may solve a difficult situation in the short-term but is in effect counterproductive on children's motivation in the long run. Children who have been punished, or even merely assume that they will be punished if they don't behave, appear to lose their inherent level of motivation for the learning process.

Avoiding negativity in one's approach to discipline is therefore an important goal. To be able to work in such a way, a teacher will need to have reached a fairly balanced state of personal development, as many people find it difficult to avoid the emotion of anger once things aren't going as they should. The teacher's own work at the level of his temperament (see 2a above) plays an important part in his process toward achieving this balance.

There is an element of being an actor in the teacher's profession. Acting a bit more cheerful than one might be deep inside oneself, is a good habit if it is one's task to motivate others to embark on a learning process. This actor inside each teacher is worth being developed to the fullest capacity, which includes the ability to deal with situations where the teacher needs to exert a level of authority. Letting the actor out gives the teacher the personal distance he needs from the actual situation and helps avoid personal disappointment if the outcome of the event is not as positive as expected.

Further elements about the power of being positive include a teacher's own passion and enthusiasm, both for his profession in general, as well as for the content of what the pupils will be learning today. The teacher's own example, set by his own behaviour and response to situations, is one of the strongest motivational stimulants for pupils. This means that the teacher must strive to be 'true' at all times – children easily perceive whether one speaks truly or whether one is merely paying lip service to empty principles. This need for 'trueness' does not contradict what was said about the actor in the teacher, above, but it does remind us not to act out untrue values.

The teacher's own sources of inspiration

Having considered all the above, the question still remains from whom or from what the teacher himself will receive motivation. This question is specifically relevant for teachers who have been in the profession for many years, and may have become disillusioned, bogged down by organisational or administrative requirements, or generally tired and worn out.

One of the conclusions derived from this research is that motivation is gained from success. A person who has achieved skills and is confident, will find it easy to be motivated for something he can do with his skills. On the other hand, a person who struggles to function will find it equally difficult to be motivated. This principle suggests that an answer to the question of motivation can be found by finding out how to improve one's skills to an adequate level. This may be in the area of lesson preparation, class management, dealing with an admin overload, or the fear of standing in front of parents. All these professional challenges have to do with skills.

Waldorf Education offers a set of tools, in curriculum as well as in teaching methodology, which assist teachers with their difficult tasks. In many instances these tools are experienced as very effective, by teachers who employ the methods in their teaching, by pupils enjoying their days at school, and by parents who see their children develop knowledge, skills as well as values for life, from an inner motivation for learning.

Teachers who continually work on improving their skills, who strive to do as well as they can in preparing the content for their pupils, and who also take time off from work at regular intervals, have a good chance to reach a level of self confidence which will enable them to function well and to remain motivated for the tasks given to them.

Many teachers find support in their efforts to be a good teacher by working at a spiritual level, for instance by using meditation or connecting professional tasks to one's religion. This enhanced level of integrated professional and personal development has the potential to be an extra source of inspiration for teachers, especially at times when one's skills are not yet coping too well with the challenges. Motivation gained this way has a profound effect on one's confidence and on the success of one's endeavours.

When Rudolf Steiner (1981, pp 51-61) prepared teachers for their profession he emphasised their responsibility for what he called 'the pupils' future soul content'. This elevates the teaching profession to a level often not considered. Seen in this light, a teacher can only be humble about his task and request the assistance of the spiritual world in his attempts to perform this magnificent task.

Conclusions

Despite its limited scope, this paper offers a number of conclusions and suggestions that may be of use for teachers and others working in educational situations.

The main thought that is derived from the readings and the research findings, is that motivation for learning is an intrinsic, natural phenomenon which occurs in people who see the benefit of the envisaged learning and who are sufficiently confident and skilled to take the next learning step. This conclusion assists in answering questions, both about the way to motivate school children for their learning process and about the way in which teachers could increase their own motivation for their teaching tasks. In both scenarios the key issue is to ensure that one is skilled and confident enough for the task that lies ahead, in order to awaken the natural level of motivation for embarking on the learning process.

This paper has offered a number of tools, suggested by Waldorf teachers who were interviewed and observed. These suggestions are offered to all teachers, whether they work in a Waldorf environment or not.

The understanding of motivation from a Waldorf perspective is that it is embedded in the life of the school community – the professional life of the teacher, the curriculum, the rhythms of the teaching

and learning day, the developmental stages of childhood and a vision of healthy and holistic development. This is not to say that all Waldorf schools “get it right”, rather that their coherent and explicit philosophy of educational practice is an important condition for “getting it right”.

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