

L.Vlasenko, O.Nikitenko

APPROACHES TO THE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

The essence of effective teaching lies in the ability of the teacher to set up a learning experience that brings about the desired educational outcomes. For this, each student must be engaged in the activity of learning. The nature of the psychological state of being engaged in the activity of learning has been the focus of much debate and research. A number of important psychological concepts, principles and processes involved in both the activity of learning itself and in facilitating such activity have been identified.

The article considers the aspects of how students learn that have the most practical relevance for effective teaching. Broadly, these fall into four sections. First, a consideration of the psychological nature of learning as it relates to effective teaching. What psychological state needs to be set up by the teacher for learning to take place?

What motivates students learning? In attempting to answer this question it is important to bear in mind a clear distinction between learning that must take place by an individual as a natural part of interacting with the environment, and the specific learning that is intended by the teacher. Within Piaget's approach, learning is the inevitable consequence of the individual's interaction with the environment. Such learning stems from the individual's biological drive towards adapting to the environment. In that sense, any educational experience that requires pupils to interact in some way with the learning task in hand will result in some learning. However, when we ask 'What motivates students learning?', we are really asking a question about the ways in which a pupil will make a positive mental effort towards the learning task. If pupils are asked when they felt most motivated towards school learning, their answers will fall into one of two main categories: 'When I was really interested in the work' or 'When I had to!' These two categories represent one of the most important distinctions made in considering pupil learning, that between 'intrinsic motivation' and 'extrinsic motivation'.

Such motivation involves an interest in the learning task itself and also satisfaction being gained from the task. Human beings are born with a strong desire to explore their environment and to seek out stimulation. Almost any situation that is puzzling will gain a person's attention and interest. Indeed, a useful way of starting a lesson or present a topic in the form of a question or problem that needs to be addressed or elicit pupils' interest. Whilst most analysis of intrinsic motivation has focused on the intellectual curiosity aspect, there is another strand to the concept that often receives less attention, but which is also important. Intrinsic motivation also includes satisfaction from undertaking the task because one finds engaging in the task is satisfying in some way. The essence of intrinsic motivation is that the person finds the task pleasurable and satisfying in itself.

The view of seeing motivation as deriving from an attempt to satisfy one's needs is very helpful in thinking about students learning. A particularly interesting development of this viewpoint is the work of Maslow (1954), who has argued that an individual's basic needs can be arranged in a hierarchy, with those lower in the hierarchy being 'pre-potent' (that is, needing to be satisfied as a matter of greater priority) in relation to needs higher in the hierarchy. Maslow's hierarchy, starting from the lowest level, is as follows:

- _ Physiological needs: e.g. need for food and oxygen.

- _ Safety needs: e.g. need for security, and freedom from anxiety.

- _ Belongingness and love needs: the need to feel one belongs, and the need to give and receive love.

- _ Esteem needs: the need for achievement, competence, mastery, and the need for status and prestige.

- _ Need for self-actualisation: the need to realise one's potentiality.

As well as basic needs, Maslow also identifies cognitive needs, based on the impulse to satisfy curiosity, to know, to explain and to understand. Maslow sees such cognitive needs as being inter-related with, rather than separate from, the basic needs. Indeed, the cognitive needs involve cognitive capacities (perceptual, intellectual and learning), which are used in part to satisfy the basic needs.

Maslow's hierarchy provides a useful framework for thinking about pupil motivation and needs. In particular, it draws attention to the importance of making sure that those needs lower in the hierarchy are being met when educational experiences that draw upon the higher needs of esteem and self-actualisation are set up. Maslow has also discussed a related notion of 'peak experiences'.

The notion of 'need for achievement' has also received a great deal of attention in relation to the motivation of pupils towards school learning.

A number of studies have explored the nature and development of both the need for achievement in general and how it is expressed in the context of academic success. The need for achievement appears to involve both intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. Research on pupils' level of need for achievement has highlighted how the expectations of others can influence their aspirations and how they interpret success and failure of themselves.

The behavioural approach to learning has a number of important educational implications. First, it draws attention to the relationship between pupils' behaviour and how the consequences of the behaviour for the pupil influences its future occurrence. In particular, it advocates that teachers should make frequent use of praise to reinforce appropriate pupil behaviour. Second, the research has identified a number of principles that can facilitate learning, for example, the use of quick corrective feedback. Such principles have been used to develop programmed learning packages, characterised by short learning steps and quick corrective feedback.

References

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