Learning environment as a modifier of study motivation in learning handicraft

Ene Lind1 PhD, Piret Lobrev2
Tallinn University, Estonia
enelind@tlu.ee

Abstract. This article deals with the motivation to learn in the Handicraft lessons, analysing the part of learning environment in this process. Humans start learning at a very early age due to an inborn natural instinct of self-development. The learning process needs to result in changes in behaviour. Thus, the purpose of learning is not only to acquire knowledge and new skills, but also to evolve into a more intelligent person and to develop creativity and social skills. According to J. Biggs and C. Tang, pupils without motivation do not exist, every pupil wants to be engaged in something. In each child lies the wish to learn, thus the teacher must find the right teaching methods and opportunities to make learning materials more interesting. The research was conducted in the winter of 2012/2013. The participants were 182 pupils and 12 teachers from various urban and rural schools. As a method of data collection, a questionnaire of three notional parts was used to gather evaluations from students and teachers. Pupils evaluated their motivation to learn to learn handicraft as average, rather than good or excellent. Meanwhile, the teachers regarded the motivation to learn of the pupils as good. The pupils desire more alternatives in class and more interesting lessons; they consider the classes to be boring and monotonous, and find the learning resources are limited and in bad condition.

Key words: learning environment, motivation to learn, handicraft.

Introduction

Study environment is the set of intellectual, social, and physical environments, which surrounds pupils and where pupils develop and learn. Study environment supports pupils' development into independent and active learners, sustains the the basic values of the curriculum and the mentality of the school, as well as retains and develops the traditions of the community and the school as a whole (Põhikooli riiklik..., 2011). The learning and school environment should be designed by everyone involved in purposefully influencing pupils' learning: parents, the enterprises in the community, cultural establishments, non-governmental organisations, and of course pupils themselves (Kello, 2005). A pleasant study environment tranquillises, eliminates anxiety, provides pupils with the sense of security, stimulates the mind, and provides support, balance and completeness in the activities. Study environment should make pupils feel cosy, yet not drowsily comfortable (Kidron, 2000, 22).

As the physical study environment we generally understand the room surrounding the learner, and the study materials (Põhikooli riiklik..., 2011). In includes a modern study environment and rooms that are aesthetically fit for the age of the learners (Sarv, 2013). Social study environment refers to pupils' relationships with the people surrounding them and the values underlying these relationships. Positive relationships between pupils and teachers guarantee success. There is growing consensus that the nature and quality of children's relationship with their teacher plays a critical and central role in motivating and engaging students to learn (Wenzel, 2009; ref Becker & Luthar, 2002; Pianta, Hamre, 2003; Hall, Higgins, 2005).

The relationships between teachers and pupils are positively associated with teachers' assessments on pupils' abilities. The higher assessment teachers give to the class they teach in, the better is the teaching atmosphere. The same pattern applies also in Estonia (Loogna, Ruus, 2009, 34-36).

J. Biggs and C. Tang (2007, 31) have identified four categories of motivation to learn, which stimulate people to act and think: external, social, achievement-related, and internal motivation. The trigger for external motivation is external or material reward (Burnett, 2006, 37). Thus external motivation emerges if pupils' learning is influenced by external factors. External motivation is among other things related to the stimulating impact of the external factors of motivation: e.g., working conditions, work...
environment, safety, and friendly personnel (Alas, 2008, 122). E. Krull believes (2000, 400-404) that externally prompted behaviour can be classified as motivation, which in addition to grades is also influenced by forms of rewarding, such as offering activity privileges (possibility to play games or spend time at one's own discretion), nominal rewarding (awards, displaying work), and praise. Motivation to learn is not something that needs to be achieved prior to learning, but it is a condition already present in pupils and it needs to be maintained during the whole time they are engaged with learning and even later, when pupils are applying what they have learned. Motivation signifies (Piht, 2004, 9-16):

- convincing pupils of the importance of what they are learning, both at the present moment as well as in the future;
- instilling self-confidence in pupils regarding their ability to acquire new knowledge and skills;
- guaranteeing pupils' contentment with study assignments and good results.

In pupils' activity motifs and goals are distinguished. Motif is an internal impulse to act; goal is the result of a purposed activity. The reasons for internal motivation lie within an individual, their activity generates mental satisfaction and happiness (Burnett, 2006, 36). In such a case both progressing on the journey and reaching the destination are important for pupils. On the occasion of such motivation pupils work because they are interested, they are able to apply their knowledge and skills (Biggs, Tang, 2007, 36). The emotional side of learning is closely related to motif, because people's activity is triggered by a certain affect, when the offered activity corresponds to certain existing needs and to closer or more distant personal goals (Koort, 1993, 16-18).

In order to generate and retain motivation to learn different factors increasing and promoting the will to learn are required. Learning as the creative acquisition of knowledge and skills is dependent on different factors: what is taught; who teaches and how; and who is taught. The nature of learning depends firstly on the material that is acquired, its content and the system of how it is presented. Secondly, it depends on the methodological techniques and the experience of the teacher, his or her personal singularities and specific teaching methods. Thirdly, the study process depends on the individualities of each pupil, the individual characteristics of their mental (intellectual, emotional, volitional) development; their attitude towards learning; their disposition and interests. Fourthly, learning is dependent on the atmosphere in the class, and fifthly, on the feedback given to pupils and teachers (Krutetski, 1979, 131-132).

Methodology

The objective of the exploratory part of the paper was to determine the factors influencing pupils' motivation to learn handicraft and the importance of the study environment within it. A quantitative study was carried out as a part of the work. For data collection questionnaires were used. Questionnaires allow collecting data fast and from a large number of people in a short period of time (Hirsijärv, Remes, 2005, 182).

Questionnaires were administered to twelve schools in Estonia, involving both urban and rural schools all over the country. The target group included Grade 8 to Grade 9 pupils studying in basic school and their teachers from four rural and eight urban schools. The sample size was determined by the number of pupils present at school on the day of the study. Carrying out the questionnaire was previously agreed with the teachers. It was personally administered at the schools, but to some schools the questionnaires were sent by post. In addition to the subject teachers also head teachers of the schools were asked for permission to carry out the study. The recovery of the questionnaires was 100%. MS Office Excel was used for analysing the data.

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions. It included both multiple choice questions and open ended questions. In case of open ended questions pupils had the opportunity to make additions to what was presented in the questionnaire. Giving the respondents a chance to express their opinion was considered highly important. Two questionnaires were drawn up: one for the teachers and one for the pupils.
Analysing the study results the total of respondents – 182 – was equalled with 100% and in case of each specific question the corresponding percentage of the total was calculated. The answers given by teachers and students were compared.

Results and discussion

Pupils were asked to assess their motivation to study handicraft, reason their assessment and point out the factors, which in their opinion would help to improve their motivation.

Pupils' interest in learning handicraft

Analysing the results it became evident that most of the pupils regarded their motivation to study handicraft as average (39%) or good (35%), 15% of the respondents thought their motivation to learn was excellent and only 11% believed that their motivation is poor.

Pupils, who thought their motivation was “good” and “average”, pointed out that
8. it is always a pleasure to go to the lessons, because the teacher is friendly and happy;
9. handicraft is a pleasant activity, because it is relaxing;
10. they are motivated by their parents and grandparents, who do handicraft at home and they go to each lesson with a conviction that they will learn new knowledge that might come handy in the future.

Pupils, who thought their motivation was “excellent” did handicraft also outside the school either at home or in hobby groups. Pupils make things knowing that they make these with their own hands, the product is just as they like it to be and they are very happy to wear the things they have made. They pointed out that if at home parents also do handicraft and show interest in products children have made at school, pupils' motivation to study handicraft is greater.

Pupils, who claimed that their motivation to study handicraft is poor noted that they go to each lesson with a fear, because they are afraid they are not able to do what is needed and have to redo their gauge swatches over and over again. The same pupils held the opinion that they can always go to the shops and buy the things they like, because they are not willing to wear the things they have made themselves.

Teachers hold the opinion that pupils' motivation to study handicraft is rather good (58%) and some also think that average (34 %). 8% of the respondents thought that pupils' motivation is excellent.

Teachers mostly assessed motivation to learn based on pupils' grades and the extent to which they were involved in the lessons; if pupils' grades were positive and they were happy to participate in the lessons, teachers mostly gave good assessment to their motivation. However, the teachers also claimed that across classes and topics motivation to learn varies greatly. If a topic is accomplishable and interesting for the pupils and they can use modern technological techniques, pupils' interest in the work is considerably greater. If a class is learning a more traditional handicraft technique, the interest in learning is smaller. In case of younger classes (Grades 4 to 7) motivation to learn was greater, because in older classes the work load is bigger than that in the younger classes. Motivation to learn was seen as excellent mostly in rural schools, where handicraft is highly valued among pupils.

Teachers' role in shaping the motivation

In addition to pupils, the motivation to learn is highly dependent also on the teacher teaching the subject. Undoubtedly the teacher also has to be motivated and enthusiastic in order to improve pupil’s motivation to learn (Landsberg, 2003, 16). Effective teachers are typically described as those who develop relationships with students that are emotionally close, safe, and trusting, that provide access to instrumental help, and that foster a more general ethos of community and varing in classrooms. (Wentzel, 2009). In addition to enthusiasm an important role is also played by teachers' high esteem in learning. (Krull, 2000, 454) Teachers' conduct is a clear message to pupils that learning is valuable, key to their self-determination and enriches their lives. Pupils have to be able to trust their teacher. Teachers' trustworthiness is an indicator that they care about pupils' self-confidence and success (Landsberg, 2003, 52). Perceived emotional support from teachers has been related significantly to students' academic performance and social functioning throughout the school-aged years (Wenzel,
Analysing the relationships between teachers and pupils it became evident that half of the respondents (pupils) thought their relationship with teachers and peers was good; only 4% claimed that relationships between pupils and teachers were poor. However, in open questions none of the teachers mentioned creating a friendly atmosphere and positive relationships between teachers and pupils.

However, in teachers' opinion the external factor that influences pupils' motivation to learn the most is an incompetent teacher (24%) or a teacher, who does not master his or her subject and is inconsiderate towards pupils. Only then do they mention other factors such as the lack of study materials and poor conditions (20%), tedious lessons and using different teaching methods (20%) and negative study environment (18%). Although in pupils' opinion the fact that they are not told what and how they should do something is the most important factor, teachers do not consider it so important.

**External factors as motivators for learning**

Among the external factors improving motivation to learn pupils mostly emphasise the existent of a good and pleasant study environment (18%) that has modern equipments; where the relationships between pupils and teachers is friendly and positive; interesting and versatile teaching methods and study aids are used, and teachers give regular feedback and praise on the work. Additionally, pupils also consider it important to have a motivated teacher, who masters the subject well and is caring and friendly to all pupils. The questionnaire showed that in pupils' opinion an important way of improving motivation to learn is to have a choice in planning and producing things (15%). If they are told what and how they have to do something, their motivation is decreased.

In teachers' opinion the external factors, which improve pupils' motivation to study handicraft the most include a good and pleasant study environment (13%), a motivated teacher (13%) and accomplishable study assignments (13%). These are followed by teacher's positive feedback (11%), choice in planning and producing things (11%) and interesting study aids (11%).

In pupils' opinion the most important factor that decreases interest in learning is the fact that the knowledge and skills learned within handicraft lessons are useless in the future.

In assessing the physical school environment, it was not appropriate to directly compare the opinions given by teachers and pupils, because pupils, who have always studied in the same school may not know what the conditions in other schools might be like. However, teachers have seen handicraft classrooms also in other schools and have a better idea on what an ideal handicraft classroom should look like in respect to decoration and equipments, as well as the relationships within the classroom.

By estimation of teachers and pupils became evident that the learning resources, materials and equipments in the classroom are more in bad conditions in the rural areas. The classrooms of handicraft in the schools of towns are more contemporary, bigger, lighting and there are more modern study materials.

If to compare the factors picking up motivation to study handicraft these are somewhat different by meaning of pupils and teachers.

Pupils pointed out the following factors that would help them improve their motivation to study handicraft:

- more interesting and exciting things should be done in the lessons;
- new and exciting techniques should be learned;
- a more spacious and bigger classroom;
- more inspiration should be obtained from the media;
- more time for completing the products should be allocated from the lesson times instead of finishing the work at home;
- more exhibitions for displaying student works should be organised;
- newer and more modern equipments should be used;
- a larger number of different teaching methods (group and team work) should be used;
• pupils should have more choice in planning and making things.

In order to improve motivation to learn teachers use the following methods:
• constant feedback during the process of work, both verbal and grades;
• tasks and practical works fit for pupils' abilities;
• choices when planning and making things, whereas only a few criteria are specified (e.g. the topic is patterning, but pupils are free to choose whether they want to make gloves, toys or a bag);
• giving a merit in the web based eKool (e-school), when a pupil has shown excellent contribution in a lesson;
• recognizing pupils' work – choosing these for exhibition display;
• showing products made by the teacher to pupils;
• taking pupils' individuality into account.

Conclusions
Although most of the pupils who participated in the study are not actively engaged in handicraft in their free time, they like the handicraft lessons at school, because these help them relax and they can do something they like and do not have to think much. Pupils tend to see their motivation towards learning handicraft rather average than good or excellent. However, teachers think that pupils' motivation to learn is good. All teacher-respondents pay attention to improving pupils' motivation to learn in the class. Teachers let pupils choose what and how they do, but unfortunately the results do not prove that teachers use different teaching methods and aids in their lessons, although in addition to a friendly atmosphere this is what pupils consider important in improving motivation to learn. Also a more spacious and bigger classroom is important and more modern equipments should be used.

Bibliography


