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THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATION THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFE

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Approaching students' motivation by only focusing on the internal (intrinsic) motivation and external (extrinsic) motivation has already become a cliché. This approach, while being important and necessary, and thus worthy of the focus education researchers and practitioners place on it, is not sufficient. The study shows that school can develop (and/or reinforce) other types of motivation, such as preventive, promotive, and altruist motivation. The study underlines the fact that, while intrinsic and extrinsic motivation deal with how students relate to their own activity, the preventive, promotive, and altruist motivation deal with how students relate to their present and future life.

Keywords: *motivation, preventive motivation, promotive motivation, altruist motivation, school, student, professor, motivational focus.*

INFLUENȚA ȘCOLII ASUPRA MOTIVAȚIEI ELEVULUI PENTRU ÎNTREAGA LUI VIAȚĂ

A devenit aproape un clișeu ca atunci când ne ocupăm de motivația elevului să avem în vedere doar diada motivație internă (intrinsecă)-motivație externă (extrinsecă). Deși importantă și necesară și, prin urmare, demnă de toată atenția cercetătorilor și practicienilor din educație, o asemenea înțelegere și abordare nu sunt și suficiente. Studiul arată că, în școală, putem dezvolta (și/sau întări) și alte tipuri de motivații, precum motivația preventivă, motivația promovare și motivația altruistă. El evidențiază faptul potrivit căruia, dacă motivația intrinsecă și cea extrinsecă au, mai ales, în vedere raportarea elevului la propria sa activitate, motivația preventivă, promovare și altruistă au, mai ales, în vedere raportarea elevului la propria lui viață, prezentă și viitoare.

Cuvinte-cheie: *motivație, motivație preventivă, motivație promovare, motivație altruistă, școală, elev, profesor, focus motivațional.*

Introduction

Almost everyone knows that an essential issue in education is motivating students placed in a compulsory educational and formation-transformation institutional environment. At a given time during childhood, children are taken from their own world and largely separated from the activities they consider interesting and valuable, being steered into an unfamiliar environment that is run on a strict schedule which children are constrained to follow.

Due to this more or less overloaded, accepted and understood (by the child) process, and considering the rapid pace of school life, the students' initial motivational state and its development during the entire school period becomes an important topic for both researchers and practitioners.

By analysing and researching the students' interest, attraction, apathy, detachment, rejection etc., we have almost exclusively come to discuss (and, in some specific cases, to focus on) only the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the relationship and transition between them. One might say that the study thereof has monopolised all (or almost all) findings and approaches to the psychological support of school learning and knowledge in formal education. Moreover, one might say that the intrinsic-extrinsic motivation area has become a common and predictable topic when it comes to providing reasons for students' education, irrespective of their age. One might argue that this angle of approach and treatment of school motivation has become one as exclusive as it is narrow and simplifying in the area of specialised research and literature that covers students' motivation with respect to formal institutional requirements and norms. This modest study does not aim to follow this undoubtedly interesting, exciting, useful, and necessary trend, trend that was, is and certainly will be followed by others in a (much) better way.

Towards another approach to researching and understanding students' motivation

Even though one cannot deny and underestimate such an approach to students' motivation (regarding their attitude towards school and their participation in school activities), – and one could not actually do that – one cannot accept it as being the only possible approach. No matter how strong the belief might be that we

only have one way of researching this vast topic, this approach does not answer all questions. We consider therefore that this area is more extensive and requires several other points of view and research paths.

Even though they do not quote the famous American psychologist A.Maslow, who established, as known, that there are two sets of forces acting in each human being (one leaning towards maintaining personal safety, self-preservation, and self-defence, the other leaning towards development, evolution, self-assertion, and self-accomplishment [1], H.G. Hatverson and E.T. Higgins [2] reached the conclusion that "although we are all preoccupied by both promotion and prevention, most people have a predominant motivational focus: the one used to approach most of life's difficulties and challenges" [2, p.15-16]. The (predominant) focus that we have influences most of our decisions, what we are and what we do, the way we express our personality. It thus influences the type of good that we want and strive for: which are the things we place value and significance on, what we appreciate, the strategies we choose, and how we feel when we succeed or fail. According to these American professors, we can talk about a preventive and a promotive motivation.

Preventive motivation is essentially connected to satisfying our safety needs; this is related to "doing what is necessary to live a satisfying life: keeping away from danger, doing what we should and what is right" [2, p.25]. When we manage to keep safe and secure "we feel the low energy emotions of tranquillity: calm, relaxation, and relief" [2, p.25]. Preventive motivation is related to fulfilling obligations, assuming responsibilities with respect to the affiliation group, self-sacrifice, duty towards others. This motivation is "served best by using *vigilance strategies*" [2, p.38]. These help in preserving what we own through a vigilant and mistake avoidant attitude.

When we are motivated by prevention, our purpose is loss mitigation, we want and aim for things to be the same as before (i.e., before the present moment); we also "try to keep away from risks and danger, avoid mistakes, fulfil our obligations and responsibilities, and to be perceived as serious, trustworthy, and reliable" [2, p.23].

People that focus on prevention are "very sensitive to the presence or absence of *negative events*" [2, p.33]; they are careful and attentive individuals, and will rather answer «no» when in doubt"; they want to avoid as much as possible the risk of being proven wrong; they do not take chances in a situation that might lead them to lose their safety conditions; in short, their approach to everyday life is prudent and conservative [2, p.37].

People that focus on prevention like to take decisions "taking seriously into account what might go wrong rather than what might go well" [2, p.38]. Their vigilance tends to be reduced "when they are confident they will succeed" [2, p.39]. They "mobilise best when things are not really working the way they should. The prospect of failure increases their motivation which leads to an increase in performance" [2, p.48]. These individuals often tell themselves that they *might* fail if they do not try hard enough. They are motivated by the fact that they see the possibility of future failure as a result of failing to do what they (think they) should do.

At the same time, people that focus on prevention "want ideas that are infallible and impossible to pass up by mistake" [2, p.64]. They usually display "better performance in analytical thinking" [2, p.64-65]. They have the tendency to limit themselves to "the given facts and turn them on all sides when drawing conclusions, rather than «move on» and complicate the problem" [2, p.65]. This type of individuals are masters of paying attention to details; they are more capable of "resisting temptations and disruptions that affect attention than people that regard objectives from the point of view of what is to be gained from them" [2, p.67].

People that focus on prevention are constantly preoccupied by "*being certain about themselves*"; they want to be sure that their opinion about themselves is (the) correct (one). To put in context, they do not feel like themselves when their performance is poor, and the issue that unsettles them is "not being able to trust their self-confidence anymore" [2, p.41]. This kind of individuals tend to regard failure "as the *presence* of some negative circumstances – suffering loss, being in danger, being punished" – and, as a result, they experience emotional states associated with *anxiety*: nervousness, tension, concern etc. [2, p.41].

On the other hand, people that focus on prevention work *meticulously*, "spending constant effort and undivided attention" and *vigilantly* "to keep safe from any mistake" [2, p.68]. During disputes (and possibly conflicts), people with this type of motivation tend to perceive their collocutors "as being intentionally more distant and less understanding of their partners' needs and wishes" [2, p.118]; they get worked up and worry (they amplify and magnify their concerns). They also approach troubles "concentrating on the conflict details themselves, rather than on the «big picture» of the relationship as a whole" [2, p.119].

Motivational focus does not only influence information interpretation, attention, approach to relationships (be they collaborative or conflictual), but also decisions. People with preventive focus are more interested in

“counter arguments when making decisions” [2, p.132]. They usually dislike options; they search until they find a solution they are sure to solve the problem and they stick to it. They consider it is better to limit ourselves to finding the best solution (through careful analysis and judgement, of course), which can only be unique, and putting in into practice.

As far as people with preventive motivation are concerned, they prefer “stability, familiarity, and tradition” [2, p.140]. They are (very) attached to tradition; obeying certain agreed behaviour rules (that are socially proven) is a good thing. They will contemplate change only when facing danger. Change needs to be absolutely necessary for them. They are reluctant to “trade the certainty of known facts for the dangers of the unknown” [2, p.141]; they will choose to keep what they already have. They prefer logic and rational thinking “trying to rely more on *the substance* of a message or argument in order to form an opinion” [2, p.143]. They are usually interdependent and include the ones they care about in their personal boundaries.

According to H.G. Hatverson and E.T. Higgins, *promotive motivation* is in its essence “a motivation to satisfy our own protection needs; it is related to our desire to have as many positive accomplishments in life: love and admiration, but also personal fulfilment, evolution, and development” [2, p.25]. When we succeed in asserting ourselves, discovering or getting new things, winning, “we experience high energy emotions that are related to well-being: happiness, joy, and enthusiasm” [2, p.25]. This kind of motivation is generally “more favourable to creative thinking. When people concentrate on promotive focus they find it easier to create original solutions for a given problem” [2, p.63]. According to the American researchers, individuals driven by this type of motivation “have a processing information style that is more oriented towards exploration” [2, p.63].

Promotive motivation also leads to a tendency of working in a fast and (largely) steady pace, and the enthusiastic argumentation of ideas, proposals, initiatives is “a distinctive sign of promotive focus mentality” [2, p.64]. This motivation is based on independence, on highlighting personal achievements, and risk taking. Promotive motivation is best served by “using what we call *proactive strategies* – means of achieving goals that ensure our promotion or reward, and at the same time protect us from failing because these strategies to do exclude other possibilities from the start and do not ignore other favourable opportunities” [2, p.38].

The two American researchers claim that people with promotive focus “tend to make decisions based on what might go well, rather on what might go wrong” [2, p.38]. Their involvement in what they do is more powerful than of those characterised by preventive focus. As a rule, when we are motivated by promotion, our aim is maximising earnings and avoiding missed opportunities, we are focused on any opportunity through which “our actions are driven by a desire to develop, stand out, fulfil our aspirations, and be praised” [2, p.23].

The researchers of Columbia University note that, while in the case of preventive motivation “we need to learn to respect the moderate pessimism (meaning a strategic pessimism – *a.n.*, *G.A.*) or the scepticism specific to this mentality and refrain from giving moralising lectures” [2, p.53], it is optimism that manifests itself in the case of promotive motivation. Optimism supports and reinforces this motivation and “helps us to become better prepared to achieve our goals based on promotion” [2, p.59].

People with promotive focus are “very aware of the presence or absence of *positive events*” [2, p.33]. They are individuals preoccupied with a “high level of self-respect (meaning a positive definition of themselves)” [2, p.41]. They regard failure “as an *absence* of positive circumstances – they did *not* win, they are *not* loved or admired, they did *not* get rewarded”; usually they experience emotional states associated with despondency: sadness, depression, discouragement [2, p.41]. On the other hand, they become really driven when they feel their performance is good. Optimism and self-trust return easily and “amplify their enthusiasm, which leads to their motivation and performance to increase exponentially” [2, p.47-48]. During debates (and possibly conflicts), people with this type of motivation resort to more creative solutions to solve litigations as compared to people with preventive focus; their emotional states revolve more around sadness and discouragement rather than around anxiety.

As shown above, motivational focus influences our decisions. People with promotive focus “think more about the pros when making decisions” [2, p.132]. They “like to generate *solution variants* to problems” [2, p.133] because they consider that each solution has its own potential; they also have the tendency to make choices that lead to change.

It is worth mentioning that, while people with preventive focus would rather process information/data based on attributes, people with promotive focus would rather process information in a holistic manner. The latter also “have the tendency to rely more on their own subjective experience – on *what they feel*” [2, p.143]; they are more prone to “ignore potential obstacles and less prone to split everything into concrete and detailed steps to reach their final goal” [2, p.145].

H.G. Hatverson and E.T. Higgins also observed that individuals with promotive focus "are more egotistical and are more prone to thinking in combatant terms: «Me against You»" [2, p.169]; they generally place more weight on autonomy and on novelty experiences.

In the context of this promising topic, H.G. Hatverson and E.T. Higgins also make several recommendations regarding communication with these groups (recommendations that are, we think, valuable for teachers that interact with these two motivational types represented by their students in their teaching activity). For example, while communicating with collocutors characterised by *preventive focus*, they should: formulate messages in terms of loss; place accent on "how"; use mostly verbs; stress on the possibility of not failing; stress on stability; describe the situation in terms of precaution; place accent on logical thinking; use cautious gestures; stress on components (because they have the tendency to process attributes). In the case of collocutors with *promotive focus*, they should: formulate messages in terms of reward; place accent on "why"; use mostly adjectives; stress on the possibility of success; stress on change; describe the situation in terms of daring to act; place accent on feelings and intuitions; use extravagant gestures; place accent on the whole (because they have the tendency to process information holistically).

Based on their research, the two professors from Columbia University make the following statements:

- Promotive focus "is more frequent among youngsters" [2, p.178]; "we are more inclined to approach goals through a preventive motivational focus" [2, p.179] as we age;
- We can talk about "a chronic or quasi-permanent dominant focus", but also focuses that are activated "by a given circumstance" [2, p.32]; after all "even though we are all characterised by a dominant focus, this may change at any given moment depending on the situation we find ourselves in" [2, p.148].

In this continuous and general dynamic between what basically characterises us from a motivational point of view and the concrete constraints/challenges that we face in life, it seems that the dominance of a certain motivational type was influenced by the fact that the "people inclined towards prevention and promotion were basically punished and rewarded *differently*" [2, p.27].

H.G. Hatverson and E.T. Higgins consider that the way children are educated, the kind of guidance they receive, "has a profound impact on the way children come to understand the world" [2, p.77]. This is why "the dominant motivational focus begins to develop during early childhood due to our interactions as babies with parents and other caregivers" [2, p.78]. The two psychologists reached the conclusion that "children are naturally endowed with the motivation to learn which type of reactions is favoured by the people that take care of them" [2, p.82]. Thus they have established that we are dealing with a *preventive and a promotive parenting*.

- In the preventive parenting setting, "failures are criticised and punished, while successes mean that things are all right and *nothing bad will happen*" [2, p.28]. Children raised in this environment "end up seeing their goals as opportunities to *avoid parents'* (and later on, everybody else's) *disagreement* and to be safe" [2, p.28]. This is the case when parents have very high expectations of children or when they care about their own and their children's image, image perceived by others more or less familiar, be they relatives or not. For these parents "life's purpose is to fulfil one's duties and obligations and to behave in such a way that is pleasing to others, thus fostering peace" [2, p.28]. It is also more likely for shy children to become prone to preventive motivation.

- In the promotive parenting setting, accomplishments are acknowledged with an exuberant articulation of loving admiration, while failures are treated by withdrawing affection and attention. Children raised in this environment "come to see their goals as opportunities to *gain parents'* (and later on, everybody else's) affectionate acknowledgement, and life's purpose "begins to be evolving to accomplish one's own ideals and striving to behave in ways that generate praise-worthy accomplishments" [2, p.28].

- Human beings continue to grow and develop (both physically and psychologically) throughout childhood and adolescence; their self-awareness (the way they see themselves) begins to take shape (more and more clearly), and the future persons begin to get some idea about what they are and what kind of people they would like to become.

When the culture and ideology we bring our children up in, and the education we bestow on them are centered on the ego and revolve around it [3], when egocentrism becomes prevalent in the world we are used to live in, then it becomes important (and useful) to dedicate our energies to the study of intrinsic, extrinsic, preventive or promotional motivation. Western society imposes such investigations in order to make it more understandable, coherent, and acceptable. It justifies these motivational cognitive paths of individuals in their

strive to survive, to become successful, to be in charge of their own lives, to get a sense of usefulness and well-being.

If, on the other hand, we lean towards another research perspective which is basically supported by Eastern culture and ideology, we discover the *altruist motivation* (as opposed to self-centred motivation). This may be the main psychological argument to promote an altruist world view [4].

Social life and personal development that revolve and operate only around the ego's interest and (exclusively) in its benefit will fuel it and provide comfortable ideas, but the perspective will always be narrow; actually, we will miss the target because "the search for complete fulfilment cannot be accomplished unless it involves goodwill and openness towards others" [4, p.16-17]. A.Jollien agrees with M.Ricard when he notes that "even the greatest personal development may be in vain if it does not bring us closer together, reinforcing the ties with our fellow human beings, and self-culture may quickly become stale if it fails to open towards real generosity" [4, p.14].

Altruism is one of the most important principles of life, principle that is almost forgotten. We have come to believe that, if it is not tied to religious rhetoric, it has become outdated, just another word, a gross hypocrisy, a naivety, a rarely found value or, simply put, pure madness.

We can always demonstrate *altruist motivation* without any traces of risk or discomfort. According to Ch.André, it "resides in the attention given to the needs of the others and in helping them". It can be exercised "without having reciprocity, gratitude or profit as a goal, even if their existence, as well as their being appreciated does not compromise or stain altruism itself. But these should not represent, if possible, the ultimate motivation" [4, p.203].

In essence, altruism (and altruist motivation) represents the intention or desire (but also the accomplishment) to do good by others. Altruism is closely connected to compassion, modesty, and goodwill:

- *compassion* represents (according to M.Ricard) "the shape taken by altruism when confronted with someone else's suffering" [4, p.208]; but altruism and compassion "are limited if they are reduced to their emotional component. They also have an essential cognitive component" [4, p.209]. It is this component that "allows us, on the one hand, to perceive others' needs, even though they are considered strangers or enemies, and, on the other hand, to expand our understanding of their suffering" [4, p.209];

- *modesty* represents the acknowledgement of our own limits and inabilities, failures, imperfections, and vulnerabilities;

- *goodwill* represents the state of (always) being ready to understand and support the others in their effort (and desire/aspirations) to conserve, defend, and develop their (personal and/or social life. M. Ricard considers that it is worthy of us human beings to "make use of our natural goodwill towards our close ones as a starting point to expand our goodwill beyond our family and the people we care about" [4, p.246]. Thus, Ch.André considers that it is important in our daily lives to try and give others "small love tokens, thoughts, and intentions" [4, p.242].

Based on this vision and from this point of the study we can actually state that the very good, good, bad, and very bad quality of our existence is determined by the quality of each moment of our relationship with others and the world. If "this relationship can be classified as goodwill, it is very important for the one experiencing it", considers M.Ricard [4, p.175].

Ch.André underlines moreover that "goodwill, love, kindness, the attention given to others are contagious. Altruist motivation can be expanded and/or secured by adopting and using them. Every time we perform a tender, affectionate, loving (unselfish care – *a.n.*, *G.A.*), every time we help somebody by giving advice, we slightly change the future of the world for the better" [4, p.99].

Altruist motivation involves the inner transformation process; it is accomplished "by thinking that all qualities we develop will be more helpful to our fellow people" [5, p.315]. Being driven and mobilised by this generous motivation type, "the only effort that should never be considered sufficient is the one spent for the spiritual evolution and for the good of those around us" [5, p.316]. According to M. Ricard, the purpose of altruist motivation is to "remove from our conscience any traces of vanity, envy, hate, avarice, etc. to become a person that does not harm anybody in any way" [5, p.169]. The author notes that, unfortunately, Western civilization "is no longer based on this kind of search (and motivation – *a.n.*, *G.A.*) that seems out of reach" [5, p.169]. Altruist motivation is discouraged in principal by vanity. This is a powerful obstacle in the way of any profound self-transformation; vanity is the one that also prevents "wisdom and kindness to manifest themselves" [5, p.261].

This motivation allows the dissipation of the attachment on the ego and the development of self-awareness. It leaves the door open for kindness, humility, and caring for those like us. When we are subject to altruist motivation we are constantly interested in the well-being of others, not only in doing some good deeds every now and again. It expands the action field considerably, "it transforms us in order to be able to help others" [5, p.109]; this motivation develops our sense of responsibility.

In short, there are motivations that concern the goodwill of the ego and the goodwill of others.

School and the type of students' prevailing motivation

Taking into consideration the data, results and information presented above, we can accept that students come to school with a certain type of motivation (shaped at home): it can be mostly preventive or promotive (both being self-oriented), or mostly altruist (oriented towards the good of others).

As far as school is concerned, it also creates the (formal-institutional) conditions, environment, and means for the activation and reinforcement of one or the other type of motivation. For example, if school strongly and coercively demands maximum and constant attention, accuracy in understanding and reproducing information, if students are asked to think about their duties and responsibilities towards coming to school, then it facilitates the "preventive diligent focus" [2, p.192]. On the other hand, if school seriously and repeatedly/insistently demand students to think about their success and accomplishments "it will determine students to adopt a promotive focus more proper for creativity" [2, p.192]. But if through school (and after-school) activities and interactions students are demanded kindly and by force of example to concentrate on their spiritual life, sensitivity towards their colleagues' issues and inabilities, open and empathic actions, and compassion, then the premises for establishing an altruist (motivational) focus are created.

On top of all these considerations (and perhaps more others that were missed here due to our ignorance and shallowness) we have the teachers' motivation (with which they enter classroom). It is easy to assume that teachers can have a predominant preventive, promotive or altruist motivation. This impacts their decisions, personal style, appreciations, acceptances and interdictions, recommendations and actions.

Thus, while teachers with preventive mentality are more inclined to use punishment, authority, and control during their interactions with students (and the class) than teachers with promotive mentality, the latter are more inclined to use more praising and encouragements than the first [2]. Teachers with altruist mentality are normally inclined to use benevolence and kindness, understanding and calm, altruist caring and responsibility, aid and cooperation in their interactions with students.

If in the given context we, as teachers, consider that preventive focus is suitable, we can speak to students about what they did in terms of the group they belong to and of the duty they have to accomplish; alternatively, if we want them to "adopt a promotive way of seeing things, we will stress upon individual and individuality", on self-confidence, courage, and risk [2, p.194-195]. After all, the transition from "I/you" to "we/you" is, according to H.G. Hatverson and E.T. Higgins, "one of the easiest ways to change the focus we are after" [2, p.195].

Students may deal with teachers that are cautious, conformist, suspicious, hardworking, with a sense of duty that, implicitly or explicitly, induces preventive motivations. They may also meet teachers that are more relaxed, flexible, courageous, more inclined towards creativity and new ideas, original results and questions, that will induce, directly or indirectly, promotive motivations. They might also come across teachers that are interested in self-awareness, inner world, inner knowledge, spiritual enhancement, driven by self-sacrifice and serving others, kind, calm, well intended, close, empathetic, generous, teachers that induce delicately and discreet altruist motivations.

Students normally find themselves (due to themselves, their parents or teachers) in the situation to obey, be cautious, do everything possible to avoid mistakes, pass exams with big grades, graduate under safe conditions, without venturing in the area of "liquid" knowledge, assumptions, and personal conclusions.

Conclusions

Motivation can be learned and become a habit, a way to create, decide, and act. "People can learn to choose and create their own proper motivations anytime anywhere", S.Fowler notes [6, p.35]. They are constantly in search for the motivation of their well-being. Its signs are the positive energy, vitality, friendly cohabitation with their own ego, the feeling of confidence, that they do what is useful and valuable to help searching for and reaching some important targets, while they are evolving and developing or while they consolidate and secure their life.

This motivation is not reduced, as we might think, only to the intrinsic and extrinsic one, but it is extended to the preventive, promotive, and altruist motivation. These can be found both in adults, as well as children and adolescents, both in their private and institutional life.

But, while the intrinsic-extrinsic motivation deals more with the way students relate to their own activity, relationship that accounts for its quality, the degree of involvement in its undertaking, the pleasure/satisfaction given by performing the activity, or the reward received for its accomplishment, the preventive, promotive, and altruist motivation deal more with the way students relate to their present and future, real and potential life. These are related to the capacity to secure, conserve or risk, develop life, live a life more for oneself or more for the others, to live a life that involves trying new, more or less risky things, or a life (more) settled, cautious, ordered, and organised.

School/formal education tends to stimulate and consolidate more the preventive and egocentric motivation through its objectives, structure, functionality, requirements, and regulations. The situations where promotive and altruist motivation are required, learned, encouraged and reinforced are (extremely) rare.

Among other things, we may conclude that it is important and necessary, while also being interesting and urgent, to better understand and seriously research – both as theoreticians and practitioners – these last two types of motivation, to expand their usage to as many (didactic) activities and students (of various ages) as possible. At the same time, studying the relationship between intrinsic-extrinsic and preventive-promotive-altruist motivation becomes a very exciting project.

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