Authoritative Teacher Style
Teachers helping their students being intrinsically motivated

I-MoToLe's overall project idea is to develop methods on how to motivate adult learners. The underlying assumption is that the high drop-out rates in adult education can be countered by a heightened intrinsic motivation to learn. Lower drop-out rates, in turn, promote the social integration and socio-economic mobility of vulnerable, often lowly educated, citizens.

Scientific studies show indeed that there is a proven effect of motivation on the participation behavior of adult learners, and their finishing a course, with or without succes. (e.g. Boeren & Nicaise, 2009)

The basic idea of the project however evokes two questions:
- What exactly does move people? (given the fact that ‚motivation' stems from the Latin *moveo*)
- If intrinsic motivation is, as the word says, ‚intrinsic', how then can it be externally triggered?

For the answers to those questions, we turn to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the most comprising and leading theory with regard to motivation research, tested over the last four decades in empirical and experimental studies worldwide. At the basis of the theory are the behavioral scientists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci.

They have found that motivation is not so much a question of quantity as of quality. What matters is, in other words, not being more or less motivated, but the quality of our motivation. A distinction is made between controlled and autonomous motivation. In the first case, we have the feeling that we have no other choice than behaving the way we do. When we feel autonomously motivated, we have a sense of choice. The so-called *flow* is a prototype of intrinsic motivation. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

In the context of education, multiple studies have shown how controlled motivation leads to less interest and effort toward achievement, whereas autonomous motivation leads to more engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), better performance (Miserandino, 1996), lower drop-out (Valerand & Bissonnette, 1992), higher quality learning (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), etc.

Moreover, controlled motivation leads to disowning one's responsibility for negative outcomes and thus blaming others, such as the teacher, whereas autonomous motivation brings about better teacher ratings (Hayamizu, 1997). Interestingly, the sense of freedom, induced by autonomous motivation, thus goes together with a feeling of responsibility, leading to enhanced persistence.

SDT sees humans as having a natural inclination toward activity and responsibility, but a vulnerability to passivity and indolence. It sees humans as inherently proactive, i.e. having the potential to act on and master both the inner and external forces, rather than being passively controlled by them. It moreover assumes that humans are growth-oriented, i.e. they have an inherent tendency toward growth, (optimal) development, and integrated functioning. (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004) We can think of the spontaneous interest and exploration of small children.

These underlying and by evidence supported assumptions which SDT holds about the human being, give us an answer to our first question, as to what moves people. It seems that people are (or have a tendency to be) moved by themselves, to be, in other words, self-motivated.

SDT, furthermore, focuses on the social-contextual conditions that facilitate versus forestall this natural process of self-motivation. It thus studies the interaction between the proactive, growth-oriented human being and the social world. It is, in other words, interested in how people's potentials will be actualized or their vulnerabilities will dominate.

It has moreover shown how there exists a process of internalization by which individuals transform actively and gradually certain externally offered convictions, behavior regulations or objectives into personal values, behavior styles or objectives. (Deci & Ryan, 1985) Later, the same scientists stated that „the primary reason people initially perform extrinsically motivated behaviors is because these behaviors are prompted, modeled, or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related." (Deci & Ryan, 2000) SDT has shown, in other words, how initially external motivation can be gradually internalized.

In order to be able to interpret numerous empirical results, the theoretical postulate of the basic psychological needs satisfaction has been proven fruitful. In order to feel well, i.e. vital, it has been found that three innate, essential, and universal (sic!) needs need to be satisfied simultaneously. We are talking about the need for autonomy, for belongingness, and competence. The first, the need for autonomy, concerns people's universal urge to be causal agents. It shouldn't be confused with the notion of independence, as humans also clearly have a need for belongingness. It shouldn't either be confused with the chaos of total freedom, as humans also clearly need to feel competent, i.e. they have an inherent desire to be effective in dealing with the environment. When the three basic psychological needs are satisfied, they yield intrinsic motivation, which in turn leads to a feeling of joy and vitality.

This resonates with the so-called authoritative parenting style. Parenting theory distinguishes four parenting styles, represented on an x-axe, from high to low responsiveness, and y-axe, from high to low demandingness. The authoritarian parent is highly demanding but lowly responsive; the permissive parent is highly responsive, but lowly demanding. The uninvolved parent is both lowly demanding and responsive; the authoritative parent is both highly demanding and highly responsive.

Considered within the theoretical framework of the three basic psychological needs, the authoritative parent satisfies the need for autonomy by being autonomy supportive (versus controlling). By being highly responsive, i.e. the high degree of support, warmth, and love s/he shows for the child, s/he satisfies the child's need for belongingness. By setting rules and applying them consistently, thus giving a clear structure, the authoritative parent moreover satisfies the child's need for competence.

Parenting theory has shown how the authoritative parenting style leads to social and educational self-regulation by the child, and how children who are brought up by authoritative parents are less prone to depression, fear of failing, stress, drug use, and delinquency. In line with the notion of the authoritative parenting style it has been argued to introduce the notion of the authoritative teacher style (Sierens, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens & Dochy, 2006).

The authoritative teacher thus supports the autonomy of the learner by, for instance, giving the learner a say in determining the learning objectives and strategies. Autonomy support can, in this case, also mean that the teacher makes the learner see the importance of the learning objectives so that the learner gradually internalizes their value.
The authoritative teacher moreover takes the learner's need for belongingness into account through the quality of the interpersonal relation between teacher and learner. S/he is ‚tuned into' the learners and makes with pleasure time for them, expressing affection and showing sincere interest, empty, warmth, and care.
Last, but not least, the authoritative teacher is also competence supportive, offering the learners a clear structure with optimal challenges, clear guidelines and expectations, and regular informative, constructive feedback, as opposed to an inconsistent and unpredictable learning environment. This way, the learners have the experience that they aren't lost, but master the learning process.

Self-Determination Theory shows how human beings are inherently proactive and growth-oriented. It also shows that intrinsic motivation is facilitated in an environment which satisfies the basic

psychological needs for autonomy, belongingness, and competence. When parenting theory is coupled to SDT, the notion of an authoritative teacher style emerges.

The authoritative teacher style takes the basic psychological needs into account, and is thus autonomy, belongingness, and competence supportive. This being said, putting these three dimensions into practice is not always easy. It is our conviction, however, that the theoretical framework, which is supported by various empirical studies, is an ideal starting point for a reflection on our own teaching styles with regard to intrinsically motivating our learners.

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