Qualitative Study of Motives in Mexican School Children

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Learning at school might be considered as an example of collective joint activity, in which pupils conform and acquire different motives. Different types of motives were identified: external and internal. External motives are related to external needs of activity, such as school marks or stimulation of learning by permission of attractive objects with no relation to cognition. Internal motives are related to cognitive needs, when the pupils are really interested and motivated by the content of school matters. The motives of activity of school learning were never studied in Latin America. The objective of this study is to propose the qualitative way of assessment of the sphere of motives by specifically organized interview and creation of interactive drawings by pupils. The study was accomplished in a small private school in the city of Puebla, Mexico, with the pupils of the third grade of primary school. The results indicate that internal motives help to guarantee positive emotional relation of children to school and create the interest for learning process. External motives might be divided into three groups: motives, which support the learning process, motives, which are indifferent to the learning process, and motives, which become serious obstacles for cognition. The results help to understand emotional and cognitive difficulties and conflicts, which accompany children in the period of learning at primary school. Reflective consideration of differences of motives in learning activity may become one of the paths for qualitative modification of social communication and organization of teaching process in modern school.

Keywords: motivation, school learning, development of personality, school age, motives of learning, development of motives

Introduction

One of important aspects of school learning, as one of dominant cultural rector activities involving the child during psychological development, is the aspect of motivation. Different studies were dedicated to the topic of motivation in relation to academic success in the system of education (Antolín, 2013; Barca-Lozano, Almeida, Porto-Rioboo, Peralbo-Uzquiano, & Brenlla-Blanco, 2012; Núñez, 2009; Saldaña, 2014), to desertion of school (Abril, Román, Cubillas, & Moreno, 2008; Van Dijk, 2012; Vries, León, Romero, & Hernández, 2011) and to low school marks (OECD, 2016).

Diverse international commissions for assessment of academic success at school have expressed an interest for determination of reasons of low school marks and general learning abilities in students in order to obtain comparisons between school success in different countries (OCDE, 2002; 2006).

The test PISA (OCDE, 2014a; 2014b) has evaluated some features of successful student, especially in mathematics. Such features as sufficient motivation, aptitudes, self-image, levels of anxiety and strategies of learning were related to high level of success in mathematics. These results indicated that nearly half of assessed students were interested in what they were learning in the matter of mathematics. However, only 38% have expressed that they were really learning mathematics because they liked to do it (intrinsic interest). 78% of the pupils have manifested that the studying of mathematics is useful for their future carrier. 66% have recognized that learning of mathematics was important for future studies, while 70% have said that it was important for finding a job (extrinsic interest).

OECD (2016) informed that each from every four pupils of the age of fifteen years old in sixty four countries included in OECD hasn't achieved the basic level of success at least in one of three assessed areas: reading, mathematics, and science.

In Mexico in particular, the situation was slightly different, as the students have expressed high interest in learning science. Nevertheless, participation in PISA 2015 (OCDE, 2016a), high motivation hasn't shown any positive relation with academic success of the students as it was not different in the marks of students with high and with low motivation (expressed by themselves).

The Secretary of Public Education of Mexico (SEP, 2016) has manifested that in school year of 2015-2016 there were 3,416,281 pupils of basic level in total. Among them, 574,906 (17%) of pupils were detected on preschool level; there were 1,914,284 (57%) pupils of primary school and 904,927 (26%) of secondary school. These numbers make it clear that the level of primary school is the most representative level in educational system of Mexico.

All the mentioned data support the idea of importance of specific studies of the topic of motivation of the process of learning in primary school.

Another important reason is the luck of psychological and pedagogical concrete studies of school motivation. Saucedo (2013) expressed that the studies related to real experience of children in primary school in Mexico are nearly absent.

One of the possibilities for such objective study of psychological processes might be found in historical and cultural paradigm of development founded by Vigotsky (1996a; 1996c; 1996d; 1996e) and in psychological activity theory (Davidov, 1988; Leontiev, 1960; 1986; Petrovski, 1983; Smirnov, Rubinstein, Leontiev, & Tieplov, 1960; Talizina, 1986).

According to Vigotsky, "the sphere of motivation of our conscience includes our inclinations and necessities, our interests and impulses, our affects and emotions" (Vigotsky, 1996b, p. 341). Activity theory offers an interesting point of view with the possibility not only of studying, but also of formation of motives of activities (Iliasov & Liaudis, 1986; Luria, Leontiev, & Vigotsky, 2007; Shuare, 1987; Rubinstein, 1964). Leontiev (1993) has stressed that each human activity has its own structure, content, forms of manifestation and lines of development. Activity might be also defined globally as a process accomplished by a subject according to a concrete motive (Talizina, Solovieva, & Quintanar, 2010).

According to Leontiev, the motives appear from necessities and might be expressed as desires and tendencies of personality (Leontiev, 1993). Internal representation of an abject of activity would be the best definition of the motive according to Leontiev (2010). Activity theory studies the structure of teaching and learning activity according to its structure, content, particular features and regularities (Talizina, 2009).

Motivation of learning process, from this point of view, is an important element of the process. School motivation might be understood as a system of different types of motives, which are included in the process of learning. The motives confirming this system might be positive or negative or of both nature.

External motives might be related to interest to be with friends, to get high marks, to communicate in general with somebody, to avoid punishment and so on. From this point of view, only internal motives are significant for positive results and efficiency of learning process at school. Talizina (1988; 2000) expresses that the relation between external and internal motives is important for understanding of organization of both teaching and learning at school. According to Talizina (1988; 1992; 2000; 2008; 2009), effectiveness of teaching and learning at school depends on many factors, but one of important points is a type of predominant motives in this process.

According to ideas mentioned above, it is important to identify the system of motives during different moments of learning process, at the beginning, at the middle of the process, and at the end of primary school. The main objective of the study was to establish types of motives in the process of learning at school in pupils of the third grade of private primary school.

Our study is of qualitative nature, which implies analyses of the data obtained from different participants (Jansen, 2013; Ruiz-Olabuenaga, 2012; Vasilachis, 2009). The logic of analyses of obtained data implies consideration of verbal information from interviews with participants by the technique of semi-structured interviews. In order to realize analyses of children's activity, we have included a new method of producing of drawings of children in the process of orientation with an adult.

Method

The study was carried out in a small private college located in the urban zone of the city of Puebla (Mexico). The college is relatively new one and was inaugurated in 2010. The College was founded on the bases of principles of activity theory and the paradigm of historical and cultural development of psychological processes. The teachers of the college study new methods for introduction of scientific concepts by stages starting from materialized symbolic level. The style of communication with children is based on confidence, respect, and constant mutual collaboration.

Participants of the research were seven pupils, one school teacher and seven parents of children. Table 1 represents the main features of the school teacher of the third grade of primary school.

Table 1

Characteristics of School Teacher

Age	41 years old	School grades, where the teacher had experience	2 and 3 grades of preschool education; all grades of primary school
Actual school grade	3 grade of primary school	Academic grade and professional title	Carrier of education of medium level in the area of pedagogy
Experience of teaching	13 years	Last courses of actualization	Formation of drawing, number concepts, reading process
Number of schools	2	Type of schools	Private schools

Table 2 shows characteristics of pupils of the third grade of primary school included in the study.

Table 2

Characteristics of Pupils Included in the Study

Pupil	Age	School years of studying in the same college	Commentary
Case 1	9	2	Regular pupil
Case 2	9	3	Regular pupil
Case 3	9	4	Regular pupil
Case 4	9	3	Neurological diagnosis of Syndrome of Williams/neuropsychological diagnosis and rehabilitation during 3 months for the moment of research
Case 5	8	5	Regular pupil
Case 6	9	5	Regular pupil
Case 7	9	6	Regular pupil

Instruments

The following instruments were used in the study: semi-structures interview with the teacher and parents of pupils; semi-structures interview with children as the process of interaction in dialogue with orientation for realization of drawings related to the topic of interests at school. All instruments were applied individually with each participant during one hour inside the school in periods approved by school administration and possibilities of the parents. All instruments were designed especially for the study and are not published yet. All participants expressed positive interest and voluntary cooperation during research.

Interview With the Teacher

The semi-structured interview with the teacher was divided in topics in order to obtain information, which would permit to identify predominant motives of learning process at school. Such topics were: the paper of school in the process of learning, materials, paper of teacher, knowledge, home tasks, school matters, school marks, sense and reflection about the goals and motivation of learning at school. Table 3 presents the content of the interview with the teacher.

Table 3

The Structure and Content of Interview With the Teacher

Topic "Paper of school"	1. Is it necessary for children to assist schools for learning?
	2. What does a school need in order to accomplish established objectives?
Topic "School matters"	3. Which topics or topics are especially difficult for children? Why?
	4. Please, name the school matters according to the order of importance. Why do you think so?
Topic "The role of the teacher"	5. What is the goal of your job as a schoolteacher?
	6. What do you do to achieve this goal?
	7. Which is the most difficult aspect of this job?
	8. How do you try to overcome this difficulty?
Topic "Knowledge"	9. How do you think the children learn better at school?
	10. Which is the most frequent reason why don't children learn well at school?
	11. Do you have any children with specific difficulties in learning? What do you do to help?
Topic "Home tasks"	12. Do you think that home tasks are useful? Why?
	13. Do you give same kind and quantity of tasks to all pupils?
	14. What do you do when the pupils don't complete the tasks in classroom or at home?

(Table 3 continued)

Topic "School marks"	15. How do you assess the children?
	16. What is the effect of assessment/exams on the children?
	17. What kind of activities for assessment is more useful to know if children have learned something or not?
	18. What do you think of exams? Are they necessary?
	19. What is the effect of exams on children?
	20. What do you think about school marks?
	21. Which is the reaction of children to these marks?
Topic "Sense and reflection"	22. What do you do to help your pupils to learn? Does it work?
	23. Do you believe all children have same level of interest for all matters? Why?
	24. What do you do in order to guarantee the interest for activities, which are not so attractive for children?
	25. What do you do if some task is especially difficult for children?
	26. What do you do when a child has no interest at all?
	27. What do you do if a child is particularly interest in some topic or task?
	28. What do you do if a child is too quick in the tasks and goes much ahead in relation to your group?
	29. What do you understand for motivation of learning?
	30. What do you do in order to improve motivation of the children?
	31. What is the most useful manner to improve motivation?

Interview With Parents

The semi-structured interview with the parents of pupils was divided in same topics. The parents were encouraged to speak openly and to express own opinion.

Table 4 presents the content of the interview with the parents.

Table 4

The Structure and Content of Interview With the Parents

Topic "Paper of school"	1. Why do the children have to go to school? Why is it important?
	2. How did you choose the school for your child?
	3. Did you child take part in selection of school? How?
	4. What were the reasons you mentioned to your child about the decision of selection of school?
Topic "School matter"	5. Which school matter does your child like? Why?
	6. Which school matter doesn't your child like? Why?
	7. What do you say or do in order to study the matter, which the child doesn't like?
	8. What do you do or say to interest the child in learning for some difficult matter?
Topic "Teacher"	9. What is the goal of teacher in school?
	10. How can the teacher achieve this goal?
	11. What is your opinion about the teacher of your child at the moment?
	12. What would you recommend to the teacher to improve the work?
	13. What is your child's opinion of the manner the teacher teaches in classroom?
Topic "Knowledge"	14. How do you know if your child learns something?
	15. How do you think your child learns better?
	16. What do you do when the child asks you about the topic of your interest?
Tasks	17. What do you think about home tasks?
	18. What does your child think about home tasks?

(Table 4 continued)

Assessment and success	19. What do you do if your child doesn't want to do home work?
	20. How is your child assessed at school?
	21. What is your opinion about school marks? Are they necessary?
	22. What is your opinion about exams? Are they necessary?
	23. What do you think about school marks of your child?
Sense and reflection of activities	24. What is the opinion of your child about election of the school?
	25. What is the attitude of your child about going to school?
	26. What is the aspect of the interest at school for your child (friends, games, matters)?
	27. If your child would say that he/ she doesn't want to go to school, what would you say or do?
	28. What would you say or do to interest your child in learning?
	29. If your child shows an interest for some particular matter, what do you do?
	30. What do you understand for "motivation"?
	31. What do you understand for motivation of "learning process"?
	32. What do you do to improve motivation for learning?
	33. According to your opinion, which is the most effective manner for improvement of motivation?

Interview With the Children

The semi-structured interview with the children was divided in some essential topics, which were: school in general, school matters, teacher, knowledge, school tasks, school marks, interest and reflection about the goals of learning at school. Researcher tried to engage children in the procedure of the interview and encouraged them to answer affectively with all possible details.

Table 5 presents the content of the interview.

Table 5

The Structure of Interview With Children

Topic	Questions
Topic "School"	1. Do you know why do you go to school?
	2. Do you choose this school or do you know who and why your parents choose it?
	3. What do you think about the school?
	4. If someone asks you to choose the school, how would you like it to be?
Topic "School matters"	5. If someone asks you to choose only one school matter, which would you chose and why?
	6. If someone asks you to choose a school matter to exclude it from school, which would you choose and why?
Topic "Teacher"	7. What for the teacher exists?
	8. How could we learn at school without teachers?
	9. How would you like your teacher to teach?
	10. Is there a teacher, whom you like best of all? Why? How she/he teaches?
	11. If you could change somehow magically your teachers, what would you change?
	12. Do you remember a teacher for something special?
Topic "Knowledge"	13. How do we learn at school?
	14. Do we learn just at school or in other places?
	15. Which are these places?
	16. Where do you learn more: at school or in other places?
	17. Which objects or materials do you use to learn?
	18. What would you like to learn?
	19. What did you learn yesterday and today?
	20. If you don't learn something in class, what do you do?
	21. Do your friends help you to learn? How? Why?

(Table 5 continued)

Topic "School tasks"	22. Do you do home tasks?
	23. Do you do them alone?
	24. What are the home tasks for?
	25. Would it be better not to have home tasks at all?
	26. What do you do when you don't know how to do a task?
Topic "School marks"	27. Do you get school marks?
	28. What do you think of them?
	29. Do you do exams at school? What for are the exams?
	30. Would it be better if there were no exams ever?
	31. Do you think that the marks are just? Why?
Topic "Interests"	32. Why do the children go to school?
	33. Why is it necessary to go to school?
	34. Why some children don't go to school?
	35. Why do you think that some children don't go to school?
	36. What would you tell a child who doesn't want to go to school?
	37. If someone says that you don't have to go to school, would you go or not? Why?
	38. Where would you go instead of school?
	39. Do you like to learn something new or to repeat what you already know?
	40. If there were only recreations at school, would you like the school? Why?
	41. If you were someone's mother/father, what would you tell your child about the school?
	42. If someone tells you that you can't go to school, what would you think/do?
	43. What do you think about the parents who punish children who don't want to go to school?
	44. What do you think about the parents who give presents to the children if they learn well?
	45. What do you think about the parents who don't allow the children to go to school and teach them at home?

Results

After realization of the whole procedure, the results of three interviews and the drawings were concentrated and analyzed in order to identify internal and external positive and negative motives. Table 6 presents the concentration of this information according to identified predominant topics and new ideas in the answers of participants. Table 6 contains essential information including aspects, which children like and dislike at school, opinions of the parents according to the role of the school and the teaching process and opinion of the teacher about the process of teaching and learning of children at school.

The data presented in Table 6 show that only three pupils present internal motives for learning at school together with external positive motives. The other four pupils show external positive motives related to the building, friends, and kind teacher and playing activities. The parents express necessity of learning process in general, but they don't express any concrete points about learning motivation. The teacher shows the knowledge of the teaching process and understanding of the necessity of guidance and orientation in groups.

Table 6

Concentration of the Results Obtained in the Study by Usage of Interview With Pupils and Analysis of Pupil's Drawings, Interview With Parents and Teachers

Interview with pupil	Pupils' drawings: 1. Things I like 2. Thing I don't like	Interview with parent	Interview with teacher
Case 1			
Making friends. Preparation for life in future "I don't like long tasks".	1.To play and to talk to friends. 2. To write a lot.	Acquire knowledge. Prepare for the future.	The school is an institution for acquisition of formal knowledge; the process of teaching should be dynamic and flexible; I need to take children's interests into account; continuous assessment is more positive than strict exams; it is necessary to teach by formative stages according to the theory we use here; we have to work collectively in groups including all friends and parents.
Case 2			
To learn new things. To make friends. To have good marks.	1. To play with friends and the building of my school; my classes and my teacher. 2. There is noting I don't like here.	Academic education. Prepare for life and have better future.	
Case 3			
To have friends. To study and to understand. Table games. I don't like science because some of them are dangerous.	1. Computer class to learn more and to be an expert. 2. Some children are not nice.	Education and social experience. The child has to learn thing to be somebody in life.	
Case 4			
The yard to play with friends. You have to study, to work and to have money.	Play with firneds and to draw. I don't like to write and I get tired.	Education and social experience. The child has to study. I show only people with success.	
Case 5			
Our building and plays. I learn to know things. I study to have good marks.	To play football. To learn in group. I like everything.	To form knowledge for life. It is an obligation. I give presents for good marks.	
Case 6			
To share with friends. To learn more in all matters. The building of my school.	The yard, the classroom; what I learn, the teachers; all are kind to everyone. I don't like if someone do bad things.	To have social experience. To acquire knowledge without pressure. To find pleasure and sense in knowledge.	
Case 7			
To learn. To know new different matters.	I like everything: classrooms, playing, the teacher, the tasks, the knowledge and the matters. I like my school.	To acquire knowledge without pressure. To have social experience. To know that knowledge is interesting.	

The presented results of the study show that children of the third grade of primary school in general show positive motivation towards study. Only three children show both internal motives for study at school and also external motives of satisfaction with friends, classrooms, playing and drawing at school. The other four children show predominant external positive motivation. The parents of children show predominance of internal motive of acquisition of knowledge at school. We can also find that parents express the necessity of positive emotional relations and respect at school. As the teacher, she has expressed the preference of interactive way of teaching process based on collective tasks and orientation of an adult.

Discussion

Different studies recognize importance of consideration of motivations at school, but few concrete proposals might be found (Alonso, 2005a; 2005b; Flores & Gómez, 2010; Miranda, 2008). Fuentes, Ortiz, Valenzuela, Vilos, Escobar, Beime, and Escobar (2006) mentioned that the interaction and positive atmosphere in classroom are important aspects of motivation.

In the study carried out by Van Dijk (2012), the presence of motivational aspects as the reasons of desertion from studies at secondary and high school was identified. It was reported that 36% of participants of the study manifested that the principal reason of desertion was that the classes were boarding and that they didn't like the classes. 3% expressed that the teachers don't explain the matters clearly. 15% said that the teachers are required to be better prepared and to be instructed to give classes. These results show existence of relation between motivation for studies and the possibility to understand the content of studied knowledge. All these studies were carried out with pupils of secondary and high school and there are no data about the aspects of motivation in pupils of primary school in Latin America.

It is easy to see that predominant emphasis was given to affective aspects while studying motivation of learning process (García, 2006). We believe that consideration only of aspects of communication and "climate" isn't enough for understanding of luck of interest for study in pupils.

The proper content of teaching process should be definitely considered. Enkvist (Ibánez, 2009) expresses that the teaching has converted to attractive process of presentation of plays and positive interaction instead of consideration of the aspects of the work with knowledge and an active participation of children in the process of learning.

Such opinion is very close to activity theory applied to leering and teaching process. This theory stresses an active role of pupils and the necessity of proper organization of the whole joint activity of teaching and learning and impossibility of isolation of the complex process into two separate aspects: teaching and learning. On the basis of Vigotsky's ideas (Vigotsky, 1996a; 1996b; 1996e), we might say that there is no teaching without considering results of learning and there is no learning without planned teaching.

Talizina (2009) has expressed possibility and necessity of identification of the system of motives (sphere of motivation) of the learning process in different ages with the importance of consideration of this system from the very beginning at primary school. Active transformation and positive changes in the sphere of motives of pupils would be possible from this perspective (Talízina, 1988; 1992; 2009; Talizina, Solovieva, & Quintanar 2010). According to activity theory, proper organization of teaching and learning according to the theory of orientation of gradual formation of mental actions by stages might help to change the system of motives and to develop from the very beginning positive personal relation with the process of knowledge acquisition at school (Galperin, Zaporozhets, & Elkonin, 1987; Galperin, 2011a; 2011b; Solovieva & Quintanar, 2016).

The methods used in our study permitted to obtain important information about the sphere of motivation of pupils for school in general and for learning process. Inclusion of the method of directed drawings permitted to obtain information not only on verbal level, but also on the level of concrete images produced by children.

The data obtained in our research show that the pupils of the third grade go to school predominantly for social communication with friends. Children expressed positive emotions when conditions for this positive affective communication with the mates and the teacher are guaranteed. It is important to stress that the

children are conscious of conditions of learning process and of manner of communication at the institution and express it verbally and by drawings in the plan of concrete images.

The results suggest that three initial years of education at primary school are not enough for formation of internal motives of study. Children of the age of eight and nine years don't express preferences for topics or matters, some of them show rejection for writing saying that they "get tired". Even the usage of oriented and collective way of learning isn't enough for development of internal motivation. According to Davidov (1988), motives for study don't appear spontaneously, but during the joint collaborative activity of teaching and learning, we might suppose that initial positive external motivation would be a base for gradual formation of internal motives for knowledge acquisition in future.

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