New Insights on Young Peoples' Motivation in Lower Secondary Education in Denmark

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Abstract

In this article we explore and develop the understanding of young people's motives for (non)participation in lower secondary education. Based on a two-year study dominated by qualitative and explorative methods, we combine a focus on young peoples' motives and goal orientations with a socio-cultural (and social constructivist) understanding of motivation/learning (Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1994). This combination allows us to explore the dynamic complexity of pupils' motives for participation in school and look into how motivation is produced in the interplay between individual goals and motives and the learning climate within the school context (Ames, 1992; Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Lemos, 2001). In the article, we identify key motivational orientations as they unfold in the social and learning processes that take place in the learning contexts young people are part of. As a mean to synthesise and highlight the complexities at play we introduce a situated model that visualises our results.

Keywords: motivation, goal theory, learning context, young people, education, lower secondary school

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Nuevas Percepciones de la Motivación de los Jóvenes en Educación Secundaria Inferior en Dinamarca

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Resumen

En este artículo exploramos y desarrollamos el entendimiento respecto a los motivos de los jóvenes para (no) participar en la educación secundaria inferior. Basándonos en un estudio de dos años, dominado por métodos cualitativos y de exploración, combinamos un enfoque en los motivos de los jóvenes y su orientación hacia metas, con un entendimiento socio-cultural (y de constructivismo social) de la motivación/aprendizaje (Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1994). Esta combinación nos permite explorar la complejidad dinámica de los motivos de los estudiantes para participar en la escuela e investigar cómo es que la motivación es producida a través de la interacción de metas individuales y motivos en conjunto con el ambiente de aprendizaje en el contexto escolar (Ames, 1992; Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Lemos, 2001). En este artículo, identificamos orientaciones motivacionales clave a medida que se relevan en el proceso social y de aprendizaje que se lleva a cabo en el contexto de aprendizaje del cual los jóvenes forman parte. Como un medio para sintetizar y destacar las complejidades en juego, introducimos un modelo situado que visualiza nuestros resultados.

Palabras clave: motivación, teoría de metas, contexto de aprendizaje, jóvenes, educación, escuela secundaria inferior

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Teachers today seem to experience a significant amount of political pressure to increase the academic level of their pupils and prepare them for further education by giving them a desire to learn more[1]. At the same time, school fatigue and poor motivation are increasingly prevalent among pupils in the final years of lower secondary school in Denmark, a phenomenon, which is well-known across a number of European countries (Peetsma et al., 2005; DCUM, 2010; Ottesen et al., 2014; Undervisningsministeriet, 2016). Studies show that a relatively large group of young people leave lower secondary school with no desire to pursue more of the same kind of learning they experienced at lower secondary school (Jensen & Jensen, 2005; Pless & Katznelson, 2007; Pless, 2009).

Through a two-year research project guided by an interest in gaining insight into the situated and subjective meaning making processes, that contribute to the elicitation of different goal orientations amongst young people in lower secondary education, we have explored motivational processes among young people, with a specific focus on the final years of compulsory schooling (years 8 to 10) in Danish lower secondary school (pupils aged 14-16 years) (Pless, Katznelson, Hjort-Madsen, & Nielsen, 2015). In Denmark, primary and lower secondary school consists of 10 years of compulsory education. There is no streaming in primary or lower secondary school, but, after finishing compulsory schooling, young people can choose different post-compulsory educational pathways: either an academically-oriented upper secondary school programme or vocational education and training (VET), although the array of choice is dependent on grades[2] and other assessments.

Based on extensive qualitative empirical material our aim is to provide insight into how lower secondary school students describe their motives for learning. The field of motivation is dominated by quantitative studies using survey measures, while qualitative studies is a less used path to the understanding of motivation (Bempechat & Boulay, 2001; Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Maehr & Zusho, 2009). In this article, we present a study that contributes to the understanding of motivation by including the voices of the young people through qualitatively generated data. But first, we shall present our theoretical inspirations.

Theoretical Inspirations

An examination of the pedagogical research on motivation reveals numerous theoretical understandings and schools of thought (Deckers, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009; Ågård, 2014). Our theoretical point of departure is the tradition of motivation theories, which focuses on young people's motives and goals for participation (or non-participation) in school (Ames, 1992; Midgley, 2002; Nicholls, 1983). Goal orientation theory, a social-cognitive approach to motivation, is widely acknowledged as an informative body of knowledge concerning the motivational processes in educational settings (Jackson, 2006; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007). According to this line of thought goals play a pivotal role in regards to the perceived purpose or meaning of a specific task and central to goal orientation theory is a focus on *why* and *how* people are trying to achieve various objectives (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007, p.2).

The goal orientation approach was originally grounded in a distinction between two main types of academic goal orientations: 'performance goals' (or ego goals) and 'mastery goals' (or learning goals). In short, performance goals can be said to include aspects related to *demonstrating* competencies by way of social comparison and competition with others whereas mastery goals is focused on the *development* of competencies by completing tasks (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Jackson, 2006; Senko, Hullemann, & Harachiewicz, 2011). Numerous studies show mastery goals to have positive effects on learning (Ames, 1992; Midgley, 2002), whereas the research findings about performance goals have been decidedly more uneven (Elliot, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Maehr & Zusho, 2009). These mixed findings have led researchers to look more into these perspectives, and this has resulted in a "…move beyond dichotomous mastery versus performance goal comparisons to a *multiple goal perspective*" (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002, p.638; Pintrich, 2003). A cornerstone here has been a division into performance-approach goals (where pupils are concerned to demonstrate high ability) and performance-avoidance goals (related to concerns about avoiding demonstrating low ability) (Jackson, 2006; Harackiewicz et al., 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001). Subsequently a similar nuancing of mastery goals was suggested although this has received limited attention in the literature (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). As is evident, the body of work on goal orientations has developed profoundly over the

years, and several different motivational goals have been defined in the literature.

The main focus within research on motivation in classroom contexts has, however, still been centered around the 'big two' (Elliot, 2005; Maehr & Zusko, 2009) whereas social motives/goal orientations (e.g. the desire for a sense of belonging) has not received attention within research to the same degree (Kaplan, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Winther-Lindqvist, 2010). Furthermore, much research on motivation and student/pupil goals uses an a priori and *quantitative* approach to identify specific (often singular) motivational goals and then attempting to validate these via psychometric research techniques (Dowson & McInerney, 2003). Only a minority of studies have applied *qualitative* approaches focusing on students/pupils own, more open perspectives (Dowson & McInerney, 2003, 2001; Pullka & Niemivirta, 2016; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Maehr & Zusho, 2009).

One of the central theoretical assumptions of goal orientation theory is also the importance of broader cultural and contextual factors and a focus on motivation as a function of activities that takes place in specific framings such as the classroom rather than as a dispositional trait bound to the individual learner.

The Importance of the Learning Context

Several researchers stress the importance of understanding the significance of the learning context (e.g. the classroom) and its contribution to the formation and support of particular goal orientations (Ames, 1992; Hutters & Murning, 2013; Jackson, 2006; Lemos, 2001; Kaplan, Middleton, & Midgley, 2002; Nicholls, 1983; Patrick et al., 2002). In our study, we use this perspective to understand how learning contexts and learning cultures affect actual learning and young people's motivation for education more generally (Wenger, 1998; Bloomer, 2010; Dysthe, 2003; Arnot & Reay, 2004).

Taking a broader perspective with regards to young people's goal orientations and focusing on the importance of specific cultures of learning allows us to gain insight into young people's motivation for participation and learning as biographies in interaction with schooling with a focus on the influence of schooling in the shaping of subjectivity (Mcleod & Yates, 2006). The addition of this contextual perspective means that learning and motivation must be understood as formed by actual experiences in specific

learning contexts, and, more generally, this points towards an understanding of how subjectivities are shaped through individuals' interactions with school (Nordahl, 2003, 2004; Erstad et al., 2009).

Altogether, the combination of goal orientation theory and socio-cultural perspectives allows us to bring together various perspectives and nuances in young people's motivation for participation and learning. These perspectives provide a theoretical basis from which to explore how motivation is created in social and contextual settings and how it must be differentiated into a variety of motivation orientations, which transect academic and social motives for participation. However, before revealing these explorations we shall present our empirical data and methodology.

Methodology

The study of young people's motivation in lower secondary education was a two-year research project on motivation in different educational contexts. The research was guided by an interest in gaining insight into the situated and subjective meaning making processes that contribute to the elicitation of different goal orientations amongst young people in lower secondary education,

Participants

The analysis in this article draws upon qualitative data produced in individual and group interviews with pupils (55 pupils) and essays on school life and motivation produced by the pupils (58 essays). The selection of interviewees was made on the basis of prior classroom observations and in cooperation with the teachers.

The pupil samples for both the individual and focus group interviews were composed in a way that would provide insights into school and learning experiences and (de)motivation for participation and learning from pupils with different social and academic posit within the school settings. Furthermore, the genders of the pupils interviewed were mixed and they came from varied social backgrounds in order to create a varied interview sample. The selection of interviewees was made on the basis of prior classroom observations and in cooperation with the teachers. The interviews were semi-structured and typically lasted 60-90 minutes. They revolved

around issues pertaining to school life, motivation, demotivation and experiences of specific learning situations (partly based on classroom observations) as well as the pupils' everyday lives outside of school.

Focus Groups

The focus groups were of mixed gender and each consisted of 3 to 6 pupils. Altogether, 30 pupils participated in the focus group interviews (15 girls, 15 boys). The focus group interview form was chosen as it is well-suited to capturing similarities and differences with regards to shared experiences in school settings, as well as norms and views in a group and the negotiation processes from which they emerge (Demant 2006; Halkier 2010).

Individual Interviews

At each school, we conducted 4-5 individual photo-elicited interviews (Marquez-Zenkov, 2007; Pless & Katznelson, 2018). Altogether, we interviewed 25 pupils (13 girls and 12 boys). The individual photo-elicited interviews were conducted in order to gain insights into the motivation and learning experiences of individual young people with different positions within school settings and how these interact with and are influenced by learning climates and classroom cultures (Lemos, 2001; Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2010). Parents were advised about classroom observations and interviews and were given the opportunity to object if they did not want their child to participate – as were the individual pupils.

All interviews were subsequently conducted and transcribed. Following this, both field notes and interviews were coded using Nvivo10. In the coding process, we combined open and axial coding. The interviews were thus coded according to recurrent themes in the narratives of the young people, but with a view to concepts and categories deriving from the theoretical base of the study.

Strategy for Data Analysis

A pivotal ambition in the study was to gain insights into the pupils' perspectives on (de)motivation for participation and learning based on an understanding of learning and motivation as embedded in and shaped by the

learning contexts in which the individual takes part and which as a consequence makes it irrelevant and impossible to distinguish between internal and external motivational factors (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Nordahl, 2004; Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Mcleod & Yates, 2006). Central to the study are the school narratives of the pupils, as these both provide knowledge about their actual school experiences and about how school is 'done' in different settings. Furthermore, the pupils' narratives provide an opportunity to study how individuals understand actual events and (school) experiences and what meaning they ascribe to them (Kaplan et al., 2002; Bruner, 2004; Illeris, 2006; Stauber, 2006; Glavind, 2016). As we were interested in delving into these meaning-making processes, the research design was (primarily) based on qualitative and interpretive methods and the overall framework of understanding was inspired by socio-cultural and social constructivist thinking (Haavind, 2000; Søndergaard, 2005).

With this in mind, we analysed the data looking for both commonalities and differences across the material, while also focusing on subjective meaning making and motives on the individual level (Haavind, 2000). The data analysis consisted of an ongoing dialogue between the qualitative data, on the one hand, and our 'theoretical lenses' as outlined above.

Throughout the analysis, it became apparent that the idea of singling out dominant motivational orientations on the individual level did not make much sense. In most of the young people's narratives across differences in social posits in school as well as gender and social background, we found examples of several different motives and different motivational orientations, linking to different learning situations or contexts.

Thus, on the basis of our analyses of the data material, we have identified and extracted five different motivational orientations that come into play in lower secondary education in Denmark. The motivational orientations are developed on the basis of the young people's narratives about their motivation regarding school and learning in combination with the existing research literature on young people's motivation.

Motivational Orientations

Motivation is defined as the outcome of an interaction between the meaning-giving principles through which the pupil understands his or her actions and

the learning contexts in which (s)he is involved at the school (Kaplan et al., 2002). The concept of motivational goals allows us to identify different classes of motives for engaging in learning processes. We use the term in the plural form to indicate that motives for participation can take many different forms just as different types of demotivation may occur when the interaction between young people's meaning-giving principles and the school setting breaks down.

By using the concept of motivational orientations, our aim is to highlight the variations in encounters between the experience the pupils bring with them to school and the school context itself. We shall in the following analysis present the five different motivational orientations and for each of them also point out the implied challenges. The five orientations are:

- Knowledge orientation
- Performance orientation
- Task mastery orientation
- Relational motivation
- Explorative learning motivation

In order to also illustrate and show the connections between the various orientations and to synthesise the complexities at play, we introduce a situated model that visualises these five orientations. According to the model, all of the orientations may play a role for young people, but to varying degrees. The orientations are present in a variety of combinations and have different weightings for different individuals just as they may vary over time and in different contexts (Katznelson, 2017).
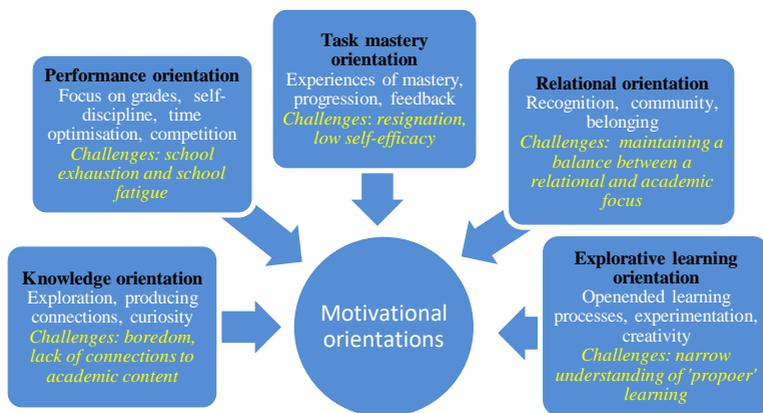
Figure 1. *Motivational Orientations in Lower Secondary Education in Denmark*

Knowledge Orientation

A recurring theme in the school narratives of the pupils was what we have termed knowledge motivation. This is expressed in narratives about specific subject areas, as in the following quote by one of the pupils, Emil:

> Emil: "I like physics and chemistry and things like voltage and electricity and various things."
> I: "Yes, why do you find it interesting?"
> Emil: "It's just the way the world is built; you can think of anything, everything occurs in physics and chemistry, so I just think it's fun to think about and I also think it's interesting to learn." (Emil, School C)

Knowledge motivation, as expressed in the pupils' narratives, revolves around curiosity, a desire for knowledge and an interest in the subject matter. For some pupils, specific subjects are of particular interest. In particular, they talk about experiencing the feeling of being engrossed in classes that focus on the world around them, whether it be the physical world and natural science (as in the quote above), historical knowledge and so on. In the pupils' narratives, knowledge motivation seems to be a matter of reaching beyond

the individual perspective and being curious about the outside world; expanding their horizons and trying to link the new knowledge to their own world. It is not just knowledge about the outside world that produces knowledge motivation, but also the pupils' understanding and exploration of how this connects to their understanding and their 'own world'.

It is noteworthy that not only academically strong pupils but also those who are struggling with school demands talk about experiencing knowledge motivation in relation to specific subjects. In one interview, a young boy enrolled in a special school for academically challenged pupils talks about a history project on slavery in North America that he has been involved in:

> I: "You seemed as if you were very absorbed by it."
> Samir: "Yeah, I like that sort of thing... in the old days people didn't like blacks. Because they have dark skin. And so they take them away from their country and to the places they have to be next time. And then they used them in all sorts of ways. I prefer how it is now to the old days. I mean, everyone can be together, and no slaves and things like that."(Samir, School D)

As the pupil, Samir, explains, he 'likes that sort of thing'. In the quote, he makes a connection between the past – the old days – and the present, and explains how the general view of people with dark skin has changed, from his perspective. From his narrative, it is clear that he was deeply engrossed in and engaged with the topic. One reason for this may be that he can link the American history of slavery and 'blacks' to his own experience as a young boy with an ethnic minority background in Denmark (Erstad et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2010). The narrative underlines the importance of the learning climate when it comes to supporting pupils' motivation to engage with the academic content.

Challenges to knowledge orientation

Knowledge motivation overlaps well-known motivational concepts such as learning motivation (Skaalvik, 2007), which educational researcher Jackson has dubbed "... the darling of motivation researchers" (Jackson, 2006) because this type of orientation is often thought to enable deep learning etc. In the interviews we conducted with teachers, knowledge orientation was

also, what they often tended to refer to when talking about their pupils' motivation. However, even though some pupils have a strong orientation towards school and knowledge, there are also numerous examples of pupils' knowledge orientation being challenged in their school encounters. Some pupils find it difficult to connect with certain subjects in school and to see the point of the knowledge they are supposed to acquire, and the subject matter thus becomes meaningless to them for a number of different reasons. If knowledge orientation is the singular focus in the classroom, it may be difficult for teachers and schools to create motivating learning environments. As we have outlined above, a differentiated approach to motivational orientations is required.

Performance Orientation

For many of the lower secondary school pupils, performance orientation plays a central role in their school narratives. This motivation orientation is closely linked to the importance placed by the pupils' on demonstrating their competencies to others – both their classmates, teachers and parents. And to a vast extent this is closely linked to grades and to grades as a mean of comparison as illustrated by the following quotation by a pupil (Thea):

> Thea: "Yes, right now I'm actually at the top of the class along with Mathilde, Lene- and a couple of boys, I think. So it's very nice to be among the brainy ones. (...) So it's always important for me to do as good as I can. (…)My mother told me a couple of times that it was ok if I did not get a A and that it is fine if you justpass". (Thea, School F)

Several of the pupils in our study talk just as Thea about how grades are an important focal point of competition in the struggle for positions within the classroom, and how this can cause drama and frustration (Reay, 2006; Pless et al., 2015). However, the performance orientation also seems to add elements of 'fun' and meaning to the learning activities. Some of the pupils talk about projects that were part of a science competition with pupils from other schools, and which focused on the development of different kinds of robots. They explain how this increased their commitment to and preoccupation with the task. As stated earlier, performance motivation has

been the topic of a great deal of debate among motivational researchers (Linnenbrinck & Pintrich, 2007; Maehr & Zusho, 2009), and in the Nordic pedagogical tradition and school debate, competitive and performative elements have often been frowned upon (Folkeskolen, 2002; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006; Balle, Haue, & Schelde, 2013). However, opposing this view, Danish professor of ICT and learning games Birgitte Holm Sørensen asserts that competitive elements play a pivotal role in many leisure activities associated with youth culture (e.g. sports and e-games) and underlines how competition and performance are closely connected to playfulness in relation to these activities (Sørensen, 2013; Harackiewicz et al., 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001). Instead of viewing competition as incompatible with learning, she calls for an interest in on how the elements of competition, performance and playfulness that are present in young people's leisure activities can become part of learning contexts in meaningful ways. In this context, she points to the importance of focusing on pupil involvement and group activities.

Challenges to performance orientation

Performance orientation is clearly present in the data material in the form of a preoccupation with the comparison of grades, which seems to motivate some of the pupils to make an extra effort in relation to school work – as a benchmark of their own performance compared to others or with a view to forthcoming exams. However, this intense focus on performance in relation to others and grades also results in a series of challenges. In some of the classroom contexts, this orientation overshadows other orientations, creating a learning environment with a predominant focus on performance. This also has implications on the individual level. Some seemingly academically capable pupils become preoccupied with performing well (and best) in all subjects and for some, this can result in a form of *school-exhaustion*, which may be a result of having pushed themselves to perform (perfectly) over a long period of time (Reay, 2006; Låftman et al., 2013; Sørensen et al., 2017). For others, especially pupils who struggle to meet the demands of school, grades and tests are shrouded in the fear of failure and the feeling of being unable to cope, which can be highly demotivating and may increase *school fatigue* (Dæhlen et al. 2011).

Task Mastery Orientation

Experiences of task mastery play a central role in the pupils' motivation and are highlighted repeatedly in the data. In an essay, one pupil explains how his motivation is closely linked to experiences of mastering something new and progressing academically:

> *It find it very motivating to have the feeling that, although you are doing a difficult task, you understand the point and can complete it correctly. Then you feel like you can really do something.* (Essay, School F)

The quotation highlights the importance of what Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura calls self-efficacy: The more you believe you can overcome challenges presented to you, the greater the chances that it will actually be the case (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is closely linked to experiences of mastery (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Imsen, 2007; Krogh & Andersen, 2013) Therefore, it is developed, to a great extent in an interplay with the learning contexts individuals are involved in (Laursen, 2012). Young people who have positive school experiences and (as a result) a belief in their own abilities as well as the expectation that they can master a given task will typically be more motivated to make an effort, while those with negative school experiences and low expectations will tend to have greater difficulty because they do not believe they can handle the task and/or they fear failure.

In our interviews with the young people, the link between mastering a subject (or an assignment) and motivation is emphasised repeatedly. But at the same time, the young people's experiences of mastery seem to be strongly linked to grades – which they seem to view as the only way to express make clear progressions in learning. This comes across very clearly in the following quote from a pupil called Stine:

> Stine: "It (grades, ed.) means a lot. You feel it's nice when you improve, then you become really happy. Yes, I've got better at this. (...) Then you can do more than you could before, so it shows that you can manage something. (...)."(Stine, School A)

Stine's quote suggests that the positive development of her grades helps to highlight her learning progress and competencies, it shows that she 'can

manage something.' The sense of mastery makes her 'really happy', she explains, and thus underlines how experiences of task mastery has strong emotional proponents.

The sense of mastery is closely linked to encountering and overcoming challenges and experiencing progression, as educational researchers Skaalvik & Skaalvik point out: "In order for pupils to feel that they are successful and feel that it is worth making an effort and see academic progress, they must be given tasks that challenge them, but which they have the skills to master" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, p. 227). Precisely this is stressed in our study by both the academically strong pupils and those struggling to meet academic demands. Our study suggests that it is important to support the motivation and feeling of academic progression among the latter group, as their patience regarding school is often limited (due to numerous experiences of 'failure'). Therefore, they need support in order to gain experiences of mastery *as well as* experience in adapting to the challenges they meet (Stauber, 2006; Dyssegaard et al., 2015).

Challenges to task mastery orientation

The biggest challenge in relation to supporting pupils' experiences of task mastery orientation seems to be that there is a group of pupils who struggle to find a viable position in school. For some young people, school seems to be all about never being 'good enough', and their school narratives are rife with experiences of (being a) failure. The emotional force of pupil narratives (either positive or negative) points to the importance of understanding the significance of school experiences for the development of the pupils' 'learner identity' (Ball et al., 2000, Bloomer, 2010). For pupils who continually struggle with meeting school expectations, this can seriously challenge their self-efficacy and belief in the project of school as something they can manage, and some give up on school altogether (Ball et al., 2000). These perspectives point to the importance of focusing on adapting teaching to pupils at different academic levels, allowing for a focus on individual learning and progression in school contexts (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Relational Orientation

In the young people's narratives, there are strong links between their sense of school belonging and their engagement with the academic subject matter. This sense of belonging seems to be two-sided: One aspect is focused on the relationship between teachers and pupils and the other is focused on the peer-relations in the classroom.

The role of teacher-pupil relations when it comes to engaging and motivating pupils for schoolwork is accentuated in the data, and this supports a large amount of educational research (Biesta, 1995; EVA, 2014; Klinge, 2016; Nielsen, 2011; Laursen, 2006; Ulvik, 2009). A shared narrative amongst pupils is the importance of teachers showing an interest in pupils' learning processes as well as in the pupils in a broader sense (Ulriksen & Murning, 2009). This is exemplified in the following quote where Thea explains why she has a positive view of her teachers:

> Thea: "It's a little more on the personal level, where you can talk about 'private stuff', stuff at home, and things like that. It just makes it easier to pay attention. It's first like this: you enter, and then you can just talk or they tease you. We get more respect. Because if they are serious, then we listen. Because if you have a good relationship with them, then you don't want them to be irritated if we can't be bothered to listen or something. (Thea, school F)

In the quote above, Thea draws a direct parallel between her relations with her teachers and her motivation for participating in class. She places particular emphasis on the reciprocity that arises in her relationship to her teachers. Because her teachers show an interest in her and her classmates – and, not least, in their personal lives – the pupils respect them and therefore do not want to disappoint them by not engaging in learning activities.

This connection is present in pupils' narratives across the schools studied and can be said to be linked with a change in the teacher-pupil relationship. This change has been thematised by Swedish cultural sociologist, Mats Trondman, who points to a shift in what he coins 'the relational grammar' being the dominating normative and cultural codes regulating the relationship between generations – parents and children as well as teachers and pupils. The shift in the relational grammar is according to Trondman

particularly linked to broader societal changes such as a decrease in the distance between adults' lives and young people's. But also a general decline in the hierarchy between adults and young people are pointed out as important. As we have seen in the quote above, motivation is produced within the context of a specific relationship between the teacher and the pupil, which points to the fact that respect from the pupils no longer seems to be there a priori, but rather needs to be developed as a result of the reciprocity in the relationship between the pupils and teachers (Trondman, 2013). A change that points to an increase in the importance of teachers' relational competencies (Laursen, 2006; Klinge, 2016).

Just like the teacher-pupil relationship, the importance of relationships with other pupils – friends – is apparent throughout the data material. School friendship clearly mean a lot to the pupils. Friends are important with regards to the pupils' wellbeing in the sense that cooperation and engagement with classmates also satisfy their need for social belonging or social inclusion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The importance of friendship and belonging are examples of how social motives for engagement play a crucial role for the pupils (Jackson, 2006).

Challenges to relational orientation

As is apparent above, strong and positive relations with teachers and classmates play a pivotal role for young people's sense of belonging to school. Emotional experiences of feeling 'in place' and part of the school context and classroom community are strongly linked to their motivation for participation in school. However, at the same time, it should be emphasised that this does not occur 'automatically'. It requires attention and further work from teachers to help pupils make link these two perspectives. Besides, during this stage in the pupils' school life (the final years of compulsory schooling) when the pupils are approaching youth peer relations play an increasingly important role (Lyng, 2004; Nordahl, 2004; Winther-Lindqvist, 2010; Nielsen, 2011). This makes great demands on teachers, who must maintain the balance between relational aspects and academic work in order to prevent pupils from losing sight of the *learning* community, which is the focal point of school (Wenger, 1998; Laursen, 2006).

Explorative Learning Orientation

In the study, pupils in different types of school contexts emphasise a motivation orientation, which centres on their involvement in more exploratory learning processes. There are many examples of this in the data material. The following is one of them:

> Int:"And what's this (points to a picture of a PC that the pupil has taken to illustrate what motivates her ed.)?"
> Stine: "It was because we were going to write an essay there. I like writing essays because sometimes I think of the strangest things, and then it's really good. Then you express your creative things or, yeah. (...) You use your imagination. So sometimes when I have written an essay, I didn't know that it could come from me; that I could write something like that. But then, you get surprised by things."(Stine, school A)

In the quote, Stine describes how her imagination is activated and how writing essays becomes a framework for an open-ended learning process in which the text takes her to new places. Thus, this represents a kind of individual pupil involvement where the set task invites pupils to complete and put their stamp on an openly formulated task. The young people highlight many other examples of teaching that supports their exploratory learning orientation. One example of this is a biology lesson based on pupils' experiments. In the observation notes, the learning situation is described as follows:

> The teacher puts a microscope on each of the four tables where the pupils are seated. He introduces the first experiment, which is about going on a 'bacteria hunt'. The pupils are quite imaginative as to where they can find bacteria. One boy tries to collect bacteria 'under his arm'. Two other boys try a bogey. Two girls decide to see if they can find bacteria down in the canteen. (…)It is my feeling that the pupils think this is fun, and they are engrossed in finding something 'disgusting'. (Observation notes, School A)

The experimental approach of the task seems to pave the way for the pupils' involvement, just as it brings their imagination into play by making

them think about where bacteria can be found and collected. Furthermore, the way the task is organised, with pupils collaborating in smaller groups to complete the assignment seems to allow motivation to emerge 'collectively' (Nordahl, 2003; Thøgersen, 2011). On one hand, these examples illustrate the fruitful results that can be achieved when pupils are invited to have a say in relation to solving concrete assignments or, more broadly, with regards to the organisation of lessons. However, at the same time, researchers stress the importance of the teacher's didactical framing of learning processes (Laursen, 2012). This requires a combination of 'classroom management' and pupil involvement (Hattie, 2012; Amondo, 2014; EVA, 2014). Thus, pupil involvement and supporting exploratory learning processes does not imply minimising the teacher's role; rather, it requires the incorporation of elements that give pupils the opportunity to make their mark into learning processes facilitated by teachers.

Challenges to exploratory learning orientation

One challenge in relation to exploratory learning orientation is that, for some pupils, learning aspects seem to become invisible in the more open learning processes. Many of the pupils in the present study made a clear division between the 'academic' activities where one 'learns' something on the one hand, and activities that are perceived as creative and connected to mutual cooperation but where one does not necessarily 'learn' anything, on the other. The underlying understanding seems to be that one cannot learn and have fun at the same time. Thus, a very narrow understanding of 'proper' learning is a common thread throughout the narratives of the young pupils of the study. For many, learning seems to be very closely linked to curriculum and exam questions, a view that is also linked to broader discourses on school and learning (Pless et al., 2015). Indeed, the lack of awareness amongst the young people that learning can take different forms in different learning contexts further develops the previous point; that pupils, in general, have relatively limited language for the learning processes they are part of.

Conclusion

In this article we seek to gain new insights into young people's motives for learning in lower secondary education by applying a qualitative approach

and by combining a focus on young peoples' motives and goal orientations with a socio-cultural (and social constructivist) understanding of motivation/learning. This has allowed us to explore the dynamic complexity of pupil's motives for participation in school and look into how motivation is produced in the interplay between individual goals and motives, broader goal structures within the school context.

Our explorations has been visualised and synthesised in a reflection model of motivational orientations, with the purpose of providing an overview of opportunities and challenges in relation to young people's motivational orientations. The model consists of five motivational orientations; knowledge orientation, performance orientation, task mastery orientation, relational orientation and, finally, exploratory learning orientation. Our aim in formulating these different motivational orientations is to contribute to an understanding of how pupils may be motivated in different ways in various contexts. This entails a shift away from viewing motivational orientations as an individual and stabile trait or characteristic, but instead motivational orientations in this understanding is dynamic and changeable. Furthermore, this approach emphasises the importance of teachers and schools in creating favourable conditions that encourage and support a variety of different motivational orientations in order to create a motivating learning environment. Our study thus, does not, point to specific teaching methodologies as particulary suited in order to create and sustain motivating learning environments. Rather, a pivotal finding of the study is, that the different motivational orientations outlined in the article complement and support each other, and that a reflection of the importance of supporting these different perspectives in a in relation to this.

As a consequence of this contextualised perspective on motivation, motivation cannot – as it often is – be perceived as a precondition for young people learning something in school. Rather, it should be seen as the result of what occurs at school. Pupils bring a variety of experiences and approaches with them to their encounters with their school, their class, their teacher and the other pupils, and it is in these encounters that opportunities to produce motivation as well as challenges to motivation and de-motivation are created.

This places a huge responsibility for the creation of motivation and de-motivation amongst young people in school on the school context. Motivation is thus no longer viewed as an intrinsic or individual matter;

rather, it emerges as on-going process and as a result of interactions with the various different (learning) contexts young people participate in within the educational system.

Theoretically, the contextual understanding of motivation fundamentally challenges the idea of a universal theory about what creates motivation. It also challenges conceptual pairs within theories of motivation such as internal/external motivation, motivated/unmotivated, etc. and extend these to 5 different motivation orientations, which together allow for a more nuanced and subtle understanding of young people's motivation, both theoretically and as a starting point for discussions amongst teachers and practitioners about the motivational orientations that are in focus at their schools and in their teaching. In this way, we hope to pave the way for a broader focus on motivational orientations in schools and education.

Notes

[1] One recent example being the Danish primary school reform: LBK nr 747 af 20/06/2016.
[2] Introduced in year 8.

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