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Teachers’ Beliefs about Student Motivation: similarities and differences across cultures

NEIL R. HUFTON, JULIAN G. ELLIOTT & LEONID ILLUSHIN

ABSTRACT The opinions of 108 teachers, about what influenced adolescent students’ motivation and de-motivation, were sought through interviews, at sites in each of the UK, the USA and Russia. Teachers’ opinions in all three milieux were found to concur—on the positive effects of: parental interest and involvement and parental dissatisfaction; partnership with parents; teacher-student relations; symbolic and material rewards; grades and marks; success in learning—and on the negative effects of some leisure pursuits and of potential post-school unemployment. However, the meaning to be attached to such concurrence is problematised by contextualising apparent agreement within significantly differing local arrangements for, and expectations of: partnership with parents; continuity and duration of teacher-student-parent relations; the development of teachers’ professional learning from experience; the deployment of praise and criticism; the pedagogical use of assessment; and the deployment of out-of-school time. Amplifying effects of peer and community subcultures, on the influence of potential unemployment, were also found to differ between contexts. It is concluded that whilst points of concurrence in teachers’ opinions are of undoubted interest for any general theory of motivation to learn in school, methods which explore the conceptual system and semantic structure of the background beliefs which inform the expressed opinions that respondents express are urgently needed. The paper argues that we need to be able to model the underlying expectations and constraints which lend structure and priority to the lived experience of being schooled.

Introduction

When we planned this article, our main purpose was to report findings from interviews with teachers in three different countries. However, in the course of the analysis of the teacher interviews and other data, it became clear that important methodological questions were at issue. Accordingly, whilst this article attempts to fulfil our original intention, we see the concluding discussion of methodology as being a no less important outcome of our research.

Since 1996, we have conducted research into student motivation in three different cultural milieux: Sunderland in the north-east of England, eastern Kentucky in the United States and St. Petersburg, in the Russian Federation. Our initial interest was aroused, not because these milieux were seen as in some way representative of their nation states, but because of significant apparent differences in student motivation, as between Kentucky and Sunderland, on the one hand and St. Petersburg, on the other. In Kentucky and Sunderland,
concerns to raise standards seemed considerably undermined by an inability to motivate some sizeable elements of the student population to study and learning. By contrast, our own early research (Elliott et al., 1999; Hufton & Elliott, 2000) had tended to confirm the findings of others (Bereday et al., 1960; Dunstan, 1978, 1992; Grant, 1972; Holmes et al., 1995; Ispa, 1994; Long & Long, 1999; Muckle, 1990; O'Brien, 2000; Schweisfurth, 1996, 1998; Shturman, 1988; Webber, 1997, 2000) that the Russian system was significantly successful: not only in motivating a high proportion of students to acquire a good level of academic general education, but accomplishing this in the potentially challenging context of all-ability classes, in neighbourhood comprehensive schools.

It is important to stress that our studies have sought to examine those factors that lead both to high levels of motivation and to actual engagement in educational pursuits. Motivation theorists have tended to focus upon cognitive factors (such as beliefs and orientations) rather than actual engagement—the realm of behaviour (Ryan, 2000). Where engagement has been considered, its volume has tended to be thought of as a measure of motivation. However, in our developing thinking, engagement needs to be differentiated from motivation; and it does not follow that high engagement can only ensue where motivation is high. Certainly, in our own work, we have found a significant discrepancy between student-reported achievement motivation and associated goal-related action (see Hufton et al., 2002a). Thus, particularly in the US context, students often did not work as hard as one might have anticipated on the basis of their self-reported levels of motivation. In order to understand the reasons for this, we recognised a need to explore broader contextual factors that impact upon student motivation and behaviour. Here we were greatly influenced by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) eco-systemic approach to human development that suggests modelling the environment as though it were a set of Matryushka dolls, each inside a larger, with the individual at the core. More formally, this ecological approach contends that the scientific study of human development should concern itself with:

the progressive mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

Thus, Bronfenbrenner argues the need to examine the proximal and distal influence of significant others, together with contextual (e.g. school, home, workplace) and broader historical and societal influences.

These studies (e.g. Elliott et al., 1999, 2000b, 2001a; Hufton et al., 2002a) also initially drew upon—and still seek to relate to—a number of leading motivational theories and perspectives, in particular, attribution, self-efficacy, goal orientation, expectancy-x value, and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation (for discussion of these, see Elliott et al., 2000; Hufton et al., 2002b). Our findings have led us to conclude that the policy implications that have been drawn from motivational theory can risk being over-simplistic and, at times, even counter-productive. For example, our studies of students and their parents (Elliott et al., 2001b) suggest that attempts to raise levels of student self-esteem, with the aim of increasing engagement with learning, may actually result in lower overall performance at a national level (Elliott, 2002). Similarly, our data have demonstrated that were students to attribute academic achievement to effort rather than ability—which Stevenson and Stigler (1992) suggest is a key reason for the more successful performance of students in Asian cultures—this may yet be without signal effect, in cultural contexts where little value is attached to academic goals anyway.
Recognising that much motivational research has focused upon student cognitions in a relatively de-contextualised fashion, our research programme has attempted to focus successively on different elements within the eco-system—the impact of significant others, such as students, peers, parents and teachers; classroom and schooling contexts; and broader historical, socio-economic and socio-cultural traditions and transformations—that might in combination have a significant bearing upon both student achievement motivation and actual engagement (Elliott et al., in prep.).

As might be expected, the most elusive influences are at the macro-level. In the Russian Federation, the demise of communism and the growth of a free market, with the social and economic dislocation that has resulted, are undoubtedly influencing student attitudes and behaviours (Elliott & Hufton, 2003). In England, the drive for economic competitiveness through ‘raising standards’, with a resultant narrowed concentration upon an academic core, has displaced a long-standing emphasis in schools, particularly for younger students, on the development of the whole person. Similarly, in Kentucky, the introduction, since 1990, of some of the most radical and far-reaching education reforms in the USA has resulted in many changes to student and teacher practices and is posing a challenge to accepted beliefs about the goals, purpose and value of education. However, in all three milieux, change of these kinds is complexly refracted through the meaning systems, practices and associated implicit values in use, amongst parents, teachers and peers. As a result, not only are the effects of macro-level change hard to predict at the micro-level, but, pari passu, one can rarely confidently explain micro-level beliefs and behaviours in terms of such change. One is perhaps on safer ground, when considering the more direct influences of teachers, schools, and peers.

Despite the insights resulting from Bronfenbrenner’s seminal cross-cultural studies of child socialisation (1967, 1979), motivation theory has tended to neglect the powerful effect of peers upon children’s behaviour (Ryan, 2000). In seeking to address actual engagement as well as educational orientation, we were particularly eager to examine the ways by which fellow students might influence peers’ actual work-rate. Our studies have shown not only that peer influences are highly significant, but also that these tended to be negative in Anglo-American settings and positive in Russian (Elliott et al., 1999, 2000, 2001a).

Motivational theorists have also given relatively little emphasis to school-related variables. In an earlier study of school-level influences, we hypothesised that a finely-interrelated cluster of largely schooling-related factors—a ‘pedagogical nexus’, absent from, or perhaps conflicted in Sunderland and Kentucky schools—might facilitate the higher positive motivation we had found amongst Russian students (Hufton & Elliott, 2000).

In our studies at the teacher-level, we initially supposed that, given teachers’ socio-culturally pivotal role, elicitation of their beliefs about motivation would have the potential to be triply informative: about their understanding of (change in) official and prevailing socio-cultural expectations; about the effects of wider change upon their students’ lives and beliefs; and about the effects of their expectations and practices on students’ motivation and behaviour. As will transpire, these expectations were only partially and imperfectly fulfilled, for reasons that are significant for the cross-cultural study of motivation, and which we will discuss in our conclusion.

**Methodology**

Our initial aim, in this part of our research, was to identify similarities and differences, across the three milieux, in teachers’ professional opinions about student motivation and to consider
the implications of those opinions for motivation theory and for the design and development of educational practice.

This paper is primarily based on semi-structured interviews of around an hour, which were audio-taped and then transcribed, with 108 teachers of 15 year-olds, carried out between September 1998 and May 1999. The teachers, who were approached to volunteer by their head-teacher, were drawn from four schools in each milieu, (the same schools as those used in our earlier studies of student attitudes—Elliott et al., 1999; Hufton et al., 2002a). We asked for nine secondary-phase teachers per school, to include at least two for each of first language (i.e., Russian, or English, including Literature), Maths and Science, at least one for either of History and Geography, and either of Music and Art and at least one for any otherwise unrepresented subjects. Our decision to distribute teachers across curriculum subjects in this way was not taken because we envisaged a later analysis by subject; samples would have been too small. Rather, this specification aimed to produce a ‘mix’ of teachers with the intention of reducing accidental subject bias. In selecting schools, we could not aim for an elusive ‘typicality’, but were guided by our local partners to choose those which represented higher and lower positions, within a broad middle range, of both school achievement and local, family socio-economic status, avoiding exceptional outliers on either of these dimensions.

The teacher interview schedule (which shadowed many of the questions previously used in interviews with 15 year-old students) explored the nature of the school day; value and uses of homework and students’ use of leisure time; students’ orientation towards learning and work; students’ relations with peers; teachers’ perceptions of students’ ability and work-rate and of the relative importance of ability and working hard upon performance; the value teachers set, and thought their students set, upon education; and teachers’ perceptions of students’ future vocational and life goals. Additional questions, designed for teachers only, asked about the teacher’s tasks and role and the impact of recent educational change.

In the analysis which follows, we are also able to triangulate against the results of analysis of 120 forty-minute interviews with 40 students in each country (Hufton et al., 2002a); of a questionnaire survey of over 6000 10 and 15-year-old students (Elliott et al., 1999); of a questionnaire survey of over 3,000 parents in the three countries (Elliott et al., 2001b); and of élite interviews with School Heads, Principals and Directors, education officials, teacher educators and teacher trainees. We were further guided by ongoing dialogue with partner colleagues at the Hertzen State Pedagogical University of St Petersburg and Morehead State University, Kentucky.

Interview transcripts were analysed using the qualitative-analytic software package, The Ethnograph, v.5.06 (Seidel, 1998). This enabled the assembly of concept-, or construct-tagged extracts of text with some perceived common relevance. A second sort, within selected categories of text, enabled a greater refinement in the identification of differences within each milieu. Reiterative reading of the transcripts was no less important, for surfacing similarities and differences across transcripts. The failure of respondents from one cultural site to mention something regularly mentioned in another was also noted.

**Similarities between the Milieux**

In each of our research milieux there had been a deliberate striving to develop a world-competitive education system for about a decade. In each, a direct relationship had been supposed between raising standards in education, national modernisation and international economic competitiveness. Further, for each, economic issues were lent a particular regional
force because of an endemic, or growing insecurity of employment, with adverse implications for young people’s future life chances.

In England and Russia, the educational authorities had responded by prescribing a common curriculum for students of compulsory school age—in England, by bringing in a National Curriculum and national assessment, under the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA); in Russia, by further revision, under the Law on Education of 1992, of the long-standing ‘Standards’ for schools (Ledneva et al., 1998). Though the 1990 Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA) expressly refrained from mandating a curriculum, the provision, at teachers’ request, of a Program of Studies and of Core Content for assessment, under ‘high-stakes’ accountability, served effectively the same purpose. These developments shared other common features.

All the curricula were constructed on some analysis of what should count as a contemporary general education. Though varying in detail, they all tended towards what Holmes et al. (1995) called the ‘encyclopaedic’. They comprised compendia of the knowledge and skills deemed of enduring worth and applicability, elements designed to socialise, acculturate and moralise a regional and national citizenry, and counters against what were perceived as negative trends in youth culture and the wider society. They showed tendencies towards global convergence, as identified by LeTendre et al. (2001).

The prescribed curricula aimed at inclusivity: providing a common, compulsory, general education for all students. Though the amount of permitted student choice varied—little in Russia, most in Kentucky—each had a common core and choice was constrained between what were construed, within each curriculum rationale, as educative equivalents. In Sunderland and Kentucky, where choice was permitted, it was rhetorised as ‘freedom’—to pursue personal, or career interests, beyond, but not instead of the common core. The declared official aim was to offer every student education that was deemed of most worth.

In each milieu, it seemed to be assumed that educational improvement involved finding optimal ways of ‘delivering’ prescribed curriculum content so as to ‘raise standards’, both of individual student attainment and, by maximising inclusion, of schools and the system as a whole. In each system, the focus was consequently on pedagogy and on a convergence on ‘best practice’ for the maximally inclusive delivery of desired learning. In all three milieux, some mix of assessment and inspection was used to ‘police’ the provision of prescribed content and to enhance the effectiveness of delivery systems. In Sunderland and Kentucky, these forms of ‘policing’ (and associated ‘high-stakes’ rewards and sanctions) were in their relative infancy and were variously disliked by teachers who perceived them both as depreciating their professionalism and as potentially threatening to the educative process (Alexander, 2000; Whitford & Jones, 2000). In Russia, by contrast, there had been long habituation to slowly evolving inspection criteria. However, it may not only have been habituation that led Russian teachers to wear their yoke more lightly. The three countries occupied different positions along a ‘policing’ continuum. Broadfoot (1996) has distinguished between evaluation by outcomes, of ‘educational products’, and by inputs, of ‘educational provision and processes to see if central directives are being carried out’. On this continuum, in Kentucky, evaluation was much more of tested outcomes, whereas in Russia, it was much more of inspected pedagogical inputs, which were also controlled through teacher training and a text book development and approval process. Teachers in the UK enjoyed the doubtful benefit of both these ‘high stakes’ evaluations—of outcomes, by way of annual nationally publicised assessments, and of inputs, through four-yearly school inspections by the national Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).
Concurrence in Teachers’ Opinions about Motivation

Though there were differences between individual teachers within a milieu, there were similar trends across teachers’ opinions, in all three milieux, about what might either support or undermine student motivation to learn in school.

Parental Influence

As teachers saw it, certain parental practices had a beneficial effect on student motivation. It helped where parents brought up their children to accept the discipline of schooling, normally supported the demands of school and took a regular, but not obsessive interest in their child’s school work:

Some of the parents sit with their children and work together and maybe they control them too much. Maybe they need more freedom to do something alone. (St. Petersburg teacher).

It also helped if parents checked that assigned homework was done; took a judicious part in learning at home and homework; and shared any problems in the upbringing of the child with the teacher. Further support for motivation might come where parents valued schooling because of its role in their own career and valued education as a form of human development:

Those parents, who themselves had an education, and value it, tend to transmit that to their kids. (Sunderland teacher)

If the family are highly educated, the students usually are motivated. (St. Petersburg teacher)

Teachers associated poorer student motivation with parental inability, or failure to supply these forms of support. In all three milieux, teachers identified some parents whom they perceived as too disordered, or self-centred in their personal lives, to be able to provide a secure and consistent domestic environment for their children’s educational development:

You have parents who find it difficult to cope on a daily basis organising themselves, let alone organising family and children. (Sunderland teacher)

Student-teacher Relations

Teachers thought that students worked harder, in and out of class, where they liked and/or respected the teacher, also where they thought that the teacher liked them as a person, recognised and valued their efforts and respected their aspirations and feelings:

A lot of it is probably actually liking the teacher, that personal rapport. (Kentucky teacher)

You will study better because you like the person you are taught by. (St. Petersburg teacher)

If they know that we really think a lot of them, I think they will try their hardest to make us proud. (Kentucky teacher)

Many teachers also thought that, in classes where relationships generally were free of hostility and tasks were within reach, motivation was higher.
Teachers' Beliefs about Student Motivation

Enjoyment of Academic Areas

Teachers unsurprisingly considered that liking for a subject increased motivation. They also thought that liking a subject and liking a teacher were mutually interactive, so that liking a teacher could induce a sufficient engagement for a subject to become liked, and vice-versa.

Rewards, Grades and Sanctions

In all three milieux, teachers recognised that both symbolic and material rewards could motivate students. They thought that students normally tended to value symbolic over material rewards, as they matured. Teachers preferred symbolic to material rewards, seeing these as more readily transitional to student self-motivation. Praise was seen as an important symbolic reward, for younger and lower attaining students:

"The most important thing is to say that, ‘You are a good pupil’. (St. Petersburg teacher)"

"It's encouragement all the way through! (Sunderland teacher)"

"Any kind of encouragement and praise helps. [Students] value the respect of an adult for their work and they—at this age, they cannot quite value their work in itself. They can’t judge it yet. (St. Petersburg teacher)"

Success was seen as rewarding in itself and many teachers thought it was important to arrange tasks so that students could experience success, which was then thought to be motivating for subsequent endeavours:

"I personally give them work that they can succeed on—because they’re easily discouraged. (Sunderland teacher)"

"I think doing well motivates them to do well. (Sunderland teacher)"

Informing parents about their child’s achievement was also seen as strongly motivating.

The use of grades to motivate was controversial, both in terms of desirability and effectiveness, in all three milieux. The great majority of teachers wished their students to be motivated to pursue knowledge, or skill, or understanding, for future utility or for personal satisfaction. They thought that ‘making the grade’ they desired could, for some students, substitute for pursuing these more valuable learning-goals. In terms of effectiveness, the use of grades was thought to be most effective with younger students, and to diminish with age. They were thought to be highly motivating to the most successful students, but to be progressively demotivating to those who gained persistently low grades.

Teachers in all three milieux thought that the most effective sanction was parental disapproval of progress, or behaviour and consequent parental discipline. All had met parents who would not give support, or parents who would offer support, but then fail to deliver, or a very small number of parents, from whom they did not wish to evoke the forms of punishment likely to be dealt out:

"One boy had some difficulties and I told the parents about it and they punished him—physically. It was bad for the boy. I decided not to warn them again. (St. Petersburg teacher)"

"I sent a boy home and I heard of him being beaten and I vowed I wouldn’t do that again. (Sunderland teacher)"

Other sanctions, such as loss of school privileges, or repeating work, or detentions, or
suspension from school, were perceived as successful in proportion to the infrequency with which they were used with individual students.

Use of Out-of-school Time

In all three countries, most teachers saw computer games, watching television and too much ‘hanging about’ streets, yards, or malls with friends as common ways to waste valuable time and distract from homework, or more improving pastimes. However, there were also some in each country who thought that children were entitled to a ‘childhood’, which included a measure of permitted idleness, ‘playful’ leisure and socialising with friends.

Employment Prospects

In all three milieux, teachers reported that future employment prospects were a factor in students’ motivation. The effect of the factor varied with age, perceived personal threat of future unemployment and the current school achievement of students. Teachers did not see the risk of personal unemployment as figuring largely in the motivational calculus of most students under 13 in any milieu. Few students under 15 were actively pursuing specific career interests—that tended to predominate amongst the 16+ students—but many aimed to get qualifications which would keep the door open to later educational progress in line with the level of their career aspirations. In all three milieux, teachers saw students’ estimates of the likelihood of future unemployment as likely to have a negative impact on their motivation, the more so where students were lower achieving. However, the relationship between students’ potential risk of unemployment and their motivation involved a number of complex intervening variables, which differed between milieux, and which are further considered, below.

Contextualising Findings

One might wonder whether high cross-cultural concurrence, amongst teachers’ opinions about student motivation, offers the possibility of progress towards a cross-cultural theory of motivation to learn in school. We will argue later that concurrence in teachers’ opinions is one form of evidence that will need to be addressed in the development of any such theory. However, the very fact of concurrence (in the face of very considerable differences between the milieux, in students’ motivation and engagement) suggests that, though teachers may have identified some of the factors implicated in motivation, they cannot have identified all the factors that lead to between-milieu differences. Our wider research would suggest that many of those factors, possibly some of the more influential, derive from within-milieu structures, practices and meanings of schooling, of which teachers’ opinions are an epiphenomenon. This can be illustrated by supplying some increased context to some of the particular findings above.

Aspects of Context

Involvement of Parents

As we found, and as has been widely reported elsewhere (Dunstan, 1978; Grant, 1972; Holmes et al., 1995; Hufton & Elliott, 2000; Muckle, 1990; O’Brien, 2000; Webber, 2000), high parental involvement in their children’s education has been a norm for Russian parents since the 1930s. Whilst St. Petersburg teachers’ opinions about the importance of the
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A. Parental Role

In the context of the Soviet system, teachers were supposed to take the lead not only in the successful education (obrazovanie), but also in the 'upbringing' (vospitanie) of children. There was strong political and normative pressure for parents to accede to teachers' leadership. During perestroika, there was something of a backlash against teachers for their earlier propagandising role, but their continuing commitment to children's welfare—despite often severe personal, and school, financial difficulties—seemed to have restored and enhanced their standing. As a result, there had been a resumption of parents' commitment to close partnership in the child's education, assistance to the school and participation in the class committees that obtained under the Soviets, with the difference that parents were now more likely to negotiate, rather than simply comply with, the terms of the partnership.

B. Teacher/Student/Parent Relationship

In both Sunderland and Kentucky, though schools were under strong governmental pressure to bring parents into a more effective educational partnership, the extent to which this involved the school taking the initiative in building the partnership had yet to be deeply habituated in many teachers' thinking and practices, or accepted as normative by many students and parents. Indeed, in his comparative study Alexander (2000) concluded that whereas upbringing and education were seen as closely entwined in Russia, in the schools he examined in Michigan, USA: ‘... the two were separate and teachers were fighting to keep them that way. One was the preserve of schools, the other of parents’ (Alexander, 2000, p. 234).

Continuity of Teacher/Student/Parent Relationship

There was a further contextual difference. Not only did Russian primary school teachers keep the same class from Years 1 to 4, but secondary school teachers—both subject teachers and form tutors (klassny rukovoditel)—also kept the same mixed-ability set of individuals through Years 5–9 of the ‘incomplete secondary school'. This gave Russian teachers, students and parents a protracted period during which to learn about each others' traits and expectations. The Russian parent-teacher partnership was well-habituated:

They often ring me up, because every pupil has my [home] telephone number, so we have this connection from both sides. I can ring them up and they can ring me up. (St. Petersburg teacher)

Further, teacher-parent relationships could become quite close, where students and parents could relate to a specific set of ten or so teachers throughout a school career:

Lots of families of my children became part of my life—of my private life—because we have got celebrations in class with parents, lots of things to be done, to prepare and to organise this, or that sort of event, to make the programme, to buy presents for children and everything ... to celebrate their birthdays. (St. Petersburg teacher)

One consequence was to allow most Russian teachers—working with form tutors—to fulfil many elements of a 'pastoral' role:

The form-tutor is a kind of 'second mother'. (St. Petersburg teacher)

Moreover, their pastoral interventions could be early and timely, with a good chance of forestalling the development of more entrenched difficulties.

By contrast, it was exceptional for most classes, in either England, or Kentucky, to keep the same teacher beyond a year (except, in England, for the two years leading up to the 16 + ‘school-leaving' exam). Consequently, each teacher had to 'learn' a new class—and each
class, a new teacher—each year, with the assistance only of paper records and informal conversations with the previous teacher.

Discontinuity also had implications for Sunderland and Kentucky teachers’ relations with parents. Each year, parents and teachers might represent an unknown for each other:

I could recognise them, like you are Mr and Mrs—I don’t know—whoever. But I couldn’t say, you know, ‘You are …’ and I think perhaps it would be nicer, on a more personal basis, to actually know … you know … where they have come from.

(Sunderland teacher)

Given the limited possibility of contact over a school year, and the likelihood of change at the year’s end, neither might think it worth investing the effort to come to know each other well. Parents might then feel reluctance to share deeper aspirations and anxieties with the teacher. Nor might the teacher welcome them doing so, except where a student presented a challenging behaviour problem, since there might not be much that could be done to help, with deeper-seated, or more long-standing learning and motivational problems, over one school year. Equally, teachers might be diffident about their ability to offer advice about student development, except as relating to the subject and year of prescribed study for which they were directly responsible.

Direct Experience of Individual Development

English and Kentucky teachers had little opportunity to follow the development of individual students over a five-year cycle. St. Petersburg teachers quite commonly described individual students as being at some—progressive, or more awkward—stage of development, whereas Sunderland and Kentucky teachers were considerably more likely to categorise individuals by their membership in a higher- or lower-achieving group, within their age cohort. The organisation of their work required St. Petersburg teachers to develop the pedagogical capability to respond to a wide variety of developmental patterns, but also put teachers (and, indeed, students) in a position directly to recollect and review relevant, earlier, shared teaching and learning encounters. As teachers ‘re-cycled’, picking up new Year 1 or Year 5 classes, they had considerable opportunity to come to understand learning, not only as a topic-by-topic response, but also in terms of how students incorporated it into prior understanding.

In the English and the Kentucky systems, aspects of ‘upbringing’, which were part of the St. Petersburg teacher’s everyday role, were more likely to be disaggregated and confided to bureaucratic structures of pastoral monitoring and official sanctions than left to the teacher:

We have some teachers, Heads of Year, whose main function is to deal with the social welfare of the children … and if there were any particular concerns about individual students, information about those concerns would filter down to teachers via Heads of Year through the pastoral system, through form tutors. (Sunderland teacher)

These might have correctional, or, more overtly in Kentucky, therapeutic overtones:

Kids who are having problems, the counsellors will relay those problems to us, or just relay the portions that they can, about things that are happening. (Kentucky teacher)

The highly personalised relationships of the Russian system enabled teachers to combine academic and pastoral roles and work with parents in upbringing. In both the English and Kentucky systems, the fragmentation of the academic task and structural constraints upon
the provision of pastoral care may have risked an alienating ‘depersonalisation’ of schooling for many students and parents.

The school likes the parent-teacher contact to be through a structure ... because the problem is, if you let teachers meet parents *ad hoc*, that might cause problems. Some may not handle a situation very well, so ... they tend to shy away from that. (Sunderland teacher)

*Praise and Criticism*

Although teachers in all three milieux thought that praise and success were important motivators, the extent to which they praised, what they praised for and the amount of effort needed to achieve success and win praise varied greatly between the St. Petersburg teachers, on the one hand and the Sunderland and Kentucky teachers on the other. Particularly in Sunderland, but also in Kentucky, giving praise and arranging pupil tasks to maximise the possibility of success were reported as important teacher strategies with all but well-motivated students:

When they do something, I just praise them a lot. (Kentucky teacher)

In St. Petersburg pupils had to make a great deal more serious effort and rise to the challenge of the task, to earn much more sparingly given praise. In the same vein, the Kentucky and even more the Sunderland teachers seemed to think that lower-achieving students would be demotivated by negative feedback, and that only high-achieving students could accept and profit from un-sugared criticism of their work:

The brighter ones often know why you are very critical of their grades. The less able feel as though it's a personal comment. (Sunderland teacher)

St. Petersburg teachers, on the other hand, normally and rather directly criticised all students’ work which fell below an acceptable level.

Of course, what may count as praise can vary from curt recognition of achievement to ecstatic approval. What makes praise, as such, motivating may vary both between cultures and within the relationships between individuals, within a culture. Within the depth of mutual acquaintance permitted by the duration and continuity of the Russian teacher-student relationship, perhaps more than a minimal expression of approbation was unnecessary and unlikely to be continually effective. Thus, given the St. Petersburg teachers’ expressed valuation of praise, it may be that they perceived themselves—and were perceived by their students—as praising when, to an English observer, they seemed to be making little more than a bare acknowledgement of acceptable responses.

Other studies (Alexander, 2000; Muckle, 1990) have similarly noted that Russian teachers tend to be more critical and challenging than English or American teachers who may often be rather undiscriminating in their praise. Such a use of praise may be peculiarly Anglo-American. It seems, for example, as Broadfoot *et al.* (1993) have reported, to be less prevalent in France. Alexander (2000) pointed out that teachers in England and the USA tended to provide evaluative rather than formative feedback and were driven by a professional ideology that emphasised a need to be highly positive in order to build self-esteem, promote enthusiasm (see also Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) and prevent misbehaviour (see, for example, Wheldall & Merrett, 1985). The ubiquity of the praise was such, however, that teachers ‘... sometimes ended up devaluing the evaluation to the point where its function was merely phatic’ (Alexander, 2000, p. 369).

Alexander (2000) further noted that whereas in Russia, praise was reserved only for
exceptional performance, in England and the USA merely doing what was required was often greeted by hyperbole. He recalled a discussion with a Russian informant who commented that, unlike the culture in American schools exemplified by the poster, ‘100 Ways to Praise a Child’, there were only a handful of praise descriptors in Russia while ‘the vocabulary of disapproval is rich and varied’ (Alexander, 2000, p. 375).

Interest and Learning

In all three milieux, teachers reported that students were more highly motivated to study by topics, or learning processes which excited personal interest. There was, however, a significant difference between the milieux in the presumed role of interest in stimulating an adequate motivation to learn effectively in school. Teachers in Kentucky and Sunderland seemed to feel professionally obligated to find interesting topics and ways of teaching:

If you’ve prepared interesting work for them, and you’re supporting them, and they understand what they’ve got to do, then that motivates them. (Sunderland teacher)

We are here to teach them and we’re supposed to make it fun, and make it interesting and relevant. (Kentucky teacher)

At the same time, in Sunderland, and more so in Kentucky, teachers accepted variation in interest, both across time and between subjects, rather as a ‘given’ of nature, than as a pedagogical challenge:

All of us are interested in some things and not interested in others. (Kentucky teacher)

[Everyone] slides periodically. That happens with all of us. Sometimes you know, in life, we have other things that are more important and we put things on the back burner. (Kentucky teacher)

St. Petersburg teachers also saw students’ personal interest as unpredictable:

You have got as many motivations as you have people. (St. Petersburg teacher)

They, too, recognised that students might dislike some subjects, and thought it was easier for students to learn where there was interest, but viewed, not interest, but study, as the prime prerequisite for learning:

In our system, homework is an essential part of the whole teaching process. (St. Petersburg teacher)

We wouldn’t know how to organise the process without homework. (St. Petersburg teacher)

There was more involved here than a greater commitment to a work ethic amongst St. Petersburg teachers. The English and American teachers were informed by a different theory of the relationship between teaching and learning than the Russian teachers. In Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers talked as though learning was primarily a consequence of classroom teaching, and so felt obliged to attempt to motivate their students by making teaching lively and stimulating. However, whereas it is a common-place of Anglo-American teacher talk to refer to ‘the teaching/learning process’, in some European traditions (Kansanen et al., 2000; Uljens, 1997) there is rather talk of ‘the teaching/studying/learning process’. In St. Petersburg, as in other European countries, learning was perceived as significantly a consequence of studying, which it was the role of teaching to sequence, inform, guide and support. Certainly the St. Petersburg teachers we (Hufton & Elliott, 2000) and our colleagues (Wilson et al.,
2001) observed were concerned to give fast-paced, varied and lively lessons, but lessons were set in a context in which the presupposition, that preparatory study and subsequent reinforcing learning would take place, was axiomatic.

Elsewhere (Hufton et al., 2002b) we have asked whether Russian pedagogy rather works to enhance the role of what Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) have termed ‘situational interest’—that is, interest which is ‘generated by conditions and or stimuli in the environment that focus attention’ (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 152), and which fosters in students the capacity to deploy ‘strategies to make their performance of tasks more interesting and eventually develop an interest in an activity that had been uninteresting’ (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 154). As they further point out: ‘Focusing on the potential for situational interest in the material and mode of presentation may help teachers promote learning for all students, regardless of their idiosyncratic interests’ (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 157).

Whereas in Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers thought they should—but did not know how to—‘connect’ to what was construed as student individual interest, in the St. Petersburg context, though individual interest was seen as enhancing motivation, it was not relied upon.

Assessment

National standardisation of assessment has not been a Russian practice and teachers have had considerable freedom in how they assessed. Those we interviewed were not required to standardise with each other the grades they gave in class:

I don’t look at somebody else’s criteria … when I give my children marks. (St. Petersburg teacher)

The criteria are different because we’re different people. Some make great demands. Some are strict, some are not. (St. Petersburg teacher)

They were free to, and reported that they did in fact, assign marks motivationally, giving a higher mark for serious effort than the work might itself merit, and sometimes dropping a mark, for good work, where a student was thought not to take study or learning sufficiently seriously.

Marks are a tool in the hands of the teacher. Yes, they’re a tool. (St. Petersburg teacher)

To motivate. It’s always to motivate. (St. Petersburg teacher)

If I see that a child is working really hard, at the top of his, or her abilities … . and making serious personal progress, then I would be inclined to put a higher grade, rather than a lower. (St. Petersburg teacher)

If a pupil who usually does well, but now is getting like a ‘4’ instead of a ‘5’, I may deliberately give him, or her a lower mark to motivate. (St. Petersburg teacher)

It seemed that grades only partly represented a judgement on the products of work. They were also an ongoing judgement of an individual’s success in what Fenstermacher (1986) called ‘studenting’—commitment to acquiring capability in and dispositions to study effectively.

In Kentucky, standardisation of assessment between teachers—apart from a problematic ‘portfolio’—tended to be patchy:

I think each teacher has a different set of standards and it goes into what they consider a B, versus what another considers a B. (Kentucky teacher)
Here teachers still enjoyed some freedom to assess students according to their own judgement. They reported using assessment motivationally, but within the year of study for which they were responsible, rather than over the duration, and in the light of sustained knowledge of individuals available to the Russian teacher. Moreover, the state had encouraged moves towards increasing standardisation of teacher assessment, which seemed likely to become a new orthodoxy.

In England, assessment was highly standardised against a set of Attainment Levels on the National Curriculum. To have an accurate appreciation of how any particular student stood against the national standard had become part of an English teacher’s professionalism. This had the effect of discouraging English teachers from using assessment motivationally. Were they to do so, they could risk appearing to be professionally irresponsible, or incompetent. Further, unless they attempted to report grades as accurately as possible to students and parents, they opened themselves to possible accusations of doing injustice, or raising false hopes. However, constant impersonal comparison with public criteria could demotivate. As one Sunderland teacher explained, about predicting 16+ public examination grades as accurately as she was able:

I say, ‘Well, you’re going to get a D’, and they say, ‘Well, so! But I’m not going to get a C’ … and kids switch off at that.

The Russian approach placed the responsibility for motivation squarely on the teacher, but it situated, authorised and empowered the teacher to fulfil that responsibility. In the Kentucky and English systems, responsibility for motivation was also laid on the teachers, but they, and particularly the English teachers, were much worse situated and empowered to fulfil it.

Use of Out-of-class Time

Variation between milieux, in motivation to learn in out-of-class time seemed clearly related both to local norms—about the relative priorities of school work, approved out-of-class activities and accepted adolescent pursuits—and to the nature and extent of alternative opportunities for the use of time.

In Sunderland and Kentucky, teachers accepted students’ daily entitlement to some measure of ‘playful’, or ‘relaxing’ leisure and to peer social activities. That young people had something close to a ‘right’ to ‘leisure’ was normative, in both milieux, though perhaps more so in Kentucky, where it seemed perceived rather as a ‘freedom’ from interference in ‘private’ time. By contrast, whilst St. Petersburg teachers agreed that students needed ‘rest’ breaks, to refresh themselves during out-of-class study, most seemed to take for granted that it was study that was normative, for out-of-class time. This view seemed to reflect the reality of student experience where many hours each evening were spent on school-related study (Elliott et al., 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Despite the widening realisation that heavy school and homework demands are seriously threatening the physical and mental health of a high proportion of Russian students (Filippov, 2001) only one or two St. Petersburg teachers expressed the view that students needed less study and more ‘leisure’, as distinct from ‘rest’:

They spend so much time after school. All they do is … they do homework and they are not left with any free time. So we think it’s wrong. (St. Petersburg teacher)

As Filippov’s claims imply, the amount of time students spent on study was a talking-point in St. Petersburg, but it seemed unlikely to be reduced by much. As was corroborated by our parental survey (Elliott et al., 2001b), many more teachers’ agreed with the view that:
Parents appreciate it. They don’t like it when their kids don’t have much work to do. (St. Petersburg teacher)

In all three milieux, leisure was perceived as problematic where it displaced the meeting of school requirements; risked physical, or moral danger, or illegality; or engendered habits of unengaged, aimless drifting (expressed more as a problem by Sunderland teachers) with the additional risk of consequential boredom leading to mischief, or delinquency. However, whilst St. Petersburg teachers could identify under-striving students who were relatively apathetic and variously ‘at risk’, and were concerned that their so far small number might be growing, this was against a background of a significantly higher expectation of out-of-class study. In plain terms, even ‘apathetic’ St. Petersburg students might still be doing as much out-of-class study as the average Sunderland student, and more than all but the most committed Kentucky students. There were thus sharp differences, almost of ‘kind’, between Sunderland and Kentucky, on the one hand, and St. Petersburg on the other—about the meaning of ‘leisure’, about students’ entitlement to it and about the amount of it that was desirable—whereas differences between Sunderland and Kentucky were more of degree.

In all three milieux, teachers, implicitly or explicitly, distinguished between ‘improving’, acceptable and problematic uses of out-of-class time. All saw as ‘improving’, participation in organised sports, cultural pursuits (such as art, music, or dance) and activities which developed what were perceived as useful social and practical skills and socialised young people into constructive and positive attitudes. However, again, this apparent concurrence concealed potentially significant differences.

In Kentucky, organised sports were high prestige:

Certainly we have a big backing here for sports. Look at the size of our gym and the size of our school! (Kentucky teacher)

They could demand many hours each week, of practice and competition, from those who took part in them, and of cheering on, from supporters. Teachers did not seem to perceive time spent in this way as competitive with the demands of study:

Sure, our sports-folk and cheerleaders spend a lot of extra time, but I don’t consider that leisure. (Kentucky teacher)

Views like these—a long-standing feature of US education (see Coleman, 1961)—were echoed by our student informants, many of whom commented that their teachers often permitted academic work to take a back seat to school sporting events (Hufton et al., 2002a). Other out-of-class activities—such as school bands, orchestras and clubs, and involvement with church and community activities at weekends—were viewed more or less approvingly, or at worst neutrally by Kentucky teachers. They, too, were not generally seen as encroaching on potential study time.

In St. Petersburg, teachers also viewed physical development through sport approvingly, but rather as part of a desirable all-round development of the individual. Some teachers voiced regret that the cost of resourcing facilities and increased striving for good school results had led many students to do little, or no sport:

The number of children doing sport went down over the last several years. (St. Petersburg teacher)

But they also saw sport as standing alongside a wide range of other valued, voluntary out-of-class activities, which could include additional study in school subjects, after-school clubs and ‘circles’, and extra tuition, sometimes state-supplied, sometimes private, in music, a language, art, or dance:
Lots of them attend music studios and music schools and art studios ... Also sports sections. (St. Petersburg teacher)

However, a significant difference in values is signalled in the St. Petersburg teacher's unconscious echo of the Kentucky teacher's remark:

When they study music, or arts school, should we call this leisure? (St. Petersburg teacher)

Further, whilst in Kentucky out-of-class activities tended in the main to occupy what would otherwise have been 'free' time for students, in St. Petersburg, they had to compete with, and were often super-added to, the already quite heavy demands of home study:

Some children have no time. They study every day. They do homework. They go to subject 'circles', to different studios to learn music and dances, and so on. (St. Petersburg teacher)

Although approving of sport, and particularly school-organised sport, Sunderland teachers tended to be nearer to St. Petersburg than to Kentucky teachers in the range of student out-of-class activities that they valued. As in St. Petersburg, cost was perceived as a factor influencing some students' freedom to engage in some sports, or cultural activities. Sunderland teachers also commented that, where students were active in such pursuits, the necessary time was often additional to that required for homework, giving such students rather busy lives.

Some students are involved in almost everything, which kind of worries me. (Sunderland teacher)

Unlike Kentucky teachers—who seemed to view students' licit use of free time as a matter for them, or their families—Sunderland teachers tended more to feel, with St. Petersburg teachers, that students' free time should be used 'improvingly'. They were the most likely of the three groups of teachers to perceive a majority of students as spending too much time unprofitably: neither on homework, nor on constructive, or educative pursuits.

Of the students in the three milieux, perhaps the St. Petersburg students had the greatest opportunity to engage in, and the least alternative to, improving pursuits. They had free or still relatively inexpensive access to the resources of a highly cultured city, still some support, though diminished, for multifariously educative activities in the former 'Houses of Culture' and schools which provided a range of relatively attractive popular and cultural activities, in contrast to the austerities of home and neighbourhood life. St. Petersburg 15-year-olds had begun to frequent, or organise their own discos and other 'Western-type' youth entertainments, and this was a matter of greater or lesser apprehension amongst teachers. However, in term of disposable cash, Russian 15-year-olds did not constitute much of a leisure market and cultural and educative pursuits were still more available, cheaper and, in general, widely valued in the society. Apart from approved pursuits, teachers reported the most common, everyday 'rest' activities for their students as watching a little television and walking and talking for 30–40 minutes with friends. These they saw as normal activities, providing reasonable breaks in study.

When they walk a lot, it is good for their health. (St. Petersburg teacher)

By contrast, in both Kentucky and Sunderland, a lively youth subculture centred around popular music, teenage fashions and weekend disco dancing and 'partying'.

It's youth ... drinking. And Saturday night's the night to party, basically. (Sunderland teacher)

When contained within reasonable limits, this seemed to be construed as normal teenage
behaviour by the majority of Kentucky and Sunderland teachers. Concern increased where there was consumption of alcohol:

There’s a lot of under-age drinking. I mean if you listen to some of these kids talking, it’s quite frightening what they get up to. (Sunderland teacher)

Sunderland teachers also reported concern that:

There’s quite a bit of drug taking … A lot of things they get into, which they regard as leisure, are things we don’t want them to do. (Sunderland teacher)

Whilst participation in non-injurious weekend social activities was largely seen as acceptable, teachers, in both milieux, were concerned about a significant number, usually of average or lower-achieving youngsters, who spent a considerable time on weekday evenings hanging around together, chatting, posing and fooling about. In Kentucky, this tended to take place on small town main streets and in shopping-mall parking-lots:

Riding round in a car, in a parking lot, seems to be very popular with some students, especially on Fridays and Saturdays and Sunday nights. (Kentucky teacher)

In Sunderland:

A typical out of school, evening by evening, experience is spending a long time on dark street corners … feeling pretty bored, feeling as if they have got nothing to do. (Sunderland teacher)

Teachers in both milieux thought this use of out-of-school time at best unprofitable and feared its potential to breed delinquency. They also thought that youngsters who spent long, evening and weekend hours watching television, or videos, or playing intellectually undemanding types of computer game, though safer, were hardly better engaged. St. Petersburg teachers were also worried about an increase in these sorts of distraction:

What is wrong with pop culture is that it doesn’t involve any sort of hard work in your spirit. You come home, you press the button and it’s there … But to read Dostoyevsky, or Tolstoy is a hard job … It’s not an easy read … and you have to work with yourself, personally. (St. Petersburg teacher)

However, it was Kentucky and Sunderland teachers, much more than St. Petersburg teachers, who confronted an attractive, commercially-enhanced youth subculture, which promoted significantly more immediate satisfactions than those offered by academic study and which competed with study for students’ time.

Effects of Employment Prospects on Motivation

Across all milieux, there were some similarities in the relationship between students’ potential risk of unemployment and their motivation. However, in Sunderland and Kentucky, the relationship was complicated by intervening subcultural variables in a way that was not found to be the case for St. Petersburg. To consider similarities first: in both Sunderland and Kentucky, where there were pockets of significant unemployment, teachers saw motivation as significantly influenced by employment aspirations, which, in turn, they saw as largely related to achievement in school. These perceptions closely mirrored the views of students and parents in our earlier studies (Elliott et al., 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Hufton et al., 2002a). The higher students’ current achievement, the higher were their perceived aspirations and the higher their motivation to study. Further, for these more highly achieving students, both Sunderland and Kentucky teachers thought that rivalry and competition tended to add to motivation.
In St Petersburg, where the employment situation had also worsened significantly over the previous decade, teachers reported that concern, both about possible unemployment and about relations between specific educational achievements and employment, had begun to influence students’ motivation. They reported this as age-related—barely significant before about the 14th year and increasingly significant thereafter—especially amongst those students who stayed on for the final two years of schooling up to 18. Amongst those who left school at 15+, the St Petersburg teachers thought that some were now less motivated to learn in school because of the adverse employment climate:

My daughter’s classmates, who graduated from technical universities, are working as shop assistants now. So what’s the point? (St. Petersburg teacher)

Others were thought more strongly motivated, because they recognised that the employment situation had become much more competitive:

They see that it’s not that easy to get a good job in life and that encourages them to work more. (St. Petersburg teacher)

Subcultural Influences

The major difference in perceptions of the motivational effects of an adverse employment climate, between Sunderland and Kentucky teachers, on the one hand, and St. Petersburg teachers, on the other, lay in the Sunderland and Kentucky teachers’ deployment of theories of subcultural influence. The St. Petersburg teachers did recount difficult experiences with occasional individual students, and recognised the existence of a (growing) minority of ‘problem’ families (which they frequently associated with parental ‘drunkenness’),

Some parents don’t take care of the children, because their only task is to bring him or her up to earn money for their drinking. (St. Petersburg teacher)

However, none offered an account of student demotivation in terms of wider neighbourhood, or community influences. Indeed, it was not possible to attribute any sense of the term ‘subculture’ to any St. Petersburg teacher’s remarks. This may have reflected survivals from the Soviet past, of a rather ‘flat’ social structure and the continuing effects of policies of socially-heterogeneous residential housing, or of a ubiquitous, egalitarian consensus about norms of behaviour and manners—fostered and enforced amongst children, not only by adults, but by peers (Tudge, 1991; Bronfenbrenner, 1967).

Devereux et al., (1965) found English and American children relatively susceptible to the promptings of other children to engage in socially disapproved activities, rather than to adhere to the moral strictures of parents and other adults. It seems likely this is still the case. Elliott et al. (1999; 2001a) found that, whereas St. Petersburg peers exerted a generally pro-learning influence upon fellow-students, the reverse was often the case in Sunderland and Kentucky. For how long this contrast will persist remains to be seen. Some Russian commentators (Bocharova & Lerner, 2000; Iartsev, 2000) perceive the employment and consumerist implications of Russia’s move to a market economy as undermining some students’ engagement with school and education. Without minimising the possibility of a growing problem, our research would suggest that such alienation is not yet deep, or extensive, compared to the British, or American experience.

In contrast to St. Petersburg teachers, those in Sunderland and Kentucky offered explanations of endemic demotivation amongst significant minorities of students—who they perceived as belonging to subcultural groups indifferent, or resistant to schooling—further exacerbated by their higher likelihood of post-school unemployment.
In Sunderland, it seems as if little may have changed in the two decades since Corrigan’s (1979) seminal study of working class boys. He found an anti-school culture that was marked by resistance to school values and practices and which was fuelled by students’ perception that schooling was largely irrelevant to their vocational futures. Twenty years later, our teachers thought unemployment a crucial factor in motivation:

What’s the point of trying, if you’re not going to have a job—and if you’re looking at perhaps the third generation who haven’t had jobs? (Sunderland teacher)

Their schools served communities, or neighbourhoods, which had experienced endemic, long-term (even inter-generational) unemployment, due to the decline of traditional industries.

As they saw it, these communities had evolved ways of life, and associated ideologies, which involved reliance on state welfare, long periods of idleness, occasional contract work, casual and part-time labour not infrequently in the ‘black’ economy and, for some, profits from petty crime:

Many families don’t have a work ethic. They don’t value education generally, because they don’t see that one could actually have improved one’s means of living by working hard at school and, if that’s the case, they transmit that negative aspect to their kids. (Sunderland teacher)

In teachers’ perceptions, the educational level in these communities was not high and for many members of the community, schooling was thought to have been an unrewarding, perhaps demeaning experience. For many students from such backgrounds, teachers felt there was a tension between affiliation and loyalty to their family and community and the pursuit of education. Nor, except where such students were successful in school—which was rare—were they thought likely to see education as practically offering them improved personal life chances:

Many of them feel that there’s nothing for them out there after school … and that could be part of the reason for them not wanting to succeed. (Sunderland teacher)

Many of these students were seen to be demotivated, often less in relation to realistic prospects of employment, than by their immersion in climates, and absorption of ideologies, of disempowerment.

A similar, though perhaps more anomic than consciously-alienated pattern characterised some families on ‘welfare’ in the former coal-mining districts of Eastern Kentucky and the same tension between loyalty to family and the pursuit of education marked children from the more rural families of Appalachia, where contributing to the family’s work and devoting time to family and community social activities had long sat uneasily with the demands of formal education (Peters et al., 1986; Wilson et al., 1997).

In sharp contrast to St. Petersburg, Sunderland and Kentucky teachers were more likely to see some students as a sub-cultural ‘hard core’, whom schools were making many efforts to reach, but whom—teachers regretfully admitted—they did not yet know how to motivate to achieve on the prescribed curricula. Some teachers further thought that attempts to contain and counter the disaffection of the strongly resistant students could generate a custodial and punitive school ethos, which risked demotivating other students who otherwise might not align themselves with these groups. This latter effect was more remarked upon in Sunderland than in Kentucky, possibly because Sunderland teachers seemed to feel under marginally greater pressure to apply the rigidities of a prescribed curriculum more universally.

Whereas St. Petersburg teachers recognised individual differences in motivation, perhaps differing at different stages of a student’s school career, Sunderland and Kentucky teachers
were more likely, from the point of view of motivation, to group students into categories. They tended to differentiate between:

- High achievers who were motivated by versions of the parental, teacher, subject and reward influences reported above, and also by peer competition and rivalry
- Lower-middling to upper-middling achievers, also more or less positively motivated by parental, teacher, subject and reward influences, but with a greater need for teacher praise and facilitated success, who tended to find competition threatening and who did not want to stand out publicly as successful competitors
- School resisters, often drawn from school-resisting local sub-cultures.

For the first two groups, teachers thought that the requirements of prospective and desired employment increasingly conditioned students’ motivation as they passed from their thirteenth to their fifteenth years. For the third group, motivation (and achievement and, often, behaviour) were perceived as declining with each year up to the school-leaving age.

Discussion

It is hoped that the above outline of contextual aspects has helped the reader to an appreciative sense of the ways in which comparative research, which solely relies on teachers’ expressions of opinion, can be problematic. Against the background of our other ecosystemic studies, it is our view that teachers’ opinions should be counted only as partial data. Moreover we argue that such opinions are, in this respect, themselves in need of explanation within any reasonably complete account of influences on students’ motivation to learn in school. There are two kinds of difficulty with data derived by asking teachers to focus their expression of views on a specific pre-chosen topic.

First, in offering their opinions in interviews, teachers are drawing on a personal system of beliefs about schooling, their educational system, and the society and the culture in which they work. In conversation with a ‘native’ researcher, teachers would mostly know how to distinguish between those of their beliefs which were expertly- or officially-sanctioned, those which were accepted ‘common knowledge’, those collegially, but not more widely shared, and those which were personal. With a ‘native’ interviewer, teachers would also mostly know where they could confidently presume concurrence of background belief, or knowledge (and perhaps where it would be prudent to conceal aspects of collegial, or personal belief). In an interview with a ‘foreign’ researcher, the background of taken-for-granted beliefs may substantially differ between interviewer and interviewee and, where items of belief apparently match, they may not stand in the same relationship to other apparently matching items in each belief-system.

To return to an example partly explored above: if teachers in different milieux say that praise is important, but enact that belief in distinctly different ways, does the term ‘praise’ preserve its meaning across milieux? Our current conclusion is that it may, but that ‘praise’ (as many similar terms) is a relative term, which implies a locus on a dimension. Whether such terms do preserve cross-milieu meaning, will depend on whether the semantic dimension that they, and related terms (e.g. ‘blame’, ‘disapproval’, ‘disgust’ ‘dissatisfaction’) form in one milieu, can be construed as having their equivalent in another. (Hufton et al., 2002b).

It may be that to improve, for example, our understanding of ‘praise’ in Russia, we need, amongst other things, to locate it amongst the rich and varied vocabulary of disapproval reported by Alexander (2000, p. 375).

We see this as implying two approaches for comparative educational inquiry, where the
focus is on a specific topic such as motivation—cognitive and pedagogical. Serious attempts need to be made:

- cognitively: to understand the conceptual system and semantic structure of the background beliefs, which inform the expressed opinions of those being researched
- pedagogically: to model the set of expectations and constraints, which lend structure and priority to the lived experience of being schooled and educated.

We do not see the two implied forms of research as an either/or. When deployed as a critique of our own research, they lead us to see it as currently being at a half-way stage. Our interviews with teachers did give us intimations of the conceptual system and semantic structure of their background beliefs, but below the level of confidence at which they could be reported to the research community. Our explorations of context have gone far enough to problematise, inter alia, our teacher-opinion data and to enable us to make provisional models of the set of expectations and constraints which lend structure and priority to the lived experience of being schooled. However, we see a fuller understanding as calling for more detailed investigation along the lines indicated above.

Second, it will only be occasional teachers whose depth of cross-cultural professional experience allows them to appreciate the saliency of any of their particular beliefs, from a comparative point-of-view. In effect, for most teachers in any milieu, parts of the range of any comparatively derived variable may be effectively invisible. For example, the experience of deliberately deploying very lightly standardised assessment pedagogically, during a five-year teaching and learning relationship with a class, could not inform Sunderland and Kentucky teachers’ opinions. Again, though the St. Petersburg teachers had begun to imagine having to compete for students’ time and commitment, against the attractions of a fully-fledged teenage leisure industry and peer subculture, they could not context their opinions about this, in direct experience of the complex value conflicts, familiar to Sunderland and Kentucky teachers. Even more basically, had we not more or less chanced upon the Russian practice of preserving continuity of class membership and teacher, then these continuities could have gone unrecognised as potentially influential variables, because English and American teachers would not have thought it salient to mention that they do change classes, nor Russians that they do not.

What, then, are we to make of the cross-cultural concurrences we did find, through soliciting teachers’ opinions about motivation. What we have, perhaps, surfaced is that the following aspects of the experience of schooling may need to figure in cross-cultural inquiries into motivation: the duration, depth and quality of teacher/student /parent relationships; the extent of the pedagogical deployment of assessment; the availability and attractiveness of distractors from study; and cultural and sub- and counter-cultural attitudes to and valuations of education. Further, as we have expressed elsewhere (Hufton et al., 2002b) it seems that if contemporary Anglo-American theories of motivation can not take account of at least these variables, they may be of uncertain application in cross-cultural research. Although such theories may be revealing, where and how they apply has yet to be established.

That concurrence was found amongst teacher opinion across the milieux is not unimportant. It may reflect, as Le Tendre et al. (2001) have suggested, the extent to which global convergence is affecting schooling and teachers’ roles and tasks. However, from the fact of concurrence, the inference should not be drawn that the variables, about which teachers express concurrence, are necessarily more influential than those which remain inexplicit, or which are less visible to them. On the contrary, it is inherently likely that ‘hidden’ variables are at least as powerful.

As will be apparent from the foregoing, we do not agree with arguments that useful
comparative educational research is ruled out by incommensurability between cultural systems (Uljens, 1997). We think it is a matter of attempting—preferably collaboratively, with researchers raised in other cultures—a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer, 1975) through the kinds of cognitive and pedagogical research we have conducted here.

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