

Travels of the Intrepid Motivation Worm

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When Carol Everhard told me that I would be kickstarting the day's proceedings, she explained that it was because 'the whole story starts with motivation, doesn't it?' As Pit Corder (1967: 164) famously put it all those years ago, 'given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data'. But where does motivation come from? Why are some human beings more motivated than others to learn a language? Why are some forms of motivation more effective or less effective than other kinds? Why do some people lose motivation? Above all, how does motivation relate to autonomy?

Well, these are some of the questions that the Motivation Worm has been busy wrestling with and trying to throw some light on, with varying degrees of seriousness and humour, and some considerable passion. I say passion or enthusiasm because, as Keeper of the Motivation Worm, it strikes me that people who write about motivation, research motivation or focus on motivation in their classroom practice, almost by definition are *passionate* about the subject of motivation in one way or another. I guess this is almost like a kind of *sine qua non* : you've got to be passionate and enthusiastic about motivation if you want to get a motivation message across to your audience or to your students. You've got to sound motivated and be motivated yourself, and practise what you preach.

In its travels over the year

- the Motivation Worm has wrestled in particular with different worm-related metaphors that seem to shed light on motivation
- it has wriggled across England from one Lamb to another Lamb (Terry Lamb and Martin Lamb, to be specific)
- it has ventured (metaphorically) into a Sheffield housing estate to consider why its young occupants might not be that motivated about learning German, in contrast to their well-motivated young Indonesian counterparts learning English in a provincial city in Sumatra
- it has crossed the species boundary, sprouted wings and flown halfway across the globe to Japan to learn at the feet of two more motivation enthusiasts – Tim Murphey and David McLoughlin
- and our heroic and intrepid Motivation Worm has even allowed itself to be sucked through the fabric of space-time, down through a metaphorical wormhole, to explore the distant galaxy of attribution theory.

Incidentally, as official Keeper of the Motivation Worm, I have, of course, had the responsibility of deciding the path it should take and who it should go to next, and it so happens that three of the four caretakers – Terry Lamb, Martin Lamb and David McLoughlin – also happen to be people whose doctoral theses I have had the pleasure of examining as external examiner. So I guess this just goes to show that being passionate about motivation also means taking motivation very seriously. Or, to put it another way, although our successive contributions to

the Newsletter *Independence* may come across as rather light-hearted musings on motivation, these musings are based on fairly serious academic scholarship. Even Tim Murphey (whose PhD thesis I didn't examine) makes direct reference to his own doctoral research in his musings about the Motivation Worm.

On motivation and metaphoric worms

(Ema Ushioda, University of Warwick, UK)

So let me begin with my own musings then. I started things off in my opening contribution by trawling through various worm-related metaphors I could think of in an effort to put a constructive spin on worms that could be linked to motivation. Not easy, really, as worms tend to have rather negative associations in our language:

can of worms; find a worm in your apple (or in your meat pie); computer worms; worm your way into someone's confidence; worm your way out of trouble; worm a secret or confession out of someone; be gnawed by the worm of distrust, treachery, ambition or greed

As I noted in the piece I wrote for *Independence*, there is an unmistakable element of 'autonomy' in these metaphors, in the sense of unstoppable infiltration and independent propulsion, but the worm images don't paint a very helpful picture of motivation, unless it is of the sinister Machiavellian and manipulative kind.

Then I hit upon two worm images which cast a more positive light on things: *bookworm* and *worm of curiosity*. Both metaphors seem to tell us something about motivation – the kind of motivation that is intrinsic and internally driven. *Bookworms* are people who have a natural intrinsic love of books and a love of reading; while to feel the *worm of curiosity* means to experience an irrepressible urge to find something out for yourself, to be driven by a desire to know or to learn. In both cases, motivation is internally driven, or what Edward Deci (1996) calls 'motivation from within'. This is the kind of motivation that underpins autonomous learning (Ushioda 1996) – and certainly what we would like our students to feel as they engage in the business of learning English.

To me, what is particularly interesting about these two worm metaphors is that they also point to what I call the underlying paradox of motivation: the paradox is that motivation needs to be internally driven, yet it is also something that is socially mediated. We cannot make students intrinsically motivated, in the same way that we cannot turn a person into a bookworm. Even if we lock someone in a library full of books, there is no guarantee that we can foster a love of reading. On the other hand, a skilful teacher can, with a twinkle in her eye and a few well-chosen words, capture her students' attention and interest and have them agog with curiosity. In short, we cannot make someone into a bookworm, but we can do things to feed the worm of their curiosity. We cannot foster an intrinsic love of learning, but we can stimulate and mediate our students' motivation to learn.

For the love of worms ...

(Terry Lamb, University of Sheffield, UK)

Then in the opening sentence of his contribution, Terry Lamb added another worm-related image that once again stresses this sense of internally driven personal interest and motivation –

the image of being '*hooked*' as a fish is attracted to a hook (well, to a worm on a hook, of course).

In his contribution, however, Terry moves quickly from this metaphorical perspective on worms to a discussion of real worms ... or rather, to reliving and recounting his schoolboy fascination with earthworms ... how they eat, how they move, how they breed and so on. Indeed, he gets quite carried away telling us all sorts of interesting and obscure facts about worms that he remembers discovering as a 12-year-old schoolboy, such as the fact that they have five hearts and that they can live for up to 10 years.

It seems that the invitation to look after the Motivation Worm has, for Terry, rekindled a deep-seated learning passion he developed as a child during otherwise less than inspiring Science lessons. As he explains, what attracted him to earthworms was the fact that they were alive, even when as kids they looked at them in the classroom; and the fact that worms lived in his garden, so that he could relate to them as real authentic creatures that had a place in his own life. He could pick them up, study them, read up about them, watch them, experiment on them, talk about them with his family and friends, and so develop and show off his own knowledge and expertise about these creatures, and feel pleased with himself and his newly found competence, which he had developed autonomously. Making this kind of deep personal connection with the subject matter of one's learning is, as we know, so vitally important for intrinsic motivation and autonomy.

Regrettably, as Terry notes, kids learning languages at school often do not or cannot make this all-important personal connection with the language they are learning. They don't see why they should spend time studying a language like German if, as young teenage Carl from a Sheffield housing estate reasons, they cannot see themselves ever going over to live or work in Germany, or ever using the language for any real purpose in their life:

'...you're not exactly like going to go working over there are you. Not like us. Well, I don't think we will anyway. So if we learn it all and don't do anything about it, it's a waste of time isn't it?'

And so, obviously, kids like this lack any motivation to learn the language, because the language does not connect with them in any personal sense. It is not part of who they are or want to be ... end of story.

Which came first, the worm or the cocoon?

(Martin Lamb, University of Leeds, UK)

This state of affairs in Sheffield housing estates contrasts very sharply with the case of eager young learners of English in far-flung Indonesia. As the next contributor and second Lamb in the series, Martin, explains (drawing on his PhD research in Sumatra), young teenage Indonesians do not necessarily express a love of learning English (in the sense of intrinsic motivation or passionate interest). However, it seems they have made a deep personal connection with the value of learning English. Based on data from interviews with young teenage Indonesians, Martin explains that English, for them, seems to represent an important part of their future identity as cosmopolitan citizens who are both Indonesian, on the one hand, and also members of the global English-speaking discourse community on the other. This

bilingual and bicultural vision of themselves in the future is the fire that drives the engine of their learning, and that motivates them to study English.

Martin makes the point that this is a different kind of motivation from intrinsic motivation or love of learning English. In some ways, the motivation exhibited by these schoolkids in Indonesia is a kind of extrinsic or instrumental motivation (learning English so that one can become a global citizen), but the crucially important point is that this motivation is *internalized*. It is something the kids themselves clearly and whole-heartedly identify with. It is internally driven, and not something that is forced on them by teachers wielding their carrot-and-stick. Their motivation is thus *self-determined* or deriving from within themselves.

As Martin explains, this notion of *self-determination* is sometimes equated with *autonomy* – in the sense of our basic psychological need to experience our behaviour as emanating from or endorsed by ourselves, rather than as controlled by others (Reeve, Deci & Ryan 2004). This kind of psychological autonomy is a necessary precondition for true motivation and learning. However, as Martin points out, people also write about *autonomy* in another more practical and metacognitive sense (that is, taking responsibility for and engaging in self-directed independent learning). This kind of autonomy is perhaps best viewed as the behavioural outcome of such internalized motivation. Differentiating between these two concepts of autonomy (the former psychological, the latter concerned with actual learning behaviours) helps us understand how motivation relates to autonomy, and why we cannot state simply which comes first, motivation or autonomy. Or, as Martin very neatly puts it in the title of his contribution ... which comes first, the *worm* or the *cocoon* ... motivation or autonomy? The answer is – well, both, of course!



One flying motivational earworm for teachers: 'listen, confirm and use whatever my students say' (repeat 20 times please)

(Tim Murphey, Dokkyo University, Japan)

In his contribution, Tim Murphey introduces us to another worm metaphor – the notion of earworms. An earworm, of course, is a metaphor for those little jingles, tunes or melodies that constantly ring in our ears for some reason or another. Tim's point in talking about earworms is to remind us (as teachers) that we should never forget to listen to our students. Indeed, we should make a point of listening to what our students have to tell us about their learning, how they go about learning, and especially what they do outside class (as well as in class) to learn. We should make a point of listening to what our students tell us about their learning, and also of endorsing what they do, since they are creating and developing their own pathways to learning. In short, they are exercising autonomy, doing things for themselves, finding things out for themselves, motivating themselves, and of course learning for themselves, beyond the limited confines of language lessons where they spend just a small fraction of their time.

Tim draws an analogy here with well-documented research on psychotherapy and counselling practices which suggests that only 15% of improvement and healing among patients is due to counselling method. The remaining 85% is due to the relationship with the therapist; and to extratherapeutic factors (i.e., factors outside the therapy encounter), such as client characteristics, behaviours, activities and experiences; and to hope and expectancy. Crucially important, it seems, is the patient's (or student's) own sense of personal agency in finding ways to do things (what Tim calls 'pathways thinking'), and in having the persistence, self-belief, hope and expectancy to actually do these things. As he says, if 85% of what helps students has nothing to do with specific teaching methods or techniques, at a meta-level it is much more productive to confirm and expand the impact of what students themselves are involved with and mostly in control of outside the lesson periods themselves, so that we promote agency and pathways thinking ... or motivation and autonomy. How many of us actually know how our students go about learning, what they do to develop and practise their language skills, in their own time? We need to ask our students and listen to them, and endorse what they do. Hence the motivational earworm: *listen, confirm and use whatever my students say*

This idea of personal agency or 'pathways thinking' is a very interesting notion, I think.

- On the one hand, it highlights the principle that students are agents of their own motivation and learning behaviour (the principle of **psychological autonomy** that Martin Lamb drew attention to – that is, our psychological need to experience our behaviour as emanating from or endorsed by ourselves, rather than as controlled by others; agency or pathways thinking means we think our own thoughts).
- And on the other hand, the idea of 'pathways thinking' highlights the principle that students have the metacognitive capacity, through their thinking and subsequent actions or behaviours, to take control of, shape and manage their learning (this is **autonomy** in the other sense identified by Martin Lamb – i.e., the sense of taking responsibility for and engaging in self-directed independent learning).

But, of course, people can choose the wrong pathways, or fail to find the right pathways, or come up with dead-ends in their thinking, and as a result motivation and learning progress can suffer. This is where, courtesy of our next and final Motivation Worm caretaker, David McLoughlin, we move into the psychological realm of attributional thinking and its effects on motivation.

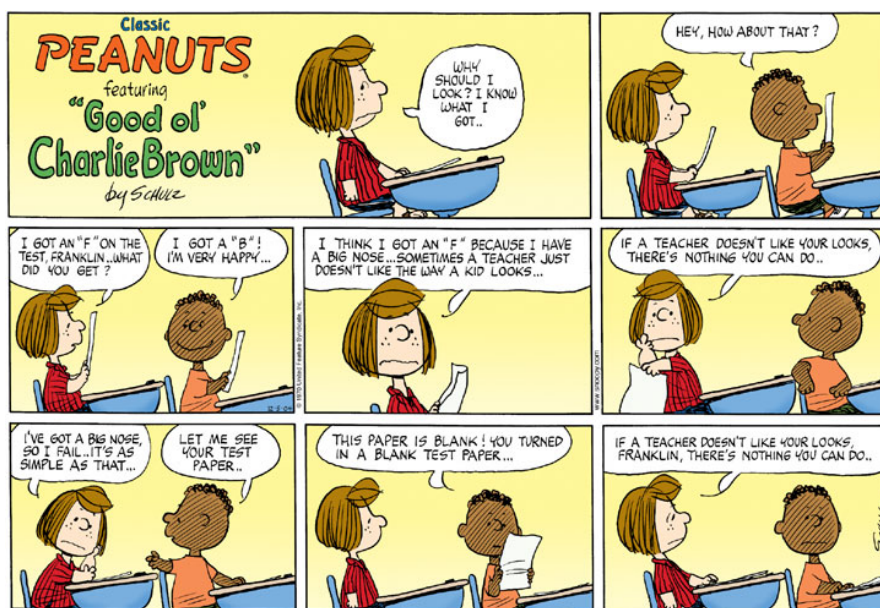
Down a wormhole ...

(David McLoughlin, Nagoya University of Commerce and Business, Japan)

David begins his piece by reminding us of yet another worm-related metaphor – the concept of 'wormholes'. The concept of wormholes derives from Einstein's Theory of General Relativity and from the idea that the fabric of space-time is actually bent or warped. Wormholes are theoretical tube-like structures which connect or act like a shortcut between two distant regions of space-time. David suggests that we send our brave Motivation Worm down a metaphorical wormhole to explore the perhaps less familiar territory of attribution theory (Weiner 1992), and its connections with motivation and indeed autonomy.

Attribution theory is concerned with what kinds of causal explanations people give for certain events, outcomes or behaviours. Attributional thinking is a psychological process that we engage in all the time as we try to make sense of our social world. In the education field, attribution theory has focused in particular on students' causal explanations for negative

learning outcomes, such as poor task performance or failure at a test. The theory suggests that students who attribute their failures and poor performances to stable uncontrollable causes, such as low ability or lack of aptitude, are likely to fall into negative patterns of thinking as they will believe that there is nothing they can do to change their ability or aptitude, and so they will lose motivation to persist at learning. Their attributional thinking is 'I'm no good anyway, so what's the point in trying further?' In other words, they become locked in a negative cycle of hopelessness, like the character Peppermint Patty in this Charlie Brown cartoon.



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On the other hand, for students who can see (or who can be brought to see) that the causes of their poor performance are actually non-stable factors within their control (such as more effort, better task preparation, or more effective strategies), their motivation and persistence are not so likely to suffer. In other words, to revert to Tim Murphey's idea, through their more positive attributions, they can engage in constructive pathways thinking – *I just need to put in a bit more effort next time* or *If I give myself more time to prepare myself before doing the task, I won't find it so difficult* or *I need to change the way I approach this and find a more effective strategy*.

Attributional thinking is, therefore, very much linked to motivation and also to autonomy, in the sense of agency or pathways thinking. How students think attributionally will affect their motivation to persist in learning, **and** affect their belief in their capacity to have some control over their learning and their learning outcomes.

David concludes his paper by highlighting the key role that we as teachers can play in helping our students to change negative to more positive attributions, particularly through the kind of feedback we give that may prompt more constructive pathways thinking. Perhaps one of the worst things a teacher might say to a student is 'Never mind, you did your best' – as this automatically implies to the poor student that his best will never be good enough. Feedback needs instead to direct students' attention to specific pathways they can undertake to improve learning outcomes. And in doing so, the feedback we give will help raise students' **metacognitive awareness** of the learning process, and heighten their sense of **personal**

agency in controlling and shaping their learning process **through how they think**. As Bruner (1996: 49) comments, once students are brought to realize that they act not directly 'on the world' but on beliefs they hold **about** the world, they can begin to 'think about their thinking' and so take control of their learning.

This brings me back to Tim Murphey's important comment about the role of talking and sharing. In his paper, he makes the point that by asking for, listening to and sharing what our students tell us about their learning, we also create valuable opportunities for them to learn new ideas or pathways from others, and to take advantage of, adapt and build on the knowledge of others to develop further their own individual knowledge, skills and understanding. As he says, the effective autonomous learner knows how to be a social learner, and engage with many others in networks and take advantage of the many models available and so build multiple pathways for learning.

To this I would add that the same principle holds true for motivation which also, I think, develops through, thrives on and is strengthened by social support and interaction (see Ushioda 2003). Perhaps nothing illustrates this social-interactive nature of motivation better than that wonderful episode from Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* where Tom is painting Aunt Polly's garden fence. I'm indebted to Philip Riley for drawing my attention to this episode in this context.

Tom has been given the laborious task of painting Aunt Polly's garden fence – not a task he relishes at all, especially because he knows other kids will be out playing and enjoying themselves and will make fun of him for having to do such a boring job on a nice sunny Saturday morning. But being a clever and resourceful fellow, Tom has an idea for how to turn the situation to his advantage and get these other kids to **want** to help him instead of mocking him. In other words, motivation develops through processes of social interaction.

Let's pick up the story just as Tom's friend Ben Rogers stops to watch Tom painting the fence and says to him:

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?"

Tom wheeled suddenly and said:

"Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."

"Say - I'm going a -swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther work - wouldn't you? Course you would!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

"What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't that work?"

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't. All I know it suits Tom Sawyer."

"Oh, come now, you don't mean to let on that you like it?"

The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth - stepped back to note the effect - added a touch here and there - criticized the

effect again - Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little."

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind:

"No-no-I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence - right here on the street, you know - but if it was the back fence, I wouldn't mind, and she wouldn't. Yes, she's awful particular about this fence; it's got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done."

"No-is that so? Oh, come now - lemme try. Only just a little - I'd let you, if you was me, Tom."

"Ben, I'd like to, honest injun; but Aunt Polly - well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn't let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn't let Sid. Now, don't you see how I'm fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it --"

"Oh, shucks, I'll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say - I'll give you the core of my apple."

"Well, here - No, Ben, no you don't. I'm afeared --"

"I'll give you all of it!"

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while Ben Rogers worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash.

And to conclude, I would like to say that the same principle holds equally true for the social-interactive nature of our professional collaborations, such as this whole 'Autonomy as a Can of Worms' project and this interactive forum for discussion we are all participating in today. We learn and are motivated to learn more and discuss more through such professional interactions, a point I made at the end of my opening contribution to *Independence*. By interacting with the community of other worms today (the Learner Training Worm, the Advising/Counselling Worm, Assessment Worm and Teacher Autonomy Worm), the Motivation Worm can feel that its own intrepid travels over the past year through housing estates, across the globe and down through the fabric of space-time can contribute to our collective and shared understanding of this fascinating and complex can of worms called Autonomy.

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