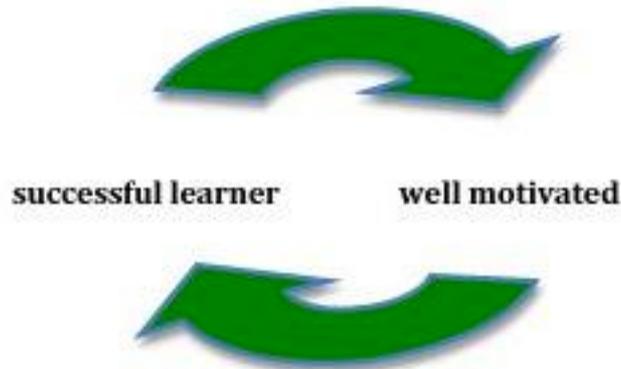


BARRIERS TO LEARNING: MOTIVATION, BEHAVIOUR AND LEARNING

Motivation, behaviour and learning are inextricably linked...



By the same token, lack of motivation hinders learning, and lack of success in learning makes it very difficult to maintain motivation. These links are observed and well understood by most teachers.

But where does behaviour fit in? Is it the cause of poor motivation and learning, or is it the result? In all of the development projects that gave rise to this website (working with 'difficult' pupils and classes) priority was given to improving the chances of successful learning. In every case, better motivation and behaviour followed and, eventually, better learning.

Bad behaviour, it seems, often stems from attempts (usually unconscious) to disguise or suppress feelings of inadequacy. This is why it is so important to identify and to deal with barriers to learning. Once a downward spiral of failure and bad behaviour has been established it is very difficult to reverse.



In the Maximising Potential¹ programmes and in the earlier Working Together² projects, modern language departments were asked to select their most difficult classes or pupils to work with. That way they were able to quickly see the benefits of the curricular changes they were making and so gain encouragement to make further changes in the way they managed learners and their learning. Teachers who had thought that the foreign language was the problem – 'too difficult for these children' - were surprised to find that was not the case. Improvements in attainment are slower to manifest themselves but inevitably followed once engagement with learning had been re-established, and teachers often expressed surprise at what learners were in fact able to do.

All this suggests that there is no point in just trying to tackle behaviour. A simple strategy of exhortation never works, and more elaborate schemes of points and rewards work only for a time if curriculum management improvements are not implemented at the same time. So the priority is to first identify and then to resolve or minimise barriers to learning experienced by the problematic pupil, group or class. As those basic improvements are put in and the learners begin to experience success, teachers' thoughts can turn to more elaborate ways to improve motivation and learning.

1 Maximising Potential:

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/maximisingpotential/>

2. Both projects are described on the LwL website (see below)

Extract from: Languages without Limits

<http://www.languageswithoutlimits.co.uk/mbl.html>