A qualitative study of Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation in the classroom.

Abstract
Motivational aspects have been a key focus for researchers and practitioners in terms of children’s academic journeys over many years. Specifically focussing upon Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation, there is a profound amount of studies, research, statistics and opinions surrounding their involvement in education. This is due to the critical importance and impact they can have upon a pupil’s development and learning from an early age. The main focus of this particular study is to decipher their individual and combined impact on children’s education. It looks in more detail at past and present developments and research, whilst critically analysing their validity and opposing arguments. Three essential specific factors are also targeted for a more detailed investigation of the overall study and methods of gathering data are reviewed to argue the validity and quality of results. This ultimately results in a conclusion of just how vital these two motivational factors really are and it appears that with considerations and knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses and impact they can have on children’s education, both forms of motivation are essential for classroom life.

Introduction
When working with children on a daily basis it is essential to understand the reasoning and motivation behind their behaviour. For an educator, having knowledge of this should essentially result in improving classroom motivation for all children. I want to find out the key motivational factors for children in the classroom environment, specifically analysing research into ‘Intrinsic’ and ‘Extrinsic’ forms of motivation. Typically the definitions for these types of motivation are as follows; ‘Intrinsic motivation’ refers to behaviour that is driven by internal rewards. In other words, the motivation to engage in a behaviour arises from within the individual because it is intrinsically rewarding’ (Cherry, 2015). ‘Extrinsic motivation’ occurs when we are motivated to perform a behaviour or engage in an activity in order to earn a reward or avoid a punishment’ (Cherry, 2015). Understandably, these two factors occur regularly in the classroom environment and therefore I want to critically research, analyse and evaluate specific aspects in more detail. This includes; which
is more effective to target in terms of furthering children’s learning, children’s social/economic/cultural differences and the effect it has upon their motivation and finally, whether children’s type of motivation changes with age. In order to do this, I will need to reflect upon my own research and findings, as well as drawing upon other sources and ideas to fully gain an understanding of what makes children motivated in the classroom.

**Literacy Review**

After extensive reading, it appears that motivational aspects in the classroom have been widely researched and studied, either as two separate factors or as an overall explanation of human motivation in children and the resulting development into adulthood.

Beginning with extrinsic, it appears that this kind of motivational encouragement dominates in schools and is potentially completely unrelated to the learning itself, focussing on delivering results and statistics for school data. However, it appears to be a common train of thought in teaching that offering a reward will inhibit children’s learning (Kohn, 1994). That’s not to say that extrinsically motivating pupils in a task always results in negativity, if we look at extrinsic motivation being a short term solution to a long term problem, some instances can result in positive outcomes. For example, some children may need the initial encouragement of a reward before being able to self-motivate. Although offering a reward may work in terms of completing work to begin with, it could then rely on reluctant students focussing upon the incentives/rewards rather than enforcing the actual benefits of learning and understanding (Kruglanski, 1978). Ultimately, this will most likely result in learning becoming a task in order to gain the result at the end and if the rewards were not available then the motivation to continue with the learning starts to disintegrate, the rewards become a negative reinforcer once they are gone (Condry and Chambers, 1978). A possible way of using extrinsic motivators for developing intrinsic motivation could be to change the way children receive ‘rewards’. For example, reinforcing the idea that being interested in a topic, producing a high quality piece of work or participating in class are all ‘rewards’ for children to achieve. There are still elements of extrinsic motivation but also internal motivation as well. Benabou and Tirole (2003)
suggest that offering a reward to an individual can empower them and improve their motivation and enjoyment of the activity (see appendix 1). Although, this may not be relevant to children specifically, as their study was conducted on adult behaviour. Theodotou (2014) discusses the idea of different forms of rewards which counteract the idea of pupils receiving them just for 'being present at a task'. They include, 'performance-contingent rewards', 'task-contingent rewards' and 'completion-contingent rewards', these are awarded at different stages and for different purposes of the task. ‘Therefore, rewards may not be the central problem but the way they are used may have detrimental effects on student’s willingness to learn’ (p19). This idea suggests that it may be the way that extrinsic motivation is used rather than the aspect itself which receives the negative connotations of motivating pupils in the classroom.

During the 20th Century, theorists observed humans to challenge behaviour perspectives and discovered that it was possible for them to engage in enjoyable activities without the motives of gaining a reward (Hunt, 1965). This type of behaviour is known as 'intrinsic' motivation, in terms of children in the classroom, this would be an instructor encouraging their self-belief and the gratifications of success (Wooden, 2014). Although it is the perfect ideal, to have every pupil be intrinsically motivated for every subject, this is often less feasible in practice without some sort of incentive. A study into early influenced ‘intrinsic motivation and later academic achievement’ was conducted into children aged between 7-8, 7-9 and 8-9, the results showed that the ‘most consistent’ scores were shown in the earlier ages (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977). This study supports Adele Gottfried’s statement from 1985, ‘development of academic intrinsic motivation in young children is an important goal for educators because of its inherent importance for future motivation, as well as for children’s effective school functioning’ further supporting that encouraging this type of thinking from the earliest possible age could ensure that children develop an understanding of being responsible for their own learning and success in the future. As children move through their academic journey, schools begin to accommodate more for pupil’s intrinsic tastes by allowing them to pick their own subjects to continue with (see appendix 3). This is where the pupil would consider which subject they received the most pleasure/enjoyment/gratification from, the one where they were most intrinsically motivated and then choose to continue this for further study.
This could suggest that as human minds grow and develop, we appear to engage in activities or academics we know we will get pleasure from and therefore encouraging children to be intrinsically motivated in every subject gives them much more variety and choice (see appendix 1).

Another factor which could have a major impact on children’s motivation is the educators and parent’s attitude and involvement in the child’s education (see appendix 2), ‘When teachers and parents nurture their children's natural curiosity about the world by welcoming their questions, encouraging exploration, and providing a supporting and encouraging environment, they are giving their children the message that learning is worthwhile and satisfying’ (Education of Scotland, 2012). With this in practice, a child’s motivation would be far more intrinsic and would not require the need for extrinsic rewards, the child would be eager to learn for self-gratification. Children themselves have interesting concepts for their own motivation. Those who are offered rewards or grades as motivation typically care less for their own work, learning and thinking and do not challenge themselves as much as those children who are not focussed upon grading and rewards (Kohn, 1993).

Perhaps, it is the child’s individual personality or age that will influence in practitioner’s decisions to use intrinsic, extrinsic or both forms of motivation, and that it is the responsibility of that educator to understand children’s specific needs, preferences, strengths and weaknesses (see appendix 1) before implementing strategies of encouragement in the classroom. Or, alternatively educators need to stop thinking in terms of rewards or punishments altogether and base learning on the environment in which practitioners provide, in the right atmosphere, young people will contribute and make commitments because they want to learn, to do good work for its own sake and be recognised as people’ (Senge, 1990).

‘The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has been one of the important theoretical conceptualizations of qualitative differences in engagement’ (Kaplan, 2010). So perhaps an important factor that needs to be discussed is whether the terms ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ should be treated as two separate dimensions, or whether they co-exist in terms of identifying children’s motivation in the classroom (see appendix 1). Harter (1981) stated that she could ‘imagine
situations in which intrinsic interest and extrinsic rewards might collaborate, as it were, to motivate learning’. Her research described how children who complete tasks with a desire for good grades can be seen as engaging with extrinsic motives, but there could be more complexity to it than that. Receiving good grades/feedback would reflect an individual’s interest in the topic and therefore counteract the idea that there was no intrinsic involvement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this case, it appears to be possible that a child can have intrinsic motivation in a particular subject even with the end result/goal being explicitly extrinsic, that a child can use their enjoyment of a topic to gain the prize at the end. So, this suggests that the two can co-exist and represent two dimensions of motivation, rather than two opposing factors.

However, Loo (2001) stated that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation should be viewed as two separate factors as they seem to be measuring different aspects of motivation. Prior to this, Lepper’s research (1972, p7) supports Loo’s statement, as it describes how a child’s intrinsic interest and motivation in a certain topic can become decreased/devalued when extrinsic motivational goals are introduced, this results into the so called ‘over justification’ effect. With this in mind, it could result in pupils entering into a form of ‘double jeopardy’ through teachers encouraging intrinsic engagement of their learning but promoting extrinsic rewards as an incentive (Covington, Muller, 2001, p158). Therefore implying that encouraging the two motivational aspects to work together could actually end up having a negative effect on the child. There is also the idea of pupils engaging in a task which they do not have particular intrinsic motivation for, but they understand the importance of completing the task for good grades and their future career. In this instance, the child is ultimately looking toward the extrinsic result of something they are intrinsically interested in doing in their futures (The Thiagi Group, 2004).

If we view ‘motivation’ as a ‘non-singular characteristic’ that an individual may possess, and that intrinsic motivation is qualitatively different to extrinsic motivation, the question which seems more appropriate is not ‘how to’ motivate students, but ‘how’ students are motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
Methodology

In order to critically analyse intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom, there has to be research and findings to refer to. To collect my data, I have chosen ‘Ryders Hayes Community Primary School’ in Walsall, Birmingham, the school is mixed gender and ethnicity with an overall Ofsted rating of ‘outstanding’ (Ofsted, 2007). It is a school that I have not visited before so I would have no preconceived ideas or bias opinions, which would potentially affect my data. The study will be based on children’s classroom behaviour in regards to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, so children and their educators will be the participants I focus upon to inform my research. I specifically want to focus on two separate year groups to allow me the opportunity for comparing behaviour as children grow and develop (see appendix 3). It is worth mentioning at this point that due to working with children and the nature of my research, ethical issues were considered in the planning process and dealt with appropriately and accordingly. I also actively sought out permission from the head mistress and the children’s parents (see appendix 9 & 10). Ethical considerations are essential for researcher’s to take into account, ‘Ethics should be applied on all stages of research, such as planning, conducting and evaluating a research project’ (Blakstad, 2008). Therefore I intend to ensure all participants come to no physical or mental harm in every stage of my investigation.

Before choosing methods of collecting evidence, it is essential to look at the type of questions you are asking to decipher what will be the most appropriate technique for the research, ‘any good researcher knows that your choice of method should not be predetermined. Rather you should choose a method that is appropriate to what you are trying to find out’ (Punch, 1998. p244). As my study is based on the psychological aspects of motivation, this led to me to believe that ‘qualitative’ methodology would give me the most relevant information to aid my focus of study. Qualitative methodology can be identified by its main aims, which are related to understanding social aspects; it is usually in the form of words rather than number data. This methodology involves collecting evidence through social research such as; interviews, questionnaires, focus groups or observations (Brikci & Green, 2007). This seemed to specifically fit my area of study as I am looking to understand children’s motives and behaviour towards learning in the classroom. Therefore, I would need to use this type of methodology to provide me with evidence that will
inform me of my chosen topic.

Of course, with any chosen methodology, there are positive and negative attributes to consider. Due to the nature of qualitative methodology, the results can sometimes appear imprecise. For example, the researcher is actively looking for specific traits in the participants which cause the results to turn out bias; this then makes it difficult to determine the validity of the research. The researcher must ensure that they keep an open mind so as not to have much of an influence on the results. Even with this, qualitative data does allow for the research to be analysed in depth and due to the specific chosen focus group, cannot be generalised over a large population. It offers compelling and informative results which aids the researcher to arrive at a conclusion (Anderson, 2010), these traits are important and relevant for my research and therefore further support my choice for this type of methodology.

After arriving at the conclusion to use qualitative methodology with my chosen participants, I then needed to decide what methods I would use to gather my results and I decided that the best place to start would be with an observation of children’s behaviour in the classroom, “the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method”(Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p92). Observations provide a lot of positive opportunities for researchers to view human behaviour in relation to their chosen focus of study, they can increase the validity of the study, provide opportunities for a richly detailed environment and support other forms of research such as interviews etc. (Kawulick, 2005). There are some limitations to using observations though which I needed to consider. When your presence is in an unfamiliar environment, the behaviour of the participants may change. For example, in terms of the classroom, students and/or teachers may behave slightly better or worse than their natural behaviour due to the appearance of a ‘stranger’ observing them. Also, the researcher may be focussing on specific details which support their ideas about the study, and again, affect the validity (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). Although these details may only slightly effect the results, they would still need to be taken into consideration when assessing the overall validity of the study. After observing children’s classroom behaviour for any traits or evidence of intrinsic or
extrinsic motivational behaviour, I then decided that I should further support this with a questionnaire for both the children and the teacher. Questionnaires are an effective way of gaining social results from participants and one of the most common methods for collecting data in research projects, they can provide insightful and descriptive responses that provide the researcher with essential information needed for their research (Rowley, 2014). Mine will involve an interview type questionnaire with open-ended questions. Because the participants are so young I will be writing their answers myself, this is so that I can record their answers efficiently without having to consider their writing abilities potentially affecting the quality of their answers. However, the problem with this method is that it could prove to be quite time consuming, and so the sample may end up being smaller than if I were to give the questionnaire to a whole class to fill in themselves. I should still be able to get a firm idea of children’s motivation from a small sample though, so this disadvantage should not affect my research too vastly. Another limitation of using questionnaires is that a researcher can never be overly confident that the participants have answered honestly and accurately, that the participants are interested or that they have even understood the question at all (Rowley, 2014). To tackle this, I have tried to use age appropriate questions which are easily understood yet still give me the information necessary for supporting my research. The whole questionnaire should not last longer than 3-5 minutes to avoid children becoming distracted or uninterested in completing it (see appendix 5 & 8). As part of furthering my research, I have chosen three questions in regards to Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation more specifically (see appendix 1,2 & 3). There are many different topics that I could have looked into but I believe that these three are informative, interesting and useful topics to consider for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. I also believe that they are potentially achievable questions to focus upon using my research methods, participants and other people’s research.

Overall, the process of choosing qualitative research methods required me to understand the strengths/limitations of each technique and to consider how I might overcome these. It has also supported my decision to use them within my research and I am confident that they will provide me with detailed and essential information to support my research into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom, an overall table of strengths and weaknesses of the methods is shown below.
**Findings**

The school itself provided me with an opportunity to witness my research, methodology and chosen focus in a real life context, it enabled me to successfully observe two lessons of different year groups and receive vital data from the participants to support my study.

Collecting the results using the qualitative methods of observations and investigative questionnaires was successful overall, providing me with useful and interesting information to support my level of understanding about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom. However, it also presented certain limitations and things to consider for future research projects.

During my observations of the two year groups, one factor which became apparent was the differences in extrinsic motivation used in the two classrooms (see appendix 4 & 7). Whilst both teachers used rewards and sanctions for motivational purposes, the Year 1 teacher used ‘rewards’ as the main incentive for children, where-as the Year 4 teacher used ‘sanctions’ as the main incentive. This could be due to a variety

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of reasons and definitely supports the claim by Kohn (1993) that extrinsic motivation dominates in the modern day school, regardless of the form it comes in. However, on closer inspection – the Year 4 class had individual children who needed specific behaviour and reward schemes to keep them focussed on the task and I might have noticed these more rigorously as it was relevant to my focus, like Anderson (2010) suggested about the researcher being biased and looking for specific traits. In this case, it seems a plausible option for the educator to use specific extrinsic motivation for the children who need it to progress (see appendix 1). The year 1 class all seemed to be very ‘reward focussed’ when working, one group of children made their own reward incentive by racing to finish first (see appendix 7). This suggested to me that in Year 1, at this stage of their learning, there was more Extrinsic than intrinsic motivation. If we look at the two age groups together and their differences in opinion to their learning, it could support the idea of practitioners using extrinsic motivation as a short term solution that results in developing intrinsic motivation later on (see appendix 1). A possible cause of the teachers using more rewards/sanctions within the lessons could be due to the stress of being observed and therefore adapting their usual lesson strategies to accommodate for good behaviour and work, as suggested by Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999). In the Year 1 lesson observation (see appendix 7), I noted that the teacher’s use of effective questioning seemed to be a positive way of encouraging the children to participate and get motivated. This directly reflects the statement by the Education of Scotland, that teachers encouraging discussion, questioning and welcoming their curiosity has a positive effect on children and I could visibly see that taking place (see appendix 2). One thing which is necessary to consider, is that the two observations only gave me a snapshot of everyday teaching. It does not give me underlying evidence of how every child in both classes are motivated, there are thousands of factors which could have altered their behaviour on that particular day and it does not fully reflect their cognitive behaviour towards motivation in relation to their whole academic lives. Nonetheless, this ‘snapshot’ still provides me with credible evidence to use in relation to my study, further supporting my methodology and decisions.

One of the first and most noticeable factors during the questionnaire was relevant to Rowley’s research (2014) and the previous discussion of the limitations in using them for gathering data. To tackle the issue of the questionnaire being time-
consuming and conscious of preventing children from missing their lunch/break time in both year groups, I interviewed them as two small focus groups at the end of each lesson. This resulted in many of the answers being extremely similar (see appendix 5 & 8) and caused me to question the honesty and validity of their answers, as they seemed to copy the answer of the previous child. However, on the questions which required an opinion, their answers were actually different. This could suggest that the simplicity of the questions and the children all having similar ideas when it came to rewards/sanctions resulted in their answers being so identical. An interesting development from the questionnaire was the change in answers from Year 1 to Year 4 when asked which statement they agreed with more. It appears that all of the younger children did their work because they ‘have to’ and all of the older children did their work because they ‘enjoy it’. This could support Gottfried’s research about children who are intrinsically motivated from a young age then taking responsibility and interest in their own learning as they grow older, my results potentially show a sample of Year 4 children who are a product of this. Interestingly though, the Year 4 teacher’s response to whether her pupils chose to do work for themselves or whether they were just following instructions was the opposite to the opinions of the four children in the questionnaire (see appendix 6). She believed this was due to their lower mathematical ability affecting their intrinsic motivation for the subject. This could be just a generalisation of the class and not specifically those four participants or even that the children were old enough to understand that this is the answer they ‘should’ be giving in regards to their education, which is why their teacher disagreed. However, she did agree with the Year 1 participant’s answers when she stated that ‘the younger they are, the less self-motivated they are’ and this was clearly supported in the children’s questionnaire (see appendix 8). This could also reflect Kohn’s statement (1993) about children who are offered rewards consequently caring less about their education. The sample size of the focus group I used was fairly small which caused me to make generalisations of the whole class, in order to gain a more accurate understanding of children’s motivation I would need a much larger sample of children. Had I had the environment, time and resources to interview every child in the class I would have gained a much larger perspective and this is definitely something to consider in the future. A statement from the teacher participant questionnaire offered another perspective of using extrinsic motivation (see appendix 6), she stated ‘they like to know they are doing the right thing’ which
can offer two plausible explanations. Firstly, that the children are completing the work for their own self-gratification and just need slight encouragement to show they are doing it the right way. Or secondly, that the children are completing the work with an interest in the topic but primarily in the hopes of receiving praise from the teacher. Both of which can be seen as extrinsic, but with slight elements of Intrinsic, which supports Harter’s idea (1981) of both forms being able to co-exist in the classroom. Another limitation of the questionnaire I used was the reliability of the participants. For example, in the interest of keeping to the ethical guidelines, participants were free to skip any questions, leave the questionnaire at any time or even not partake at all. This resulted in having only one teacher complete the questionnaire, a child from year 4 skip a question and a child from year 1 leave the questionnaire before finishing. Whilst this did not affect my results too dramatically, it was an important aspect which I needed to respect and then take into consideration when reviewing the data.

Reviewing my findings gave me extensive detail to support the three specific questions I wanted to look closer at (see appendix 1, 2 & 3) and an understanding of whether it was possible to answer them. My own research, and that of others which I have reviewed, have had an influence on my opinion and their relevance to my chosen focus. In my opinion though, to answer the questions fully, I would need vast amounts of more research, data and statistics. Looking at children’s age with regards to motivation has proven to be a vital topic to discuss and I was able to further research this myself by looking at two separate year groups. My results did in fact show a change in behaviour and more of an intrinsic motivational pattern amongst the children in Year 4 and more extrinsic motivation traits in the younger year 1 class. However, in order to gain a larger perspective and understanding of why and how this change occurs, I would need to specifically look at a larger sample of children and research. Looking at social/economic and cultural differences proved to be the most challenging of the three focusses. The two year groups I observed were majority White British children from similar backgrounds and this inhibited my ability to look closely at those particular factors. In hindsight, as well as visiting two separate year groups, my results would have benefited from visiting another school with a larger percentage of multiculturalism as well. This would have given me more
of an understanding of whether these factors really effect children’s classroom motivation. Questioning which form of motivation is more effective for a practitioner to target is arguably the most important focus of the three. My research has provided evidence in support and against targeting both types solely and the result of targeting them both together. Again, researching this topic could go much wider than my own findings but they have resulted in developing my own personal opinion as a practitioner.

After reviewing all of my research I still fully support my own decisions with regards to the techniques I used for collecting data, as well as the specific questions I chose to focus upon. All of my decisions proved to have strengths and limitations which were considered before and after my study and ultimately shaped my knowledge, understanding and personal opinion of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative study of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom has enabled me an opportunity to understand children’s cognitive behaviour and the effect that certain types of motivation can have on their attitudes to learning. This study has further supported my interest and decision in reviewing this particular topic, as well as an understanding of just how extensive and detailed the issues surrounding it are. Reviewing the strengths and limitations of using certain methods of research has influenced my understanding and preference for future studies. Specifically focussing on certain aspects of motivation has proven that there are many issues to consider and that this topic is not straightforward for researchers to evaluate.

Overall, it seems apparent that young children are extremely impressionable and adapt quickly to a type of motivational encouragement in the classroom, which can result in positive and negative behaviour surrounding the responsibility for their own education. The aspect which I found most interesting in this investigation was whether the two could co-exist and which was more effective for practitioners to target. I am convinced that it is possible to find a healthy balance. Whilst extrinsic
rewards, grades and praise are a common aspect of motivation for children, there are many damaging qualities that this can result in if it is the only sole focus and incentive. What proved more positive to focus on in the classroom is children being intrinsically motivated in their own learning. However, I think to continuously focus on one specific aspect could be more damaging than to incorporate the two together, as it could be argued that the internal feeling you have for doing something you love is essentially extrinsic as well as intrinsic. Children do need to be encouraged to take control of their own motivation and have independence first and foremost, however, rewards are a positive reflection that comes with achievement and to deny this could leave children with negative connotations of learning. Therefore, I believe incorporating them both in the classroom could prove quite successful. It appears that age is a specific factor related to children’s motivation, encouraging intrinsic motivation is essential for younger children and will positively develop their education in the future. Their motivation does appear to develop more intrinsically as they get older and become more invested in their own education, however, this is a generalisation of my own personal study. Regarding social, economic and cultural issues influencing motivation – this topic needs a lot more evidence and information than my study has concluded in order for me to form a justifiable opinion. One agreeably important detail this study has proven though is that every child is completely individual and unique, teaching should always be adapted to suit every child and this is relevant to the way in which they are motivated too. External factors such as their background should be considered in every aspect of teaching, as well as their motivation.

As a developing practitioner, it has influenced my understanding of practice and the way that I will motivate the children I teach in the future. If I can focus on ‘how’ individual pupils are motivated, celebrate their achievements and encourage responsibility for their own learning, then intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will both prove to be an essential part of my classroom ethos.