1. Introduction

Most teachers in mainstream education in Greece complain that they teach students who
with some exceptions dislike school. They see that students’ enthusiasm on the first day
of the school year is transformed into boredom very quickly and they end up working
only with a few consistent students while they feel helpless in motivating the rest of
them. Overall, the school culture is not considered as motivating since its centralised
structure hinders the development of students’ critical thought and creativity. A question
that has already emerged is how far traditional school practice is untenable and whether it
should be replaced by new education models that could meet the needs of students who,
in spite of having a normal learning potential, fail in school.

To those who have dropped out from secondary compulsory education in Greece a
second chance is offered through two types of schools: the Evening Schools (ESs) and
the Second Chance Schools (SCSs). While ESs have the same curricula as well as the
same teaching and evaluation methods as ordinary schools in mainstream secondary
education, SCSs are considered to be innovative. They operate without pre-specified
curricula, use new teaching and evaluation methods and offer counseling to students.

This paper is part of a large scale research project on meaningful learning conducted in
two different school environments – that of an evening school and a second chance
school. It aspires to evaluate motivation in these school environments.
2. Literature review

2.1 ES culture

The first ES was established in 1934 (Katsikas, 2000) but in their present form they were established through the Law 1566/85 introduced by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (GMERA, 1985).

ESs offer compulsory education (3 years) as well as upper secondary education (4 years) while they admit people older than 14 years old who have a job and have dropped out of the ordinary secondary education.

Since ESs operate exactly as mainstream schools, their culture can be approached through literature on secondary mainstream education.

Hopf and Xohellis (2003) characterise teaching in Greek secondary mainstream education as purely theoretical, verbalistic and textbook oriented as well as without any reference to real life. They found that learning by rote is usually promoted and observed deficiencies in teaching ability. As for assessment, it is often based on recitation of the already acquired knowledge.

Konstantinou (2001) stresses that school aims at making students comply with teachers’ perceptions. Traditional teaching along the knowledge transmission model is the most commonly used teaching method and normative assessment is often used as a means to ‘motivate’ students (ibid).
Pre-specified curricula do not leave space for teachers’ intervention and creativity (Kossyvaki, 2003) and teachers’ pedagogical knowledge is frequently insufficient (Konstantinou 2001, Kossyvaki 2003).

2.2 SCS culture

Following the proposal of the European Commission (1995) which is contained in the White Paper on Education and Training, the aim of which was to fight social exclusion, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (GMERA, 1997) established SCSs. These schools offer accelerated compulsory education to people older than 18 years old who have dropped out of ordinary compulsory education. After two years of study students can obtain qualification equivalent to that obtained in ordinary education.

SCSs, according to the school guidelines published by the Institute of Lifelong Learning (IDEKE 2003), should use constructivist pedagogy. Learning is conceived as action and not as acquisition and therefore it is based on discovery on the part of the students as well as teachers who should also be active researchers. Therefore collaborative learning, the method of project as well as crosscurricular approaches within the context of multiliteracies, are considered to be the most appropriate teaching and learning methods. In this way students take initiatives with regard to their own learning while they acquire gradually meta-cognitive abilities. Teachers are invited to recognise students’ needs regarding their way of learning and support them accordingly. It should be noted that students with learning difficulties are further supported through extra teaching sessions in groups as well as individually. Students are also offered counselling by a career advisor.
and a psychologist in each school. In this sense SCSs constitute a highly nurturing environment. Assessment is descriptive, based on students’ participation in the learning process and focuses on methods which facilitate not only the cognitive process but the whole development of students’ personality. Assessment does not test only cognition but also takes into account understanding, critical thinking as well as meta-cognitive ability. In its turn meta-cognitive ability creates the condition for self-assessment. In general assessment is individualised, representative of student’s progress and avoids comparisons among students. Teachers do not assess students’ competence in complex mental activities but their involvement in such activities. Emphasis is also given in students’ ability to interact and co-operate with others. Recommended modes of assessment are the one based on portfolio, the assessment of the process of realisation as well as of the outcome of projects, the assessment of smaller scale tasks, self-assessment and peer-group assessment.

2.3 Motivation and learning context

The issue of motivation is central in theories of cognition. Students may be intrinsically motivated and therefore engaged in learning for its own sake or extrinsically motivated since they come to school in order obtain a separable outcome (Watkins et al., 2005). According to Deci and Ryan (2000), there is more than a polarised distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and social contexts supportive of the needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness facilitate the internalisation of extrinsic motivation. According to modern pedagogy such suitable learning contexts are created
through constructivist pedagogy, in other words pedagogy that is based on student activity, collaboration and learner’s agency (Watkins et al., 2002).

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 The research question

The aim of this study is to detect and evaluate motivation in two distinct school environments in second chance education and should be considered as a first step towards researching such a complex psycho-pedagogical phenomenon.

The central research question of this study is as follows:

*To what extent are students motivated to learn in Evening and in Second Chance Schools?*

For the purposes of this study the degree to which these schools constitute motivating learning environments is considered to be dependent on the reasons why students came to school as an indication of their motivation for learning, the school pedagogy to enhance their motivation and the kind of learning that is produced as the outcome of enhanced students’ motivation.

3.2 Theoretical framework

This is mainly a qualitative study with the exception of calculating and presenting some numerical data that determine the profile of the schools since what is going to be
researched is the qualities of persons, processes and meanings that are not measurable (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

This study was conducted from the perspective of social constructionism because it seeks to understand multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Robson, 2005). More specifically, within the social constructionist framework of symbolic interactionism, motivation was researched along the conceptual lines developed by Blumer (1998). According to Blumer, the notion that human beings act on the basis of interpretations of meanings about things acquired through social interactions constitutes the ideological premise of symbolic interactionism. What enables the construction of meaning is that the individual being in possession of its ‘self’ can stand out of it and put it in the position of others. Blumer suggests that organisations as arrangements of people interlinked in their specific actions have to be studied and explained in terms of the interpretations in which acting participants are engaged as they handle situations. Participants bring to such formations the world of objects, the sets of meanings and the schemes of interpretation that they already possess. Equally, they are continuously redefining their own perspective of the situation by defining others’ perspectives as well as their own through self-interaction.

3.3 Methodology

For the purposes of this research two case studies have been conducted, one for each type of school. Case studies focus on the groups of actors and seek to understand their perception of events (Hughes cited in Cohen et al., 2003).
Data was collected only via semi-structured in depth interviews although observation was also needed for safer results. According to Brown and Dowling, (2003) interviews render exploring of complex issues possible while they allow the researcher to provide clarification, to probe and prompt. Moreover, semi-structured interviews increase the comprehensiveness of data, make data collection systematic for each respondent, anticipate logical gaps and remain conversational and situational (Cohen et al., 2003).

Since ESs are mainstream schools and therefore constitute a familiar learning environment, interviewing two teachers and two students was considered to be adequate for drawing conclusions on motivation. On the other hand, SCSs constitute an innovative school environment and, therefore, interviewing more persons was necessary for safer conclusions. So, it was decided that four teachers and five students should be interviewed. Students were selected on the basis of various criteria. Some students made interesting interventions in classes I happened to observe and some stimulated my curiosity during some short talk or because I heard teachers talking about them. Teachers were selected with a view to covering the main teaching subjects. All interviews took place in the schools and were recorded. For reasons of confidentiality pseudonyms are used in place of participants’ real names. Finally, it should be noted that participants’ words quoted in this study were translated into English by me.

The ES under investigation is situated in a low/medium income area near the center of Athens where many families of foreign workers live over the last fifteen years. The SCS is situated in a low/medium income suburb near Athens where many repatriated Greeks from Russia, gypsies as well as families of foreign workers live.
For data analysis the guidelines of the Miles and Huberman approach were followed (Miles and Huberman 1994, Gibbs 2004)) as it is incorporated into NUD*IST. The components of this approach are data reduction in order that data can be kept manageable, data display so that the researcher can feel what data are telling him as well as conclusion drawing and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

For the purposes of this investigation interviews were transcribed. Due to the small number of transcripts only data reduction was done through coding by means of the qualitative analysis package Nvivo. Coding was done by associating paragraphs in the raw interview transcripts with one or more themes defined in a hierarchical coding structure.

Because of the small scale of this investigation definite conclusions are not drawn, yet the likelihood of the validity of some findings is stressed. As far as the trustworthiness of this research is concerned the possible presence of bias is discussed in the concluding section of this study.

4. The findings

4.1 Motivation in the Evening School

At the beginning of the school year 114 students were enrolled in this school. 35 of them were foreign, mostly Albanians. During the school year 44 students, almost 40% of all students dropped out. Six full-time and three part-time teachers were placed in the school. The student per teacher ratio was 70/9=7.8.

Choosing a path
MT, the maths teacher, describes students who study there as:

Adolescents who have failed many times in ordinary education,……adolescents from Albania who need to work and study as well as grown up women …… These women are the best students.

LT, the language teacher, says:

They have known school failure all these adolescents………They know they will come to the ES and at least teachers will help them pass………Grownups…look upon school differently as they want to learn and fulfill unfulfilled wishes.

Many youngsters drop out during the year. LT alleges:
	hey are youngsters either involved in drugs, or others with families not able to help them...........

MT reports that many young students react by dropping out when they realize that they cannot cope with school requirements. LT, the language teacher, however, thinks this reaction is a natural consequence of schooling:

….School is by nature a power exerting institution. Hence, students automatically perceive school as something oppressive, something against which they have to react a priori……

In his second year of studies a male younger student, MYS, has ten brothers and sisters and dropped out because of financial reasons. Although he believes knowledge is useful, the main reason he came back to school is ES qualification because he wishes to get a job in the public sector. He also seeks social acknowledgement:

……..knowledge makes you somewhat better, in other words you think differently. ..................I don’t want people from my village to say: ‘You did not go to high-school …..
FOS, a female older student is about to graduate. She dropped out when she was young because she had a tetraplegic brother she had to take care of while her parents had to work. Besides, her parents thought that she did not need to go to school because she was going to end up as a housewife anyway.

FOS also needs qualification. She wants to continue to the vocational education in order to be an assistant physiotherapist but she also has a deep interest in learning for its sake:

……..When I read poetry images appear, situations already known. When I read Herodotus moments of my life come up. When I read ‘Helena’ I can understand the feelings of that woman. I have been mother, wife and daughter, I am familiar with these things, it (school) is an amusement to me, it’s my only amusement now.

Therefore, regarding motivation for returning to school, one could infer that older students are more likely to be intrinsically motivated in contrast to young ones.

Collaborative culture could facilitate internalization of extrinsic motivation but teaching methods in the ES are of traditional nature.

Pedagogy

ESs have the same pre-specified curricula as ordinary schools but teachers teach fewer things and of course at a lower level. LT states:

It’s wrong that they have the same books in ES as in ordinary schools. Kids in ES deal with plumbing, engines and electrical stuff. They have different interests…………………

Teachers in ES use traditional teaching methods. MT uses the textbook but he tries to teach those things that students meet in everyday life, like what ‘15% discount’ means or what ‘ml’ on a coca cola bottle stands for.
A student told me the other day that he asked colleagues at work what ‘ml’ stood for and nobody knew. He thought he was clever. They learn a few things and they do feel they’ve learnt something……

In language classes things are different. As FOS said, students read a text, they write a summary and then they do grammar and syntax exercises. In history class they underline the most important things during class and then they have to learn the historic events by heart for the next time. Students are reluctant to do homework, so tasks are sometimes given in classroom. MT states:

Only very few do homework. Only one or two of the older women……

Moreover, LT confesses:

I can’t even think of giving them any homework, it is too much……..Sometimes they write essays in classroom but they are unfortunately very short. Only older students (write good essays) who feel embarrassed to hand me something badly written……Youngsters, on the other hand they want to leave the classroom as soon as possible.

Students have the chance to ask teachers a question in class or during the break whenever they have difficulties in learning something. As MYS says, relations between teachers and students are good, yet typical.

Pedagogy is traditional in the ES since curriculum is pre-specified and collaborative, student-centred teaching methods as well as meaningful student activity are absent. This kind of pedagogy cannot help extrinsically motivated students. As a result, whether young students learn is questionable.

Assessing learning
The situation regarding young students’ learning is alarming. LT states that there is nothing she could do with younger students, but the situation is different with older ones.

….. When I see younger students I can feel their resignation……..I get upset when I see that quite often they don’t even want to open their books or they come to school without books……. And then they ask for charity (to pass).
I think older ones enjoy ES more because it reminds them of their childhood.

MT thinks that some students cannot learn. He alleges:

……..Of course you cannot make one learn if one does not want to…

Despite non-learning most students pass. LT argues:

Most students pass. There is no other way…. because of pedagogical sensitivity as well. If a student has failed in ordinary education twice or three times and he/she comes here to get the qualification, I think it would be very bad if he/she didn’t pass.

However, when I asked these two students whether they feel they are getting something out of school they said:

MYS: Knowledge from primary school that I had forgotten come to memory again……

FOS: If I had the keys of the classroom I could show you what I wrote on the board with an indelible marker the first day I went in: ‘Life chisels the soul, knowledge polishes it so that it can glow with pride.’

Despite the fact that most progressive educators challenge whether real learning can be produced through traditional pedagogy, it could be said that intrinsically motivated older students are more likely to learn. Such pedagogy, however, does not stimulate mainly young students’ interest if they are extrinsically motivated.
In summarising findings we can say that a large percentage of students, mostly younger ones, drop out. Further, students’ age plays an important role in motivation and internal regulation for learning.

Younger students are more likely to be, if at all, extrinsically motivated.

The curriculum is pre-specified and does not seem to meet the interests of most younger students, while it may satisfy the older ones.

Traditional pedagogy along the knowledge transmission model with the use of examples from real life and discussion in some cases cannot be considered as motivating. As a result, extrinsically motivated young students remain in a state of non-learning.

Teachers blame students for lack of motivation and appear helpless to motivate younger ones. On the other hand, they do not express any concern regarding pre-specified curricula, teaching methods or school practice.

In conclusion the ES school culture does not seem to facilitate internalization of extrinsic motivation.

4.2 Motivation in the Second Chance School.

At the beginning of the school year 2004-05 98 students were enrolled in this school. 6 of them were gypsies, 1 Muslim and 16 repatriated Greek immigrants. During the school year 6% of all students dropped out. Sixteen teachers were placed in this school and the student per teacher ratio was 92/16=5.8

Choosing a path

Students’ motive for returning to school is not always learning.
MOS, an older first year student attended high school for one year and dropped out from mainstream education because the school was far from his village. Right now he has a job in the public sector. He confesses:

The reason I have come back to school is not that I need high school qualification for my job but because there was something of an unfulfilled wish in me……………………..

FOS, a repatriated Greek from Russia, is a female older second-year student. She says:

It’s the deep pain I feel because I didn’t finish school. I wanted to be a teacher…..I feel better when I learn things.

FYS1, a young first year student, attended high school for one year and dropped out because she had to look after her little brother while her parents had to go to work. She works as a hairdresser and wishes to go on studying in vocational education.

….if my child asks a question I want to be able to answer…..but the most important reason I have come back to school is that I felt awful with myself….

Since FYS2, another young first-year student, graduated from primary education has thought that going to high-school is absolutely unnecessary until recently when she has had difficulties in finding a job:

The truth is that if I didn’t need compulsory education to get a job I surely wouldn’t do it….. I have an affair, we are practically engaged and I wouldn’t go through all this now.

MYS1 is a male young second-year student. He works as an electrician and wants to be self-employed. He leaves no room for misunderstanding:

I’m not here to learn; I’m here for the certificate, for my job!
LT, the language teacher, comments on the impact of age on students’ attitude towards learning:

Younger students make absences or try to avoid work. ………….Older students are very stable in relation to attendance while they have a sense of self-respect when it comes to their duties.

ST, the science teacher, generally doubts students’ real motives for coming back to school:

……..They say they really want to learn but in my opinion they also want to get the qualification not just to learn………..

MT, the maths teacher, on the other hand, believes that students should be trusted irrespective of cultural and cognitive level:

I think we have the best part of Greek society here. They’re people who have decided to take this step and they stick to this decision. You don’t find it very easily in society.

Hence, students’ motivation for learning is questionable and in any case varies with age. Older students are more likely to be intrinsically motivated than young ones. The question that arises, though, is whether school pedagogy stimulates extrinsically motivated students’ interest in learning.

**Pedagogy**

LT, the language teacher, says that students get motivated to learn because the curricula are not pre-specified, so subject matters can be jointly chosen:

………..If they know that something lies within their interests and widens their scope, they have every reason to work on it.
She uses teamwork, so that even him who cannot do the task can get satisfaction from group success. She believes that:

In this way a collective outcome is better than an individual one and so one feels she/he has succeeded.

Besides teamwork she uses role play and brainstorming as teaching methods and organises cross-curricular sessions with other colleagues.

On the other hand, MT, the maths teacher, confesses:

It drives me crazy when maths teachers tell me I should teach maths according to students’ needs and interests. This means nothing; empty words.

SoT1, a sociology teacher, blames students for teachers using traditional teaching methods. She argues:

They want to listen to the teacher talking. What they have in mind is mainstream school, the stereotype of a teacher who does the talking.

But without admitting it she also shares the same stereotypes:

Traditional teaching cannot be abolished in the SCS. It can only be a joke, because some things have to be clarified…It should be the starting point.

So, it is the teacher who starts talking. S/he suggests, proposes and clarifies while students follow instructions. The teacher has the leading part in any case.

SoT2, another sociology teacher, admits:

Look, you can’t escape from traditional teaching. It’s very difficult. After so many years I simply can’t…

The ST teaches 10% of the syllabus that is normally taught in an ordinary high school. Additionally he chooses to introduce interesting unusual topics within his domain and uses ‘theatricality’, as he calls it, to draw students’ attention:
I use theatricality. I have the power to draw peoples’ attention no matter what I say. In science there are many beautiful quaint things you can talk about. For instance while female mammals suckle their babies from their breast what happens with female dolphins or whales and their babies?

Theatricality is not everybody’s method. The FYS1 describes how SoT1 teaches:

She hands photocopies out and we read them aloud during class while she interrupts and explains what we have just read.

Students are viewed as hard working people; therefore teachers never give them homework. On the other hand, tasks are given occasionally at school.

Workshops and projects are inherent in the curriculum as a means of student active learning. ST, however, alleges that students are not in a position to work on projects properly, so they end up being prepared by teachers who are responsible for them:

It doesn’t work because in my opinion they conceived the idea of the project in a wrong way…………

In conclusion, despite what school guidelines proclaim, pedagogy is not of constructivist nature. Teaching, as most teachers confess, is traditional based on the knowledge transmission model. It is remarkable that only one teacher stated that she uses collaborative methods whereas nobody mentioned meaningful activity as the centre of her/his teaching. From this point of view the SCS culture does not seem to facilitate internal regulation for learning.

Assessing learning

ST argues that there is no point in assessing people since they are not going to remember anything in a year’s time. He assesses ‘randomly’ as he argues.
… I’ve divided students in groups on the criterion ‘who is friend with whom’ and I give everyone in a particular group exactly the same assessment…………………..

LT believes that they can not only learn but they can also recall already known stuff and systematize it. ST, however, has a different opinion.

These subjects (science) demand personal work, something students in ES and in SCS are not disposed to offer. …..Of course they learn something, but in one or two months they will not remember a thing. Here we offer the illusion that they learn.

SoT1 really wonders whether students really learn and confesses:

Sometimes students surprise me when they recall previously taught knowledge…

On the other hand, TM believes that students learn because they are free to ask questions. When I asked students whether the school has offered them the chance to learn, older students argued that it helped them classify things already known, whereas young ones alleged that studying in this school has been beneficial without being able to specify how in detail. Hence, we could infer that learning is not easily traceable in the SCS either.

In summarising findings we can say that drop out rate in the SCS is low. The age of students plays an important role in motivation and internal regulation for learning. SCS were supposed to constitute an innovative learning environment and knowledge should be generated through open curricula and collaborative teaching methods.
However, teachers in many cases use traditional teaching methods and as a consequence whether learning occurs is a question.

It is remarkable that, as in the case of the ES as well as of mainstream education, teachers do not blame teaching methods or school culture for non-learning, whereas some of them seem to blame students for such an outcome.

Hence, one could infer that the SCS does not facilitate internal regulation of extrinsically motivated students.

5. Conclusions

Despite the small scale of this research and the need for further investigation we could infer that the particular SCS does not constitute a more motivating school environment in comparison to the ES under research.

The age of students plays an important role in motivation and internal regulation for learning in both schools. Older students may be extrinsically motivated by distal goals but at the same time they might also be intrinsically motivated in order to make their unfulfilled dreams concerning learning come true.

Pre-specified curricula in the ES do not appear to meet the interests of most younger students, while they may satisfy older ones. The reason could be that older students are possibly satisfied with anything they learn while they are already familiar with pre-specified curricula from past school experience. Additionally, teaching methods in the ES are traditional following the principles of the knowledge transmission model. In general, in the case of the ES, as in the case of mainstream education, there is no room for teachers to develop initiatives towards a more student-centred pedagogy. As a
consequence, disappointed teachers appeared helpless to motivate unmotivated students and at the same time expressed their care for them by letting students pass at the end of the year. This peculiar situation, however, destroys any sparkles of motivation for learning in younger students.

On the contrary, the SCS culture encourages teachers’ initiative and offers wider scope for motivating teaching, at least in theory. However, what happens in praxis is that teachers rarely use the chance to challenge traditional culture. While curricula in the SCS are open and what is taught might meet students’ real needs and despite the fact that some teachers in the SCS might use up to some point collaborative teaching methods, this is not the rule in the SCS with adverse consequences on motivation and learning.

As for this study, findings should be considered with caution not only because of the bias its size might infer but also because of other factors:

Of course a certain amount of ‘researcher bias’ may be present in this study because, despite the fact that I presented myself as a researcher and explained the aim of the study, I have the impression that students might have thought that I was an administrator. Therefore, I fear that in some cases they might have exaggerated in praising processes or hiding bad sides. In the case of the SCS I have the impression that the relations between teachers and management might have resulted in further bias. Thus teachers might have overstressed good sides or reported only negative ones.

Despite the fact that I recognised these risks of bias and tried to reduce them as much as possible during interviews it is possible that they have affected the quality of data.
References


