

Understanding and Promoting Autonomous Self-Regulation: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Self-regulation is a process whereby people organise and manage their capacities in the service of attaining some desired future state. These capacities comprise their thoughts (such as competency beliefs), emotions (such as interest), behaviour (such as engagement with learning activities), and social-contextual surroundings (such as selecting a quiet, comfortable place to study).

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behaviour (such as engagement with learning activities), and social-contextual surroundings (such as selecting a quiet, comfortable place to study). Theories of self-regulation vary considerably in their specific foci: some focus on the 'why' of self-regulation, some on the 'what', and some on the 'how'. When autonomous in their self-regulation, students are self-initiating and persistent because the tasks they undertake are perceived as interesting or personally important to them.

- Self-determination theory (SDT) begins with the assumption that people are active by nature with an evolved tendency to engage with the environment, assimilate new knowledge and skills, and integrate them into a coherent psychological structure.
- There are minitheories within SDT, including cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, and basic psychological needs theory.
- Cognitive evaluation theory explains how aspects of the social environment affect intrinsic motivation.
- To be intrinsically motivated is to engage in an activity because one finds the activity itself interesting and enjoyable.
- A general tendency for rewards undermines intrinsic motivation, although positive feedback tends to enhance intrinsic motivation. Moreover, tangible rewards can potentially enhance intrinsic motivation when they are used to communicate competence or improvement.
- External factors tend to undermine intrinsic motivation when they convey incompetence or pressure and control people's behaviour.
- Organismic integration theory investigates the phenomena of internalisation and integration.
- Internalisation refers to the process through which an individual transforms an externally prescribed regulation or value into one that is internally endorsed.
- Integration refers to the experience in which an

internalised regulation has been fully and coherently assimilated with one's sense of self.

- Basic psychological needs theory focuses on the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the basis of students' autonomous self-regulation.

Student-classroom dialectical framework

- According to the SDT framework, all students possess inner motivational resources that can potentially allow them to engage constructively and proactively in learning activities. This is regardless of their starting point, background, or ability.
- Students' inner resources are psychological needs (such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, integrated values, interests, and intrinsic goals).
- The classroom learning environment includes the teacher's motivating style (such as autonomy supportive vs. controlling) and external events. These events can include interesting things to do, opportunities for action, rules and limits, reward and incentives, goals, feedback, rationales, optimal challenges, and evaluations and assessments.
- The student proactively engages in learning opportunities as an expression of the self and out of a desire to interact in the classroom effectively.
- The classroom environment sometimes nurtures and enriches the student's inner resources, maintaining intrinsic motivation and facilitating internalisation. However, sometimes it can disrupt and thwart these natural processes.

Autonomy-supportive instructional behaviour

- Listening: the time a teacher spends listening to student voices during instruction
- Asking what students want or need: frequency with which

teacher asks what the students want or need

- Creating independent work time: time teacher allows students to work independently and in their own way
- Encouraging student voice: time students spend talking about the lesson during instruction
- Seating arrangements: the provision of seating arrangements in which the students (rather than the teacher) are positioned near the learning materials
- Providing rationales: frequency with which teacher provides rationales to explain why a particular course of action, way of thinking, or way of feeling might be useful
- Praise as informational feedback: frequency of statements to communicate positive and effective feedback about the students' improvement or mastery
- Offering encouragement: frequency of statements to boost or sustain student engagement (such as 'You can do it')
- Offering hints: frequency of suggestions about how to make progress when students appear stuck
- Being responsive: being responsive to student-generated questions, comments, recommendations, and suggestions
- Perspective-taking statements: frequency of empathic statements to acknowledge the student perspectives or experiences

Controlling instructional behaviours

- Uttering directives/commands: voicing commands, such as do this, move that, place it here, turn the page.
- Uttering should, got to, ought to: voicing statements that students should, must, have, got to, or ought to think, feel, or do something that they are not currently thinking, feeling, or doing
- Telling 'the right way': verbalising (or announcing) a particular way of behaving before students have the opportunity to discover an effective way of behaving for themselves

- Showing 'the right way': explicitly displaying (or exhibiting) a particular way of behaving before students have the opportunity to discover an effective way of behaving for themselves
- Monopolising learning materials: the teacher physically holds, possesses, and monopolises the learning materials
- Controlling questions: communicating directives posed as a question and voiced with the intonation of a question

Classroom research on self-determination theory

- Autonomy-supportive classroom contexts tend to promote autonomous self-regulation by helping students to achieve the following: set their own goals; direct their own behaviour; seek out optimal challenges; pursue their own interests and values; choose their own way of solving a problem; think more flexibly and more actively; persist rather than give up; perform better and more creatively; employ more mature coping strategies; and experience more positive feelings about themselves and their learning.
- When learning tasks were introduced in autonomy-supportive (as opposed to controlling) ways, students achieved more positive learning outcomes.
- Supporting intrinsic motivation means being attuned to students' autonomy, competence, and intrinsic motivation, and finding ways to enrich learning opportunities to render them more interesting and relevant to students' lives.

Supporting internalisation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation

- Teachers can provide rationales that explain why their recommended way of thinking or behaving might be personally useful for the students.
- Teachers can use informational rather than pressuring language.

- Teachers can acknowledge students' negative feelings about undertaking uninteresting or nonvalued endeavours.
- Teachers can display high relatedness to students; hence, they know with confidence that their teacher truly cares about and is looking out for their personal welfare.
- Teachers can suggest 'interest-enhancing strategies' to support student engagement during relatively uninteresting lessons. For example, goals can be added, repetitive tasks can be conducted in different ways, and students can work in the company of friends.

How to support self-regulated learning?

- Encourage autonomy by offering choices
- Build competence by providing challenge
- Encourage group work and peer support
- Build-in student self-evaluation
- Use feedback that is nonthreatening and mastery oriented