Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Practices

An autonomy-supportive motivational style is characterized by practices that nurture students’ intrinsic motivational resources (e.g., incorporating students interests and establishing relevance), non-controlling language, and acknowledgement of students’ feelings and perspectives. In comparison to a controlling motivational style, an autonomy-supportive style is associated with higher intrinsic and mastery motivation, greater perceived competence, as well as improved academic persistence, conceptual understanding, academic performance, and well-being.

All students possess six engagement fostering inner motivational resources:

1. **Autonomy**: the freedom to self-regulate one’s behavior in the absence of controlling external forces; the need to be the origin of one’s behavior
2. **Competence**: the ability to achieve mastery and experience efficacy; the need to interact effectively with one’s environment—to seek optimal challenges, take them on, and exert persistent effort to make progress in mastering them
3. **Relatedness**: concerns the attainment of a sense of belonging, attachment, security, and intimacy with others; the need to be involved in warm relationships characterized by mutual concern, liking, and acceptance
4. **Curiosity**: a cognitively generated emotion that occurs whenever students become aware of an unexpected gap in their knowledge that they wish to close
5. **Interest**: an engagement-fostering emotion that occurs whenever students have an opportunity to learn something new or to develop greater understanding
6. **Intrinsic goals**: an inward focus to pursue personal growth or closer interpersonal relationships; efforts that satisfy psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and/or relatedness) during their pursuit
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<th>Autonomy-Supportive Practice</th>
<th>What it Looks Like in the Classroom</th>
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| Taking the Students’ Perspective | - Inviting, asking for, welcoming, and incorporating students’ input  
- Being aware of students’ needs, wants, goals, priorities, preferences, and emotions |
| Harnessing Students’ Inner Motivational Resources | - Exciting curiosity and providing interesting learning activities  
- Supporting students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness  
- Planning learning activities with students’ intrinsic goals and interests in mind |
| Providing Explanatory Rationales for Requests, Rules, Procedures, and Uninteresting Activities | - Explaining why, stating, “Because…”,”The reason is...”  
- Identifying the value, importance, benefit, use, and/or utility of a request |
| Using non-pressuring, informational language | - Using flexible, open-minded, responsive communication  
- Providing choices and options  
- Using phrasing such as “you may” or “you might” that is non-pressuring |
| Acknowledging and accepting students’ negative thoughts and emotions | - Listening carefully, non-defensively, and with understanding  
- Acknowledging students’ negative affect (e.g., “okay”; “yes”)  
- Accepting complaints as valid |
| Displaying Patience | - Allowing students to work at their own pace in their own way  
- Calmly waiting for students’ signals of initiative, input, and willingness |

**Common Practices that Hinder Students’ Intrinsic Motivation**

- Taking only the teacher’s perspective: prioritizing your plans and needs; unaware of students’ needs, goals, emotions, etc.
- Introducing extrinsic motivators: offering incentives and seeking compliance; giving consequences for desired and undesired behaviors (e.g., rewards and punishments)
- Failing to provide explanatory rationales: requests and directives without explanation
- Using controlling, pressuring language: evaluative, critical, inflexible, “no nonsense,” “you should, you must, you have to”
- Countering or trying to change students’ negative emotions: arguing against students complaining or “bad attitude”; trying to change students’ negative emotions into something acceptable to the teacher
- Displaying impatience: rushing students, intruding into their workspace

**References**