COMBATING STUDENT APATHY: HELPING TEACHERS CREATE
AUTONOMY-SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOMS THAT FOSTER MOTIVATION AND
HIGHER ACHIEVEMENT

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Saint Paul, Minnesota

August, 2018

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Introduction

This project is designed to address the question, *How does providing students with autonomy-supportive instruction strategies and choice impact motivation to learn within the classroom?* This is a more refined variation of a major question of mine since I first started teaching in 2013. After having multiple professional conversations regarding student apathy towards education, I chose to uncover possible reasons why so many students are disengaged and in some cases, seem unwilling to learn. This curiosity lead me toward the creation of my project, a website, so that I could share my findings with other educators.

Project Overview

The overarching goal of this project is to provide teachers with a resource that provides them with a host of materials to better understand student motivation, and what they can do to foster engagement and continued motivational growth within their classrooms. As teachers continue to see increasing instances of amotivation among their students, my project will serve to help them identify possible reasons why amotivation exists within their student population, and how to most effectively address it using best practices. The reason why I decided to choose a website format was because I feel a website provides the best platform for teachers to access information, visualize existing realities, and create or conceptualize possible solutions. Part of this process is to work on developing a website that is reflective of the goal in mind -- fostering student motivation.

In addition to being a more conducive to learning complex concepts, a website is an effective way to transmit a growing research field, which contains a lot of information, in an
easy-to-use format. Having this information centrally located on a website will help teachers to pull significant aspects of current and past research, and formulate action plans to implement autonomy-supportive strategies within their classrooms. Having a one-stop resource will serve to help these teachers gain quick insights into amotivation, and help create additional conversations in their PLCs.

**Audience and Setting**

The main audience for this project will be for educators of students between the ages of 5-18, but could be expanded to include post-secondary educators who experience many of the same problems younger age-group teachers see in their classrooms when it comes to student motivation. The intent behind focusing on this audience is to encourage all teachers to understand how classroom management strategies, curriculum development, and pedagogy can be transformed to encourage more meaningful engagement among all students and serve to gradually address causes of student amotivation. Additionally, focusing in on teachers as the main audience will encourage changes to be made at the source of education across the board.

**Frameworks**

The organizational framework for this project is a website created using Google Sites, which provides a steady platform to display research and provide resources to teachers. When creating a website, it is important to consider web design and usability guidelines to ensure the site is user-friendly for the intended audience. During the creation of my website, I referred to the guidelines provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure I was meeting this goal. These guidelines were particularly useful in helping me ensure my
homepage entice users to remain on the site, and also provide useful content throughout the entire website.

**Homepage**

According to HHS (2006), the homepage serves as a first impression for the site’s visitors. They add, website visitors only make it past the homepage about half the time (HHS, 2006). With this in mind I knew it was important for me to design a homepage that would make a positive impression on my audience. One way to accomplish this is by limiting the length of the page along with the amount of text. The HHS (2006) explains most users simply scan the homepage, and including too much text can slow them down or turn them off entirely. They also suggest limiting the overall length of the homepage to one screenful, as users rarely scroll past that (HHS, 2006). On my website homepage, I adhered to this suggestion by limiting content to a mission statement and contact information. By having a short mission statement, viewers will be able to quickly determine if the material suits their needs.

**Providing Useful Content**

In addition to having a website that would contain as a positive first impression to visitors, it was also important to me to provide useful content throughout the entire site. The HHS (2006) explains a website’s contents should be “engaging, relevant, and appropriate to the audience” (p. 2). With this in mind, I have included sections of researched content illustrating a holistic approach to understanding student motivation through a Self-Determination Theory lens. I made a key point to give analogies where appropriate, and provide resources to help educators take positive steps towards meeting the needs of their students though motivation
strategies.

Research Question:
How does providing students with autonomy-supportive instruction strategies and choice impact motivation to learn within the classroom?

Welcome!

This website will serve to provide schools that are seeing low levels of motivation in student populations with resources to better understand student motivation and work to help re-engage students and develop motivating supports. If your school recognizes motivation and engagement among your student body as being a deficit to your community, this website is to provide you with some resources to get started in moving towards more autonomy-supportive strategies that increase engagement and motivation for struggling students. How this will be accomplished is through:

- Understanding Self-Determination Theory (SDT)
- Assessing student motivation
- Providing a framework for educators to implement in the classroom

“What motivates students?” With the chance of educators visiting this site, there is a need for basic knowledge of concepts to make the framework as clear as possible. In this page, are headings that are aimed at providing clarity to terminology and concepts in research. In the middle of the page, there are two links to separate pages within the website: “current research”, and “Guided Framework”. Both of these links are to be used to skip forward if the reader deems it appropriate. In addition, analogies and images are located throughout the page to create deeper understanding of concepts.
“What Motivates Students” subpage

**Self-determination theory.** Users will be visiting this website to gain a knowledge set on how to support student motivation. One way to do this was to create a page that establishes an understanding of important motivation research. This effectively serves as a lens through which educators can view their classroom environments and students who might be struggling with motivation. The “Self-Determination Theory” page is therefore set up with educators in mind. A video is located at the top, along with a brief description of what the theory is. Supporting subheadings are then located lower on the page, which give more complete explanations of various concepts within the theory.
“Self-Determination Theory” subpage

Guided framework. With a foundation of knowledge established in the first two pages of the website, an emphasis was placed on the “Guided Framework” page, which was to serve as the main resource for teachers in moving towards more motivation-supportive strategies in their classrooms. Within this page, a brief description of how educators can use the contents is included at the top and center. In addition to the description, a video was placed front and center at the top of the page as a summary to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) lense they should be looking through when viewing the page. The subsequent subheadings were seven steps of thought of the framework, each meeting one of the three psychological needs of SDT (autonomy, relatedness, competence). Under each subheading, is a combination of research-based findings, and summaries of research synthesized into suggestions for educators.
Classroom resources. Some educators accessing the site might want to have easier access to resources to be used in classes. This page is linked under the “Guided Framework” page, and therefore serves as a quick-link to all resources included in the website. A description of the resources is included under the headings giving additional context in how they can be used. Each of the resources are accessible via a live links. One of the resources that seemed necessary to include was a resource that made providing student choice easier to implement. The “Student Choice Guide” serves as this resource, and gives readers a guide in giving students more choice in demonstrating learning. Color coding and examples are used to give a clear picture of how the guide works, and how it can be implemented in classrooms.
**Student Choice Guide**

*Use this guide to support student autonomy through choice.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Application Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard(s)</strong>&lt;br&gt;This can include multiple standards. However, it is best if they complement each other.</td>
<td>Identify where water collects on Earth, including atmosphere, ground and surface water, and describe how water moves through the Earth system using the processes of evaporation, condensation and precipitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong>&lt;br&gt;This is an overarching, general question connecting student inquiry to standards.</td>
<td>Define and explain at least one example of the hydrologic (water) cycle, where it fits, and what difficulties and/or benefits it presents to our global community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problems or class questions</strong>&lt;br&gt;These are student questions or topics discovered in class. This gives students a choice in topic.</td>
<td><strong>Topic</strong>&lt;br&gt;Choose one (Autonomy)&lt;br&gt;- Erosion&lt;br&gt;- Algae blooms and sea life&lt;br&gt;- Monsoons&lt;br&gt;- Drought&lt;br&gt;- Plant life&lt;br&gt;- Solar radiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method(s)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Include scaffolding supports within this category that elicit student cognition. Things like idea webs are good tools to get students thinking and develop metacognitive skills. Make sure to include choices of method for students to create something of their own that contributes to collective understanding.</td>
<td><strong>Imperative Scaffolding Method</strong> (Competence)&lt;br&gt;(You must complete both of these)&lt;br&gt;- Idea Web: connect your topic to the hydrologic cycle and explain how it happens (how), and any potential problems related to it.&lt;br&gt;- Slide-Show or video: of real world example explaining significance and connection to the water cycle (who, what, where, why)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Choice Method</strong> (Relatedness)&lt;br&gt;Choose one&lt;br&gt;- Drawing or painting&lt;br&gt;- Newspaper article/newscast announcement&lt;br&gt;- A mock social media post (Instagram, vlog, etc.)&lt;br&gt;- Action plan: create a solution and a sales pitch explaining how it works to solve a problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Student Choice Guide” located in the “Resource” subpage

**Suggested readings.** The final content page on the website, “Suggested Readings” includes links to useful readings. Understanding that many users of this site might want additional readings to learn more about SDT, this page contains the headings “Books”, and “Websites” in separate locations. Both of these headings have multiple links that viewers can use
to learn more about current research and resources.

**Suggested Readings**

**Books**

- *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*
  By: Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci

- *Inquiry Mindset: Nurturing the Dreams, Wonders, and Curiosities of Our Youngest Learners*
  By: Trevor MacKenzie and Rebecca Bathurst-Hunt

**References**

Website Link: https://sites.google.com/hamline.edu/combating-student-apathy/home
References


Deci, E., Ryan, R., & Koestner, R. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the


[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdYev6MXTOA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdYev6MXTOA) Inquiry-Based Learning: Developing Student-Driven Questions


Patall, E. A., Cooper, H., & Wynn, S. R. (2010). The effectiveness and relative importance of
choice in the classroom. *Journal Of Educational Psychology*, 102(4), 896-915.

