Room to Grow

Enhancing Learning by Supporting Autonomy

Larry Rudiger
The University of Vermont

Stacie Spencer
MCPHS University

Keith Bujak
Georgia Institute of Technology

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The Plan

- A bit of **Self-Determination Theory** (SDT)
- **Reeve's advice**: how to enhance learning by supporting autonomy
  - Five Practices
  - A few case studies (about 3.5)
- **Think it through**: where, how, and why might you provide more autonomy?

Self-Determination Theory

- **Preferences**
- Need for ***autonomy***
- **Intrinsic motivation**

Rich Ryan & Ed Deci

Autonomy Support
Why?

- **Better student outcomes**: learning, subsequent motivation, engagement, performance, and well-being
- **Benefits for teachers:** more accomplishment, less emotional exhaustion; greater relationship satisfaction.
- **Learn-able:** novice & experienced teachers respond to training

See Reeve, 2011, for details.

Autonomy Support
How?

1. Recognize your students' experiences.
2. Bring that into the learning process.
3. Develop student's capacity for autonomous self-regulation.

And now, five mechanisms.

1. Nurture inner motivational resources.

Use when introducing a new learning activity, to spur engagement.

Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Inner motivational resources:	*External* motivational resources:
• Need for autonomy	• Directives, commands
• Intrinsic motivation	• Compliance requests
• Self-endorsed goals & values	• Assignments
• Optimal-challenge preference	• Incentives
• Curiosity	• Rewards

Students as origins, agents, doing what they value.

Adapted from Reeve, 2011

Case Study
Stacie & the *MRI Project*

- Health Psychology students work with MRI students to address the issue of MRI-related anxiety
- Consultation model
- Interprofessional education (IPE) opportunity
- Development of Institute of Medicine (IOM) Core Competencies
- Development of professional identity

1. *The MRI Project*

Used to spur engagement.

Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Inner motivational resources:	*External* motivational resources:
• Provide personal experience	• Describe typical experience
• Student-selected evidence	• Professor-assigned readings
• Identification of issues to address	• Assigned issues to address
• Student-determined solutions	• Professor-determined solutions

Students as origins, agents, doing what they value.

2. Provide explanatory rationales.

Use when the task is uninteresting (but important).

Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Communicate and reveal the task's…	*Offer no rationale, and students come to think that…*
• importance	• it's busy work
• potential usefulness & significance	• rules are arbitrary
• value, especially when not obvious	• they are being ordered around

Students internalize value (from not worth to worth doing).

Adapted from Reeve, 2011

Case Study
Stacie & *RM Consulting*

- Real-world questions
- Students collaborate to
  - Review the literature
  - Design a study
  - Prepare a recommendation
- Increased engagement

2. *RM Consulting*.

Use when the task is uninteresting (but important).

Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Communicate and reveal the task's…	*Offer no rationale, and students come to think that…*
• similarity to real-world decision making	• they won't have to do these things after college
• relevance to other courses	• this is just what *this* professor wants
• contribution to developing skills expected by employers	• silly professor, research methods is just a required course

Students internalize value (from not worth to worth doing).

3. Employ non-controlling, informational language.

Use when communicating requirements & responsibilities; when giving feedback; or addressing unproductive behavior.

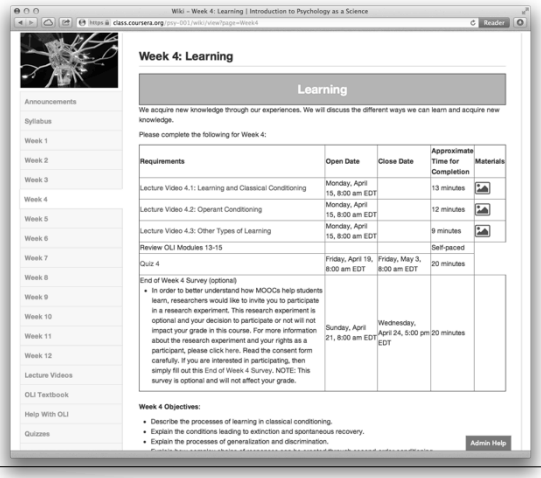
Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Communicate requirements & address problems with messages that are…	
• nonevaluative	• evaluative
• flexible	• rigid
• informational	• high-pressure

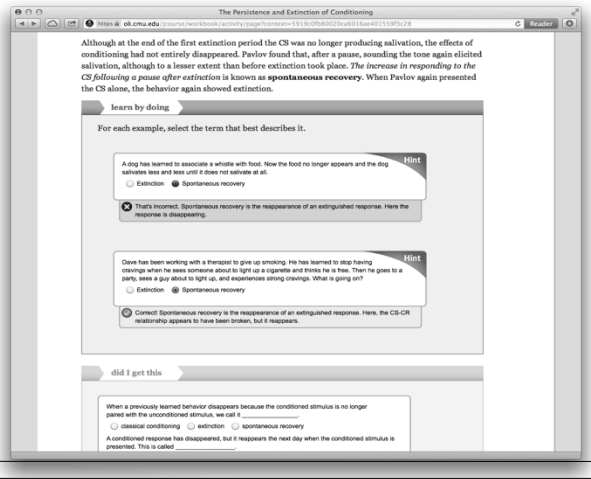
- Maintains positive student-teacher relationships
- Helps students self-diagnose (and take responsibility for) performance.

Adapted from Reeve, 2011

Case Study
Keith and a MOOC

- Learning environments
  - Coursera: video lectures, assignments, quizzes
    - Dr. Anderson Smith, Alex Duncan
  - OLI: text, videos, activities
    - Carnegie Mellon University
- Of 27,000 enrolled students…
  - 63% were "active"
  - 56% watched first lecture
  - 41% accessed OLI
  - 7% watched final lecture
  - 4% took the final exam





Case Study
Keith and a MOOC

- OLI
  - Optional yet 41% of students accessed it
  - "The OLI textbook is a great tool. I've already done some courses on Coursera, but this is the first time I encounter[ed] such a textbook. I really appreciate that and would like to see it for more courses!"
- Written assignments
  - Rubric was brief and general
  - Some students were frustrated
- Quizzes
  - Allowed one week to complete, then two weeks
  - Some students wanted *more* time

4. Be patient. Make learning the constant, time the variable.

Use when learning complex concepts or skills that require trial-and-error, reflection, and revision.

Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Displaying patience as students…	Impatiently interrupt and…
• explore & manipulate materials	• offer a (your) solution
• make plans & set goals	• do it for them
• revise work & work strategies	• invade their space

- Learning takes time (more than most predict).

Adapted from Reeve, 2011

Case Study
Larry & *U-Pace*

- Mastery-based, self-paced.
- Higher grades, and more learning, especially for disadvantaged students.
- Students who are ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) eligible
  - Attempting to coach learning skills and content mastery under deadlines.
  - Anxiety, depression, other episodic conditions

5. Acknowledge & accept resistance & negative emotion.

Use when learning complex concepts or skills, AND when student preferences don't match teacher requests & requirements.

Autonomy-Supportive	Controlling
Respond to resistance & negative emotion with…	Counter/control resistance & negative emotion…
• acceptance	• dismissively
• acknowledgement	• with counter-arguments
• gratitude	• to (immediately) change behavior
…because they are potentially valid.	…so that it's acceptable to you.

- Students often have a point. **Focus on coaching impression management**.

Adapted from Reeve, 2011

Small Case Study

Impression Management
Dr. Rudiger's Finishing School.

Duct-tape ~~parenting~~ teaching

"Nothing wrong with being a control freak if you are controlling YOUR words, actions, and behaviors."

Vicki Hoefle