Teacher Autonomy-Support Fosters Intrinsic Motivation in Students, which Lead to Greater Levels of School Enjovaly, Creativity, Academic Engagement, and Persistence. Student perceptions of teacher autonomy-support and intrinsic motivation decline with age, however the reasons responsible are less well established. This study will address this area by examining the motivational styles of teachers across the elementary, middle, and high school level using the Self-Determination Theory. Implications for educators and school psychologists will be discussed.

Introduction

- Research has consistently indicated that student intrinsic motivation is associated with numerous benefits, including creativity, academic engagement, higher self-esteem, and persistence. However, it appears to decline as students progress through school (Gillett et al., 2011; Ciani et al., 2009).

- The Self-Determination Theory postulates that teachers have motivating styles that are either autonomy-supportive or controlling (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Reeve, 2009).

- Teachers with higher autonomy-supportive motivating styles have been shown to increase intrinsic motivation, school attendance, and psychological well-being (Reeve et al., 2009).

- Ciani (2010) found that high school teachers adopted a more controlling motivational style as compared to middle and elementary school teachers.

- The purpose of this study is to determine differences in teacher motivational styles based on grade level and experience. This study expands upon previous research on teacher motivational styles by providing qualitative questions.

Method

Participants:
- 29 (31%) elementary, 28 (30%) middle, and 37 (39%) high school education teachers participated in the study. Teachers were from a district in Southwest, Wisconsin.

Demographics:
- Responsible for 66% males, 64% females
- Teaching Experience in Years: 0-5 (n=10), 6-15 (n=33), 16-25 (n=15), 26-35 (n=15), 36+ (n=7)
- Median Split: Low=0-15 years, High=16-35+ years

Instrumentation:
- The Problems in School Questionnaire (PISQ) (Ryan & Deci, 1981) contains 8 vignettes depicting typical classroom scenarios. Each vignette has four different responses and asks respondents to rate the appropriateness of each response independently on a scale of 1 (very inappropriate) to 7 (very appropriate). This questionnaire measures teachers’ motivational style as being either autonomy-supportive or controlling in nature using four scales.

- Four qualitative questions were also administered to obtain a stronger understanding of teachers’ perspectives about student motivation and their use of motivational strategies.

Results

Alpha for HC=.47, MC=.63, MA=.71, HA=.81, Total=.82. Individual scale means were calculated for grade level (see Figure 1). Each scale was then weighted and combined to find the overall mean for each grade level, as supported by the authors (see Figure 2). Higher mean scores indicate a more autonomy-supportive motivational style. An ANOVA was conducted to assess if there was a difference between teachers’ motivational styles as a result of their level of experience and grade level assignment. No significant differences in teacher motivational styles were found for:

- Grade Level Assignment, F(2,88) = .70, p = .50, λ = .92.
- Teaching Experience, F(1,88) = 1.07, p = .30, λ = .91.
- Interaction effect, F(2,88) = 2.11, p = .13, η² = .05.

Discussion and Conclusion

- Results indicate no significant differences in motivational styles as a result of grade level assignment and teaching experience, which did not align with previous research that found high school teachers adopted a more controlling motivational style compared to middle and elementary teachers.

- Qualitative results indicated a middle and high school teachers identify building a positive relationship and incorporating real life applications to teaching as their most successful motivational strategies, whereas elementary teachers identify using positive reinforcement as their most successful strategy. Further research will need to validate the effectiveness of these strategies.

- Qualitative results could be used to inform PLCs and diversify teachers’ understanding and use of various motivational strategies. Many teachers reported uncertainty with the interaction of specific strategies with certain students.

- The main limitations of this study was a small participant sample across each grade level and reliability of the High Controlling scale.

- Future research should include student perception of teacher autonomy-support and teachers’ use of motivational strategies and the impact on student outcomes.

References


Figure 1 Mean Scale Scores

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Figure 2 Mean Survey Score By Experience

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Weights and Mean Scale

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Teacher Motivational Styles: Impact of Teaching Experience and Grade Level

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