



Review

A literature review on how need-supportive behavior influences motivation in students with sensory loss



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Need-support is important in the education of students with sensory loss.
- Structure is the most studied dimension of need-support.
- All studies on structure provide examples of need-supportive teaching.
- Fewer studies address teachers' autonomy support and involvement.
- For autonomy and involvement also examples of need-thwarting are reported.

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ABSTRACT

This review examines the literature on the effects of need-supportive teaching on motivation, engagement, and educational outcomes of students with visual or hearing impairments or deafblindness. We searched literature for evidence relating to dimensions of need-supportive teaching, namely providing structure, autonomy support, and involvement, as described in Self-Determination Theory. Of the 19 studies reviewed, most addressed how teachers provide structure. The literature revealed that, in general, teachers provide structure in their lessons, and this has a positive impact on students' motivation, engagement, and educational outcomes. Fewer studies and inconsistent results were found concerning teachers' provision of autonomy support and involvement.

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1. Introduction

Motivation is important for high-quality learning, conceptual understanding, enhanced personal growth, and adjustment (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Research has shown the impact teacher-student interaction has on students' motivation for school (e.g., Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994; Stroet, Opdenakker, & Minnaert, 2013; Tucker et al., 2002). Creating teacher-student interactions that have a positive impact on students' motivation is therefore a central element of a teacher's daily work. Studying teacher-student interactions, particularly in students with sensory loss, is important in order to support their development.

In addition, the study of teacher-student interactions is important due to the prevalence of students with sensory loss. According to an estimate of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014), 32 million children worldwide have hearing loss, and 19 million children are visually impaired. An estimate of the number of children with deafblindness is not provided by the WHO. There are estimates that there are 10,000 children with deafblindness in the United States (The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness, 2008) and 4000 in the United Kingdom (Sense, 2016).

Sensory impairments can hinder a student's ability to learn through observation, imitation, and exploration. This consequently has an impact on their motivation to learn. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' intrinsic motivation to learn. They can help the student to overcome the restrictions imposed by sensory impairments, to encounter and make sense of the world, and to make the most of every learning opportunity. The role of teachers interacting with students with sensory loss is the focus of this

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study. The objective of the present research is to explore the literature on teacher-student interactions regarding students with sensory loss. This study hopes to provide grounded and practice-oriented recommendations for teachers' professionalization, training, and educational practice.

Interacting with students can be challenging, in particular when dealing with students with sensory loss, because students with hearing impairment, visual impairment, or both encounter difficulties in various domains. Sensory loss can have an impact on communication, orientation in the environment, and information (Rødbrøe & Janssen, 2006). Moreover, students with sensory loss can experience difficulties in understanding what they do see or hear. They might experience difficulties in learning from the events around them. Their learning is limited to what their instructors and carers provide (Aitken, 2000). Since sight and hearing are important for creating and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Rødbrøe & Janssen, 2006), sensory impairments can hinder positive teacher-student interactions. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship is tremendously important, perhaps more so for these students. The development of a warm, secure, and trusting relationship between teacher and student is the cornerstone for educating students with sensory impairments (Clark, 2000).

As previously mentioned, research has shown the impact that teacher-student interaction has on student motivation, so teachers must understand how to best elicit behavior suited to create positive interactions that have a positive impact on student motivation. The literature lacks an overview of those teaching behaviors that support the motivation of students with sensory impairments. Moreover, we found no studies that explicitly use a theoretical framework geared to the motivational processes of students with hearing and/or visual impairment. Research on students without sensory impairments does provide such a framework. Much has been published about motivation in regular education settings; Self-Determination Theory is currently a well-established model (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

1.1. Theoretical background

According to SDT, humans are intrinsically motivated to undertake activities that are interesting, optimally challenging, and spontaneously satisfying (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT also claims that this process promotes development (Niemic et al., 2006). SDT is a comprehensive theory that addresses the influence of the (social) context on intrinsic motivation. The theory states that people's basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness must be met. Contexts that support people in being competent, autonomous and related to others promote intentional motivated action (Deci et al., 1991). On the other hand, contexts that thwart these basic psychological needs are assumed to diminish motivation.

1.2. Need-supportive teaching

Fig. 1 presents an overview of SDT, as applied in an educational setting (adapted from Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). The figure shows that SDT views students' motivation as dependent on the social context in the classroom. In the educational setting, the theory assigns a primary role to teachers in providing support for students' needs. The extent to which students perceive teachers' behavior as focused on fulfilling their needs influences how motivated they will be for a learning task.

Teachers can support student competence, autonomy, and relatedness (column 2), by providing structure, autonomy support, and involvement (column 1). Table 1 shows examples of need-supportive teaching behaviors. These are based on the literature

study by Stroet et al. (2013) which focused on the teaching of students without impairments. It provides an overview of the components of the three dimensions of need support on the basis of prior theorizing in the tradition of SDT. Some extra components were added, derived from the SDT literature.

As Fig. 1 shows, need-supportive teacher-student interactions lead to certain actions (column 3) and outcomes (column 4). Students can be disengaged or engaged in learning. Engagement can be seen as the outward manifestation of student motivation (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). It refers to the intensity and emotional quality of students' involvement in initiating and carrying out learning tasks (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

For people to be active engaged they need to feel that their basic psychological needs are being met. Peoples' engagement in an activity varies as a function of the degree to which they experience need satisfaction. In order to maintain the intrinsic motivation to engage in activities, students' needs must be satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Student motivation and engagement lead to desired educational outcomes such as academic achievement, well-being and personal growth.

The concept of needs is extremely useful because it provides a way of understanding why some behaviors enhance motivation, whereas others do not (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Need-supporting behavior has a positive influence on motivation, need-thwarting behavior does not, since it is by definition need-thwarting, hence demotivating. By considering whether a particular contextual factor is likely to support satisfaction of basic psychological needs, it is possible to predict the effects of that factor on outcomes such as motivation, behavior, performance affect, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Deci et al., 1991). In this way, the theory provides both theoretical and practical insights.

1.2.1. Structure

Teachers can enhance students' feelings of competence by providing structure. The need for competence refers to the feeling that one is competent in interacting with the environment (Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996). Competence also involves understanding how to attain an outcome and being efficacious in performing the actions needed to attain a goal (Deci et al., 1991). Providing structure helps students attain this feeling (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). According to Jang et al. (2010), structure-providing teacher behavior includes framing students' learning activities using explicit directions and guidance. Examples of structured teacher behaviors are listed in Table 1. The opposite of a structured teaching style is a chaotic or laissez-faire teaching style, in which teachers give confusing or contradictory information (Jang et al., 2010).

1.2.2. Autonomy support

A second dimension of need-supportive teaching is autonomy support. The need for autonomy refers to the experience of one's own behavior as self-initiated and volitional (Deci, 1975; Niemic & Ryan, 2009). A person's actions should be considered to be personally interesting or valuable (White, 1959). Teachers can fulfill students' needs for autonomy by behaving in an autonomy-supportive manner (see Table 1). The opposite of autonomy-supportive behavior is autonomy-suppressive behavior, in which teachers are controlling (Belmont, Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1992), pressuring, coercive, evaluative, or intrusive (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002). Moreover, autonomy-suppressive teachers force meaningless and uninteresting activities on students (Assor et al., 2002), and rely on incentives, consequences, directives, and deadlines (Jang et al., 2010).

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