Provide Rationale in an Autonomy-Supportive Way

Most people typically use external contingencies to motivate others, such as a deadline (Amabile, DeJong, & Lepper, 1976), reward (Eisenberger & Armeli, 1997), or goal (LaPorte & Nath, 1976). Unfortunately, such methods, often lead to relatively poor functioning and outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Learning is more effortful when deemed to be meaningful (Bruner, 1966; Rogers, 1969). Experimental studies (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Sansone, Weir, Harpster, & Morgan, 1992; Sansone, Wiebe, & Morgan, 1999) have shown that providing a rationale causes participants, working on an uninteresting task, to generate “interest-enhancing strategies” (e.g., perform the repetitive task in a different way each time), hence transforming a boring task into a more interesting one.

A rationale is a “verbal explanation of why putting forth effort during the activity might be a useful thing to do” (Reeve, Jang, Hardre, & Omura, 2002, p.185). When participants hear the rationale of an uninteresting activity, they perceive the task as an important one and puts in more effort. However, if the rationale is communicated with controlling language or without acknowledgement of negative feelings, self-determination and engagement is not enhanced (Reeve et al., 2002).

Thus, to motivate students to be engage in an uninteresting task, we need to provide a rationale in an autonomy-supportive way (Reeve et al., 2002; see practical tip 20) and acknowledging negative emotions.

Practical examples:

😊 Acknowledge and accept negative affect expressed by students and communicate an understanding of students’ perspective. Acknowledge that resistance is understandable.

😊 During disagreements, acknowledge students’ points of resistance and solicits students’ input with “Yes, the assigned book is long. 300 pages. Does anybody have a tip or suggestion about how to read 300 pages in a week?”

😊 When imposing a limit on students’ behaviour, provide a rationale to clarify not only why the limit is being imposed but also why it is a positive (i.e. personally useful) one.

(Reeve, 2006)
References:


Key definitions:

| Autonomy-supportive | Environments that minimize the salience of external incentives and threats, avoid controlling language, and acknowledge the learners’ frame of reference (Black & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Connell, 1989). Autonomy-supportive teaching involves behaviors that seek to promote students’ tendency to engage in learning because they value this activity or find it interesting (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). |