# A systemic approach to supporting motivation and behaviour in the classroom

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## Background

Low intrinsic motivation in school is associated with a range of negative outcomes including: poor school engagement (Froiland & Worrell, 2016), lower academic attainment (Taylor et al., 2014), reduced psychological wellbeing (Burton et al., 2006) and increased disruptive behaviour (Granero-Gallegos et al., 2020). A notable decline in intrinsic motivation has also been observed during adolescence (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016).

Taking a systemic approach, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that intrinsic motivation can be fostered by supporting students' three core psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Other teacher professional development (PD) studies have focused on autonomy-supportive interventions and engaging students within PE and sport. The impact of teacher interventions focused on all three psychological needs and in relation to general classroom engagement is therefore important.

## Research Questions

Following an online, SDT-based, teacher PD intervention, is there:

An *increase* in secondary teachers'
➢ Teaching self-efficacy (*RQ1*)
➢ Personal responsibility (*RQ2*)
➢ 'Confronting-Contracting' (moderate teacher control beliefs) and 'Relationships-Listening' (low teacher control beliefs) (*RQ3b*)

A *decrease* in secondary teachers'
➢ 'Rules and Consequences' (high teacher control beliefs) (*RQ3a*)
➢ Negative attitudes towards challenging student behaviour (*RQ4*)

What do teachers perceive to be important when considering how to support students' re-engagement with school after COVID-19? (*RQ5*)

## Method

➢ 33 secondary teachers from across the UK
➢ 91% female, 49% 1 - 5 years teaching, 85% mainstream
➢ 4 hour SDT based online training (PD) session
➢ Part 1 = SDT theory, Part 2 = SDT informed strategies
➢ Reflection activity between Part 1 and 2
➢ Pre and post questionnaire data (RQ1-4) analysed using paired t-tests; textual data from the reflection activity (RQ5) analysed using Framework Analysis (Ritchie & Spencer 2002)

## Quantitative findings

| Variable | Direction of change | Significant effect and effect size (ES)? |
|---|---|---|
| Self-efficacy (RQ1) | Increase | ✓ Medium (0.65) |
| Personal responsibility (RQ2) | Increase | ✓ Small (d=0.38) |
| Moderate teacher control (RQ3b) | Increase | ✓ Small (d=0.39) |
| Low teacher control (RQ3b) | Increase | ✗ |
| High teacher control (RQ 3a) | Decrease | ✓ Medium (d=0.58) |
| Negative attitudes towards behaviour (RQ4) | Decrease | ✓ Medium (d=0.58) |

## Other significant findings

Significant **increases** in

Self efficacy for *student engagement* and *classroom management* (large ES)

Personal responsibility for *student motivation* (medium ES)

Significant **decreases** in

*Negative emotions (*large ES*) and *negative immediate reactions* (medium ES) towards challenging behaviour*.

## Qualitative findings

How could we use SDT theory to support students' re-engagement with school after COVID-19?

**Inductively generated category**
A different approach is needed; prioritising psychological needs
Understanding and empathy; prioritise core psychological needs; time; support; engage and motivate

**A priori generated categories**

| Relatedness | Autonomy | Competence |
|---|---|---|
| Reconnect and rebuild relationships | Control and freedom | Differentiate |
| Trust, honesty and openness | Choices and decision | Reassurance (academic) |
| Belonging and safety | Student voice | Building confidence and self-esteem |
| Relatedness comes first | Non-pressurising | Catching up or moving forward |

## Implications

➢ Brief online training, underpinned by an ecological theory of motivation, might help to shift teachers' attitudes and beliefs and encourage them to consider the impact of the school environment on student motivation and behaviour.
➢ SDT can be used as a framework for thinking about and understanding 'challenging' student behaviour and for informing class-based strategies that foster the three core psychological needs.
➢ School systems might benefit from support to plan and implement relational and need-supportive approaches to behaviour management, e.g. through relationship-based behaviour policies.