



## **EDITORIAL**

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### **Supported teaching autonomy support. [Enseñanza apoyada en el soporte de autonomía]**

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The findings obtained from the study and research into the consequences of applying determined teaching styles has led to a growing interest in this area among the scientific community. The student-centered and constructivist learning environments which enable students to gain a significant understanding through their own efforts has grown in importance compared with the traditional learning environment based on the transfer of learning by teachers (Oguz, 2013). In the context of the constructivist approach, students create their own knowledge by actively participating in the learning process (Wang, 2011), and by giving importance to the learners' autonomy. In these environments of interaction, the teacher becomes the learning facilitator, planning tasks and supporting responsibility for learning (Koç, 2006), providing students with options, helping them make their own decisions and solve problems for themselves. Consequently, this new focus provides students with opportunities to ask their own questions, and create their own learning concepts and strategies based on existing knowledge. The teacher has to accept students' autonomy and their enterprising spirit, and support them in this sense. In the context of this constructivist focus, one of the main objectives of education is to promote students' autonomy (Öztürk, 2011).

In order to distinguish the perspective of autonomy support of the self-determination theory from other focuses that only associate autonomy with promoting independence, Soenens et al. (2007) coined the term 'promotion of volitional functioning'. Several studies have demonstrated that there are numerous benefits to promoting volitional functioning, including deep level learning, positive affect and achievement and behavioral persistence (Buff, Reusser, Rakoczy, & Pauli, 2011). Teachers can promote volitional functioning by providing students with choice, giving a meaningful reason when choice is constrained, by accepting and not countering irritation and anger that arises during the learning process and using a more inviting language. (Vansteenkiste et al., 2012). In this sense, Reeve (2006) carried out in-depth research about which teacher qualities could lead to a positive relation with students, highlighting four qualities: attunement (sensing and reading students' personal state and adjusting instruction), supportiveness, relatedness (a sense of being close to students, providing

a sense of warmth, affection and approval for students), and gentle discipline (a socialization strategy that involves explaining why a certain way of thinking or behaving is right or wrong).

According to Vansteenkiste, Williams, and Resnicow (2012), on certain occasions teachers expect their students to manage their studies independently, that is to say, without the teacher being available to help them or to supervise the learning process. Within this point of view, autonomy support can be equated with promoting independent functioning, which consists of conceding students unlimited freedom so that they can complete their tasks without the teacher's help. Although a definition of autonomy support as the promotion of independence is only used implicitly in literature about self-regulated learning, this point of view is explicitly endorsed by some researchers in teaching literature (Karagözoğlu, 2009), and it is quite common in the broader socialization literature (Silk, Morris, Kanaya, and Steinberg, 2003). However, from the perspective of the self-determination theory, students' autonomy support has a different meaning, since teachers are concerned about responding to students' personal interests and responses.

According to Vallerand (1997), the consequences that favor behavior, cognition and affectivity can depend on the social factors surrounding students. One of these social determiners is the way in which students perceive autonomy support not just from teachers, but also from parents (family) and peers. Therefore, through motivation from the different social groups it is possible to choose and to reduce pressure on performance and on external control of behavior (Hagger et al., 2007; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2006), which implies regulating behavior by approaching the interests and values established by the students themselves. In this sense, Ryan and Deci (2000) indicate autonomy frustration as being responsible for the lack of satisfaction with life. For example, teachers who support autonomy take into account students' perspectives, thoughts and feelings, supporting their ability to develop in order to self-regulate autonomously, motivating them by fostering their internal motivational resources, offering

them explanations, using informative language and showing patience. However, teachers with a more controlling style want their students to have only the perspective that the teachers themselves propose, interfering in students' thoughts, feelings and actions, pressuring them to think, feel and act as required by the teacher. They motivate students through extrinsic incentives, use a commanding language, and show impatience for students to give the correct answer or to behave as required. (Reeve, 2009).

Different studies about teaching styles prior to the publication of the self-determination theory assert that students exposed to different types of teaching benefitted more than from a single determined style, since there are many effective teaching styles that can coincide with the students' learning styles (Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, Soenens, & Dochy, 2009). Therefore, it was preferable for teachers to be skilled in several teaching styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1979). However, since the eighties, with the publication of the self-determination theory, significant changes to these approaches have been postulated.

Consequently, according to Deci and Ryan (1987) the optimum social context that favors self-determined behavior is the one that favors the development of autonomy, establishes an adequate structure and involves significant others. Based on this theory, autonomy support is an important factor that can influence people's ability to properly improve their personal growth and satisfaction.

Nevertheless, human beings are sometimes not only stimulated by and committed to learning activities in the classroom, but they also act reactively and/or passively. Recognizing this, their participation in the learning process partly depends on the quality of the climate in the classroom where they are learning. The results obtained in the studies carried out under the auspices of the self-determination theory assert that a classroom climate supported by a methodology of participant support, presents positive adaptive consequences for different factors like satisfaction of basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation. In the context of this dialectic framework, students would have to experience learning situations where they have to resort to internal resources for resolving classroom problems. When the teachers find the way to cultivate these internal resources, they adopt a motivating style of autonomy support.

Therefore, in order to achieve this, teachers specializing in physical education would have to use an interpersonal style to encourage students' decision making, positive relations, adequate perception of competence and valuation of effort. Nevertheless, we are also aware of the need to resort to more controlling interpersonal styles when the ecological situation requires it. To do so, when training physical education teachers and teachers of physical education and sports sciences it would be of interest to take into account the contribution of this theory, since knowledge about it and its evidence can help the future of our society.

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