

## *Using Choice to Increase Motivation*

**Summary:** Giving students' choice in an easy and effective strategy for increasing their motivation. In an article for the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, researchers at Duke University and the University of Texas-Austin conducted a study on the effect of choice on high school students' homework completion (the results of which are quite applicable to elementary school).

### **Practical Applications**

This experimental study is steeped in research showing that providing students with autonomy increases their motivation, achievement and task completion rates; indeed, “children provided with choices demonstrated greater learning, as measured by the number of problems answered correctly on a math test, compared with when choices were not provided. Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that the positive effects of choice remain even for choices that appear trivial or ‘illusory’” [citations removed]. While other researchers have suggested that there are more deep-rooted ways to provide autonomy to students, such as the teacher demonstrating that he or she is listening and reacting to student's suggestions, this study looked at what happened when you provided certain students with a choice of two similar homework assignments to complete while others received no choice (students were grouped randomly). Among the key findings:

- Homework completion rates were higher among the students who were provided choice – 85% over two units versus 80% for students who were not provided choice.
- Average unit test scores were also higher, by nearly 3%, among the students were provided choice.
- Using questionnaires, the researchers found that the students provided with choice on homework assignments had significantly higher intrinsic motivation and perceived competence, as well as a higher perception that their teachers provided them with autonomy.
- The researchers note that assignment-choice is only one style of choice that can be utilized; at times, they note, “...autonomy-supportive practices, such as teacher efforts to take student perspectives; providing opportunities for students to ask questions; or providing rationales for engaging in various tasks may be more effective.”

### **Conclusion and Citation**

These research findings suggest that building opportunities for students to make choices – even seemingly simple ones such as between two similar homework assignments – can have a notable impact on their motivation, perception of school, and ultimately achievement. The more opportunities teachers can find to give students autonomy within the classroom, the more intrinsic motivation is likely to increase.

Cooper., H., Patall, E. & Wynn, S. “The Effectiveness and Relative Importance of Choice in the Classroom.” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102.4 (2010), pp. 896-915. <http://tinyurl.com/4k8kkq2> (subscription only).