Student Autonomy in the Secondary ELA Classroom

Kailee Galloway and Leah Nillas*
Educational Studies, Illinois Wesleyan University

Research Question

- How do teachers promote *student autonomy* in an ELA classroom?
- How can check-ins support student autonomy?

Methodology

- Participants included 15 senior high school students. 5 in AP classes and 10 in ELC classes.
- Data was collected in the form of field notes and reflections, anecdotal records, lesson plans & materials, and student work.
- This study utilizes the *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT).

Factors	Practices
Self-Determination	Content Relevancy
Engagement	Teaching Style
Motivation	Classroom Environment
Self-Perception	Self-Evaluation

Table 1. The table above features the essential factors and practices autonomy-supportive educators should acknowledge and utilize in their instruction. The top of the table reflects more on the educators end whereas as the bottom ties more into student behaviors.

Literature Review

- *Self-Determination Theory* is a critical framework of autonomous practice (Denny & Daviso, 2012; Turner, 2019).
- Research studies argue that *content relevancy* and *teaching style* largely contribute to student engagement (Corso, Bundick, Quaglia & Haywood, 2013; Gutherie & Klauda, 2014; Matos, Reeve, Herrera, & Claux, 2018).
- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as psychological needs for competency and relatedness affect autonomy (Alley, 2019; Koth, 2016; Pennington, 2017; Rodriguez, Nunez, Valle, Freire, Ferradas, & Rodriguez-Llorente, 2019).
- Classroom community and curriculum structure are environmental variables to autonomy (Matric, 2019; Nichols & Coleman, 2021; Hauk & Groschner, 2022; Jacome, 2012).
- Research showed evidence that self-regulation and self-evaluation contribute to an increase in student autonomy (Akmilia, Purnawarman, & Rodliyah, 2015; Dalland & Klette, 2016; Klein & Rose, 2010; Strom, Strom, & Arrington, 2016).

Results and Data Analysis

- Establishing a learner-centered environment provided a sense of trust in student-teacher relationships, positively impacting one-on-one formal and informal check-ins and timely submissions.
- Implementing routine self-evaluations encouraged students to develop positive habits and self-perception.
- Implementing routine feedback and check-ins provided autonomous-support daily.

- Integrating student identities and goals into content resulted in a perceived increase in engagement and motivation.

Conclusion

- Engagement, motivation, and self-determination are all impacted by autonomy-supportive instruction.
- "Best fit" practices are malleable to students of various backgrounds, identities, and ability.
- Future research in the ELA classroom should expand beyond reading and include writing-specific practices.