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Encouraging adolescents to be self-directed learners: Influences of classroom motivation on student outcomes

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Teaching American adolescents in public schools presents a unique challenge: how to foster an instructional environment that simultaneously encourages intrinsic desires for lifelong learning, allows for the development of self-determination and autonomy, and teaches students appropriate academic skills. It was hypothesized that relying mainly on extrinsic motivations would be associated with more problematic outcomes for students while relying mainly on intrinsic motivations would be associated with more desirable outcomes. Additionally, it was hypothesized that schools organized around different educational philosophies would favor the use of different motivational strategies. A literature review was conducted that included a review of theories of learning pertinent to student motivation with specific emphases on ethical perspectives, educational philosophy perspectives, and motivation research perspectives. Results yielded conclusions around the value of intrinsic motivations and the effectiveness of a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in classrooms. Implications for this work suggest that teachers individualize and adjust current curriculums and teaching practices based on the characteristics and situations of the individual students and classrooms as a whole. Additionally, at the whole school level, periodic reviews of motivational practices should be conducted to assess the alignment of practices with student needs, goals, and outcomes.