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TITLE: Motivational interviewing in school to promote autonomy-supportive teaching and teacher efficacy

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**Abstract** (297 words)

Teachers' relational approach and teacher efficacy can greatly affect students' motivation, achievement and commitment in school. To help teachers develop and strengthen their relational competence and sense of efficacy, interest in applying motivational interviewing (MI) in schools has increased. MI is a collaborative communication style used to enhance behavior change, and there is an increased support for using MI in schools. However, there is a lack of interventions where teachers have specifically been trained in MI in order to be more autonomy-supportive and to strengthen their teacher efficacy (i.e. teacher's own belief in his/her capability to organize and implement specific teaching tasks required to achieve desired outcomes of student engagement and learning). This study aims to explore whether an intervention based on MI could help teachers to become more autonomy-supportive and strengthen their teacher efficacy. Using a pretest-posttest design, we designed and implemented a MI-based intervention to help teachers become more autonomy-supportive and to strengthen their teacher efficacy. Sixteen primary school teachers participated in the intervention and data were collected through a survey measuring teachers' perceptions of their autonomy support in the classroom and their sense of efficacy. Findings in the current study indicate that an MI-based intervention may help teachers to become more autonomy-supportive towards their students. Preliminary results also show that the intervention increased teachers' sense of efficacy and perceived ability to motivate their students. This study is a valuable contribution to the field of Nordic teaching research, as teachers' relational approach and sense of efficacy affects teaching quality. Findings in the present study reflect that an MI-based intervention may help teachers to become more autonomy-supportive, which can promote students' motivation for learning. The results also show that the intervention increased teacher efficacy, which previous research has shown influences teachers' commitment and instructional quality.

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## **Extended summary**

### **Introduction**

Teachers' relational approach and teacher efficacy can greatly affect students' motivation, achievement and commitment in school (Hattie, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). However, teachers often lack formal education about the relational aspects involved in teaching (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). To help teachers develop and strengthen their relational competence and sense of efficacy, interest in applying motivational interviewing (MI) in schools has increased (Rollnick et al., 2016; Strait et al., 2014; Svensson et al., 2021). MI is a collaborative communication style used to enhance behaviour change. More recently, there is increasing support for using MI in schools, where MI has been applied in two different ways: student-focused school-based MI and consultative school-based MI (Rollnick et al., 2016; Strait et al., 2014). The student-focused type of MI has been used directly with students to improve both academic and mental health outcomes (Cryer & Atkinson, 2015; Snape & Atkinson, 2016; Strait et al., 2012). The consultative type of MI has been used to enhance teachers' motivation to adopt and implement school-based interventions designed to promote students' academic achievement or prevent challenging behaviour (Frey et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2013). However, there is a lack of interventions where teachers have specifically been trained in MI in order to be more autonomy-supportive and to strengthen their teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is defined as teacher's own belief in his or her capability to organize and implement specific teaching tasks required to achieve desired outcomes of student engagement and learning (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Understanding what effects such an MI-based intervention may have on teachers' instructional style and sense of efficacy could provide valuable information for future school development and teacher education. Hence, this study aims to explore whether an intervention based on MI could help teachers to become more autonomy-supportive and strengthen their teacher efficacy.

### **Theoretical background**

MI has a growing research support and is used almost around the world, mostly in health care and health promotion (Lundahl et al., 2013). MI is based on an approach called the MI spirit, four central processes and four core MI skills, which together form the fundamental principles of MI. The MI spirit is an important aspect of MI, and is based on four key components: partnership, compassion, evocation of change talk and acceptance (Miller & Rollnick, 2012b). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a motivational theory about human behaviour and personality (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which is used as a relevant theoretical framework to understand school motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Although MI is a collection of communication techniques, MI is in many ways similar to SDT (Miller & Rollnick, 2012a). Deci and Ryan (2012) suggest that SDT can be used as a theoretical framework for explaining the effects of MI. Based on SDT, students have three basic psychological needs that need to be satisfied for them to thrive and develop autonomous motivation; the need for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Autonomy is central in both MI and SDT, and autonomy support means that the teacher creates a social environment that promotes students' sense of freedom of choice and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Previous research has shown that students who receive autonomy support from their teacher have reported increased intrinsic motivation and greater engagement in school (Cheon et al., 2012). Autonomy support is defined as the teacher being respectful to the students' perspective, and supports their intrinsic sources of motivation and sense

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of freedom of choice. Autonomy-supportive teaching vitalizes students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. In an autonomy-supportive environment, students are encouraged to come up with their own suggestions and initiatives, and the teacher strengthens the students' sense of freedom of choice (Reeve, 2009).

## Methods

Using a pretest-posttest design (six months), we designed and implemented a MI-based intervention to help teachers become more autonomy-supportive and to strengthen their teacher efficacy. Sixteen primary school teachers participated in the intervention and they received MI training with a focus on school. We delivered the MI training in five workshops during one semester. The workshops provided the basic knowledge and skills in MI, and an understanding of the practical application of school-based MI. Between each session, the teachers were given exercises to practically apply MI in their classes with the students, which was part of the skills training. Previously validated measures were used to collect survey data. Teachers' perceptions of their autonomy-supportive teaching style was assessed using *Learning Climate Questionnaire* (Black & Deci, 2000; Cheon et al., 2016). Sample of items include "I provide my students with choices and options". To assess self-reported teacher efficacy we used *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Sample of items include "How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?". To analyse data we used a paired sample t-test.

## Preliminary findings

Preliminary findings in the current study indicate that an MI-based intervention may help teachers to become more autonomy-supportive towards their students ( $M_{T1} = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .40$ ;  $M_{T2} = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .39$ ;  $t = 2.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Results also show that the intervention increased teachers' sense of efficacy and perceived ability to motivate their students ( $M_{T1} = 6.13$ ,  $SD = .68$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $M_{T2} = 7.03$ ,  $SD = .69$ ;  $t = 6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This study can be a valuable contribution to the field of Nordic teaching research, as teachers' relational approach and teacher efficacy affects teaching quality. Findings in the present study reflect that an MI-based intervention may help teachers to become more autonomy-supportive, which can promote students' motivation for learning. The results also show that the intervention increased the teachers' sense of efficacy, which previous research has shown influences teachers' commitment and instructional quality (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Teacher efficacy is one important dimension of instructional quality, and findings in this current study show that MI training can be a method to strengthen teachers' sense of efficacy and thus strengthen their teaching quality.

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