

Research Briefing N° 84

School engagement: A multi-dimensional and developmental concept

This research examines the multiple dimensions of school engagement, its development over time and in context, and its association with longer-term outcomes.

Key words: school engagement; measurement; longitudinal studies; academic attainment; career development



Key findings

Findings are of particular relevance to educators, policy makers, researchers, students of motivation, young people and their parents.

School engagement (students' involvement in school-related and academic activities, and the quality of their school-related relationships e.g. with staff and class mates) entails multiple distinguishable features, including cognitive, behavioural and emotional dimensions. These different dimensions contribute differently to academic performance and drop-out rates and also predict educational success, career development, and health.

- Students are more likely to succeed academically if they attend classes regularly, participate in class and use self-regulated learning strategies to help understand class materials.
- School drop-out appears to be more a function of behavioural participation (i.e. positive conduct) and emotional belonging (sense of acceptance and inclusion) than just participation (i.e. to attend class) alone.
- Teachers can promote student's learning motivation and engagement by creating a supportive school environment that stresses and provides opportunities for students to feel autonomous, competent and emotionally supported.
- School engagement is generally higher among girls than boys.
- School engagement plays an important role in promoting successful career development.
- The evidence also suggests that school engagement is an important resource for younger students planning their careers and for promoting their mental health. It is also a resource factor for students who encountered a problematic life course transition such as leaving school early.

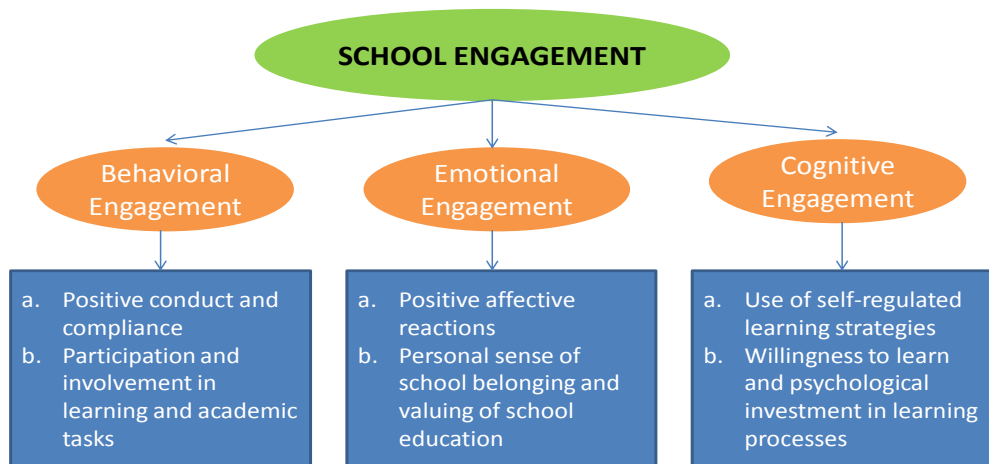
See Figure 1 for a diagram showing the multiple features that influence school engagement.

Figure 1: A multidimensional model of school engagement

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Multidimensional Model of School Engagement

(e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Wang, Willett, & Eccles, 2011)



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What we did

The research was conducted within the international post-doctoral Fellowship programme PATHWAYS to Adulthood, funded by the Jacobs Foundation. It involves collaboration between academics in the US (University of Michigan), Finland (University of Helsinki), Sweden (University of Stockholm), Germany (Universities of Jena and Tübingen), and the Institute of Education, University of London. All collaborating institutions use longitudinal research to map individual development over time and in context.

How we did it

Studies involved in this project include longitudinal data from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS), a Finnish study of 1,530 students in Eastern Finland (FinEdu) and the British Cohort Studies. Using the data, the structure of different dimensions of school engagement were examined. Furthermore the trajectories of school engagement were studied over time and how they differ by gender, ethnicity and family background. Associations between school engagement and longer-term outcomes were also assessed, including variations in academic attainment, career development, and health.

Further information

A [full list of publications](#) is available on our project website. See also '[Pathfinder – The Pathways to Adulthood newsletter](#)' [Issue 3, September 2011](#) (pdf 0.6mb)

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