ENGAGEMENT AND DISAFFECTION AS CENTRAL TO PROCESSES OF MOTIVATIONAL RESILIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Ellen A. Skinner

The study of motivation at school is rich in both theory and research (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2015). Incorporating concepts from educational, social, and developmental science, this work has produced an abundance of complex constructs that predict individual differences in students' motivation (Deci, 1992; Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2008; Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & Schunk, 2003; Reeve, 2005; Ryan, 2012; Weiner, 1986). These constructs originate from many levels, including individual factors such as feelings of belonging, achievement goals, self-efficacy, values, identification, and self-regulatory style. Moreover, factors outside the person—from social relationships, contexts, and tasks—have also been found to shape motivation, factors such as pedagogical caring, support from parents and peers, goal structures, autonomy support, school climate, disciplinary and management strategies, and the nature of academic work.

In recent years, however, prominent researchers reflecting on the complexity of the field have called for a period of thoughtful integration (Ford, 1992; Ford & Smith, 2009; Martin, 2012; Pintrich, 2003; Wentzel, 2009), during which researchers could jointly identify essential elements, combine constructs and measures that capture similar ideas, and take time to figure out how elements that are truly different from each other work together and function for students from different backgrounds across different developmental periods. These suggestions dovetail with insights gained from translational work carried out in schools. Although the field's current appreciation for the complexity of its target phenomena has provided a springboard for a range of intervention efforts, interventionists have been repeatedly struck by the daunting task of providing an overview of the field to educational stakeholders that is comprehensive but also clear and comprehensible (Connell & Kubisch, 1998). The field as it is currently constituted is so complex that it defies parsimonious and straightforward summary (Martin, 2012; Pintrich, 2003).

The goal of this chapter is to make progress in constructing a comprehensive and comprehensible account of the field of motivation that can be used by educators and interventionists to explain the role of motivation in student learning and...
academic success. To guide next steps in this communal process, the current chapter focuses on the construct of engagement and explores ways in which it may help to organize and clarify theories (and research) on motivation. The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, the multidimensional constructs of engagement and disaffection are defined and their connections to the field of motivation are clarified. Second, six evidence-based functions of engagement in the motivational system are identified. Third, the utility of these ideas for educational interventions is illustrated by discussing how they can inform teachers’ mental models of student motivation and learning and so guide improvement of their pedagogical, motivational, and disciplinary practices.

The decision to rely on the construct of engagement may seem puzzling to those who are familiar with research that has sprung up around this construct, starting in the late 1980s and burgeoning in the last decade, spurred by the publication of a definitive review (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) and a handbook (Christensen, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). How can research on engagement be used to clarify and organize the much larger and older field of motivation, when this relatively young area of research seems to be in a state of confusion and in need of both clarification and organization (Reschly & Christenson, 2012)? Indeed, definitional issues swirl around the construct of engagement, with agreement on only a few core features, but beyond that, little consensus (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

Hence, in order to prepare the constructs of engagement for their helper role in work on motivation, the first section of this chapter aims to return the favor, by using well-studied decades-old distinctions in the motivational field to help clarify definitions of engagement, and especially to help distinguish the constructs proper from their potential antecedents and consequences. In fact, running through this chapter is the theme that there are multiple mutually beneficial reciprocal connections between work on motivation and on engagement. In some ways, the younger and more rambunctious subfield of engagement can provide renewed energy and vigor to the field of motivation, while the more well-established and mature field of motivation can provide some guidance and advice for work on engagement.

WHAT ARE ENGAGEMENT AND DIAFFECTION?
A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The concept of “student engagement” provides a leitmotif for a fuzzy set of constructs capturing students’ involvement, participation, attachment, bonding, and connections to school and its many facets, including schoolwork, extracurricular activities, teachers, classmates, and friends. Because interest arose from several different educational and psychological traditions and was examined using a variety of measures available from existing data sets, there exists no single well-accepted definition of engagement (Christenson et al., 2012). Researchers do, however, agree on three key features of the concept. First, they agree that engagement can operate at several different levels, distinguished by the target with which students are engaged and the consequences of that engagement (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). For researchers interested in learning, achievement, and academic success, the kind of engagement that has captured the most attention focuses on engagement at the level of the classroom, specifically on the quality of students’ participation in academic work. The second issue researchers agree on is that classroom engagement
Engagement and Disaffection is a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, affective, and cognitive facets (Fredricks et al., 2004).

**Behavioral Engagement**

Third, researchers agree on the core definitional and operational features and functions of behavioral engagement with schoolwork. Also called participation, on-task behavior, or academic engagement, this kind of engagement refers to students’ involvement in observable behaviors directly related to the learning process, starting with attendance and continuing up the spectrum to attentiveness, compliance, effort expenditure, concentration, focus, persistence, hard work, and taking initiative on academic tasks (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Decades of research have convincingly demonstrated that this kind of engagement, both concurrently and prospectively, is linked to and leads to positive academic outcomes, including student learning, achievement, retention, school completion, on-time graduation, and readiness for college and careers (Fredricks et al., 2004). This connection holds up for students who differ on a wide variety of demographic and status indicators. It has been replicated across gender, grade level, race and ethnicity, immigration status, and socioeconomic status (Christenson et al., 2012). The strength and reliability of the link between behavioral engagement and school success is the main pillar on which claims about the importance of engagement rests. Despite consensus about the multilevel and multidimensional nature of engagement and the centrality of its behavioral facets, however, at least three major areas of disagreement remain.

**Affective and Cognitive Engagement**

The first issue involves the conceptual definitions and measurement of the other two facets of engagement, namely, affective and cognitive engagement. A variety of overlapping concepts have been suggested. Attempts to identify indicators of affective engagement have taken two tacks. One is centered on the general idea of students’ feelings of being connected to school, and so are drawn from measures of school attachment, belonging, bonding, valuing, and identification. Sometimes these concepts have also been expanded to include feelings of connection, closeness, and supportive relationships with teachers and peers. The second tack parallels agreed-upon definitions of behavioral engagement, and, just as behavioral engagement focuses on behavioral participation in the learning process, emotional engagement focuses on emotional experiences during participation in learning. Efforts to define “cognitive engagement” have also taken two tacks. The first identifies as “cognitive” any set of beliefs or cognitive constructions that students hold about the factors relevant to school, such as their perceived ability, competence, efficacy, or identity. A second tack (similar to conceptualizations of behavioral and emotional engagement with the learning process) focuses on students’ interactions with academic tasks and considers the “heads-on” component of involvement with academic work, reflecting the depth of learning processes.

**Sources of Information**

A second area of confusion in the work on engagement stems from the source of information about engagement—that is, whether it is provided by students, teachers, or
classroom observations. Student self-reports, by definition, tap students’ cognitive representations, and so some engagement researchers have wondered whether all student self-reports, including reports about their relationships, self-perceptions, or learning processes, should be considered forms of cognitive engagement (e.g., Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

The Opposite of Engagement

The third major area of disagreement in work on engagement is whether the construct space should include not only positive states of engagement but also negative states or absence of engagement. Many markers of engagement inherently incorporate information about lack of engagement—for example, attendance rates also include information about absence rates. However, the area has not even converged on a common label for the opposite of engagement. Several have been suggested, including disengagement, disaffection, burnout, withdrawal, noncompliance, disruptive behavior, helplessness, and amotivation. In sum, over the last several decades, engagement researchers have generated a diffuse cloud of constructs loosely woven around the idea of students’ connections to school. The anchor of this network is students’ behavioral engagement with learning, which shows close connections to academic success for students from many different groups. The other facets of engagement all seem relevant to students’ connections to school, but they are widely dispersed over a much broader conceptual space, and they show weaker and less consistent links to academic outcomes.

Motivational Distinctions to Help Clarify Definitions of Engagement and Disaffection

Some of the confusion in the field of engagement reflects the hubbub that accompanies the profusion of research surrounding a newly popular construct. It is possible, however, that some of the confusion can be clarified using distinctions and construct labels that have been employed for decades in the closely related but older field of motivation. Although reflecting distinct origins, in that work on engagement emerged from educational research on dropout and its prevention (Reschly & Christenson, 2012), whereas achievement motivation is an offshoot of the larger field of human motivation (Ryan, 2012), the two areas have so much overlap that some researchers use the terms “engagement” and “motivation” interchangeably (e.g., Martin, 2009). From a motivational perspective, three distinctions show particular promise in helping to sort out some of the definitional issues in work on engagement.

Indicators versus Facilitators

The first cut suggested by motivational theories is between (1) concepts that are indicators or markers of engagement proper—that is, that belong inside the construct of engagement—versus (2) concepts that belong outside of engagement proper because they represent factors that influence it (i.e., facilitate or undermine it). Decades of research in motivation have already been examining some of the facets that engagement researchers have labeled as affective, cognitive, and school engagement. However, in work on motivation, they are not considered to be indicators of engagement; instead, they are seen as facilitators or causes of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in the learning process.
Self versus Context

The second cut suggested by motivational researchers refers to the distinction among different kinds or classes of facilitators. One set of facilitators focuses on features of the self that promote motivation and active engagement with learning. Also referred to as self-perceptions, self-appraisals, or self-systems, these include a sense of belonging, connection, or relatedness with teachers, parents, and classmates (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow, 1993), perceived competence and efficacy (Elliot & Dweck, 2005), beliefs about the value, utility, and relevance of school (Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), and goal orientations (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). A second class of facilitators long studied by motivational researchers focuses on the social contexts and relationships that promote motivation and active engagement. These include relationships with parents, teachers, and peers (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Wentzel, 1997, 2009), as well as the nature of academic work (Newmann, King, & Carmichael, 2007) and the management and organizational systems used to govern classroom participation (Emmer & Sabornie, 2014). These facilitators refer to the objective social conditions surrounding the learning process, such as the teacher’s warmth, the clarity of assignments and rules, and whether academic work is project based and connected to students’ daily lives. These constructs tap features of actual relationships and social contexts. As can be seen in Figure 8.1, several constructs that engagement researchers sometimes think of as indicators of engagement itself can be collected, grouped, and
relabeled as two kinds of causes or facilitators—those focused on the self and those focused on the context.

**Actual versus Experience**

A third important distinction used by motivational researchers is the difference between the actual behaviors of social partners versus students’ interpretations, appraisals, or experiences of these interactions. A significant portion of the research on motivation has been dedicated to uncovering the kinds of objective social relationships, interactions, and contexts that shape the development of students’ self-system processes—for example, the kinds of classroom practices and teacher relationships that lead students to hold mastery goals or to feel efficacious. As part of this work, motivational researchers have learned two important lessons. First, the extent to which features of objective relationships and contexts actually exert an impact on students’ motivation and engagement depends on students’ subjective understanding of those objective features. As a result, students’ interpretations have typically been found to mediate the effects of actual contextual conditions, and hence (compared to such conditions) they are stronger predictors of students’ engagement or academic outcomes.

The second lesson, however, is that these interpretations are influenced by objective conditions and relationships, and so objective features are crucial targets for interventions designed to promote engagement and motivation. For example, even though students’ self-reported experiences of autonomy support are among the strongest predictors of their engagement, improvements in students’ experiences of autonomy support can best be accomplished by changing a variety of objective teacher practices (Su & Reeve, 2011). This distinction suggests that both objective features of social contexts and subjective experiences of them are important kinds of facilitators of motivation and engagement (see Figure 8.1).

**Motivational Conceptualizations of Engagement and Disaffection**

From a motivational perspective, when aspects of the self, the social context, and students’ experiences of the social context are distinguished as facilitators or causes of engagement, this makes the core indicators of engagement easier to identify. They refer to the quality of students’ participation or involvement with the learning process. As already documented by engagement research, the core of this kind of participation is behavioral engagement. And, if behavioral engagement in the learning process is the core facet of behavioral engagement, then it can be argued that the core aspects of emotional and cognitive engagement should also focus on students’ participation in the learning process. This implies that emotional engagement comprises the subset of emotions generated by interactions with schoolwork, including students’ enthusiasm, interest, satisfaction, and enjoyment while learning and participating in schoolwork (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014), and that cognitive engagement includes students’ mental orientation during learning activities, as seen in their mastery orientation, preference for challenge, and use of self-regulatory or coping strategies (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012).

As a result, nested within the classroom is the kind of engagement that motivational researchers are most interested in: student engagement with the learning process, which we define as constructive, enthusiastic, willing, emotionally positive, cognitively focused participation with academic work (Connell & Wellborn, 1991;
Engagement and Disaffection

The behavioral, emotional, and cognitive facets of this kind of motivated engagement appear in the center of Figure 8.1 and are listed in Table 8.1. From a motivational perspective, these are the core indicators of engagement proper. Additional facets have been suggested (e.g., agentic engagement, Reeve & Tseng, 2011), and to the extent that they depict the quality of students' participation in the learning process, they would also qualify as indicators of engagement.

Disaffection

Finally, motivational conceptualizations highlight the complex processes involved when students lack or lose motivation and disengage from school-related learning activities. Work on motivation suggests that there are multiple behavioral indicators of disaffection, including passivity, procrastination, disengagement, noncompliance, and disruption; these are accompanied by a variety of disaffected emotions, including boredom, anxiety, self-blame, shame, and frustration, as listed in Table 8.1. Moreover, there are also multiple facilitators or pathways toward disaffection, including helplessness, hopelessness, emotional exhaustion and burnout, self-handicapping, devaluing of school, deterioration of intrinsic motivation, and failure to internalize sources of extrinsic motivation.
facilitators of engagement can be distinguished from its indicators;
• these facilitators include features of the self, such as a sense of belonging or identification, as well as features of objective social contexts and relationships;
• students make sense of their experiences in these social contexts and relationships, and these subjective interpretations are powerful contributors to their self-systems and engagement;
• building on the dimension of engagement that has been documented to be a robust predictor of student academic success (namely, behavioral participation in the learning process), additional parallel dimensions of engagement can be identified (namely, those that depict emotions and cognitive deployment during the learning process); and
• multiple markers of disaffection can be identified, which are the product of different pathways through which students can lose or fail to develop motivation and engagement.

ENGAGEMENT AND DISAFFECTION SERVE SIX FUNCTIONS IN THE MOTIVATIONAL SYSTEM

Just as work on motivation has several ideas to offer conceptualizations of engagement, so too do constructs of engagement have several important ideas to offer the field of motivation. The first idea is that engagement and disaffection are central constructs of motivation (Skinner et al., 2009). As we have argued previously,

the study of motivation is most fundamentally concerned with processes that underlie the energy (vigor, intensity, arousal), purpose (initiation, direction, channeling, choice), and durability (persistence, maintenance, endurance, sustenance) of human activity. Hence, motivational conceptualizations of engagement are ones that capture the target definitional manifestations of motivation—namely, energized, directed, and sustained action. . . . That is why constructs of engagement and disaffection should be (and always have been) central to theories of motivation. (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 225)

As depicted in Table 8.2, and as illustrated in the recent handbook on engagement (Christensen et al., 2012), all major theories of motivation have as an outcome some feature of engagement or disaffection. In fact, motivational theorists attempting to nudge the area toward integration have consistently pointed out the centrality of engagement as a fixed point or North Star for these efforts (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Ford, 1992; Ford & Smith, 2009; Martin, 2009, 2012; Reeve, 2012).

If engagement and disaffection are central outcomes of all theories of motivation, then a focus on these constructs might facilitate progress in the field, perhaps by helping to guide theoretical integration and research, but even more importantly by helping to clarify and organize an account of student motivation that is comprehensive, comprehensible to educational stakeholders, and provides actionable information to teachers in the classroom. A first step in making progress on this challenging task is an unwavering...
| Table 8.2 | Motivational Theories and Examples of the Constructs That Correspond to Engagement |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Examples of Behavioral Engagement** | **Examples of Emotional Engagement** | **Examples of Orientation** |
| **Achievement Goal Orientations** | Effort, exertion | Enthusiasm | Selection of challenging tasks |
| (Anderman & Patrick, 2012) | Persistence | Enjoyment |  |
| | Task involvement | Anxiety |  |
| | Procrastination |  |  |
| **Causal attributions** | Effort, persistence vs. giving up, withdrawal | Joy, anger, pride, shame, guilt |  |
| (Graham & Williams, 2009) |  |  |  |
| **Effectance motivation** | Energized participation | Enthusiasm | Preference for challenge |
| (Harter, 1978; White, 1959) |  |  |  |
| **Engagement in Academic Work** | Effort to learn | Enthusiasm | Concentrated attention |
| (Newmann et al., 1992) | Active involvement | Interest | Psychological investment |
| | Participation |  |  |
| **Flow** | Effort | Enthusiasm | Preference for challenging, difficult, novel tasks |
| (Shernoff & Anderson, 2013) | Persistence | Enjoyment | Curiosity |
| | Task involvement | Interest | Preference for challenging, difficult, novel tasks |
| | Persistence |  | Absorption |
| | Giving up | Sadness |  |
| | Avoidance | Dejection |  |
| **Learned helplessness** | Effort | Enthusiasm |  |
| (Reivich, Gillham, Chaplin, & Seligman, 2013) | Persistence | Enjoyment |  |
| | Task involvement | Optimism |  |
| | Failure to respond |  |  |
| **Mastery** | Effort | Enthusiasm | Preference for challenge |
| (Dweck & Master, 2009) | Persistence | Enjoyment |  |
| | Determination | Optimism |  |
| | Time & effort | Display of enthusiasm |  |
| | Initiate interactions |  |  |
| **Participation/Identification** | Effort | Enthusiasm | Preference for challenge |
| (Finn, 1989) | Persistence | Enjoyment |  |
| | Time & effort | Optimism |  |
| | Initiate interactions |  |  |
| **Perceived control** | Effort, Determination | Enthusiasm |  |
| (Skinner et al., 1998) | Persistence | Enjoyment |  |
| | Initiation of action | Attention |  |
| **Self-determination** | Participation | Enthusiastic, joyful, energetic vs. anxious, angry, rote vs. rigid, pressured |  |
| (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeve, 2012) | Persistence vs. withdrawal | Willing, flexible, spontaneous |  |
| **Self-efficacy** | Initiation of action | Anxiety |  |
| (Schunk & Mullen, 2012) | Expenditure of effort | Resignation |  |
| | Performance attempts |  |  |
| **Self-system Model of Motivational development** | Effort, hard work persistence vs. withdrawal, passivity | Enthusiasm, interest, liking vs. boredom, sadness, frustration, |  |
| (Connell & Wellborn, 1991) |  |  |  |
| **Value-expectancy** | Achievement strivings | Enthusiasm | Preference for challenge |
| (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) | Effort exertion | Liking |  |
| | Persistence | vs. boredom, sadness, frustration, |  |
focus on engagement and disaffection as central organizing forces in the dynamics of the complex motivational system. As argued by other motivational theorists (e.g., see Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Reeve, 2012, Figure 7.5), at least six important functions of engagement and disaffection can be identified (see Figure 8.2).

1. Engagement Is an Engine of Learning

The primary reason the construct of engagement has captured the imagination of researchers and educators is that it fuels learning. It is clear, conceptually and empirically, that engagement is a necessary condition for learning to occur. In order to absorb and apply knowledge, students must participate constructively in the hard work that leads to conceptual and practical understanding: They must pay attention, concentrate, exert effort, reflect on, and persevere on academic tasks. Especially important evidence supporting this claim comes from longitudinal studies that examine the effects of engagement on subsequent trajectories of academic performance and achievement (e.g., Ladd & Dinella, 2009; Luo, Hughes, Liew, & Kwok, 2009; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Moreover, if engagement is a necessary condition for school success, then it follows that student disaffection should be a sufficient condition for undesired outcomes, such as student underachievement, burnout, and dropout (e.g., Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Janosz et al., 2008; Li, Zhang, Liu, Arbe, Schwartz, Bowers, & Lerner, 2011; Martin, Anderson, Bobis, Way, & Vellar, 2012). The centrality of engagement to processes of learning provides a common fixed point for researchers and educational
stakeholders: The promotion of engagement and the prevention of disaffection must be included as essential goals in all efforts to support student success (Martin, 2012).

2. Engagement and Disaffection Are Pathways from Motivationally Relevant Aspects of the Self and the Context to Academic Success

A primary reason why motivational research focuses on indicators of engagement and disaffection is that they are key mechanisms through which a wide variety of motivational processes exert their influences on important academic outcomes. Engagement is a prime reason why certain features of students’ self-systems (e.g., goals, self-efficacy, values, or met needs) shape desired outcomes like learning, achievement, and retention (Christenson et al., 2012); likewise, student disaffection is a key player in motivational explanations of the adverse effects of negative self-appraisals, figuring prominently in explanations of how maladaptive social cognitions (e.g., devaluing of academic tasks, feelings of helplessness) contribute to undesired outcomes, such as underachievement, burnout, and dropout.

Engagement and disaffection also mediate the effects of contextual factors (like teacher warmth, mastery grading, peer support, or parental involvement) on academic outcomes. Whether the effects of contextual factors are accomplished by shaping engagement and disaffection directly, or through multiple intermediaries—for example, by shaping students’ experiences of these factors or their resultant self-perceptions—if these motivational factors are going to exert discernible effects on student learning and achievement, then they must contribute to improvements in engagement and/or reductions in disaffection. Clearest support for the notion that engagement and disaffection are pathways from self and context can be found in longitudinal studies that directly test mediational models (e.g., Fall & Roberts, 2012; Green et al., 2012; Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Jang et al., 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

3. Engagement and Disaffection Are Guides to the Selection of Contexts, Activities, and Tasks

A third important function of engagement and disaffection can be found in processes of selection—contributing to students’ motivated decisions about the contexts, activities, and tasks they intend to undertake and those they prefer to avoid or abandon. Students’ academic and social choices about classes, extracurricular activities, peer groups, and so on are motivated in part by their previous experiences of engagement in those situations. Activities and social partners who foster enthusiastic engagement are ones students will likely choose to revisit, whereas they are likely to avoid activities characterized by boredom, frustration, or worry (i.e., disaffection). One source of evidence of the effects of engagement on subsequent task choice can be found in research examining the effects of emotional engagement on subsequent behavioral engagement (Ladd & Dinella, 2009; Skinner et al., 2008). Future studies that look directly at task choice as an outcome can explore this possibility more explicitly (Eccles & Wang, 2012).

4. Engagement and Disaffection Are Resources and Liabilities for Self-Regulation, Coping, and Persistence

A fourth important function of engagement and disaffection in the motivational system is to shape students’ reactions to academic challenges, difficulties, and failure. Ongoing engagement could serve as a resource for adaptive coping, self-regulation, and persistence.
by providing energy, momentum, and stamina to sustain and guide students when they encounter academic obstacles, whereas disaffection may add friction to the process of dealing with such problems (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012; Dweck, 2006). Few studies have directly examined the prospective connections between engagement and disaffection, on the one hand, and coping, self-regulatory strategies, and persistence, on the other, but the few that have do uncover the expected relations (Martin, 2011; Martin & Marsh, 2009; Reschly et al., 2008; Pitzer & Skinner, 2013; Spangler, Pekrun, Kramer, & Hofmann, 2002; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

5. Engagement and Disaffection Evoke Reactions from Teachers and Peers

Most of the research on social contexts and motivation examines the feedforward effects of the motivational supports provided by parents, teachers, and peers on students’ ongoing engagement and disaffection (Wentzel, 1998). However, over the last several decades, studies that look at this connection longitudinally have revealed that it appears to be reciprocal—in that engagement and disaffection feed back into the social context to shape the positive and negative reactions of teachers and peers (Reeve, 2012). The few studies that have explicitly investigated whether students’ engagement shapes how teachers subsequently respond to them have revealed that this process seems to be operating in kindergarten (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999), elementary school (Hughes et al., 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), middle school (Altermatt et al. 1998), and junior high and high school (Fiedler, 1975). In terms of peers, a few studies examining peer relationships at school suggest that children select and are selected by others based in part on their engagement, with more engaged students joining (and being allowed to enter) peer and friendship groups composed of more engaged peers, whereas more disaffected students join (and are only allowed access to) groups of peers who are more disaffected (Kindermann, 2007).

6. Engagement Provides Information about the Self’s Goals, Values, Capacities, and Place

The sixth function of engagement and disaffection is to provide information to students about their own academic self-systems and identities. Just as with work on social contexts, most of the research on self-systems and engagement focuses on feedforward effects in which students’ self-perceptions (i.e., goals, efficacy, autonomy, belongingness) shape their subsequent engagement and disaffection. At the same time, however, reciprocal feedback effects are possible: Experiences of engagement with schoolwork and social partners can reveal to students the kinds of tasks and goals they like and that interest and absorb them, shaping their self-system beliefs about who they are and where they fit in. Likewise, experiences of disaffection can apprise students about their dislikes and discomforts in school, eroding academic values and commitments, and convincing students that they are not “the kind of person” who belongs in school. This direction of effects is a central tenet of participation-identification models in which “participation” is closely related to behavioral engagement and “identification” comprises a sense of belonging and valuing school (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 2012). Longitudinal studies exploring motivational dynamics have been especially useful in uncovering such feedback effects from engagement to self-systems (e.g., Fall & Roberts 2012; Green et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2008; Jang et al., 2012; Legault et al., 2006; Wang & Fredricks, 2013).
In sum, conceptualizations and research suggest that motivational systems are organized around engagement and disaffection. Not only are they engines (and brakes) of learning and achievement, but they are also the primary pathways through which motivationally relevant factors, like self-perceptions and objective contextual conditions and relationships, exert an impact on academic outcomes. Moreover, engagement and disaffection may play a role in students’ selection of academic activities and contexts as well as influencing whether they will rely on adaptive or maladaptive self-regulatory and coping strategies to deal with obstacles and challenges in their schoolwork. Finally, engagement and disaffection also show feedback effects on the social partners and self-systems that shape them, in that engaged students are more likely to elicit more motivational support from teachers and to have access to more engaged peers, whereas disaffected students are more likely to receive lower levels of teacher support as well as to select and be granted entry only into groups of peers who are also disaffected.

**ENGAGEMENT AND DISAFFECTION AS ANCHORS FOR ACCOUNTS OF MOTIVATION AND LEARNING**

If engagement and disaffection are central players in students’ academic success, then interventionists can use these connections as a starting point for providing comprehensible descriptions of the field of motivation to educators and explaining how its rich research base can be used to guide improvement efforts. This section focuses on important steps that may be useful in beginning to craft such accounts. One way to think about this process is the idea that interventionists are helping educators construct evidence-based mental models of student motivation and learning, or more precisely (since teachers already have assumptions about teaching and learning), helping teachers to surface and rework their existing mental models (Connell & Kubisch, 1998).

**Working Models of Motivation and Learning**

An important priority for all teachers is student learning. Hence, any working model has as a primary outcome students’ academic success at the current grade level and readiness for academic work in the next grades. As pictured in Figure 8.3, that long-term target secures the end point of a working model. As argued previously, the near-term predictor of student success is high-quality engagement in learning—effort, persistence, enthusiasm, interest, and preference for challenging work. Recognition of the importance of engagement moves teachers’ attention backwards from academic performance and encourages them to actively focus on what each student is doing (and feeling and thinking) during academic activities. A key part of any teacher’s working model is the realization that engagement is the pathway (and disaffection the obstacle) to all student learning and success.

Moreover, because of their centrality to motivation, improving student engagement and reducing disaffection have the potential to accomplish more than just promoting student achievement. Such changes should also transmit positive ripple effects throughout the entire motivational system: encouraging students to seek out more challenging activities; supporting them in coping more constructively and persevering in the face of obstacles and setbacks; providing positive feedback about students’ views of themselves and the value of school; opening doors to affiliations with more engaged peers; and even improving the quality of relationships with teachers and parents (see Figure 8.2). In other words, although...
educators may initially value engagement for its important role as the engine of academic success, over time, teachers may begin to hold working models that place engagement at the center of all aspects of student development, viewing it as a tide that lifts all boats.

The good news for educators (and interventionists) is that, in general, teachers are good judges of student engagement (Kaiser, Retelsdorf, Südkamp, & Möller, 2013; Lee & Reeve, 2012; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009), suggesting that teachers can have direct and daily access to the target of their educational efforts (i.e., to the observable aspects of engagement). And once good channels of communication with students are established, teachers can also gain access to the aspects of engagement (i.e., emotion and cognition) that students may otherwise try to mask. Moreover, student engagement is not only good for students, it is also good for teachers. Teaching a class of engaged students is an intrinsically rewarding experience that promotes teachers’ engagement in teaching (e.g., Frenzel, Goetz, Lüdtke, Pekrun, & Sutton, 2009). By the same token, markers of student disaffection, including lack of motivation and disciplinary issues, are named by teachers as among the most taxing stressors in their professional lives (Chang, 2009; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Hence, although teachers may initially work to promote engagement based on its positive effects on student development, over time, they may come to realize the potency of student motivation in supporting teachers’ own satisfaction in teaching and their own long-term development.

Figure 8.3 Essential Elements of Teachers’ Evidence-Based Working Models of Student Motivation and Learning

These can be considered naïve theories of change that (1) start with Student Success and work backwards to the proximal influence of (2) Student Engagement, Task Selection, and Coping, which are shaped by (3) Students’ Experiences as well as supported or undermined by (4) the Actual Classroom Context Student Academic Performance and Engagement, in turn, provides (5) actionable information that teachers can then use to reconfigure or rework their own practices.
Engagement and Disaffection

Working Models of the Malleability of Engagement

A crucial goal involves strengthening the idea that engagement is malleable and responsive to factors that are under a teacher’s control. It may be important to note that the malleability of engagement has the potential to be seen by teachers as a double-edged sword. Although it opens up a field of possibilities for future improvements, malleability also implies that teachers and schools are complicit in the creation of disaffection (Martin, 2012). And, it would be understandable if teachers tended to view motivation as a stable trait that originates in the student. From the first day of class, some students seem to be more motivated than others, and research documents a high level of interindividual stability (e.g., Gottfried et al., 2007; Marks, 2000; Otis et al., 2005; Skinner et al., 1998). In fact, interindividual stability seems to increase as students move through junior high and high school (Gottfried, 1990; Gottfried et al., 2001). Teachers may interpret such stability as proof that engagement is a fixed motivational trait. However, accumulating evidence suggests that stability may instead be the outcome of the recursive dynamics of the motivational system (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012). Longitudinal research examining reciprocal effects among students’ engagement and their achievement, motivational resources, and social contexts (Green et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2008; Jang et al., 2012; Wang & Fredricks, 2013) suggests that these feedback loops seem to continually recreate a dynamic stability (see Figure 8.2). Hence, an evidence-based working model holds that both engagement and disaffection are responsive to features of classrooms, teachers, and tasks. In fact, this notion creates an opening through which the accumulated wisdom from the field of motivation can be channeled.

Student Experiences That Can Shape Student Engagement

Research on motivation suggests that a very important feature of teachers’ working models would be the idea that students have their own subjective interpretations about what is happening in school. These are included in Figure 8.3 under the label of Student Experience, and they are a proximal cause of student engagement as well as a filter between objective conditions and students’ engagement or disaffection. Motivational theories have a lot to say about these interpretations and how they contribute to engagement. Most central are students’ views of themselves; in Figure 8.3, these are all grouped under students’ “academic identity.” As it currently stands, the field of motivation has nominated dozens of differentiated constructs (and their subdimensions) for inclusion in this category, but it is clear that no teacher can create a working model that incorporates all of them.

Hence, one goal motivational researchers may wish to undertake, inspired by the desire to be useful to educators and interventionists, is to identify core constructs that map the essential elements of students’ academic identities. To begin this process, the idea of “families” of constructs may be useful. Just as engagement research may benefit from converging on a “family” of constructs that entails students’ behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation in the learning process, motivational researchers may also begin to converge by identifying families of constructs that map onto the major features of the self-systems that promote engagement and learning. A next step toward that goal is represented in Table 8.3, which depicts seven families of constructs and examples of their many members, organized around the themes of (1) belonging, (2) purpose, (3) growth mindsets, (4) self-efficacy, (5) learning goals, (6) valuing, and (7) ownership. Each of these families represents multiple converging lines of scholarship. Each has been
shown to be a robust predictor of engagement, and the absence of each has been shown to be a risk factor for disengagement, disaffection, giving up, burning out, and/or dropping out.

Because even seven categories are likely too many for a parsimonious working model, it would also be possible to group these further, as shown in Table 8.3, considering each as a fundamental part of three basic pillars of student motivational development. In turn, teachers could use these pillars to help organize their essential motivational goals, helping each student to develop (1) a sense of belonging and purpose as a member of the classroom/school community; (2) a mastery orientation, which includes a growth mindset, a focus on learning goals, and strong self-efficacy; and (3) commitment, which includes a high value for learning and success in school as well as ownership for one’s own academic progress. Motivational researchers could support intervention efforts by continuing to hold productive discussions about these families, arguing about the elements that should be considered essential and whether/how they should be grouped.

Table 8.3 Families of Motivational Constructs That Comprise Students' Academic Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct Family as Described to Educators</th>
<th>Examples of Family Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Belonging** Students feel they are valued and welcome members of the school community. | • Belonging  
• Relatedness  
• Attachment  
• School membership  
• School connectedness |
| **Purpose** Students see their participation in school as part of something larger and more important than themselves and as a way of making a positive difference in their community and the world. | • Purpose  
• Social purpose  
• Sense of meaning |
| Mastery Orientation                        |                            |
| **Growth mindset** Students realize that ability is something that improves through practice and effort (as opposed to a fixed trait). | • Growth mindset  
• Malleable mindset  
• Conceptions of ability |
| **Self-efficacy** Students are confident they have the capacity to succeed in school. | • Self-efficacy  
• Expectancies of success  
• Perceived competence  
• Perceived control |
| **Learning goals** Students focus on deep learning and self-improvement (and not on competition or self-protection). | • Achievement goals  
• Mastery goal orientation  
• Learning goals |
| Commitment                                 |                            |
| **Valuing** Students see their schoolwork as personally important to them and worthy of their time and effort. | • Value  
• Relevance  
• Identified self-regulation  
• Authentic academic work |
| **Ownership** Students willingly take personal responsibility for their own academic progress. | • Autonomy  
• Agency  
• Responsibility  
• Commitment  
• Investment |
further. Interventionists could also weigh in, based on what they have learned from educators—for example, the families that resonate most strongly with teachers and the labels that communicate the nature of the families most clearly. Teachers can teach motivational theorists about the kinds of maps of the field that are useful to them in rethinking their classroom practices.

**Motivational and Teaching Practices That Shape Student Academic Identity and Engagement**

An important message from the field of motivation is that students are continuously evaluating their experiences with respect to these core features of academic identity, essentially using their cumulative experiences to answer questions such as, “Is this a good place for me?”, “Can I do this?”, “Does this matter to me?”, and “Is this worth the effort?” A key element of teachers’ evidence-based working models is the notion that students are active partners in teaching and learning, reflecting on their experience and using those experiences to inform their subsequent participation. Hence, teachers will want to be guided, not only by their own understanding of effective practices, but also by their understanding of the meanings that students make of those practices. For example, teachers may intend management practices to provide students with clear expectations and consistent consequences, but if students perceive such practices as unfair or coercive, they will not serve their intended purposes (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010).

Motivational researchers also have much to offer teachers in terms of advice on strategies that should support the development of students’ academic identities and promote engagement. Taken as a whole, theories have identified dozens if not hundreds of relevant teaching, motivational, and management practices (Wentzel & Brophy, 2013). At the same time, however, if teachers (and interventionists) are to create manageable mental models from this mass of ideas, motivational theorists may wish to take on the task of sorting out these lists of potential school and classroom practices. This is no easy project.

One strategy is to use the facets of the student learning experience listed in Table 8.3 and to identify clusters of strategies that should support each one. For example, the student experiences found to promote “ownership” have been studied under the rubric of “autonomy support” (Reeve Bolt, & Cai, 1999). Autonomy support is not a specific teacher behavior, but instead comprises a repertoire of practices, communication strategies, and kinds of learning activities, such as provision of choice, responsiveness to students’ questions, respect for their emotions and opinions, incorporation of authentic academic work, encouraging students to explore their own interests, and providing rationales for rules. These practices have been observed in classrooms of teachers whom students experience as autonomy supportive, and interventions have shown that they increase students’ ownership (i.e., autonomy) and engagement (Su & Reeve, 2011). Other such higher-order concepts might include pedagogical caring (Wentzel, 1997), mastery-oriented teaching and grading (e.g., Anderman & Patrick, 2012), structure or competence support (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Jang et al., 2010), and other overarching categories that capture the quality of teachers’ classroom practices (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008).

Motivational researchers could be of use to educators and interventionists if they would participate in the difficult discussions that would allow them to jointly nominate a set of these higher-order concepts. Such an approach would not dictate specific classroom practices, but would instead identify a small set of core concepts and a catalog of options for practices that have been found to support each one. Teachers could
realistically review their own practices in light of these higher-order concepts, perhaps based in part on self- or peer observations or student reports of their experiences. Then teachers could select their favorite alternatives from the menu of options, leavening their typical practices with these new ideas and examining their effects on students’ experiences as well as on engagement and learning. This kind of approach would potentially scaffold teachers’ own development and support their autonomy by providing them with choices, strategies, and rationales for new practices. It could also encourage their own engagement in teaching, by making visible the kinds of feedback loops that extend from teacher practices to student motivation. These feedback loops should contribute to teachers’ direct experiences of student motivation as malleable and responsive to factors under teachers’ control.

In terms of parsimony, teachers would not be expected to have mental models that contain all of the motivational and teaching practices that could possibly influence student motivation and learning. Instead, they would have mental models permeated by the conviction that teachers can influence student motivation and that a raft of evidence-based strategies can be tried out in their classrooms. Perhaps most importantly, it would create a mental model that motivates teachers to try out new ideas and to view students as partners in their own learning, encouraging teachers to look carefully at students’ actions and listen openly to their experiences.

**Engagement and Disaffection as Actionable Information in the Classroom**

At some point in the construction of comprehensive mental models of motivation and learning, it will dawn on teachers (and, of course, the most effective teachers already know) that student engagement and disaffection hold a great deal of information that teachers need, and want, to inform their daily decisions about how to organize their classrooms and how to teach. Although students’ lack of motivation, disciplinary problems, and struggles with learning can be experienced by teachers as noxious stressors, it is also possible to view these “problems,” not as roadblocks, but as signposts that guide teachers about what students need to allow them to re-engage with challenging academic material and to continue learning (as depicted by the return arrows in Figure 8.3).

Theories of motivation that include engagement and disaffection have started to examine whether patterns of students’ emotional and behavioral participation in the classroom can be considered diagnostic of specific student experiences and self-systems (Furrer, Kelly, & Skinner, 2003; Furrer, Skinner, & Pitzer, 2014). These analyses stand typical models of motivation on their heads by starting with the kinds of packages of student actions that teachers observe in the classroom (e.g., patterns in which students are passive and bored, or actively disengaged and resentful, or active but anxious, and so on). If teachers can recognize a range of prototypes of engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), they can in principle use them to diagnose the likely motivational profiles and student experiences that give rise to them (Furrer, Skinner, & Pitzer, 2014).

These motivational profiles, in turn, can clue teachers in to the kinds of higher-order supports students may need (e.g., autonomy support or pedagogical caring) in order to boost or repair them, directing teachers to the menus of possible practices that contribute to these higher-order supports. For example, if teachers see high behavioral engagement accompanied by emotional disaffection, in the form of high anxiety, educators may rely on research on anxiety, which implicates certain self-perceptions: for example, a combination of beliefs that set up the high cost of failure (such as high value of school,
a performance goal orientation, or fear of losing parental regard) and beliefs that make adequate performance seem uncertain (such as low self-efficacy or a fixed mindset; e.g., Martin, 2011). Such an analysis encourages teachers to continue to take students’ perspectives and to try out practices (at the student or classroom level) that can remedy the motivational maladies they observe. In the case of anxiety, teachers could rely on a mixture of practices shown to relieve some of this internal pressure as well as to bolster confidence.

A consideration of the full range of indicators of engagement, as suggested by person-centered approaches (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2011; Luo et al., 2009; Martin, 2011; Roeser, Strobel, & Quihuis, 2002; Wang & Peck, 2013), can help teachers avoid the common motivational trap in which they focus most of their attention on a single dimension of engagement—typically on behavioral engagement, because of its role in improving student performance. If teachers look primarily at on-task behavior, they may concentrate on practices that ramp up student participation but fail to notice their unintended side effects on emotional or cognitive engagement. If teachers are not careful, they may create classrooms in which students are pressured to work hard (e.g., through competition or external rewards), whether or not they experience any positive emotions or are involved in deep conceptual learning. If relied upon in isolation, such strategies may undermine subsequent positive emotions and intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999, 2001).

Classrooms That Promote Motivational Resilience and Development

When teachers allow student engagement and disaffection to move to center stage, and come to view them as multidimensional and malleable motivational states that represent precious energetic resources as well as joint responsibilities for teachers and students, all of the arrows pictured in Figure 8.3 begin to align. Together, they create dynamics in the classroom that lift up the quality of students’ experiences, their academic identities, and their enthusiastic participation in the processes of learning. As depicted in Figure 8.2, these dynamics should also have a forward-reaching effect on students’ future experiences as well; they should encourage students to seek out challenging academic activities and contexts that will provide opportunities for further growth. Moreover, such classroom experiences cumulatively allow students to develop motivational resilience, in that they help students to build a repertoire of coping and self-regulatory strategies that will allow them to deal constructively with the setbacks, obstacles, and problems they are sure to encounter when engaging fully in challenging academic tasks.

Students can begin to create mental models of their own motivation and learning that include views of their engagement and disaffection, as well as those of their peers and teachers, as malleable states for which they share a joint responsibility. This may help students to stop viewing their own disaffection, boredom, or discouragement as primarily the fault of teachers or schools, but instead to come to view these states as their teachers do, as important information about students’ classroom experiences that can help everyone jointly analyze what is happening—in the classroom and in teachers’ and students’ minds—that is contributing to these malleable states. Teachers and students (and parents and peers) can help each other to uncover and then listen to these many perspectives, in order to use this information as a basis for cooperatively working together to improve and rework classroom practices. Such efforts should allow teachers to lead their students in recovering and replenishing their own engagement, and in facing and
attending to their own disaffection, which are after all the keys to their motivation, learning, resilience, and development.

REFERENCES


