

Engagement and Disaffection as Organizational Constructs  
in the Dynamics of Motivational Development

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Abstract

Theories and research on children's motivation in school employ a wealth of constructs to explain its differential development (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). Classes of major predictors have been drawn from work on self-system processes, such as perceived control, goal orientations, self-efficacy, and autonomy, as well as from work on social contexts, including interpersonal contexts provided by teachers, parents, and peers and organizational contexts like school climate and curriculum. A common thread runs through these diverse bodies of research, namely, that the proximal outcomes of academic motivation can be captured by a construct depicting children's active, constructive, focused enthusiastic involvement and participation in the activities of learning, a construct that has been referred to as academic *engagement* (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). In this chapter, we make the case that engagement is a central construct critical in explaining the development of the entire motivational system. First, we present the definitional features of engagement and disaffection, focusing on an action theoretical conceptualization. Second, we briefly review major theories of motivation to show that such constructs appear in all of them. Third, we demonstrate how these constructs, through their reciprocal relationships to self-systems and features of social contexts, organize the dynamics of the motivational system. These dynamics, over time, gives rise to a host of important outcomes, such as a sense of solidarity, efficacy, ownership, and identity within the academic community. The development of these motivational resources, which may emerge at successive ages, can be seen as protective factors, fostering academic resilience, and shepherding youth away from risky choices and toward positive outcomes. Five key challenges to studying and promoting motivational development are outlined.



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The study of children's motivation in school is a vibrant area of research, replete with rich theories and complex constructs (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). The lion's share of this work focuses on individual differences, attempting to identify the forces, originating from many levels, that shape student motivation. A wide array of factors have been identified (Deci, 1992; Eccles et al., 1998; Heckhausen, 1991; Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & Schunk, 2003; Reeve, 2005; Weiner, 1986; Wigfield, et al., 2006), including individual factors, such as self-efficacy, expectancies of success, perceived control, perceived competence, learned helplessness, values, goals, goal orientation, self-regulatory style, interest, commitment, identification, sense of relatedness, attachment, and feelings of belonging.

Moreover, factors outside the person, from their social contexts have also been found to shape motivation, factors such as contingencies, rewards, goal structures, the nature of academic tasks, autonomy in decision-making, involvement of authority figures (e.g., parents, teachers, coaches) and peers (e.g., classmates, friends), organizational climate (e.g., school, family, neighborhood climate), clarity of expectations, warmth and caring, structure, psychological control, and relationship style (e.g., authoritarian). General process models have guided the study of how subsets of these factors are linked to each other, examining their unique and interactive effects and exploring how they mediate each other in predicting academic success.

This work has a strong developmental bent, with the expressed goal of documenting age differences and changes in motivation itself and in each of the contributing factors, tracing their mean levels across the span of a student's entire academic career (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield et al., 2006). The resulting picture is clear but not encouraging. Research reveals that

children's interest, enthusiasm, and intrinsic motivation for learning in school deteriorate continuously from their entry into kindergarten until they complete high school (or drop-out), with striking losses during the transitions to middle school and high school (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Gottfried et al., 2001; Harter, 1981; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992; Hedelin & Sjoberg, 1989; Pajares & Valiente, 1999; Roeser, Strobel, & Quihuis, 2002; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Siedman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991; for reviews, see Eccles et al., 1998 and Wigfield et al., 2006). The erosion of engagement is especially severe for boys and for students from low socioeconomic, minority, and immigrant backgrounds (Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Meece & Kurtz-Costes, 2001; Wigfield et al., 2006).

Researchers have succeeded in identifying many of the factors responsible for these developments. They appear to reflect normative age changes (e.g., puberty, cognitive developments, increasing interest in other activities, such as peers and romantic relationships), as well as social institutional decisions (e.g., changes in schools so that they become more bureaucratic, impersonal, and controlling as children get older). The most complete accounts are provided by explanatory theories of "stage-environment fit," in which it is argued that systemic social changes in schools, especially during middle school and high school, are in direct opposition to changing developmental needs of early adolescents and youth for increasing autonomy, self-regulation, and connection (see Eccles, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NRC, 2004; Wigfield et al., 2006, for details).

Implicit in much of the developmental work is the idea that academic motivation is not a reflection of a trait or characteristic of the child, but instead is the product of the interaction among a host of internal and external factors, many of which are changing across time and

development (Dornyei, 2000; Ford, 1992). In other words, it may be useful to consider these elements part of a system, a “motivational system,” which gives rise to the quality of a student’s academic beliefs, values, commitments, and actions in school. The goal of this chapter is to bring into focus a view of the motivational system as dynamic, iterative, and changing systematically over time and with development. To do so, we argue that the constructs of *engagement and disaffection* must be more fully articulated and integrated into theories of motivational development, since they play a critical role in organizing the dynamics of the system.

We make our case in three sections. First, we present a motivational conceptualization, grounded in action theory that depicts engagement and disaffection as a set of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), describing the quality of children’s interactions with academic activities. We identify the defining features of engagement and disaffection, which include behavior, emotion, and cognitive orientation and argue that they represent the outward manifestation of motivation. Second, to support the argument that the constructs of engagement and disaffection are central to an understanding of motivation, we briefly review major theories of motivation and point out that all of them contain corresponding constructs.

In the third section, we show how engagement itself, because of its reciprocal relations with the intrapsychic and interpersonal factors that shape motivation, organizes the motivational system and is responsible for the dynamics of its differential development. We explore how key motivational resources and vulnerabilities may emerge from these dynamics at different points in development, and conclude by enumerating the challenges to studying and promoting the development of the entire motivational system. As subtext throughout this chapter is the conviction that, for motivational psychologists, the explicit inclusion of engagement represents an opportunity to move the field forward: to move beyond theories and research implying that motivation is the product of static (mostly intrapsychic) characteristics, such as self-perceptions

and social cognitions, and toward conceptualizations that have the potential to begin integrating individual difference, process, and developmental views of motivation, eventually leading to studies that explicitly investigate their dynamics.

### *A Motivational Perspective on Engagement and Disaffection*

There is, of course, no single correct definition of *engagement*. In recent years, the concept has emerged as a leitmotif in theories and research attempting to identify the factors that promote academic achievement and resilience, and protect children and adolescents from drop-out and delinquency (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Parks, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Grief, 2003). For educational psychologists, a focus on engagement represents a shift away from research showing that the personal status characteristics of students (such as ethnicity or socioeconomic status) are the primary predictors of their achievement and school completion, and towards the investigation of a set of potentially malleable behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes that schools can target as proximal intervention outcomes (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). As underscored by Sinclair, Christensen, Lehr, and Anderson (2003), “engagement is not conceptualized as an attribute of the student, but rather as a state of being that is highly influenced by contextual factors, such as policies and practices of the school and family or peer interactions” (p. 31).

In fact, enthusiasm about the construct from a variety of research, theoretical, and practice perspectives has resulted in a profusion of overlapping definitions and operationalizations (Fredricks et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2003; Maddox & Prinz, 2003; O’Farrell & Morrison, 2003). Three distinctions have been particularly useful in attempting to clarify conceptualizations (Fredricks et al., 2004; Sinclair et al., 2003). First, is the distinction between *indicators* of engagement and *facilitators* of engagement, in which descriptions of student engagement itself are distinguished from the explanatory factors (such as school discipline practices or

relationships with teachers) that shape its quality. The second distinction is among the components *within* engagement itself; these are often described as behavioral, affective, and cognitive, although no consensus exists about exactly which features of engagement are included in each (Fredricks et al., 2004). The third distinction focuses on the target of engagement, that is, the specification of exactly what the student is engaged or involved *with*. For example, student engagement with academic activities in the classroom has often been singled out as an important target because of its causal role in contributing to high quality learning; it can be differentiated from engagement with other features of school (such as the school as a whole, extra-curricular activities, sports, or self-governance), as well as from involvement in other academic activities (such as museum and library visits, or watching educational television).

*Engagement as a motivational construct.* Of most interest to motivational researchers are conceptualizations of engagement that target the core features of motivation. The study of motivation is most fundamentally concerned with psychological processes that underlie the energy (vigor, intensity, arousal), purpose (initiation, direction, channeling, choice), and durability (persistence, maintenance, endurance, sustenance) of human activity. Hence, a motivational conceptualization of engagement is one that captures the target definitional manifestations of motivation—namely, energized, directed, and sustained action. A core argument of this paper is that “action” is *the* reflection of human motivation, with engagement versus disaffection perhaps the central manifestations of ongoing motivated actions (Wellborn, 1991). That is why constructs of engagement and disaffection should be (and always have been) central to theories of motivation.

*The concept of action.* In asserting that engagement, and “actions” more generally, are a reflection of human motivation and are energized and directed by motivational processes, the term “action” does not refer to its common language usage, as a synonym for “behavior.” Instead,



it refers to the notion of “action schema” from the long European theoretical tradition of action theories (Boesch, 1975; Brandtstädter, 1998; Chapman, 1984; Frese & Sabini, 1985). Compared to behavior, “action” is a more complex and inferential construct: It incorporates behavior (or physical gestures), but also requires simultaneous consideration of individuals’ emotions, attention, and goals. Actions are intentional or goal-directed, and the same behavior is part of different actions if it is deployed in the service of different goals. For example, the behavior of clapping, depending on the intention, can be part of “expressing appreciation,” “a request for silence,” or “getting rid of a mosquito.” By the same token, very different behaviors, if they serve the same goal, can be considered to belong to the same type of action. For example, breathing deeply, counting to ten, and taking a brisk walk can all be behaviors intended to calm oneself and so considered part of the same action category.

Action theories are based on the idea that the natural unit of analysis for conceptualizing transactions between people and their social contexts is not “behavior” but “action.” The main idea is that goals and emotions energize and direct attention and behavior, and it is this amalgam, these actions, that reflect an individual’s motivation. Action theories deal with motivated actions that are not expressed overtly by using the concept of “action tendencies” or “action readiness;” these are defined as desires, urges, or wishes to act, that unless constrained by internal or external regulatory forces, will be expressed as actions. Actions are available to many levels of regulation, from automatized action tendencies to reflective conscious voluntary processes. Importantly, actions (and not behaviors) are the features of individuals to which the context (including the social context) responds.

*Motivational conceptualizations of engagement and disaffection.* From these definitional features of “action” follow the idea that motivational constructs of engagement should include not only behavior, but also attention and emotions; that engagement should describe an

individual's interactions with important features of the environment; and that engagement should include both the initiation of motivated action and its durability in the face of obstacles or difficulties. Hence, for motivational theorists, of most interest are conceptualizations that have at their core definitions of engagement that encompass students' constructive, enthusiastic, willing, cognitively-focused participation in learning activities. From this perspective, the behavioral dimension of engagement includes effort, intensity, persistence, and perseverance in the face of obstacles and difficulties; emotional or affective engagement includes enthusiasm, enjoyment, fun, and satisfaction; and cognitive engagement encompasses attention, focus, "heads-on" participation, and willingness to go beyond what is required.

Motivational conceptualizations also incorporate the opposite of engagement, which is sometimes called disengagement, alienation, helplessness, passivity, or disaffection (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2000). The link to motivation is most clear in theories that refer to this state as "amotivation" (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Brière, Senécal, & Vallières, 1993). All of these constructs include a behavioral component depicting ways in which students' withdraw their participation or involvement in learning activities. Descriptors of such a state include physical withdrawal of effort, such as passivity, lack of exertion, simply going through the motions, or avoidance as well as their mental counterparts, such as inattention, lack of concentration, apathy, or daydreaming. At the same time, emotional reactions are critical to descriptions of disaffection. Examples of relevant emotions would include withdrawal based on anxiety, boredom, shame, frustration, or sadness. Hence, the quality of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation are also core features of the negative pole of engagement. To capture the potential emotional intensity of children's disengagement from academic activities, we prefer the term "disaffection" (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Wellborn, 1991). A schematic of a general conceptualization of engagement and disaffection is presented in Figure 1.

*Engagement and Disaffection as Common Constructs among Motivational Theories*

A central argument of this paper is that major theories of motivation in the field today already include as a target some facet of engagement or disaffection. Perhaps surprisingly, however, these constructs are rarely in the theoretical foreground (Murphy & Alexander, 2000). Although extensive efforts have been devoted to differentiating the factors that impact human motivation, much less attention has been paid to explicitly identifying the factors that *reflect* human motivation. A central argument of this paper is that, despite the fact that each theoretical framework has focused on its own preferred motivational “outcomes,” they can all be considered to be descriptors of the energized and directed state of “engagement,” or more precisely, as a set of durable, energized, and directed actions that can be described as “engaged.” Although a detailed review of each of these theories is outside the scope of this paper (for authoritative reviews, see Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Heckhausen, 1991; Pintrich & Schunk, 2003; Reeve, 2005; Weiner, 1986; or Wigfield, et al., 2006), brief descriptions of the features that correspond most closely to engagement and disaffection are highlighted for a selection of major theories.

*Motivational theories of perceived control and efficacy.* A set of motivational theories, organized around constructs of control, include theories of self-efficacy, perceived competence, control beliefs, and causal attributions (for overviews, see Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Skinner, 1996). These theories have as their goal to predict intentional behavior and affect, most especially action initiation and goal strivings, including active attempts, effort, attention, concentration, and persistence in the face of obstacles, versus passivity, giving up, and withdrawal of effort. For example, the primary outcomes of self-efficacy are initiation of action, expenditure of effort, and performance attempts (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2005), the major behavioral outcomes of attribution theory are effort and persistence (Weiner, 1985, 2005), and the target of theories of perceived control is engagement versus disaffection (Skinner et al., 1998).

These theories also focus on the emotional outcomes of perceived control. For example, causal attributions are considered important predictors of emotions, such as anger and shame (Weiner, 1985, 2005). Low self-efficacy predicts anxiety and resignation (Bandura, 1977, 1997). High perceived control predicts enjoyment, interest, and enthusiasm (Patrick et al., 1993). Although vigorous argument continues about whether the precise causal determinants are efficacy expectations, outcome expectancies, perceived ability, effort attributions, or some combination, consensus seems to exist that the actions encompassed by the construct of engagement are one set of constructs these theories are designed to explain.

*Motivational theories of learned helplessness.* Theories of learned helplessness, focusing originally on expectations about the (lack of) contingency between responses and outcomes (Seligman, 1975) and later on naïve explanations of noncontingency (Abramson et al., 1978), have as a major goal to examine the role of these expectancies and attributions in the creation of motivational deficits, including passivity, apathy, avoidance, giving up, and failure to respond. The emotional consequences of perceived non-contingency, including sadness and hopelessness, are also defining features of the syndrome of learned helplessness (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). The concept of mastery, as the opposite of learned helplessness (Dweck, 1975, 1999), includes effort, persistence, concentration, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. As theories of mastery and learned helplessness have been elaborated to include children's conceptions of ability, their own perceived ability, and their achievement goals (Dweck, 2002; Dweck & Molden, 2005; Nicholls, 1984), the target motivational outcomes have remained the same.

*Motivational theories of achievement expectancies and value.* Expectancy-value models of achievement (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, 2002) focus on the social psychological influences on achievement strivings, most especially effort, choice, and persistence. Much of this work has focused on elaborating and refining the

proximal predictors of motivation, specifically, expectancies for success and task value, to incorporate task-specific beliefs (perceptions of competence, perceptions of task difficulty, goals, and self schema), ability beliefs, and different components of task value (attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost). Although researchers using these models have been particularly interested in predicting individuals' decision-making and choice (e.g., about what activities to pursue, courses to select, careers to seek), they have also examined motivational outcomes related to achievement striving, effort exertion, and persistence.

*Motivational theories of self-determination.* Organismic theories of motivation assume that people are born with the capacity to engage in activities for their own sake in ways that are spontaneous, flexible, creative, joyful, and energized. "Intrinsic motivation" is used as a term to describe both the source of motivation and its manifestation (Deci, 1975; Harter, 1978). The source of motivation is "intrinsic" to the person in the sense that all humans are assumed to possess inborn psychological needs, akin to the physiological needs for food and water, such as the need for autonomy (the need to experience oneself as the source of one's own actions) and the need for competence or effectance (the need to be effective in one's interactions with the environment). Activities in which these needs can be met are intrinsically motivating. The quality of enthusiastic, flexible, joyful involvement is a hallmark of intrinsic motivation.

Research in this tradition examines how the qualities of interpersonal contexts and individual's appraisals influence their intrinsic motivation, for example, how the use of rewards can undermine participation in intrinsically motivating activities or how a controlling orientation can result in rigid or pressured participation in school work (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Recent advances have also investigated the developmental processes by which motivation for activities that was originally extrinsic, or external to the person, can be internalized and transformed, thereby allowing it to become more integrated, autonomous, and

self-determined (Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Researchers seek to explain how people can participate in activities in ways that are autonomous, even when the activities themselves are not intrinsically motivating. A developmental continuum for extrinsically-motivated activities has been hypothesized that progresses from *external* regulation, in which participation is based on demands from authority, rule compliance, or fear of punishment, to *introjected* regulation, in which participation is based on internal esteem-based pressure to act, to *identified* regulation, in which participation is based on one's own personal goals, and, finally, to *integrated* regulation, in which performance is based on values that have been incorporated into the authentic self. The quality of an individual's participation in learning tasks, and especially its emotional tone (e.g., enthusiastic or anxious), can be depicted as engagement.

*Motivational theories of achievement goal orientations.* Theories of goal orientation focus on individuals' reasons and purposes for engaging in academic tasks, that is, what an individual is attempting to accomplish while involved in a learning activity (Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Nicholls, 1984). Although combining the work of several distinct traditions (see Elliot, 2005; Harackiewicz, Baron, Pintrich, Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Pintrich, 2000; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1998), the two primary orientations are: (1) a learning or *mastery* orientation, in which the focus is on learning, mastering new material, and improving one's own skills versus (2) a *performance* orientation, in which the focus is on demonstrating one's superior ability and maximizing favorable evaluations (performance-approach goals) or on protecting one's sense of ability and minimizing negative evaluations (performance-avoidance goals).

Work on goal orientations has not unequivocally established the differential motivational consequences of these different orientations. The general sense is that mastery goals are adaptive and performance-avoidance goals are not. However, consensus does seem to be forming around

the set of consequences that should be considered in determining their effects: In addition to performance and actual learning, of course, they include effort, exertion, persistence in the face of failure, selection of challenging tasks, intrinsic motivation, and emotions such as anxiety, enjoyment, and enthusiasm.

*Individual differences in intrinsic motivation.* Theories of academic intrinsic motivation have also been proposed that focus on individual differences between children (Gottfried, 1985). The target construct concerns enjoyment of school learning characterized by a high degree of task involvement, mastery orientation, curiosity, persistence, and the preference for challenging, difficult, and novel tasks. Longitudinal research on academic intrinsic motivation has shown that it declines in mean level from early childhood to late adolescence at the same time that its interindividual stability (correlations from year to year) increases (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001). Although there are additional defining features of intrinsic motivation, the core features of engagement, namely task involvement and enjoyment, are also considered target outcomes.

*Student engagement in academic work.* The construct of engagement is featured prominently in some attempts to provide a conceptual framework for planning educational reforms. In this work, as summarized by Newmann and colleagues (1992), “engagement stands for active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention” (p. 11). These researchers define “student engagement in academic work as the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 12). Because engagement depicts an “inner quality of concentration and effort to learn...”, “[l]evels of engagement must be estimated or inferred from indirect indicators such as the amount of participation in academic work (attendance, portion of task completed, amount of time spent on academic work), the

intensity of student concentration, the enthusiasm and interest expressed, and the degree of care in completing the work” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 13).

*Motivational theories of participation and identification.* Participation-identification models of school completion and success emphasize “students’ active *participation* in school and classroom activities and a concomitant feeling of *identification* with school” (Finn, 1989, p. 123). Students’ active behavioral involvement in the classroom (e.g., attending, reading, studying, responding to questions), referred to as “level one participation,” is considered the minimal essential ingredient for formal learning to occur; hence, its absence in the early grades is considered a risk factor for school withdrawal. As students continue in school, “level two participation” arises; this involves initiation of interactions with the teacher and the display of enthusiasm by expending more time and effort than required. A third level of participation, including participation in the social, extracurricular, athletic, and self-governance activities of the school, can appear in later years. These forms of participation are considered essential to the development of a sense of identification with school (also known as affiliation, involvement, attachment, commitment, or bonding), defined as an internal emotional state with two features: an internalized conception of belongingness and the valuing of school related goals.

*Process model of student motivation.* Add (Dornyei, 2000; Dornyei & Otto, 1998) ?

*Motivational Systems Theory.* Add (Ford, 1992)

*Self-system model of motivational development.* One of the most explicit conceptualizations of engagement can be found in the Self-System Model of Motivational Development (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985). This integrative motivational model is based on fundamental human needs and assumes that engagement reflects the extent to which a particular context has been able to tap the underlying reservoir of a student's intrinsic motivation and to foster the internalization of motivation for activities that were originally extrinsically



motivated. The model holds that to the extent that the social context in an enterprise (like school) provides participants with warmth, structure, and autonomy support, individuals have opportunities to meet their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, and so will be more engaged with the activities and people in that enterprise (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991). At the same time, the model holds that when social partners and activities in school are experienced by participants as uncaring, unfair, or coercive, individuals needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy will be thwarted. They will begin to feel that they are not welcome in school, and that they are not capable of or interested in reaching the goals that school has set for them. They will become more disaffected and alienated from the people and activities of school over time, eventually withdrawing their participation, and when they are old enough to do so, they will leave, either through absenteeism or by dropping out.

*Summary.* Major models of motivation have a set of target behaviors, emotions, and orientations in common that include action initiation, effort exertion, concentrated attention, and persistence as well as feeling states, such as interest, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. Some theories also include the opposites of these behaviors and emotions, such as passivity, apathy, not trying, giving up, going through the motions, anxiety, frustration, and boredom. Taken together, these actions, which can be referred to as engagement (participation, involvement) and disaffection (alienation), capture an important set of descriptors of energized, directed, and persistent actions (and their opposites), and hence, can be considered core foci of theories of motivation.

#### *Engagement and Disaffection as Key Components of the Motivational System*

Despite apparent differences among the target phenomena of models of motivation, the promise of a common thread, embodied by the constructs of engagement and disaffection, has the potential to allow meaningful comparisons of empirical studies across traditions and to begin to integrate conceptual systems (Ford, 1992). All models of motivation have in common certain

classes of constructs, allowing for the creation of a general framework. All models posit that both interpersonal contexts *and* intrapsychic processes contribute to the quality of engagement. Hence, a general framework for the study of motivation can be organized around the general classes of Context (interpersonal factors), Self (intrapsychic factors), Action (engagement), and Outcomes (learning and development). This general framework can be used to collect from motivational theories the many constructs that depict the kinds of contextual supports that should facilitate engagement and the many intrapsychic processes hypothesized to mediate their effects. A selection of these is included in Figure 2.

*Context.* As can be seen, contextual supports can be provided by a variety of social partners and contexts, including parents, siblings, extended family members, teachers, peers, friends, classmates, neighbors, and other people from the school, neighborhood, and community. The experiences they provide can range from affection, caring, autonomy support, relevance, and respect to hostility, coercion, inconsistency, rejection, and neglect. This general model emphasizes the cumulative effects of these various inputs from multiple social partners, making clear the possibility that contexts can be synergistically positive or negative in their effects, and that inputs from one context may cancel out, compensate for, or amplify the effects of another.

*Self.* Because most major theories of motivation today focus on cognitions as proximal predictors of motivation (Murphy & Alexander, 2000; Pintrich, 2003; Wigfield, et al., 2006), the most elaborated component of the motivational system are cognitive appraisals, beliefs, and self-perceptions, such as goal orientations, perceived control, perceived competence, self-efficacy, learned helplessness, values, autonomy, locus of causality, sense of relatedness, internal working models of attachment figures, and perceptions of social support. These appraisals are key parts of the motivational system, because they shape an individual's experience of their interactions with the social context and indicate the extent to which individuals find the activities or tasks within a

particular enterprise to be meaningful, possible, desirable, or fulfilling their psychological needs. Attitudes, values, and beliefs about the self and activities are among the most important predictors of engagement and disaffection.

*Action.* The constructs of behavioral and emotional engagement and disaffection are central to all motivational models, but they do not necessarily capture the full range of possible motivational targets (Fredricks et al., 2004). Many of the theories described previously emphasize additional components as well: For example, individual difference theories of intrinsic motivation focus on curiosity and preference for challenge (Gottfried, 1985), self-determination theory accentuates flexible and creative versus pressured and controlled involvement (Deci & Ryan, 1985), theories of learned helplessness often underscore the volitional deficits that accompany experiences of non-contingency (Dweck, 1999; Kuhl, 1984), and some educational theories highlight the development of a psychological or “orientation” component that includes identification, commitment, psychological investment, or a feeling of belonging (Finn, 1989; Newmann, 1991).

In fact, at least two entire classes of motivated actions can be identified that are not typically included in definitions of engagement (but see Fredricks et al., 2004): (1) “choice” or selection of tasks, activities, or goals (Eccles, 1993; Eccles et al., 1998; Wigfield, et al., 2006), a key manifestation of the “direction” of action; and (2) “action regulation” or the intentional management and guidance of action in the face of difficulties or challenges, that is studied in the academic domain as self-regulated learning (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994) or academic coping (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994, 1997). In general, regulation reflects the direction of action, but as theorists consider motivation regulation (Wolters, 2003), it may come to encompass energization of action as well. The general motivational model creates a place for additional classes of motivated actions, including choice and initiation of action, ongoing participation, and action

regulation, whether or not they are collectively referred to as engagement and disaffection.

### *The Dynamics of the Motivational System*

A key argument of this chapter is that engagement and disaffection not only reflect motivation but they also act as key players in the motivational system. As can be seen in Figure 2, engagement plays an influential role in three ways: (1) by contributing directly to learning and development; (2) by mediating the effects of individual and contextual factors on short- and long-term outcomes; and (3) by exerting an impact on subsequent contextual (and perhaps even individual) factors. Empirical evidence supports the role of engagement in each of these causal processes.

*Engagement and disaffection as proximal processes.* In their discussion of ecological systems perspectives on development, Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) argue that the primary engine of all development are "proximal processes," which they define as "progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the person's objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment" (p.996). Engagement and disaffection, which describe children's and youth's daily interactions with academic activities, are proximal processes. Over time, they are the process mechanisms through which development occurs in schools—most obviously, cognitive development or learning. It is through sustained high quality participation with academic materials, tasks, teachers, and classmates that children learn in school. For this reason, motivational researchers have begun to focus on the nature of academic work (such as classroom activities, projects, homework) as a critical factor in children's motivation (e.g., Lepper & Cordova, 1992; see Wigfield et al., 2006 for a review). If engagement is to contribute to high quality learning, it needs to be with tasks, activities, and people from whom the student can learn something.

In general, more engaged individuals perform better, and a given individual will perform

better when he or she is more engaged. However, an individual may be highly motivated and actively engaged in a task, and still not perform well. Levels of performance depend on additional features of the individual, task, and context, such as skill, task difficulty, opportunity, and contextual conditions. Nevertheless, for difficult tasks, engagement is likely to be a necessary condition for learning and high levels of performance; and, for all tasks, *lack* of engagement is likely to be a sufficient condition for failure. In keeping with this analysis, research has shown that students' active, enthusiastic, and effortful engagement in learning activities predicts important academic outcomes, including their school grades and achievement test scores (Connell et al., 1995; Jennings, 2003; Jimerson et al., 2003; Ryan, 2000; Skinner et al., 1998; Wentzel, 1993), attendance, retention, and graduation (Connell et al., 1994; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Sinclair et al., 2003), and academic resilience (Finn & Rock, 1997; for a review, see Fredricks et al., 2004).

*Engagement as a mediator of the effects of motivational processes.* A second way in which engagement and disaffection organize the motivational system is that they are the action outcomes of motivational processes, and as such they are critical process mediators in all theories of motivation in school. It is possible to take the extreme position that no intra-psychic process or interpersonal condition will have an effect on learning or development, unless it first has an impact on action or engagement. For example, no matter how a competent child perceives herself to be, these perceptions will not have an impact on that child's development unless they lead the child to constructively engage in activities in ways that produce actual learning. Correspondingly, no matter how autonomy supportive a teacher may be, this support will not contribute to learning and development unless it shapes student engagement. From this reasoning, it follows that all process theories of motivation and all theories of motivational development require an action component, like engagement and disaffection (Dornyei, 2000). A growing body of research has

examined whether engagement and disaffection mediate the effects of self-system processes and contextual conditions on performance and achievement. For the most part, these studies have found the predicted mediational effects (e.g., Connell et al., 1994, 1995; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Patrick et al., 1993; Skinner et al., 1990, 1998).

*Engagement as a contributor to the reactions of social partners.* A third way in which engagement and disaffection organize the motivational system is through their feedback effects on social partners, especially teachers. The central idea is that students' engagement in the classroom is a valued energetic resource which teachers notice and to which they respond with warmth and involvement. In contrast, student disaffection, also salient to teachers, is aversive and tends to elicit teacher criticism or withdrawal of attention. The few studies that have used experimental or longitudinal designs to examine these reciprocal effects have usually found them. Students who are more highly engaged solicit increased attention, autonomy support, and high quality teaching from their teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Reeve, 2005). At the same time, students who are more disaffected tend to lose their teachers' involvement and enthusiasm over time (Furrer, Kelly, & Skinner, 2003; Furrer, Skinner, & Kindermann, 2007; Pelletier & Vallerand, 1996; Schutz & DeCuir, 2002).

For example, kindergarteners who showed more behavioral engagement had closer relationships with their teachers over time than did those who showed less engagement (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Similarly, elementary school students (in grades 3 through 5) with higher behavioral engagement in the fall experienced increases in teacher involvement, structure, and autonomy support over the school year (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Similarly, an observational study of middle schoolers revealed that students who showed more participation in class elicited greater teacher responsiveness (Altermatt, Jovanovic, & Perry, 1998). (See Furrer et al., 2007, for a discussion of the psychological mechanisms proposed to underlie these effects.) It should be

noted that the effects of engagement on social partners seem to extend beyond teachers to include peers. For example, research shows that students who are more engaged select and are selected by more engaged peers (Kindermann, 1993, in press).

#### *Differential Development of the Motivational System*

Taken together, these links form a system organized around cycles, bouts, or episodes of engagement with academic activities in the classroom (Ford, 1992; Skinner, 1991). In these cycles, children who start school “rich” in motivational resources through the quality of their engagement become “richer” as they progress through school, whereas children “poor” in motivational resources through their disengagement with learning activities become progressively “poorer.” Such cycles have been documented most clearly in work on perceived control. For example, in our own research (e.g., Schmitz & Skinner, 1993; Skinner, 1991, 1992, 1995; Skinner et al., 1990, 1998), time series and longitudinal studies have shown that children who evince high levels of efficacy and confidence in their abilities are more likely to engage with learning tasks and cope with difficulties in ways (sometimes referred to as “mastery-oriented”) that allow them to be more successful and to learn more, thereby verifying their initially high perceptions of control. At the same time, students who doubt their capacities are more likely to participate in learning tasks and deal with challenges and obstacles in ways (sometimes referred to as “helpless” or avoidant) that interfere with their success in schoolwork and the development of competencies, thereby cementing their initially low sense of control. Over time, these amplifying loops (or virtuous and vicious cycles) can contribute to patterns of differential motivational development that increase the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” (Dweck, 1999, 2005; Skinner, 1991).

Hence, engagement is a critical construct organizing the development of the entire motivational system (Connell, 1989; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1989, 1993; Marks, 2000;

Newmann, 1991; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Skinner, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998). The arc of an individual's trajectory of engagement over their school career is one indicator of motivational development, and individual differences in these trajectories are strong predictors of withdrawal from and eventual dropout from school (Connell et al., 1994, 1994; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Marks, 2000). Underlying (and creating) these trajectories are the dynamics of motivational development. The support provided by social contexts and partners, through its effects on children's appraisals, shapes their engagement in activities of these enterprises; this engagement has a feed-forward effect on their own learning and eventual development, as well as a feed-back effect on their self-systems and social partners. These motivational cycles, reinforcing and amplifying themselves over time, are responsible for the motivationally "rich" becoming richer over time, and to some extent, explain the ever tightening links among social support, self-perceptions, motivation, performance, and development. The motivational dynamics of engagement and disaffection are pictured in Figure 3; the dynamics that amplify engagement are depicted in the top portion, and those that fuel disaffection in the bottom portion.

*Emergence of motivational resources and liabilities.* These engagement episodes or cycles have the effect of maintaining themselves at a steady state (Ford, 1992) or of creating successive increments and decrements in their components over time, as can be seen in research that documents strong inter-individual stability of motivational processes as well as parallel trajectories of teacher support, children's self-perceptions, engagement, and achievement over the school year and over many years (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002; Kowaleski-Jones & Duncan, 1999; Roeser, Strobel, Quihuis, 2002; Skinner et al., 1998; Trautwein, Lüdtke, Kastens, & Köller, 2006).

Cumulatively, these cycles may create durable energetic resources and liabilities, such as



self-confidence, valuing of specific activities, commitments to people and institutions, or the availability of social supports. Such a dynamic view of motivation is consistent with other systems perspectives. For example, as explained by Martin Ford (1992), “Historically, motivation has been viewed either as a variable state that has little enduring significance (e.g., a state produced by a temporarily aroused drive or a set of environmental contingencies) or as a stable trait representing a relatively fixed part of an individual’s personality (as illustrated by concepts such as need for achievement and locus of control). A major objective of [Motivational Systems Theory; MST] is to add a *developmental orientation* to these tradition perspectives on motivation. Specifically, MST views motivation in terms of dynamic ‘steady state’ patterns that exhibit both stability and variability within boundaries. These motivational patterns are neither fixed nor fleeting; rather they often endure and gain strength over time, while still retaining considerable potential for significant change” (pp. 15-16).

In the long run, engagement also marks a developmental process, that, explains how, over developmental time, students’ energized and focused interactions with the academic activities and social partners become part of a process that shapes the emergence of actual competencies, enduring social relationships, the construction of personal identities, and eventually the kind of commitment to academic goals and identification with school (Finn, 1989; Roeser et al., 2006; Voelkl, 1997) that allows children to maintain participation in the face of difficulty and adversity and to take responsibility for their own learning. Motivational researchers have documented the role of some of these resources and vulnerabilities in early adolescence, especially during school transitions (see Wigfield et al., 2006 for a review). However, we know relatively little about their emergence, in terms of the timing of their appearance, their earlier forms, or the history of experiences that give rise to them. Detailed programs of research on the development of goals (Dweck, 2002), values (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 2002), perceived control (Skinner et al, 1998),

and self-regulated learning (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002) may provide guidance for research attempting to explore qualitative developmental changes in other key assets, such as a sense of solidarity, ownership, and identity within the academic community. These motivational resources, although they likely emerge at successive ages, can all be seen as protective factors, fostering academic coping and resilience.

*Challenges to Studying and Promoting the Entire Motivational System*

A focus on motivational development makes clear that research and interventions must attempt to examine and then take into consideration the dynamic interactions within engagement and between engagement and the explanatory forces (such as school discipline practices or relationships with teachers) that shape its quality over time, and that also shape the emergence of other important motivational outcomes (such as identification with school or taking responsibility for one's own learning) that arise at later developmental levels. Although this general motivational framework can be very useful in guiding research and interventions focused on engagement, it also presents many challenges. We enumerate five.

*Rich conceptualizations of engagement and disaffection.* A major challenge to researchers and practitioners is to realize the full richness promised by the constructs of engagement and disaffection. Motivational conceptualizations, attempting to capture energized and directed action, suggest that the quality of children's ongoing participation in academic tasks and activities encompasses multiple components, including behavior, emotion, and cognitive orientation. A time component is also implied, including choice of activities, initiation of involvement, ongoing participation, and responses to obstacles and difficulties.

Such multidimensional constructs raise thorny conceptual and measurement issues (see O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003, for a list of examples). The construction of explicitly multi-dimensional assessments of engagement and disaffection (Appleton et al., 2006; Skinner et al.,

2007; Wellborn, 1991), including ones with hierarchical structures, are needed to clarify and elaborate these constructs. Moreover, in identifying patterns of action, the use of both variable-centered and person-centered approaches (e.g., Patrick et al., 1993; Roeser et al., 2002) are useful strategies. That is to say, combinations of dimensions may be needed to fully capture the presentation of engagement and disaffection in individual students. For example, a student who is anxiously trying hard has a different quality of engagement from one who is enthusiastically involved in a task (e.g., Patrick et al., 1993). Or a student who is behaviorally passive because of boredom has a different quality of engagement than a disengaged student who is frustrated and angry (e.g., Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995). Conceptualizations and assessments may move away from variables and toward typologies or prototypes of engagement (e.g., Connell & Welborn, 1991; Wellborn, 1991).

For practitioners and interventionists, a complex construct like engagement and disaffection also has benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, it places more demands on proposed improvements and on teachers, who will need to focus on multiple dimensions of students' participation in class, including ones that are not as obvious as behavioral engagement and disaffection, such as engaged and disaffected emotions and cognitive orientations, and they will need to monitor teacher's own reactions to students as well as changes in both over time. On the other hand, a full conceptualization of engagement identifies a "worthy adversary," that is, a motivational outcome worth working toward, and it also specifies a motivational resource that must be safe-guarded when improvements in other outcomes (e.g., cognitive or social) are the target. No matter what the gains, if teaching practices or intervention efforts undermine any of the features of engagement or foster disaffection, they will not have a lasting positive effect.

*Distinguishing and integrating constructs from different motivational theories.* The identification of a common construct that taps key motivational processes has a huge potential

benefit to the motivational area: In principle, it allows theorists to compare, contrast, and begin to integrate major models of motivation, that for too long have occupied separate territories (Ford, 1992). However, it will be a slow and challenging process. As first steps, researchers can examine the effects of a broad range of motivational factors (both interpersonal or individual) on a common set of important motivational processes, thus allowing for the detection of factors that have similar patterns of effects and the discovery of factors that boost one aspect of engagement (e.g., persistence) while undermining another (e.g., enjoyment). However, progress will also involve theoretical disputes and dueling structural analyses, to determine which intrapsychic processes are part of the same self-systems (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 1989; Skinner, 1996) and how many of the supports provided by teachers or parents should be differentiated (e.g., Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005).

*Can engagement be used as a diagnostic tool?* Patterns of engagement and disaffection, if they are core indicators of student motivation, may also have the potential to provide teachers and parents a window into the contextual and intrapsychic obstacles students are dealing with as they tackle school related activities (Furrer et al., 2003). However, it will be a major challenge to theorists and researchers to provide an empirical map detailed enough to justify its use in the field. A few examples may illustrate the potential of this approach: If a child shows a pattern of disaffection characterized by low participation and boredom, and the strongest predictor of such behaviors and emotions is a lack of autonomy, then teachers who see these patterns in the classroom may consider the antidote of more autonomy support-- that is providing students with more interesting academic tasks, more choices in selecting activities or approaches, or activities in which the relevance to their daily lives is more apparent (Reeve et al., 1999).

In contrast, patterns of disaffection in which anxiety is the dominant emotion may point to a sense of helplessness and incompetence as a primary source. Research on the facilitators of a

sense of control, in turn, suggest that provision of involvement and structure, including information about strategies and support for enacting them, may begin to rebuild self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Skinner et al., 1998). Research on the psychological and interpersonal predictors of other common patterns, such as passive-withdrawn or disruptive disaffection (Finn et al., 1995; Roeser, Strobel, & Quihuis, 2002), may likewise reveal both the self-perceptions that likely support them and the teacher and parent responses that may be effective in counteracting them. Studies investigating the progression of qualitatively different patterns of engagement and disaffection may eventually reveal warning signs early enough to allow preventative actions.

*Capturing process, episodes, and dynamics.* A major challenge to researchers and interventionists will be to explore the directions of effects in process models and to detect feedback loops (Dornyei, 2000; Ford, 1992). To accomplish this, of course, studies will need to include markers of change over time. So far, longitudinal, time series, and experimental studies suggest that influence flows in both directions. In general, research suggests that amplifying loops are the most typical, reinforcing virtuous or vicious cycles of motivation and achievement. Additional research is needed which documents teachers' and parents' typical reactions to student engagement and disaffection, at different ages and over different time windows. Of greatest interest would be studies which help to identify the conditions under which disaffection is met with *compensatory* teacher and parent reactions that lead students back toward engagement. In general, the intelligent inclusion of time, whether real-time, episodic time, or developmental time, is in its infancy in research on motivation (Ford, 1992), just like it is in the field of psychology more generally (Turkewitz & Devenny, 1993). Process models (Dornyei, 2000; Heckhausen, 1991) and dynamic systems theories of motivation (Ford, 1992) will provide some initial guidelines for these endeavors.

*What is developing in motivational development?* For motivational researchers, it will be a

major challenge to examine how differential motivational dynamics give rise, not just to individual differences in trajectories of engagement, but to qualitative shifts in important internal motivational resources. As children go through the level of concrete operational thought between about third to fifth grades, they may be accumulating experiences and beliefs that will crystallize and consolidate as they enter middle school and beyond. Models of participation and identification are one example of what may be at stake for children motivationally during these transitions (e.g., Finn, 1989). These models hold that children's participation at school can lead them to identify with its values and goals, and to internalize the sense that they belong there. Other developmental models emphasize the eventual emergence of a sense of pride, ownership, and responsibility for one's own school performance (Wolters, 2003), the capacity and desire to become a self-regulated learner (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994), or the acquisition of a repertoire of constructive strategies for coping with challenging learning activities and the inevitable setbacks and failures (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994, 1997).

These models also highlight what is at risk for students who are not fully engaged in learning or who lose that engagement during the early school years. They paint a picture of disaffection that leads to withdrawal or disruptive classroom behavior, which if unchecked leads to the kinds of disidentification with school, resistance to taking responsibility, and opposition to the values and goals of schooling, that eventually promises absenteeism, academic failure, and drop-out from school. These trajectories of escalating disaffection and eventual drop-out are much too familiar to researchers and educators, and as previously mentioned, are especially prevalent among low income, ethnic minority, and immigrant groups (Wigfield et al., 2006).

### *Conclusion*

Enthusiasm about “engagement” has led researchers and practitioners to load up the idea with a variety of meanings and messages. It has come to symbolize the notion that neither

children's academic achievement nor their chances of completing high school are predetermined by their racial, economic, or social status, but instead depend on the extent to which teachers and educational institutions, along with parents and communities, can make schools a welcoming place where students *want* to come and, when present, where they are willing and able to do the hard work that is learning. It allows us to describe what success looks like: enthusiastic hard work, concentration, determination in the face of difficulty, fun. The idea of engagement focuses researchers and practitioners on relationships and social interactions, between the student and teachers, principal, classmates, friends, family members, and importantly, the academic activities themselves, and on the disciplinary practices and organizational structures that shape them.

We suggest that engagement and disaffection, because they mediate the effects of individual and interpersonal factors, because they directly influence learning and performance, and because they shape reactions from the social context, are central players in the dynamics of motivational development. Taken together, these feedforward and feedback effects place engagement at the heart of motivational cycles that amplify initial individual differences in such a way that the motivationally "rich" get "richer" and the motivationally "poor" get "poorer" as students progress through their academic careers. Cumulatively, such episodes give rise, not only to learning, but also to bonding, commitments, and identifications that function as social glue, allowing children to stay engaged when the going gets rough and promoting academic resilience and self-regulated learning and, eventually, allowing children and youth to take responsibility for their own academic progress and development.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. A motivational conceptualization of engagement and disaffection.

Figure 2. A general process model of motivation that distinguishes the social contexts and self-systems that facilitate and undermine motivation from engagement vs. disaffection and other indicators of motivated action, such as selection and self-regulation, and developmental outcomes.

Figure 3. The motivational dynamics of engagement and disaffection. The dynamics that amplify engagement are depicted in the top portion, and those that fuel disaffection are depicted in the bottom portion.

	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Disaffection</b>
<b>Behavior-</b> Initiation Ongoing participation Re-engagement	Action initiation Effort Exertion Working hard Attempts Persistence Intensity Focus Attention Concentration Absorption Involvement	Passivity Giving up Withdrawal Restlessness Half-hearted Unfocused Inattentive Distracted Mentally disengaged Burned out Unprepared Absent
<b>Emotion-</b> Initiation Ongoing participation Re-engagement	Enthusiasm Interest Enjoyment Satisfaction Pride Vitality Zest	Boredom Disinterest Frustration/anger Sadness Worry/anxiety Shame Self-blame
<b>Orientation-</b> Initiation Ongoing participation Re-engagement	Purposeful Approach Goal strivings Strategy search Willing participation Preference for challenge Mastery Follow-through, care Thoroughness	Aimless Helpless Resigned Unwilling Opposition Avoidance Apathy Hopeless Pressured

**CONTEXT → SELF → ACTION → OUTCOMES**



