

STUDENT' S ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Students' Engagement in School has been the focus of debate concerning academic success and school dropout, and pointed out as a mean to address the problems affecting our schools and their students, not only for having value in itself, but also for being an important mediator between several academic variables. This paper reviews the research and literature on this concept and its relations with personal and contextual variables, as well as with academic performance, with the aim of summarizing the main relationships found. Literature presents a significant number of studies which sustain that personal variables, such as self-efficacy and self-concept, as well as contextual - peers, school, family- are related with school engagement. The adoption of mastery goals, for instance, has a positive impact on school, as they are related with the use of cognitive and self-regulatory strategies by students. Positive relationships with peers, teachers support and the quality of family relations are associated with higher levels of engagement and academic performance, while negative experiences, such as bullying, are related with educational difficulties. Following this, we reflect about the relevance of studying engagement in school, in the context of widespread financial crisis, and emphasize the need to rethink educational institutions considering the paradigmatic changes that currently occur.

Keywords: Students' Engagement in School, Personal Variables, Contextual Variables, Academic Outcomes, Intervention

1 STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL: THE CONCEPT IN THE LITERATURE

This paper presents a literature review on the concept of *Students' Engagement in School*, which, following previous works (Veiga et al., 2012) [1], we define as the centripetal experience of bonding the student to the school, in specific dimensions, such as cognitive, affective, behavioral and agency (the student as an agent of action). Students' Engagement in School has been operationalized so as to value the extent to which students are committed to school and motivated to learn (Simon-Morton & Chen, 2009; Veiga et al., 2012) [2] [1]. Overall, there is an agreement concerning its multidimensional nature, and is often presented as a meta-construct, with two to four dimensions (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012) [3].

A substantial number of references in this domain express engagement in three types of dynamically related dimensions: cognitions, emotions, and behaviours (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003) [4] [5] [6]. The cognitive dimension refers to the students' personal investment (Ainley, 1993) [7], as well as learning approaches and self-regulatory strategies (Fredricks et al., 2004) [4], and is operationalized as perceptions and beliefs about the self, school and colleagues, also including self-efficacy strategies, motivations and academic aspirations (Jimerson et al., 2003) [6]. The emotional dimension – or psychological, another denomination preferred by authors such as Appleton et al. (2008) [8], Glanville and Wildhagen (2007) [5], Harris (2008) [9], and Marks (2000) [10] – is related to the sense of identification with school