Motivation and engagement

Students who are motivated by what they learn at school engage naturally in the classroom activities and tasks they are assigned. They participate actively in class (e.g., taking notes, speaking, participating in group work), do the assignments and homework teachers give them, spend time on learning activities, and put enough effort into their work to succeed. This investment is necessary to learn, succeed, and graduate. However, students who lack motivation tend to adopt behaviours that are incompatible with learning and success at school, behaviours such as passiveness, lack of effort, and rushed work, which can compromise their schooling.

What the research says

Studies on motivation and self-concept have clearly shown that these two factors are linked to success in school. In her research, Bouffard showed that a sense of self-efficacy, strongly associated with motivation, is the top determinant of academic performance, above even intellect.[1] Students' perceptions of their control and abilities are the most powerful determinants of success in school.

Most researchers today believe that students' most important sources of motivation are rooted in their perception of their ability to carry out an activity and their own control over how it is carried out.

In his book on motivation at school, Viau states that motivation is a dynamic concept that has its origins in students' perception of themselves and their environment, one that induces them to select an activity, engage in it, and work at it until the end goal has been reached.[2] While motivation is one of the most determinant factors in school success, it is also sensitive to environmental conditions and tends to decline as students progress through the education system. The move from elementary to high school is the most difficult transition, and this is when the decline in motivation appears most prominent.

Data collected from about 5,000 elementary and high school students by Bouffard's research team show that as students get older, their sense of self-efficacy declines and becomes a better predictor of school performance than their actual potential.[3]

COMMITMENT

For more information
Motivation, Support and Evaluation
http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PSG/recherche_evaluation/MotivationSoutienEvaluation_ClesReussteEleves_a.pdf
Motivation scolaire
http://rire.ctreq.qc.ca/thematiques/motivation-scolaire/

[1] La Clé de la Motivation Scolaire, a report featuring Ms. Bouffard in the Télé-Québec program *Le Code Chastenay:* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsXtXkBJzIA.
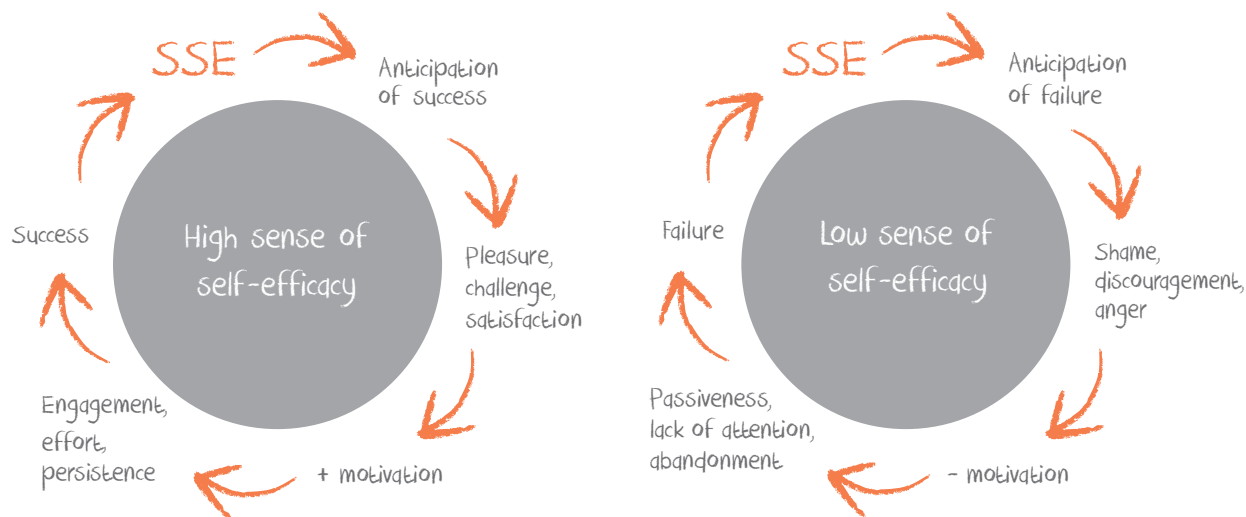[2] R. Viau (1994), *La motivation en contexte scolaire*, Montréal: Éditions du Renouveau Pédagogique.
[3] T. Bouffard, M. Brodeur and C. Vezeau (2005), La motivation des élèves au primaire : un élément essentiel de la réussite scolaire, research data, SQRSC. Downloaded at: http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PSG/recherche_evaluation/prprsFiche1.pdf

Taking effective action

Motivation is related to anticipation. Students anticipate the success or failure of an action; they set goals and find means of achieving things that hold value for them. Students are more interested and show greater engagement if the action is meaningful and offers a challenge while still being achievable. Motivation and behaviour regulation thus stem from a perception of the future; in other words, you are more likely to succeed if you believe you can succeed. So it is vital that parents and people working with youth believe that students can succeed and provide activities that are compatible with their abilities.

SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY (SSE)[1]

SSE → Anticipation of success
High sense of self-efficacy
Pleasure, challenge, satisfaction
+ motivation
Engagement, effort, persistence
Success

SSE → Anticipation of failure
Low sense of self-efficacy
Shame, discouragement, anger
− motivation
Passiveness, lack of attention, abandonment
Failure

Studies of parental attitudes that promote student motivation for school have primarily concluded that the best way for parents to motivate their children is to have high but realistic expectations and demands, believe in their abilities, create a climate of support and human warmth, and be models of learning by creating situations that allow their children to watch them learn. Verbal and non-verbal cues that may seem inconsequential, such as making disparaging remarks about their children's abilities or about the school and its teachers, can have negative consequences on children's motivation.

Avenues for effective action related to motivation and engagement

Put in place activities that guide parents in supporting their children's motivation:
- to foster the continuation or development of meaningful relationships with adults at home,
- to help youth set motivational goals and objectives and to encourage their efforts by maintaining high expectations (steps to take, adaptation of goals, choices, etc.),
- to provide positive and regular feedback on young people's performance and achievements (reinforcement, praise, encouragement, etc.).

Implement screening and support programs at school and in the community that focus on student motivation:
- to ensure that youth who lack in motivation are individually monitored ("hall workers", brainstorming or orientation workshops, etc.),
- to promote the development of meaningful relationships with adults at the school and in the community and with peers (tutoring, mentoring, pairing, employers, etc.),
- to organize activities that youth find attractive and that offer them realistic challenges (contests, artistic presentations, sports, creative activities, extracurricular activities, recognition events, hands-on projects, etc.).

Motivation and engagement

[1] Presentation by Thérèse Bouffard (2010–2011), Le sentiment d'efficacité de l'élève: http://www.crevale.org/upload/File/2011-12/CREVALE_2010-11_TBouffard.PDF

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