

Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana
Dipartimento formazione e apprendimento
Centro competenze innovazione e ricerca sui sistemi educativi

SUPSI

Well-being in Education Systems

Conference Abstract Book
Locarno 2019

Luciana Castelli, Jenny Marcionetti,
Andrea Plata and Alice Ambrosetti (Eds.)

Well-being in Education Systems

Conference Abstract Book, Locarno 2019

What are the functions of positive emotions in fostering school engagement in primary school (and how to deal with it)?

Philippe Gay¹, Nicolas Bressoud¹, Elena Lucciarini¹, Jean-Marc Gomez¹, Jérôme Rime¹ and Andrea C. Samson²

¹ Haute Ecole Pédagogique du Valais

² Université de Fribourg

Introduction

The main goal of teachers is without doubt helping students to learn and succeed. Previous research has shown that negative (sadness, frustration) as well as positive (happiness, pride) emotions are frequent in the school context and affect school engagement, which plays a key role in successful learning.

It is well established that school engagement is particularly important for achievement (e.g., Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012; Pietarinen, Soini, & Pyhältö, 2014). It is also associated with academic motivation and prevents school dropout (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Engagement is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of actions, emotions and thoughts. The most recent attempt to develop a comprehensive approach of this concept has empirically distinguished three dimensions in school engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004): behavioural, emotional and cognitive.

Behavioural engagement refers to behaviours such as following the school and the class rules (e.g. not skipping school or getting into trouble, homework), making effort and persisting in academic achievement (e.g., focusing and asking questions) and non-academic school-related activities (e.g., participation in athletics or school governance).

Emotional engagement relates to students' positive and negative reactions in the classroom; these reactions (e.g., interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, anxiety) are supposed to engage or disengage students.

Finally, cognitive engagement focuses on psychological investment in learning, a desire to go beyond the requirements of the teacher, and a preference for challenge.

Regarding the factors related to engagement, Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel, Barchfeld, and Perry (2011) found higher correlations between intrinsic motivation (including school engagement) and positive emotions than between intrinsic motivation and negative emotions. Similarly, Malmivuori (2001) showed that perseverance is almost independent from anxiety but strongly correlated with positive emotions. Therefore, positive emotions in the classroom seem to play a more important contribution to students' engagement than the inhibitory role of anxiety.

In an attempt to clarify the underlying mechanisms of engagement, some researchers proposed that positive emotions lead students to focus more on the task (Meinhardt & Pekrun, 2003) and increase perseverance (Rodríguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996). Moreover, a virtuous circle can be described. Positive attitudes imply better results, which in turn leads students to perceive their learning even more positively (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014). Research has also shown that positive emotions can broaden the scope of attention (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Indeed, positive emotions play a role in complex problem-solving skills by helping to approach the learning situation with divergent and creative solutions (Fredrickson, 2001).

Interestingly, positive emotions are essential to psychological well-being (Seligman, 2011; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Ryff, 1989) as defined by Diener et al. (1999) as “a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (p. 277). Thus, what some people call a good life may be a life where good (positive) experiences play an important role and at school, this may be characterized by pleasant work as well as good relationships with classmates and teachers. We propose to use the term positive feelings (of students) to more precisely define the subjective emotional experience component of emotion and thus avoid considering other aspects of emotions such as physiological changes (Scherer, 2005).

In this context, positive feelings related to school and teachers as well as more general well-being and positive emotions play a crucial role in school engagement. However, it is important to clarify what kind of positive feelings and in which context they can foster school engagement. In this context, it could be very helpful for teachers to better know how and when feeling good can have an impact on their students’ engagements.

Research question and aims

The aim of this study is to better understand which types of positive feelings are related to engagement with pupils between 8 and 12 years in the school context. Insight into these associations may lead to promotion of good practices on what a teacher can do to increase students’ engagement, which is known for predicting academic achievement.

Methodology and methods

A total of 146 children (66 females) between 8 and 12 years old ($m=9.61$, $sd=1.15$) completed the following questionnaires:

- The KidScreen (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008) with the five subscales Physical Well-Being (4 items, $\alpha=.63$), Psychological Well-Being (3 items, $\alpha=.55$), Peers and Social Support (4 items, $\alpha=.82$), School Environment (4 items, $\alpha=.80$) and social acceptance (3 items, $\alpha=.77$).
- The school engagement measure (SEM; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2005; French validation: Bernet, Karsenti, & Roy, 2014) with three dimensions: behavioural engagement (4 items, $\alpha=.61$), emotional engagement (6 items, $\alpha=.81$) and cognitive engagement (7 items, $\alpha=.71$).

Analyses and results

Correlational analyses revealed that both school environment’s positive feelings and physical well-being are positively related to the three dimensions of school engagement. Psycho-

logical well-being is positively related to behavioral and affective engagement, and social support is positively related to affective engagement.

Multiple regression analyses including gender, age and the five dimensions of the KidScreen as independent variables revealed the following significant results, each presented by order of magnitude of the standardized beta (β):

- Behavioural engagement was predicted by School Environment ($\beta = .487$; $p < .001$), physical well-being ($\beta = .199$; $p < .05$) and gender ($\beta = -.158$; $p < .05$; indicating that girls obtained higher scores than boys).
- Emotional engagement was predicted by School Environment ($\beta = .585$; $p < .001$).
- Cognitive engagement was predicted by School Environment ($\beta = .289$; $p < .001$) and age ($\beta = -.183$; $p < .001$).

Discussion

In accordance with previous results and suggestions, the present study emphasizes that positive feelings about school and teachers are important to promote students' engagement, which could ultimately lead to learning and achievement. The results showed that feeling good in school and getting along with teachers are related to the three forms of school engagement whereas physical well-being is also a significant predictor of behavioural engagement.

While psychological well-being is positively correlated with affective and behavioural engagement, these relations disappear when other dimensions of the kidscreen are controlled for. This indicates that a positive feeling specifically related to school context is more important than general dimensions of well-being to improve these two forms of engagement.

Several approaches have shown to be efficient at adaptively increasing positive emotions and well-being in school as well as to developing a positive climate in the classroom and foster students' academic performance (for a review, see e.g., Waters, 2011). For instance, interventions in positive psychology, such as gratitude, mindfulness or strengths-based approaches could be of interest. In this context, the present study may lead to such projects' implementation in schools underlining that interventions addressing the positive climate are crucial not only for feeling good but also for academic achievement.

Limitations and perspectives

Despite promising results, several limitations should be mentioned. The correlational nature of the present study precludes any causal inferences about the relations; the use of questionnaires may have different biases; finally, the dimensions of positive emotions and well-being should be more developed and with measurement of fine-grained. Thus, future studies should use a longitudinal design, direct observations (e.g., dropout or perseverance in different tasks for engagement) as well as distinguishing different forms of positive and negative school climates (e.g., authoritarian vs democratic).

In conclusion, giving time to positive emotions and school climate is important if teachers aim to increase school engagement in their pupils.

References

- Bernet, E., Karsenti, T., & Roy, N. (2014). Mesure de l'engagement scolaire. Engagement scolaire en milieux défavorisés: traduction et validation exploratoire d'une échelle de mesure. *Educational Journal of the University of Patras Unesco Chair*, 1(1), 20–33.
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 276–302.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218–226.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Branigan, C. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition & Emotion*, 19(3), 313–332. doi:10.1080/02699930441000238
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P., Friedel, J., & Paris, A. (2005). School Engagement. In K. A. Moore & L. H. Lippman (Eds.), *What do children need to flourish: Conceptualizing and measuring indicators of positive development* (pp. 305–321). New-York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of educational research*, 74(1), 59–109.
- Hagenauer, G., & Hascher, T. (2014). Early adolescents' enjoyment experienced in learning situations at school and its relation to student achievement. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 2(2), 20–30. doi:10.11114/jets.v2i2.254
- Malmivuori, M. L. (2001). *The dynamics of affect, cognition, and social environment in the regulation of personal learning processes: The case of mathematics* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki, Finland). Retrieved from <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/19814/thedynam.pdf?sequence=2>
- Meinhardt, J., & Pekrun, R. (2003). Attentional resource allocation to emotional events: An ERP study. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17(3), 477–500. doi:10.1080/02699930244000039
- Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Frenzel, A. C., Barchfeld, P., & Perry, R. P. (2011). Measuring emotions in students' learning and performance: The Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ). *Contemporary educational psychology*, 36(1), 36–48.
- Pekrun, R., & Linnenbrink-Garcia, L. (2012). Academic emotions and student engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 259–282). New York, NY: Springer.
- Pietarinen, J., Soini, T., & Pyhältö, K. (2014). Students' emotional and cognitive engagement as the determinants of well-being and achievement in school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 67, 40–51. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2014.05.001
- Ravens-Sieberer, U., Gosch, A., Rajmil, L., Erhart, M., Bruil, J., Power, M., ... Phillips, K. (2008). The KIDSCREEN-52 quality of life measure for children and adolescents: Psychometric results from a cross-cultural survey in 13 European countries. *Value in Health*, 11(4), 645–658.
- Rodríguez, J. I., Plax, T. G., & Kearney, P. (1996). Clarifying the relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy and student cognitive learning: Affective learning as the central causal mediator. *Communication education*, 45(4), 293–305. doi:10.1080/03634529609379059
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is Everything, or Is It? Exploration on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 1069–1081. doi:10.1037/034645
- Scherer, K. R. (2005). What are emotions? And how can they be measured? *Social science information*, 44, 695–729. doi:10.1177/0539018405058216
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28, 75-90. doi:10.1375/aedp.28.2.75

This book collects the contributions presented at the 2nd International Conference on Well-being in Education Systems, held in Locarno on 12-13-14 November 2019 and organized by the *Competence centre for Innovation and Research on Education Systems* (CIRSE). The 49 contributions are research papers, theoretical dissertations and field interventions of academic researchers and practitioners from 10 countries around the world. They cover four areas: student well-being, burnout and teacher well-being, well-being promotion and well-being and academic achievement.

Scientific committee of the 2nd International Conference on Well-being in Education Systems

- **Antonella Delle Fave**, Università degli Studi di Milano
- **Franco Fraccaroli**, Università degli Studi di Trento
- **Fabian Gander**, Universität Zürich
- **Michel Janosz**, Université de Montréal
- **Tage S. Kristensen**, Task-consult, Denmark
- **Doris Kunz-Heim**, Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz
- **Christian Maggiori**, Haute école spécialisée de Suisse occidentale
- **Jonas Masdonati**, Université de Lausanne
- **Laura Nota**, Università degli Studi di Padova
- **Lindsay G. Oades**, University of Melbourne
- **Micheal Pluess**, Queen Mary University of London
- **Barbara Poggio**, Università degli studi di Trento
- **Sue Roffey**, Exeter and Western Sydney Universities
- **Jérôme Rossier**, Université de Lausanne
- **Kimberly Schoenert-Reichl**, University of British Columbia
- **Lisa Wagner**, Universität Zürich

Luciana Castelli, PhD in Human Interactions, is senior lecturer and researcher at the Competence centre for Innovation and Research on Education Systems (CIRSE) of the Department of Education and Learning, SUPSI. Her research interests lie in the area of teacher well-being, stress and burnout, pre-adolescents' well-being, and the risk of drop-out and burnout during professional training for teachers.

Jenny Marcionetti, PhD in Psychology is senior lecturer and researcher at the Competence centre for Innovation and Research on Education Systems (CIRSE) of the Department of Education and Learning, SUPSI. Her research interests lie in particular in education and work transitions and in factors associated with adolescents' school achievement, career indecision, and life satisfaction.

Andrea Plata, Master in Political Science, is lecturer and researcher at the Competence centre for Innovation and Research on Education Systems (CIRSE) of the Department of Education and Learning, SUPSI. His main research interests are school climate, education policy and civic and citizenship education.

Alice Ambrosetti, Master in Economics, is researcher at the Competence centre for Innovation and Research on Education Systems (CIRSE) of the Department of Education and Learning, SUPSI. Her research activities mainly relates to standardized assessments, at national and international level. She is also interested in the factors associated with students' outcomes, with a special focus on contextual factors.

Hogrefe Publishing Group

Göttingen • Berne • Vienna • Oxford
Boston • Paris • Amsterdam • Prague
Florence • Copenhagen • Stockholm
Helsinki • São Paulo • Madrid • Lisbon

www.hogrefe.com

ISBN 978-88-98542-25-3