

MUN05400 It's All About MeE: A Motivation and Engagement Framework

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This paper presents a framework that attempts to reconcile both psychological and sociological understandings surrounding student motivation and engagement. The MeE framework draws on research in the psychology of education undertaken by Martin (2001, 2002, 2003b, 2005) and in the sociology of education by the UWS Fair Go Project (2004a, 2004b). In bringing together these two projects, the framework looks to overcome the inherent limitations in both psychological (failing to account for the wider dimensions of social power) and sociological (failing to fully understand the complexity of the individual) approaches. The paper will first describe the theoretical underpinnings and principles of the MeE Framework. It will then explore its practical possibilities as a heuristic that can provide educators with a tool to analyse schools and classrooms in order to make productive interventions aimed at encouraging students to develop powerful and enduring relationships with education.

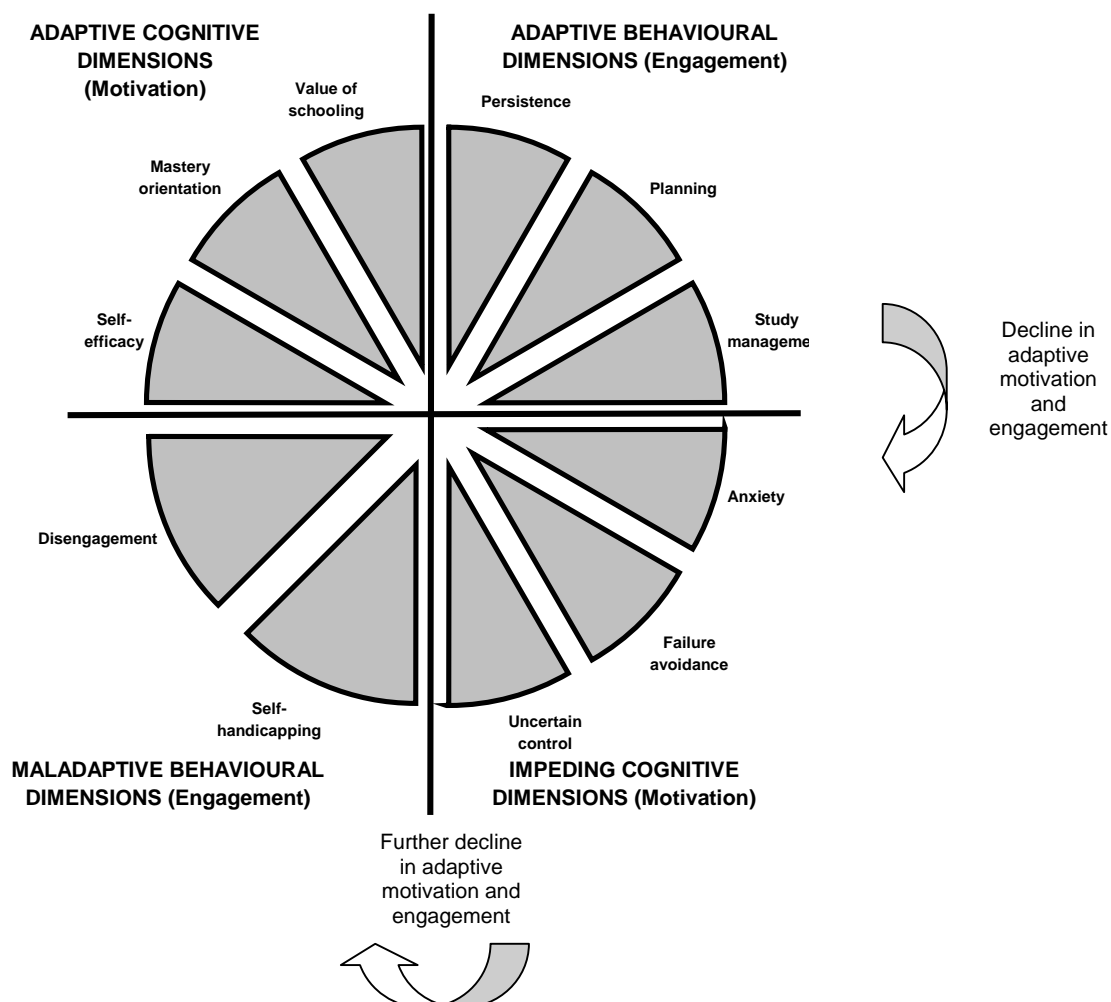
You Say Motivation, I Say Engagement

There is a complexity surrounding the thoughts, feelings and actions of school students that requires educators to think creatively and widely across paradigmatic divides. Such a process would arguably involve a reconciliation of enduring tensions between the psychology and the sociology of education. These tensions were highlighted by Furlong (1991) in his appeal for the reconstruction of theoretical perspectives around disaffected school pupils. In short, it is argued that psychologists hardly ever get to the dimensions of social power affecting students' responses. On the other hand, there is a view that sociologists invariably suffer from a denial that there are important psychological questions to pose and answer in any social exploration of the relationship between students and education, "particularly at an emotional level" (Furlong, 1991, p.295). These respective weaknesses were previously highlighted in a discussion (Munns, 2004a) that attempted to draw distinctions between a psychological view of student motivation (individual processes), and sociological perspectives on student engagement (social processes and relationships involving reciprocity and mutual exchange). This paper attempts to extend and, along the way, resolve some of the contradictions thrown up by that discussion by bringing together research in the psychology of education and the sociology of education by presenting a motivation and engagement framework. This framework situates motivation and engagement in a harmonised tension, and in so doing addresses Furlong's dilemma (above) by utilising the combined strengths of the psychological and sociological approaches. The strength of the psychological focus is in the understanding of the factors that impact on individual student responses and energies. A sociological strength is found within an examination of the connections between classroom processes and discourses and the wider dimensions of social power. Each of these is now discussed before the framework is presented.

What Drives or Impedes the Individual? A Psychological Perspective

The psychological perspective is informed by Martin's *Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel* (Figure 1). Martin (2001, 2002, 2003b, 2005) proposes and theoretically justifies a distinction between motivation and engagement. He notes that motivation can be conceptualised as students' cognitive orientations towards themselves, school, and schoolwork (Martin, 2002). On the other hand "engagement" can be defined as the behaviours that follow from these cognitive orientations. In this way Martin brings together motivation and engagement in a complementary but non-overlapping fashion as shown in the following figure.

Figure 1 – Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel (adapted from Martin, 2003a)



The upper segments of the wheel show the motivating thoughts (self-efficacy [Bandura, 1997], mastery-orientation [Elliot & Dweck, 1998] and value of schooling [Wigfield, 1994]) that influence engaging adaptations (persistence, planning, study management [Zimmerman, 2001]). The lower segments point to the impeding thoughts (anxiety, failure avoidance, uncertain control [Sarason & Sarason, 1990]) that lead to maladaptive behaviours (self-handicapping and disengagement [Covington, 1992]). The Wheel provides an important way of understanding the complex individual ways that students construct their classroom relationships in positive and negative ways.

The strength of the Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel is that it can be easily communicated by practitioners to students and following from this, is readily understandable by students. The practitioner and student can easily separate the ‘helpful’ (adaptive dimensions) motivation from the ‘unhelpful’ (impeding and maladaptive dimensions). Thus, this model is an easy way for students to understand their motivation and an easy way for practitioners to explain it to them. When students understand motivation and the dimensions that comprise it, intervention is more meaningful to them, and as a consequence, is likely to be more successful.

At a meta-level, intervention designed to enhance students’ motivation and engagement involves improving students’ (a) approach to their schoolwork, (b) beliefs about themselves, (c) attitudes towards

learning, achievement, and school, (d) study skills, and (e) reasons for learning. Also at a meta-level, intervention involves addressing (a) educators' messages to students, (b) educators' expectations for students, (c), how learning is structured and paced, (d) feedback to students on their work, and (e) classroom goals and assessment. At this point there is a very strong connection with the pedagogical relationships working at the engagement level (see below). To enhance students' motivation and academic resilience, however, it is important to move beyond the meta-level to address the specific ways in which motivation and engagement are enacted in students' lives and in the classroom. This is where the Wheel is able to assist. This model holds that educators are to do one or more of the following: keep high adaptive dimensions high, keep low impeding and maladaptive dimensions low, increase low adaptive dimensions, and reduce high impeding and maladaptive dimensions.

This individually-focused cognitive-behavioural approach is what psychology would articulate as the effective intervention to enhance students' motivation and engagement. Nonetheless, there is a further perspective to be considered within the motivation and engagement domain: one that shows the wider social processes and connections in play that may be provided by a sociological framing. This is now discussed.

Are These Engaging Messages? A Sociological Perspective

The sociological perspective draws on research into student engagement among low SES students undertaken by the Fair Go Project (Munns, 2004b). This research defines student engagement on two levels. The first level is termed small 'e' engagement ('e'ngagement). This is a multifaceted view of student engagement: the simultaneous coming together of the cognitive, emotional and behavioural at high levels. This view draws on the meta-analysis of student engagement undertaken by Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), who argue against discrete cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of engagement. Their argument is similar to that for the conceptualisation of motivation advanced by Martin (2004). Fredricks *et al.* contend that engagement can be thought of as a 'multidimensional construct' and that 'the term engagement should be reserved specifically for work where multiple components are present (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). The second level is big 'E' engagement ('E'ngagement), a wider relationship with school and education. 'E'ngagement is a sense among students that "school is for me" (Munns, 2004b, Fair Go Team, in press). This means that students have a sense that school is a place that works for them and education is a resource that they can successfully deploy in the present and the future. There is a temporal and embedded link between these two levels of engagement that is captured in the phrase "the future in the present". That is, the daily 'e'ngaging experiences in classrooms that provide opportunities and support for students to think hard (high cognitive), feel good (high emotional) and actively participate (high behavioural) build to the more powerful "school is for me" relationship. The strength of the embedding of the two levels of engagement relies on the power of classroom messages. The research argument is that these messages operate within discourses of power. Such a notion is firstly theoretically underpinned by Bernstein's (1996) conceptualisation of classroom message systems (curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation). Secondly it makes connections between classroom practices and discourses with wider societal structures. While students are processing and taking up positions within the powerful school and classroom message systems they are also negotiating with their teachers "discourses of power": knowledge, ability, control, place and voice. Issues such as –

- o what counts as knowledge and who has access to really useful knowledge?
- o who has ability?
- o who controls the teaching space?
- o who is valued as an individual and a learner?
- o whose voice is given credence within that space?

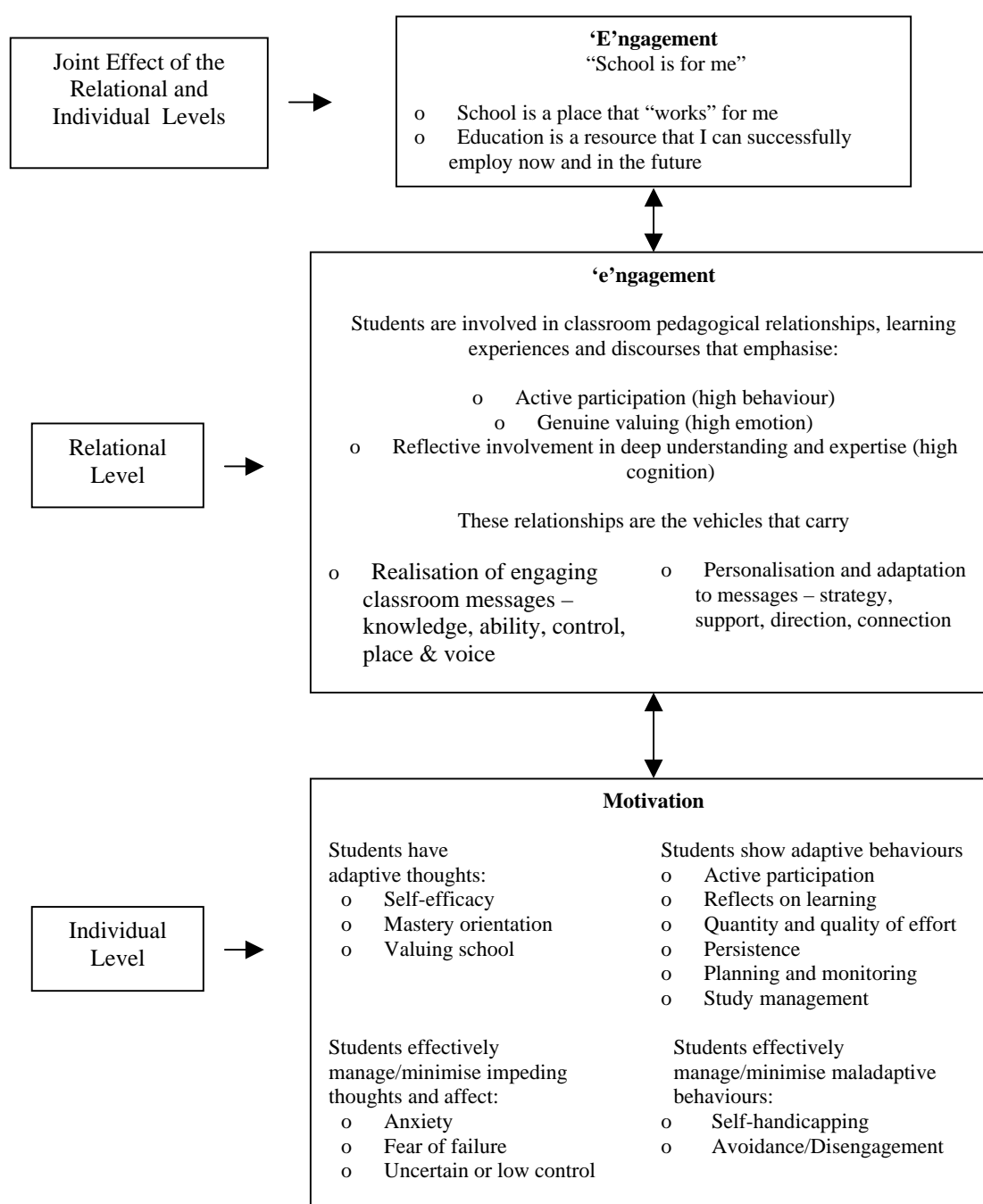
all influence the way teachers teach and how students see themselves as learners. This perspective on student engagement builds on and complements the individual focus of the Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel. It pays particular attention to the nature of classroom pedagogies and the interplay of classroom discourses. These pedagogies and discourses are the vehicles that carry either engaging or disengaging messages. Critically, this perspective opens up opportunities for educators to consider how students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds have historically received disengaging school and

classroom messages. From this position alternative pedagogies and discourses might be developed in order to produce messages that powerfully engage learners from all social and cultural backgrounds.

The MeE Framework

The MeE framework brings together the Martin psychological perspective on motivation and engagement and the Fair Go Project sociological research into student engagement. It highlights a number of vantage points from which the construction of school and classroom relationships may be viewed. Importantly also, the framework points to the dynamic interplay of different aspects of school life and the individual and relational processes that constitute this interplay.

Figure 2 – The MeE Framework of Motivation and Engagement



The framework performs a dual role: both a guide to planning for student engagement and an evaluative device. It suggests that a multifaceted approach across each of its areas is most likely to encourage motivated and engaged students. Its focus is on the positive aspects of school and classroom life, but by reduction it can point to areas that are working negatively on the students. In both the motivation and 'e'ngagement spheres it pays attention to the positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours that combine when students are displaying powerful and constructive relationships with school and education. The argument is that it is this combination that will work strongly towards that enduring 'E'ngagement. It is important to understand that while it is useful to consider issues in different spheres of the frame, in the end it is the interdependence of all the elements that is the pivotal idea.

The Individual Level of the MeE Framework (motivation)

Within the area of motivation attention is directed to the ways individuals are supported and encouraged at school. This may happen at a classroom level through relationships with the teacher, peers, curriculum and pedagogy. It might, on the other hand, be facilitated through special programs and individual guidance. The key points of the motivation sphere are:

- o individual support to develop a belief and confidence in one's own ability to succeed at school, overcome challenges and perform at their best
- o individual encouragement to focus on learning, solving problems and developing skills
- o individuals are helped to see that school is useful, important and relevant
- o individual help for students to overcome anxiety, take risks (not avoid failure) and have more control over their learning
- o pedagogy that promotes effort and persistence
- o teaching and learning fostering key self-regulatory processes such as planning, monitoring, and study management
- o practices that help students manage or minimise maladaptive behavioural dimensions such as self-handicapping and avoidance.

Positive actions from this sphere come about in two ways. First, individuals need to enact these motivating cognitions and this brings the behavioural sphere into play. There is strong connection here with the 'e'ngagement level discussed below. That is, it is difficult to sustain motivation when the messages received from the classroom are disengaging (see below). Second individuals need to make positive adaptations with appropriate strategies and directions and be continually encouraged within this process.

The Relational Level of the MeE Framework ('e'ngagement)

The relational level of the framework is primarily concerned with the connections between classroom processes and discourses and the wider dimensions of social power. It concerns the relationships occurring within the teaching and learning context and relates to the primary means by which students personally connect to the pedagogy in the classroom context. It is the key means by which the psychological level is translated into the big 'E' 'Engagement' construct. The relational level is very interested in both sides of the teacher-student relationship. It has a pedagogical focus on the nature of classroom learning experiences and interactions: classroom experiences purposely designed for all students to work towards active participation, genuine valuing, and reflective involvement in deep understanding

Hence, the sociological level is concerned with classroom experiences and relationships designed to send engaging messages for all students across all discourses of power

- o knowledge – reflectively constructed access to contextualised and powerful knowledge
- o ability – students are made to feel able to achieve and are encouraged to have high expectations and aspirations
- o control – classroom time and space is shared, there is mutuality and shared power

- o place – students are valued as individuals and learners with feelings of belonging and ownership over their learning
- o voice – there is an environment of discussion and reflection about learning with students and teachers playing reciprocal meaningful roles.

Positive actions within this sphere are in the realisation of these classroom messages. Realisation carries two meanings here. The first is clarity of understanding. The second is “creating” and “making real”. It captures the idea that messages need to be realised at a conscious and practical level. For example, students should not only feel they are being successful but success should be opened up to them through the totality of classroom processes.

The Final Dimension of the MeE Framework: ‘E’ngagement

The third perspective of the MeE Framework is *big ‘E’ engagement* or *‘E’ngagement*. This can come about as a result of the joint effect of the individual and group strategies undertaken within the psychological (M) and sociological (e) frames. That is, the proposed interrelationship of the three perspectives suggests that for students to feel that “school is for me”, they have to feel supported as an individual learner and as a member of a cohesive and culturally inclusive learning group. It also may be influenced by schools working widely on policies and practices that complement these individual and group strategies. So it is useful to think of ‘E’ngagement as both a positive social outcome, as well as a whole school focus that encourages students to feel valued, supported and catered for across involvement, emotional and cognitive levels. Strategies at this level include a positive school ethos, curricula choices that support a wide range of learning needs, a variety of extra-curricular activities catering for many different interests, peer support through mentoring, the use of role-models and the design of productive post-school options. What this means is that first of all students see that their school will look after them and provide them with a wide range of educationally worthwhile and enjoyable experiences across both curricular and extra-curricular areas. Importantly also, students will believe that they will be supported if they need help when they have learning or behavioural problems. Students are not left to “fall through the cracks”. Second, it means that students see that their school as a place will help them gain the educational resources that will be important for their future lives.

Conclusion: The Joint Effects of the Sociological and Psychological Dimensions

The MeE Framework offers a way of understanding the complexity of relationships that students have with school and education. Through the joint operation of the sociological and psychological dimensions, students gain a core sense that “School is for me” (or not for me, as the case may be). Through appropriate pedagogies, discourses and meaningful connections (by way of sociological foundations) to individual students’ cognitive and behavioural lives (by way of psychological foundations), students become ‘E’ngaged with school. Through the interconnection of sociological and psychological foundations, it is hypothesised that students come to feel that their school has something to offer them at a cognitive, emotional and participatory level.

About the Authors

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Dr Geoff Munns is a Senior Lecturer in pedagogy and curriculum in the University of Western Sydney 's School of Education and Early Childhood Studies. He has more than 25 years teaching experience in primary schools (including executive roles as Assistant Principal and Principal). His research interests focus on improved educational outcomes for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (including Indigenous students). In particular he is interested in how these students can become engaged in their classrooms and subsequently develop a long-term commitment to education. Dr Munns has experience in qualitative, ethnographic methodologies.

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