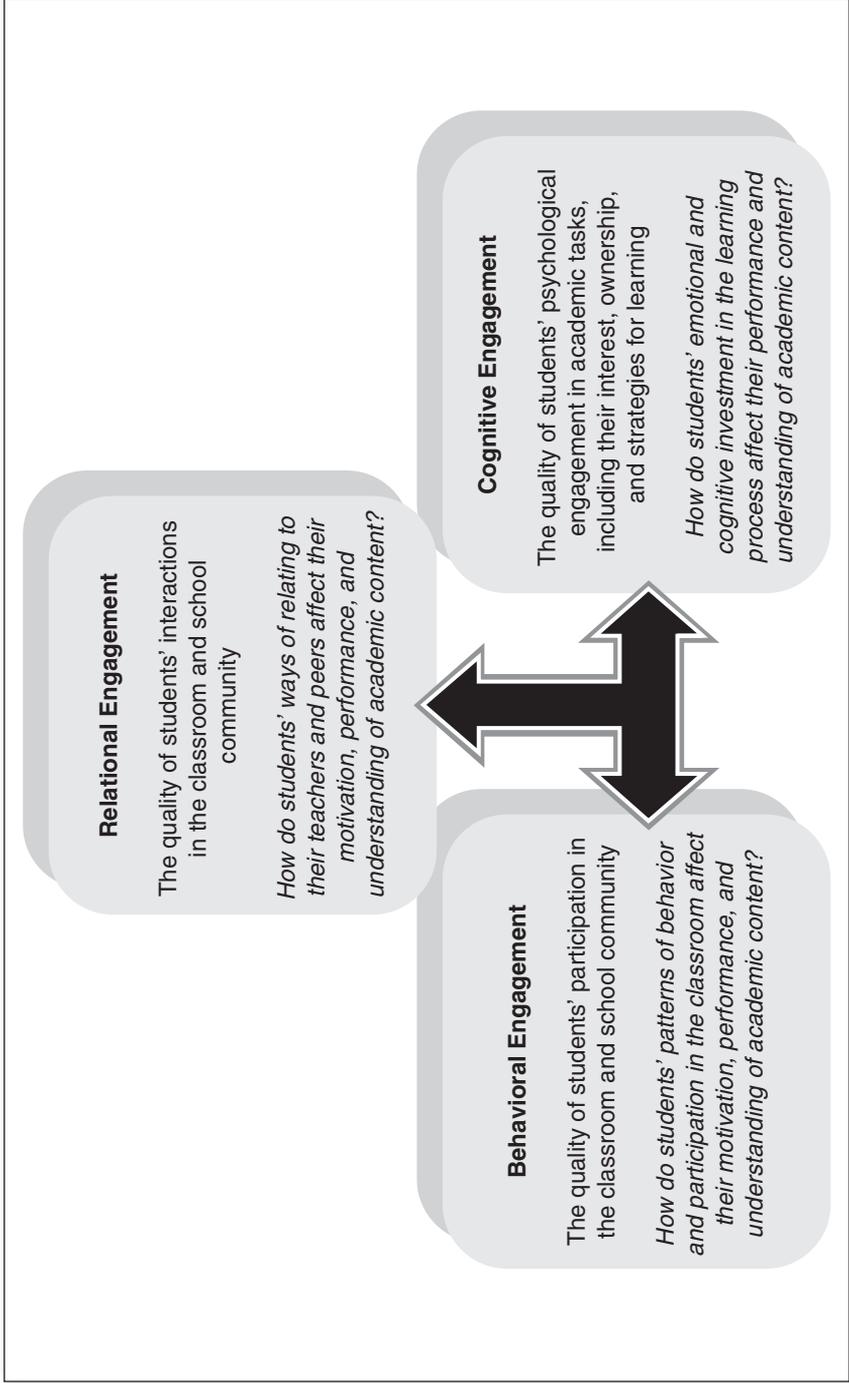# 1

What Does It Mean for Students to Be Engaged?

Teachers are constantly working to connect their students to school and to learning because they know that engagement is crucial to school success. It may help teachers to know that school engagement occurs on multiple levels. Addressing each level of engagement can increase the chances that a teacher can sustain his or her students' engagement. The definition of school engagement is complex, and there has been some disagreement with regard to the number of theoretical dimensions. Some scholars argue for two dimensions (i.e., behavioral and emotional; see Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), and other scholars argue for three dimensions (i.e., behavioral, emotional, and cognitive; see Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). We argue that teachers need to think about engagement as encompassing three interconnected dimensions: *behavioral engagement*, *cognitive engagement*, and *relational engagement* (see Figure 1.1). We

Figure 1.1 Three Interconnected Dimensions: Behavioral Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, and Relational Engagement

Behavioral Engagement

The quality of students' participation in the classroom and school community

How do students' patterns of behavior and participation in the classroom affect their motivation, performance, and understanding of academic content?

Relational Engagement

The quality of students' interactions in the classroom and school community

How do students' ways of relating to their teachers and peers affect their motivation, performance, and understanding of academic content?

Cognitive Engagement

The quality of students' psychological engagement in academic tasks, including their interest, ownership, and strategies for learning

How do students' emotional and cognitive investment in the learning process affect their performance and understanding of academic content?

believe **relational engagement** is most relevant to classroom management that promotes optimal engagement in school.

THREE TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

Consider the student who always works hard but still seems to struggle with learning. This student may be behaviorally engaged but not cognitively engaged. Scholars tend to agree that **behavioral engagement** encompasses students' effort, persistence, participation, and compliance with school structures. In general, school-level changes are typically focused on modifying students' behavioral engagement. Achievement in school is often included in the research as an outcome of students' behavioral engagement as measured by teacher or self-reports of students' effort (e.g., including daily/weekly grades for classroom/lab participation and homework completion and task persistence; Davis, Shalter-Bruening, & Andrzejewski, 2008).

 Cognitive engagement is a matter of students' will—that is, how students feel about themselves and their work, their skills, and the strategies they employ to master their work (Metallidou & Viachou, 2007). Teachers may be familiar with the student who always works hard but still seems unable to learn effectively. This student also may be behaviorally engaged but not cognitively engaged. In other words, just because students appear to be working on the task at hand does not mean they are learning. It is important to note that effort is involved in both behavioral and cognitive definitions of engagement: "In this sense, cognitive engagement refers to the quality of students' engagement whereas sheer effort refers to the quantity of their engagement in the class" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 105). The inclusion of cognitive engagement makes an important distinction between students' efforts to simply do the work and effort that is focused on understanding and mastery (Fredricks et al., 2004; Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004). Students who are cognitively

and behaviorally engaged will attend to the task at hand and simultaneously manage their learning (e.g., thinking about similar tasks they have done, realizing when they need to ask for help, using problem-solving strategies).

> Reflect on the common activities you assign students in your class. What are the characteristics of activities that promote both behavioral *and* cognitive engagement?

While the concepts of cognitive and behavioral engagement are well understood in the context of previous research (Fredericks et al., 2004), there is little consistency in the way in which **emotional engagement** has been defined by educational researchers. For example, in their study of the ways in which classroom structures affected students' emotional engagement, Skinner and Belmont (1993) defined emotional engagement as students' feelings of interest, happiness, anxiety, and anger during achievement-related activities. In contrast, Sciarra and Seirup (2008) defined emotional engagement as the extent to which students feel a sense of **belonging** "and the degree to which they care about their school" (p. 218). Emotional engagement from their perspective has more to do with the pleasant and unpleasant emotions students connect to their relationships with teachers, peers, and school rather than the feelings they have during learning activities. In a recent study by Davis, Chang, Andrzejewski, and Poirier (2010), the researchers argued that previous definitions of emotional engagement, like that of Sciarra and Seirup, may actually be referring to **relational engagement**. Specifically, Davis et al. used students' reports of perceived teacher support, perceived press for understanding (i.e., students' perception that the teacher wants them to learn and understand), and their sense of school belonging as proxies for understanding the extent to which students were relationally engaged in school.

What would a student who is relationally engaged in the classroom look like? Within the research literature on motivation, several theoretical and empirical models include aspects of relational engagement, such as Reeve's research of teacher **autonomy support** and motivation (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010; Reeve, 2006, 2009; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004), Middleton's study of academic goals and press for understanding (Middleton & Midgley, 2002), and Goodenow's (1992, 1993a, 1993b) work on school belonging and motivation in urban populations. However, some of the most comprehensive theories that capture the multiple facets of relational engagement are motivational systems theory and self-determination theory.

> Think about your classroom. What could relational engagement look like in your classroom?
>
> To what extent do the students in Alice's and Kim's classes appear to be behaviorally, cognitively, and relationally engaged?

MOTIVATIONAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Originated by Ford (1992), motivational systems theory (or MST) proposes that effective functioning or **competence** can best be defined as the attainment of personally and/or socially valued goals (1992, 1996). Goals are attained if the following prerequisites are met:

1. The person has the motivation needed to initiate and maintain activity directed toward a goal.

2. The person has the skill needed to construct and execute a pattern of activity that is appropriate and effective with respect to those outcomes.

3. The person's biological structure and functioning is able to support both the motivational and skill components.

4. There is a responsive environment facilitating progress toward a goal.

Within the first prerequisite, it is assumed that goals, emotions, and personal agency beliefs (i.e., beliefs that one has control over learning the activity) work together to guide decision making, including to support caring behavior. Ford argues that caring behavior, what we might label as an important aspect of relational engagement, provides a strong motivational foundation for cognitive and behavioral engagement in school contexts. In other words, students who care for each other and perceive that they are in a caring environment are motivated to engage cognitively and behaviorally. Theoretically, the personal goals most relevant to caring behavior are four integrative social relationship goals: *belongingness, social responsibility, equity,* and *resource provision* (Ford & Nichols, 1987, 1991). Students who are able to work successfully toward these goals typically say that caring for and about others is always, or almost always, important. It is important for educators to be aware of each of these social relationship goals.

Belongingness goals are defined as building or maintaining attachments, friendships, or a sense of community. Maintaining or enhancing a sense of belongingness with teachers or successful peers can facilitate school achievement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991) and positive adjustment in school (Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roset, 2009). **Social responsibility goals** are defined as keeping interpersonal commitments, meeting social role obligations, and conforming to social and moral rules. Like belongingness, social responsibility goals also appear to provide the motivational foundation needed to facilitate positive school adjustment (i.e., liking school, having friends in school) and academic achievement (Wentzel, 1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1994, 1998). One of the ways teachers can increase students' sense of belongingness and social responsibility is to develop positive peer relationships by using cooperative learning structures in the classroom (Hijzen, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2007). This instructional method will be explored further in Chapter 5. Another means of increasing students' sense of belonging is to develop positive relationships with their teacher (Davis, 2003, 2006). These student-teacher relational processes will be explored further in Chapter 4.

Equity goals are defined as promoting fairness, justice, reciprocity, or equality. According to Dover's (2009) review,

several different studies found that teachers who incorporated the following principles of social justice instruction in their classrooms had high levels of academic engagement, created learning communities that encouraged social cooperation among students, and increased overall performance:

1. Assume all students are participants in knowledge constructions, have high expectations for students and themselves, and foster learning communities.

2. Acknowledge, value, and build upon students' existing knowledge, interests, cultural, and linguistic resources.

3. Teach specific academic skills and bridge gaps in students' learning.

Resource provision is defined as giving approval, support, assistance, advice, or validation to others. Resource provision goals can be embedded in social relationships that are reciprocal (i.e., peer-to-peer relationships) or in asymmetrical social roles where one person is responsible for providing resources to another (i.e., teacher-student relationships). Many of the intervention strategies to reduce general aggression and bullying behavior in schools focus on helping students develop social competence and empathy skills toward other students, which are forms of resource provision. Some of these strategies will be reviewed in Chapter 5.

> Think about your own classroom.
>
> To what extent do students have an opportunity to belong?
>
> To what extent do students have an opportunity to behave in socially responsible ways?
>
> To what extent do students have an opportunity to promote fairness and experience reciprocity?
>
> To what extent do students have an opportunity to serve as resources for you and their peers?

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory emphasizes the significance of three basic psychological needs in people's self-motivation and healthy psychological growth—the needs for competence, **relatedness**, and **autonomy**. According to self-determination theory, social-contextual conditions that provide people with the opportunity to satisfy their basic needs lead to enhanced motivation, optimal functioning, and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, when teachers and classrooms support the satisfaction of student needs, students will feel *self-determined*. Need for *relatedness*, or a basic need to be connected or related to others, is most relevant to our understanding of relational engagement. There is not as much research that focuses on relatedness as the other two basic needs for autonomy and competence in the classroom, but the research that exists focuses on teachers' emotional support for students (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 1997, 1998) rather than on students' caring for each other. For example, in a recent study by Nie and Lau (2009), teacher caring, or involvement, predicted students' emotional and behavioral engagement and satisfaction with school. Nie and Lau also found that the teacher's ability to manage his or her classroom was an important predictor of emotional engagement. In a similar study, Furrer and Skinner (2003) also demonstrated the relationship between students' feelings of relatedness and behavioral engagement, but they took into account that students have relatedness needs from specific social partners—namely parents, teachers, and peers. Furrer and Skinner suggested that more research is needed to discover how children achieve a sense of relatedness with peers and how schools can facilitate this process.

> Consider the students in your classroom.
> What are (might be) their relational needs?
> What are your relational needs as their teacher?

WHY IS RELATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

We believe that the components of integrative social relationship goals described above are very much in line with our definition of relational engagement. In particular, students who have positive social relationship goals tend to care about others in ways that predict their ability to be successful in social situations, such as classrooms. In an empirical study of caring competence, or ability to care, Ford and his colleagues (Ford, Love, Chase, Pollina, & Ito, as cited in Ford, 1996) found that students' caring competence was positively correlated with all four integrative social relationship goals: belongingness, equity, social responsibility, and resource provision. Most of the students in the high-caring group had high scores on measures of belongingness, resource provision, and empathic concern. In other words, the profile of a caring student has strong resource provision goals, compelling feelings of empathic concern and pride or pleasure in helping others, and positive capability beliefs for caring action. Compared to the low-caring students, high-caring students were more likely to be interested in a diversity of personal goals that were both social and nonsocial, including intellectual goals and creativity goals. Therefore, it seems that teachers should be able to increase students' ability to care by acting on goals related to belongingness, social responsibility, equity, and resource provision. Similarly, teachers can help students meet their relatedness needs in the classroom in order for them to be optimally engaged in the learning process (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO TO SUPPORT CARING AND STUDENTS' RELATEDNESS NEEDS

It would be easy to say that teachers need to develop a sense of caring and relatedness in their classrooms by emphasizing a sense of community, but how does one begin to do that? With a unique perspective on developing learning community, Heck

(2004) uses Paula Underwood's Native American Learning Stories (2002, as cited in Heck):

> I use these stories to enrich my classroom content with narrative and cultural diversity, nurture my dispositions toward others who seem difficult or puzzling, and expand my abilities to develop meaningful learning environments and experiences. The stories readily enhance, rather than detract from, curricular goals and state standards, while engaging students in active and critical thinking about relationships with others. (p. 36)

Although these stories are not specifically designed to help teachers with classroom management, they offer a holistic way of learning by participating in relational engagement activities. Specifically, Heck suggests that Underwood's stories can be used to teach caring about another's voice (see also Noddings, 1995). Each story addresses the following pedagogical dilemmas outlined by Adams (1997, as cited in Heck, p. 41):

1. The challenge of balancing the emotional and cognitive demands of the learning process

2. The challenge of acknowledging and supporting the subjective contexts (how students make meaning out of their own individual experiences) while illuminating the systemic contexts (the demands of moving between social groups) that affect learning

3. The challenge of attending to students' social relationships in the classroom

4. The challenge of balancing personal reflection with regular observations of their experiences as tools for fostering student-centered learning

5. The challenge of valuing awareness, personal growth, and change as meaningful outcomes of the learning process

If we revisit the case of how Alice and Kim manage their classrooms, described in the introduction, one might come to the conclusion that Alice is trying to address these dilemmas by using a relational engagement approach to classroom management. Alice clearly appears more interested in helping her students "care" for one another by teaching them skills associated with caring competence (Ford & Nichols, 1991), which will hopefully facilitate students' positive social relationship goals in her classroom and in the long run.

KEY TERMS

Autonomy: A student's feelings of independence or freedom to make his or her own decisions; one of the three components of self-determination theory.

Autonomy supportive: A classroom environment that supports the development of student autonomy by giving students more opportunities to make their own decisions and choices.

Behavioral engagement: A student's effort, persistence, participation, and compliance with school/classroom rules and structures.

Belongingness goals: The desire to build and maintain friendships or a sense of community with others.

Cognitive engagement: A student's completion of academic tasks and monitoring of his or her own learning habits.

Competence: A student's confidence in his or her abilities; one of the three components of self-determination theory.

Emotional engagement: A student's positive emotions related to school activities.

Equity goals: The desire to promote values such as fairness, justice, or equality in society.

CONNECT TO YOUR PRACTICE

Reflect on High- and Low-Caring Students' Attempts to Meet Relatedness Needs

Students' pursuits of social goals in classrooms can vary widely across classrooms and can look different depending on whether they are a high- or low-caring student. Spend a week observing the social goal pursuit of two students in your class. Identify a high-caring and low-caring student to observe. Make note of the different ways the students pursue their needs to acquire the resources they need to learn, to be treated equitably, to behave responsibly, and to feel like they belong in the classroom.

Social Goal Pursuit	High-Caring Student	Low-Caring Student
Resource provision		
Equity		
Social responsibility		
Belongingness		

Relatedness/belonging: A student's feelings of being connected or related to others; one of the three components of self-determination theory**.**

Relational engagement: A student's feelings of being supported, pushed to learn, and accepted at school.

Resource provision: The giving of approval, support, assistance, advice, or validation to others, whether in a peer-to-peer relationship or a teacher-student relationship.

Self-determination theory: A theory that holds that students' ability to be self-motivated depends on whether or not their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are satisfied.

Social responsibility goals: The desire to meet social norms, such as having friends.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Educators for Social Responsibility: http://www.esrnational.org/otc/
Self-Determination Theory: http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/
Wentzel, K. R. (2003). Motivating students to behave in socially competent ways. *Theory Into Practice*, 42, 319–326.