

Measuring student engagement could help teachers, administrators adapt strategies

March 19 2015, by Fran Webber

Educators believe that student engagement in the classroom is crucial to learning and that it can increase achievement and enrollment in challenging courses while decreasing dropout rates. Until recently, teachers and administrators lacked tools to measure the engagement levels of their students in the classroom. Now, a University of Missouri researcher has developed a scale that quantifies student engagement and could help educators identify barriers to student participation and increase levels of student involvement and learning.

"Many educators believe engagement leads to better school performance and is necessary for developing student motivation and interest," said Ze Wang, associate professor of educational, school and counseling psychology in the College of Education at MU. "After developing our scale, data from follow-up testing confirmed that students' engagement scores were positively correlated with indicators of performance, such as good grades and independent learning outside of school motivated by interest. If teachers and administrators can understand how students differ in engagement levels through use of our scale, then they can take steps to increase academic engagement and positive learning outcomes among students in their classrooms."

Based on data collected in a Missouri school district by her MU colleagues Christi Bergin, associate research professor, and David Bergin, associate professor of educational psychology, Wang and her colleagues developed a scale that improves understanding of classroom engagement and can be readily used in fourth through 12th-grade

classrooms. The survey is relatively short and inexpensive to administer, Wang said.

"Using the scale, we can compare different groups of students to see which have higher and lower levels of engagement," Wang said. "For example, we found that [middle school students](#) had less affective engagement or positive emotions - such as interest, happiness and excitement - than elementary [school](#) students. This makes sense because elementary students tend to be more obedient to their teachers, so they may show higher levels of this type of engagement at that younger age."

After Wang developed the scale, she and her colleagues tested it on the same students from whom the original data used to create the scale was collected. Wang found that engagement varied among different groups of students. Those who did not receive free or reduced-cost lunch had higher cognitive and behavioral engagement. Also, girls had greater affective and behavioral engagement than boys. Understanding how these groups differ in classroom engagement can help teachers and administrators adapt their strategies to fit the specific needs of [students](#), Wang said.

The research study, "Measuring Engagement in Fourth to Twelfth Grade Classrooms: The Classroom Engagement Inventory," was published in *School Psychology Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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