



livingripples
Empower • Support • Connect

Focus Area:

Factor = School Experiences

Creating a positive connection between students and their school directly contributes to achieving academic, social and personal success. Individual experiences with teachers and connections with their peers are significant factors in creating a sense of belonging in school.

The importance of school experiences

School relationships are pivotal in shaping the educational experience of learners, supporting retention in school and laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

1. **Motivation and Engagement:** A positive relationship fosters a sense of belonging and connection to the school community, motivating students to engage in academic pursuits. Feeling valued and supported by the school environment enhances a student's enthusiasm for learning, making education a more enjoyable and rewarding experience.
2. **Academic Performance:** Students who feel connected to their school are more likely to perform better academically. A positive school experience contributes to a conducive learning environment, enabling students to focus on their studies and achieve their academic potential. Supportive relationships with teachers and peers can enhance each student's confidence, leading to increased participation in class activities and a greater willingness to take on life challenges.
3. **Social and Emotional Wellbeing:** A positive school relationship provides a support system that addresses students' social and emotional needs. Feeling a sense of belonging helps students develop strong emotional resilience, which reduces stress and anxiety and contributes to a healthier mindset and sense of self.
4. **Character Development:** Schools are not just places for academic learning; they also play a crucial role in character development. A positive relationship with the school encourages the development of essential life skills such as teamwork, communication and empathy. Students learn valuable lessons about respect and responsibility and develop values through positive interactions with teachers, administrators and peers.

5. **Long-term Success:** The positive experiences gained during the school years contribute to a student's long-term success in their personal and professional life. A happy relationship with the school can instil a lifelong love for learning and a sense of curiosity, which are essential traits for adaptability and success in an ever-changing world.
6. **Community Building:** Schools are microcosms of society and positive relationships within the community contribute to a positive societal culture. When students experience a supportive and inclusive school environment, they are more likely to carry those values into their communities, fostering a sense of civic responsibility and cooperation.

Action Planning ideas

Key Action: Support students to feel SAFE

- School rules and regulations need to be clearly understood, achievable and consistently administered for all school members. Ideally, students are encouraged to actively participate in their development at both classroom and whole school levels. For example, the "Can we sort it?" approach empowers students to be solution-focused in addressing incidents that occur. As a school, keep a log of incidents that have taken place in the playground or classroom while on an excursion, make sure to de-identify students involved, present one of the incidents, and ask the class, "Can we sort it?". Facilitate students to discuss and brainstorm to come up with positive solutions and practical advice to help prevent the incident from happening again.
- Establishing physical and psychological safety is imperative to facilitate effective student learning. Schools should crosscheck that they are implementing practical security measures alongside safe and supportive learning environments. Ensuring the safety of our schools requires the implementation of effective policies that:
 - Facilitate conducive, inclusive and supportive conditions for learning
Deliver comprehensive and well-coordinated learning support systems to encourage positive behaviour and address students social-emotional and mental health needs. Provide access to qualified mental health professionals employed within schools.
 - Provide appropriate crisis and emergency preparedness and response training for all school staff; and
 - Foster effective partnerships between schools, families and communities to create a collaborative approach.

Key Action: Foster STUDENT VOICE

- Student Voice is one of the five elements of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework. When students have authentic opportunities to participate actively in their learning, they feel connected and can use their social and emotional skills to be respectful, resilient and safe. Create learning opportunities that enable student voice and action, consider regular channels for feedback, such as student forums or suggestion boxes. Enabling students to feel heard and responsible by giving them a voice and hearing them helps learners feel valued and develops student efficacy and agency.

- Define lesson and assessment success criteria clearly accommodating all students in the room and enable choice and opportunity in the way student work is developed and delivered to be inclusive of the different learning styles and preferences within the classroom.
- Find ways to get to know your students through in class activities and offer opportunities to find connections through games, classwork, presentations, stories, incursions, excursions. Students will naturally respect your interest in them and respond in kind.

Key Action: Foster INCLUSIVITY

- The language a school community uses about disability can influence attitudes and impact people's lives. When school communities speak about others positively, using language that students with disability and their families prefer, it contributes to an inclusive culture that changes how students with disability are viewed by themselves and others and supports a sense of belonging. On specific terms for disability, student preferences and voice (and those of their family when appropriate) take priority, for example, ensuring a student's preferred name and gender are entered correctly on school management systems and classroom rolls, and implement responsive policies that consider the diverse backgrounds and challenges students may face.
- Implement inclusive practices that celebrate diversity and create a sense of belonging for learners.
- Connect with community priorities or host events important to your learners and their families to build understanding and recognise students' out of school lives, commitments and responsibilities.

Key Action: Improve student SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Implement mentorship programs where students have a designated adult or older student they can seek guidance and support. Organise community-building activities, clubs and events that allow students to connect with adults and their peers with similar interests.
- Foster and facilitate regular planning and reflection processes to enable students to develop their own frameworks for achievement, growth and goal setting.

Key Action: Foster FUN

- While it's important to distinguish between times for fun and times for learning, it's equally crucial to recognise the value of incorporating both elements into the school experience. Having fun builds morale, enhances bonds and positive relationships with others and helps break up intense learning periods with lighter activities that help refresh the mind.
- Changing how we learn also adds to the variety and keeps things light and fresh; set goals and plans for taking a lesson outdoors or add gamification elements to student learning activities, which can help engage the entire school, improve retention and enhance bonds between students and teachers.

References

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