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**Emotion regulation at school:
Proactive coping, achievement goals,
and school context in explaining
adolescents' well-being and school success**



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Student well-being and school success have been taken as critical issues in counting educational outcomes. School context, student belief, motivation, and emotion, are often treated as separate domains in fostering student well-being and school success. The explosion of emotion regulation-related studies supports the importance of emotion regulation strategy in promising health, well-being, and work performance (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011). This study intends to build a comprehensive approach to align school context, student proactive coping belief, and achievement goals with the process model of emotion regulation to understand adolescents' well-being and school success.

1.1 Background and Statement of Problem

1.1.1 Emotion, Well-being, and Achievement

Emotion was thought to be one of the fuzziest concepts in all of the sciences by Frijda and Scherer (2009). During the past decade, studies of emotions experienced by students have some growth (Goetz, Frenzel, Hall, & Pekrun, 2009). These studies document that emotions profoundly affect students' engagement, performance (Capa & Audiffren, 2009; Gumora & Arsenio, 2002), and well-being (Greenglass & Fiksenbaum, 2009; Cheng, 2004), which also implies that they are of critical importance for the agency of educational institutions and of society of large. Compared with other constructs research in school, like cognitive constructs, the students' school-related emotions are still insufficient (Pekrun, 2009; Pekrun, Elliot & Maier, 2006; Schutz & Lanehart, 2002). "Emotion" is used to represent the whole conception in this work. "Emotions" are used to represent discrete emotion states.

From a systematic perspective (Scherer, 2005), *emotions* (a) are focused on specific events, (b) involve the appraisal of intrinsic features of objects or events as well as of their motive consistency and conduciveness to specific motives, (c) affect most or all bodily subsystems which may become to some extent synchronized, (d) are subject to rapid change due to the unfolding of events and reappraisals, and (e) have a strong impact on behaviour due to the generation of action readiness and control precedence. Positive emotions and negative emotions are seen as two big dimensions of

discrete emotions in this study, which were labelled as signals of subjective well-being (Andrews & Whithey, 1976). *Subjective well-being* research cares about the manner people experience their life in positive ways, including cognitive appraisal and affective consequences (Diener, 1984; 2009). Meanwhile, in a broaden-and-built theory of Friedson (2001), positive emotions were argued to be instrumental to promote psychological growth and to improve well-being as well. Furthermore, predictive functions of positive emotions on school achievements (Daniels, Stupnisky, Pekrun, Haynes, Perry, & Newall, 2009) and on physical health (Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, & Steward, 2000) were also found. Therefore, the attempt to find predictive factors of positive emotions in school context would be instrumental for promoting students' development.

1.1.2 Emotion and Emotion Regulation

According to emotion appraisal theories, personal beliefs, goals, control potentials, and context factors are all possible antecedents of emotion generation (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2001; Gross, Scheppes, Urry, 2011). A number of attempts have been made to find protective factors in fostering students well-being and achievement separately in previous coping study (e.g. Greenglass & Fiksenbaum, 2009), motivation study (e.g. Daniels, Stupnisky, Pekrun, Haynes, Perry, & Newall, 2009), emotion regulation study (e.g. Gross and John, 2003), and school culture study (Kaplan & Maer, 1999; Hoy, 2000). Among these studies, emotion regulation research (Gross, 2007; 2001) developed a relatively comprehensive process modal based on emotion appraisal theories, encompassing context factors, personal meaning, appraisal, regulation strategies, and emotional response tendencies. Some researchers pointed out that emotion regulation involving efforts to modulate emotional arousal could facilitate adaptive functioning (Calkins, 1997; Garber & Dodge, 1991; Gross, 2002). It has been well developed in clinical studies and different regulation processes were seen as contributors of different form of psychopathology (Rottenberg & Gross, 2003; Rottenberg & Johnson, 2007). Although researchers have begun to investigate the emotion regulation capacities of infant and children (Eisenburg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998), the application of emotion regulation process modal in education realm is still underdeveloped, especially in promoting adolescents' well-being and school success.

Emotion regulation refers to the processes that individuals use to influence the emotions they experience and do not experience, the situations under which they experience a given emotion, and how they express them (Gross, 1998). The process modal of emotion regulation represents five families of emotion regulation processes: situation selection, situation

modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. In the school situation, situation selection and modification should be referred to various school culture factors embracing students. Attentional deployment family, which represents personal meaning, should be considered together with students' achievement goals and beliefs. Particularly, two emotion regulation strategies, *cognitive reappraisal* in the family of cognitive change and *expressive suppression* in the family of response modulation, were emphasized in the generation process of emotion and in understanding well-being and achievement in previous studies (Tamir & Gross, 2011; Gross, 2007; Gumora & Arsenio, 2002; Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Clkins, 2007). Nevertheless, according to Tamir and Gross (2011), both positive and negative emotions can potentially contribute to well-being if they are experience in an appropriate context. Thus, the importance of context, associated with situation selection and modification strategies, should be accentuated in understanding student's long time pleasant state, well-being (Ryan & Huta, 2009) and school achievement.

1.1.3 Emotion Regulation and School Context

School context as a whole can support and impede students' learning, achievement, and social-emotional well-being. (Hargreaves, 1995; Roeser, Midgley, & Urda, 1996; Hoy, 2000; Zeinz & Scheunpflug, 2010; Roeser, Urda, & Stephens, 2009). In the motivation affordance modal, school context was defined as a cultural entity involving school academic culture, behavioural culture, and social climate for students. The word "School culture" is used to touching the core of school context and "school context" is employed when I discuss school as a context of emotion generation and emotion regulation. Emotions in essence are adaptive respondents to on-going situations and are labels or consensually correct words for the various person-environment relationship patterns (Lazarus, 1991). Compared with other environments, school context can be seen as one of the most important environment in bringing about adolescents' emotional experiences and subsequent outcomes (Roeser et al., 2009; Anderman, 2002). Although school context is a matter of great account for positive outcomes, it is still a need to know why this is so and what are the mechanisms that explain these impact of school culture (Hoy, 2000).

1.1.4 Emotion Regulation and Belief

The role of belief in shaping when and how people try to regulate their emotions is still a growing point (Gross, 2007). Proactive coping is conceptualized as a life belief in which demands and stressful events are seen as challenges rather than inherently threatening that individuals seek to mo-

dify, reduce or eliminate challenges in order to facilitate positive outcomes (Greenglass, 2002). The process that people analyzed potential stressors and act in advance to prevent them or to minimize their impact should not happen after emotion reappraisal (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). It was seen as a form of emotion regulation which can happen previously in selecting situation or avoiding unwanted environment (Koole, 2009). Proactive coping were found significantly related to positive behavioral outcomes (Greenglass, Marques, DeRidder, & Behl, 2006) and in facilitating many psychological functions (Greenglass & Fiksenbaum, 2009; Gan et al., 2007; Chang & Sanna, 2001; Uskul & Greenglass, 2005). Considering the adaptive nature of school life, it is plausible that proactive coping may exert certain influence on students' performance as well as on positive emotion and well-being. Although the protective function of proactive coping is ascertained in several studies, less is known about how it is interactive with school context and personal reappraisal in the process of emotion generation and in understanding school-related outcomes.

1.1.5 Emotion Regulation and Achievement Motivation

Motivational state, either aversive or appetitive, is an appraisal of event that can influence emotions directly (Roseman, 2001). According to a motivated approach, emotion experiences should be examined with respect to the goals that people are trying to achieve and how well they do in pursuing these goals (Tamir & Gross, 2011). Students' achievement goals have been analyzed as an promising set of antecedents of emotions, which are taken as important factors that can influence students' emotions, cognition, and behavior in achievement settings (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984; Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2006; Elliot, 1997). Achievement goal orientation is defined as behavior directed at developing (mastery goal) or indicating (performance goal) high ability reference to oneself and others (Nicholls, 1984). Mastery goal orientations or mastery goals can be accessed through the comparison of one's own improvement with reference to the past and performance goal orientation or performance goals can only be judged as competence relative to that of others. In choosing tasks and also performance, individuals differ themselves with others by possessing different ways of indicating their capacities. Although amount of research has examined the relationship between achievement goals to various types of achievement-related outcomes (Pintrich, 2000; Murayama & Elliot, 2009), less is known about how achievement goals relate to emotion regulation and to students' subjective well-being (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2008).

1.1.6 Emotion Regulation and Developmental Issue

Emotion regulation has attracted increased attention of researchers interested in developmental issues. It was found to be useful in understanding infancy and children's adjustment and morality (Eisenberg, Fabes, Bernzweig, Karbon, Poulin, & Hanish, 1993; Eisenberg, 2000). To foster the study of emotion regulation beyond infancy and toddlerhood, Shields and Cicchetti (1997) developed a new criterion Q-scale to measure school age children's emotion regulation capacities, which was highly correlated with children's autonomy, ego resiliency, and agency. Charles and Carstensen (2007) argued that as children and adolescents develop their capacities to manage emotion impulse and achieve themselves over their environment, they also grow up gradually at expressing and regulating their emotions. In addition, Scheibe and Blanchard-Fields (2009) found that both young and old adults groups initially demonstrated increased working memory performance after mood induction, but older adults' performance continually increased when instructed to down-regulate disgust feelings, whereas young adults' performance dropped. It was also found in previous studies that older adults experienced low levels of distress (Charles & Carstensen, 2007). It is very likely that old adults possess mature and effective down-regulation strategies which can help them to confront negative situations. As the favourable functions of emotion regulation strategies accumulated, it would be rewarding to highlight these strategies in developmental area and in educational realm.

1.2 Theoretical Background

1.2.1 Emotion Appraisal Theory and Emotion Regulation

People can influence the emotions they have and the way to experience them. But what and in which way they experience these emotions should have quite different outcomes. Cognitive approaches to emotion claim that cognitive appraisals are regard as the determinants of emotion and emotions are elicited by personal interpretation of events (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2001; Scherer, 2005). Cognitive change in emotion regulation process refers to changing how we appraise the situation we are in to alter its emotional significance, either by changing how we think about the situation or about our capacity to manage the demands it poses (Gross, 2003). People may differ when they are facing same situation. A possibility is that people may differ in their beliefs regarding life, emotion and goals, and these differences may in turn shape how they evaluate a situation, whether they try to regulate their emotions, and how they respond to the situation.

Another possibility is that emotions are elicited by outside factors. For example, the relationship between the leading role and those people who are presenting may affect his or her response tendency to a situation. Both cognitive appraisal and reappraisal should be understood by considering its proper social and dynamic context rather than be seen as the exclusive driving force behind emotion causation (Lazarus, 1991; Gross, 2007; Parkinson, 2001).

1.2.2 Motivational Affordance Model of School Context

A motivational affordance model of school environment was developed by Roser et al. (2009), which links features of the school context with students' perceptions of school culture, the situational beliefs, goals, values and feelings. The model proposed that students' subjective perception of aspects of their school culture, and their related goals, values and well-being could mediate the organizational context features and students' school engagement, achievement, extra-curricular activity involvement, and educational attainments. As to student, features school context as a synthetic culture in this motivational affordance model include three aspects: school academic culture, behavioral culture, and social culture. With respect to school as a learning environment designed for students, students' perception of school context as a whole culture very likely affects their motivational and emotional experiences in school yard and may in turn affect their school performance and psychological well-being. As to students' beliefs and goals, they should mediate the effects of students perceived school culture and their later educational attainments according to the model. The measures for evaluating school culture in this study were selected on the basis of three aspects of school culture that are described in the motivational affordance model of school context, including academic culture, behavioral culture, and social culture.

1.2.3 Proactive Coping Theory

A fantastic psychological function of people is they can think and act before a real stressor occurs. They can analyze the processes through which people anticipate or detect potential stressors and act in advance to prevent them or to minimize their impact (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Proactive coping theory tries to extend the existed coping theory with a time-related feature. The proactive coping is seen as an effort to integrate resources that facilitate promotion toward challenging goals and personal growth (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002). People in proactive coping are forward-looking and perceive these upcoming situations as challenges and chances to personal growth. Therefore, proactive coping belief holders are proactive

than reactive, and strives for life improvement and organize resources that assure progress and quality of functioning. It focuses on improving quality of life and in so doing incorporates elements of positive psychology (Greenglass and Fiksenbaum, 2009).

1.2.4 Achievement Goal Theory

The primary emphasis of achievement goal theory has been on the dichotomous model of achievement goal: mastery and performance (Nicholls, 1984). Achievement behavior is defined as behavior directed at developing or indicating high ability reference to oneself and others (Nicholls, 1984). Mastery goals can be accessed through the comparison of one's own improvement with reference to the past, whereas performance goals can only be judged as competence relative to that of others. The conceptions of mastery and performance were developed to individual differences in ego orientation and task orientation over learning process and outcomes in later research (Nicholls, 1989). For task-oriented (mastery) individuals, the goal is not to indicate competent but to improve in performance or to accomplish something had not previously done and task orientation involved effort in the learning process which will end of itself. For ego-oriented (performance) individuals, the goal is to attain the superiority of one's ability relative to that of others and a gain in knowledge and skill is not the end of personal goal. According to achievement theory, these two groups differ in the level of consciousness of their goals and interpretation of later success.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study intends to explore the associations of emotion regulation strategy, proactive coping belief, achievement goals, and school context as well as to investigate their direct and indirect impact on adolescents' well-being and achievement. To this end, the study plan to use structural equation modeling to examine the fit of the three hypothesized cognitive-affective-outcome models at school. The study would like to examine the total effects of emotion-related factors on adolescents' school outcomes and the mediation effects of these factors between perceived school culture and school outcomes respectively.

1.4 Research Questions

Five research questions are posed in this inquiry:

- (1) How does positive school context contribute to adolescents' well-being and school success directly and indirectly?
- (2) How do emotion cognitive reappraisal and suppression contribute to adolescents' well-being and school success directly and indirectly?
- (3) Whether emotion cognitive reappraisal and suppression can mediate the effect of school context on adolescents' well-being and school success?
- (4) How does proactive coping contribute to adolescents' well-being and school success?
- (5) How do achievement goals contribute to adolescents' well-being and school success?

1.5 Scope and Limitations

As Izard (2002) argued, many popular school-based programs have not yet identified precisely what factors exert change and how it works, and these will be done only if closer relations are built between science and practice. This work is prepared to make contributions to the fields of emotion-related preventive intervention, curriculum development for practicing teachers, school inform for improving school effectiveness, and the literature on emotion regulation in caring professions. Present study focuses on emotion-related antecedents of well-being and school success in Chinese adolescents, which will also address the influence of students' perception of positive school culture in predicting educational outcomes. It is a paper-based survey research involving Chinese high school level adolescent sample, which should be considered prior to generate the results to other age groups or culture groups. Applying a multiple-method approach to investigate the relationships of these individual and contextual factors with emotions, well-being, and achievement is suggested for future study.

1.6 Summary

In this chapter, the first section frames the contemporary development and the state of problem of the field and defines each of the important terms of this study. The second section provides the theoretical background for implementing a comprehensive approach. The third section describes the study purpose, and research questions are presented in the fourth section. The final section summarizes a brief description of contributions and limitations of this project.

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