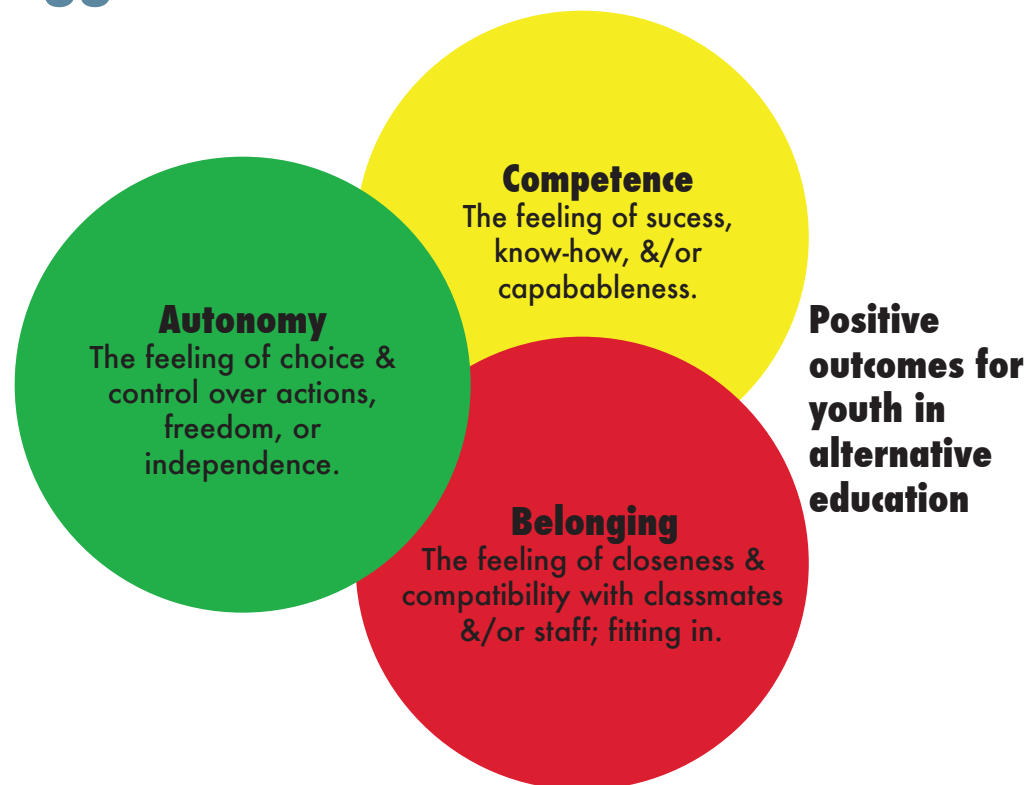


Promoting Positive Life Outcomes for Children & Youth Who Have Struggled in School

School environments are critical contexts for supporting children and youth to develop socially, emotionally, and academically, and for preparing them to lead successful and satisfying lives beyond school. Research indicates one of the most important things schools can do is promote a sense of self-determination in students. Self-determination refers to students' confidence in their ability to succeed academically and personally - the sense that they control what happens to them in their lives. Teachers and schools can support students' development of self-determination by making sure to meet their needs for autonomy, belonging and competence.

Our research has three main goals:

1. understanding what characteristics of alternative education environments meet students' needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence;
2. helping teachers in these contexts to design activities and structure interactions with students to meet these needs; and
3. asking youth how they experience autonomy, belonging, and competence in their alternative education programs.



What Are We Doing?

- We partner with teachers and students in alternative education programs
- We observe "what's going on"
- We interview teachers
- We give cameras to students and:
 - Invite them to take photos during program activities when they feel a sense of autonomy, belonging, and/or competence
 - Ask them to talk about the photos they have taken



What Have We Found?

Our observations have shown that teachers are helping to meet students' needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence by:

- Providing a clear structure for activities.
- Giving students a part in program decision-making.
- Encouraging active participation in the group.
- Showing an interest in and support of students.
- Developing a close and harmonious bond with students (e.g., by using humor in a friendly way).



Autonomy

"It's a picture of my, like, own, like, design of a skateboard. And it features my own logo ... that's my initials for my name, so it's technically representing me. Yeah, like, art is a kind of expression. Like, it expresses me. For who I am, so."

Students experienced a sense of autonomy when they were given choices about what activities to take part in and how they completed these activities.

Belonging

"I was being acknowledged ... I wouldn't want to say I was being asked any questions necessarily, but... just lots of talking. 'Cause I was floating around back and forth talking and ... nobody was so busy they couldn't talk to me. They were doing activities, but I also felt included. And they were showing me what they were doing and how they were doing it"

Students experienced a sense of belonging in their school environment when they interacted with peers, teachers, and other staff.



Competence

"What was nice was that I painted these at home, and then [the staff at my program] let me bring them in and they still marked me on them just because, I guess, you could see the success of my paintings... I trust my art... I really like these pieces and I feel like this is probably one of my best works that I've done"

Students experienced competence when they completed tasks that were challenging or meaningful for them.

What's Next?

We are working with teachers to identify projects we can work on together to address particular needs in their classrooms, for their students. For example, with one teacher, we are developing and implementing strategies that support youth to set realistic, manageable goals and follow-through. All our projects aim to increase youth's self-determination and self-regulation.



a place of mind

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