Motivation is critical to students’ achievement and enjoyment at school. Motivation is multi-faceted, comprising FEELINGS, THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIOURS that:

1. ENHANCE MOTIVATION – ‘MOTIVATION BOOSTERS’

self belief, value of schooling, learning focus, planning and monitoring, study management, persistence.

and 2. REDUCE MOTIVATION – ‘MOTIVATION GUZZLERS’

anxiety, low control, failure avoidance, self-sabotage.

Data show that Year 7 students are significantly higher than Year 9 students on all boosters (self-belief, learning focus, value of school, planning and monitoring,
students’ motivation can decline in the middle years of high school. However, Year 7 students are also significantly lower than Year 9 on control and higher in failure avoidance.

Self-belief and persistence are correlated with literacy and numeracy. However, the strongest effects in literacy and numeracy are found for guzzlers such that low control, failure avoidance, and self-sabotage are negatively correlated with literacy and numeracy. Anxiety is also negatively correlated with numeracy. Correlations between motivation and both literacy and numeracy do not differ markedly between boys and girls.

Boosters

Each booster falls into one of two groups: booster thoughts and booster behaviours.

Booster thoughts include self-belief, learning focus, and value of schooling. Booster behaviours include persistence, planning and monitoring, and study management.

Self-belief (eg. "If I try hard, I believe I can do my schoolwork well"): Self-belief is students’ belief and confidence in their ability to understand or to do well in their schoolwork, to meet challenges they face, and to perform to the best of their ability.

Value of schooling (eg. "Learning at school is important to me"): Value of schooling is how much students believe what they learn at school is useful, important, and relevant to them or to the world in general. If students value schooling they tend to believe that what they learn can be used in other parts of their life, believe that it is important to learn at school, and feel that what they learn at school is relevant to current events in the world.

Learning focus (eg. "I feel very pleased with myself when I really understand what I’m taught at school"): Learning focus is being focused on learning, solving problems, and developing skills. The goal of a learning focus is to be the best student one can be. If students are learning focused they tend to work hard, want to learn more, enjoy learning new things, enjoy solving
problems by working hard, and do a good job for its own satisfaction and not just for rewards.

Planning and monitoring (eg. "Before I start an assignment I plan out how I am going to do it"): Planning and monitoring is how much students plan their schoolwork, assignments, and study and how much they keep track of their progress as they are doing them.

Study management (eg. “When I study, I usually study in places where I can concentrate”): Study management refers to the way students use their study time, organise their study timetable, and choose and arrange where they study.

Persistence (eg. "If I can’t understand my schoolwork at first, I keep going over it until I understand it"): Persistence is how much students keep trying to work out an answer or to understand a problem even when that problem is difficult or is challenging. If students are persistent they tend to keep going over schoolwork until they understand it, spend time trying to understand things that do not make sense straightaway, and keep working at a task even when it is difficult.

Guzzlers

Each guzzler falls into one of two groups: guzzler thoughts/feelings and guzzler behaviours.

Guzzler thoughts/feelings include anxiety and low control.

Guzzler behaviours are failure avoidance and self-sabotage.

Anxiety (eg. "When exams and assignments are coming up, I worry a lot"): Anxiety has two parts: feeling nervous and worrying. Feeling nervous is the uneasy or sick feeling students get when they think about their schoolwork, assignments, or exams.

Worrying is their fear about not doing very well in their schoolwork, assignments, or exams.

Low control (eg. "I'm often unsure how I can avoid doing poorly at school"): Students are low in control when they are unsure about how to do well or how to avoid doing poorly. If students are low in control they tend to be unsure about
how to do well, be unsure about how to avoid doing poorly, and can feel helpless when doing their schoolwork.

**Failure avoidance (eg. "Often the main reason I work at school is because I don’t want to disappoint my parents")**: Students have an avoidance focus when the main reason they do their schoolwork is to avoid doing poorly or to avoid being seen to do poorly. If students have an avoidance focus they tend to do their schoolwork mainly to avoid getting bad marks, do their schoolwork mainly to avoid people thinking they cannot do it, and do their schoolwork mainly because they do not want to disappoint their parents or teachers.

**Self- sabotage (eg. "I sometimes don’t study very hard before exams so I have an excuse if I don’t do as well as I hoped")**: Students self sabotage when they do things that reduce their chances of success at school. Examples are putting off doing an assignment or wasting time while they are meant to be doing their schoolwork or studying for an exam. If students self-sabotage they do not try hard at assignments or difficult schoolwork, do not study very hard before tests or exams, and do other things when they should be doing their schoolwork or studying.

**FEAR OF FAILURE AND MASCULINITY**

From a need achievement theory perspective, students vary in terms of their motive to avoid failure and approach success (Atkinson 1957; McClelland, 1965). Based on a need achievement model of motivation, **students can be characterised in terms of three typologies: those that are success oriented, those that are failure avoidant, and those that are failure accepting.**

Success- oriented students tend to be optimistic, adopt a proactive and positive orientation to tasks, and respond to setback with optimism and energy (Covington & Omelich, 1991; Martin, 1998; Martin et al, 2001a).

Failure- avoidant students are the classic failure fearers. They tend to be anxious (Alpert & Haber, 1960), motivated by a fear of failure, live in self- doubt, and are uncertain about their ability to avoid failure or achieve success (Covington & Omelich, 1991). Although these students often work hard and achieve, they tend to be adversely affected by setback as it tends to confirm their doubts about their ability and their uncertain control
(Covington & Omelich, 1991; Martin, 1998; Martin & Marsh, in press; Martin et al, 2001a, in press). In essence, they lack resilience.

Failure-accepting students (sometimes referred to as learned helpless) have given up to the point of not even trying to avoid failure. These students are generally disengaged from tasks and display a helpless pattern of motivation (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; see also Covington, 1992, 1997). These students lack both motivation and resilience.

From a motivation perspective, an important aim is to develop students into success strivers and shift them from failure avoidance and failure acceptance. A model developed by Martin (2001b, in press) encompasses the factors that underpin success orientation. **Four factors in his model that are particularly congruent with success orientation are self-belief, learning focus, value of school, and perceived control. Most importantly, it is these factors that are the conduits for intervention aimed at promoting success orientation** (Martin, 2001b, in press).

The issue of fear of failure is particularly pertinent to boys and their construction of gender. **For boys, fear of failure operates across a number of domains. It relates to fear of not living up to popular images of masculinity, fear of being labelled a sissy or seen as feminine in any way (O’Doherty, 1994), fear of powerlessness (Mclean, 1997), and fear of having their sexuality questioned. In the learning domain, boys have been found to be unwilling to attempt new learning when they are uncertain of success and are less likely to re-attempt something that they had previously been unsuccessful at (Ludowyke & Scanlon, 1997). According to O’Doherty, “many of the problems boys experience during their education can be traced to their frustration and feelings of inadequacy in attempting to live up to what they believe their peers and society generally expect of them as males”** (1994, p. 22).

Boys’ fear of failure can also have the effect of them exaggerating their masculinity – referred to by Jackson as ‘hyper-masculinity’ – and lead to defensive manoeuvring in the classroom and in assessment situations. Such defensive manoeuvring can take the form of defensive pessimism (setting unrealistically low expectations), self-sabotage (setting obstacles in the path to success), and even failure acceptance (Martin et al, 2001a, in press). As Jackson comments, “insecure boys, who are very much aware of their vulnerability, strive to display a hyper-masculine performance that will not
only defend themselves from the fantasized ‘weakness’ but also gain the approval of the peer group . . . as a result, not working hard at school can be seen as a defensive strategy by some boys to distance themselves from an academic world that is perceived as dangerously ‘weak’” (1998, p. 89).