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Student-Teacher Relationships: An Exploration of Student Motivation

Cindy Griffing

State University of New York College at Brockport

Acknowledgments

The purpose of this page is for me to be able to look back over my life and realize how utterly impossible it seemed only a few years ago that I would be completing a thesis. There was a time in my life that the idea of receiving a graduate degree was so far out of reach that I didn't even see it as a possibility. With the completion of my thesis, it is important for me to take the time to appreciate the people that helped me with this endeavor.

To my husband – without your help and support this project would have been much more difficult if not impossible. Looking back over this year, I recall so many incidents when you took Micah and Aspen out for the day so I could write, when you believed in me even though I doubted myself, when you listened to me complain as my frustration built, when you proofread what I wrote, when you simply gave me a hug and said it would be alright. I absolutely cannot imagine what I would have done without your help.

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insight, honesty, and willingness to share your voices with me. It was my intention and is my hope that I conveyed not only your voices but also your thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and personalities while writing this paper.

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Abstract

The role that the student-teacher relationship has on students' academic motivation was studied utilizing a phenomenology /hermeneutics technique with four 6th grade participants, three 8th grade participants, four 10th grade participants, and four 12th grade students. Results of the study suggested that student motivation is fostered when teacher support, teacher caring, teacher patience, extrinsic rewards, an emotional connection with the teacher, teacher expectations that are neither too high nor too low, and teacher motivation are present. Results also suggested when students witness other teachers harshly correcting other students, academic motivation is negatively affected. Finally, student maturity may impact motivation, as well as fun or interesting assignments, and a calm classroom atmosphere. Limitations and implications of this study were discussed.

Student-Teacher Relationships: An Exploration of Student Motivation

The main focus of this study is the role that the student-teacher relationship has on students' academic motivation. This study begins by looking at some of the factors that affect academic achievement, academic motivation, and finally, academic motivation in relation to the student-teacher relationship. A review of the literature and the methodology used to study this topic is presented. In addition, the results of this study are discussed along with suggestions for increasing students' academic motivation within the context of the student-teacher relationship.

Teachers, counselors, and school administrators all seem to spend a lot of time and energy in trying to understand why some students are not academically successful. Part of the reason can be explained by looking at student's home life (Currie, 2005), support (Kelly, 2004), and effort (Jarvis & Seifert, 2002). Another facet of academic success seems to be the level of motivation a student has for completing their school work.

One aspect of student motivation seems to be how teachers affect their students' level of motivation; specifically, how the relationship between the students and the teachers affect the students' level of motivation. This topic has not been widely researched nor has it been done using participants from different school grade levels. In addition, few studies have asked for the students' voice in this process. Therefore, this current study will look at the relationship between the student-teacher relationship and student motivation with a participant sample from four different grade levels. In addition, this study will ask for the students' voice to investigate this topic.

Literature Review

Academic achievement has been shown to be influenced by many factors (Wentzel, 1998). Among these factors, academic motivation, or the degree to which students are cognitively and behaviorally engaged in their school work, has been shown to play a key role in academic achievement (Oldfather, 1994). Furthermore, the relationships that students have with their teachers influence their academic motivation (Paulson, 1998). The main focus of this study, therefore, is to investigate how the student-teacher relationship affects students' academic motivation.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement may be defined in a number of ways, such as, test and assignment grades, grade point average, and standardized test scores has been shown to be affected by several factors. These factors include socioeconomic levels (Lupton, 2005; Marks, 2000; Murdock, 1999), home and family conditions (Currie, 2005; Shumow, Vandell, & Kang, 1996; Singh, 1995), cultural backgrounds (Clark, 2003; Hall, 1986; Murdock, 1999), parental involvement (Kelly, 2004; Seyfried, 2002; Singh, 1995), peer influence (Bain & Bell, 2004; Brownell & Gifford-Smith, 2003; Clark, Dogan, & Akbar, 2003), effort (Hall, 1986; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Meltzer, Katzir-Cohen, Miller & Roditi, 2001), homework completion (Callahan, Rademacher, & Hildreth, 1998; Toney, Kelley, & Lanclos, 2003; Xu, 2004), and attendance (Schulte, Shanahan, Anderson & Sides, 2003; Tobias & Myrick, 1999). Students' academic motivation is another factor that has been shown to affect academic achievement (Deci 1995; Ryan, 2000; Wentzel, 1998).

Academic Motivation

Academic motivation has also been defined a number of different ways. For example, academic motivation, according to Ryan (2000) is made up of two factors: cognition and engagement. Cognition refers to the thoughts a student has pertaining to a particular assignment, such as his or her desire to complete the task. Engagement refers to the actual behavioral response to these thoughts, such as the amount of work that is completed. Similarly, Oldfather (1994) defined academic motivation in terms of thinking and doing. Thinking can be conceptualized as having a positive attitude, being open-minded, looking for the worth behind an assignment, and self-regulation. Doing refers to observing other students' interest and immediately beginning the project. Deci (1995) defined motivation as the combination of the degree a person expects to be successful at a project, the degree to which they will value whatever reward they receive for being successful, and the opportunity to engage in the project. Academic motivation, therefore, has been conceptualized as processes of both cognition and behavior.

For the purpose of this study, academic motivation will be defined as the degree to which a student is both cognitively and behaviorally engaged in their assigned academic tasks. Several factors briefly discussed above have been shown to affect academic motivation. Students' academic motivation has been shown to be influenced by parental involvement, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, motivation orientation goals, self-efficacy or perceived competence, and student interest. Another facet of student motivation is how well the students relate with their teachers. This is the main focus of this study, which is how the student-teacher relationship affects students' academic

motivation, is then explained with increased detail. The areas that are thought to affect student motivation within the student-teacher relationship include attachment theory, high teacher expectations, students' perceptions that their teachers care about them, teacher support, types of feedback, sense of belonging, and the students' age.

Supportive Parental Involvement

One factor that seems to influence student motivation is supportive parental involvement. Supportive parental involvement, according to Wentzel (1998) and Daniels and Arapostathis (2005), has been shown to positively affect children's academic motivation. Interestingly, Wentzel stated that parents had more of an impact than teachers or peers on students' motivational goals. A motivational goal is a way to conceptualize how a student approaches learning and can either favor a performance orientation or a mastery orientation. When a performance motivational goal is adopted, learning is thought to take place as a product of an assignment; whereas, when a mastery motivational goal is used, learning is believed to occur for the pleasure of gaining knowledge. A performance motivational goal is considered to be less desirable than a mastery motivational goal. In addition, Daniels and Arapostathis believed that parental influence affects students' level of motivation because students want to please their parents. It is important to note, however, that students also considered their teachers to be important.

Extrinsic/Intrinsic Motivation

A second way to depict motivation is in terms of extrinsic motivation, or completing a task for an external reward, and intrinsic motivation, or engaging in a project for the sheer enjoyment of learning (Lepper, Henderlong, & Iyengar, 2005).

According to Lepper et al., the way that students become motivated is affected by which type of reward, extrinsic or intrinsic, they prefer. Rewards that foster extrinsic motivation are believed to lessen the joy of learning, decrease motivation, and lower academic grades, especially for students transitioning to middle school and high school (Lepper et al.; Otis et al., 2005). In contrast, intrinsic motivation is believed to foster the love of learning, increase motivation and academic grades (Otis et al.).

Motivation Orientation Goals

A third approach to describe motivation is in terms of the motivation orientation goals of mastery and performance. A motivation orientation goal can be defined as the way a student is oriented to learn, such as a visual or auditory learner. When a mastery motivation orientation is chosen, a student prefers to gain knowledge for the pleasure of learning. Also, with a mastery motivation orientation, learning is believed to be long-term and of high quality (Ames, 1988; Wentzel, 1998). However, when a student prefers to approach learning with a performance motivation orientation, knowledge is only gained when completing an assignment and is limited by the scope of the assignment. In addition, learning is thought to be short term and of low quality (Ames; Wentzel). Parental influence, according to Wentzel (1998), also had an impact on students' motivation orientation goals. Interestingly, according to Jarvela (2004), students' motivational goals change over time and across situations. Also, Ames (1992) believed that mastery and qualitative type measurements are preferred when assessing for both types of motivation.

Self-Efficacy

A fourth way that has been shown to impact motivation is self-efficacy, or the degree to which an individual feels competent to perform a given task. According to Fortier, Vallerand, and Guay (1995) and Wentzel (1999), the more students believed they would be successful at a given task, the more motivated they became. In addition, competency in one area seemed to generalize to promoting self-efficacy in areas where students felt less competent (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005).

Student Interest

A fifth aspect of student motivation is student interest. Student interest, in the subject matter, has been shown to increase study time (Boekaerts, 1996) and help reluctant students become motivated to learn about the material (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). In contrast, Wentzel (2002) believed a student's sense of responsible behavior has more impact than student interest on motivation.

Summary

In sum, several of the factors that affect academic motivation are supportive parental involvement, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, a mastery motivation versus performance motivation approach to learning, self-efficacy or perceived competence, and student interest. Furthermore, the main focus of this paper is on the relationship between students' academic motivation and the student teacher relationship. The research has shown that attachment theory, high teacher expectations, students' perceptions that their teachers care about them, teacher support, types of feedback, sense of belonging, and the students' age all influence student motivation within the context of the student-teacher relationship.

Student-Teacher Relationship

The relationship between students' academic motivation and the student-teacher relationship is complex. In order to begin to understand this intricacy, several factors will be investigated. These factors include attachment theory, high teacher expectations, students' perceptions that their teachers care about them, teacher support, types of feedback, sense of belonging, and the age of the students.

Attachment Theory

According to Bowlby (1988), attachment behavior occurs when a person maintains closeness to another person who is conceived as better able to deal with a given situation. Furthermore, Bowlby believed that attachment is seen in almost every person, which facilitates the belief that one is strong and the feeling of security. Consequently, when a person realizes an attachment figure is available, he or she will value the bond and have the desire to continue the relationship. In accordance, the theory of attachment is a theory that can be applied when exploring motivation within the student-teacher relationship (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Hamilton, 2000; Howes, Hamilton, & Philipson, 1998). A brief explanation of this theory, as it relates to the student-teacher relationship, is this relationship parallels the parent-child relationship. In other words, students view the relationships with their teachers through a lens that is colored by past experiences with their parents or caregivers, which may account for individual differences in many factors, including student motivation (Davis, 2003).

Study. Wentzel (2002) conducted a study with 452 sixth graders from two suburban middle schools were involved in a study exploring whether effective teachers had similar qualities as good parents. Self-report measures were utilized regarding

student motivation variables and teaching dimensions. The student motivation variables consisted of three factors: mastery orientation, interest in class, and social goals.

Demographics for the first school consisted of 87% European American students, 6% African American students, and 7% from another ethnic status with male and female participants being almost equal in number. Data for students from the second school consisted of 92% African American students, 6% European American students, and 2% from another ethnic status with the number of male and female participants being almost equal. The results suggest that teachers have more of an impact on students' level of motivation than the students' parents. Consequently, the relationship with teachers is thought to have a strong impact on the students' level of academic motivation.

High Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations have been shown to influence student motivation. Teachers with high expectations have student who are motivated and perform well academically (Murdock, 1999; Paulson, 1998; Wentzel, 2002). Likewise, teacher expectations have more influence on students' academic motivation than parents' expectations of their children's academic performance (Paulson, 1998). It is important to note that motivation is different than the motivation orientation goals mentioned by Wentzel (1998). Motivation may be defined as the thoughts and behaviors associated with working on a project (Deci 1995; Oldfather 1994; Ryan, 2000), whereas, motivation orientation goals can be described as the way students approach learning (Wentzel).

Studies. Teachers' expectations that their students will perform well academically have been shown to play a positive role in their students' level of

motivation. Murdock (1999) studied motivational predictors of alienation in middle school, which included teacher support and expectations, peers' academic aspirations and support, and the economic value of education. Specifically, the relationship between motivation and teacher expectations was studied with 431 students (65% Caucasian students, 30% African American students and 5% from another ethnic status with 51% males and 49% females) from a semi-urban mid-Atlantic middle school. The students were given questionnaires on engagement in school tasks, perceived motivational context, and teachers' academic support and expectations. The results of these questionnaires suggested that there was a positive correlation between teacher's long-term expectations of students and the students' level of motivation.

In a study by Wentzel (2002), 452 sixth graders from two suburban middle schools were involved in a study exploring whether effective teachers had similar qualities as good parents. Self-report measures were utilized regarding student motivation variables and teaching dimensions. The student motivation variables consisted of three factors: mastery orientation, interest in class, and social goals. Demographics for the first school consisted of 87% European American students, 6% African American students, and 7% from another ethnic status with male and female participants being almost equal in number. Data for students from the second school consisted of 92% African American students, 6% European American students, and 2% from another ethnic status with the number of male and female participants being almost equal. As part of this study, teacher expectations of their students were studied in relation to motivation. The results suggest that the teachers' high expectations of the students were positively correlated with the students' academic motivation.

Paulson (1998) conducted a study investigating the level of congruence between parents' patterns of parenting and teachers' patterns of teaching with 230 fifth and sixth grade students (47% males and 53% females) from three Midwest school districts. The participants came from 17 different elementary and middle school classrooms (5 fifth-grade classes, 6 sixth-grade classes, and 6 seventh-grade classes). Most of the participants were Caucasian with a mean age of approximately 11 years old. Specifically, the relationship between teacher academic expectations of their students and, likewise, parent expectations of their children were studied. The students were asked to complete several measurements, which included scales of parenting style, parental involvement, teaching style, school atmosphere, and student outcomes. The results of this study suggest that motivation may be positively affected by high academic expectations from teachers and may be complemented by high expectations from parents, as well. Interestingly, high expectations by parents alone did not appear to affect academic motivation, which suggests that high teacher expectations of students may have a powerful effect on student motivation.

Caring

The perception that teachers care about their students also seems to influence student motivation. Several researchers believed that students' perceptions that their teachers cared about them also had an effect on their level of academic motivation (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Skinner, 1993; Wentzel, 1997). Furthermore, the more students perceived their teachers cared about them, the more motivated they became (Murdock & Miller, 2003). The more motivated they became, in turn, caused the teachers to behave in an even more caring fashion (Skinner, 1993). This caring also

seemed to influence student self efficacy with respect to their academic grades (Wentzel).

Studies. Several studies suggest that when students perceive their teachers care about them, their level of motivation increases. Wentzel (1997) performed a three year long study regarding the role of students' perceptions of teachers that care about them and academic motivation among 248 sixth through eight grade students (92% Caucasian, 2% Black, 2% Hispanic, 3% Asian American, and 1% other ethnicity with 50% males and 50 females). Perceived caring from teachers was measured using the Teacher Social and Academic Support subscales of the Classroom Life Measure (Johnson, Johnson, Buckman, & Richards, 1985). Academic motivation was assessed by asking students questions related to effort or motivation, such as "How often do you really try in each of these classes?" Responses were averaged and then correlated. Perceived teacher caring by the students was significantly and positively related to the students' level of academic motivation. Interestingly, there was a significant and negative correlation between perceived teacher caring and the students' beliefs that they had control over their academic grades. In other words, when the students did not believe their teachers cared about them, the students did not believe they had control over their grades.

A study was conducted by Skinner (1993) with 144 children in grades 3 through 5 (94% Caucasian, 6% African American) and their 14 teachers exploring the reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement. The assessments that were used included the teachers' report of their interactions with each student and the students' perceptions of teacher context. The results suggest when students experience their

teachers as warm and caring, the students feel happier and more enthusiastic in class. Additionally, it appears that there is a reciprocal relationship between student engagement and teacher behavior. In other words, as students actively engage in the learning process and become involved, their teacher's behavior is affected positively, which increases student motivation. Accordingly, when students appear to be more passive in class, their teachers' behavior is affected negatively by liking students less than other students and by preferring to spend time with other students. Therefore, when teachers are perceived as behaving in a caring manner, their students may behave in a way that further increases their teachers' level of caring. In contrast, when teachers are not perceived as caring, their students may behave in a manner that decreases their teachers' level of compassion.

Murdock and Miller (2003) conducted a study with 206 eighth grade students (50% Caucasian, 44% African American, 6% another ethnic status with 52% females and 48% males) involving the role that teacher caring had on student motivation. Teacher caring was comprised of three variables: perceived teacher expectations, perceived teacher respect, and perceived teacher commitment to teaching. Both students' self-reports and teachers' ratings were used. The students' self-reports consisted of measures of academic self-efficacy and intrinsic value of education. The teachers' reports consisted of student effort. According to this study, teacher caring had a significant impact on student motivation. In addition, there appears to be a positive correlation between the strength of the student-teacher relationship, which teacher caring is a component, and student motivation. That is, it may be that the more a student perceives a teacher cares, the more the student will be motivated.

Support

Teacher support, which can be characterized as providing emotional support to their students, according to Wentzel (1998), also had a positive influence on the motivation of students. Teacher support also seemed to have more impact on motivation with female students than with male students. In a similar study, Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) found that reluctant learners became more motivated when they received teacher support.

Studies. Teacher support has also been shown to have an effect on student motivation. Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) interviewed four students that were considered reluctant learners, or students that appeared to possess the intellectual ability to succeed in the classroom, as evidenced by their ability to complete most school assignments, but chose to not try. These students shared that they were motivated to learn from the teachers that appeared to support them and have a sincere desire for them to succeed. In contrast, these students were not motivated to learn from the teachers that they perceived to be their opponent and were just waiting for them to fail.

Wentzel (1998) conducted a study with 167 sixth grade students (92% Caucasian, 1% Black, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian American and 2% other ethnic status with almost equal number of males and females), that explored the role that teachers have on middle school students' motivation. The students were given questionnaires regarding perceived support from their teachers. Achievement data or the end of the year grade point average was also collected from the students at the end of the year. The results indicated that teacher support was a positive predictor of student motivation.

In addition, teacher support had a stronger impact on the female participants versus the male participants.

Forms Of Feedback

The type of feedback that teachers give to students about their school work and behavior was also a factor in students' motivation. Negative teacher feedback given to students on a regular basis was found to predict students' lack of motivation and, subsequently, poor academic performance (Wentzel, 2002). Accordingly, Mueller and Dweck (1998) believed that feedback regarding students' effort was found to increase their motivation, whereas feedback regarding the teachers' perceived intelligence level of the student decreased motivation.

Studies. Wentzel (2002) studied the effect of negative teacher feedback on students with 452 sixth graders from two suburban middle schools. Self-report measures were utilized regarding student motivation variables and teaching dimensions. The student motivation variables consisted of three factors: mastery orientation, interest in class, and social goals. Demographics for the first school consisted of 87% European American students, 6% African American students, and 7% from another ethnic status with male and female participants being almost equal in number. Demographics for students from the second school consisted of 92% African American students, 6% European American students, and 2% from another ethnic status with the number of male and female participants being almost equal. Negative feedback was found to be a consistent predictor of students' negative academic performance. These results emphasize the potentially harmful effects of negative and critical feedback on student motivation.

Mueller and Dweck (1998) conducted a study 128 fifth graders (50% Caucasian, 19% African American, 31% Hispanic with 45% males and 55% females) regarding the effects of two different forms of feedback. The mean age of the participants was 10.7 years of age. The first type of feedback pertained to the perceived intelligence level of the child. The second form of feedback pertained to the perceived amount of effort the child exerted. The participants were given three sets of puzzlelike problems to solve. The first set of participants received positive feedback regarding their intelligence. The second set of participants received positive feedback regarding their effort. The third set of participants did not receive feedback regarding their intelligence level nor their effort. All of the participants then went on to solve another set of problems that were more difficult. The results suggest that students who were given praise for their effort alone had a higher level of motivation for trying more difficult problems, were more likely to enjoy challenging problems, and had a higher level of persistence in solving them.

Belonging

Another feature of motivation is the students' feeling that they belonged within the school community. When students believed they belonged within the school community, they demonstrated higher levels of academic motivation than those students who did not feel they belonged (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Stipek, 1996). Likewise, Osterman (2000) said that a strong positive relationship exists between students' perception that they relate or belong in their school community and their academic engagement. Furthermore, Maslow (1954) believed that before a person can perceive they belong, they must have their physiological and safety needs met.

Studies. Belonging, or having close relationships with individuals, school social groups, and school activities, has been shown to be a significant factor in school motivation (Ryan, Stiller & Lynch, 1994). Faircloth and Hamm (2005) performed a study with 580 African American, 948 Asian American, 860 Latino, and 3,142 European American students (47% male and 53% female) from seven ethnically diverse high schools. The students' sense of belonging as measured by a friendship nominating activity, time spent in extracurricular activities, and bonding with teacher contributed to student motivation and success across several different ethnic groups. In addition, it has been shown that students perform better and are more motivated in environments where they sense community and relatedness (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Stipek, 1996).

Osterman (2000) reviewed research related to the importance of students' experiencing a sense of belonging in school. According to this review, students' level of academic motivation increases when they believe they belong within the school community. Interestingly, however, students' perception that their teachers accept them is more important than their parents or friends acceptance (Osterman, 2000).

According to Maslow (1954), having a sense of belonging is one component of becoming self-actualized or receiving self-fulfillment. Before a person can perceive they belong or relate within a community, they must first meet other needs. One of those needs is satisfying physiological desires, such as hunger and thirst. The other need is safety. When a person does not feel safe within their environment they, most likely, will also not feel as if they belong (Maslow, 1954). Accordingly, when students are arriving at school hungry and afraid, it is unlikely that they will feel as if they belong. When

people feel that they belong, their motivation increases and inversely; when people do not have their basic need of belonging met, their motivation decreases (Maslow, 1954).

Student's age

Academic motivation seems to change as students get older. According to Daniels and Arapostathis (2005), students' level of motivation may be affected by the change in teaching relationships from elementary school, where participation is encouraged, to middle school, where the focus is primarily on academic grades. Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier (2005) said motivation decreases for students between the 8th and 10th grade, in addition students that are motivated intrinsically are better able to handle the transition to high school (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Therefore, it appears that student motivation may change as students age.

Studies. The age of the student has also been shown to affect their level of motivation. In a three-year long study by Otis et al. (2005), 646 participants (321 males, 322 females, and 3 undefined) ranging between the ages of 13 and 15 years old completed a questionnaire about motivational change. The students showed a decrease in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation between the 8th and 10th grade. In addition, the results suggest that students who are intrinsically motivated at the end of junior high school are better able to handle the transition to high school. According to a study by Daniels and Arapostathis (2005), a change occurs between elementary school and middle school, where there is a shift in teaching from participation or emphasizing students' involvement to performance or focusing on students' grades. According to Daniels and Arapostathis, this shift affects motivation because some students have a

difficult time maintaining their motivation based solely on grades. In addition, this study suggested that motivation may change over time.

In conclusion, academic achievement has been shown to be affected by several factors including academic motivation. In turn, academic motivation is influenced by, parental involvement, self-efficacy or perceived competence, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, a mastery versus performance approach to learning, student interest, and the student-teacher relationship, which is the focus of this paper. Some of the factors inherent in the student-teacher relationship that affect students' academic motivation are the theory of attachment, teachers' high expectations of students, caring student-teacher relationship, teacher support, feedback given by the teacher, sense of belonging, and students' age.

Rational For Current Study

Although a number of studies have examined students' academic motivation, only a few ask the students to directly share their voices about what teachers do that affects their level of motivation. In addition, the current study represents a cross-section of students from four different grades (6th, 8th, 10th and 12th). This cross-section approach is being utilized because research has suggested that as students' age, their level and type of motivation changes (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Otis et al., 2005). In review of the current literature, a cross-section approach, with students in these grades, used to study academic motivation and the student-teacher relationship has not been performed. Few studies have examined actual student perspectives from different grades about student motivation within the student-teacher relationship.

Methods

Participants

The participant sample consisted of four 6th grade Caucasian students (50% male and 50% female), three 8th grade Caucasian students (33% male, 67% female), four 10th grade Caucasian students (25% male and 75% female), and four 12th grade Caucasian students (25% male and 75% female). Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, these participants were recruited from a rural, western New York middle school and high school. Requests for volunteers continued until there were four participants each from the 6th grade, 10th grade, and 12th grade. Even after several attempts to procure volunteers, only three participants volunteered for this study from the eighth grade. Volunteers were recruited by the researcher in either their Activity Block, for participants in the 6th grade and 8th grade or their Flex Block, for participants in the 10th grade and 12th grade. In exchange for their participation, the participants received pizza for lunch to be given after the research was collected.

Setting

The participants attended either a rural, western New York middle school or high school. The population of the surrounding community was 4,481 at the last census. The average income of people in that community was \$46,359. The ethnic makeup of the citizens within that community was 93.7% Caucasian, 3.5% African American, .9% American Indian, .8% Hispanic, 1.2% other ethnicity. In addition 24% of the participants attending the middle school received free or reduced lunch; while 13% of the participants attending the high school received free or reduced lunch.

In order to protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms were used. The two 6th grade boys were named Samuel and Steve; the two 6th grade girls were named Sarah and Sue. The 8th grade boy was named Aden; the two 8th grade girls were named Amy and Aliceson. The 10th grade boy was named Nick; the three 10th grade girls were named Nancy, Natasha, and Nichole. The 12th grade boy was named Tim; the three 12th grade girls were named Tina, Tashia, and Tonia.

Procedure

Recruitment. A list of 6th grade, 8th grade, 10th grade, and 12th grade teachers were compiled along with a list of students in their Activity class (for students in the 6th and 8th grade) and Flex class (for students in the 10th and 12th grade). The teachers were then contacted via a memo to set up a date and time for the researcher to present the study. Once a compatible date and time was established between the researcher and a teacher, the researcher presented a description of the study, both verbally and in writing (See Appendix E for 6th and 8th grade students and Appendix G for 10th and 12th grade students) to the students in that class during either their Activity Block, for 6th grade and 8th grade students, or their Flex Block, for 10th and 12th grade students. Informed consent forms for both the student and their parent(s) to sign were then given to each student (See Appendices H and I). As part of the description of the study and the informed consent forms, the practice of tape recording the interviews was explained. The researcher explained to the students that if they wanted to participate in the study, they would have to sign, date, and write their birth date on the consent form labeled “Statement of Informed Consent – Student.” The researcher also explained that it was required that the students’ parent or guardian sign and date the consent form labeled

“Statement of Informed Consent-Parent/Guardian.” The researcher then went back to the same classroom two days after handing out the informed consent forms to pick up the signed consent forms. This procedure was repeated until four students from the 6th, 10th, and 12th grades turned in the completed consent forms. After speaking with each student in the eighth grade at least twice, and only receiving three completed consent forms, the decision was made to discontinue the recruitment process for this grade and utilize the three students that already volunteered for the study. In the event that more than four students from a grade volunteered, four participants would have been randomly selected from the study.

Once the participants for the study had been identified, the researcher reviewed the participants' class schedules and found times that were compatible with the researcher's schedule to conduct an individual twenty-minute interview with the participants in the researcher's office. The researcher then sent passes for the participants to arrive at the researcher's office and the interviews were completed.

Measure. A qualitative study using a phenomenology/hermeneutics approach with a semi-structured interview was conducted with fifteen participants, which consisted of four 6th grade Caucasian participants (50% male and 50% female), three 8th grade Caucasian participants (33% male, 67% female), four 10th Caucasian participants (25% male and 75% female), and four 12th grade Caucasian participants (25% male and 75% female). According to Hill, Thompson, and Williams, (as cited in Heppner & Heppner, 2004), a sample size of between eight to fifteen participants is sufficient when conducting qualitative research as the sample size will allow the

researcher to examine the variability and consistency across the participants. Also, additional participants are not believed to typically add a wealth of new information.

A phenomenology/hermeneutics approach to gathering information for this study was used instead of other types of qualitative research theories, such as, grounded theory and consensual qualitative research. The focus of this study was to capture the central meaning of experiences from several individuals, which, according to Heppner and Heppner (2004) would best be obtained using a phenomenology/hermeneutics approach. A grounded theory approach was not utilized because, according to Heppner and Heppner, a constant comparative method is used with a grounded theory approach and is performed by collecting data, coding the data, analyzing the data, and then collecting more data in response to the existing data. In addition, these steps are not discrete; in other words, data can be collected at the same time that other data is being analyzed. For the purposes of this study, the data will be collected, transcribed, coded, and then analyzed in discrete steps. Due to the time constraints, the researcher believed that repeating these steps would be unsuitable for this study. Similarly, a consensual qualitative research method was not employed because, according to Heppner and Heppner, participants are selected using a criterion-based sampling method, which the researcher did not believe was applicable to this specific population.

Procedure. A semi-structured interview was used to gather data in this study. The interviews were tape recorded and did not contain any identifying information to protect the interviewee's confidentiality. Before the interviews began, the researcher spent between five and ten minutes with each participant to ascertain their present emotional status and to begin establishing rapport. The researcher reviewed the

purpose of the study and asked the participant if there were any questions. The researcher then asked the participant if he or she was ready to begin and, once the participant agreed, the tape recorder was set to record and the interview proceeded. During one of the interviews, the researcher turned the tape recorder off as one of the interviewees began to explore some issues that were more of a personal nature. The researcher had consent to record the participants discussing issues related to the study but did not receive permission to record the participants discussing personal matters. In order to elicit the information needed for this study, a similar semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The semi-structured interview contained the following statements.

1. I would like you to help me understand...
 - a. ...what teachers do that helps motivate you in school.
 - b. ...what teachers do that helps you to not be motivated in school.
 - c. ...what role, if any, does support from your teachers have on your level of motivation.
 - d. ...what role, if any, does teacher caring have on your level of motivation.
 - e. ...how you believe you fit in socially in this school and how that affects your level of motivation.
 - f. ...if getting a reward from your teacher affects your level of motivation.
 - g. ...how your motivation has changed as you have grown older.
 - h. ...how your motivation is affected, if at all, by how teachers talk to you about your schoolwork.
 - i. ...what else teachers do that influences your motivation.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed. Once the interviews were transcribed, the tapes that contained the interviews were destroyed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The transcriptions did not contain any identifying information; however, the transcriptions were labeled in regards to the interviewee's grade level and gender. Once the transcriptions were completed, they were coded for major themes. The transcriptions were then separated by theme and gathered back together according to theme. For example, all text that dealt with support and its affect on motivation were put together. Similarly, all text that dealt with participants' age and motivation were put together. This procedure was repeated until all of the major themes were compiled together.

The themes were then analyzed according to the overall sample and grade level. Specifically, the number of times a theme occurred and the corresponding percentages were calculated for the overall sample. Accordingly, the number of times a theme occurred was calculated for each grade level. The results of these responses were then discussed and summarized. In addition, the participants' verbal responses were discussed according to theme, grade level, and overall sample.

Results

This study explored the perceived effect of the student-relationship on the participants' level of academic motivation. The participants of this study included four 6th grade participants, three 8th grade participants, four 10th grade participants, and four 12th grade participants. Pseudonyms were used in place of the actual participants' names as a means to protect confidentiality. Several themes emerged among the data related to the participants' motivation and the relationships they have with their

teachers. These themes included teacher support, rewards, an emotional connection with the teacher, teacher expectations, caring, witnessing other teacher and student interactions, patience, parental/teacher influence, and teacher motivation. Maturity, fun or interesting assignments, and a calm classroom atmosphere also appeared to affect the academic motivation of the participants.

Teacher Support

Positive. Teacher support, both positive and negative, was the topic that the participants discussed the most as influencing their motivation. Teacher support was defined as teachers providing extra academic help and assisting with students' personal concerns, such as problems with friends and family. According to Nancy, a 10th grade student, when teachers showed their support, "They (the teachers) just made me want to work harder." Nichole, another 10th grader said "It helps me want to do my work when you have like someone that you can go to when you need help and you don't feel like you're on your own when you're doing a project or something." In conjunction, Samuel, a sixth grade student, said "When she (the teacher) helped me, I wanted to do a lot better."

Negative. Negative support, defined as the perception that a teacher did not want to provide extra help or listen to personal concerns, also appeared to play a role in the academic motivation of the participants in this study. Tonia, a 12th grade student had this to say about her experience with some of her teachers, "Just the way they approach you – you know that you can't go to them for extra help – they'll just be like why are you here." In addition, Amy, an eighth grade student responded strongly to her perception of lack of support from one of her teachers, "They like say you have a certain

grade and you need to raise your test scores but you can't raise your test scores (if they don't give extra credit, extra help, or anything." It is important to note that having teacher support was seen as positively affecting the participants' motivation and the lack of support was seen as negatively affecting the participants' motivation.

Statistics. Interestingly, out of the 35 comments made regarding support throughout the interviews, 10 of the comments were made by male participants and 25 comments were made by female participants. Accordingly, fourteen comments were made by the 6th grade participants, eight comments were made by the 8th grade participants, eight comments were made by the 10th grade participants, and five comments were made by the 12th grade participants. Teacher support was the theme that was mentioned most often by the participants as affecting their academic motivation. Among all of the themes, support was mentioned approximately 23% of the time, the highest percentage in this study, as a factor in the participants' academic motivation.

Rewards

Positive. Receiving extrinsic rewards also appeared to be a strong factor in the academic motivation among the participants. Rewards were defined as extrinsic and originating from the teachers. Rewards, such as, stickers, candy, food, and grades were all included in this study. For example, Nick, a 10th grade student, talked about one of his teachers promising the whole class a reward if the class averaged above a certain grade on a test, "It helped me to get ready for the test so that I could get that grade and it also helped me to want to help the kids who struggle to get that grade – to help them as well." Likewise, Tina, a 12th grade student also said this about rewards, "I

think it's one of the best things that helps students. Grades are rewards but getting an instant reward is good – it helps.” Similarly, Sarah, a sixth grader said this in relation to rewards, “You do better, when teachers give rewards you feel like you can do better.” Interestingly, one of the participants, Aliceson, an eighth grader, seemed to have a negative connotation connected with liking extrinsic rewards, “It sounds like a bad kid thing but I like food reinforcements.”

Negative/Neutral. Rewards also appear to play either a negative role or a neutral role in relation to motivation among some of the participants. Steve, a sixth grader said “If we get candy because we did something right then we would always want candy when we did a homework assignment or something else.” Tim, a 12th grade student said “Rewards definitely helped me in the lower grades but now that I’m in the upper grades, as long as the students have respect for the teacher, they’ll still do the activity.” Aliceson, an eighth grader, also said “Some teachers give us treats but only for the people getting high grades so if you try and still get a low grade you don’t get anything for that.” Receiving extrinsic rewards does seem effective as a means to raise some students. However, it seems that extrinsic rewards are best not given for everything a student does right and is distributed to every student, not just the ones with high grades as this may actually lower the motivation of students who are struggling academically.

Statistics. Out of the 19 comments made regarding receiving rewards throughout the interviews, 8 of the comments were made by male participants and 11 comments were made by female participants. In addition, four comments were made by the 6th grade participants, five comments were made by the 8th grade participants, six comments were made by the 10th grade participants, and four comments were made by

the 12th grade participants. Receiving extrinsic rewards from teachers was the theme that was mentioned the second most often by the participants as affecting their academic motivation. Among all of the themes, extrinsic rewards were mentioned by the participants approximately 13% of the time, as a factor in their academic motivation.

Emotional Connection

Positive. Having an emotional connection with their teachers also appeared to be a factor in the level of academic motivation among the participants. An emotional connection was defined as the student and the teacher having a positive working relationship that included the teacher being interested in the students' lives, the teacher sharing portions of his or her own life, and the teacher being genuine. According to Natasha, a 10th grader, "If they like tell me about them and get to know me - it helps me. I'll want to do my work kind of like for them." Similarly, Nichole, another 10th grader said, "...when they want to talk to you – when they want to know more about what you think about something it helps you to be more comfortable around them and you want to do better for them." Amy, an eighth grade student said "The more they connect with me, the more I want to connect with them. It like raises it (motivation) it's like – it just makes you happier." In addition, Tashia, a 12th grader, said "It's just easier to get motivated if you feel a connection to the teacher." Having an emotional connection with the participants' teachers was seen as positively affecting the participants' motivation. It seems that the students benefited from establishing an emotional connection with one or more of their teachers because the students felt as if they were included and wanted in a group, which is a characteristic drive for adolescents. As some of the participants' emotional needs of inclusion were met, there

seemed to be a theme of reciprocity, as the more the teacher tried to connect with the student, the more the student tried to connect with the teacher. One way that the participants may have attempted to connect with their teacher was by completing their work.

Negative. The lack of an emotional connection also appears to have a negative affect on the participants' level of academic achievement. Nancy, a 10th grader, said this about one of her teachers "...he gave you something to do and you did it all class and you didn't talk to him – he talked about 5 minutes every class and then you handed your work in every class. ...you're really not learning anything – well you are but not as well it's not like put in your head – you're just going through the motions and nothing extra." The lack of an emotional connection was seen as negatively affecting the participants' motivation as it seemed to take away from the overall educational experience for the student, which included motivation.

Statistics. Interestingly, among the 18 comments that were made regarding an emotional connection between the teacher and students having an affect on motivation, all of the comments were made by female participants. It appears that a sense of emotional connectedness with their teachers were more important to the female participants than the male participants. Furthermore, one comment was made by a 6th grade participant, two comments were made by the 8th grade participants, thirteen comments were made by the 10th grade participants, and two comments were made by the 12th grade participants. Interestingly, this may suggest that emotional connectedness may be more developmentally important to students in the 10th grade than in 6th, 7th, or 11th grade. Among all of the themes, an emotional connection was

mentioned approximately 12% of the time as a factor in the participants' academic motivation.

Expectations

Positive and negative. Expectations from teachers regarding student work also appeared to have an impact on the level of academic motivation among the participants. Expectations were defined as the degree to which teachers believed their students would perform. Samuel, a sixth grade student, said, "If they know I can do it, it makes me better." Whereas, Amy, an eighth grade student, said, "...if sometimes if it's a high bar, you can't reach it and you feel really bad because you can't reach it for them. If it's too low of a bar, you stop trying to succeed or exceed your expectations." Sarah, a sixth grade student, said, "When they have high expectations, they think you can do this and when you don't that sort of lowers it (motivation) a little." It appears that when teachers have high expectations for students, the students believe their teachers have confidence in them. In contrast, when teachers have high expectations for their students and the students are not able to obtain that arbitrary goal, the students seem to become discouraged, which lowers their motivation. It also appears that when teachers have low expectation for their students, the students perceive that they do not have confidence in their abilities, which may also lower their motivation.

Statistics. Among the 15 comments that were made regarding teacher expectations having an affect on motivation, 6 of the comments originated from the male participants and 9 of the comments originated from the female participants. Furthermore, five comments were made by 6th grade participants, two comments were made by the 8th grade participants, four comments were made by the 10th grade

participants, and four comments were made by the 12th grade participants. Among all of the themes, teacher expectations of their students' work were mentioned 10% of the time as a factor in the participants' academic motivation.

Caring

Positive. The participants' perception that their teacher cares about them is also a factor in academic motivation. Teacher caring is defined for this study as liking or regard by the teacher for the participants. Nick, a 10th grader, said "...because you know that they care and they want to help you so you want to do well because you know that they want you to do well, so you do well." Furthermore, Nichole, a 10th grade student, believed this about the presence of teacher caring in the school, "...a lot of teachers know a lot about us. They really care about us and help us to excel both inside and outside of the classroom." It appears that students interpret teachers that care about them as their cheerleader; they are at the sidelines continuously cheering them on. There again seems to be a reciprocal cycle between teacher caring and student motivation. The more the teachers show they care, the more that most of the students wanted to maintain that connection by completing their work and doing well in school.

Negative. The perception of lack of teacher caring by the participants also seems to play a role in academic motivation. Tonia, a 12th grade student, said "When they don't care, I don't care about their class. I don't care about what they're teaching." Sue, a sixth grade student, had a similar thought, "If the teachers don't seem like they care about me, it's easier for me not to want to get my work done. Once again, there

appears to be a reciprocal relationship of students not having the desire to complete their work when the students do not perceive that their teachers care.

Statistics. There were 13 comments made regarding teacher caring and the affect on academic motivation. Of these comments, two of the comments were made by male participants and eleven of the comments were made by female participants. It appears that the perception that their teachers cared was more valued by the female participants than by the male participants. Additionally, seven comments were made by 6th grade participants, three comments were made by 8th grade participants, two comments were made by 10th grade participants, and one comment was made by a 12th grade participant. Among all of the themes, teacher caring was mentioned approximately 9% of the time as a factor in the participants' academic motivation.

Social Observation

Positive. This factor arose from the interviews and was not expected. Several of the participants discussed having their motivation affected when they witnessed a teacher yelling at or correcting another student. This seemed to have either a positive or a negative affect on the participants' motivation. Sarah, a sixth grade student, responded in this manner, "I think it (observing teachers yelling at another student) does help because it makes me want to not forget my homework and like not get the teachers mad and stuff." Samuel, a sixth grader, said "that (yelling) makes me more motivated to hand my work in ... they're kind of teaching everyone a lesson just by that one person getting yelled at." Even though these participants' motivation increased when they observed a student being corrected by a teacher, it is questionable whether or not the

students were completing their work for the sake of learning or were completing their work out of fear that their teacher may get mad.

Negative. Some of the participants recalled a different experience when talking about this issue, specifically their motivation to engage in their schoolwork decreased. Tim, a 12th grade student said the following about his feelings when teachers yell at other students, “I don’t feel as positively motivated. At that point, I do it (the work) to avoid being yelled at and not necessarily for learning.” Sue, a sixth grade student, said “I just really like wanted to blow the work off” when she witnessed a teacher yelling at another student. Sarah, another sixth grade student, said “You just want to hide” in response to hearing teachers yell at other students. In addition, Nick, a 10th grade student, said ...”it (yelling) definitely affects everybody when you kind of feel a small fear about speaking your mind in class ... what if I do say or do something that is contrary to him, what’s going to happen then? It seems to be that when teachers yell at students, the students that witness the occurrence are affected as well as the student who is being scolded.

Statistics. There were 11 comments made regarding the observation of witnessing another student being yelled at by a teacher. Of these comments, five of the comments were made by male participants and six of the comments were made by female participants. Additionally, three comments were made by 6th grade participants, two comments were made by 8th grade participants, three comments were made by 10th grade participants, and three comments was made by a 12th grade participant. Among all of the themes, teacher caring was mentioned approximately 7% of the time as a factor in the participants’ academic motivation. Approximately half of the students

found witnessing a student being corrected by a teacher helpful and approximately half of the students found it harmful. However, the students that spoke of observing this occurrence as harmful seemed to be more affected by what they observed, as evidenced by the energy behind their statements, than the participants that did not view this behavior as harmful.

Lack of Patience

Negative. The lack of patience a teacher exhibits towards students is also believed to play a role in students' academic motivation. Interestingly, the participants' did not discuss the affect on their motivation when teachers displayed patience; they only commented on what happened to their motivation level when they perceived that their teachers displayed a lack of patience. Patience will be defined as the amount of tolerance and calmness that is displayed in a given situation. Aliceson, an eighth grade student, said the following in relation to her experience with a teacher, "I didn't complete it (her homework) so she (the teacher) got mad because I didn't understand the homework question...It made it (her motivation) go down." Accordingly, Steve, a sixth grade student, said "if you made one mistake she'd be mad at you. You got worried. You didn't want to try anymore." Similarly, Aden, an eighth grade student, said "Well the teachers that are mean like sometimes it affects people and then because you know that you're probably going to get yelled at you don't go to school." Finally, Amy, an eighth grade student, said "They just get like really angry because I won't do like most of the homework in math. I'm really bad at it and I don't understand it so why bother. I get to a question and I can do the question over ten times and still not get it right and

then I just crumble up the whole piece of paper. It appears that when teachers display a lack of patience with their students, their students' motivation decreases.

Statistics. There were 9 comments made regarding the patience level of teachers and the affect on academic motivation. Of these comments, interestingly, six of the comments were made by male participants and three of the comments were made by female participants. Additionally, all of the comments, except for one, were made by participants in the 6th and 8th grade. It may be that students in middle school are more influenced by a lack of teacher patience than students in the higher grades. Five of the comments were made by 6th grade participants, three comments were made by 8th grade participants, and only one comment was made by a student in the 12th grade. Among all of the themes, patience level was mentioned approximately 6% of the time as a factor in the participants' level of academic motivation.

Parental/Teacher Influence

Positive. The results of this study suggest that both parents and teachers have an affect on academic motivation. The participants only discussed to what extent their parents or teachers positively influenced their motivation. Steve, a sixth grade student, said "she (his mom) wanted me to do better because she knew I could do it, which motivated me a lot." In addition, Steve said that his parents had more influence on his motivation than his teachers. Natasha, a 10th grade student, said "...sometimes I might get a lower grade and they'll (her parents) say to study a little more or go to the teacher and ask for help and that helps me want to do better." Natasha also said, "My teachers aren't my parents but they are my mentors. I care almost as much for them as I do my parents." In addition, Nick, a 10th grade student, said " I have proven to them (his

parents) that I can do well and now they don't expect anything less than to keep up what I have been doing." There seems to be some discrepancy among the participants as to if their parents or their teachers have more influence on their motivation, overall, however, parents and teachers do appear to have a great influence over their children's and students' motivation, respectively.

Statistics. There were 5 comments made regarding the extent to which parents and teachers influence academic motivation. Of these comments, three of the comments were made by the male participants and two of the comments were made by the female participants. Accordingly, one comment was made by a student in the 6th grade and one by a student in the 8th grade. Two comments were made by participants in the 10th grade, with one comment made by a student in the 12th grade. The influence of parents and teachers were mentioned approximately 3% of the time affecting the participants' academic motivation.

Teacher Motivation

Positive. When the participants observed their teachers' motivation in the classroom, it also seemed to affect the participants' academic motivation. Tim, a 12th grade student, said "First of all, they have to be motivated themselves, you can't learn from a teacher that doesn't even sound interested in his own subject." Tim also, said "If the teacher is ... motivated in your own class, that's probably the best way." Similarly, Tashia, a 12th grade student, said "One year I had this teacher...he'd share his passion...he would dress up and make up little silly songs. It made learning a lot easier." It appears that students' motivation in the upper grades, ten and twelve, may

be more influenced by a teacher who is motivated than students in the lower grades, six and eight.

Statistics. There were three comments made regarding the level of motivation the teacher displayed and, subsequently, the amount of motivation the participants displayed. One of the comments was made by a male participant with the remaining two comments made by female participants. Intriguingly, all of the comments originated from participants in the 10th and 12th grades, with one comment from a 10th grade student and two comments from 12th grade participants. It appears that teacher motivation may be more important to students in grades ten and twelve versus grades six and eight. Teacher motivation was mentioned approximately 3% of the time as a factor in academic motivation among the participants.

Maturity

Positive. Even though maturity is not a factor that is inherent within the student-teacher relationship, it, nevertheless, appears to play a role in the academic motivation of the participants. As the students grow and mature, their level of academic motivation seems to change. Tina, a 12th grade student, said "Well, in middle school it was about fitting in and at the beginning of high school, it was more about getting the grades and now it's like I need a good grade to get into college." Similarly, Nancy, a 10th grade student, said "...it's like the last three years of high school are the most important so my motivation got better." Furthermore, Natasha, another 10th grade student, said "...in middle school I didn't really try because I like knew that my grades always counted but now that I'm in high school I know that they really count for like college." Also, Tim, a 12th grade student, said "When I first hit high school my dad had

always been telling me that...you might be able to slip up in middle school but when you hit high school it all goes on your record. The motivation for me is the light at the end of the tunnel.” In addition, Samuel, a sixth grade student, said “In sixth grade you get to move around now and they give you a little more freedom. My motivation got a little better this year.” There seemed to be a general trend among the participants of the older they got, the more motivated they became.

Statistics. Development or maturity was mentioned seven times as a factor in the participants’ motivation. Of those comments, only two of the comments were made by male participants, while five of the comments were made by female participants. In conjunction, one comment each was made by a 6th grade student and an 8th grade student. Three of the comments originated from 10th grade participants and two of the comments originated from the 12th grade participants. Maturity was mentioned approximately 5% of the time as playing a role in the academic motivation of the participants.

Interesting or Fun Assignments

Positive. The results of this study suggest that when a student perceives an assignment or subject to be fun or interesting, their motivation is affected. Samuel, a sixth grade student, said “Well, I like writing essays and stuff. When those things are assigned, I usually go home and do it right then.” In addition, Sarah, a sixth grade student, said the following in response to an assignment “I wanted to get it done because I love reading and I love doing projects about it.” Similarly, Amy, an eighth grade student, said “...when they make a homework assignment sound fun, it motivates

me.” The results suggest that it may be helpful for teachers to consider what is fun and interesting to their students and, if possible, assign work around those areas.

Negative. The inverse also seems to be true; when the participants do not perceive what they’re learning to be fun or interesting, their motivation decreases. Steve, a sixth grade student, said “Usually they just make it like you just have to do this homework and if it’s not interesting you don’t try.” Accordingly, Aliceson, an eighth grade student, said “...make it relate more” in response to what teachers can do to help motivate students to learn. It seems as if students enjoy having fun and working with topics that are of interest to them.

Statistics. There were 12 comments made regarding student interest and its affect on academic motivation. Of these comments, six of the comments were made by male participants and six of the comments were made by female participants. Interestingly, seven of the comments were made by 6th grade participants, and two comments were made 8th grade participants, one comment was made by a 10th grade student, and two comments were made by 12th grade participants. Among all of the themes, student interest was mentioned approximately 8% of the time as a factor in the participants’ level of academic motivation.

Calm Classroom Environment

Positive. Being in a calm classroom environment seemed to play a role in the motivation of some of the participants. The participants, however, did not discuss their motivation in relation to not being physically comfortable. Tina, a 12th grade student, said, “...he’ll like bring in food for us to eat and it makes us all like get along and it like calms us down so when everyone is calm and not stressed out everything just seems to

work better.” Aliceson, an eighth grade student, said “...as long as they’re a laid back teacher, it makes me strive more. Not one of those teachers where you’re just taught to accept things.” It may be that a calm classroom environment may lend itself to a quieter room, which may lead to more concentration. The more concentration a student has, the more they may be willing to engage their work more fully.

Statistics. There were 4 comments made pertaining to a calm classroom environment and motivation. Interestingly, all of the comments were made by female participants. Also noteworthy, two of the comments originated from participants in the 8th grade and two of the comments originated from participants in the 12th grade. Being in a calm classroom environment was mentioned approximately 3% of the time by the participants as a factor in their academic motivation.

In sum, there appears to be several factors inherent in the student – teacher relationship that had an influence on the participants’ level of academic motivation. Among these factors are teacher support, rewards, an emotional connection with the teacher, teacher expectations, caring, witnessing other teacher and student interactions, patience level, parental/teacher influence, and teacher motivation. Maturity, assignments that were fun and interesting, and a calm classroom atmosphere also appeared to affect the academic motivation of the participants.

Discussion

Discussion of Results

The results of this study suggested that several factors within the student-teacher relationship did have an affect, either positive or negative, on the academic motivation of the participants. These factors included teacher support, rewards, an emotional

connection with the teacher, teacher expectations, caring, witnessing other teacher and student interactions, patience, parental/teacher influence, and teacher motivation. Maturity, fun or interesting assignments, and a calm classroom atmosphere also appeared to affect the academic motivation of the participants.

Support. Teacher support does seem to be an important factor for having a positive influence on the academic motivation of students. Teacher support was the item that the participants discussed most often as influencing their motivation. The lack of teacher support, inversely, also seems to have a negative influence on students' academic motivation. The notion that the presence of teacher support does help students' motivation is also supported by Wentzel (1998) and Arapostathis (2005). Interestingly, Wentzel (1998) said that teacher support seemed to have more impact on academic motivation with female students than with male students, which the current study supported.

Rewards. Receiving extrinsic rewards from teachers seemed to play a mixed role, both positive and negative, in the academic motivation of the participants. Several participants said that receiving some type of extrinsic reward does positively affect their academic motivation. This is not, however, in agreement with Lepper et al. (2005) and Otis et al. (2005) who said that receiving extrinsic rewards actually decreases motivation. The participants that viewed extrinsic rewards negatively did so for a number of discrete reasons. These findings raise the question if extrinsic rewards may indeed help students complete their work and may be beneficial to their academic motivation. It also calls into question whether different types of rewards may be beneficial at different points in the learning process, such as, giving extrinsic rewards at

the beginning of the learning process and intrinsic rewards during the middle of the learning process.

As a side note, when participants for this study were first sought from the 6th and 8th grade classes, a pizza lunch was not offered. After receiving only one volunteer, however, the decision was made to offer the pizza lunch as reimbursement for the students' time. Only after the offer of pizza was added, did other students begin to volunteer. The extrinsic reward of pizza seemed to motivate the students to participate for this study.

Emotional connection. The results of this study also show that when students feel emotionally connected to their teachers, their motivation is increased. The inverse also appears to be valid for this study; when students do not feel emotionally connected to their teachers, their motivation is decreased. This may be, in part, explained by Bowlby (1988), Cassidy and Shaver (1999), and Hamilton (2000) who said that when a person perceives another person to be more competent than they are in a given situation, the person will value the relationship and wish to continue the bond. Therefore, when a student perceives his or her teacher to be competent, they may desire to form a relationship with that teacher and continue the bond by possibly doing what the teacher asks, such as, completing their assignments, homework, and receiving good grades on their tests. In other words, they may display an increased level of academic motivation. Interestingly, all of the comments that were made regarding an emotional connection with their teachers were made by the female participants. This calls into question if an emotional connection with their teachers may be more important for female students than male students.

Caring. Similar to having an emotional connection with a teacher, teacher caring also seems to have an influence on the participants' academic motivation. Wentzel (1997), Murdock and Miller (2003), and Skinner (1993) are all in agreement with these findings. There also seems to be a reciprocal relationship between the lack of teacher caring and the lack of student motivation. In other words, when students do not believe their teacher cares, the students begin to not care about their schoolwork. Wentzel (1997) found that when students did not perceive their teachers cared, the students did not believe they had control over their grades. This may translate for some students into a pattern of not perceiving their teachers care to a decrease in their academic motivation; followed by a sense of hopelessness that they have any power to improve their academic scores. As with having an emotional connection with their teacher, the majority of the comments made were from female participants. This may mean that the female participants valued emotional connectedness more than the male participants. Also noteworthy, sixth grade participants commented on this issue more than all of the other comments added together from the 8th, 10th, and 12th grade participants. This may mean that female students' motivation entering middle school may be especially affected by caring teachers.

Expectations. The findings of this research showed teacher expectations of students' work playing an almost dichotomous role in the participants' academic motivation. When teachers had high expectations for the participants' work, the participants' academic motivation increased. High teacher expectations seemed to translate into themes that the teacher had confidence in the participants' abilities or the teacher knew the student well. These findings are in accordance with Murdock (1999),

Paulson (1998), and Wentzel (2002), who stated that when teachers hold high expectations for their students, their motivation for academics increase and they, subsequently, receive higher grades. Unexpectedly, however, low teacher expectations also seemed to lower the participants' motivation. Low teacher expectations seemed to translate into themes that the teacher did not have confidence in the participants' abilities or the teacher did not know the student well. Therefore, the amount of expectations a teacher has for a student, may only be a superficial cover to the underlying theme of how well the teacher knows the student and how much confidence the teacher has in the abilities of that student.

Social Observation. This was a finding that was not expected. Specifically, as a student witnesses another student being corrected harshly by a teacher, the student's motivation that is witnessing the correction is also affected. The participants seemed to be affected in primarily two ways. The first way the participants were affected was by becoming seemingly more motivated by getting their work done, as a means to not getting corrected by that teacher. Within that theme, however, an underlying theme emerged. Even though some of the participants seemed to become more motivated, they did so because primarily they were scared and did not want to get yelled at and not, specifically, because they wanted to learn. The second way the participants' motivation seemed to be affected was by shutting down and not doing their work. When the participants did not believe it was fair for a teacher to be correcting another student in that manner, the participants spoke of shutting down and, therefore, losing motivation. Likewise, Wentzel (2002) said that students' motivation decreases when they receive negative feedback from the teacher. The results of this study may reflect

Wentzel's study; however, it may also extend to students' motivation being adversely affected after witnessing another student receiving negative feedback.

Patience level. The results of this study suggest that when teachers do not appear to have a lot of patience, the students' motivation is negatively affected. This may be supported by Wentzel's (2002) study exploring whether effective teachers had similar qualities as good parents. The argument can be made that a teacher displaying a lack of patience, may not be educating effectively; therefore, according to Bowlby (1988), is not seen as someone a student would want to establish a relationship and try to please by completing their schoolwork. Interestingly, two-thirds of the comments regarding a teacher's lack of patience and its subsequent affect on the participant's motivation, were made by male participants. This may possibly mean that male students are more affected than female students when a teacher displays a lack of patience. It may also mean that male students behave in a manner more often than female students that elicits a teacher to display a lack of patience. Furthermore, participants in the 6th and 8th grades seemed to be affected more often than participants in the 10th and 12th grades, possibly suggesting that having patience with students is even more important with students in middle school than in high school. Another possibility is that students in the 10th and 12th grades are developmentally more mature and are less likely to behave in a manner that would cause a teacher to display a lack of patience. Nonetheless, a lack of patience does appear to lower the motivational levels of the participants.

Parental/teacher influence. The results of this study seem to reflect the literature that states both parents and teachers have an influence on student motivation (Wentzel,

1998; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). There seemed to be a mixed result for this study; some participants communicated that their parents were more important, some said that teachers were more important, and others said that both their parents and their teachers had about the same influence on their academic motivation. A theme emerged among the discussions, however, of the older the student, the more the participants wanted to please their teachers, subsequently, the more motivated the participants became. Therefore, it appears that both parents and teachers have an impact on their student or child, respectively, and may be powerful forces when working together.

Teacher motivation. The last factor found within the student-teacher relationship that affected the motivation of the participants was the motivation level of the teacher. There seemed to be a reciprocal affect as the more the teacher became motivated, the more the participant became motivated. Even though teacher motivation did emerge as a factor, it was not mentioned as a factor among the 6th grade participants and the 8th grade participants; only the participants in the 10th grade and 12th grade commented on teacher motivation affecting their motivation. The older participants seemed to be more aware of how their motivation may affect their upcoming college admission than the younger participants and more appreciative of their teachers. Therefore, the older students seemed to be more serious about earning good grades and more open to being affected by their teachers, including their teacher's level of motivation. Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) believed that student interest had a positive affect on student motivation, therefore, there may be a possible connection between teacher interest and student motivation. In other words, it may be possible that the more a teacher is

interested in his or her subject and expresses that interest through enthusiasm, the more enthusiasm or motivation is elicited from the students.

Maturity. The maturity level of the participants seemed to play a large role in the academic motivation of the participants, which is in accordance with Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) as well as Otis et al. (2005). Even though the maturity level of the participants are not part of the student-teacher relationship, the subject presented itself as a strong feature among the motivational level of the participants and was subsequently included in this study. The main reason that emerged as evidence that maturity does affect motivation was the older participants' preparation for college. It seems that since they began high school their grades became more important as they realized that their grades may affect their chance of going to the college of their choice.

Interesting or fun assignments. The results of this study suggest that assigning of projects, homework, etc. that students consider interesting or fun also appears to have an affect on their motivation. There seems to be somewhat of a disagreement among the literature, however. Boekarts (1996) along with Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) believed that student interest does have a positive impact on student motivation. Wentzel (1999) does not take quite a staunch position on this issue. Wentzel believed that a student's sense of responsible behavior has more to do with their motivation than receiving an assignment that is of interest or enjoyable to them. Curiously, except for one comment in by a student in the 12th grade, only participants in the 6th and 8th grades said that assignments that were of interest or fun to them increased their motivation. This may be due to the maturity level of the participants. The older participants' motivation may not be affected if an assignment is not of interest or is not

fun to them because school for older students, 10th and 12 graders, seems to become more important due to their upcoming graduation and possibly college. Another possibility is that the 10th and 12th grade students are more mature and, therefore have a better frustration tolerance for assignments that are not of interest or fun.

Calm classroom atmosphere. Another unexpected finding, of being in a calm classroom atmosphere, emerged as having an affect on the participants' academic motivation. Of interest, the only participants that mentioned a calm classroom atmosphere affecting their motivation were female participants. This may be due to the limited sample size or it may be that the motivational level of females are impacted more by a calm and quiet atmosphere more than the motivational level of males. A conjecture on these results may be that females are socialized to be more calm and quiet than males and, therefore, are better able to function under those circumstances.

In review, several factors within the student-teacher relationship that affected the participants' academic motivation are discussed and related with the literature. These factors include teacher support, rewards, an emotional connection with the teacher, teacher expectations, caring, witnessing other teacher and student interactions, patience, parental/teacher influence, and teacher motivation. Maturity, fun or interesting assignments, and a calm classroom atmosphere also appeared to affect the academic motivation of the participants.

Limitations

There were several limitations that may affect the validity of this study. The first limitation is the sample size. There were only fifteen participants in this study, separated into four groups. These groups consisted of four participants in the 6th grade,

three participants in the 8th grade, four participants in the 10th grade, and four participants in the 12th grade. An additional limitation of this study is the gender makeup of the sample. The sample did not contain equal numbers of males and females. Utilizing equal numbers of males and females may have produced more equitable results based on gender. There were also an uneven number of participants in the groups. Among the four groups, 6th grade, 8th grade, 10th grade, and 12th grade, all of the groups contained four participants with the exception of the 8th grade. The 8th grade group consisted of three participants. Another limitation is the ethnic makeup of the participants. All of the participants were Caucasian. Utilizing participants from different ethnic backgrounds may produce different results. Also, the students that volunteered for this study may be more influenced by extrinsic rewards, pizza lunch, than the general student body. A further limitation to this study is the geographical region where the study was conducted. The study took place in a Northeastern region of the United States. Utilizing participants from different geographical regions may produce different results. An additional limitation is the community in which this study took place. The community can be described as a rural middle-class community. Because all of the participants were from a rural middle-class community, these results might not generalize to other socioeconomic and urban environments. A limitation also exists in the researcher being the sole coder and interpreter. An expectancy effect may have taken place under these circumstances. Having several people come to an agreement regarding the meaning of the transcriptions and subsequent coding may have provided a more valid and reliable study.

In review, sample size, gender inequity in sample, uneven number of participants in groups, ethnic makeup of participants, geographical region, and composition of surrounding community were limitations of this study. A further limitation may have occurred as the researcher also completed the coding and the analysis of the data. Implications of this study for practice include providing support, caring, an emotional connection, patience, and interest in students' lives. Finding the right balance between high and low expectations, assigning work that is interesting or fun, and being a motivated educator all seem to affect students' academic motivation. Accordingly, providing private correction that is gentle also seems to be important. Implications of this study for research include utilizing a larger sample size, having a gender equitable sample, using participants of different ages, community backgrounds, and ethnicities. In addition, the use of several researchers and the investigation of the unexpected themes that emerged will also provide further research avenues.

Implications

Practice. For educators that are interested in utilizing the relationship that they have with their students to enhance the students' level of academic motivation, several suggestions have emerged from this study. The first suggestion is for teachers to be supportive of their students, on both an academic and a personal level. Other suggestions for teachers are to show that they care about their students, attempt to form an emotional connection with their students, strive for patience, and show interest in their students' lives, both within the school and also outside the school. Also, it is important for educators to find the right balance, not too low or not too high, when it comes to setting expectations for work from their students. Furthermore, providing

assignments that are fun or of particular interest to students, may improve their motivation. Being a motivated educator also seems to be contagious. As students see their teachers being motivated, they become motivated themselves. Lastly, it is important to provide correction to a student in a gentle manner when other students are not present.

Research. For researchers that are interested in exploring this topic further, there are several suggestions that may help round out this research topic. The first suggestion is to utilize a larger sample size with equal number of students in each group. Another idea is to run this study using an equal number of male and female participants. Other thoughts are to perform this study again using participants of different ages, community backgrounds, and ethnicities. Also corroborating with several researchers in the coding and analysis of the data may help reduce a possible expectancy effect. Further investigation into themes that emerged from this study that were not expected, such as the witnessing of another student being harshly corrected, the use of extrinsic rewards, and the underlying meaning to students of teacher expectations may be warranted.

Summary

The role that the student-teacher relationship has on students' academic motivation is studied utilizing a phenomenology /hermeneutics study with 6th grade participants, three 8th grade participants, four 10th grade participants, and four 12th grade participants. Results of the study suggest that student motivation is fostered when teacher support, teacher caring, teacher patience, extrinsic rewards, an emotional connection with the teacher, teacher expectations that are neither too high nor too low,

and teacher motivation are present. Results also suggest when students witness other teachers harshly correcting other students, academic motivation is negatively affected. Finally, the maturity of students may have an impact on their level of motivation, as well as fun or interesting assignments, and a calm classroom atmosphere.

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Appendix A

October 19, 2005

Tom Woodruff
Caledonia-Mumford
High School Principal

Dear Tom Woodruff,

As a new requirement for SUNY Brockport's Counseling Internship program, I must receive approval for my thesis from the Institutional Review Board at SUNY Brockport. As part of this process, I must obtain your signature authorizing my research project. I have begun doing an extensive literature review and have narrowed my topic to the point where I can feasibly complete the project this year. I have attached my thesis description and am requesting that you review the description and then sign the form if you find the project suitable.

Thank you,



Cindy Griffing

Appendix B

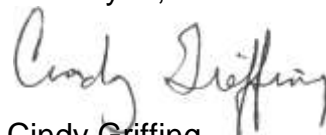
October 19, 2005

Bob Molisani
Caledonia-Mumford
High School Principal

Dear Bob,

As a new requirement for SUNY Brockport's Counseling Internship program, I must receive approval for my thesis from the Institutional Review Board at SUNY Brockport. As part of this process, I must obtain your signature authorizing my research project. I have begun doing an extensive literature review and have narrowed my topic to the point where I can feasibly complete the project this year. I have attached my thesis description and am requesting that you review the description and then sign the form if you find the project suitable.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy Griffing".

Cindy Griffing

Appendix C

CALEDONIA-MUMFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL

COUNSELING CENTER

99 NORTH STREET
CALEDONIA, NY 14423
(585) 538-3445 • FAX (585) 538-3430



Thesis Description-

I would like to study how the student-teacher relationship affects student motivation. I would like to study this information by individually interviewing four students from sixth grade, four students from eighth grade, four students from tenth grade, and four students from twelfth grade. The students' identity will remain confidential and once I have transcribed the audiotapes, the tapes will be destroyed. After the interviews are transcribed, the transcriptions will be coded for common themes and synthesized. I believe this information will be useful because although there has been research conducted regarding how the student-teacher relationship affects student motivation, there has been little research conducted that incorporates the students' voice in the process.


Principal's Signature

10/19/05
Date

Appendix D

CALEDONIA-MUMFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL

COUNSELING CENTER

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CALEDONIA, NY 14423
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Robert Molisani

Principal's Signature

10/19/05

Date

Appendix E

Pizza, anyone?



I am looking for research participants to help me investigate the role teachers have on student motivation. I would like to talk with you for one 20-minute interview and hear your thoughts on the role that teachers have on your motivation.

If interested, please sign the attached form and have your parent(s) sign the other form. I will come back in two days to pick up the signed forms. Once the completed forms are handed back to me, I will randomly select four students from each grade to interview. The interviews will occur at a time that will not affect your core classes.

Please consider helping - I would really appreciate your involvement. Thank you.

Appendix F

Pizza, anyone?



In order to complete my research project regarding motivation, I need your help so I am now prepared to offer some **incentive!**

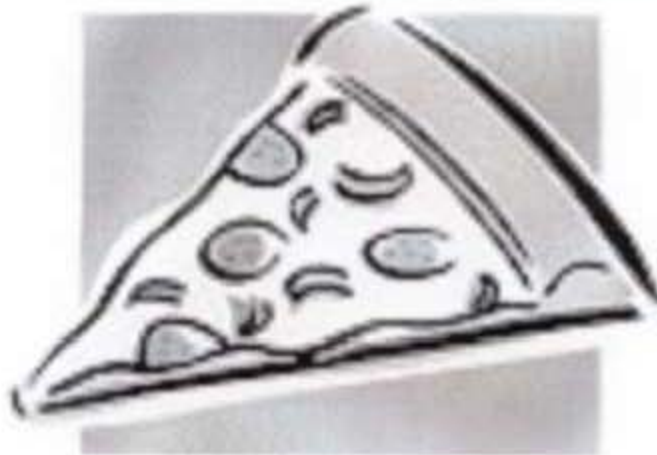
For each grade, I am again requesting that you sign the attached informed consent form and also have your parent(s)/guardian sign.

Once the completed forms are handed back to me, I will randomly select four students from each grade to interview. **After the interviews are completed, the four students that are selected will be treated to a pizza lunch.** Again, the interviews will only take about 20 minutes and will occur at a time that will not affect your core classes.

Please consider helping - I would really appreciate your involvement.

Appendix 6

Pizza, anyone?



I am interested in your thoughts regarding what teachers do that affects your motivation. In order to gather this information, I would like to talk with you for one 20-minute individual interview. If interested, I am requesting that you sign the attached informed consent form and also have your parent(s)/guardian sign.

Once the completed forms are handed back to me, I will randomly select four students from each grade (10 and 12) to interview. **After the interviews are completed, the four students that are selected will be treated to a pizza lunch.** Again, the interviews will only take about 20 minutes and will occur at a time that will not affect your core classes.

Please consider helping – I would really appreciate your involvement!

Appendix H

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT – STUDENT

This form describes a research study being conducted with middle school and high school students. The purpose of the research is to learn about the relationship between student motivation and the teacher/student relationship. The person conducting the research is a graduate student at SUNY College at Brockport in the Masters of Counseling program. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to discuss your thoughts and feelings regarding how different teachers affect your motivation to succeed at school. The study will take about twenty minutes and will occur at a time that will not affect your core classes.

A possible risk for you is that some material discussed may be of a personal nature. There are no other known risks. If any topic makes you uncomfortable, you don't have to discuss it. You will have a chance to talk about any feelings you have about any topics discussed with the interviewer. If anything you say during the study causes the interviewer to be concerned about you, he or she will talk with you further.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information that will be learned would allow teachers and other professionals to better help students improve their motivation.

Any information that you give in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the project staff. The only exception that there could ever be to this is that if in talking to you, project staff find that there is something happening in your life that is an immediate and serious danger to your health or physical safety. In that case, your parents or another professional might have to be contacted. We would always talk to you about this first. Except for this consent form, all records will be given a code number and will not be identified by your name. If publications in scientific journals arise from this research, results will be given without names and in group form only, so that you cannot be identified.

Your interview will be tape recorded, so that our discussions can be recorded accurately. If you have any questions during this study, you may call Mrs. Griffing at 538-3413, Dr. Susan Seem at 395-5492, or Dr. Tom Hernandez at 395-5498.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in this study or refusing to be in it, will not affect your contact with any school professionals. This research is not part of your regular school program, is not being conducted by the school, and your participation in this study will not affect your grades. You are free to stop being in the study at any time without penalty.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the information contained on this form, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian says you can participate.

Once all informed consent forms are collected, four participants from each respective grade will be randomly drawn. These random participants will be contacted by the researcher to set up the interview.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate as a subject in this project.

Signature of participant

Date

Birth date of participant

Signature of a witness 18 years of age or older

Date

Appendix I

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT-PARENT/GUARDIAN

This form describes a research study being conducted with middle school and high school students. The purpose of the research is to learn about the relationship between student motivation and the teacher/student relationship. The person conducting the research is a graduate student at SUNY College at Brockport in the Masters of Counseling program. If you agree to allow your son or daughter to participate in the study, he or she will be asked to discuss their thoughts and feelings regarding how different teachers affect their motivation to succeed at school. The study will take about twenty minutes and will occur at a time that will not affect your child's core classes.

A possible risk for your son or daughter is that some material discussed may be of a personal nature. There are no other known risks. If any topic makes them uncomfortable, they don't have to discuss it. They will have a chance to talk about any feelings they have about any topics discussed with the interviewer. If anything your son or daughter says during the study causes the interviewer to be concerned, the interviewer will talk with your son or daughter further.

The possible benefit from your son or daughter being in this study could be that information will be learned that would allow teachers and other professionals to better help students improve their motivation.

Any information that your son or daughter gives in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the project staff. The only exception that there could ever be to this is that if in talking with your son or daughter, the project staff finds that there is something happening in their life that is an immediate and serious danger to their health or physical safety. In that case, you or another professional might have to be contacted. We would always talk with your son or daughter about this first. Except for this consent form, all records will be given a code number and will not be identified by your son or daughter's name. If publications in scientific journals arise from this research, results will be given without names and in group form only, so that your son or daughter cannot be identified.

The interview will be tape recorded, so that the discussions can be recorded accurately. If you have any questions during this study, you may call Mrs. Griffing at 538-3413, Dr. Susan Seem at 395-5492, or Dr. Tom Hernandez at 395-5498.

Your son or daughter's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in this study or refusing to be in it, will not affect your son or daughter's contact with any school professional. This research is not part of the regular school program, is not being conducted by the school, and participation in this study will not affect your son or daughter's grades. At any time, you are free to prohibit your son or daughter from being in the study without penalty.

You are being asked whether or not you want your son or daughter to participate in this study. If you agree with their participation, and you agree with the information contained on this form, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw your son or daughter from the study. You can prevent your son or daughter from participating even if they have agreed to participate.

Once all informed consent forms are collected, four participants from each respective grade will be randomly drawn. These random participants will be contacted by the researcher to set up the interview.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree that my son or daughter can participate as a subject in this project.

Signature of participant's parent/guardian

Date

Name of participant

Birth date of participant