

Running head: IMPROVING ACADEMIC MOTIVATION

Improving Academic Intrinsic Motivation through Counseling

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
History of Research on Motivation in Education	8
Environmental Determinants	9
Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation	9
Goal Orientation	12
Praise	14
Individual Differences	15
Cognitions	18
Self-efficacy	18
Learned Helplessness	22
Why Motivation is Important in the Middle School Years	22
How Counseling Can Improve a Students' Academic Intrinsic Motivation	27
Sense of Relatedness	28
Method	35
Participants	35
Materials	36
Procedure	38
Results	39
Student 1	40
Student 2	41

Student 3	43
Student 4	45
Student 5	46
Student 6	48
Student 7	50
Discussion	51
Limitations	56
Suggestions for School Counseling Programs to Improve Motivation and Achievement	57
References	59
Appendix A- Children’s Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory Sample Items	64
Appendix B- Letter to Parents of Student Participants	65

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## Abstract

Academic intrinsic motivation is a key factor in academic performance and achievement. Many students, for various reasons, have minimal motivation for school evidenced by little persistence and little effort expended at school. This investigation examined the effect of counseling on academic motivation and achievement. Participants were seven 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school students who were identified as students who lacked motivation. The Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI) (Gottfried, 1986) was used to confirm that motivation was an issue for student participants. Each student completed a minimum of 11 counseling sessions over a 13-week research period. Results for each student are reported. Support was found for the hypothesis that motivation and self-efficacy would increase through the counseling process and as a result, grades, and in some instances attendance, would improve. Limitations of the study are discussed and suggestions for the direction of school counseling programs are presented.

### Improving Academic Intrinsic Motivation through Counseling

During the first few weeks of my graduate-level, counseling internship at a middle school, I became aware of a number of students who, when looking at their academic records, seemed to lack motivation. This was evidenced by a discrepancy between a student's scores on standardized tests (average to above average) and grades in one or more core-curriculum classes (failing or near-failing). Additionally, teachers reported that they thought these students had the knowledge and the ability to do well academically however they did not put forth the effort required of them outside of class.

Throughout the span of research on motivation, various researchers have used an assortment of definitions for motivation while some have not provided a definition (see Murphy & Alexander, 2000). Archer (1994) explained that motivation focuses on "the achievement goal or goals that a person holds." Bergin, Ford, and Hess (1993) described motivation as the psychological processes involved in the direction, vigor, and persistence of behavior. Pintrich and De Groot (1990) suggested that motivation involves expectancy, value, and affect or emotion. The definition used for the purpose of this study came from Wentzel and Asher (1995) who conceptualized the term in education-related terms and more broadly than the researchers previously mentioned here. In their description of motivation, the authors included "children's commitment to schoolwork, interest in school, effort expended in the classroom, and concern with earning positive evaluations of work" (Wentzel & Asher, 1995, p.755).

Pintrich and De Groot (1990) provided evidence that motivation was a key factor in academic performance. They investigated two components of classroom academic performance, motivation and self-regulated learning, based on an adaptation of a general

expectancy-model of motivation. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) developed and researched this model and explain it in the following way. Beliefs about how well an individual will do on a given activity and the extent to which they value the activity explains an individual's choice, persistence, and performance on that activity.

Pintrich and De Groot's (1990) proposed model suggested that three components of motivation could be linked to three components of self-regulated learning. Expectancy, value, and affective components made up the motivational piece of classroom learning while the self-regulated piece of classroom learning was comprised of metacognitive strategies, management and control of effort, and actual cognitive strategies used by students (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Through their research, they concluded that the motivational components were linked to student cognitive engagement and academic performance. Another important finding in their research was that self-efficacy was positively related to student cognitive engagement and performance. Those students who believed that they were able to achieve academically reported use of cognitive strategies and more self-regulating activities than those who did not believe that they were able to achieve in school. These students were also more likely to continue with difficult or uninteresting tasks than students who were not as confident in their abilities. The authors also suggested that the use of self-regulation strategies (i.e., goal setting, planning, effort management, persistence) was essential in improving academic performance.

It was this connection between motivation and academic performance that prompted the present research. The question to be examined was could the counseling relationship assist in improving a students' academic motivation. It was theorized that this improvement in motivation would improve academic performance and in turn,

increase the likelihood of that student fulfilling their goals and dreams for their future. From observation, motivation seemed to be a factor in whether a student was encouraged to reach their goals or yield to a secondary plan. From personal experience in middle school as a student and as a staff person, it seemed that students had difficulties making the connection between for example, how ancient history would help them to become a veterinarian. It seemed as though opportunities were being missed because interest in a particular subject was not strong, which often led to lower grades and less opportunities. A decrease in confidence level spread from one subject to another, as grade level material was increasingly more difficult and this cycle took an increasingly downward turn. This investigation began by looking at the history of research on motivation in education.

#### *History of Research on Motivation in Education*

Research on motivation in education began in the 1940's (Weiner, 1990). At this time, research focused on medical (e.g. biochemical, neural) and innate characteristic explanations of motivation. By the 1960's, the research focused on four prevailing theoretic approaches (i.e., associationistic theory, drive theory, cognitive theory, and psychoanalytic theory) to explain motivation. The 1970's were marked by a continuation of these theoretical approaches as well as further exploration of human behavior and achievement strivings. By 1980 and 1990, the four main theoretical conceptualizations faded and focus shifted to environmental determinants, individual differences, and cognitions (Weiner, 1990). These ideas and concepts have continued to be central in the study of academic motivation through 2004. The current study focused on the most recently proposed ideas. Environmental determinants and the two main types of

motivation are presented first, followed by a discussion of individual differences, and finally cognitions.

### *Environmental Determinants*

The environmental determinants most prominent in recent literature on academic motivation include extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, goal orientation, and praise. These are discussed in the following section in terms of how they affect motivation and academic achievement.

#### *Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation*

Ryan and Deci (2000) explain simply, “to be motivated means to be moved to do something” (p. 54). However, as the research suggests, there is much more to motivation. Students can vary in both the amount of motivation they have and the type of motivation they have. There are two specific types of motivation described in the research, extrinsic and intrinsic.

Extrinsic motivation is doing something for an external reward or other independent result (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In other words, there is an external controlling factor aiding in the likelihood for compliance to a request. Research findings have suggested that generally, students who were externally controlled showed less interest, value, and effort in school and they were likely to blame others, such as teachers, for negative outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Anderman, Griesinger, and Westerfield (1998) utilized an extrinsic reward structure in their study of the link between motivation and cheating during early adolescence. Their research results supported the idea that adolescents who believed they would receive some type of reward (i.e., not having to do homework) were more likely to

engage in cheating behaviors. The authors pointed out that often a student found the extrinsic reward more important than learning the task itself, which resulted in an increased likelihood that the student would employ cheating behaviors to gain a reward. As a result, these students learned very little of the intended lesson. Anderman, et al. (1998) also concluded that students were more likely to engage in cheating behaviors when they perceived their school to emphasize performance goals.

In another study, A. E. Gottfried, Fleming, and A. W. Gottfried (1994) examined parental motivational practices on student motivation and achievement. More specifically, they examined the influence of mothers' motivational practices on 9 and 10-year-old students' academic intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can be described as doing something that is naturally fascinating, appealing, or enjoyable. Therefore, a student with high academic intrinsic motivation is described as someone who enjoys school learning, is curious and persistent, and willfully takes on the challenge to master difficult and novel tasks (A. E. Gottfried, 1985). Mother's motivational practices were important because they were found to significantly facilitate or diminish children's early academic intrinsic motivation, depending on the practices that were used. The authors made similar conclusions to previous researchers in this area and suggested that the use of consequences (i.e., rewards) would have a detrimental effect on children's academic intrinsic motivation. From their results, the researchers recommend that parents not use extrinsic consequences (i.e., rewards) when promoting learning and motivation to their young students, as this may be considered as controlling children's behavior. Rather, it is important for parents to encourage autonomy and self-determination in learning tasks. A.

E. Gottfried, et al. also provided support that early motivation was significantly and directly related to future motivation and achievement.

Because of similar results from the myriad of research, much of the recent literature on academic motivation has focused on the intrinsic type. Ryan and Deci (2000) explained that intrinsic motivation resulted in high-quality learning and creativity, which seemed to be key in what teachers were looking for in their students. Because of the importance often placed on high-quality learning and creativity of school children, the researchers suggested that it was important for schools to focus on stimulating rather than undermining intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When devising strategies for effective teaching it is important for teachers, parents, and others in the education field to consider the differences between and consequences of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational practices. As Ryan and Deci (2000) pointed out, much of what is taught in school is not inherently fascinating, appealing, or enjoyable for students. They suggested that educators implement a program that incorporates active learning and options for students rather than passive and controlling classroom environments. This suggestion is based on the idea that if students were allowed the opportunity to find something on their own that was interesting to them they would be intrinsically motivated. Thus, they would be more likely to experience enjoyment in learning and persevere in expanding their knowledge in that area (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Mendler (2000) provided specific techniques that could be used by teachers and others in the education field to improve academic motivation in students. He mirrored ideas in the research regarding the sometimes-detrimental effects of using extrinsic

rewards to improve student motivation. He proposed five key processes that could be used by educators to intrinsically motivate students to learn. These five processes include emphasizing effort, creating hope, respecting power, building relationships, and expressing enthusiasm. Mendler (2000) provided explanations for each process and suggestions of how to implement each process in schools and classrooms.

A key process most relevant to the current study is Mendler's suggestion of the importance of building and maintaining relationships. The counseling process is based on a positive relationship between the counselor and in this case, the student. Being honest and genuine in interactions with students is of utmost importance in building trust. A positive relationship involves both parties being contributing, active members. Though many of Mendler's suggestions are more relevant to the teacher-student relationship, his main point seemed to be that relating well with students aids in the student's desire to expend more effort and persistence in daily classroom work (Mendler, 2000).

Now that the types of motivation have been explained and discussed, we can move to other environmental determinants that are factors in the make-up of a student's motivation; goal orientation and praise.

#### *Goal Orientation*

Goal orientation was defined by Meece, Blumenfeld, and Hoyle (1988) as a "set of behavioral intentions that determine how students approach and engage in learning activities" (as cited in Murphy & Alexander 2000, p. 12). Seven goal orientations are prominent in the literature and are defined in the following paragraph. The goals include, (1) ego or ego-involved goals, (2) learning goals, (3) performance goals, (4) task or task-involved goals, (5) work avoidance goals, (6) social goals, and (7) mastery goals.

Students with ego or ego-involved goals strive, in their achievement behavior, to demonstrate superior ability to self or others, preferably by achieving mastery with little effort expended (as cited in Murphy & Alexander, 2000, p.14). Dweck (1986) provided the following definitions for learning and performance goals. With regards to learning goals, students “seek to increase their competence, to understand or master something new” whereas for performance goals students “seek to gain favorable judgments of their competence or avoid negative judgments of their competence” (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040). For a task or task-involved goal, a student’s main goal is to demonstrate or develop individual proficiency and understanding through effortful learning” (as cited in Murphy & Alexander, 2000, p. 15). Students with a task-involved orientation focus on the task rather than on the self. A student has been said to have a work avoidance goal when the student’s main concern seems to be to get work done with a minimum amount of effort. Social goals involve a student seeking to please others, such as parents or teachers and trying to be socially responsible by doing what is asked of them in the classroom. Finally, a student has a mastery goal when they believe that their effort will lead to success and the focus of their attention is on the intrinsic value of learning (Murphy & Alexander, 2000).

Dweck (1986) suggested that students choose a goal orientation rather than a particular orientation being a part of who they are innately. She pointed out previous research that concluded that intellectual ability does not have an impact on motivational orientation and proposed that various achievement situations offer a choice of goals. Further, she proposed that the type of goal chosen by the student determined the achievement pattern the student would display (Dweck, 1986).

*Praise*

Henderlong and Lepper (2002) argued that praise, when perceived by students as genuine and sincere, can be beneficial to intrinsic motivation. The authors stated that when praise encourages attributions of performance to causes within the student's control, promotes autonomy, enhances competence without total reliance on comparisons to other students, and conveys attainable standards and expectations, there are significant beneficial effects (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). The two studies presented next help to further explain some of the differences among some of the types of praise that have been researched.

Koestner, Zuckerman, and Koestner (1987) examined the relationships between the content of praise, type of involvement in a task, and intrinsic motivation. They based their hypotheses on previous research that suggested that verbal feedback presented in an informational manner enhances intrinsic motivation more than similar feedback presented in a controlling manner. Koestner, et al. found support for all three of their hypotheses. The first one being, that students in the task-involved condition displayed more intrinsic motivation than students in the ego-involved condition. Second, students who received ability-related praise had greater intrinsic motivation than students who received effort-related praise or no praise. Third, students who were task-involved showed more intrinsic motivation than those who were ego-involved when both received effort praise whereas students who were ego-involved showed more intrinsic motivation than those who were task-involved when both received ability praise. These results led the authors to suggest that the relationship between praise and motivation is very complex and individualized for students (Koestner, et al., 1987).

Mueller and Dweck (1998) also found evidence to support the idea that praise is only beneficial to students under certain circumstances. Utilizing results from six studies, they compared praise for effort to praise for intelligence. Their results implied that praise for intelligence had more detrimental consequences than praise for effort. Further, after students experienced failure, those exposed to praise for intelligence displayed less task persistence, less task enjoyment, more low-ability attributions, and lower task performance than those students exposed to praise for effort. Praise for hard work seemed to lead students to value learning opportunities. Those students who were praised for intelligence viewed intelligence as a stable trait whereas those praised for effort and hard work viewed intelligence as a trait that could be improved upon (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

### *Individual Differences*

Age and gender differences have been considered in some of the research on academic motivation (e.g., Dweck, 1986; A. E. Gottfried, 1985; A. E. Gottfried, Flemming, & A. W. Gottfried, 2001). Goal orientation varies from student to student, as does perceived praise and support, and students come from various family backgrounds. Moss and St. Laurent (2001) considered attachment and its effects on academic performance. They concluded that even though secure children have greater cognitive engagement and mastery motivation, they did not differ from insecure children on academic performance (Moss & St. Laurent, 2001). Brackney and Karabenick (1995) even examined the role of motivation in academic performance of students with psychopathology. Research in recent years has focused very little on additional individual differences such as the need for achievement, anxiety about failure, locus of control, and

attributional style. Weiner (1990) mentioned these latter four individual differences as some of the topics that seemed to be paving the direction of motivational research in the 1990's. However, the search for related literature by this author ended with very few results. Some comments are offered on these topics in the following brief section.

The overall idea presented in the literature on academic motivation is that as students experience success in school, they begin to expect to do well in the future, keeping a higher level of self-efficacy beliefs. Then they become more concerned with keeping their reputation and/or continuing to receive praise and positive responses from parents, teachers, and others. This implies that there is a need for achievement on initial tasks to get this process or cycle started and the need for achievement is what continues to drive the cycle. Students want to keep their positive reputations and continue to strive to meet their own or their parents' expectations. The need for achievement is very much related to goal orientation, which may be an explanation for why this topic has gone by the wayside. Goal orientation seems to determine how strong a student's need for achievement is in various situations and at various times in their development. Goal orientation also helps to explain why some students seem to have less of a desire to achieve.

A. E. Gottfried (1985) found evidence that academic intrinsic motivation is significantly and positively correlated with achievement and perceptions of academic competence. Evidence was also found for a clear negative correlation between anxiety and academic intrinsic motivation. Students with higher academic intrinsic motivation in a specific subject area had lower academic anxiety than students with lower motivation (A. E. Gottfried, 1985). Again, there is little research on this topic and the results

mentioned here with regards to anxiety were just a one small part of one of three main ideas being examined in the study.

With regards to attributions, Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested that students must not only experience perceived self-efficacy (perceived competence) if intrinsic motivation is to be maintained or enhanced, but students must also experience their behavior to be self-determined. Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) explained self-determination and locus of control as separate unrelated terms whereas other researchers have used these terms interchangeably. They proposed that locus of control, or perceived control, refers to whether an individual believes that they can reliably attain a desired outcome. They continued their explanation by proposing that the concept of self-determination, or locus of causality, concerns the degree to which an individual experiences their behavior to be of their own volition and freely chosen rather than forced or pressured by desired outcomes. This implies that self-determination requires an intrinsic drive of some sort whereas locus of control is based solely on beliefs of achievement without considering pressure, either from within or from an outside source (Deci, et al., 1999). Further, Ryan and Deci (2000) implied that students who typically experience externally regulated behavior perceive their behavior as controlled and they perceive their actions as having an external locus of causality.

Dweck (1986) reported research outcomes that indicated that significant changes in persistence in the face of failure occurred after retraining children's attributions for failure. Further, these changes persisted over time and generalized across tasks. This retraining involved helping children understand that their failure was a result of, for example, effort or strategy rather than ability (Dweck, 1986). Brief mention is made in

other research concerning ability and effort attributions however little connection is made to motivation.

### *Cognitions*

#### *Self-efficacy*

Schunk (1984, p.29) defined self-efficacy in the following words: “personal judgments of how well one can perform actions in specific situations that may contain ambiguous, unpredictable, and stressful features.” This definition is important to the current study as it brings to light the intrinsic nature of motivation and the variability of the characteristic among people in general. Research has examined the influence of self-efficacy on choice of behavioral activities, effort expenditure, persistence in the face of obstacles, and task performance (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991) as well as how self-efficacy beliefs affect motivation.

One cannot mention self-efficacy without crediting the important work of Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997). The creation of his self-efficacy theory was the beginning step in developing a unified theoretical explanation as to how behavior therapy and other psychotherapies work. Bandura (1977) conceptualized self-efficacy as the individual’s belief or expectation that they can master specific actions in a situation and bring about desired change. In simpler terms, self-efficacy is an individual’s perceived competence.

Bandura’s model purports that behavior changes are achieved through such means as modeling, guided exposure, persuasion, and anxiety reduction. His model also suggests that these methods are in part the result of creating or strengthening one’s efficacy expectations (Multon, et al., 1991).

Numerous researchers have examined the relationship between self-efficacy and academic motivation (i.e., Bong, 2001; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986; Multon, et al., 1991; Schunk, 1984; 1991; Summers, Schallert, & Ritter, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). The most relevant of these studies are reviewed in further detail in the following section.

Multon, et al. (1991) discussed the cycle that has been proposed to occur with regards to increasing motivation and self-efficacy beliefs. This cycle includes student aptitudes and past educational experiences from which efficacy and outcome expectations are initially developed. These expectancies influence student effort expenditure and persistence at tasks, (i.e., motivation) which helps in determining performance outcomes. Performance feedback then affects subsequent efficacy and outcome expectancies, which completes the cycle. This ongoing process takes place in a continuous feedback loop (Multon, et al., 1991).

Multon, et al. (1991) found support for their hypothesis that self-efficacy beliefs are positively correlated with academic performance and persistence. The authors furthered this examination by also comparing student's achievement status with relations to self-efficacy. Multon, et al. found that the relationship was stronger for students in a low-achieving condition than for students making normative academic progress. From this, the authors suggested that methods to promote academic self-efficacy for these low-achieving students be further developed and evaluated. They also suggested that self-efficacy-based counseling interventions be designed and utilized to facilitate academic achievement and persistence. The authors mention that large underestimates of personal efficacy may lead to avoidance of potentially rewarding learning pursuits, resulting in limited skill development. On the other hand, large overestimates of academic ability

may lead students to attempt activities that are well beyond their capabilities, resulting in failure and/or discouragement. These outcomes disrupt the cycle mentioned above.

Further, it is mentioned that misjudgment of perceived ability is more likely for younger students, as self-awareness is not as fully developed at younger ages than with older students (Multon, et al., 1991).

A. E. Gottfried (1985) found a significant positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy across four subject areas. Those students who perceived themselves as more competent within a particular subject area also had higher intrinsic motivation for that subject, as measured by the Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI). An additional result of interest from this research was that subject areas appeared to be involved in increases and decreases in academic intrinsic motivation across the grades. With advancing grades, motivation for Reading decreased whereas motivation for Social Studies increased. A. E. Gottfried (1985) suggested that changes in curriculum emphasis or changes in interests may have been a contributing factor in the change of motivation levels across the subjects. Bong (1991) found support for the idea that specific school subjects function as an organizational framework for adolescent academic motivation.

Schunk (1984) compared the effects of rewards and goals on task motivation, self-efficacy, and performance. He found support for his hypothesis that a student who was presented with both performance-contingent rewards and performance goals would demonstrate higher self-efficacy and skillful performance than a student who was presented with either just rewards or just goals. This hypothesis was based on the following ideas presented in the research on motivation and self-efficacy. First, the

anticipation of attaining a goal has been shown to motivate individuals to persevere at a task. Second, presenting students with the opportunity to earn an award has been shown to increase motivation to complete a task and to improve task performance. Third, earning a reward symbolizes progress to the student, improving self-efficacy beliefs. On a division task, students in the rewards plus proximal goals condition had higher levels of self-efficacy and performance than students in the rewards-only and goals-only conditions (Schunk, 1984).

Lent, et al. (1986) also examined the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and performance, and the extent to which self-efficacy beliefs predict academic grades, persistence, and perceived career options. The results supported and extended previous findings that self-efficacy expectations were related to academic performance. In addition, Lent and his colleagues concluded that self-efficacy contributed significantly to the prediction of persistence and range of career options considered by individuals. This study was unique as compared to much of the other research reviewed here because it provided implications for counseling. Lent, et al. suggested that counselors explore self-efficacy beliefs with the individuals they work with, in addition to other commonly assessed attributes in career and academic counseling. The researchers suggested that counselors might be able to assist in modifying the efficacy beliefs of those individuals who underestimate their abilities regarding a desired educational or vocational goal (Lent, et al., 1986).

Pintrich and De Groot (1990) also examined the role of self-efficacy in student motivation. Their results implied that (1) improving student self-efficacy beliefs would lead to more use of cognitive strategies, (2) it is important for teachers to socialize

students' intrinsic value for schoolwork, and (3) self-regulation strategies (i.e. comprehension monitoring, effort management and persistence, goal setting, planning) were essential for academic performance on a variety of classroom tasks. The authors point out that socializing the intrinsic value for schoolwork won't necessarily directly improve grades or scores on assignments or standardized achievement tests, but that it might lead to more cognitive engagement in daily classroom work.

### *Learned Helplessness*

Mendler (2000, 2001) suggested that children learn to be unmotivated. He purports that we are all born with qualities of curiosity, inquisitiveness, and motivation, and that if these qualities are not nurtured they are lost (Mendler, 2000). Additionally, Mendler (2001) suggested that helping to show students that they can overcome obstacles helps them to build confidence and increases desire to try to conquer further obstacles.

Dweck (1986) concluded from her research that adolescent students who avoided challenges and exhibited little persistence when presented with difficult tasks are considered to be exhibiting a maladaptive or helpless pattern. Such students often displayed signs of negative affect, such as low self-efficacy and/or anxiety. In contrast, adapted, or mastery-oriented individuals looked for challenges and persisted when faced with difficult tasks. Further, such individuals seemed to enjoy exerting effort in the pursuit of task mastery. Interestingly, intellectual ability did not differ between students who exhibited such adaptive and maladaptive patterns (Dweck, 1986).

### *Why Motivation is Important in the Middle School Years*

Research on academic motivation has been conducted across all age groups from elementary to adult students. The focus of this research project was adolescent, middle

school students so this age group was the focus in the review of the literature. Some research (i.e., A. E. Gottfried, et al., 2001) has suggested that academic motivation is a stable construct through adolescence while other research (i.e., McDermott, Mordell, & Stoltzfus, 2001) has suggested that academic motivation begins to decrease at some point in early adolescence.

An important area of research is that which has explored the effects of school transitions on motivation (i.e., Ratelle, Guay, Larose, & Senécal, 2004; Wentzel, 1999). This was of importance in the current study, as middle school students, amidst transition, were the focus of this study. The above-mentioned research suggested that students either strive or struggle with such transitions. Intervention for those students who struggle with this transition is important for success throughout the remaining school years (Ratelle, et al., 2004).

From personal observations and experiences, I have found that students at the middle school level are a unique group of individuals. From a developmental perspective, the years spent in middle school include changes in biological, physical, behavioral, and social aspects of self. Students in this age group experience a new type of diversity and ever changing ideas and attitudes. This is a time of transition in which students must often adjust to a new school building, a new sense of independence, different teachers and school supports, and increased social opportunities. Students begin to try new activities and attempt to begin to define who they are as an individual. As mentioned above not all students are able to make a successful transition and as a result begin their decline in academic motivation at this transitional time.

Dweck (1986) suggested that maladaptive motivational patterns begin to develop during middle school years and that these maladaptive tendencies often impact future achievement. A. E. Gottfried (1985) also examined the relationship between academic intrinsic motivation and achievement. Results showed support for a positive and significant correlation between motivation and achievement. The purpose of the current study was to examine a new intervention (i.e., counseling) for these students with maladapted tendencies in an attempt to minimize the long-term effects of decreased academic intrinsic motivation.

Researchers have determined that between sixth and seventh grade, a significant shift occurs with students from an intrinsic orientation to an extrinsic orientation toward school (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Wentzel and Asher (1995) proposed that with early adolescence comes a desire for conformity to peers and that these relationships would have a strong connection to school adjustment. They examined the academic lives of four types of children (neglected, rejected, popular, and controversial) as compared to average children. Figure 1 presents the distinguishing characteristics of each of the four sociometric status groups of children discussed in the study. Significant results pinpointing academically relevant characteristic differences follow.

Figure 1

	Infrequently nominated as a best friend	Frequently nominated as a best friend
Actively disliked by peers	Rejected Children	Controversial Children
Not disliked by peers	Neglected Children	Popular Children

This study found, as compared to average children, that neglected children were preferred more by teachers, were viewed by teachers as more independent, less

impulsive, more appropriate in their classroom behavior, and neglected children reported significantly higher levels of school motivation. In contrast, rejected students were perceived by teachers to be more insecure and less appropriate in their classroom behavior than their average peers. Additionally, rejected students were less preferred by teachers and viewed by their classmates as poor students. As compared to average students, controversial students were not preferred as much by teachers and teachers viewed them as less independent, less likely to follow rules, and more likely to start fights. Lastly, teachers viewed popular students as more helpful to others than average students and popular students were nominated more by their classmates than average students as being good students (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

As indicated by Wentzel and Asher (1995) neglected children developed academic competencies that were unique as compared to their average or popular counterparts. An explanation given for this result was that peers might neglect those with such a high compliance level and those who are liked most by teachers. A second explanation provided was that neglected children might focus more on academic or individual interests without being particularly concerned with a high volume of social interactions. The authors suggested that being liked by teachers is more important for prescribing to academic goals than being highly accepted by peers (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Wentzel and Asher (1995) concluded that it is important for students to be liked by teachers if they are to adopt school-related goals. They linked their conclusions to additional research that provided evidence of a positive correlation between perceived social support from teachers and classroom effort and achievement. Connell and

Wellborn (1991, as cited in Wentzel & Asher, 1995) argued that a valuable intervention for schools to improve student academic motivation would be to focus on developing positive student-teacher relationships.

A. E. Gottfried, et al. (2001) researched the continuity of academic intrinsic motivation. Their longitudinal study of individual students, beginning at age 9 and continuing to age 17, resulted in support for their hypothesis that academic intrinsic motivation is a stable construct from childhood through late adolescence. In other words, an individual's level of motivation did not change significantly during these years to keep up with school curriculums that become more challenging and anxiety related to increased school activities and college admissions increases. A second finding in this study was that there was a general decline in the mean level of academic intrinsic motivation over these ages. The authors called attention to these findings by pointing out the importance of intervention early in a child's schooling if motivation is to be improved. They suggested assessment during childhood to identify those children who may be at risk for low motivation and low academic performance (A. E. Gottfried, et al., 2001).

As previously mentioned, misjudgment of perceived ability is more likely for younger students, as self-awareness is not as fully developed at younger ages than with older students (Multon, et al., 1991). The current study proposed that counseling during the middle school years would be an advantageous intervention at a critical time in a student's academic, social, and vocational development.

*How Counseling Can Improve a Students' Academic Intrinsic Motivation*

As explained in the definition previously, motivation involves children's commitment to schoolwork, interest in school, effort expended in the classroom, and concern with earning positive evaluations of work (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). How can counseling relate to such concepts?

Results of research by Multon, et al. (1991) and Lent, et al. (1986) support the proposal that an individual's self-efficacy beliefs can be improved through counseling. As the counseling process unfolds, individuals learn about themselves, including but not limited to, their strengths and weaknesses, behavioral responses, and feelings and reactions to various situations. This increased awareness often leads to desired changes, successes in new situations, increased ease with adjustments, and a higher level of functioning.

A significant part of a school counselor's job is advocating for students. Advocating includes enhancing relationships between students and teachers, especially when a student has had a difficult start to the school year or is struggling to interact positively with a teacher. Often teachers have developed perceptions and ideas about students, based on the previous year's teacher reports, experience with siblings, or initial interactions with students. When these perceptions are negative, the relationship suffers. Usually, teachers do not have the close, open relationship with a student that is common with a counselor. Once a relationship is developed between student and counselor, the counselor can help teachers to better understand the situation of the student and offer suggestions to promote the students' success and interest in school. The counselor can also act as a mediator when issues arise between a student and a teacher.

*Sense of Relatedness*

Furrer and Skinner (2003) showed support for the idea that a student's sense of relatedness contributes significantly to their academic motivation and performance. Relatedness was defined as a basic feeling of connection, association, and/or relation to others. Furrer and Skinner (2003) examined the relationships that students in third through sixth grade had with teachers, parents, and peers. From the results, the researchers came to the conclusion that a children's sense of relatedness to adults (viz., teachers and parents) plays an important role in their academic motivation and performance. This effect was particularly relevant for boys and for children entering middle school. The researchers provided a possible explanation for this effect which was that it is probable that children have more fun when engaging in activities with people that they like and with people that like them in return. Furrer and Skinner also called attention to additional research that has shown that children with secure attachments to their caregivers are able to function well in areas such as school performance, peer relations, and the establishment of healthy relationships with non-familial adults. They mention that this level of functioning continues throughout childhood and adolescence. When this attachment is missing or lacking for a student and issues arise in social interactions and/or in academic achievement at school, the buffer against negative emotions is not there to lessen feelings of boredom, anxiety, pressure, or frustration (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

In many instances, a student without a secure attachment at home ends up in the school counselor's office for one reason or another and over time, is able to develop a sense of relatedness with the counselor. This sense of relatedness with a non-familial

adult can be a suitable replacement or supplement for the attachment that may be missing or lacking at home. Rather than lessening or minimizing such feelings, as the researchers suggest, a counselor's role is to help the student work through such feelings. The school counselor is an adult who can provide a safe environment for children to explore and engage in interactions with others. The relationship can foster an increased level of functioning in the areas of concern mentioned above. Through individual (and group) counseling, students can learn how to function in the school environment in ways that are productive for healthy peer and teacher relationships and may be able to transfer such skills to familial relationships.

What are the benefits to the student that occur through such feelings of relatedness? Furrer and Skinner (2003) mention previous research that has indicated that feelings of belonging, inclusion, acceptance, importance, and interpersonal support have been linked to self-efficacy, success expectations, achievement values, positive affect, effort, engagement, interest in school, task goal orientation, and grades. Many of these effects are connected to important academic outcomes. Another important result suggested in Furrer and Skinner's research is that children who experience satisfying relationships with adults may be able to be academically successful despite poor peer relationships. The authors suggested that a priority for schools should be to build the quality of children's relationships (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Wentzel (1997) also reported evidence providing strong support for the idea that adolescent students are more likely to engage in classroom activities if they feel supported and valued. Wentzel suggested that these feelings were produced through providing students with opportunities for autonomous decision-making, democratic

interaction styles, nurturance, and approval. She suggested that such opportunities foster the development of positive beliefs about personal autonomy and competence and positive feelings of self-worth. One important idea that Wentzel pointed out was that perceived support from teachers is a significant predictor of motivation and academic achievement in adolescents. Another idea that was offered was that transitions from elementary to middle school often result in lowered levels of trust between teachers and students, student perceptions that teachers no longer care for them, and less opportunities for students to establish meaningful relationships with teachers (Wentzel, 1997).

Wentzel (1998) also looked at relationships between middle school students and parents, teachers, and peers. In this study Wentzel examined how each relationship played a role in an adolescent's various aspects of motivation. Results led to the suggestion that the nature of each relationship resulted in independent motivational outcomes. For example, perceived support from teachers was a positive predictor of reported social goal pursuit and family cohesion was a positive predictor of mastery and performance goal orientations. Another product of this research was the conclusion that although parents, teachers, and peers played relatively independent roles, there was a supplementary versus compensatory effect of multiple sources of support. With regards to the effects of peer relationships on motivation, it was suggested from the results that perceived support from peers motivated these adolescents to help and cooperate with each other (Wentzel, 1998). In other words, although peers may not have had a direct influence on academic motivation, they helped to support motivation in social situations. This motivation may be transferred to other situations and indications were that this peer support added to the overall feeling of relatedness for a student. Often times, social

activities in the classroom are as important as academic activities (e.g., appropriate classroom behavior, group projects, presentations) (Wentzel, 1998).

In her review of research on school motivation, Wentzel (1999) summarizes additional ideas that have emerged in the literature. One important idea is suggestions that people's beliefs about their abilities seemed to influence not only what they chose to do but also why they persisted at certain activities and not others. Another important idea dealt with parent-child interactions. Wentzel credited research conducted by Lewin and his colleagues, (as cited in Wentzel, 1999) which documented that children who were provided with developmentally appropriate levels of autonomy and personal control by adults exhibited more persistence at assigned tasks in the absence of adults than did children who interacted with over- or under-controlling parents. Further, results of this research implied that as a result of being given appropriate levels of autonomy, children's behavior in certain social situations might be motivated by internalized goals and values rather than by mere compliance (Wentzel 1999).

Wentzel (1999) pointed out that declines in academic motivation and achievement after the transition to middle school correspond with young adolescent reports of declines in the nurturing qualities of teacher-student relationships. One last important idea that was presented is that students who perceive their classrooms as socially supportive environments are likely to pursue those goals that are valued in the context. It is suggested that if students develop a sense of relatedness to their teachers, students will adopt and pursue goals valued by teachers, including social goals and task-related goals to learn and achieve (Wentzel, 1999).

Berndt, Laychak, and Park (1990) examined friend's influence on adolescent academic achievement. A pretest composed of six dilemmas was given to each individual in the study to assess achievement values that affect student effort, involvement, and interest in schoolwork. For each dilemma, a decision had to be made on the action they would take. Two choices were given, one reflecting a high level of achievement motivation and a second reflecting a low level of achievement motivation. After completing this pretest, students were given the opportunity to talk with a friend for three minutes, discussing their response to each dilemma and reasons for their choice, with the goal of each pair to reach a joint decision on each of the dilemmas. After the discussion, a posttest was given with instructions to think about the dilemmas again and decide for themselves how to answer each one without being concerned with what their previous response was. One finding in their research was that adolescents changed their decisions on dilemmas when their friends provided new information about their original decision. Further examination of the results suggested that discussions with a friend did not have negative effects on decisions relevant to academic achievement motivation but that such discussions did not have positive effects, either. Decisions depended on which friend each adolescent was paired with. The researchers suggested that influence among adolescents depends heavily upon information exchange (Berndt, et al., 1990).

Wentzel, Barry, and Caldwell (2004) also examined friendships in middle school and their influences on motivation and school adjustment. The authors conducted a two-year longitudinal study that focused on prosocial behavior, academic achievement, and emotional distress as sixth grade students progressed through middle school to eighth grade. For this study, motivational processes were perceived efforts to behave prosocially

and to learn. Of particular interest was whether individuals would adopt or develop specific behavioral styles or interests because they are considered to be desirable characteristics of their close friends. From their results, they concluded that individuals do adopt the behaviors of others with whom they identify and with whom they have a strong emotional bond. Another interesting finding in this research was that students who had a friend at the beginning of their middle school career displayed better social and academic adjustment than those students without a friend. Those students who initially did not have a friend improved their academic performance over the two-year span, suggesting that they took longer to make positive adjustments than those who already had friends or were able to establish relationships quickly (Wentzel, et al., 2004).

Wentzel, et al. (2004) discussed the possible advantages and disadvantages of social comparison among groups of friends. They suggested that some students might gain intellectual benefits from friends with greater academic ability and be motivated to work harder academically whereas other students might suffer from the negative consequences and become even less motivated to do well. In support of the work of Lewin and his colleagues (see Wentzel 1999), Wentzel, et al. (2004) suggested that friendships characterized by high degrees of connectedness might be more likely to support the transfer and adoption of prosocial goals whereas those characterized by conflict and rivalry might be more likely to support the adoption of self-serving, antisocial goals.

Adolescents in middle school strive to be independent while trying to simultaneously hold on to their carefree childhood. This often causes conflict and struggle between parents and children. The sense of connection with a parent might have

similar results in social arenas. This could be important for parents to remember as they attempt to guide their children through such tumultuous developmental years and try to instill goals and values in their children.

A. E. Gottfried, et al. (1994) examined the role of parental motivational practices in children's academic intrinsic motivation and achievement. The authors noted previous research that suggested that promoting self-engagement in tasks resulted in enhanced intrinsic motivation. Further, this study provided the first empirical evidence that parents socialize their children's academic intrinsic motivation (A. E. Gottfried, et al., 1994). The important role that parents play in encouraging curiosity, persistence, and mastery to their children parallels the role of school counselors. The school counselor has the ability to reach those children whose parents are minimally involved in their academic lives.

Much of the recent research has looked at parent, teacher, and peer influence in students' academic motivation and achievement (e.g. Berndt, Laychak, & Park, 1990; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wentzel, 1997; 1998; 1999; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). There is little to no mention of the role of the school counselor in improving student academic motivation and achievement. When considering the numerous changes in academic, social, and developmental areas of a student during the middle school years and the role of the school counselor, it seems appropriate that a school counselor would be able to assist with students' ability to gain insight and to provide growth opportunities for students struggling with middle school.

It was the goal of the present research study to examine this unique counselor-student relationship and the effects such a relationship would have on a student's academic performance. It was proposed that through counseling, students would gain

insight as to what aspects of their life are affecting their academic motivation and achievement. The hypothesis was that motivation and self-efficacy would increase through the counseling process and as a result, grades, and in some instances attendance, would improve.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 7 seventh and eighth grade students (2 female, 5 male) from a rural school district in upstate New York. The district encompassed two neighboring towns. Students attended separate elementary schools, in their respective towns, and combined together in the middle school to complete grades 6-8 and in the high school to complete grades 9-12. Enrollment in the district was 2350 students; about 550 of these students attended the middle school.

All students involved in this study were recommended by their school counselor and were identified by teachers as students who were not working to their potential and seemed unmotivated. Additionally, most of these students scored 3 on at least three of four of their most recent Tests of New York State Standards (TONYSS) assessments. The TONYSS were given in English/Language Arts (ELA) and Math in fifth, sixth and seventh grades. Additionally, these students were in jeopardy of failing multiple classes during their previous school year.

On their five-week progress reports and ten-week report cards throughout their previous school year, students who participated in this study received multiple comments from a variety of teachers stating the following: students puts forth minimum effort, student does not seem to care about class work, student is not working to potential,

homework is often late, student has difficulty meeting deadlines, inconsistent effort has affected student's grade, student has not completed work, inadequate preparation of assignments has affected grade, and work needs more thought and effort.

### *Materials*

The Tests of New York State Standards (TONYSS) are a set of criterion-referenced tests that align with the New York State Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. These tests are administered each year in grades 2-8. The TONYSS are designed to help teachers in New York State determine what students know about English Language Arts and Mathematics, to identify each student's strengths and weaknesses, and to plan subsequent instruction in preparation for the New York State testing program, which occurs in grades 4 and 8. Content and test-item formats mirror the New York State tests, including multiple-choice, short-answer response, extended-response, and writing tasks (Riverside Publishing, 2004). Scores on the TONYSS range from 1 to 4. A score of 1 denotes a Below Basic level and scores of 2, 3, and 4 denote Basic, Proficient, and Advanced levels, respectively.

The Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) was used as a means of confirming that motivational issues were in fact a concern for each of the students included in this study. The Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI) is a 122-item self-report inventory designed to measure children's motivational orientation toward school learning in general and across four specific subject areas (Math, Reading, Science, and Social Studies). The general subscale contains 18 items whereas the four subject-area subscales contain 26 items each. The items for each of the four subscales are identical except for reference to the particular subject. A 5-

point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used for 24 of the 26 items in each of the subject area subscales. The remaining two items required a forced choice between an intrinsic and non-intrinsic alternative. On the general scale, all 18 items required responses based on the same 5-point Likert scale as mentioned above (Gottfried, 1986).

Items were designed to measure both high and low academic intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation was not considered to be the opposite of intrinsic motivation. The items are balanced so that for approximately half of the items, high intrinsic motivation corresponds to agreement and for the other half, high intrinsic motivation corresponds to disagreement. See Appendix A for examples of items. The CAIMI can be administered in groups or individually. For this study, the CAIMI was administered individually. It is intended for use with children in fourth through eighth grades (Gottfried, 1986).

Reliability of the CAIMI was reported to range from .66 to .76 for two-month test-retest coefficients and internal consistency coefficients ranged from .83 to .93. No differences were found among race, sex, or IQ. Validity was established through convergent and discriminant measures and indicated that the CAIMI scales provide a good measure of a child's academic intrinsic motivation (Posey, 1989).

This school district implemented a "Grounded List" incentive program the previous year in an attempt to reward the hard work of students who did well each marking period and to improve motivation (for students who struggled) to complete work and keep grades in the passing range. If a student was failing a class or owed work for a class, the student was placed on the "Grounded List" and lost certain privileges (i.e., no

computer usage) during study halls. Also, extracurricular activities were limited while the student was on the list. Students who were not on the grounded list for the week prior to the end of the ten-week marking period, earned the opportunity to participate in fun activities with their friends and peers for one hour and a half on the last afternoon of the marking period. The counselor reviewed this list each week and discussed what work was owed to teachers with each student who participated in this study and was on the list. Although the grounded list opposes intrinsic motivation theory and research, it was a significant measure for tracking progress of students involved in this research study. The counselor used the list solely for the purpose of reviewing with the student what their status was with regards to their academic progress.

### *Procedure*

This study occurred during the first 13 weeks of the school year. School counselors recommended students for the study. After checking school records to confirm that there was a discrepancy between TONYSS scores and academic performance (measured by grades), the counselor met with the recommended students and asked if they would be interested in meeting with the counselor about once per week for about three months to talk about things that were on their mind and to help them be successful in school. Each student who was recommended agreed to participate in counseling sessions. The initial meeting also served as the first counseling session in which roles were explained, time and schedule issues were discussed, and confidentiality was explained. A letter was sent to parents of these students explaining that their child was identified as someone who could benefit from counseling services that might improve

academic motivation (see Appendix B). This letter also explained that an inventory would be completed by their child to determine areas of strength and weakness.

During the second meeting with the counselor, students completed the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986). The third sessions between the students and the counselor involved reviewing and discussing results of the CAIMI, talking about goals, and whatever else was on the student's mind. The remaining 7-9 sessions were person-centered counseling sessions. All students completed a minimum of 11 sessions with the counselor. At the conclusion of the sessions, students were offered to continue meeting with their respective counselors for the remainder of the school year.

The counselor met with students during a study hall time as much as possible. Two students had no study halls; the other five students had at least one regular study hall (i.e. every day or every other day) during the 13-week research period. Passes were written and given to advisory teachers to give to students in the morning on the days that counseling sessions were scheduled.

### Results

For all five scales on the CAIMI the mean T-score was 50 ( $SD=10$ ). T-scores and percentiles for each scale are reported for each student in the following sections. Standard error of measurement is  $\pm 3$  T-score points for each of the four subject areas and  $\pm 4$  T-score points for the General scale (A. E. Gottfried, 1986). Results from each student in this study suggested below average academic intrinsic motivation on the General scale (Range  $T=29-41$ ) and at least one other of the subject area scales.

*Student 1*

Student 1 was a 12-year-old, seventh grade female. She was moving into a new house during the first few weeks of the school year, which she stated was difficult but she also acknowledged that it was a move for the better. She lived with her mother, an older sister, and a younger sister. She saw her biological father occasionally on weekends. Her overall average at the end of sixth grade was 79.8. She earned a score of 3 on each of the Math and English Language Arts (ELA) TONYSS during her fifth and sixth grade years. She had 11 absences from school and was tardy five days during sixth grade. She had not repeated any grade levels.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that her General motivation for school was below average (T=40, percentile=16) for her age and grade. Additionally, results suggest that this student had below average motivation in Reading (T=45, percentile=30), Social Studies (T=42, percentile=21), and Math (T<20, percentile <1). The Science scale resulted in an above average score (T=61, percentile=87). When discussing results with her, the student agreed that she enjoyed Science more than other subjects in school. She also reported having a significant amount of difficulty in Math throughout most of her school career.

This student attended a total of 11 sessions with the counselor. She was prompt in getting to her counseling appointments and seemed to enjoy her time with the counselor. She appeared comfortable and open with regards to sharing about her family, pets, and school issues that arose for her throughout the research period. She was on the grounded list one week for one class and remained off the list for the rest of the research period. Her 10-week report card, near the end of the 11 sessions, reflected an improved overall

grade point average (84.5) from any of the quarter averages she had received in sixth grade (82.0, 77.9, 77.0, 76.7). Additionally, her report card included the following comments: student has developed good work habits, student is working to potential, student's effort and attitude are excellent, and student is demonstrating good effort (reported by teachers in three classes). The comment for math, which was her lowest grade (65) by 18 points, was: student has shown improvement. During the 13-week research period this student was absent 2 days and was tardy 0 days.

### *Student 2*

Student 2 was a 12-year-old, seventh grade male. He lived with his mother and was an only child. His father was incarcerated prior to and during the research period. Student 2 also had to move to a different house during the first few weeks of school and had to deal with the transition of packing, unpacking, and getting used to a new house at the beginning of the school year. He stated that he didn't think the move affected him other than having to set up a space to do his homework at his new house. This student ended his sixth grade year with an overall average of 65.5 and was recommended for summer school. He attended summer school between the sixth and seventh grade and did well enough to be promoted to seventh grade. He scored 3 on the Math TONYSS and 2 on the ELA TONYSS, given in sixth grade and on the fifth grade assessments he scored 4 in Math and 2 in ELA. This student was absent 4 times in the previous school year and was tardy 7 times. At the time of this study, he had not been retained in any grade levels.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that his General motivation for school was below average ( $T=31$ , percentile=3) for his age and grade. Social Studies and Math generated the highest scores for this student however results

suggested that he was in the average range of academic intrinsic motivation for Social Studies (T=50, percentile=51) and Math (T=46, percentile=33). Reading and Science scores (T=31, percentile=3; and T=31, percentile=3, respectively) fell in the same range as the General score for this student, which was 2 standard deviations below average.

Student 2 met with the counselor for 12 sessions. In initial sessions with this student, he was quiet and reserved, not offering a great deal to talk about besides answering questions from the counselor. He often said he did not know how he was doing in his classes and that he did not know what assignments were owed. Counseling sessions focused on developing organizational skills and developing a schedule for staying after school to receive extra help from teachers and to complete homework. Historically, he had been a student who was hesitant to ask for help and/or clarification from teachers. These skills were discussed with the student and modeled and encouraged by the counselor. This student was also known for leaving quickly after school to go home each day, avoiding staying after with teachers to complete work and/or get extra help. Additionally, this student is one who had been on the grounded list regularly the previous year.

As counseling progressed and the relationship between student and counselor grew, he began to ask questions and became an active, involved participant in tracking his academic progress. By the seventh session with this counselor, he stayed after school once per week with the counselor to complete work, go over grades, or to just talk about how things were going for him at the time. Additionally, he was staying after school for extra help from teachers at least one other night each week. Beginning in the last few counseling sessions he was initiating discussions with the counselor regarding his

progress and grades. By the end of counseling sessions, this student showed interest in his grades and had learned how to look up what assignments he owed using a grading program on the computer. At the beginning of the research period he was on the grounded list for four and five subjects. As counseling sessions progressed, this student decreased the number of subjects he was listed for and was only listed for one to two classes during the last three weeks of the research period. This student's report card at week ten of counseling stated an overall average of 71.0. This average for the first marking period of the year was the highest marking period average he had earned in middle school. Previous averages, in sixth grade were 69.5, 64.4, 63.8, and 54.7. Comments on the report card from teachers in two classes reported, "Student is demonstrating good effort." During the first 13 weeks of this new school year, this student was absent 3 days and tardy 4 days.

### *Student 3*

Student 3 was also a 12-year-old, seventh grade male. During the summer months prior to this study, this student's parents separated. As a result, he lived primarily with his mother in an apartment and had frequent visits (3-4 per week) with his dad, who continued to live in the house this student lived in during the previous years. He had an older brother who also split time between both parents. The final average for student 3 in sixth grade was 78.4 however due to a final grade of 67 in two core classes, he was in jeopardy of repeating sixth grade. He scored 3 on the Math TONYSS and 2 on the ELA TONYSS, given in sixth grade and on the fifth grade assessments he scored 3 in Math and ELA. He was absent 10 days and tardy twice during the previous year. This student had not been retained in any grade levels.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that his General motivation for school was below average (T=38, percentile=12) for his age and grade. All subject area scales suggest similar levels of academic intrinsic motivation. Scores on Reading (T=39, percentile=13), Math (T=38, percentile=12), Social Studies (T=37, percentile=10), and Science (T=41, percentile=18) fell in the range of one standard deviation below average.

This student met with the counselor for 12 sessions. Counseling sessions focused on organizational skills and keeping current with class work and homework. During the previous year, this student struggled with staying current with assignments and would often feel overwhelmed with the pile of back-work and current work that was owed at any one time. He stated during one of the first sessions that he had a goal to keep up with assignments so he would not feel so overwhelmed during seventh grade. This student talked very little about his the situation with his parents. However, he acknowledged that it was upsetting to him and stated that he felt worse when he talked about it.

Student 3 started the research period on the grounded list for two classes and by the fourth week was on the list for six classes. He remained grounded in six classes for the following six weeks. For the remaining four weeks of the research period, he was on the grounded list for two, two, three, and four classes, respectively. The ten-week report card had mixed comments, varying from “student needs to use class time effectively,” “student is not working to potential,” and “student has not completed work” to “student gives his best effort,” “student has shown improvement,” and “student is a pleasure to have in class.” His average for the first marking period was 70.9. This was the lowest average he had received for a marking period during his middle school career. Sixth

grade averages were 76.3, 72.0, 76.0, and 76.4 for the first, second, third, and fourth marking periods, respectively. However, he had passing grades in all classes except one, (Social Studies) which was an improvement from the previous year. This student joined the swim team, for which practices and meets occurred during the last four weeks of the research period. He was absent one day and tardy 4 days during the first marking period.

#### *Student 4*

Student 4 was a 12-year-old seventh grade male. He lived with his mother and older brother. This student had limited contact with his father, whom he described as “weird.” Student 4 stated that he wished that he could spend more time with his father but that a history of neglect/abuse limited extended contact between them. This student finished sixth grade with an average of 67.1. He was asked to attend summer school in order to have the chance to be promoted to seventh grade. Through completing summer school, his average increased to 70.0, allowing him to be promoted to seventh grade. TONYSS scores were 2 and 1 for sixth grade ELA and Math assessments, respectively. TONYSS scores were 3 and 2 for fifth grade Math and ELA assessments, respectively. This student was absent 39 days in sixth grade and tardy 5 days. This student had not been retained in any grade levels.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that his General motivation for school was below average (T=30, percentile=2) for his age and grade. Three subject area scales suggest similar levels of academic intrinsic motivation. Scores on Reading (T=33, percentile=5), Math (T=31, percentile=3), and Science (T=31, percentile=3) fell in the range of two standard deviations below the average. Results suggested low-average intrinsic motivation for Social Studies (T=44, percentile=29).

Student 4 met with the counselor for the initial session and a second session to complete the CAIMI. Around this time, absences were beginning to increase and by week six, he had missed so much school that participation in this research would not be feasible. He was terminated from this study in week six, after two sessions with the counselor. At the conclusion of the 10-week marking period, this student had missed 16 days of school and was tardy 10 days. For the majority of these tardy days, this student missed more than half of the school day. The Assistant Principal, the student's assigned School Counselor, and an outside social service agency coordinated further assistance and services for this student and his mother.

#### *Student 5*

Student 5 was a 14-year-old eighth grade female. She lived with her mother, stepfather and new, baby sister. This student did not know her biological father. Her mother gave birth to a new daughter just before the beginning of the school year so this student found herself adjusting to being one of two daughters rather than the only child in the household. Student 5 completed seventh grade with an overall average of 71.8. Her TONYSS scores in sixth grade were 3 for both ELA and Math and in seventh grade she scored 3 and 2 on the ELA and Math assessments, respectively. During her seventh grade year, she was absent 11 days and tardy an additional 11 days. She was retained in first grade.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that her General motivation for school was below average (T=29, percentile=6) for her age and grade. Three of the four subject area scales suggested similar levels of academic intrinsic motivation. Scores on Social Studies (T=37, percentile=10) and Math (T=32,

percentile=4),) were low however Reading (T=<20, percentile=<1) was extremely low. Science (T=58, percentile=79) fell in the high-average range.

Student 5 met with the counselor for 12 sessions. Counseling sessions focused on organization, familial issues, and ideas about future plans. She recognized and stated at the beginning of sessions that the friends she spent time with the previous year were a negative influence on her and that her grades and attendance suffered as a result. She seemed ready to make some changes during her eighth grade year, indicated by statements she made that many of the friends who caused issues previously were now at the high school and that she had a new attitude and outlook on her relationships with her friends who were still at the middle school. She believed that she and her friends had matured, socially, over the summer break from school. At the conclusion of the 10-week marking period, her overall average was 66.4 and she had 6 absences and was tardy 9 days. The tardy incidents were not caused by Student 5 arriving to school late but by waiting for friends to get off the bus, wanting to spend time talking with them prior to the school day in the hall or at lockers and reporting to her advisory classroom late. This student's mother grounded her regularly for things such as grades that weren't to her mother's expectations and attitude and behavior at home. This student was grounded most all of the time during the research period. She reported a great deal of anger and frustration in dealings with her mother and stepfather.

This student reported being proud of her interim 5-week report, as most of her grades were good, per her expectations. However, she stated that her mother focused on the few poor teacher reports and that she did not get recognized for the good work that she had done. This student's expectations for herself were shaped by what her mother

wanted for her and she tried very hard to please her mother. She said that she gave up after the reaction she received from her mother from the 5-week report. She felt that she was in a no-win situation with her mother. Student 5 revealed this information during the final three sessions. At this point, focus shifted to exploring who she was as an individual and who she wanted to become, personal versus parental goals for grades and accomplishments in middle and high school, and plans for her post-secondary life.

#### *Student 6*

Student 6 was a 13-year-old male in eighth grade. He lived with his mother and father and had two older brothers, one of which lived with him. His average at the end of seventh grade was 69.5. He was asked to complete summer school and did so. Student 6 was retained in sixth grade. Because of the retention, this student had two sets of TONYSS scores for sixth grade and one set for seventh. On all tests except his second attempt at the sixth grade ELA (3), this student scored 2. In seventh grade, he was absent 10 days and tardy one day.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that his General motivation for school was below average (T=41, percentile=18) for his age and grade. Scores on Social Studies and Science scales suggested an average level of motivation (T=49, percentile=45 and T=50, percentile=50, respectively). His score on the Reading and Math scales fell two standard deviations below the mean (T=39, percentile=14 and T=32, percentile=4, respectively).

Student 6 completed 11 sessions with the counselor. During counseling sessions, grades and progress were reviewed, organizational skills were discussed, and goals were developed and assessed. At the beginning of sessions, this student demonstrated an

understanding that improved organization would improve grades. He also recognized that his memory could not be counted on to remember assignments and that he would have to write assignments in his agenda and use it to refer to each night to determine what work he needed to do. Goals were developed based on these two beliefs. This student worked on keeping his locker clean and organized, keeping his agenda with him more often than he had in the past, and getting work done in school so that he wouldn't have to take it home. He tried an organizational system for keeping materials for each subject separate from other subjects however found that the system he originally employed did not work well for him. He then found another, less complicated system that required less time and effort and worked well for him. This student seemed resistant to talking with the counselor about issues that might have been bothering him. He stated at least once during most sessions that he was bored and was reminded that his time with the counselor was his time to do what he wanted. Grades, progress, and grounded classes were reviewed with the student during each session. The student asked questions about vacations, (i.e., when the next one would be, how long would it last), high school classes and requirements, and careers. Discussion ensued regarding these topics and these times were when he seemed most interested and was most involved.

He remained on the grounded list for two to four classes each week during the research period. Although the other classes varied, he was on the list for math every week. His overall average at the conclusion of the 10-week marking period was 75.7. This average was higher than any of his overall averages the previous year (73, 64, 59, and 73). He reflected that this was better than he had done in previous years and was happy with his accomplishments. Regarding grades, his goal was to earn at least an 80

average in each of his classes. He reached this goal in four of his nine classes. Of worth mentioning is that his grades in his core classes were below his goal of 80. He earned an average of 75 for both math and social studies, which were the highest grades of his core classes. Interestingly, intrinsic motivation, as measured by the CAIMI, was the lowest for math for this student whereas science was his lowest grade (62) while the CAIMI results implied that this student had the greatest motivation in science. This student had no absences or tardy instances during the research period.

#### *Student 7*

Student 7 was a 13-year-old, eighth grade male. He lived with his mother, father and two older brothers. Two additional older brothers lived in other locations. This student finished seventh grade with an overall average of 79.3. He scored 3 on both Math and ELA TONYSS in his sixth grade year and in seventh grade scored 3 on Math and 2 on ELA TONYSS. He was absent 7 days in his seventh grade year. He had not repeated any grade level.

Results of the CAIMI (A. E. Gottfried, 1986) suggested that his General motivation for school was below average (T=41, percentile=19) for his age and grade. His scores suggest high-average motivation in Social Studies (T=56, percentile=72) and average motivation for Math (T=48, percentile=42). Results of the Science (T=43, percentile=24) and Reading (T=39, percentile=13) scales did not differ from the General scale, suggesting this student is about one standard deviation below the mean with regards to motivation in these areas.

Student 7 met with the counselor for 12 sessions. A variety of subjects were discussed from personal/social issues to academic concerns. This student talked about

familial relationships and the struggles he has had with one brother, in particular. He also expressed feelings of frustration, anger, and hurt from incidences with parents and his brothers. After a few sessions and some discussion of school issues, this student agreed with the counselor's impression of him that he seemed shy or nervous when it came to asking a teacher for help with assignments he was struggling with. Discussion and role-play ensued to assist with assertiveness in such situations. This student later reported a successful experience with asking for assistance from a teacher. As counseling progressed, student 5 seemed more open and more engaged in sessions as measured by increased involvement and self-direction of time spent with the counselor. This student was on the grounded list for one to two subjects each week at the beginning of the research period and remained off the list for three of the final five weeks. His overall average at the conclusion of the 10-week marking period was 80.3. This was higher than three of the four marking periods the previous year (84, 77, 68, and 79). Additionally, he earned an average of at least 85 in all except three classes. He was not absent or tardy at all during the research period.

### Discussion

The results of this study showed improvements in academic achievement for most student participants. Attendance was also an area where improvement was shown for most students, when dividing the number of the student's previous year's absences and tardiness by four and comparing this number with attendance reported at the conclusion of the first 10-week marking period. Teacher comments, as compared to teacher comments from the previous year, were more positive and mentioned fewer times that the student lacked motivation. A brief discussion of each individual in this study will be

presented, followed by a review of the meaning of the results, in general. Finally, limitations of the study and the results are discussed and suggestions for the direction of school counseling programs are presented.

Student 1 noticed an improvement in her overall average and an improvement in her grades in some classes that had previously given her difficulty. Furthermore, she stated that her mother noticed an improvement and that her mother preferred that she continue to receive counseling supports beyond the research period. Perhaps the biggest change for this student was the teacher comments that she received on her first marking period report card versus her report cards from the previous year. Teacher perceptions were consistent and positive in all classes rather than mostly negative and varying between subject areas.

Student 2 became an active and involved participant in counseling as the research period progressed. It seemed that this increased activity level and involvement spilled over into the academic realm of his life. He seemed more willing to stay after school for extra help, as evidenced by him staying on his own volition rather than having to serve an academic detention, as had happened during his sixth grade year. Also, instead of being afraid to ask for help and stating that he didn't know what his status was in various classes, he was able to articulate what assignments he owed, grades he had received, and had success in asking for assistance from teachers when he had questions. Teacher comments on the report card implied some improvement in the teacher's perception of his abilities and effort, as did grades. The relationship between student and counselor, in this case, seemed to be beneficial to the student. In sixth grade, his sense of relatedness to adults seemed to be lacking whereas in seventh grade, it seemed to be growing.

Student 3 was opposed to talking about the situation with his parents in counseling sessions however, to the counselor, it seemed as though the situation weighed heavy upon him and significantly affected personal and academic areas of his life. He talked about visiting his dad some days after school and doing some homework with him while other days, he was at his mom's apartment after school, having to self-initiate the completion of homework assignments. Student 3 historically was not a student who would have the self-discipline needed to work on schoolwork when other, more enjoyable (to him) activities were available. This student's attendance rate was different from the past year, indicating fewer days absent and more days tardy. Some of the tardiness issues were dependent on which parent's house he had stayed at the night before (whether he rode the bus to school or was driven in by the parent).

Attendance was an integral problem in the academic achievement of Student 4. This had been an increasing problem as he advanced through his sixth grade year and proved to be an even larger problem as he began seventh grade. His mother had a great deal of difficulty disciplining him at home and getting him to go to school. This student's main desire was to stay at home during the school day so that he could do what he wanted to do versus going to school, where he was required to do some things that he did not enjoy. This student reported that anxiety about school was the main reason for his high absenteeism. In this case, academic motivation was minimal while motivation for staying at home to avoid work seemed to be high.

Student 5 had a relatively high rate of absenteeism and tardiness in her seventh grade year and during the research period. As mentioned in the results, tardiness was due to the student wanting to socialize with her friends in the morning before school began.

As far as attendance, four of the six missed days were because the student had a sprained ankle and wasn't able to walk well enough to get around the school, per her mother's report. The counselor conducting this study and the student's assigned School Counselor had a parent conference with this student's mother at week 12 of the research period. The following information was obtained from that conference. Her mother hypothesized that grounding this student from the phone was causing her to spend school time talking with her friends (since she did not have the option of talking to her friends on the phone the night before), resulting in tardiness. Her mother was concerned about this student's academic motivation and achievement and seemed cognizant of the fact that the use of this and other extrinsic practices were producing negative effects at school. From this, she said that she had decided to change her approach and would be putting fewer limits on this student's social life. The results for this student supported research conclusions by A. E. Gottfried (1994) regarding mother's motivational practices and Wentzel (1999) regarding over- and under-controlling parents. It would be interesting to see how this change would effect this student's achievement at school. The current study did not extend long enough to see the results of such change.

Student 6 showed some improvement in academic achievement, measured by the 10-week report card averages. This student seemed to benefit from the counseling relationship in terms of establishing a better organizational system and having one consistent person checking on his progress on a weekly basis. Although he was silent much of the time during sessions, it may have allowed him to ruminate about things that were on his mind that might have otherwise distracted him at a later time when he would have to focus on schoolwork. Attendance was not a major issue for this student during

previous years or during the research period. Talking with this student about future academic requirements and the amount of education needed for various careers may have had an impact on this student's motivation for improved school achievement.

Student 7 did not show improvement in academic performance if grades alone were considered. However, the grounded list indicated that he was keeping up on his work better than in the previous year and social (teacher) relationships seemed to be at least slightly enhanced. This student had been too shy and embarrassed to ask for help on an assignment, for which he was on the grounded list for three weeks. Once he stayed after school with the teacher and obtained answers for his questions, the assignment was completed and turned in. The grade for that assignment was considerably lower than what it would have been had he turned it in on time. This student however indicated that he had learned from this situation that it wasn't so bad to ask for help, if it meant not losing crucial points on an assignment that constituted a large portion of his grade for that class. This may have been a case of learned helplessness. Student 7 talked about frustration and difficulties with getting along with parents and siblings. This student also mentioned during counseling that he wished that his parents and brothers would be able to put themselves in his shoes. There is speculation that this student learned not to ask for help because of negative responses he received when asking for help in situations at home. In this case, the counselor was able to assist with initiating the first steps in increasing this student's comfort with asking for assistance at school, reversing the learned helplessness effects.

From the results and this discussion, it is evident that counseling can have an impact on many functions of academic motivation and performance. The counseling

relationship proved to be a positive experience for students involved in the study, even if improvements seemed small or minimal.

Ryan and Deci (2000) state that if intrinsic motivation is to be maintained or enhanced, students must experience self-efficacy and they must experience their behavior to be self-determined. The counseling relationship and experience is the optimal environment for students to develop self-efficacy and to do so with little influence or manipulation from others. Counseling provides a safe, open environment for students to explore and learn about themselves, including who they are and who they would like to become.

The literature (Wentzel, 1998) suggested that there was an additive effect of multiple adult influences on aspects of motivation. Many of the students in this study came from families where the parents are separated/divorced. Students living with only one parent are at a disadvantage, numerically, to those who are living with both parents as far as potential support and involvement. There are most likely situations where a single parent in one family situation is more supportive and involved than two parents are in another family situation. Regardless of the amount of support at home, it is important for counselors, teachers, and administrators to provide students with support in order to further improve academic achievement. This case certainly is one where more is better.

### *Limitations*

One limitation in this study was the time frame. Larger effects would probably have been evident if the study was conducted over an entire school year, as results from 11 and 12 sessions suggest some improvement in student academic achievement. Improving or changing aspects of one's personality takes a great deal of time and for

middle school students, this process may take longer because of the developmental stage that they are in, which is characterized by self exploration and self actualization.

Another limitation of the current study is that it does not distinguish whether counseling improves motivation or academic achievement. However, results implied that counseling strengthened qualities associated with achievement and motivation (e.g., self efficacy, sense of relatedness). Counseling seemed to aid in the process of getting students into a positive cycle of success, increased efficacy, and improved persistence and task involvement.

#### *Suggestions for School Counseling Programs to Improve Motivation and Achievement*

Maehr and Midgley (1991) proposed a program for a school wide approach to improving academic motivation based on research and goal theory. They suggest the TARGET system. TARGET is an acronym including the following components of the program: Task, Authority, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation and Time. The focus, goals and strategies are explained for each of the six components (Maehr & Midgley, 1991).

Another newer framework available for schools is The New York State Model for Comprehensive K-12 School Counseling Programs (Dahir, Hardy, Ford, & Morrissey, (Eds.) 2005). This program was developed by the New York State School Counselor Association (NYSSCA) as a means of providing support for school counselors in meeting the academic, vocational and personal/social needs of children. It was built upon the framework of the American School Counseling Association's Model for School Counseling and integrates the New York State Learning Standards into the program. This document outlines the importance of counselors in schools and offers current theories on

building and managing counseling programs in schools. This document will continue to be important for the future of the school counseling profession.

Wentzel and Asher (1995) suggested that focusing on positive student-teacher relationships (to offset the effects of being rejected by one's peers) would be a profitable school-based intervention to improve academic motivation. I argue that a student-counselor relationship would be as beneficial if not more, for improving academic motivation and more within a student.

As with many smaller school districts, the first major school transition occurred for these students when they entered middle school. Essentially, children spent their first six years of school in the same building with the same classmates. As they entered middle school, sixth grade students who previously attended two separate elementary schools combined in a new building, with new teachers, new administrators and staff, and increased independence. Rather than staying in one classroom, with one lead teacher for most of the day, they had to change classrooms and learn the "rules" of each teacher and classroom. This transition from elementary to middle school involves many aspects of a student's life, leaving a great deal of room for difficulty. The school counselor is the person most available to these students to help them in their transition and to help them be successful students.

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## Appendix A

Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI)  
Sample Items

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1. I enjoy learning new things in...

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DON'T AGREE OR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
math	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
social studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
science	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. I do not enjoy learning.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DON'T AGREE OR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. I feel good inside when I know I have learned something new in...

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DON'T AGREE OR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
math	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
social studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
science	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix B

Letter to Parents of Student Participants

September 13, 2005

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Tracy Altman. I am working on completing the requirements for a Master's Degree in School Counseling at SUNY Brockport. As a part of the program, I am carrying out a one-year internship at the \_\_\_\_\_ Middle School. Also, I am required to conduct a research project on a topic of interest. My internship and thesis research are under the supervision of staff from the SUNY Brockport Counselor Education Department and \_\_\_\_\_, Middle School Counselor.

For my thesis, I have chosen to work with students who seem to have difficulties with academic motivation. Your child has been identified as a student who could benefit from counseling services that focus on improving academic motivation. I have met with your child at least once already and we plan to continue to meet about once per week until December. We will work together to determine what might be getting in the way of academic success and what strategies we can use to improve areas of weakness. Additionally, your child will complete an inventory at the beginning of our counseling sessions to determine areas of strength and weakness.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your child's progress during our time together, please feel free to call myself or \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. I am at the Middle School Monday and Wednesday mornings and all day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Thank you in advance for allowing me the opportunity to help your child succeed in school.

Sincerely,

Tracy W. Altman  
School Counselor Intern