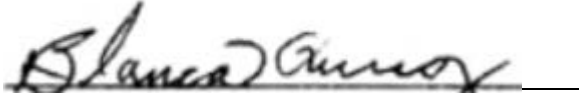


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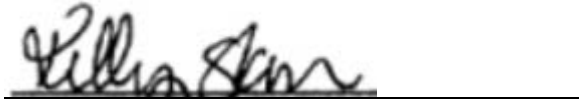
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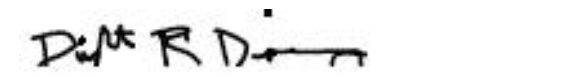


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ACADEMIC MOTIVATION FACTORS AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL, RESPONSIVE
TEACHING, AND STUDENT VOICES

by

Sofia Kind

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ABSTRACT

Increasing academic motivation in middle school students is an essential task for every teacher. The researcher assessed academic motivation factors within a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California. The study included 140 middle school students (6th-8th), 16 middle school teachers, 2 administrators, and 3 special projects teachers. Participants answered open-ended questions about their experiences with academic motivation to identify factors that directly affect students' academic motivation. The responses were coded for thematic relationships and frequencies. Findings revealed that middle school students are academically motivated by factors such as *grades*, *encouragement*, *teaching methods*, and *access to curriculum*. The study found that students listen to and value teachers' words of encouragement. Administrators and teachers identified *teaching methods* as a leading motivating factor.

Keywords: academic motivation, middle school students, encouragement, motivation at the middle school level, motivating students, responsive teacher, stage- environment fit theory, person-environment fit theory

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As individuals mature, they face altering emotional, physiological, cognitive and social needs. Since middle school students have a set of unique needs, schools must consider meeting these needs in developmentally appropriate ways to provide the kind of social context necessary to motivate students' interest and academic engagement (Kiefer, Ellerbrock, & Alley, 2014). As children mature, they inevitably experience pubertal and social changes that affect their emotions and cognition (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). At this period in their lives, behavior, cognition, and the brain, experience a massive level of development (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). This phase of development demands that the students' personal and social needs be met effectively, strategically, and consistently (Kiefer et al., 2014). Middle school organizations, that intend to satisfy the fundamentals of their students, must begin to think of a pedagogical structure that is suitable for their students' developmental growth level (Kiefer et al., 2014; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). This optimal learning structure would direct students towards a progressive path leading to higher cognitive maturity (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, & Buchanan, 1993). Even at such a stage of physiological complexity, middle school students need an environment that will guarantee academic engagement. The goal of this dissertation is to discover the main factors that increase academic motivation at the middle school level. Another element that will be discovered is the manner in which teachers responsively meet the three essential needs of students: competence (ability to cope with new contexts), autonomy (choosing for themselves), and relatedness (needing to bond with others intimately) as defined by Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory.

Chapter one is organized as follows: (a) background of the study; (b) statement of the problem; (c) purpose of the study; (d) significance of the study; (e) definition of terms; (f)

theoretical framework; (g) characteristics of the middle school student; (h) research questions; (i) limitations; (j) delimitations; (k) assumptions; (l) organization of the study; and (m) summary.

Background of the Study

After working with middle school students and teachers for two decades, the researcher has firsthand experience in how unaware the middle school educator is to the fact that middle school students are experiencing intense, radical physiological and psychological changes; and in how academically unmotivated middle school students are to learn. There appears to be such a disconnection and misunderstanding between teachers and students at this stage. Middle school students are experiencing numerous simultaneous changes. One such change is an increase in gonadal hormones, which results in changes in the brain's architecture, particularly in the frontal lobes of the brain (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). These lobes are responsible for functions such as self-discipline, discernment, emotional management, organization, and planning (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). Such vicissitudes cause the middle school student to be emotionally unstable, lack organization and planning skills, have no consistent self-control, and misjudge events and people (Nagel, 2007). These changes may also prompt an academic plummet as students have less interest in their academic work; which then, goes unnoticed, since the social and academic structure within a middle school is typically ill-equipped to meet students at their appropriate developmental level (Eccles et al., 1991a).

Furthermore, when the middle school student attempts to understand either relationships or her academic studies, she experiences the deficiency in her brain's architecture which then prevents her from discerning what is wrong, managing emotions, correctly judging events and people, and organizing their academic workload (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). Middle school educators would serve their students better if they made a shift away from the current practice of

whole group teaching, excessively controlling environments, public embarrassment (Eccles et al., 1991a), rigorous grading, less varied evaluation techniques, and intensified social assessment among peers (Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994) to a more appropriate developmental learning environment, which enhances cognitive maturity (Eccles et al., 1993a). Middle school students find themselves not only facing physiological and biological changes, but also new social demands from their surrounding community and peers (Lord et al., 1994).

Elementary school students transform into extrinsically motivated middle school students and tend to have lower levels of intrinsic motivation when faced with academic school work (Eccles et al., 1991a). In addition, the self-determination theory discusses the cognitive evaluation theory, which reveals that a student's social environment can promote or prevent intrinsic motivation, by encouraging or hindering, respectively, the student's innate developmental needs (Kiefer et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

As a result of the middle school student being dependent on extrinsic motivation, academic motivation plummets at this age (Eccles et. al., 1991a). For the middle school students' benefit, it is imperative for educators of middle school students to become aware of how the person-environment fit theory impacts academic motivation in these students. The person-environment fit theory asserts that the amount of adult control over students must complement the student's need for autonomy (Eccles et al., 1991a). The classroom environment will either promote autonomy or hinder it, and with this will come an increase or decline in academic interests. Autonomy is one of three psychological needs middle school students have at this developmental stage (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to the researchers, when students experience autonomy in their environment they feel as if they are acting on their own will (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Interestingly, at this age, in the students' homes there is a momentary increase in

family opposition, mostly over autonomy and control (Eccles et al., 1991a; Eccles et al., 1993a). This is because as students experience a level of autonomy at school, they want to experience it at home as well.

A student's determination to acquire such autonomy originates from the internal, biological progressions marking the transition to a young adult; such as sexual maturity and increasing cognitive maturity, as well as, social vicissitudes and anticipations that accompany these biological changes (Lord et al., 1994). These family oppositions intensify self-consciousness, lower self-esteem, and increase self-image imbalance (Lord et al., 1994); all of which may have negative effects on academic motivation. Additionally, the middle school social context is rich with social situations; which are demanding of coping skills, on account of decreased supervision and new autonomous roles. The resources available to adequately and appropriately respond to these external circumstances are meager at such a young age (Lord et al., 1994). Consequently, student academic motivation abates.

Middle school students' innate adaptive ability is the reason they find the resources from which to adapt. As they experience an increased amount of unsupervised time, students have a higher amount of interaction with same-age people (Eccles et al., 1993a). Students autonomously engage in equal relational interactions, and they experience themselves making decisions. Unsupervised time and decision making are both autonomous acts that facilitate an increased amount of opportunities for students to spend a lot of time in relationships generally more balanced in terms of interpersonal power and authority (Eccles et al., 1993a). These symmetrical social experiences encourage middle school students to expect the same power and equality within their family relationships (Eccles et al., 1993a). Experiencing this level of autonomy encourages students to experiment at home, where it may not be allowed or expected,

and which may turn the home into an unsupportive environment for the middle school student. The majority of parents are unprepared for such a seismic shift in overall behavior (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016). On one hand, parents find themselves with an opinionated, vocal, problem solver, and may not know how to handle their developing middle school child. On the other hand, middle school students, for the first time in their lives, experience guiding the decision-making process; as well as, participating in making decisions and having others follow them. The self-determination theory asserts that this form of autonomy is essential as the middle school student develops (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When schools and home environments fail to consider the psychosocial needs of middle school students, there is a decrease in academic motivation, student engagement, and academic performance (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Wang and Eccles (2013) also found that a socially and emotionally supportive school environment improves middle school students' perceptions on their own academic abilities, promotes student engagement, as well as, increases self-efficacy. Ryan and Deci (2000) agree, as their self-determination theory states, that self-efficacy assists in enhancing the essential component of autonomy, which middle school students need at this developmental stage of life.

Eccles et al. (1991a) found that middle school students often find themselves in unsupportive environments both at home and at school during the middle school years. This may be due to parents and teachers failing to acknowledge the person-environment fit theory, where neither the parents nor the teachers are providing the adequate autonomous-rich environment needed for the middle school student to cognitively mature (Eccles et al., 1991a). For educators to achieve the finest academic developmental outcomes, teachers need to know when to progressively allow student autonomy and lessen teacher control within the learning context

(Eccles et al., 1991a). The amount of control that parents and teachers maintain over the student must match the students' need for autonomy (Eccles et. al., 1991a).

The stage-environment fit theory explains that the environment of middle school students must have developmentally appropriate opportunities, like freedom to make choices, self-directed activities, and leadership opportunities (Eccles et al., 1991a). A controlling middle-school teacher is not providing an appropriate learning environment for students to progress to their next developmental level. In fact, Eccles et al. (1991a) found evidence that middle school teachers are shown to be much more controlling than elementary fifth grade teachers. This control is characteristic of what Eccles et al. (1991a) describes as regressive in growth development, or developmentally regressive. It is of paramount importance to middle school students to progress into autonomy, as it is one of the essential needs of the student (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Appropriate developmental, autonomy-promoting changes a school can make are: (a) progression to smaller learning groups; (b) more consistency in the set of teachers teaching students; (c) less bureaucracy in the school structure; (d) increased teacher-student relationships; (e) increased team teaching; (f) fewer departments; (g) a decrease in curriculum tracking; (h) less standardized grading; (i) and an increase in objective-based grading (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991b). It is unfortunate that research finds that middle school educators fail to follow the middle school philosophy listed above (Eccles et al., 1991b); and as a result, students are bored, have little interest in school, lack classroom engagement, and withdraw from school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). This act of withdrawing from school usually signifies that students are having low academic motivation levels. Jang, Kim, and Reeves (2016) embedded the idea of academic engagement in the classroom with the self-determination theory and discovered a direct link between perceived fit of student needs to engagement and disengagement in class over time.

Which means that when students perceive that their needs are being met, they are engaged in their learning.

Research has found that the typical decline in middle school students' academic motivation is directly associated to the type of change in the classroom environment, as they transition from elementary to middle school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Eccles et al., 1991b). When middle school students do not have access to a progressively appropriate context in which to learn, academic motivation is not fostered. These young adolescents need more than autonomy. In order to succeed academically, they need autonomy that is a suitable match to their developmental level. Educators need specialized training in recognizing when to allow students more freedom (Canter, 1989). Eccles (2004) highlighted the importance of a developmentally responsive school context:

Individuals have changing emotional, cognitive, and social needs and personal goals as they mature. Schools need to change in developmentally appropriate ways if they are to provide the kind of social context that will continue to motivate students' interest and engagement as students mature (pp. 125–126).

Statement of the Problem

Eccles (2004) asserts that schools need to change in order to meet their middle school students' developmentally appropriate stages. She stresses the significance of creating a developmentally responsive school context, since middle school students are in a stage of change in areas of emotions, cognition, social, and personal (Eccles, 2004). Ames (1990) found that middle school teachers are entering the classroom lacking adequate training of motivation theory, constructs and associated standards to the practice; as a result, they fail to consider motivational concepts that are related to each other, to developmental vicissitudes, to personal

and culturally related differences, and to classroom learning contexts. Although the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (2009) encourages teachers to motivate their students to become self-learners (CSFTP 2.4), there are no strategies or teacher developments established, nor do the California Standards for the Teaching Profession imply proper teacher training to prepare teachers to academically motivate their students. Kiefer et al., (2014) found that academic motivation and engagement in learning drops at the middle school level, when middle school students are attempting to acquire autonomy. This disengagement is one negative consequence of existing incompatibility between a student's need for autonomy and the actual prospects that exist within his new middle school learning environment (Kiefer et al., 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013). The stage-environment fit theory postulates that a middle school student is at a disadvantage, when the student's environment does not match the level of autonomy necessary for development (Eccles et al., 1991a; Eccles, 2004).

Educational organizations that aspire to satisfy the academic needs of middle school students need to apply the functions of the stage-environment fit theory. Almost two-thirds of middle school teachers are unaware of the significant roles that the person-environment fit theory, the stage-environment fit theory, and teacher-student relationships have on student motivation and achievement (Kiefer et al., 2014). The first step in addressing academic motivation is raising awareness of the stage-environment fit theory, self-determination theory, responsive teacher practices, and the person-environment fit theory; which, if not done, may continue to have overwhelmingly negative side effects on the educational success of middle school students.

To adequately examine the methods that teachers use to support academic motivation in a large, low, socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school environment, key research

participants, like teachers, administrators, and above all, students must be given a voice (Kiefer et al., 2014). The given voices must allow expressions of how each student is best motivated, how students are academically motivated, how teachers may increase academic motivation, and how students may manage to raise their own academic motivation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to discover, through the eyes and voices of students, teachers and administrators, what factors foster academic motivation at the middle school level, particularly, academic motivation in a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school. Kiefer et al., (2014) investigated the ways teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation in one large, low-socio economic, and ethnically-diverse middle school. They discovered the need for further qualitative, inductive case studies in different educational contexts. This would give allowance to educators and students at the middle school level to have an individual voice regarding academic motivation. Through the use of inductive research, the researcher will take students' and educators' views and capture the essence of academic motivation and responsive teaching. This study seeks to reduce the gaps in the literature related to the field of developmentally appropriate academic motivation in the middle school grades. Currently, the research that addresses middle school students' academic motivation is limited on first-hand research investigating student and educator insight of this phenomenon (Kiefer et al., 2014; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007).

Improving academic motivation at the middle school level has received less attention since the No Child Left Behind initiative took lead in educational organizations (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007). This new priority, in academics alone, has prompted researchers to address research-based effective interventions intended to promote academic motivation and classroom

engagement (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007). Despite this effort, successful academic motivation research at the middle school level remains limited (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007). Academic motivation questions that largely remain unanswered in existing research are:

1. What are students' perceptions, in regard to academic motivation?
2. What are teachers' perceptions, in regard to increasing academic motivation?; and
3. What do administrators, who observe teachers' pedagogy daily, believe is the best method of advancing academic motivation?

According to Tomlinson (2012b), academic motivation is best enhanced through a responding to the students' needs within their environment. Instead of taking a punitive approach (which research has shown is ineffective for adolescents), responsiveness in the classroom shows respect, empathy, and a clear desire to support students in learning the necessary skills for growth (Tomlinson, 2012b). In addition, teacher-student relationships that include caring connections between teacher and student and where teachers respond to students' needs, enhance students' feelings of belonging (Kiefer et al., 2014). For students' academic motivation to increase, it is important that students feel that they belong to a community (Mauro, 2014).

This study is an in-depth investigation into the manner in which teachers support student motivation from the perspectives of multiple key participant groups in Seville Middle School in Southern California. Voices of 140 students, 16 teachers, 2 administrators and 3 special project teachers will be incorporated. The ending goal is an effort to provide a deeper understanding of the ways teachers promote student academic motivation, and to offer meaningful recommendations for practicing responsive teaching within a low socio-economic and ethnically diverse middle school context (Kiefer et al., 2014).

By recording, analyzing, and deriving the essence from data collected from teachers' and students' thoughts about what they have experienced, what they perceive, and what supports academic motivation, discoveries about the role of responsive teaching were made. These findings may facilitate an increased awareness of the needs of the middle school student and the manner in which teachers can meet them.

Significance of the Study

According to Davis (2006), a large number of middle school teachers lack the awareness of the effect that high quality relationships between teacher and student have on the students' development and academic success, as well as, lack the knowledge that such relationship building is their responsibility. The majority of teachers who leave their teaching positions at the middle school level claim that they leave as a result of the absence of support and feel emotionally burned out (Hong, 2012). Low self-efficacy is prevalent among middle school teachers, which contributes to their stress levels (Marachi, Gheen, & Midgley, 2000). Teacher programs meant to train educators in the teaching field mostly focus on elementary or high school, and tend to leave the middle school teacher untrained to meet the needs of their middle school students (Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008). Less than one in four teachers receive adequate training to teach students at the middle school level prior to beginning their middle school teaching career (National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2002). These different factors contribute to low teacher self-efficacy and inadequacy in teaching middle school students.

This teacher state-of-being causes learning and academic motivation to be negatively impacted. Awareness of who the middle school student is, what the middle school student

thinks, and what truly works for the student from the student's perspective, is the first step to providing an adequate learning environment.

This study was an in-depth investigation into the methods teachers use to support student motivation from the perspectives of multiple key participant groups in the middle school ecosystem. Voices of students, teachers, and administrators were incorporated, in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of the manner in which teachers promote student academic motivation, and to offer meaningful recommendations for practicing responsive teaching within an large low-socio economic, ethnically diverse middle school context (Kiefer et al., 2014).

Definition of Terms

To understand and clarify the terms used in the study, the following are hereby defined:

Responsive Teacher: - This genre of teacher delves into teacher-student relationships lying at the core of teaching. (S)he realizes that caring and connecting to students is paramount for all academically successful endeavors (Kiefer et al., 2014). This type of teacher is one who values young adolescents, who engages them in active, purposeful learning, and who challenges them by holding high expectations (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010).

Academic Motivation: This type of motivation is the type that middle school students acquire strictly for advancing their academic studies in school.

Motivation: Motivation is recognized as a set of beliefs that drive and sustain behavior and is an important precursor to learning and success in school (Wentzel, 2012; Wentzel, & Wigfield, 2007; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). A motivated person is moving towards doing and mastering something, is full of energy and actively heading towards an end goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To be motivated means to have enthusiasm to accomplish something.

Intrinsic Motivation: In this study, the definition of intrinsic motivation is, “Intrinsic motivation is closely allied to the fundamental motivation to learn and acquire new skills. The building blocks, or psychological needs, that underlie intrinsic motivation are the need to determine one's behavior (what psychologists term self-determination), the need to feel competent, and the need for relatedness...” (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011, p. 33). It implies doing an activity because it is interesting and enjoyable. It satisfies people’s basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It is the prototype of self- determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). “When individuals are autonomous they experience themselves as volitional initiators of their own actions” (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-talk is the highest form of intrinsic motivation.

Flow: Karageorghis & Terry (2011) state that when an individual is at their highest level of intrinsic motivation, then they are functioning at what they call “flow.” “Flow occurs when there is a perfect match between the perceived demands of an activity and the perceived ability to meet the demands” (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011, p. 35).

Self-Talk: “Positive self-talk is one of the most tried and tested strategies among sport psychology interventions. It is used to maintain concentration and to induce optimal arousal” (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011, p. 36). Students who use self-talk are functioning at their highest level of intrinsic motivation according to Karageorghis and Terry (2011).

Extrinsic Rewards (Motivation): Doing an activity specifically because it leads to a separate consequence such as a reward, avoidance of a punishment, or social approval (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Belonging: Belonging is the way a student feels about being a member of their school; it is undoubtedly dependent on numerous aspects of the middle school experience, incorporating

both academic and social dynamics (Anderman, 2003). The feelings of belonging to the school club symbolize a student's perception about the social environment of the school and their personal position within it (Anderman, 2003). Because schools are organizations in which academic and social elements are fundamentally interwoven, one must anticipate that both social and academic elements can predict a student's sense of belonging (Anderman, 2003). All social and academic dynamics are dependent on a student's feelings of belonging to a community (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

Relatedness: Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory defines relatedness as one of the three human needs, relatedness meaning a need to have close, affectionate relationships with others.

Autonomy: Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory defines autonomy as one of the three human needs, autonomy meaning the need to control the course of their lives.

Competence: Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory defines competence as one of the three human needs, competence meaning the need to be effective when dealing with the environment - leadership ability.

Assertive Discipline: Assertive discipline is based on a combination of teacher and student rights. Students have the right to choose how to behave and know the consequences that will follow. Teachers have the right to establish and request appropriate behavior from the students, which also meets the students' right to learn and enhances the positive social and educational development of the child (Brinkerhoff, 2016).

Person-Environment Fit Theory: This theory suggests that the match between the child's need for autonomy and the amount of adult control exercised is critically important. Students

will have optimal motivation and satisfaction in settings that afford them as much autonomy as they desire (Eccles et al., 1991a).

Stage-Environment Fit Theory: This theory suggests that there are negative motivational and behavioral consequences of being in an environment that does not match a student's psychological needs. In contrast, positive motivational consequences result when there is a good match between individuals' needs and the characteristics of their environment. This theory, at the most basic level, endorses the importance of considering the fit between the needs of middle school students and the opportunities afforded to them in the middle school environment and their home (Eccles et al., 1991a). Academic motivation is severely affected when there is a mismatch.

Responsive Teacher: A responsive teacher is proactively planning mixed approaches to meet students' needs, to meet how they learn, and to discover how much they have learned, in order to match their learning with their abilities, so that time is spent toward efficient learning (Tomlinson, 2003).

Self-Determination Theory: Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory asserts that relatedness, autonomy, and competence are the three basic psychological human essentials.

Access to Curriculum: When students are able to understand the curriculum being taught to them without supporting materials. Students are able to complete their assignments independently.

Theoretical Framework

The middle school years are a period of life scientifically considered a transitional period. When middle school students are faced with an interaction between developmental vicissitudes, at both the personal and social environmental levels, they have undesirable psychological

changes related to middle school and their own personal development (Eccles et al., 1993a). Middle school students in America find themselves battling, not only their physiological changes due to their growing stage, but their new, inadequate learning and social environments. When these challenges are left unaddressed by educators, the academically harmful consequences that result are directly related to the mismatch between a middle school student's psychological needs, and the low likelihood that his environments will meet these needs (Eccles et al., 1993a). School plays a pivotal role in providing or depriving middle school students of the benefits that an adequate environment can offer.

Schools have maintained a general image of being a place where students can obtain care and education. According to Ellerbrock, Kiefer, and Alley (2014), a school is a vital place for the nurturance and advancement of care. As students transition into young adults, they seek genuine care and connections with their teachers. The perception they have about feeling respected and cared for within their classroom environment is part of feeling connected (Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2007). Relationships with teachers, with each other, with family, and with friends, are what build resiliency in a middle school student. Research reported that, when educators demonstrate an adequate level of care for middle school students, so much so that the student establishes at least one non-familial adult relationship within the school, there is a rise in feelings of belonging and academic success (Ellerbrock et al., 2014; Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Association; National Middle School Association, 2010). This means if one student connects or bonds with one teacher, coach, or administrator, then his or her academic motivation is guaranteed to increase. Ryan and Deci (2000) speak of relatedness in their self-determination theory. One essential human need is to have intimate bonds and connections with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When the lack of belonging, feelings of no connection, and perceived dislike from adults dominate the middle school student's mind; then, a downward spiral begins, which marks the start of low academic motivation increasing the chances of the student dropping out of school in the future (Eccles et al., 1993b; Eccles et al., 1991b). "For some children, the early adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral in school-related behaviors and motivation that often lead to academic failure and school dropout" (Eccles et al., 1993b, p. 554).

Research findings indicate that students who feel connected to schools perceive that they have a high-quality relationship with adults (Kiefer et al., 2014). Nichols (2008) found that students' feelings of belonging are directly connected to the type of relationships established with peers and teachers; hence, feelings of belonging are a direct result of interpersonal relationships students build in school. Belonging and relationships may predict drop-out rates at the high school level (Eccles et. al., 1991a); therefore, becoming aware of this finding at this developmental stage, would benefit middle school educators. To prevent students from dropping out of high school, educational leaders may want to address the importance of supporting the middle school student through appropriate developmental classroom engagement, opportunities to instill a sense of belonging, and relationship building between teachers and peers (Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015).

Eccles and Zarrett (2006) encourage educators to conduct an examination of structural limitations on adolescents' choices and engagement in activities that stimulate future options, opportunities and life courses, as well as, what resources and requirements are essential for keeping middle school students on a healthy, productive pathway into adulthood. Teachers, coaches, and administrators can build on social capital, in order that students can benefit academically (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). How many opportunities to choose are students afforded

throughout their school day in their different classes? What are the daily levels of autonomy offered to students? How are middle school teachers being trained to appropriately meet these specific cognitive and social developmental needs their students have? These are questions that could provide the first steps towards a learning environment shift, which would then enhance academic motivation at the middle school level. Some of these questions were answered by the data found from this research.

Tomlinson (2011) found that the manner in which educators communicate with students, particularly with middle school students, will either build a relationship or establish a gap. It is imperative to develop understanding about what a teacher-student relationship means in the overall educational career of the student. A strong teacher-student relationship, may earn a teacher the student's respect. Academic motivation can thrive through respect earned between both student and teacher, since the teacher will be connecting with the middle school student (Tomlinson, 2011). By genuinely connecting with students, teachers are paying attention to who the student truly is as a person and as a contributing member of the class (Tomlinson, 2011). Following connection with a teacher, a student becomes more receptive to feedback given by the teacher. Research has also found that the quality of student-teacher relationships, which stem from connections, promotes engagement and learning (Reyes, Bracket, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Communication skills and connecting skills are still developing in students at the middle school age. As a result of this lack of social skills, students' coping abilities cause them to be mostly misjudged and neglected by both parents and teachers alike (Ellerbrock et al., 2014). By paying enough attention to students, giving them positive feedback, showing concern by appreciating the work they produce, making a genuine effort to connect with them,

complimenting their areas of strength, and being kind to them, students detect respect and respond positively (Tomlinson, 2011). Middle school students crave opportunities to embrace engagement and respond confidently to them.

Characteristics of the Middle School Student

Despite the fact that research on middle school students is documented in literature, there still exists a limited amount of research on actual student and educator perception (Ellerbrock et al., 2014). This study afforded middle school students a voice to share “what and who” has positively influenced their own academic motivation while attending middle school. The researcher treated students as *expert witnesses*, since they are the authority on the middle school experience and with academic motivation (Ellerbrock et al., 2014). The researchers found that teacher-student relationships are significant in fostering academic motivation (Ellerbrock et. al., 2014). Establishing communication with middle school students is fundamental for educators who wish to provide a successful learning environment. Students face numerous emotional challenges that a teacher can help appease, yet not solve, if a relationship is established.

Middle school educators can provide opportunities to enhance academic motivation, through responsive teaching (Tomlinson, 2011). Ellerbrock, Kiefer, and Alley, (2014) research found that by giving a voice, through a written survey, to middle school students’ thoughts about their own personal experiences with academic motivation in the middle school years, teachers would learn more about who the middle school student is. Most middle school educators are unaware of the potential that understanding middle school students has on every aspect of how teachers are educating them. With multiple growing stages meeting at the crossroads, middle school students are the most misunderstood, and as a result, the most disregarded of all students (Ellerbrock et al., 2014).

The social challenges middle students combat daily may be related to culture, religion, life preference, relationships, connections, and philosophy, as well as, social, psychological, physiological, and cognitive developmental issues. The middle school culture provides an abundance of internal and external conflicts that are often times ignored by parents and teachers alike (Ellerbrock et al., 2014). One example is the *us vs. them* dichotomy which creates deep trenches amongst students (Sorrells, 2013), primarily because students, at this developmental stage of life, face more internal conflicts than at any other age (Eccles et al., 1993a; Kiefer et al., 2015). Who a student thinks he or she is (us), is compared to those students around him or her (them) and this becomes an area of exploration and conflict. What group do they join? Which group accepts them? Where do they go, when there is no group or community available for them to join? The social trenches go to deeper levels and create intense intercultural conflicts among peers, teachers, and the educational organization. Researcher Nichols (2008) gives the definition of belonging as the level at which students perceive they belong within a school setting, and he also asserts that the feeling of belonging may positively influence academic motivation.

Middle school students are at a developmental stage where cognitive, social, and physiological changes exist. These changes are happening unbeknownst to the student; and as a result, demand attention in order that the students may be able to cope with them. Students seek an adequate level of autonomy; therefore, the person in charge, in this case, the teacher, is expected to provide it. The level of autonomy granted must match the students' developmental level, to allow maturity, as the self-determination theory has found (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Unfortunately, this is not the case most of the time in the middle school classroom (Eccles et al., 1993b; Kiefer et al., 2015). The self-determination theory asserts that because autonomy is one of the human essential needs at this developmental stage, it must be provided to foster academic

motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers and parents must learn to adjust their exercise of control dependent on the developmental stage of the middle school students; not doing so, has shown to have negative academic consequences (Eccles et al., 1991a). For the student, the dropping of academic grades in classes is so great that it can essentially predict future academic failure, including dropping out of high school (Eccles et al., 1991b). According to Warde (2005), John Dewey asserted that every generation of students is obstructed and damaged by the grown-ups who practice direct control over them. This control directly impacts a student's developmental advancement, since the student is battling with what he or she is feeling, as well as, with who he or she is as a person and as a human being. This student needs a supportive understanding learning environment that facilitates cognitive maturity.

Social

Socially, middle school students face intense personal challenges. Not only do these students have to face and learn to cope with a mass of physiological and psychological changes, but they must learn to adapt to their new middle school environment and culture. The student's perspective about the new setting determines how much motivation he or she will have for academic learning. Strong teacher-student relationships would facilitate this transition into middle school (Tomlinson, 2011; Reyes et al., 2012).

Researchers have found an increasing amount of data suggesting that students' perceptions of their in-class relationships influence academic motivation and academic success (Madill, Gest, & Rodkin, 2014; Reyes et al., 2012; Tomlinson, 2011; Mauro, 2014). Essentially, at the social-level, middle school students demand a positive peer community to advance academically (Reyes et al., 2012). A positive peer community is a schoolroom with strong levels of apparent prosocial behavior among classmates, in other words, a place where students

perceive that their peers genuinely respect each other and care about each other's well-being (Madill et al., 2014). This positive peer community enhances learning, belonging, and academic motivation. If, instead, there are feelings of disconnectedness and a lack of a community then, a student's academic performance suffers (Reyes et al., 2012).

Without the positive peer community, a student's coping resources may be missing during adjustment to stressful situations, such as this middle school transition (Lord et al., 1994; Reyes et al., 2012). Inability to cope with such a massive amount of physiological and psychological changes happening simultaneously, is a clear predictor of academic failure (Eccles et al., 1993a). Often, middle school students have not developed intercommunication skills necessary for socialization and for the acquisition of a community and acceptance. It is not shocking to discover that the advancement of technology has placed a colossal disadvantage on our young generation. The Pew Research Center has found that 57% of middle school students meet friends strictly online (Clarkson, 2016). Also, 55% spend their day texting, while 27% use instant messaging to communicate with their friends on a daily basis (Clarkson, 2016). In addition, research shows that 71% of middle school students text daily, and 90% access their cell phone constantly with a period of 24 hours (Detwiler, 2015). If the method of communication is texting, chatting, or video gaming, then middle school students may suffer emotional trauma and academic failure as a result of their lack of sociolinguistic communication skills (Clarkson, 2016). Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Kik, and other social media platforms are not exactly meant to train students in social communication skills; in fact, these platforms have a negative effect on how students communicate in 'real life' (Clarkson, 2016). Despite the negative consequences, middle school students find a sense of connection and bonding by using these

social media platforms, both of which are essential at this developmental stage (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kiefer et al., 2014; Reyes et al., 2012).

Additionally, middle school students struggle with intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and self-perception (Eccles et al., 1993a; Kiefer et al., 2015). These struggles are developmental challenges students experience; therefore, the mental health aspects of technology and social media platforms are an added stress, and as a result middle school academics becomes a last priority. Two key components that help middle school students cope with this time in their life are connection and bonding with friends and with at least one non-familial adult (Kiefer et al., 2014; Reyes et al., 2012). Evidence suggests that affectionate daily interactions between the teacher and the middle school student are central mechanisms through which teachers influence a student's academic development (Madill et al., 2014).

Furthermore, because students are experiencing intense physiological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive changes there is a shift in their social and achievement-related needs (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). At this developmental stage in life, a student's primary task is to manage all the biological and cognitive changes as well as, tackle the side effects these changes have on their behavior, mood, and social relationships (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). Often ignored, is the fact that students have left an environment (elementary school) where their relationships were close with their teachers and parents. They left their elementary circle of friends and family-classroom environments, where they were involved in group activities, games, and recess, all of which are very intimate relationship encounters. Their voices were heard and they were known by their peers and teachers within a small community. At the middle school level, they enter a traditionally large environment characterized by competition, social comparison, self-assessment, decreased opportunities to make choices, lower cognitive learning, and one that is

rich in diversity (Eccles et al., 1993a). Findings have shown, that as a result of such drastic environmental changes, hostile-disruptive behaviors are associated with less teacher closeness (Madill et al., 2014). A middle school learning environment needs to take into consideration all the changes and challenges a middle school student is facing, and then work at making the necessary effective modifications to meet the students' needs in order to foster academic motivation. This study asks students, teachers, and administrators about their personal experience with academic motivation and the factors affecting student academic motivation.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. In what ways do teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation at a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California?
2. What factors supported students' academic motivation?
3. What factors might enhance students' academic motivation according to the students' perceptions?

Both teachers and students alike have a perspective about their learning, which generally goes unheard by researchers, and one which is important to learn of, in order to educate middle school students effectively. This study contributes to the field of middle school academic motivation. Kiefer et al. (2014) have conducted research on academic motivation and gave students a voice concerning their perspective on academic motivation. These researchers gave the researcher permission to use the same questions they used to study academic motivation at the middle school level. This study adds a personal dimension, when it asks about a students' self-efficacy concerning academic motivation. This allows students to voice a more in-depth explanation about their personal experience with academic motivation. This study also takes

place on the west coast, whereas the authors' study took place on the east coast. The complexity of how the middle school student obtains academic motivation is further understood through this study.

Limitations

The participating school, Seville Middle School, located in Southern California, had a current enrollment of 936 for the 2016-2017 school year. The study only surveyed 140 student participants, 16 teachers, 2 administrators and 3 special projects teachers. The study included more girls than boys. The study will focus on one public school in Southern California; which means the voices of students, teachers, and administrators belonging to a private or charter school anywhere else in the nation will be unheard in the study. A final limitation is that student demographics included mostly African American and Hispanic students.

Delimitations

Qualitative data collected in this study promotes the understanding of how to positively approach the middle school students' learning environment, so teachers may provide an adequate learning environment that fosters academic motivation. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, the researcher focused only on one large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse public middle school in Southern California. The use of one public school in this case study did not permit the researcher to gain the views of those middle school students attending private and charter schools located in the state of California.

Assumptions

This study included the following assumptions: (a) the selected participants, both students and educators, responded to the survey honestly and indicated their perceptions in regards to academic motivation; (b) the selected participants understood the vocabulary and concepts

associated with academic motivation and middle school context; (c) the data collected measured the experiences, perceptions, and personal thoughts of teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic motivation; and (d) the interpretation of the data accurately reflected the perceptions of the respondents through triangulation of 161 participants' responses (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 consisted of the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the assumptions of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature; specifically, the chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) the middle school student; (b) student belonging; (c) self-determination theory; (d) self-efficacy; (e) responsive teacher; (f) academic motivation; (g) teachers' spheres of power; (h) person-environment fit theory; (i) stage-environment fit theory; (j) teacher-student relationship; (k) student perception; and (l) summary. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for this research study, and its organized as follows: (a) setting and selection of participants; (b) sampling procedures; (c) instrumentation; (d) student survey; (e) teacher survey; (f) administrator survey; (g) self-efficacy survey; (h) validity and reliability; (i) data collection; (j) data analysis; (k) ethical issues; (l) the researcher; and (m) data summary.

Chapter 4 presents the study's findings including the participants' demographic information, testing the research questions, confirmatory factor analysis and results of the data analyses. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the entire study, discussion of the findings,

implications of the findings for theory and practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

Summary

In summary, the middle school student is enveloped in a challenging developmental stage, rich with changes in many areas, including emotional, cognitive, social, physiological, and psychological. Middle school educators are often under-equipped to provide adequate developmentally-fit learning environments that will foster academic motivation in the middle school student. More than 50% of educators said that the teacher pre-service trainings did not equip them sufficiently to encourage engagement and motivate students (Education Week Research Center, 2014). This problem of middle schools in America is best described in the words of Jacqueline Eccles a field expert, “For some children, the early adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral in school-related behaviors and motivation that often lead to academic failure and dropping out of school” (Eccles, 1999, p. 37). This is a serious issue to delve into, since schools are known to be places of care. If middle school students are unknown by the people who are supposed to care and educate them for their future, then, the first step to a solution is awareness.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Listening to the voices of middle school students may help influence and guide researchers to examine the ways middle school teachers support student academic motivation. Studies on teacher-student relationship have demonstrated that teachers must first connect with students at a personal level, in order to impact their learning and academic motivation (Tomlinson, 2011; Reyes et al., 2012). When teachers' actions within the learning environment communicate a sense of care, respect, and appreciation towards their students then this leads to deeper engagement in learning, hence, a teacher's emotional support predicts and fosters academic engagement (Patrick et al., 2007; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Through their actions in the school or classroom, teachers can convey a sense of caring, respect, and appreciation for their students that may lead to students' greater dedication to school. Teacher social support predicts a range of indicators of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Tomlinson, 2011; Patrick et al., 2007).

Traditionally, school is the main community for middle school age children to find nurturance and a caring culture (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). As children mature, they change emotionally, cognitively, and socially (Eccles, 2004; Kiefer et al., 2014). In addition, the characteristics of a school environment differ tremendously from elementary to middle school, and this difference is at odds with the developmental needs of the middle school student (Wang & Eccles, 2011). To create an environment that fosters academic motivation and engagement, schools must transform in developmentally fitting ways (Eccles, 2004; Kiefer et al., 2014). This means that in order to meet students' developmental needs, schools must change according to their students' level and provide a learning environment in which students are afforded opportunities to develop autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Student academic motivation is a key indicator of educational success; however, administrators and teachers, both state that less than 50% students are motivated and engaged (Education Week Research Center, 2014). Both teachers and administrators also stated that, based on their experience, student engagement and motivation were the most important factors contributing to academic success (Education Week Research Center, 2014). Furthermore, Deci (1995) argued that teachers have the potential to be architects of situations that enable students to become self-motivated.

One way to foster academic motivation in middle school students is by training teachers to be responsive to students' needs. Responsive teachers engage students in learning lessons by providing a learning context that is appropriate to their developmental level (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994; Tomlinson, 2011). Within the school setting teachers are indispensable when building a community of care, since they are the bridge between the school and the student, and offer the fundamental support for students to be efficacious and to feel a sense of belonging (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). Being a responsive teacher means caring about the student and showing care for who they are as people (Tomlinson, 2011).

The effort of creating a community and being responsive to students' needs will have high academic benefits (Kiefer et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2014a). Wang and Eccles (2013) found that a school structure that is emotionally and socially supportive improves students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in learning. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory states that the feeling of belonging to a community affects academic motivation. Conversely, academic motivation and engagement will drop dramatically at this grade level without such an effort (Kiefer et al., 2014). Classroom disengagement, low motivation, and lack of academic interest often contribute to academic failure during this developmental stage (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Kiefer et al. (2014) discovered that, within the learning environment, there is a *mismatch* between the needs and the opportunities middle school students are afforded to meet their developmental needs. They have found that this mismatch is one cause for decreased academic motivation at the middle school level, which then leads to low academic achievement (Kiefer et al., 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004). Educational institutions would benefit their students by creating and providing an adequate learning environment that serves their students' developmental needs at the middle school level.

Educational researchers have studied middle school students in limited capacities. Kiefer et al. (2014) found that prior research falls short of exploring middle school students' perspectives on the subject being researched- academic motivation. Findings from this study intend to put middle school educators in touch with the most recent research and practice on academic motivation; mostly with low socio-economic and ethnically diverse middle school students.

This research draws on Eccles et al.'s (1991) stage-environment theory, person-environment fit theory, Tomlinson's (2014a) responsive teacher theory, and Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. Focus is given to teacher-student relationship, academic motivation, responsive teaching, and student voices on academic motivation. Specifically, Chapter 2 is organized into the following sections: (a) the middle school student; (b) student belonging; (c) self-determination theory; (d) self-efficacy; (e) responsive teacher; (f) academic motivation; (g) teachers' spheres of power; (h) person-environment fit theory; (i) stage-environment fit theory; (j) teacher-student relationship; (k) student perception; and (l) summary.

The Middle School Student

In life, there exist infrequent developmental periods of life, which are distinguished by a

large number of simultaneous changes at different physiological levels. Middle school students experience these synchronized vicissitudes which happen due to: (a) puberty, (b) redefining one's social role, (c) cognitive development, (d) school transition, and (e) sexual development (Eccles et al., 1993a). These natural physiological changes happen in such a rapid manner in middle school age students that the phenomenon places students at risk for social and environmental challenges (Eccles et al., 1993a).

Middle school students are ill-equipped to appropriately cope with such challenges without social support because of their developmental stage; therefore, a student's social structure plays a role in their academic motivation. Socialization determines how much academic motivation increases (Ryan, 2001). The more social connections students make with their peers and teachers, the more they feel connected to their academic studies. In addition, encouragement from both teachers and peers can produce significant positive influence for success (Wang & Eccles, 2013). A school environment that supports students, both emotionally and socially fosters student motivation and engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Middle school students seek connection with peers and with teachers. When students do not have adequate amounts of social connections, they use technology and the internet to connect to others (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Current findings have discovered that 83% of teenagers use online social platforms to connect as an integral part of their lives; they do so, because these platforms make them feel closer to their friends (Anderson, 2015). The responsive teacher encourages teacher-student relationships in the classroom to meet these types of social needs faced by the middle school student (Tomlinson, 2011; Reyes et al., 2012; Nichols, 2008). When students experience feelings of connection with their peers and the teacher they are receiving emotional and personal

support that stems from this intimate connection (Reyes et al., 2012; Nichols, 2008).

Connection

One basic psychological human need, especially at the middle school age, is to feel relatedness, or that one belongs to a community and has close intimate bonds with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Academic motivation and success depend on meeting this need for connection. An emotionally supportive environment fosters engagement and, in turn, academic motivation (Mauro, 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Such support is emotional and personal because students perceive feelings from connecting with teachers (Reyes et al., 2012). Meaningful relationships are important to students at this age (Mauro, 2014).

In addition to the lack of connection with their teachers and peers, Kiefer et al. (2014) stress that further academic difficulties come from current educational trends, like the high stakes testing, the prescribed curriculum in place, and the lack of understanding of the middle school student. These additional demands placed on middle school teachers make their social function in the classroom of connecting with their students more difficult than in previous generations (Kiefer et al., 2014). The reasons why students would still be motivated to learn in this new context are important to know, since these reasons have significant implications for how teachers manage and engage students in learning (Ames, 1990). When the psychosocial needs of students are neglected, academic motivation and engagement levels decrease (Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Development

As a result of puberty, cognitive development, a new school environment, and the change of roles with peers and parents, the middle school student experiences many simultaneous changes (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). These developmental difficulties may include: (a) lacking the sense of acting on their own behalf (i.e. being self-advocates for their developmental needs);

(b) under-developed necessary social coping skills; and (c) facing hopelessness when failing at anything at this school age (which develops low self-efficacy) (Tomlinson, 2013b). These deficiencies create a vulnerability to self-evaluate, more so when negative teacher-feedback is given, which then leads them to adjust their expectations downward after failing (Ames, 1990). In addition, middle school students' adaptive abilities lead them to begin to engage in low academic or failure-avoidance motivation (Ames, 1990). This is where students who have low academic motivation purposely engage in failure-avoiding tactics such as: (a) discontinue trying; (b) procrastinating; (c) exerting untrue effort; and (d) completely avoiding genuine effort (Ames, 1990). These defense mechanisms become daily practices. Even though these behaviors may perpetuate failure from the student's perspective, failing by never trying does not reflect on them negatively; in fact, they have now failed with honor (Ames, 1990). "From the students' point of view, failure without effort does not negatively reflect on their ability. What they have achieved is "failure with honor" (Ames, 1990, p. 413). These feelings of helplessness are not healthy because even though it saves them emotionally, they ultimately fail academically. A more beneficial solution to these socio-emotional threats of failing could come from a responsive teacher who provides social emotional support and self-worth in students (Tomlinson, 2013b). Building self-efficacy in the middle school student is crucial. Through a community of group work where students may have opportunities to build confidence, a student will slowly develop.

Expectations

Eccles learned that middle school students tend to perform according to what they believe they are capable of doing, and what they believe they will succeed in doing (Bembenutty, 2008). At this developmental stage, students' perception about any matter becomes important to their performance. Engagement increases when students perceive that their teachers genuinely care

about their academic success (Mauro, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014a). Middle school students are easily influenced by extrinsic circumstances that happen at home or within the school context (Bembenutty, 2008). External circumstances such as family events and tragedies (e.g. death and divorce), influence middle school students because they have a strong emotional and psychological impact, and because they are at a sensitive stage of growth (Nagel, 2007). Furthermore, high self-imposed expectations on one's achievements weigh heavily in the social context at the middle school age (Bembenutty, 2008); as students have a strong tendency to focus on what others' expectations are of them, they place high priority on meeting them (Eccles et al., 1991a).

Student Belonging

Belonging to a community is a fundamental need middle school students have, and when this need is met, their ability to cope with changes becomes more feasible, since they feel they belong somewhere (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). One of the students' main desires is to be part of a community of people who welcomes them (Tomlinson, 2014a; Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are several communities students can belong to within the larger school community. The first one is the classroom community, which is an important community to belong to, because it dictates much of the social communities students later choose to join, or into which they are accepted (Tomlinson, 2014a). Mauro (2014) agrees that, "A sense of belonging for students stems from emotionally supportive classroom environments" (p. 8). Because students are extrinsically motivated at this age, their academic motivation is lower as they seek a community in which to belong (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

There is a direct correlation between a student's need to belong and being able to cope with developmental changes experienced at the middle school age (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). The

element of feelings of belonging to a community is essential (Mauro, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014a). This sense of belonging is ever changing, especially in middle school (Anderman, 2003). How much time a student chooses to spend at school will significantly impact a student's feelings about how much he or she belongs to the school community (Anderman, 2003). The feeling of belonging derives from an environment rich with emotional support (Mauro, 2014). Connection is important, as feelings of connectedness impact academic success (Mauro, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students feel connectedness with their school community, they will be prompted to succeed academically (Nichols, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Clubs, sports, or academic teams, are small communities students may join. "Students flourish when they find a sort of school family—a group that accepts, nurtures, and needs them" (Tomlinson, 2014a, p. 86). These groups are decided within the classroom environment. Being admitted into the classroom community is highly dependent on the teacher. Research findings have shown that teachers respond differently to different students in the same classroom; this is contingent upon a number of factors (Eccles et al., 1993a). Middle school students pick up on this difference and respond through their behavior accordingly. Effective educators who display care towards students deliver the opportunity for students to gain the emotional support they need to fortify their sense of school belonging and experience high levels of academic motivation (Kiefer et al., 2014).

Opportunities

One important academic motivation aspect to consider, besides a student's feelings of belonging, is how a student spends his or her free time at school. Anderman (2003) found that an evident social predictor of academic success is a student's level of involvement and/or engagement in his or her classes or clubs in the school. Unfortunately, with such high stakes

with state tests, extracurricular activities may be viewed as having no significant academic impact on students and are generally devalued by both educators and parents (Hetland & Winner, 2001). The indirect impact these activities have on academic motivation is an oversight of educators and parents (Anderman, 2003). When a student chooses to participate in any activity, he is choosing to give up his own free time for something he chooses and wants to do. This autonomous choice magnifies academic success, especially when that activity is associated with school and allows them to experience success. Students have stated that they attend school because they like to spend time with their friends, both in class and in clubs and sports (Mauro, 2014). Drawing on the self-determination theory, connecting at this level fulfills the psychological need of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students participate in extracurricular activities, they are building relationships on two different levels, at the peer level and at the teacher level.

The school or teacher who endeavors in providing additional academic clubs in which students can choose to participate is increasing the opportunities for students to feel they belong to the school community and fosters academic motivation. Students who participate in school activities outside of classroom time gain an increasing sense of belonging, which then fosters academic motivation and decreases dropout rates (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). In addition, choosing to spend extra time in school brings multiple opportunities for academic interaction with other students and with teachers (Mauro, 2014). Clubs, tutoring, arts, and sports are opportunities for students to belong and connect socially. With such experiences, students become empowered to discover their strengths, as well as, their learning style, which may positively impact academic motivation. Middle school students' interactions with arts and with teachers give them academic

opportunities to build relationships and feel they belong to a community. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory stresses relatedness as a basic psychological need for academic motivation.

While after school theatre classes enhance verbal skills that transfer to other academic subjects improving academic motivation (Harvard Project Zero, 2001) arts and sports allow students to build relationships with their peers and with teachers. Although in American schools arts education normally plays a relatively insignificant role (Hetland & Winner, 2001), one study found that when teachers, administrators, and collaborative artists partner-up in an art-academic joint model, students' academic and standardized test scores improve (Peppler, Powell, Thompson, & Catterall, 2014). Students determine where they will belong when the opportunities are provided for them. Academic motivation needs to be fostered within the middle school environment in every possible manner. A student will feel relatedness, connection, and/or belonging when (s)he is part of a school community (Mauro, 2014). Middle schools may consider offering more art and extracurricular activities to their students.

Self-Determination Theory

Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory posits that three psychological needs every student has include relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Relatedness has to do with relationships, belonging has to do with relationships and feeling connected; while, autonomy is having to choose for one self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) also stress that once a student experiences and obtains the three needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, the student builds self-efficacy. A school that offers multiple opportunities for these three needs to be developed is fostering academic motivation.

Relatedness

Students will seek to make friends and connect to a group of people. At this period of a student's life, finding the appropriate level of independence and building bonds (Bergin & Bergin, 2009) becomes imperative for students to develop self-efficacy and academic motivation. Middle school teachers hold a critical position in supporting students' academic motivation (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Kiefer et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2014a). Since students are at a transitional stage physically, mentally, and emotionally, teaching can be a challenge.

Researchers assert that social predictors of academic success include the following: (a) a teacher's capacity to be just (Anderman, 2003); (b) a teacher's capacity to esteem students (Anderman, 2003; Tomlinson, 2014a); and (c) a teacher's capacity to bond with students (Anderman, 2003; Tomlinson, 2014a; Mauro, 2014). Bergin and Bergin (2009) have found that effective teachers, not only connect with their students, but they "care for their children with warmth, respect, and trust" (p. 150). Healthy and secure teacher-student relationships predict higher levels of academic motivation (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Patrick et al., 2007; Mauro, 2014).

The practice of effective teacher-student relationship building is seen when a responsive middle school teacher: (a) shows respect for every student through actions and words that convey respect; (b) discovers a student's redeeming abilities and believes all students have them; (c) becomes a warm demander by allowing students to know she cares and still keeps high expectations; and (d) allows students to choose how they will act and behave in class by teaching them awareness of how their words and actions convey messages to others (Tomlinson, 2012b). Empowering students to choose, by keeping them informed, fulfills the need for autonomy that students have at this developmental stage (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Having the freedom to choose is an effective form of autonomy building.

Competence

Possessing the ability to achieve teachers' expectations is a way to build capacity, which is one of the basic psychological needs in students according to Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory which they call competency. Even though middle school students may have doubts about their own abilities in reaching goals they deem as difficult, to endeavor in accomplishing such goals will foster a strong sense of worth, because difficult-to-reach goals provide a student with so much more evidence about his or her capabilities to obtain knowledge and skills, than do effortless goals (Patrick et al., 2007; Schunk, 1985). Research suggests that focusing on increasing a student's self-efficacy enables students to engage in trying different strategies and developing skills that could lead to academic success, which will raise their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Patrick et al., 2007; Ames, 1990). Self-efficacy can only be acquired through a supportive learning environment that encourages student understanding of the course material, the byproduct being feelings of self-efficacy and engagement (Patrick et al., 2007). Providing students the opportunity to start and end challenging tasks is what will raise their self-efficacy. In addition, a responsive teacher provides an emotionally and socially supportive classroom environment, which enhances the perception students have of their academic abilities, increasing intrinsic motivation (Wang & Eccles, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013b).

Wang and Eccles (2013) found that an emotionally and socially supportive school structure enhances students' perceptions of their academic abilities and increases intrinsic motivation (i.e. interest in school), while also promoting student engagement. Tomlinson (2013b) confirms that one way to cultivate self-efficacy is to build confidence by providing students with independent opportunities to be productive. By autonomously completing a difficult task within the classroom environment, students are able to succeed one step at a time,

which will eventually lead to the acquisition of the teacher's confidence in them and will build competence. Experiencing success increases levels of self-efficacy; hence, when students have numerous opportunities to prove that they are capable of doing something well, they recognize the skills they have acquired, which in turn, reinforces confidence in their abilities and their self-efficacy (Tomlinson, 2011). Students then learn that they are capable, by experiencing that they are trusted to do an activity autonomously. The message a responsive teacher gives students when she gives them autonomy is that the student is capable; only then, is self-efficacy enhanced within the student (Tomlinson, 2013b).

Another way to build on competence to foster self-efficacy is to enrich students with affirmation and opportunity by providing a variety of opportunities to independently fail and succeed, as well as provide strategies for success (Tomlinson, 2013b). By doing this, a teacher will also have a number of opportunities to give praise, support, and words of affirmation (Tomlinson, 2013b).

Autonomy

The middle school teacher needs to be responsive to her students by fostering autonomy and decision-making in the classroom (Eccles et al., 1991a). Researchers have found a positive correlation between middle school students who have more autonomy in decision-making within a particular context and the level of self-esteem and intrinsic motivation he shows (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Eccles et al., 1991a; Mauro, 2014). Those students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation were given more autonomy within their learning contexts. Thus, students in a learning context with appropriate levels of autonomy will have high levels of intrinsic motivation and higher levels of self-esteem (Eccles et al., 1991a; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The middle school student will have increased academic motivation in environments that yield him or her as much

autonomy as it is individually needed (Eccles et al., 1991a; Klem & Connell, 2004). As a result of their personal belief in their own abilities, students tackle demanding responsibilities as challenges to be conquered (Bandura, 1994). Acquiring such efficacious disposition enhances intrinsic motivation in learning activities (Bandura, 1994). For the middle school student a learning environment that fosters autonomy will support self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Becoming aware of students' motives for learning will guide a teacher as to how to maximize or optimize each learning experience (Ames, 1990). "This self-concept of ability or self-efficacy has significant consequences for student achievement behavior" (Ames, 1990, p. 412). Furthermore, self-efficacy is a critical factor in forecasting a child's choice of tasks, their efforts to try, their persistence with difficult tasks, and their performance in class (Ames, 1990). Other research has found that students' self-efficacy is enhanced within a supportive social environment (Patrick et al., 2007; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Middle school students tend to suffer an intensified feeling of self-consciousness and heightened susceptibility to social comparison (Anderman, 2003), which may cause them to feel isolated. The harsh change into middle school also brings with it whole-class task organization, in-between classroom grouping by ability, and open evaluation of inaccuracy of class work (Eccles et al., 1993a) all of which, cause separation from teachers and peers. When the measurement tool being used is their peers, students become susceptible to public humiliation and disconnection (Eccles et al., 1993a). Negative changes as these are most likely to intensify social comparison, worry about evaluations, and some competition, as well as, raise a middle schools student's anxiety levels (Eccles et al., 1993a).

Social fluctuations paired with public methods of grading, assessment performed by

teachers, and more normative grading standards, will result in an influx of negative impacts on the middle school student's self-perception and academic motivation (Eccles et al., 1993a). As a result, the feelings of being outsiders, of disengagement, and of perceived dislike from peers, parents, and teachers causes students to fall into a descending path, which is, with high certainty a definite predictor of dropping out of school in the future (Eccles et al., 1993b; Eccles et al., 1991b; Klem & Connell, 2004).

Self-Efficacy

Ames (1990) defines efficacy as: "Efficacy is not self-concept of ability in a general sense; it is task- or situation-specific. One's self-worth is implicated when the task is important and when one's ability is threatened" (p. 412). When children are in elementary school, they have high self-efficacy about their school endeavors (i.e. drawing, painting, coloring, and writing); however, as they enter middle school self-efficacy decreases and they tend to incessantly reflect on a teacher's evaluation of their abilities (Ames, 1990). Researchers agree with Ames, "A learner's conviction that he or she is valued by a teacher becomes a potent invitation to take the risk implicit in the learning process" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 18). Tomlinson (2014a) stresses the important role a responsive teacher plays in the classroom and in evaluating students. Teachers, the educational environment, social factors, and the developmental stage, all play crucial roles in restoring high levels of self-efficacy in the middle school student (Ames, 1990).

Responsive Teacher

Tomlinson (2013c) describes a few of the top qualities found in a responsive teacher and in a responsive teaching environment. A responsive teacher: (a) knows that everyone has the capacity to be creative; (b) asks explicitly for creativity; (c) values differences; (d) helps students

find their passions; (e) talks about what creativity means, why it matters, and how it develops; and (f) crafts an environment that evokes creativity.

Opportunities

The responsive teacher provides affirmation in the classroom, followed by opportunity. Soon after providing affirmation, prospects of demonstrating abilities must immediately follow, and finally, incessant support in words and actions must be present (Tomlinson, 2013b). In contrast, when the teacher encourages a student and neglects to provide an adequate amount of opportunities to act on the encouragement then, affirmation becomes a vain endeavor (Tomlinson, 2013b). Middle school students seek out moments when they can shine with their abilities and responsibilities. Responsive teachers strategically provide a rich-opportunity learning context with numerous occasions for the middle school student to demonstrate acquired skills (Tomlinson, 2013b). Opportunities to think and create, followed by words of encouragement are a hallmark of a responsive teacher.

Differentiation

The responsive teacher is able to effectively use differentiation in her instruction. Tomlinson (2017) identified the characteristics of successful differentiation:

In a differentiated classroom, the teacher assumes that different learners have differing needs and proactively plans lessons that provide a variety of ways to “get at” and express learning. The teacher may still need to fine-tune instruction for some learners, but because the teacher knows the varied learner needs within the classroom and selects learning options accordingly, the chances are greater that these experiences will be an appropriate fit for most learners. Effective differentiation is typically designed to be robust

enough to engage and challenge the full range of learners in the classroom.

In a one-size-fits-all approach, the teacher must make reactive adjustments whenever it becomes apparent that a lesson is not working for some of the learners for whom it was intended. (pp. 5-6)

Tomlinson further advises: “Do not consign creativity to the realm of fairy dust” (Tomlinson, 2013a, pp. 85-86). Most of these qualities do not require elaboration; however, crafting a context that beckons for creativity and fairy dust are two significant points teachers must fully understand. Tomlinson (2013a) stresses the fact that, “Rigid deadlines and curriculum guides, lock-step tasks, penalties for errors, closed-ended questions, and bean-counting rubrics are antithetical to generative thought” (p. 86). Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory stresses that students need freedom and space to develop as individuals and to increase their intrinsic motivation and autonomy. Tomlinson (2013a) challenges educators to become a catalyst for creativity. Responsive teachers not only carry with them “an ethic of excellence—hard work, pride in craftsmanship,” but “know a great deal about their domain or discipline” (Tomlinson, 2013a, p. 86). High teacher self-efficacy is characteristic of the responsive teacher. The responsive teacher always believes her students learn what they are being taught.

Tomlinson (2010) upholds that teaching cannot be algorithmic, despite that it may seem like it is at times. She stresses that incredible teachers approach the art of teaching with humility as they are aware of the fact that there is no instructional methodology that will be effective with every single middle school student, for students are like a kaleidoscope (Tomlinson, 2010). Consequently, differentiated instruction, which she calls “personalized instruction,” is indispensable (Tomlinson, 2010). This type of learning environment gives teachers the opportunity to meet different needs and make learning more impactful. Tomlinson’s findings

stress the importance of personalizing learning for each learner (Tomlinson, 2010). When she was a teacher, Tomlinson said that, if she needed to learn a new discipline she would learn it; if learning to think in a more flexible manner was needed, she would do it; if it meant deserting prescribed learning targets for more personalized goals, she would do it (Tomlinson, 2010). Risking her career to provide an adequate learning environment to meet the middle school student's needs was her daily goal (Tomlinson, 2010), as being responsive is the most effective way to reach students.

Etiquette

The responsive teacher clearly and firmly communicates the classroom etiquette to students and is prepared to reinforce expectations with appropriate consequences. She is also a caregiver, disciplinarian, and tough-minded teacher; all of which are characteristics of a nonsensical type of teacher (Ware, 2006). The teacher responds in a manner that maximizes the potential to meet expectations, but in no way violates the best interests of the students. Students learn to trust and respect an assertive, responsive teacher, because they know the teacher is “fair” basically, they always say what they mean and mean what they say (Tomlinson, 2012b). Knowing the classroom parameters enables students to choose the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors upon which they will act. The responsive teacher works with middle school students from the point of respect, empathy, and a clear desire to support them to learn necessary skills, instead of a punitive approach that research has shown to be ineffective at this age (Tomlinson, 2012b).

Care

When students perceive that a teacher cares about their thinking and cares about what they have to say Tomlinson (2014c) calls this respect. Tomlinson (2014c) states that a highly

responsive teacher teaches her students “how” to think through her demeanor. This teacher’s “power source,” as Tomlinson (2014c) calls it, is her “clear and unequivocal respect for her students” (p. 90). Respect is gently demonstrated through the teacher’s probing questions and her keen listening skills (Tomlinson, 2014c). Every day students are enveloped in a learning context filled with value, affirmation, and nurture. “A learner among learners,” is the responsive teacher’s demeanor, working towards building a higher-cognition student, who feels as if what he or she has to say is something important to contribute to the class on a daily basis (Tomlinson, 2014c).

First, when teachers personalize learning to follow students’ developmental levels; academic motivation becomes a byproduct. One way the responsive teacher does this is by assuring the middle school student that, as a teacher, she is happy to be in the room teaching them (Tomlinson, 2014b). Each teacher may find their own unique way to show this joy to be true by using words, actions, and overall demeanor. The most important element to remember is that students must *feel* the happiness the teacher intimates about teaching them. Some may argue that this is a subjective matter; however, the responsive teacher makes it her responsibility to ensure all students know about her happiness in teaching them (Tomlinson, 2014b).

Once example of a responsive teacher is Mr. Rogers, a 1960’s television children’s personality; he was renowned by his young audience as being a happy person who would be there to talk to them daily. He conveyed this welcoming by taking off his sweater, changing his shoes to house slippers, and hanging up his work jacket and putting on a comfortable soft house sweater (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014). This entire opening of the show spoke clearly and loudly to children by saying, “This is where I want to be. I’m comfortable here. I’m at home and ready to welcome you” (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014, p. 87). Like Mr. Rogers, responsive teachers need to

find their style to convey that same joy to their students. Teachers who are respectful, who trust their students, and who care about their learning are providing appropriate social-emotional support that middle students crave in order to excel and engage in academic tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Second, the responsive teacher values each of his middle school students and makes sure each of them knows it. Mr. Rogers's message was a powerful one, because it conveyed to children all over the world a strong message of recognition, “we are better [people] because of you” (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014, p. 87). No matter how challenging this endeavor may appear, a responsive teacher ventures in making it possible. Relatedness means to personally feel important and significant in a classroom, which then prompts academic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students will deliver their best work and performance when their teacher can see the best in them (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014).

Third, the responsive teacher is trustworthy because she ensures, through communication, that her middle school students know that their ideas matter (Tomlinson, 2014c). As soon as students feel they matter to a teacher, they are most likely to respond positively and be more receptive to learning from that teacher (Tomlinson, 2014c). A middle school student's developmental stage of emotional and psychological disequilibrium may inhibit him or her from trusting anyone. One middle school student explains that teenagers do not allow outsiders into their worlds, and when they do, it's a rare occasion (“Eighth,” 2011).

Fourth, the responsive teacher is open to meeting the psychological needs of middle school students by having discussions about issues that matter to students, for example the divorce of parents, the death of a pet, or the social competition they face at this age (Tomlinson, 2013c). Conversations led by student topics allow for social skill development. These skills

include delayed gratification, respect, patience, and kindness (Tomlinson, 2014c). Because this zone of comfort matches the middle school students' stage development, the results are positive, as the stage-environment fit theory predicts (Eccles et al., 1993b). Eccles et al.'s (1993a) stage-environment fit theory asserts that students' learning environment must match their developmental level. In this case, students have a need for connectedness and relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Mauro, 2014). When students share and others listen, bonding occurs, and care is fostered. Students are not able to learn if they feel they are not cared for (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Other positive consequences are that students feel empowered and become resilient towards life circumstances (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). As a result, the responsive teacher has given students a clear demonstration that she cares. When students perceive a caring relationship, they are academically motivated (Mauro, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014a).

Finally, the responsive teacher: (a) teaches engaging lessons, which have the power to disarm students, including the one who enters class with negative expectations; (b) shows respect for every student through actions and words; (c) finds the student's unique redeeming characteristics; (d) believes all students have favorable characteristics; (e) tries to learn what is behind the negative behavior, for she knows that when something is wrong in their world students act out in behavior; (f) becomes a warm demander by allowing students to know she cares, yet holds high expectations; (g) assists students to act on their own behalf; and (h) makes students aware of what their words, actions, and demeanor convey to others (Tomlinson, 2012b). According to Tomlinson (2012b), responsive teachers also see challenging students for who they are.

Students who are considered difficult or challenging, would do better, if they were able to. Working with them from a perspective of respect, empathy, and a desire to help them

learn the skills necessary for success is both more productive and more redemptive than a punitive approach (p. 89).

Furthermore, the responsive teacher never takes things students say and do personally. She knows a student's actions towards any given situation are dependent on the student's world, and oftentimes this world is uncontrollable, as is the behavior that results from it (Tomlinson, 2012b). Having tough skin would be an asset for the middle school teacher.

Academic Motivation

An educational organization's priority should be to assist teachers to develop a thorough understanding of why academic motivation is imperative (Ames, 1990). Middle school teachers should not neglect the vital role they play in a middle school student's life; as neglected middle school students will, inevitably, project their depression and loneliness onto their academics (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Low levels of engagement and poor academic performance are the direct result of neglected psychosocial needs of the student (Wang & Eccles, 2013). In addition, disengagement tends to lead students to earn lower grades and may lead to dropping out of school (Klem & Connell, 2004). When middle school students are not being provided with an adequate learning environment, they become disengaged in their learning, and academic motivation levels drop.

Motivation is a set of beliefs that navigate and nurture behavior and is an important precursor to learning and success in school (Wentzel, 2012; Wentzel, & Wigfield, 2007; Wigfield et al., 2006), as Ryan and Deci (2000) state, "To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated" (p. 54). To be motivated means to have motivation to accomplish something. To

have academic motivation means that the individual is inspired to achieve thorough understanding of a particular curriculum and high grades. According to Ames (1990),

We not only want students to achieve, we want them to value the process of learning and the improvement of their skills, we want them to willingly put forth the necessary effort to develop and apply their skills and knowledge, and we want them to develop a long-term commitment to learning. (p. 140)

Ames (1990) explains that if educators placed value on advancing enthusiasm to acquire knowledge in the classroom, then they are making a shift to concern themselves with learning; not only will they lead students to embark in learning processes, but they will also be sustaining a consistent involvement in the system of education and its academic process. Academic motivation in students means they have a passion to learn, and therefore, are engaged in their learning. The opposite is also true; when students are disengaged in the classroom, they tend to have lower grades and are more susceptible to dropping out of school (Klem & Connell, 2004; Eccles et al., 1993b).

Educational organizations need to seek to promote strategies that motivate students to do what they want them to do consistently throughout their educational years. One such strategy is for teachers to build high-quality relationships with students, which will then prompt engagement (Mauro, 2014). Another strategy Nichols (2008) explains is that through building a school community where students feel connected, students then value their education, strive for academic success, and choose more productive habits that lead them towards academic success. Finally, a strong influence of academic motivation and engagement is social relationships in the students' lives (Mauro, 2014). Relatedness, which is feelings of belonging have shown to increase academic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As students feel they belong, they will

engage in learning, and when students are engaged in their learning, academic motivation increases, as their engagement enhances learning (Mauro, 2014). Ames (1990) stated the importance of academic motivation when she said that:

Student motivation has, for some time, been described as one of the foremost problems in education. It is certainly one of the problems most commonly cited by teachers.

Motivation is important because it contributes to achievement, but it is also important itself as an outcome. (p.409)

Extrinsic Motivation

Karageorghis and Terry (2011) state that two key sources of motivation exist. The motivation that derives from the outside, such as rewards, financial gains, high grades, or encouragement. This is the classic definition of extrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) discuss extrinsic motivation from a new perspective, where extrinsic motivation has different levels. They discuss the traditional definition of extrinsic motivation where students perform strictly propelled into action with indifference and hostility as result of an external negative consequence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The next level of external motivation they discuss is one where students perform a task as a result of self-endorsement and with a sense of choice or free will. To achieve this level of external motivation there are steps students must go through. The first step is internalization, which is the act of accepting a value; the second step is integration, where the student embeds the value or regulation into his or her own beliefs; and third, by choice alone, do students perform a particular act because they see the value it has to their future or to their lives (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This is the form of external motivation Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to in the self-determination theory. Although the study may demonstrate that students are mostly motivated by external motivators, further study would allow a researcher to investigate

the level of external motivation students are acting upon.

Intrinsic Motivation

Contrary to extrinsic motivation is intrinsic motivation, which derives from those who participate in an activity because they “enjoy the process. They find the [activity] interesting, stimulating, and enjoyable without being preoccupied by extrinsic rewards” (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011, p. 33). Intrinsic motivation is doing something for the sheer joy of the activity.

Karageorghis and Terry (2011) define intrinsic motivation as:

Intrinsic motivation is closely allied to the fundamental motivation to learn and acquire new skills. The building blocks, or psychological needs, that underlie intrinsic motivation are the need to determine one's behavior (what psychologists term self-determination), the need to feel competent, and the need for relatedness, or to have meaningful relationships with other people. (p. 33)

Karageorghis and Terry (2011) assert that when an individual is at her highest level of intrinsic motivation, then she is functioning at what they call “flow.” They explain that “flow occurs when there is a perfect match between the perceived demands of an activity and the perceived ability to meet the demands” (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011, p. 35). When students speak to themselves, they are functioning at their highest level of intrinsic motivation, according to Karageorghis and Terry (2011). The authors emphasize that “Positive self-talk is one of the most tried and tested strategies among sport psychology interventions. It is used to maintain concentration and to induce optimal arousal” (p. 36). Thus, positive self-talk is a form of the highest level of intrinsic motivation. Students who practice self-talk are in the “flow” state, and functioning at the highest level of intrinsic motivation, according to Karageorghis and Terry (2011).

Teachers' Spheres of Power

A teacher's role at the middle school level is very important and should not be underestimated (Jackson, 2013). Teachers are the source of power to academic motivation (Tomlinson, 2014a). They are a social predictor, as a teacher's ability to be fair, to respect students, and to connect with students (Anderman, 2003) dictates relationships and connectedness. A teacher's power is found in the ability to reach students on a daily basis. Tomlinson's (2014a) findings inform middle school educators about middle school students' social needs, reporting that middle school students are enveloped in three spheres, which a teacher must cross in order to reach and positively impact the student.

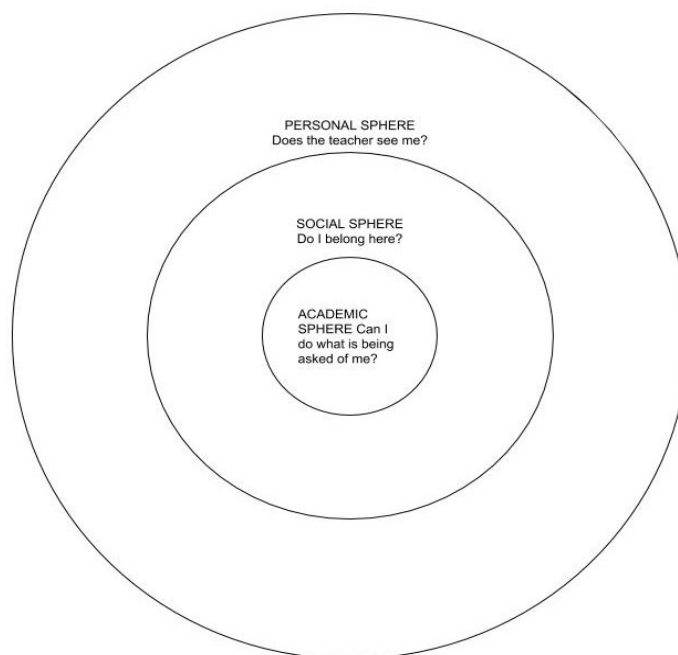


Figure 1. Tomlinson's three concentric circles.

The outmost sphere is the personal sphere, where a student's concern is based on personal relationships with the school and with teachers. Questions students may ask in this sphere include: Does my teacher see me? Does my teacher like me? and How does my teacher

see me? (Tomlinson, 2014a, p. 86). Extrinsic circumstances are significant influencing factors to the middle school level student (Bembenutty, 2008). Students easily pick up on teacher cues and treatment, and what they *perceive* to be true becomes influential in how they behave and how motivated they are; hence, a student will be greatly positively or negatively influenced by the teacher's demeanor (Bembenutty, 2008). A teacher's demeanor towards students will convey how she sees them and what she thinks of them, as perceived by the students' minds (Tomlinson, 2014a). According to Tomlinson (2003), if the teacher is going to be effective in reaching students, then her demeanor, words, and actions must convey to the students a form of invitation and acceptance: (a) I respect who you are, as well as who you can become; (b) I want to know you; (c) You are unique and valuable; (d) I believe in you; (e) I have time for you; (f) I learn when I listen to you; (g) This place is yours too; and (h) We need you here. From their personal experiences with their teacher, evidence is gathered by the student's perspective and the questions are answered favorably or unfavorably by the student (Tomlinson, 2014a).

The middle phrase is the social sphere which is a more introspective, personal and reflective one. Questions asked include: "Do I belong here?", and "Am I valued here?" (Tomlinson, 2014a, p. 86). Students seek answers to these questions and look to the teacher's demeanor to answer them. Teachers have a particular sphere of powerful influence (Jackson, 2013). Jackson (2013) advises to stop underestimating teachers. Teachers can increase or lower test scores; they can hurt or heal; they can transform a learning environment for the better; or through inaction and mediocrity they can cause the environment to decline (Jackson, 2013). To master this sphere and become successful, a teacher must ask and ponder on the following questions: How do I present this learner to all other students? And how do I speak to the student in front of other students? (Tomlinson, 2014a). Teachers need to develop a mindset and internal

voice that will assist them to problem solve and “make the right decision for every student every day” (Jackson, 2013, p. 136). The relationship a teacher builds with individual students will determine her success and effectiveness with the class (Wu & Hughes, 2015).

Teachers must consider the supposition that closeness or conflict in teacher-student relationships actually predicts the social status of the student, future behavior, and future academic outcome (Wu & Hughes, 2015). Teachers play a significant role in the classroom; they are the ones who have the power to foster academic motivation (Tomlinson, 2014a). Teachers have a powerful influence over their classrooms and their students, such that this influence can raise test scores or lower them, and can heal or hurt the educational system (Jackson, 2013).

The innermost sphere is the academic sphere, where students ask: “Is this stuff worth my time? and Can I do what’s being asked of me?” (Tomlinson, 2014a, p. 86). Responsive teachers accept the power they hold and taps into the student’s potential to inspire, wonder, imagine, reason, disagree, self-correct, and question, all with the aim to celebrate their student’s growth (Tomlinson, 2014a). The power of a teacher is an incredible asset on which the educational system can capitalize. “The teacher is key to student motivation. We have immense power to unleash—or diminish—a young person's desire to learn, and “there is so much we can do in either direction” (Tomlinson, 2014a, p. 86).

Person-Environment Fit Theory

The person-environment fit theory states that a student’s treatment by an adult must match her developmental level (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Treatment refers to the degree of control exerted on the student. Middle school environments are commonly found to be excessively controlling environments (Eccles et al., 1991a). When there is a mismatch, where

the person in the student's environment does not fit the student's developmental level, the latter suffers. Students in middle school have a developmental need to be given trust, responsibility, and purpose for growth (Eccles et al., 1993a) which, in turn, enhances academic learning and meets developmental needs.

Throughout their academic careers, students will find themselves in social-educational contexts that will either enhance their learning or inhibit their academic motivation (Eccles et al., 1991b). Motivation to learn, motivation to achieve academically, and motivation to continue to come to school are all dependent on external factors at the middle school age (Eccles et al., 1991b). At this developmental stage middle school students need to be given an adequate amount of freedom along with acceptance and responsibility. The middle school student fundamentally depends on adults; and therefore, experiences adults controlling them at different degrees as they mature (Eccles et al., 1991a). The degree of control must change as children develop socially and emotionally. The person-environment fit theory affirms that it is critical to create a balance and with no inconsistency between the middle school student's need for autonomy and the amount of control exercised over them by adults (Eccles et al., 1991a; Eccles et al., 1993a).

The person-environment fit theory recommends that teachers adjust their degree of control over children depending on the child's developmental stage (Eccles et al., 1991a). Eccles, an educational psychologist at the University of Michigan, found that social contexts in middle schools can determine whether a student will be academically successful or not (Bembenutty, 2008). In fact, there is a powerful negative adjustment that affects students transitioning from elementary school to middle school (Eccles et al., 1993b). This mismatch between school culture and the culture of the students may lead to the misunderstanding of

actions and misreading of communication between teacher and student (Ware, 2006). Eccles et al.'s (1993b) person-environment fit theory states that, in order to have the greatest opportunity for growth, the environment in which the student is learning must fit the developmental stage that the student is in. The person-environment fit theory reveals that conduct, academic motivation, and emotional health are all susceptible to be influenced by the fit between characteristics individuals bring to their learning community environments and the characteristics found within the learning community environment (Eccles et al., 1993a). If the learning community is unfit to fulfill the middle school student's development needs, then person-environment fit theory predicts that middle school students will be academically unsuccessful and their academic motivation will plunge (Eccles et al., 1993b). This is because the student's environment lacks the developmental elements that the student needs, such as autonomy, connectedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Moreover, the person-environment fit theory predicts a decline in interest, performance, and behavior as the student moves into this unproductive learning environment (Eccles et al., 1993b). Because the middle school student's psychological needs of autonomy and independence are being neglected by the unfit educational environment they are placed in academic motivation is stymied (Eccles et al., 1993a). Eccles et al. (1993a) assures teachers that this knowledge can be used to benefit student learning. Her focus in schools and explicitly the social context that influences student learning helped her discover the sensitive growth stage in which the middle school students are placed, and also illustrated how teachers can use this to improve learning by becoming responsive to middle school students' developmental needs (Bembenutty, 2008).

As a result of being in such a transitioning age, middle school students lack self-advocacy skills, problem-solving skills, adaptive skills, and consequently, are disheartened by failure (Tomlinson, 2013b). If a teacher publicly points out the wrong choices a student has made enough times, then hopelessness sets in the mind of the student and academic motivation will go into its lowest levels (Tomlinson, 2013b). Growth opportunities must be given in a safe learning environment.

The person-environment fit theory suggests that in order for the middle school student to successfully adapt to the new middle school context, she requires a sensibly safe, as well as, mentally challenging environment; one that offers a sector of comfort, with an adequate amount of challenging risks for growth (Eccles et al., 1993a). The more teachers afford students opportunities to be part of something greater than themselves, gives the trust, responsibility, and purpose; the easier it is for students to experience growth, learning, connection, and commitment (Tomlinson, 2014b). All the opportunities that are characteristics of the psychological developmental needs at this age.

Most middle school students have the tendency to lose their excitement for education and success, and are inclined to become another addition to the large implicit club of underachievers (Eisenberg, Isackson, & Maddux, 2005). Concurring with Eisenberg et al., is renowned expert in the field of academic success, Jacquelynne Eccles, an educational psychologist at the University of Michigan. She encourages teachers and parents to instill self-confidence, risk taking, disappointment, and acceptance in students, in order that their innate longing to triumph may be kindled (Eisenberg et al., 2005). Drawing on the person-environment fit theory, it can be hypothesized that if the person-environment fit theory is being implemented by both parents and teachers, the practice would guarantee middle school students an adequate level of autonomy and

opportunity to fail and succeed; and in turn it would build confidence and resilience, which will later progress to self-efficacy.

Teacher's Control

Eccles' research demonstrated that the way students think about what they, themselves, are good at or not, influences their abilities (Bembenutty, 2008). She found that the change of environment from elementary to middle school also brought with it different teacher beliefs about student learning (Eccles et al., 1991a). Students leave a supportive elementary teacher and encounter a middle school teacher who is less friendly, more controlling, less supportive, less caring (as per students' perceptions), and one who trusts their students less (Eccles et al., 1993a). The person-environment fit theory states that there must be a match between the developmental needs of the student and adult treatment. In middle school, students seek opportunities to develop autonomy; however, as a result of more controlling teachers, the student is set up for failure (Eccles et al., 1993a). The person-environment fit theory asserts that students in such a regressive environment tend to fail academically, because their psychological needs are not being met by the middle school environments provided to them (Eccles et al., 1993b; Mauro, 2014).

Stage-Environment Fit Theory

Meece and Eccles (2010) suggested that

Different types of educational environments are needed for different age groups to meet developmental needs and foster continued developmental growth. Exposure to the developmentally appropriate environment would facilitate both motivation and continued growth; in contrast, exposure to developmentally inappropriate environments, especially developmentally regressive environments, should create a particularly poor person-

environment fit which should lead to declines in motivation as well as detachment from the goals of the institution (p. 13).

There are harmful motivational and behavioral outcomes from dwelling in an environment that is unfit to a student's developmental needs (Hunt, 1975). When a student enters a developmentally-appropriate learning environment, positive motivational consequences occur (Eccles et al., 1991b). The appropriate learning context for the middle school student is one that meshes perfectly with the student's current level of maturity and has a well-balanced level of control and autonomy; and draws the student towards the appropriate developmental course, one that leads to higher levels of cognition (Eccles et al., 1991b).

The stage-environment fit theory asserts that if a student is in an environment with a controlling adult, his or her intrinsic motivation will be negatively impacted, and result in low or no interest in that particular activity (Eccles et al, 1991). Findings show that middle school students have low intrinsic motivation, and that teachers at the middle school level exhibit extreme control, perhaps, more so, than the student's elementary school teacher and high school teachers (Eccles et al., 1991a; Eccles et al., 1993a). The stage-environment fit theory asserts there are harmful motivational and behavioral outcomes that result when there is a mismatch between the psychological needs and the provisions found in a particularly controlling learning environment (Eccles et al., 1993a).

To treat a middle school age student as an elementary school child would be developmentally regressive (Eccles et al., 1991a). Students at this level need to be given adequate levels of autonomy, such as opportunities to choose and face the consequences of their choices (Canter, 1989). By affording the middle school student with an environment rich with

opportunities and independence, he or she will be empowered, and academic motivation will increase.

Michigan Study of Adolescents

Many middle school students tend to withdraw and become depressed when an environment does not match their growth stage (Eccles et al., 1993a). The Michigan Study of Adolescent and Adult Life Transitions (MSAALT) project proved, through the stage-environment fit theory, that the decline in academic motivation was the result of the new poor environment and not the students' lack of natural passion to learn (Bembenutty, 1993; Eccles et al., 1993b). The MSAALT examined classrooms and discovered shocking counterproductive behaviors middle school students are forced to endure, such as: (a) low expectations; (b) mediocre or absent positive teacher-student relationships; (c) feelings of not fitting in on the student's part; (d) lack of teachers' trust or support for their students; and (e) intensified feelings of being incapable of doing the class work (Bembenutty, 2008). These teacher-imposed negative environmental factors also cause lower teacher efficacy, as teachers feel less effective as educators (Eccles et al., 1993a). A controlling learning environment, that lacks relatedness, trust, confidence, high teaching efficacy, and high student efficacy, is not fit for the middle school student's developmental stage (Eccles et al., 1991a).

Eccles et al. (1991) recommend that middle school educators consider that the lack of academic motivation in their students is a direct result of the teacher's inability to provide students with a learning context that is fitting to their growth development. Middle school age students almost always respond negatively to a controlling environment, whether it is at home or at school (Eccles et al., 1993a). Therefore, it is recommended that teachers start implementing a learning environment that promotes choices, responsibilities, opportunities, and consequences

(Tomlinson, 2014b). Canter (1989) found that through assertive discipline, experienced teachers trained their students on class expectations and appropriate classroom etiquette. They then positively enforced these expectations, as well as established and followed consequences for misbehavior. These teachers allowed students to choose whether to follow classroom etiquette or to defy it; those who chose to disregard etiquette would serve the established classroom consequences. If teachers were consistent with their consequences, then students felt empowered, since consistency provides students a safe predictable environment (Canter, 1989). Predictability in any environment promotes choice and autonomy (Canter, 1989). When the responsive teacher implements assertive discipline, a rapport is inevitably built between the teacher and student (Canter, 1989). Connection is at the root of improving academic motivation, because students feel cared for by their teacher (Mauro, 2014).

Allowing students to learn or not, to behave or misbehave, and responding with appropriate consequences, means the teacher is providing students with an adequate amount of control, freedom, and much desired autonomy. The need for autonomy stems from the inner biological progressions that mark transitioning to a young adult (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Lord et al., 1994). A developmentally adequate learning environment such as this provides the middle school student the autonomy and freedom to choose, even if that means choosing wrong. Ultimately, the choice is theirs, and this meets the need for *choice*, which is developmentally appropriate and needed at this stage. Opportunities to mature cognitively are also essential.

Expectations

One example of an opportunity-rich environment that leads students to higher levels of autonomy, trust, responsibility, and growth, is the classroom which incorporates the arts, like theatre or dance. Through the arts, learning becomes ingrained into the student's knowledge

repertoire (Tomlinson, 2014b). Every spring learning-expert Tomlinson directed a play which incorporated lasting learning experiences, challenged students at many levels, gave students the opportunity to belong to a larger community, and, most importantly, provided a platform for students' creativity, and occasions for them to succeed in tasks normally thought to be too difficult for a middle school student (Tomlinson, 2014b). A learning environment prolific in multiple opportunities for failure, success, affirmation, and support provides the essential components for academic motivation (Tomlinson, 2014b).

Empower

Another opportunity-rich environment is one in which students are empowered with the knowledge that will foster academic motivation, as Carol Dweck recommends. Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford, stresses that middle school teachers have to teach students that they are in charge of their intellectual development (Eisenberg et al., 2005). Dweck teaches Dubbed Brainology, an *unorthodox approach* meant to teach students the basics of neuroscience, how the brain works, how the brain can continue to develop intelligence; and how intelligence is malleable (Eisenberg et al., 2005). Her method of equipping students with neurologic knowledge, which enhances and enriches their academic motivation, has provided interesting results in her research. Dweck's findings show that middle school students embrace information about their brain and display motivation to learn how to control their intelligence (Eisenberg et al., 2005). This autonomous empowerment supports Eccles' stage-environment fit theory, which calls for autonomy during this middle school developmental stage (Eccles, 2014). Eccles' stage-environment fit theory explains that a student's environment can be conducive to her development or regressive to her cognition. The amount of autonomy given within this learning

environment determines cognitive maturity and growth; hence, the environment must ‘fit’ their developmental stage (Eccles et. al., 1993a).

Classroom

The classroom is a laboratory where middle school students can interact with knowledge and each other in order to acquire perseverance, imagination, problem-solving skills, confidence, and resoluteness (Tomlinson, 2013b). Middle school students will embrace their learning by being emotionally and behaviorally engaged, when they perceive that their peers and their teachers care about them (Wang & Eccles, 2013; Mauro, 2014). Students have transitioned to the middle school environment, and they are faced with multiple new social and academic situations. These new “more harsh realities of junior high school environment” (Eccles et al., 1989) include, new teachers, new social contexts, and a new developmental stage, all of which, may cause a low self-concept (Tomlinson, 2014b). In addition, the middle school classroom includes more competition, more comparison, and less teacher-student trust (Eccles et al., 1989; Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995). When focusing on student development, students have a need to be given trust, responsibility, and purpose for growth in their learning environment (Eccles et al., 1993a).

Teacher Student Relationship

Poor communication with middle school students may be the result of a lack of understanding by middle school teachers. Ultimately, the academic motivation of middle school students could suffer as a result of poor relationships between teachers and students, leading to students feeling disengaged and disconnected (Reyes et al., 2012).

Middle school educators need a deeper comprehension on the roots of academic motivation, which lies within the element of relationships between students, teacher, and peers

(Mauro, 2014). The role of the teacher-peer-student relationship has not received the attention it merits in research or teacher training, even though teachers may recognize its importance, especially in relation to motivation. “Teachers need to know how this conceptual knowledge relates to the classroom and to their instructional role in the classroom... Teachers also need to know how to rely on this knowledge when dealing with issues that involve motivational concerns and when making instructional decisions” (Ames, 1990, p. 409). For students, having relationships with teachers and peers fosters belonging in a learning environment, and in turn, enhances academic motivation (Mauro, 2014).

Quality

The quality of relationship students have with their teachers is of high importance to middle school students (Mauro, 2014). When students move to middle school and experience teachers who show less academic support towards them, students demonstrate less interest in subjects they loved in elementary schools (Eccles et al., 1991b). Further findings have shown that middle school students need to have an intimate relationship with at least one non-familial adult for healthy developmental maturity (Eccles et al., 1993a). According to Eccles et al. (1993a) the middle school student spends a considerable amount of time at school, more so than the amount of time she spends in her bed. The school environment is the prime developmental platform for the student. School is the location where students discover a new culture, spend time with new friends, choose to participate in clubs and sports, and learn in new ways all of which nurture a student’s identity and influence their future (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Teacher Role

Teacher-student relationships and student belonging both dictate the level of academic motivation a student will develop, the psychological well-being of the student, and the level of

engagement in learning the student will choose (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Mauro, 2014). A teacher's perception of a student may either be conducive to the adolescent's feelings of belonging or detrimental to the student's social-emotional development (Tomlinson, 2014a). A surface relationship is not what adolescents need; what they need is a bonding relationship, one in which the student feels the teacher genuinely cares and likes him or her. This type of intimate relationship is meant to encourage the advancement of competence and resilience, especially when immediate family members and communities are unable to provide such support to the student (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Although most adolescents seek autonomy at this middle school age, a teacher embodies a significant, if not the only, non-parental role model middle school students have (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Teachers hold a powerful position, one which can influence a student in a negative or positive manner (Tomlinson, 2014c). As a result of heightened self-consciousness and pronounced identity issues, middle school students will feel negatively about most relationships they have (Eccles et al., 1993a). A student's learning environment paired with the student's perceptions and feelings about how the teacher perceives them, can strongly affect their academic motivation (Tomlinson, 2014a). If the teacher is a responsive teacher and if she is consistent, then the student-teacher relationship will be established with expectations and consequences, and no part of that will be subjective (Canter, 1989). Student and teacher know that, if a student chooses to make the wrong choice, then the prearranged set of negative consequences will be applied (Langa, 2014). Objective respectful treatment shows students that they are, indeed, in control of what they can expect in the classroom (Canter, 1989).

Discipline Rapport

Responsive teachers practice assertive discipline to build relationships with students. When a teacher practices assertive discipline, students become informed students of the classroom (Canter, 1989). Assertive discipline does not allow teachers to veer towards inconsistency or other means of consequences. Once a student makes the wrong choice and disrespects the class or an established rule, the consequence must not be delayed (Canter, 1989). When students experience assertive discipline through a caring teacher, they learn to separate their behavior and the way a teacher feels about them personally (Canter, 1989). The student begins to realize that she did make a wrong choice, and because this choice was made, negative consequences will apply. The teacher becomes only the executor of consequences, while the student chooses to follow directions or not to follow directions (Canter, 1989). Subjectivity, which includes negative emotions and feelings that students wish to place on their teachers, are now part of their responsibility (Canter, 1989). This method of discipline within a classroom is one example of how the stage-environment fit theory can be applied. The theory asserts educators should provide an environment to fit the developmental needs of a middle school student (Eccles et al., 1993b). In this case, students are given autonomy to make their choices and also to serve the due consequences based on their choices. This developmentally appropriate environment will help students see that the teacher is fair and treats everyone with the same consistency, when behavior is involved (Canter, 1989; Anderman, 2003). A consistent teacher helps students perceive more accurately what their teacher thinks of them (Anderman, 2003).

Student Perception

At every educational level; however, at the middle school level this is intensified. A student's perception of what the teacher thinks of her will have a positive or negative affect that

may last for a lifetime (Eccles et al., 1993a). As a result of the human developmental stage students are in, and because they are more self-conscious, a student's perception of how a teacher feels or thinks about the student significantly intensifies at the middle school age (Eccles et al., 1993a). If the student believes and feels that his teacher has faith in him learning a concept, then he will learn it exceptionally well (Tomlinson, 2014a). Unfortunately, the same will be true if a student feels the teacher does not believe in her; then, she will not learn. A "teacher's emotional response to children shapes the children's interests... teachers provide information regarding their various beliefs about academic achievement to their students" (Upadyaya & Eccles, 2014, p. 404). A teacher's demeanor includes facial expressions, body language, stares or glances, and the teacher's rhythm, stress and intonation during speech, which all convey belief, or disbelief (Eccles et al., 1993a). Not only are these emotions conveyed to one student, but they are conveyed to all students about any particular student. This means that if a teacher's tone and demeanor convey disrespect and disbelief for a particular student, then the entire class will feel the same way about this student and begin disrespecting him or her the same as the teacher (Upadyaya & Eccles, 2014). This behavior towards a student from his peers may be long lasting. Teachers need to understand the power they have over students' lives and academic motivation (Tomlinson, 2014a). They must also become aware that they may respond differently to different students in the same classroom (Eccles et al., 1993a).

Another aspect of an educational environment that affects academic motivation includes "ability groupings, general atmosphere, and the ways teachers give their feedback to children are reflected in children's motivation" (Upadyaya & Eccles, 2014, p. 405). When students seek help, the rhythm, stress, and intonation of the teacher's tone when responding to a student's question will convey to the student how smart the teachers believes he or she is (Eccles et al.,

1993a). Teachers may not be aware of this and may be conveying feelings that will negatively affect students (Eccles et al., 1993a). Students must feel like they belong in a learning environment; questions they ask and comments they make must all be welcomed and accepted in order to embrace the student into the learning community (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

Finally, a teacher can be proactive when she endeavors to support students' learning by anticipating topics that may cause confusion in the student and having solutions to tackle these confusions effectively (Jackson & Zmuda, 2014). Teachers may endeavor to help students understand why they are learning what they are learning, anticipate areas of misunderstanding, and have a backup plan that will give students access to the curriculum (Jackson & Zmuda, 2014). As a result of this preparation, questions students ask will be more related to the subject, and students will feel safer asking them. This accessible learning context is the practice of "withitness." This is when the teacher is fully aware of which student is about to take a risk, and she manipulates the environment to welcome the student's questions (Jackson & Zmuda, 2014). Having the ability to anticipate the what, the when, and the how of a student learning within a classroom is the practice of "withitness" (Canter, 1989). A responsive teacher creates a safe learning environment by taking action before the lesson begins.

Summary

In Chapter 2, the review of the literature was presented. The backbone of academic motivation includes the person-environment fit theory, the stage-environment fit theory, the self-determination theory, and the responsive teacher theory.

Gutman and Eccles (2007) argue that the period of maturing from the initial stage to the final stage of adolescence is unlike any other period in students' lives, due to the multiple, synchronized physiological changes that exist across various levels. "Changes occur as a result

of puberty and cognitive development, school transitions, and changing roles with peers and families” (Gutman & Eccles, 2007, p. 522). These changes are coupled with sudden, unexpected psychological side effects. At this age, such shifts may have a positive or a negative impact on students (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Negative side effects range from low self-esteem to mental health issues, which will inevitably manifest in problem behavior and lack of academic motivation in the classroom (Gutman & Eccles, 2007).

Furthermore, middle school students are not children; they are students at an early adolescent stage of life. Because students are extrinsically motivated at this age, their academic motivation is lower as they seek a community in which to belong (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). Eccles et al. (1991a) stress the need for educators to become aware of two important theories:

1. The person-environment fit theory: This theory posits that there must be a perfect match between the student’s need for autonomy and “the amount of adult control exercised” (p. 54). The manner in which adults treat their students must match their students’ developmental stage and needs.
2. The stage-environment fit theory suggests that there are negative motivational behavioral consequences of being in an environment that does not match a student’s emotional needs. The learning environment needs to be adequate for the middle school student (i.e. safe, collaborative, challenging, rich in opportunities for autonomy and competence, and interactive).

Providing middle school students with the adequate amount of autonomy will foster academic motivation, because they will know that they are active participants in what they are learning (Eccles et al., 1993a). Over-controlling a class at the middle school level will have destructive results for students, as this act is developmentally regressive (Eccles et al., 1993a).

At this developmental stage students are being motivated by extrinsic factors, which cause them to crave connection, bonding, and care, in order for their academics to matter to them (Kiefer et al., 2014).

After providing students a proper amount of autonomy, teachers can create a learning context that offers students opportunities to practice their autonomy (Tomlinson, 2014b). This includes involving students in the decision-making process within the classroom, allowing students to choose to make wrong choices, and giving students consequences for misbehavior, as well as good behavior (Canter, 1989). The use of creative differentiation teaching methods would be an effective practice that may foster academic motivation.

A responsive teacher diligently practices assertive discipline in order to positively bond with students. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory reminds us that every human being has three basic needs; relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Middle school students have an increased need for these as they are at a fragile developmental stage.

Ames (1990) asserted that teachers need to become aware of what academic motivation is. They must recognize it as an element of education, which is a primary component of advancing students' academic careers. Responsive teaching, student-teacher relationships, student perception, and student belonging are all elements that foster high levels of academic motivation. The responsive teacher builds a significant relationship with middle school students -- one in which the student's perception is that the teacher truly likes the student. In addition, the responsive teacher works at becoming aware of the manner in which she portrays the student to the class. Finally, Tomlinson (2014a) and Jackson (2013) stress the teacher's powerful position in advancing academic motivation, as she creates the learning environment, interacts with the students, and controls what happens in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this study was to investigate the ways in which teachers support middle school students' academic motivation in one large, low, socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school. To thoroughly understand the factors that increase academic motivation, students, teachers, and administrators voiced their experiences with academic motivation.

Through data collected; the following research questions were addressed in this research study:

1. In what ways do teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation at a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California?
2. What factors supported students' academic motivation?
3. What factors might enhance students' academic motivation according to the students' perceptions?

The methodology employed to test the research questions is presented in this chapter. The chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) setting and selection of participants; (b) sampling procedures; (c) instrumentation; (d) student survey; (e) teacher survey; (f) administrator survey; (g) self-efficacy survey; (h) validity and reliability; (i) data collection; (j) data analysis; (k) ethical issues; (l) the researcher; and (m) data summary.

Setting and Selection of Participants

Seville Middle School (SMS) has gone through a physical change within the past ten years, going from bungalow classrooms to a three-story building with walls of gray bricks. The building is shaped like a horseshoe, and has metal bars encapsulating the inside of the horse shoe. Bright lights hang from the second floor to aim towards the center of the horseshoe. The

hallways are gray and dark. They have small dark empty pockets at each end where the stairs are located. There is one small art piece on one of the sides of the center of the horseshoe.

Seville Middle School (SMS) is located in Southern California, and operates under a Title I Schoolwide Program (SWP) authorized under the NCLB Act Legislation. The SWP option enables high-poverty schools to integrate programs, strategies, and resources to support high quality education. The student body consists of 936 students, 48.6% of who are classified as basic or below basic in Language Arts and 46.5% are below proficiency in Mathematics. The demographics of SMS are 67% Hispanic, 25% African American, and 8% Other (“Movo Real,” n. d.). The “Other” category includes students of White, Asian, or Pacific Islander background. Of the student population in SMS, 45% are considered English Learners.

SMS is a middle school with sixth through eighth grade students, located in a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse school district in Southern California in the United States. This district is located in California’s Los Angeles basin, only minutes away from the Los Angeles International Airport. SMS belongs to a school district whose average educational load is 10,000 pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade students. The district was founded in 1907, and serves 7 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 1 charter high school. In autumn of 2016, when data was collected for this study, SMS maintained an enrollment of 936 students, with 86.4% of their students qualifying for free and reduced meals. The selected participants were sampled through qualitative open-ended questions that allowed them to share their personal views.

Participants

Student participants totaled 140. All students had the same characteristics, such as attending the same school, being enrolled at SMS since the 6th grade, and exposed to the

common curriculum and general instructional practices. There was a total of two participants who were administrators, one principal, one vice principal, and three special projects teachers. Special projects teachers are those who specialize in reading and math instruction. They are official administrative designees on campus when administrators are busy or in meetings. There was a total of 16 teacher participants: two sixth grade teachers, one seventh grade teachers, six eighth grade teachers, and seven teachers who teach sixth to eight (see Appendix E). The school has a total number of 44 teachers, and 16 teachers volunteered to take the survey. Teachers (n=16) were personally invited one by one, and a link was sent to them.

The study was open to all 936 students on campus during the 2016-2017 school year; however, the student population sample used for this study was finalized based on the interview and consent by parents. Students who demonstrated understanding of academic motivation during the screening interview and returned a signed parental consent form were allowed to participate in the research. The researcher spoke to English Learner classes and special day classes to ensure that students performing at various academic levels were included in this study. Any simplification and/or generalization of the results of this study to demographics that do not bear an almost exact resemblance to the students in SMS must be done with prudence. Although an equal number of student participants from all levels was sought out to represent the three grade levels (6th, 7th, and 8th) however, there was a greater student representation from the seventh and eighth grade, as compared to sixth graders. Student participants chose a pseudonym to keep their identity confidential. Their demographic information can be found in Appendix D.

Teacher and administrator participants were recruited by email and face-to-face invitations. Initially, an email was sent to all teachers asking for their participation. To ensure equal representation, the researcher personally spoke to interested teacher and administrator

participants. Teacher participants' demographics, such as discipline, grade they teach, and gender, are found in Appendix E.

Sampling Procedures

Student participants were chosen based on their availability and on their ability to submit the proper consent forms. Participants were also chosen based on them being part of this large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school. Sampling of students, teachers, special projects teachers, and administrators took place. An online survey was used for this qualitative study, and was given to all participating students, teachers, special projects teachers, and administrators. The individual responses about their experiences with academic motivation from these surveys were analyzed to identify significant factors that foster academic motivation.

The choice of sampling methods used in this case study were based on the researcher-practitioner's accessibility to the population. This qualitative research used a convenience sample to represent students from different motivational levels. This sampling method provided the appropriate means to investigate a specialized population of students attending a large, low socio economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in California. The convenience sampling ensured that every student on site with different levels of academic motivation were represented.

This sampling was preferred to guarantee an "information-rich" case, which would allow triangulation of data. Collecting perspectives of a specific narrow group of middle school students would provide strong findings for the study. A total of 161 participants were involved in this investigation, including 140 students, 16 teachers, 2 administrators, and 3 special project teachers (see Appendix D, E, and F). In the 2016-2017 school year, the researcher carried out interviews with a student subsample from among the student volunteers who returned parent consent permission slips. The purpose of the interviews was to make sure students understood

the general meaning of academic motivation, as referred to in this research. The sample population selected for the study was archetypal of the general demographics of the students' population and was composed of 96% ethnic minorities ("Prairie," 2016).

The 16 teachers selected for the study were the teachers who chose to volunteer for it. Although an effort was made by the researcher to encourage maximum participation and ensure a minimum of two participants at each grade level, the final sample consisted of more teachers who taught all three grade levels from sixth to eighth grade. The vice principal was also recruited to participate in the study, as his daily job includes addressing and assessing students' instructional needs and academic motivation, all of which are relevant topics in the study. All participants signed an informed consent slip, including parents/guardians of the student participants. In addition, student participants went through a session on informed consent, where the informed agreement procedure was read aloud to them, and they were asked to give assent prior to becoming participants.

Instrumentation

Collecting qualitative survey data from students, teachers, administrators, and special project teachers gave the researcher in-depth insight into the perspectives on academic motivation. To increase reliability, permission was granted to the researcher by Kiefer, Ellerbrock, and Alley (2014) to use their study's survey. The modification made was adding the self-efficacy section to the survey. The survey used for this study was administered to participants online through SurveyMonkey and was also available as a hard copy for those who preferred this mode of administration. A paper copy of the entire survey was provided to students and their parents as reference. All students were clearly informed of their two possible

options for taking the survey (online or on paper). Data was analyzed through SurveyMonkey and the program Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.

A list of all students, teachers, administrators, and special projects teachers, who agreed to participate in this study was kept to identify them, ensure follow-up, and encourage completion of the survey. Once the survey was completed, the list was kept in a safe location, accessible only with a password in order to keep all responses and data collected from survey participants confidential and private, and to prevent discrepancies to keep the study valid by maintaining authentic responses.

Student Survey

The student survey contained ten open-ended questions. Students were able to choose a hard copy with the questions, on which they would write their answers. The other option was an online survey created on SurveyMonkey, which allowed participants to use their own devices or a school device to access the questions online. Furthermore, students who wished to have a hard copy to view as they answered the questions online were given the hard copy.

In the survey, students were asked about their experiences with academic motivation among their peers, teachers, parents, and themselves. For example, “In what ways do your teachers, classmates, or friends help support your academic motivation in school?” Another significant element sought out was current experiences with engagement to increased academic motivation such as, “Talk about a time this past year when you were highly engaged in class.” This question on engagement directly connects to academic motivation, as when students are initially engaged in their learning; it signifies they have access to curriculum, which means they understand what they are learning and understand the assignment, which in turn, fosters academic motivation. Finally, the survey targeted students’ unfiltered, subjective thoughts and

opinions about academic motivation. The student survey (see Appendix G) ended with some general questions asking students to provide feedback about what schools can do to increase their academic motivation and interest in school and learning.

Self-Efficacy Section

A section on self-efficacy was added to the student survey. This section asked students their own personal perceptions about how their academic motivation is fostered and what they individually do to increase their academic motivation. The manner in which the middle school student meets his or her personal academic needs was investigated to offer a more thorough, intimate, and all-inclusive understanding of academic motivation at the middle school level (Kiefer et al., 2014). These questions added validity to the study as the perspective is directly from the student.

To allow students to share their experiences about academic motivation openly and fully, they must be given the opportunity to focus on their thoughts, their strategies for self-motivation, and their own reflections about academic motivation. The self-efficacy section is one way that students were able to explain their perspectives. It also afforded student participants a place to put into writing their actions about what they do or have done to advance their own learning and promote their academic motivation. The ideas articulated by students in this section of the survey will be triangulated with the voices of the different participants, the teachers and the administrators, which will increase the validity of the findings in this study (see Appendix H).

Teacher Survey

Teachers were asked similar questions to students, but they were phrased from a teacher's perspective. One focus in the teacher's survey was the teachers' insights into what they believed would increase academic motivation of the middle school student. The survey also collected

information about teachers' knowledge on methodology and pedagogy related to academic motivation. The teachers' observations of students' academic motivation were collected throughout the survey. The open-ended questions gave teachers the freedom to identify, detail, and offer their own thoughts about what academic motivation looks like in their classroom and about how students respond to an appropriate level of academic motivation. The survey ended with a broad question asking teachers to identify their educational perspectives about academic motivation at their school sites (see Appendix I).

Administrator Survey

The administrator's survey included a similar line of questions, which gathered perspectives about the entire organization- SMS. Using open-ended unstructured questions, administrators were asked to take into consideration the culture of their schools when sharing their insights about what they witness their staff doing to promote academic motivation at their school sites. For example, one question was "In what ways do teachers support student academic motivation in school?" The survey also asked them about their ability to observe teachers and identify significant factors that influence and foster academic motivation. A question that focused on the school's culture was asked of the administrator: Does the administrator see the school as a learning environment that fosters academic motivation among all of its students? If they replied in the negative, the researcher subsequently asked questions about aspects of their school and its teachers that show evidence of academic motivation being fostered. The administrator's survey ends with questions about methods, steps, pedagogy, and ideas about how to further promote academic motivation at the school site (see Appendix J).

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the results from the surveys are strong as the researcher supplemented her findings with qualitative analysis done in collaboration with two outside raters. After the researcher organized data and responses in an excel spread sheet, she trained two outside raters to code 14% of the data. Both outside raters coded the data responses independently using the given themes that derived from the data. After the raters were finished coding data, they met with the researcher to discuss the themes selected for the data given. Discussions took place about disagreements on certain themes and objections were clarified until agreement was reached about the themes selected. The interrater reliability was 70%.

The concept of reliability was addressed through the use of questions from a previously established survey research study performed by Kiefer, Ellerbrock, and Alley in 2014. Permission was granted by the researchers, Kiefer, Ellerbrock, and Alley, to use all or part of the questions used in their study on academic motivation. In addition, a panel of educational leadership and efficacy teachers reviewed the survey questions and provided feedback on strengths, weaknesses, omissions, and recommended changes in order to fit the survey demographics. These experts were educators, both administrators and teachers from middle schools in Southern California.

To increase internal item and sampling validity, during the screening of only student participants, an interview question was asked about the meaning of academic motivation, which stated: "What does academic motivation mean to you?" Students who had a clear understanding of academic motivation proceeded to take the research survey. Those who did not were given the definition of academic motivation and given the opportunity for clarification. Out of 140 student participants, only 7 students needed clarification, 1 being an English Learner on her way

to transitioning to Only English, who needed the direct translation of the question. All 140 students who turned in the consent form and answered the question were given the survey to take. This allowed the researcher to ensure that all students had a similar thorough understanding of what academic motivation meant, so they were better equipped to discern when and where they experienced academic motivation or when it was lacking. The convenience sampling of participants included 140 student participants, 16 teachers, 2 administrators, and 3 special projects teachers ensured that the voices of all the important stakeholders were represented, giving validity to the study of academic motivation at the middle school level.

Triangulation through data collection from multiple sources (students, teachers, and administrators) allowed personal perspectives and experiences to be validated against each other (Shenton, 2004). The triangulation of participants' collective data gave the researcher a generous view of the feelings, needs, and perspectives concerning factors that foster academic motivation at the middle school level. Comparing the feelings, needs and perspectives of administrators, teachers and students provided additional validity to the research and a more thorough understanding of the factors that foster academic motivation at this developmental level.

The researcher also took careful steps to promote truthfulness in participant responses. One measure taken was being present when students took the survey to ensure they completed the survey on their own and did not share or discuss their responses with their peers. Students were told that they were free to decline to respond to any survey question, a minimum of three times in different ways. The first time was when they were asked to give assent, another time at the beginning of the survey, and one more time orally as they were taking the survey. They were assured that no consequences would result from refusal to participate. To encourage honesty and

increase validity, participants were also told that their responses would not be graded or judged by the researcher. They were reminded about what the consent form states, that the researcher would not know who said what; therefore, they should feel free to write what they truly feel without fear of anyone finding out what they wrote.

Kiefer, Ellerbrock, and Alley (2014) conducted a similar study on middle school students and academic motivation. Reliability was addressed by using a replication of the survey used in Kiefer et al.'s, (2014) study. The exact same questions asked in the original study were asked to the participants in the current research. A researcher-constructed section was added to the survey to expand on the students' personal perspectives of academic motivation and self-efficacy. Additionally, the student survey was carried out in a familiar and comfortable environment. Students were given access to a laptop in a familiar environment such as their classroom with the aim of enhancing their authentic voices. In addition, students were given the option to choose the way in which they preferred to take the survey, either on a hard copy or online. In summary, the authentic perspectives of middle school student participants were prompted through the use of clear survey questions, a low stress environment, knowledge of knowing they did not have to answer the questions, knowledge that there were no wrong answers, and knowledge that the researcher would keep the identities of survey participants confidential. Teachers and administrators completed the survey at their own convenient time and place, which provided a low filter context with minimal levels of stress or pressure.

Data Collection

The qualitative method used for data collection was an online survey. Recruiting was done through a school wide intercom announcement repeated once a day for two weeks. The message was as follows:

Good morning middle school students. There is a terrific opportunity for you to be part of a study about your experiences here in middle school. If you would like to share your personal experience with a researcher, please report to room 300 any time during your morning, lunch, or after school. Thank you for helping future teachers understand who you are as middle school students.

There were also individual classroom visitations. Special day classes and English Learner classes were targeted for visitations to ensure that diverse students were included in the study, however, there was only one student participant who asked for language clarification of the interview question, and she was able to complete the survey on her own. Every other student participant understood the survey well enough to complete it independently. The survey was administered on a volunteer basis only. No reward or consequence was given for participation or nonparticipation. The researcher made 200 copies of the consent forms, 167 of the consent forms were picked up, and 140 returned and participated in the survey. Student participants were able to pick up parent consent forms to participate in the study before school, at lunch or after school. All teacher and administrator participants were contacted in person to request their participation. To make sure all disciplines were included and to maintain validity, personal visits were made to teachers of English Learner classes and Special Day classes. Teachers and administrators took the survey during their own preferred time and location. If they did not take the survey, an email followed inviting them to take the online survey. Before the survey deadline approached, teachers received a final email invitation to take the survey for the study. Completion of the survey was on a volunteer basis; therefore, if a teacher or administrator did not respond, they were not contacted again. All teachers and administrators were given coffee for their participation in the survey.

Procedures

Every student who reported to room 300 to participate in the study received a parent consent form. Included with the consent form, parents received a hard copy of the online questions to review with the rationale and explanation of the study. Students who turned in their signed consent form were screened with an interview question, and then received the survey to complete online or on a hard copy, based on their preference.

Before the students began their survey, they were briefly interviewed. Student interviews took place on the SMS campus in a private classroom setting at times when students were free to participate in the study, either before or after school. If students wanted to come after they ate lunch, the researcher made this option available as well; however, they were required to eat their lunch first. The screening interview consisted of one question, “What does academic motivation mean to you?” If students did not know the answer or the response was unclear, clarification was given by defining, orally and in writing, academic motivation for the student. Only seven students were unsure about academic motivation, and they were given the definition and the opportunity to ask for clarifications:

Academic Motivation – This type of motivation is the type that middle school students acquire strictly for advancing their academic studies in school. In other words, what things help you want to study more, learn more, and pay attention more in your classes? If students responded correctly about the meaning of academic motivation as defined, they were asked to give their oral assent and were reminded that they did not have to finish all questions if they did not want to.

In the next phase, students were offered the online or paper copy of the survey. Those choosing to complete the survey online were directed to a laptop on which they were able to take

their survey. Laptops were placed about three feet away from each other to avoid conferencing, and in view of the researcher to sustain validity. Students took the survey online through SurveyMonkey. They were verbally reminded that they were allowed to leave the survey any time they wanted with no consequences to them.

The student survey asked questions such as, “Share about your motivation in your academic classes” (see Appendix G). The researcher asked educators questions such as, “What does it mean for students to be academically motivated at your school?” General demographic questions were also included to obtain information about age, gender, and ethnicity of all participants. All participants’ surveys including teachers and administrators were completed online through SurveyMonkey.

Furthermore, all participants were provided an explanation of the researcher’s purpose for the study and the intended outcomes of the research process. Each student participant was assured that his or her responses would be kept confidential and was, to that effect, asked to choose a pseudonym. Student participants were also provided the reassurance that the option to remove themselves from the research process at any time was afforded to them (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). All student participants had to verbally give their assent to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

All online survey data was collected through SurveyMonkey. Students who chose to complete a hard copy survey had their data entered into SurveyMonkey by the researcher. The survey on SurveyMonkey asked for demographic and other general information, such as gender, sex, and age. Data was then downloaded and uploaded onto Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Each response to each survey question was analyzed by the researcher, in order to draw out themes. All data from student, teacher, and administrator responses were categorized by relevant themes.

After thorough reading of participants' responses, the data was coded with themes. The themes arose from participants' general response or essence (see Appendix K). There were no set themes established for data analysis. The response was read and the general idea was identified by the researcher. For example, one student's response said, "They can help support my academic motivation in school by helping me with my work and give me help on school subjects, such as math and L.A." This phrase would be coded as "access to curriculum" because the student needs help understanding his work and is asking for help to complete his assignment. The researcher independently coded the phrases with themes based on the message expressed in each independent phrase. The themes that were determined for the data analysis captured the nature of the responses of the participants (see Appendix K).

The two actions involved in analyzing the data included seeking patterns in data collected, and making overall statements relating to the phenomena (Hatch, 2002). Themes were drawn directly from data collected. Frequency of themes was established and recorded. Frequency of themes was organized by most frequent themes, and lowest frequency themes were placed in a category titled, "other." The frequency of themes was prioritized differently by the research participants (students, teachers, and administrators). As the data showed, each group prioritized factors affecting their academic motivation in a slightly different order.

The researcher also sought out the expertise of a qualitative methods expert to peer review the analysis process and crosscheck the study's conclusions. Together, they assigned each question a "type" (factual, perception, engagement, self-efficacy) based on the wording of the question. Factual questions were those questions that addressed academic motivation experiences within the year, for example, "Tell me about your motivation in your academic classes this year." Perception questions were questions where participants stated what they

believe fosters academic motivation, for example: “In what ways can teachers, classmates or friends help support your academic motivation?” Engagement questions were those questions that asked about specific things people did to engage students in their learning, for example, “Talk to me about a time this past year when you were highly engaged”. Self-efficacy questions were questions that targeted students’ personal actions, for example: “In what ways can you support your academic motivation?”

There were two additional outside raters who coded about 14% of the data in order to support the process of coding and categorization, to keep validity and reliability integrity. These raters were trained on coding the data by the researcher. Then they proceeded to independently code the random data selected by the researcher.

Ethical Issues

The researcher anticipated potential ethical issues to arise based on the observation that she is an employee of school district, she teaches at the school where the study is taking place; and students may be influenced by the fact that she will read their responses. One way to address ethical concerns was that all students were invited to participate, not only the researcher’s students. Another way ethical issues were addressed was that student participants were reminded that they would have anonymity throughout survey. The researcher would not know who they were or what they wrote in response to the survey questions.

The Researcher

The researcher has over twenty years of educational middle school classroom experience, and has been working with middle school students in a low-socio economic middle school. The disciplines the researcher has taught range from language arts, social studies, math, and choir to dance. The researcher has taught all the grade levels targeted in this study, sixth through eighth.

In these different roles, the researcher has been exposed to and has been engaged in a variety of contexts which aim to academically motivate students. Every year, the researcher creates a new extracurricular activity in which students are able to participate. A few examples are mini4wd engineering club, nutrition food club, and dance club. This deep involvement with middle school students allowed the researcher to learn about middle school students' likes and dislikes; as well as the general characteristics of a middle school student.

The researcher's main goal when working with middle school students for these past two decades has been to contribute to building a solid bridge of relationship between teachers and students to maximize students' academic progress and teacher efficacy. The researcher would like to help students and teachers become more aware of the effects of the person-environment fit theory and the stage-environment fit theory. These theories can help teachers in providing middle school students with the best learning environment at this sensitive developmental age. The researcher's personal experiences with students' academic motivation made her an advocate for fostering academic motivation. Academic motivation at the middle school level is a topic of interest to teachers all over the nation. Knowing how to foster academic motivation at this level would be an incredible benefit to all middle school students and teachers alike. This research has the potential of changing the perspective of the middle school teacher, in regards to their words of encouragement used towards their students.

Summary

This study was conducted to discover students' perspectives on academic motivation and teacher support. The participants were from a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in California. Participants were recruited in person, through schoolwide announcements, by email, and by classroom visitations. The goal was to discover the factors that

foster academic motivation in a large, low-socioeconomic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California. This chapter restated the purpose of the research and presented the research questions. It addressed the methodology used to collect data related to academic motivation, described the procedures for recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis. The validity, reliability, ethical issues, and a summary were also included.

Finally, a brief description of the researcher and her experience with middle school students was given. Her experience with middle school students adds to the validity of the study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which teachers support students' academic motivation in a large, low-socioeconomic, and ethnically diverse middle school with a majority of students coming from families with low-socio economic status in Southern California. The purpose of the study was achieved by discovering the factors that foster academic motivation through analyzing participants' responses about their experiences with academic motivation. The study is an inductive qualitative case study intending to understand the relationship between teachers' support and students' academic motivation. This research collected teachers', administrators', and students' opinions, personal insights, and experiences about academic motivation through a survey. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis of the three stated research questions:

1. In what ways do teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation at a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California?
2. What factors supported students' academic motivation?
3. What factors might enhance students' academic motivation according to the students' perceptions?

Demographics

Data from 161 survey participants in Seville Middle School was used in this qualitative analysis. The survey was given on a volunteer basis and no compensation was offered. From grades 6th-8th, 140 students (50 male; 90 female) participated, 16 teachers, 1 nondisclosed, (10 male; 5 female) participated, and 5 educators (3 male; 2 female) who take an administrator role at the school participated. Participation was strictly voluntary. Both administrators, principal and vice principal participated, and all three special projects teachers participated in the study.

The primary goal of this study was to discover academic motivational factors, as seen through the students' perspectives. The demographic variables of the participants are described in the following sections.

Students

Middle school students who participated in the survey included 140 students in Grades 6 to 8 (see Table 1). More students who participated in the research were female (65%) and more from the 7th grade (40%). This may be a result of the overall school demographics; 7th graders are represented in larger numbers than any other grades.

Table 1

Number of Male and Female Student Participants at Each Grade Level

| | Number of students | Female | Male |
|---------|--------------------|--------|------|
| Grade 6 | 25 | 17 | 8 |
| Grade 7 | 56 | 35 | 21 |
| Grade 8 | 59 | 38 | 21 |
| Total | 140 | 90 | 50 |

Descriptive statistics depicted the ethnicity and age of the student participants. The majority of the participants were Hispanic, which also reflects the population of the school (see Figure 2). Two students declined to identify their ethnicity.

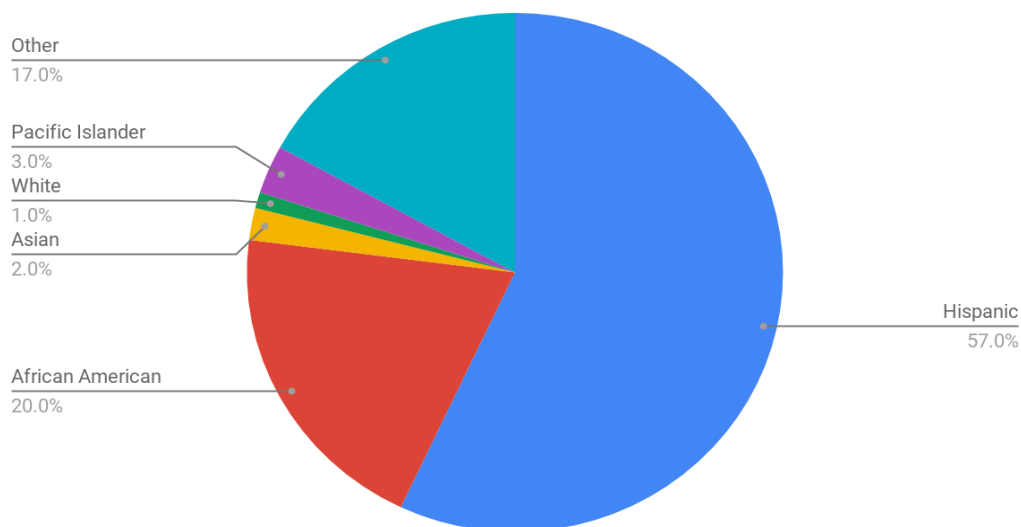


Figure 2. Pie chart showing ethnicity of student participants.

Students in the sample ranged from 11 to 14 years old. The age range may be due to the retention and late enrollment due to district birthday restrictions. The largest percentage of students was 12 years old (see Figure 3). Two participating students did not identify their age.

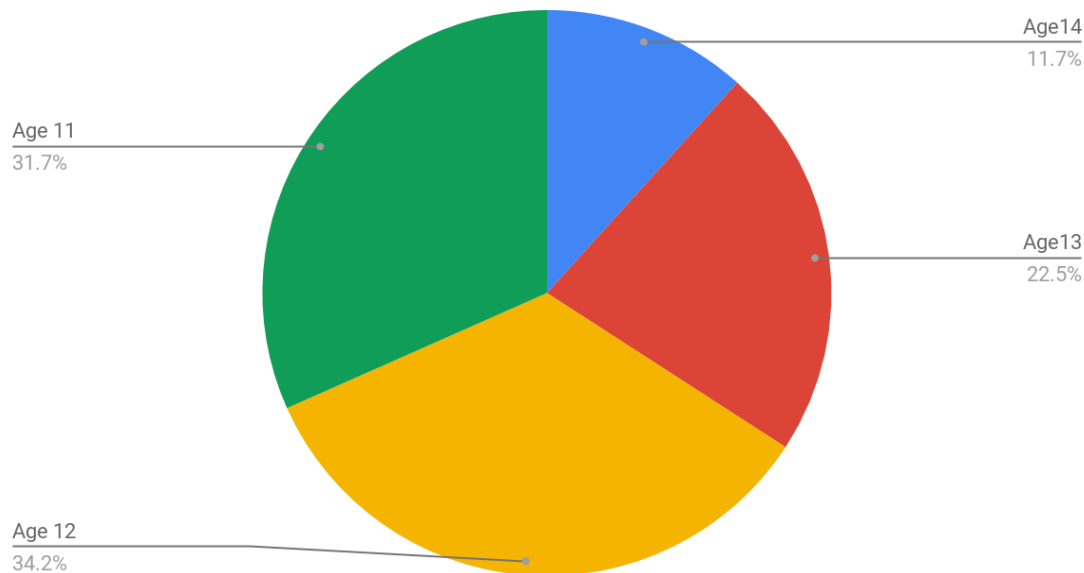


Figure 3. Pie chart showing percentage of students with different ages.

Teachers

To increase the validity of the study all educational disciplines were included. The study included two art, three science, one language arts, six math, two special education, and two who selected “Other” teachers. In the survey, “Other” may represent the teacher who teaches three subjects or a combination of subjects. For example, one teacher participant teaches three language art classes and two piano classes. The chart below shows the number of math and language arts teachers, all others are under the last category titled “other.” Table 2 shows the number of teachers and their specific characteristics. Teachers who were surveyed included 2 sixth grade, 1 seventh grade, 6 eighth grade, and 7 teachers who teach all three grade levels. Teacher demographics include 5 Hispanic, 2 African American, 5 White, 3 Other, and 1 undisclosed ethnic identity. The teachers’ gender identity included 6 female, 9 male, and 1 undisclosed gender.

Table 2

Demographics Data Teachers

| Grade | Number | Female | Male | Refuse to State | Math | Language Arts | Other |
|-------|--------|--------|------|-----------------|------|---------------|-------|
| 6 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 8 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 6-8 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 16 | 5 | 10 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 9 |

Administrators

Educators who take an administrator’s role at the school included one principal, one vice principal, and three special projects teachers. The total number of school administrators was 5.

This included 2 female and 3 male school leaders – 2 Hispanics, 2 White, and 1 categorized as Other.

Data Collection and Coding

Data from 140 students, 16 teachers, 2 administrators, and 3 special projects teachers were collected through online surveys using SurveyMonkey and coded manually using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. All teachers and administrators completed their surveys online. Out of the 140 student participants, 130 students completed their surveys online and 10 students on paper copies. The researcher input the data collected from the paper survey into SurveyMonkey. After data was organized by question and responses, themes were derived. SurveyMonkey allowed the researcher to download all data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, from which the researcher organized the data by question and response and added columns for coding purposes, as seen on the chart titled Data Analysis Chart (see Appendix K). The most frequent themes were then selected for coding, while the least frequent themes were placed into a category named “Other.”

Coding Process

The data was analyzed by phrases found in each response. Each phrase stated was given a theme. A part of the coding process was organizing the themes by frequency. Themes used for coding were derived directly from the responses given by the participants. Each phrase was read by the researcher multiple times and the essence of the message became the theme. After reading through all the survey data, all responses were categorized by themes (see Table 3). The students’, teachers’, and administrators’ responses were used as data for this report. For teachers and administrators, the coding was not exclusive, as more than one code was applied to a given response, since their responses were longer and more descriptive. Each student response corresponded to one code. The coding analysis was used to address the research questions of

this study: (a) In what ways do teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation at a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California?; (b) What factors supported students' academic motivation?; and (c) What might enhance students' academic motivation according to the students' perception?

After thorough analysis, coding, and frequency determination, all of the data were characterized by following 16 themes: (a) teaching style; (b) teaching methods; (c) interesting; (d) relationships; (e) grades; (f) tools/technology; (g) social environment; (h) encouragement; (i) support; (j) challenge/social competition; (k) rewards; (l) goals; (m) consequences; (n) parent; (o) intrinsic motivation; (p) access to curriculum; and (q) other. The descriptions of the themes are listed in Table 3. All low frequency themes were placed in a category titled "other." Low frequency themes were dependent on the total of all other categories; the top five themes were selected as the top academic motivators.

Table 3

Themes Emerging from Participant Responses and Their Descriptions

| Theme | Description |
|------------------------|--|
| Teaching Style | Strict, Creative, Traditional, Facilitator |
| Teaching Methods | Traditional, Interactive, Hands-on, Mixed |
| Interesting Curriculum | Lack of interest in topics |
| Relationships | Friends, family, teachers |
| Grades | Academic report card grades |
| Tools/Technology | Includes equipment such as computers |
| Social Environment | Includes bullying, class talking |
| Encouragement | "Teachers tell me", "saying to me", "telling us" |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Support | Tutor help |
| Challenges/Social Competition | Friends competing with each other for better grades |
| Rewards | Gifts, toys, cell phone, games |
| Goals | Future, high school, college |
| Consequences | No football, no cell phone, death, sexual harassment, divorce, family issues |
| Parent | Parents encouraging, motivating, making parents proud |
| Intrinsic Motivation | Self-determination theory, self-talk |
| Access to Curriculum | Understanding lesson to complete independently |

Findings

The number of times each theme was coded was totaled to find the most frequent themes. All themes were added separately. Student themes were totaled and organized, as were teacher and administrator themes. All data was then compared to find similarities and differences.

Frequency of Themes

The theme that appeared in the highest number of responses was the most frequent. For example, for Question Number 2, “What would you say might increase your academic motivation?” the theme that appeared most frequently was *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk) as shown in Appendix A for student participants, Appendix B for teacher participants, and Appendix C for administrator participants. For data analysis, the questions were organized horizontally on the table with the themes on the left column. The percentage scores each theme received based on the question are reported in this table.

Themes

The five most frequent themes that emerged from all combined data collected were intrinsic motivation (self-talk), access to curriculum, encouragement, grades, and interesting curriculum. These themes were prioritized differently by the different participants (students, teachers, and administrators).

Data Analysis

Data was coded into a total of 16 themes originally (see Table 3). This analysis focused on the most frequent themes. The most common themes included *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk), *access to curriculum*, *encouragement*, *grades*, and *interesting curriculum*. Questions gathered information about how students experience academic motivation and what they believe will improve their academic motivation. The most frequent themes became the factors that positively affect academic motivation. In addition, the survey questions also explored perceptions of students' engagement and self-efficacy. Students', teachers', and administrators' responses were compared based on an analysis of concepts, which include perceived support during that year, beliefs of what would help, perceived support in engagement, and students' self-efficacy.

Interrater reliability was calculated at 14% of data cases that were chosen randomly by the researcher. Data was coded at the phrase level by the researcher and two outside coders trained by the researcher. There was a total of 130 phrases coded in the data from 14 participants' responses. The Cohen's Kappa coefficient was 70% and disagreements were resolved by discussing and reaching consensus between the coders.

A total of 10 questions (Q) with two sub-questions were used to elicit perceptions on motivation from students including: (a) what factors academically motivated students (Q1 & Q6); (b) perception of what factors would academically motivate students (Q3, Q5, Q5a); (c)

what factors engaged students (Q4, Q9, Q9a); and (d) what factors promoted students' self-efficacy in maintaining their own academic motivation (Q2, Q7, Q8, & Q10). Teacher and administrator surveys included five questions. A question regarding students' perception of what is important in middle school was used to validate the findings obtained about the contrast between student', teachers' and administrators' perceptions of academic motivation. The surveys for teachers and administrators were ordered differently, thus, the question numbers on their surveys do not correspond to the question numbers in the student survey. Nevertheless, all the surveys explored the same concepts including observed motivational factors, perceptions of what teachers and administrators could do to motivate students, observed engagement, and students' self-efficacy in academic motivation. In addition, teachers and administrators provided more complex answers, thus, their responses were not coded exclusively, that is, one response was coded with one or more themes.

Contrast Between Participants' Perspectives

Data analyzed were organized by factual, perception, engagement, and self-efficacy questions. Factual questions were designed to obtain data about academic motivation within their current academic year. This detailed academic motivation experiences students, teachers, and administrators were having within the school year. Perception questions were designed to discover what factors are perceived to foster academic motivation. These responses were what participants believe they need in the future or what they believe would increase academic motivation in the future. Engagement questions were designed to elicit factors that engage students to want to learn and participate within the classroom. Finally, self-efficacy questions were designed to learn about what student participants are doing or could be doing to personally motivate themselves academically. Both teachers and administrators also provided data

concerning what self-efficacy steps students should be taking to academically motivate themselves.

What Motivated Students in the Past Year

Factual questions were questions designed to ask participants about what their experiences with academic motivation were within the current school year. All research participants demonstrated different opinions about what factors they felt fostered academic motivation.

Students (Q1 & Q6). On average across these two questions, 33% out of the students who responded were academically motivated by *grades* during the past year, 15% by words of *encouragement*, and 10% by *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk). Student data found that an average of 9%, a lesser percentage, were motivated by *interesting curriculum* and even lower by *access to curriculum* (6%).

Teachers (Q8 & Q10). Teachers responded to a similar question regarding their knowledge of students' academic motivators during that year (Q8 & Q10). The most common responses for teachers were *teaching methods* and *interesting curriculum*. On average, about 30% believed students were motivated by *teaching methods*, and about 31% of teachers' responses indicated that an *interesting curriculum* had motivated students in the past year. Because this school is a public school, curriculum is dictated by the district and teachers do not have authority to change it; therefore, *teaching methods* was selected to take the top position for teachers when referring to factual factors that academically motivate students. Teachers did not find *encouragement* to be a motivating factor, as it was at a low 17%, close to *access to curriculum* at 16%. Teachers also found that *intrinsic motivation* was almost non-existent in students (5%).

Administrators (Q2 & Q4). Based on two questions about factors that administrators believe academically motivated students in the past year from questions, 17% agreed with teachers, specifying *teaching methods* as a leading academic motivating factor. Administrators reported that the factor of *encouragement* (9%) motivated students. Also, based on their personal observations of students, an average of 9% believed that the source student academic motivation was *grades*.

A question which requested the opinions of students, teachers and administrators based on observations from their actual experiences yielded distinctively different responses about what motivated students. Given that these responses were based on their experiences each of these types of participants seemed to be experiencing motivation differently.

Perception About What Would Motivate Students

Students (Q3, Q5, Q5a). A large majority of students equally believed that *access to the curriculum* (29%) and *encouragement* (30%) would academically motivate them. The second question was followed by a sub-question to students requesting an elaboration on what would academically motivate them; thus, the total frequency was calculated by adding the number of responses of both of these questions together rather than separated by participant, since they are not exclusive. Unexpectedly, students did not perceive that they were academically motivated by *grades* (1%), *interesting curriculum* (2%), or *intrinsic motivation* (5%).

Teachers (Q12). About 63% of the responses indicated that teachers mostly motivate students through their *teaching methods*. Interestingly, only 30% believed that they were able to support students' motivation through *teaching methods*. Teachers also believed that *access to curriculum* (25%) would academically motivate students; however, only 16% reported *access to curriculum* was a motivating factor for students.

Administrators (Q6). Using the same question as the one used with teachers, results showed that administrators agree with teachers, in that they could support academic motivation through *teaching methods* (20%) and, in higher proportion, they also thought that *encouragement* (30%) academically motivated students. Their perception about what *teaching methods* could do to motivate students agrees with what they do; however, the same trend is not observed about *encouragement*. Although administrators believed that *encouragement* (30%) can increase academic motivation, they did not truly use *encouragement* (9%) to motivate students academically.

In response to a hypothetical question about their beliefs, students, teachers and administrators seem to agree that *access to curriculum*, *encouragement*, or *teaching methods* would be successful academic motivators for students.

Factual Questions About What Engages Students

Students (Q4, Q9, Q9a). Students' memories of being engaged in the classroom or in their work were influenced by factors such as *access to the curriculum* (14%), *intrinsic motivation* (13%), and, to a lower frequency, *grades* (11%). The second question related to engagement included a follow up sub-question that requested similar information in a different manner. This question was designed to provide participants with the opportunity to elaborate; thus, frequency of response type was used as the unit of analysis here.

About a quarter of all responses (25%) indicated that students were primarily engaged by the use of *interesting curriculum*. Both students and teachers agreed (25%) that students were engaged by an *interesting curriculum*. Similarly, students (14%) and teachers (13%) closely agreed that *access to curriculum* was an engagement factor. Their answers were distributed

across two other categories including *intrinsic motivation* (13%) and *grades* (11%), while *encouragement* (2%) did not seem to engage them.

Teachers (Q11). The engagement of students was mainly attributed to *teaching methods* (56%) and secondly by *interesting curriculum* (25%). Teachers agreed with students about *engagement* to some extent (25%).

Administrators (Q5). Administrators believed that students were mostly engaged through *teaching methods* (30%) and *access to curriculum* (20%). At a lower percentage came *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk) (10%) which was mentioned as important to student engagement.

Perception of Students' Self-Efficacy in Maintaining Their Academic Motivation

Students (Q2, Q7, Q8, Q10). *Access to curriculum* and *intrinsic motivation* seemed to be what students perceived to contribute to their self-efficacy. On average, across the four questions used to gauge students' self-efficacy perceptions, less than half of the students (41%) believed that they could maintain academic motivation by using *intrinsic motivators* (self-talk). They also considered *access to curriculum* as a self-efficacy tool (29%). Students did not use *encouragement* or *grades* to academically motivate themselves.

Teachers (Q9). Teachers, like students, most commonly believed that *intrinsic motivators* were major contributors to the self-efficacy needed for students to maintain their academic motivation (42%). *Encouragement* was less commonly mentioned as contributing to student self-efficacy (17%).

Administrators (Q3). Administrators mentioned *encouragement* and *intrinsic motivation* at equal frequency as being motivators to student self-efficacy (22%). Only 11% mentioned *grades* as a self-efficacy motivator for students.

Voices of Academic Motivation

One of the most interesting aspects of this research was hearing the participants' voices about academic motivation, engagement, support, and the way they perceive academic motivation. This section uses the statements made by participants in response to their experiences with academic motivation within the last year. Pseudonyms were used to share some of the excerpts of student, teacher, and administrator responses to maintain anonymity. Students' most commonly mentioned motivating factors are listed in Figure 4.

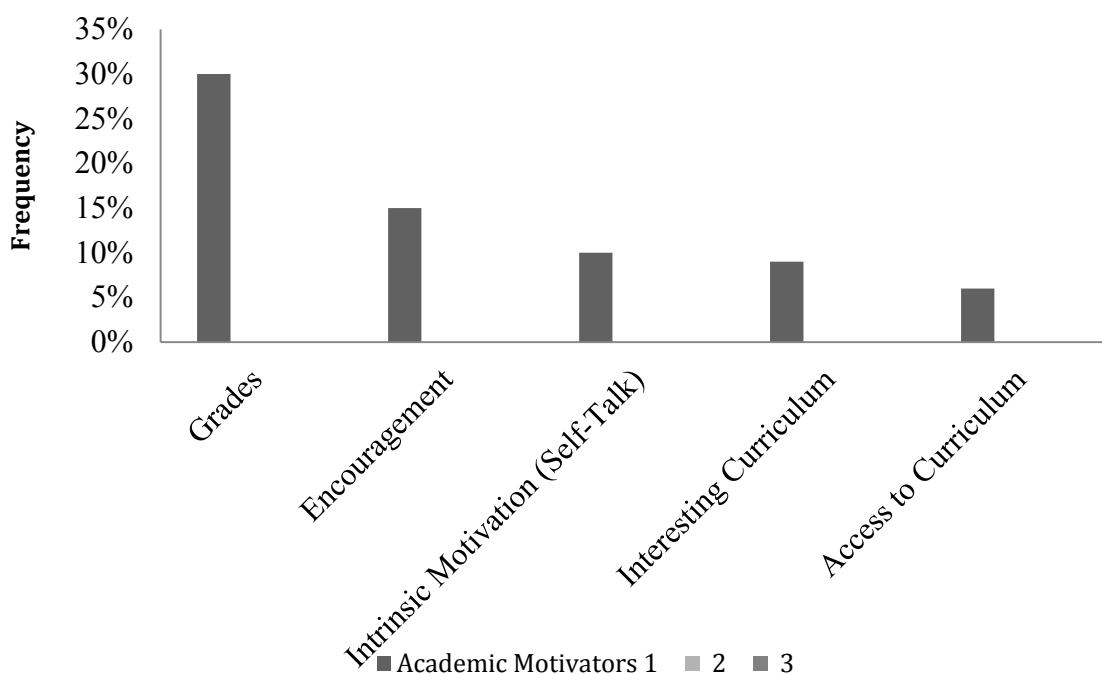


Figure 4. Student's five most commonly-mentioned academic motivators.

Leading Student Motivators

According to the data, the top three academic motivators that students found to be most effective were *grades* (33%), *encouragement* (15%), and *intrinsic motivation* (10%). At much lower percentages, came *interesting curriculum* (9%) and *access to curriculum* (6%) as described in the next sections.

Encouragement. Students' voices with regards to *encouragement* as a motivator were salient in the data collected. Students shared words used by teachers to foster academic motivation in them. They emphasized the importance of public positive encouragement in front of peers. One student, Hoseok, wrote, "One day in my s.s/l.a class, my teacher announced that I was the only one with an A. I felt very confident and wanted to be more hard-working to keep my status." Another student, Beauty, wrote, "My teachers, classmates, or friends support my academic motivation in school by telling me what I can do to reach my academic goals." It seems that students care about what teachers have to say about them, whether it is individually or through making public recognitions. It is also interesting to learn that, to students, teachers' words of *encouragement* are appreciated. This is seen in the data as students recall specific words said to them for example; Royalty wrote, "Cheering me on. Telling me if I'm driving off course."

Grades. Having high grades was motivating to students, as Samantha wrote, "get inspired in school to have good grades." Lezley wrote, "I will get better grades and will always be happy." Student data shows that grades are a very important academic motivator. Royalty wrote, "Having good grades and having a good reputation among teachers" The finding that *grades* are important to students makes sense, as it is probably the clearest display of their academic success.

Access to Curriculum. Having *access to curriculum* means students are able to complete their work all by themselves and teachers help students understand the assignment to complete it. In this research, *access to curriculum* was found to be a form of academic motivation. Students used the word 'help' to demonstrate their need to understand and access the curriculum. Phrases used by students in their responses were: (a) "Helping me do my

homework;” (b) “By helping me;” and (c) “They all help me with my assignments.” One specific example was Samantha, who wrote that, “when we did something that I did not understand my teacher helped me a lot.” Carola wrote that, “to help me in a way I understand.” Students affirmed that when teachers helped them by tutoring them, by giving them additional help in class, and/or explaining the curriculum, they were motivated to do their assignments. Students seemed to have a clear understanding of what type of help they needed, and they seemed to appreciate the extra effort that teachers made to help them in way they could understand.

Interesting Curriculum. Although the data revealed that the theme *interesting curriculum* was not mentioned as a frequent motivator (9%), participants’ voices about *interesting curriculum* should be acknowledged, as this is one way in which teachers can make a difference within the classroom context. When the curriculum was interesting students responded by being engaged and therefore, motivated to learn. John wrote, “when my teacher was “teaching me about samurais, I wanted to know a little more.” Melody wrote, “More visual and life story’s experiences to make it interesting.” Students express their appreciation of visuals and topics that they like to know more about. As a result of this being a public school, teachers have minimal control over curriculum. Furthermore, teaching experience plays a role in the teacher having skills to be creative in making the curriculum, no matter the topics, relevant to students’ lives. Teacher efficacy is another element of experience that gives teachers confidence or fear about teaching the curriculum set forth by the school district.

Teachers and Administrators

The data showed that both teachers and administrators seemed to view the motivating factor *interesting curriculum* differently, but the factor *teaching methods* similarly. Only 4% of

administrators, but 31% of teachers believed that the factor *interesting curriculum* motivated students. Both gave concrete examples about their personal experiences and observations. Both teachers (17%) and students (15%) believe that *encouragement* is a factor in increasing academic motivation. It makes sense that teachers and administrators have different perceptions about what motivates students, since their exposure to and experience with students is very different. Teachers are in the classroom with students observing students daily, while administrators have weekly observational walkthroughs into teachers' classrooms. According to this research the factual questions showed that both teachers and administrators agreed that some of the ways they have and could motivate students to learn is through *teaching methods*.

Teaching methods

When asked, administrators said that teachers motivated students through *teaching methods* (17%) and *encouragement* (9%). Administrator John wrote, "In my PLTW class, students had the opportunity to design and build their own pinewood derby cars. They took great pride in trying to create a car that was functional and fast." This activity motivated students since it was hands-on, autonomy was promoted, creativity was allowed, and the topic of cars was interesting to students.

Both teachers (56%) and administrators (30%) agreed that *engagement* occurred through creative and responsive *teaching methods*. Administrator Franco wrote that "Supporting and encouraging students continuously, establishing and maintaining high expectations, helping students set goals and supporting the attainment of those goals, differentiating instruction to ensure that it is accessible for all students." Administrator Franco mostly focused on students and how the school could provide them with an effective learning environment, one that would

enhance academic motivation. Teacher Sarah wrote, “Anything out of the ordinary and new, like adding arts to a theme,” would engage students in their learning.

Interesting curriculum

Teachers remembered that students were engaged by *interesting curriculum* (25%). Teacher Jeremy wrote, “Whenever we play music games in my class, the students are highly engaged. I believe this is because it is a highly competitive game (them against me), and they want to win for bragging rights. It is in this space that I find I am able to insert pieces of knowledge that truly stick in their brains.”

Teacher Jeremy explained how he observed his students’ interest, “This year, while reading the last page of our class novel, students were organically engaged, and interested in the learning. Afterwards they engaged in an in-depth discussion about central themes in the book.” The novel they read proved to be interesting to the students, as they were enveloped in their learning. Teacher Jacob shared, “This year, my students were academically motivated when working on their “Osmosis Egg Lab,” a lab where they had to measure the rate of diffusion and osmosis of moisture in a cell.” Students’ interest in the curriculum is seen in their engagement, as teacher Xavier wrote, “Students were highly engaged in presenting their science fair projects. They want to share what they learned with their peers.” Interesting topics of learning bring students to a state of learning. Teacher Diana’s voice was interesting to note:

Students seem to be engaged sometimes because the material is easy for them. With some students, I can see that if the material is challenging and they have accessibility to different types of texts to help them find answers/definitions/examples that seems to motivate them. I also see students who are not motivated because the topics/books seem too difficult to read/understand for them.

This quote points to an aspect of accessing curriculum. When students understand what they are being taught, they engage and become academically motivated. Teacher May added how teachers helped give students access to curriculum, “teachers make themselves available before and after school to help their students. There is also after school and lunch time tutoring.” Administrator Franco agreed, “[teachers need to be] differentiating instruction to ensure that it is accessible for all students.” By giving students access to curriculum, whether it is through tutoring, teaching methods, or other strategies, findings show that students become engaged and motivated. These reiterations of the students’, teachers’, and administrators’ voices allowed for triangulation of the voices and validated the data’s interpretations. It is interesting to see that teachers are thinking of *interesting curriculum* in a complex way that includes their role in making the curriculum interesting, as well as the subsequent impact of the learning. They are paying attention to the students’ level and the contents’ level of difficulty. This is perhaps why they differed from administrators in their order of prioritizing access to curriculum. A question to ponder on when reading this data is, does *access to curriculum* make curriculum interesting?

Summary

In summary, the research found that the most frequently mentioned academic motivators were *encouragement*, *grades*, *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk), access to curriculum, and *interesting curriculum*. According to students they were less motivated by *access to curriculum* and *interesting curriculum*. On the other hand, teachers (31%) reported that they believed students to be academically motivated by *interesting curriculum* being taught in class. Meanwhile, the most frequently mentioned academic motivator mentioned by administrators (17%) was *teaching methods*. Administrators agreed (17%) with teachers (30%) that *teaching methods* motivated students academically.

Logically it makes sense that teachers felt that *interesting curriculum* was the highest factor of academic motivation because teachers facilitate the given curriculum and have first-hand experience with students being motivated or not. Also, administrators who observe teachers focus on ‘how’ a teacher delivers the curriculum and would say *teaching methods* are the most important academic motivators. Students’ data revealed a contrast with both teachers and administrators showing that students perceived to be mostly motivated by the factors *words of encouragement* and *grades*. Each of the participants had a strong understanding of what was more relevant to their own role.

Teachers’ and administrators’ answers were not exclusively focused on the question asked. They tended to write more and to blur the distinctions between motivation and encouragement. Administrators tended to focus more in the systemic ideas of what “would” motivate, while teachers offered more concrete examples of what they have observed and experienced. It was interesting to note that only the students spoke of the role of their peers in motivating them or in contributing to their self-efficacy.

It is worth noting that the data uncovered students’ immense care about what their teachers think and say to them. Words of encouragement coming from teachers foster academic motivation. Because of the psychological and physiological developmental stages students are in, they want to know they belong to a community where they have built relationships. Students significantly care about their grades because having good grades means they are able to participate in extracurricular activities they enjoy, and they are able to make their parents proud. Students know what they need and how to obtain it. They are also active in pursuing their needs through tutoring in order to have more access to their curriculum. Teaching methods also matter to students because they help in understanding and accessing the curriculum. It would be useful

for the voices of students to be responded to by appropriate teacher and administrator action, as this is likely to lead to student appreciation about their words being heard and is likely to nurture greater student motivation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This chapter will give a summary of the current research which investigated the factors that increase academic motivation at the middle school level, the function of the responsive teacher, and student, teacher, and administrator voices. Chapter 4 provided findings and analysis of the research data collected. This chapter will provide a summary of the study, implications of findings, interpretations of teacher and administrator findings, implications for teachers, discussion on limitations, and future direction.

Summary of the Study

This chapter begins with a summary of the structure and purpose of the study and is followed by key findings identifying factors that foster academic motivation in the middle school student. This study included the perceptions on academic motivation of 140 middle school students, 16 middle school teachers, 2 administrators and 3 special projects teachers in a large, low-socio economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California. Participants were given a survey in which they wrote about their experiences with academic motivation by answering questions about the topic which specifically focused on what they perceive and what they have personally experienced. The survey for students included ten questions with two sub questions, which was used: to gather information about academic motivation experienced that year; to learn about what engages student learning; to learn about the perceptions of factors that ‘could’ academically motivate students; and to discover students’ self-efficacy in maintaining their own academic motivation. In addition, one question focused on helping the researcher contrast students’, teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of academic motivation, which added validity to the study.

Questions included in this study investigated what students perceive and what they believe would increase academic motivation. The study found additional support for Eccles et al.'s (1991b) discussions on the person-environment fit theory which can predict low academic motivation in middle school students. The study also found similarities with a previous study done by Kiefer et al., (2014) which researched academic motivation at the middle school level. Academic motivation at the middle school level needs to be supported, encouraged, and enhanced. Following are the research questions answered by the data:

Research Questions

1. In what ways do teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation at a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California?
2. What factors supported students' academic motivation?
3. What factors might enhance students' academic motivation according to the students' perceptions?

Research Findings

The study included survey questions that were categorized as follows: factual, perceived, engagement, and self-efficacy. Although the factual questions answered by teachers showed that they experienced the theme *interesting curriculum* as the top academic motivating factor for students, as teachers, they do not have the freedom to change curriculum. They may only use supplemental material, provided by the district, to meet their students' needs. The researcher focused on the second academic motivating factor for teachers which was *teaching methods*. The first research question answered by this study's data is listed below:

In what ways do teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation at a large, low socio-economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern California?

By promoting student engagement through the use of responsive teaching methods, teachers were able to motivate students academically. When teachers engaged students in their learning, they had the potential to impact students' grades and supported them academically. Teachers' responses reflect their awareness that through the use of responsive *teaching methods* and *interesting curriculum*, they academically motivated students to be engaged. Teachers were also aware of the fact that giving students *access to the curriculum* through teaching methods engaged and motivated students. Responsive teaching methods gave students access to curriculum and made the curriculum interesting. At a lower percentage, teachers felt that their words of *encouragement* motivated students academically.

Students identified *grades* and teachers' *encouragement* as key academic motivational factors. Mauro (2014) found that an emotionally supportive environment (words of encouragement) fosters student engagement, and as a result of being engaged, it enhances academic motivation. Previous studies found that words of *encouragement* from teachers provide social-emotional support and self-worth in students (Tomlinson, 2013b). Teachers contribute directly to students' academic motivation by encouraging students with positive words, and indirectly helping them earn good grades by facilitating access to curriculum.

Administrators reported their agreement with teachers. They explained that teachers could support academic motivation in middle school classrooms through *teaching methods*. Administrators observed the use of a variety of responsive teaching methods which allowed students to collaborate in groups, interact with each other, and create hands-on projects. The use of responsive teaching methods increased student participation as it gave them greater access to the curriculum, promoted high levels of engagement, and fostered academic motivation. Studies found that academic motivation is fostered by a learning environment which promotes choice,

responsibility, and opportunities (Tomlinson, 2014b; Mauro, 2014). The administrators' perceptions about teaching methods indirectly relate to students' access to the curriculum. *Teaching methods* was the tool that gave students access to the curriculum as the curriculum was broken down in creative ways and students were able to manipulate the curriculum through projects and group problem-solving. Administrators agreed with students about words of *encouragement* being a factor that academically motivated them. At a lower percentage, administrators felt that *grades* were also motivating factors. Overall, *teaching methods* and words of *encouragement* support students' academic motivation most frequently in the view of administrators.

Link to Previous Research

Eccles et al.'s (1991b) stage-environment fit theory posits that the type of learning context students find themselves in must match their developmental level. Findings in this research showed that the learning environment provided to the students fit because it met students' psychological, emotional, and physiological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Responsive teaching methods which teachers implemented provided students with an appropriate and fitting environment, one in which students were able to increase their academic motivation. Students stated that they were bored with the curriculum, and did not understand it; however, when teachers modified their learning environment through the use of responsive teaching methods, involving hands-on and collaborative activities with their peers, students were engaged and motivated to learn. *Teaching methods* gave students access to curriculum. Student findings showed that *access to curriculum* was one of the motivating factors for participating students.

The second study question this research answered was:

What factors supported students' academic motivation?

According to students' factual responses, the data found that the factors that increase academic motivation in students are *grades*, *encouragement*, and *intrinsic motivation*. As a result of students being more extrinsically motivated, *grades* are their number one academic motivator. Second factor that motivated students is words of *encouragement*. Teachers' words and stories were found to make a significant impact on students' motivation. The data showed students intrinsically motivated themselves with positive self-talk.

Grades

Student data showed that *grades* were essential to students' middle school academic progression. Studying, getting tutoring, and completing tests are all very important elements to students in middle school. They acknowledged that the assignments due and submitted affected their grades, therefore they motivated themselves to do it. Students placed great value on grades, and many said the most important thing in middle school was their grades. *Grades* as an academic motivating factor is not surprising as students' focus is on what people outside of them expect of them (Eccles et al., 1991a). In this case high grades may be expected of them by teachers and parents.

Encouragement

Encouragement or words of encouragement are at the top of student academic motivation, according to students. This research found what Tomlinson (2013b) affirms, a teacher's affirmation of a student's work is powerful. Students care about what their teachers say to them, and they are attentive to every word spoken by their teachers. Encouraging words like, "you're so smart," or "you can do it," and "don't give up," are all words that students

perceive to foster academic motivation in them. Students wrote about words that were said to them years ago, as well as within the current year.

Intrinsic motivation

Students believed that their *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk) was one of the most important factors that sustained and fostered their academic motivation. They used positive self-talk, reminding themselves that they can do it (i.e... the assignment, passing the tests, other academic endeavor). They also reminded themselves that having good grades would help them achieve their future goals of graduating, playing sports, attending college, or making their family happy and proud. Additionally, their self-talk included complimenting themselves on who they are, for example, “I am smart, strong, and have goals that I have to reach.” According to Karageorghis and Terry (2011) people who speak to themselves to motivate themselves are at their highest level of intrinsic motivation. They further state that positive talk is the one strategy that has been most tested among sports psychology interventions (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011). It is important to note this strategy is being used by middle school students who want to do their best in school.

Link to Previous Research

When students transition into the middle school environment they are primarily extrinsically motivated, with very low levels of intrinsic motivation (Eccles, Buchanan, Flanagan, Fuligni, Midgley, & Yee, 1991a). This study found that about 10% of student participants reported they were academically motivated by *intrinsic motivation*. Given that intrinsic motivation depends on a certain level of autonomy afforded them, and these students are not allowed much autonomy, the low percentage may reflect this. Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory affirms that the three psychological needs students have are

relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Lessons which included interaction, collaboration, and opportunities to choose, lead, and prove one's ability to create or build are important, as they fulfill the need for student relatedness, competence, and autonomy. When students were engaged in their learning then, their grades were impacted in a positive manner. In addition, when teachers take the time to talk to their students and show care they strengthen students' sense of belonging, which leads to elevated academic motivation (Kiefer et al., 2014). Finding a community in which to belong is something students seek at this age (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

The third study question this research answered was:

What factors might enhance students' academic motivation according to the students' perceptions?

According to students' perspectives, teachers academically motivated them by using *words of encouragement* and by providing *access to curriculum*. Students' perceptions of ways of increasing motivation are aligned to reported practices of responsive teachers. Students also reported having *self-efficacy* strategies to academically motivate themselves.

Encouragement

The top factor that might enhance students' academic motivation according to students' perception was *encouragement*. Students appreciated when teachers told them that they were doing great, cheering them on, and encouraging them to keep on going. This finding supports previous research that responsive teachers who take the time to point out what the good students are doing or take the time to talk about how their grades and their learning affects their future, foster academic motivation in students (Tomlinson, 2003). Students felt cared for when teachers took the time to talk to them about their academic work, their lives, and/or their future. Students expressed their wish for adults and teachers, alike, to discuss about what their present choices

can cause in the future. The findings also showed that students felt a connection and bond when teachers spoke to them about their prospective endeavors and the consequences of their actions. Connections build relationships and in Kiefer et al.'s (2014) study, teacher-student relationships were found to be effective in fostering academic motivation.

Access to Curriculum

Having *access to the curriculum*, understanding assignments, and completing their work was very important to students. They reported that having *access to the curriculum* or getting help to understanding it would be academically motivating to them. This finding matched the reported data that *grades* were a top academic motivating factor for students. Students seemed to make an implicit connection between the strategies teachers use and their own understanding. Both of which impacted their self-efficacy and grades. Being able to understand the curriculum allowed students to complete the given assignments. Thus, students perform better when they have an increase in confidence about their abilities (self-efficacy) in the classroom.

Self-Efficacy

Interestingly when students were asked about what they believe they do to academically motivate themselves, the most frequently reported practice was *intrinsic motivation* (self-talk), followed by having *access to curriculum*. They perceive that when they self-talk themselves into going to tutoring and seeking help, they get greater access to the curriculum, which then motivates them academically. Middle school students use the highest form of intrinsic motivation, self-talk, which goes beyond the realm of education. Sports psychologists teach and train their players to use self-talk for better performance and increased motivation (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011). Students spoke about finding their own positive thinking strategies, telling themselves encouraging words, and reminding themselves of their future and their future goals.

Although this study revealed that middle school students mostly depended on external factors for academic motivation, students also affirmed that they used intrinsic motivational factors such as self-talk, which is something they can do for themselves. Thus, they identified their self-agency as learners. This form of learning strategy was identified by Ryan and Deci (2000) as a motivator in their self-determination theory. This type of motivator fosters autonomy by providing decision-making in the process of learning. The students' interest in *access to curriculum* and their obvious understanding between curriculum learning and grades confirm their need for autonomy. An autonomous learning environment is fit to the middle school student's developmental stage. Furthermore, Eccles' stage-environment fit theory states that an environment that responds to the changes that the middle school student needs at this developmental stage in growth, such as, promoting autonomy, leadership opportunities, and self-direction, allows the middle school student to engage in their own learning and promotes positive outcomes in academic motivation (Eccles et al., 1991b; Gutman & Eccles, 2007).

Implications of Findings

The theories examined in this dissertation included Eccles' person-environment fit theory, stage-environment fit theory, Tomlinson's responsive teaching theory, and Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory. When these theories are put into practice, they provide the optimum learning environment for middle school students. The findings from this research supported the tenets of Eccles' person-environment fit theory (1991b) about academic motivation. The theory asserts that the middle school student needs a balanced amount of control and autonomy. When students were treated as leaders and given a level of autonomy in group settings that allowed them to make decisions, they were engaged and academically motivated. The responsive teacher used appropriate teaching methods to foster academic

motivation and gave students the opportunity to grow, instead of allowing cognitive digression by controlling the learning environment. The person-environment fit theory relates to how much control a teacher places on a middle school student and how much autonomy is afforded. The responsive teacher implements autonomy effectively to produce an environment rich in opportunities to grow. Collaborative grouping, interactive discussions, and hands-on teaching methods, all foster an adequate level of control over the middle school student.

Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, and Buchanan's (1993a) stage-environment fit theory asserts that the learning environment surrounding a middle school student must be fit to the developmental level the student is experiencing. At this level, the student needs more autonomy, in the classroom there tends to be a decrease of teacher efficacy, teacher-student relationships are non-existent, and the gifted middle school students tend to be neglected (Eccles et al., 1993a). The responsive teacher implements teaching methods that allow students to solve problems, in order to have increased autonomy and creativity, all of which lead to an increased academic motivation. Tomlinson's responsive teaching theory provides guidance for teachers to connect, bond, care, reach out, and provide adequate pedagogy to students for learning at the middle school level. The responsive teacher meets students' needs as she encourages students, implements group activities that are tactile, promotes group discussions, and offers opportunities for interaction when teaching a lesson. Teachers who become responsive by using *teaching methods* that meet the learning needs of the middle school students show care and concern and create opportunities to encourage students with their positive words. The research findings support this, as data from both teachers and administrators showed that *teaching methods* were a top motivating factor.

Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2000) encourages teachers to provide a learning context that allows experiences of competence, connectedness, and autonomy. The findings in this study confirmed that when students experience learning as challenging, relational, and autonomous, their engagement and academic motivation increased.

Middle school teachers, who practice responsive teaching and learn about the effects of stage-environment theory and person-environment theory, would gain a new understanding of the type of environment they can create to increase academic motivation. Middle school teachers have much more power over students' academic motivation. Their words can show care and concern for the middle school student and demonstrate genuine bonding, all of which increase academic motivation. The data from this research found that students believe words of *encouragement* are their number one factor for academic motivation. Students care and listen to what teachers say and do in their class. Within an environment that is fit for the students' developmental level students are able to experience and develop competence, connectedness, and autonomy, which are the basic psychological needs to enhance academic motivation according to Ryan and Deci (2000).

The middle school learning environment needs to be rich with *encouragement*, *access to curriculum*, and responsive *teaching methods*. This research reported that students are mostly extrinsically motivated by *encouragement*, *grades*, and *access to the curriculum*. It also identified self-talk as an intrinsic motivator that students can control. Through words of *encouragement* teachers are able to focus on students' academic motivation and stimulate their interest in their work. In addition, the data showed that students believed *access to curriculum* was a motivating factor for them.

The findings in this study confirmed that middle school students primarily depend on extrinsic motivation to achieve academic motivation. Students who are verbally encouraged by their teachers about their learning, or who receive a public announcement of their achievements to the class, are more academically motivated than those students who are not complimented or encouraged. Students want to hear from their teacher that they are able to complete the task at hand, as this demonstrates that their teacher believes in them. According to student participants, *encouragement* is a top factor of academic motivation. Therefore, when teachers say to them, “you got this!” or “you can do this!” the data in this research found this form of encouragement fosters academic motivation in the middle school student. The responsive teachers who encouraged their students caused the students to feel cared for and to experience a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging produces a sense of connectedness to the school. Kiefer et al., (2014) found that students who feel connected to their school perceive that they have high quality relationships with adults at the school. Research has also found that quality student-teacher relationships which stem from connections promote engagement and learning (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Reyes et al., 2012).

Responsive teachers implement teaching methods that are tactile, collaborative, and creative. By providing such a developmentally fit learning environment, students will have opportunities to demonstrate their competence and autonomy. The implementation of responsive teaching methods gives students access to the curriculum, which then directly affects students’ grades. Earning good grades is an incredibly important aspect of the middle school students’ lives because the task is motivated by external factors. External factors include making parents and teachers proud, receiving public recognition, and earning privileges like playing sports.

Interpretation of Teacher and Administrator Findings

Teachers and administrators indicated students were academically motivated when the classroom lesson was rich with a variety of tactile, collaborative working methods, which gave students access to the curriculum and made topics being taught interesting to them. Teachers need to allow collaborative group work, rich with opportunities to lead, plan, organize, create, build, solve, and choose.

There is a gap between what students know they need and what teachers believe they need. The data found students perceive they need more words of *encouragement*, while teachers perceive students need more implementation of interactive responsive *teaching methods*. There is also a disagreement about what is the most important factor of academic motivation between students, teachers, and administrators. Nevertheless, the study showed students are asking for responsive teaching methods in order to access curriculum, which in turn will help them earn high grades.

Interestingly, administrators agree with students that they need more words of *encouragement*. Teachers perceive that students seldom need words of *encouragement* (0%) to be academically motivated. Such a disposition of unawareness should prompt teachers to acknowledge, recognize, learn, and apply theories like the stage-environment fit and person-environment fit. Knowing what middle school students need to academically motivate them can make the difference between student cognitive maturity and cognitive digression. Teachers hold this power.

Implications for Teachers

There are a number of changes teachers can make to see an increase in academic motivation in their students based on the study's findings. First, although both teachers and

administrators agreed to some extent that academic motivation was influenced by the topic of interest being taught, or the curriculum, within the public-school system there is little room for change in this area. The responsive teacher must take up the challenge of connecting any topic to the middle school students' lives; teacher efficacy and adequate professional development play a role in making this possible. Second, since both administrators and teachers agreed that *teaching methods* foster academic motivation, teachers need to implement more collaborative, interactive, and hands-on activities into their lessons in order to increase academic motivation. Creating an environment where students have opportunities to choose, lead, create, and problem-solve is key to increasing academic motivation. Third, teachers need to use more words of *encouragement* if they want their students to be academically motivated in their classes. Findings in this study showed that students recall specific positive encouraging words teachers spoke to them at one point in their lives. Students care about their teacher's words and will be positively or negatively impacted by them.

This research opens up a question that warrants further investigation: Are students academically self-motivated by grades or are they motivated because of the consequences that may follow if bad grades are earned? Consequences such as losing the chance to play sports, losing access to their cell phone, or losing time to play video games can all be indirect motivators.

Discussion on Limitations of Study

One limitation the study had was a low number of participants in the study. Educators need to hear more student voices to gain a more comprehensive view of how to increase academic motivation at the middle school level. Another limitation was the location. The study only included one large, low-socio economic, and ethnically diverse middle school in Southern

California. More schools covering broader demographics from all over the nation would provide a clearer perspective of the middle school student.

Finally, the study was done in a public-school setting. As a result of this being a public school under state management, district administration controls curriculum, schedules, and other significant school-level factors that can affect motivation. This control may have affected the data, as responsive teachers may not have the liberty or time to act on their responsiveness, since most aspects of the curriculum are dictated and monitored.

Future Directions

Future research should include a more in-depth study on student voices about academic motivation. Middle school educators have a responsibility to our society and our children, to give every middle school student the opportunity to become all they can become in order to positively impact our world and society. In this 21st Century the middle school student's voice needs to be understood. Studies discussing students abound. However, studies with students' actual voices are missing within the educational research community. More studies allowing middle school students to speak out their perceptions about the factors that can increase their academic motivation and about the factors that factually increase their academic motivation need to be performed all over the world. Middle school students' academic motivation is a complex phenomenon. Researchers need to delve into the minds of the students to meet the needs they have at this challenging developmental stage and be able provide the ultimate learning environment, which can predict a student's future success or failure.

Furthermore, middle school administrators and teachers need to examine the voices of their students thoroughly and listen to their needs. Careful consideration should be allotted to these findings as academic motivation is at the core of learning and higher test scores. Higher

test score boost student confidence and self-efficacy. Confidence and self-efficacy give the student more academic opportunities because they would then qualify to experience more complex sciences and literature courses offered at the school. More complex classes equip students with experience to discover their own future endeavors. Responsive teachers who respond to students' needs at deeper levels, create bonds and form a connection that middle school students need to endure the physiological, psychological, and socio-emotional challenges they face every day in their school environment.

The focus of middle school educators at this stage should be placed on encouraging students and creating a developmentally-fit learning environment (Eccles et al., 1991a). A developmentally-fit learning context will motivate students to become engaged because they will have access to the curriculum, which will, in turn, allow them to complete their work and earn good grades. By earning good grades students build self-efficacy, leading to a cycle of academic achievement that will produce fulfilled and productive members of society.

School districts may consider providing professional developments that will educate teachers on the person-environment fit and the stage-environment fit theories. By providing this on students' psychological socio-emotional state of being, will support teachers by helping them be better equipped to teach middle school students. This training would also increase teacher efficacy. Finally, as an essential step for the benefit of the students, administrators and district members need to acknowledge the power teachers have within the classroom. Acknowledge the power by giving teachers the freedom to implement strategies teachers' see fit for their students. Also provide teacher-efficacy professional developments that will equip teachers with awareness of the environment they are walking into. When given the proper training, middle school teachers are incredible individuals who can and will make a difference in a middle school

student's lives and educational careers. Teachers also need to be given the time and opportunity to be responsive to meet the needs of middle school students. Training, value, and opportunities may create the type of teacher students need at this age.

In conclusion, providing the middle school teacher with trust, will allow them to reach, to connect, and to bond with their students in ways that will dramatically increase academic motivation.

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Appendix A

Student Frequency of Themes Per Question

Table A1

Frequency of Themes per Question

| Question (Q) | Intrinsic Motivation (IM) | Access to Curriculum (A) | Encouragement (E) | Grades (GR) | Interesting Curriculum (I) |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Tell me about your motivation in your academic classes this year | 7.5% | 4.5% | 17.3% | 35.3% | 5.3% |
| 2. What would you say might help us increase your academic motivation at school? | 32.8% | 15.7% | 11.9% | 3.7% | 3.7% |
| 3. In what ways do your teachers, classmates or friends help support your academic motivation in school? | 3.7% | 34.3% | 43.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 4. Talk to me about a time this past year when you were highly engaged/not engaged in a class. What would have helped you be more interested in class? | 11.5% | 12.2% | 3.1% | 3.1% | 31.3% |
| 5. In what ways can your teachers, classmates or friends support your academic motivation? | 4.5% | 45.0% | 31.0% | 1.5% | 0.7% |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 5a. Is there anything more you would like to add that would help me better understand what influences your academic motivation at your middle school? | 6.0% | 7.0% | 15.0% | 1.5% | 6.0% |
| 6. Tell me about a time when you were academically motivated this year? | 11.9% | 7.5% | 12.6% | 31.3% | 11.9% |
| 7. In what ways can you maintain/increase your academic motivation in school? | 49.2% | 23.5% | 6.1% | 5.3% | 0.8% |
| 8. In what ways do you support your academic motivation in school? | 49.2% | 26.9% | 0.8% | 9.2% | 0.0% |
| 9. Talk to me about a time this past year when you were highly engaged/not engaged in coursework? | 8.0% | 17.0% | 3.0% | 12.0% | 25.0% |
| 9a. Why were you highly engaged/not engaged? | 19.0% | 12.0% | 0.0% | 17.0% | 19.0% |
| 10. In what ways can you support your academic motivation? | 31.5% | 48.4% | 0.0% | 7.3% | 0.0% |

Appendix B

Teacher Frequency of Themes Per Question

Table B1

Frequency of Themes per Teacher Question

| Question (Q) | Teaching Methods (TM) | Interesting Curriculum (IC) | Encouragement (E) | Intrinsic Motivation (IM) | Access To Curriculum (I) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8. Tell me about a time when you felt students were academically motivated this year? | 18.18% | 54.54% | 0.0% | 9.09% | 0.0% |
| 9. In what ways can students maintain/ increase their academic motivation in school? | 8.33% | 8.33% | 16.60% | 41.7% | 8.33% |
| 10. In what ways do teachers, support student academic motivation in school? | 41.7% | 8.33% | 33.33% | 0.0% | 25.0% |
| 11. Talk to me about a time this past year when students were highly engaged/not engaged in a class. Why were they highly engaged/ not engaged? | 56.5% | 25.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 12.5% |
| 12. In what ways can teachers/ students support students' academic motivation? | 63.0% | 12.50% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 25.0% |

Appendix C

Administrator Frequency of Themes Per Question

Table C1

Frequency of Themes per Administrator Question

| Question (Q) | Teaching Methods (TM) | Interesting Curriculum (IC) | Grades (G) | Encouragement (E) | Intrinsic Motivation (IM) | Access To Curriculum (I) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2. Tell me about a time when you felt students were academically motivated this year? | 16.66% | 8.3% | 8.3% | 8.3% | 8.3% | 0.0% |
| 3. In what ways can students maintain/ increase their academic motivation in school? | 0.0% | 0.0% | 11.0% | 22.0% | 22.0% | 0.0% |
| 4. In what ways do leaders/ teachers, support student academic motivation in school? | 18.18% | 0.0% | 9.09% | 18.18% | 0.0% | 9.09% |
| 5. Talk to me about a time this past year when you witnessed students were highly engaged/not engaged in a coursework. Why were they highly engaged/ not engaged? | 30.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 10.0% | 20.0% |
| 6. In what ways can school leaders/ teachers support students' academic motivation? | 20.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 30.0% | 0.0% | 10.0% |

Appendix D

Student Participant Demographics

Table D1

Student Participant Demographics

| Gender | Grades | Age | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Female = 65% | 6 = 25 | 11 = 17.99% | White = 0.72% |
| Male = 35% | 7 = 56 | 12 = 41.01% | African American = 20.14% |
| | 8 = 59 | 13 = 26.62% | Hispanic = 57.55% |
| | | 14 = 14.39% | Asian = 2.16% |
| | | No Response = 0.71% | Pacific Islander = 2.88% |
| | | | Other = 16.55% |

Appendix E

Teacher Participant Demographics

Table E1

Student Participant Demographics

| Gender | Grade | Subject | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Female = 60% | 6 = 12.50% | Math = 37.50% | White = 33.33% |
| Male = 40% | 7 = 6.25% | LA/History = 6.25% | African American = 13.33% |
| | 8 = 37.50% | Science = 18.75% | Hispanic = 33.33% |
| | 6-8 = 43.75% | Art = 12.50% | Other = 20.00% |
| | | Other = 12.50% | |
| | | Special Ed = 12.50% | |

Appendix F

Administrator Participant Demographics

Table F1

Administrator Participants' Demographics

| Pseudonym | Title | Ethnicity | Gender |
|-------------|------------------|-----------|--------|
| Jane | Special Projects | White | F |
| Ok(Oscar) | Administrator | Other | M |
| Franco | Special Projects | Hispanic | F |
| John | Administrator | Hispanic | M |
| PVMS(Peter) | Special Projects | White | M |

Appendix G
Student Participant Survey

Table G1

Student Participant Survey

| Question Number | Question |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Tell me about your motivation in your academic classes this year. |
| 2 | What would you say might help to increase your academic motivation in school? |
| 3 | In what ways do your teachers, classmates, or friends help support your academic motivation in school? |
| 4 | Talk about a time this past year when you were highly engaged/not engaged in a class. |
| 4a | What would have helped you to be more interested in the class? |
| 5 | In what ways can teachers, classmates, or friends help support your academic motivation? |
| 6 | Tell me about a time when YOU were academically motivated this year. |
| 7 | In what ways can YOU maintain/increase YOUR academic motivation in school? |
| 8 | In what ways do YOU support YOUR academic motivation in school? |
| 9 | Talk to me about a time this past year when YOU were highly engaged/not engaged in coursework. |
| 9a | Why were YOU highly engaged/not engaged? |
| 10 | In what ways can YOU support YOUR academic motivation? |

Note. Reprinted from “The Role of Responsive Teacher Practices in Supporting Academic Motivation at the Middle Level,” by Kiefer, S. M., Ellerbrock, C., & Alley, K., 2014, *RMLE Online*, 38, 1.

Appendix H

Student Self-Efficacy Survey Section

Table H1

Student Self-Efficacy Survey

| Question Number | Question |
|-----------------|--|
| 6 | Tell me about a time when YOU were academically motivated this year. |
| 7 | In what ways can YOU maintain/increase YOUR academic motivation in school? |
| 8 | In what ways do YOU support YOUR academic motivation in school? |
| 9 | Talk to me about a time this past year when YOU were highly engaged/not engaged in coursework. |
| 9a | Why were YOU highly engaged/not engaged? |
| 10 | In what ways can YOU support YOUR academic motivation? |

Note. Reprinted and modified from “The Role of Responsive Teacher Practices in Supporting Academic Motivation at the Middle Level,” by Kiefer, S. M., Ellerbrock, C., & Alley, K., 2014, *RMLE Online*, 38, 1

Appendix I

Teacher Participant Survey

Teacher I1

Teacher Participant Survey

| Question Number | Question |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | What does it mean for students be motivated? |
| 2 | What does it mean for students to be academically motivated at your school? |
| 3 | Tell me about a time when you feel students were academically motivated this year. |
| 4 | In what ways can students maintain/increase their academic motivation in school? |
| 5 | In what ways do teachers support student academic motivation in school? |
| 6 | Talk to me about a time this past year when students were highly engaged/not engaged in your class? |
| 7 | Why students were highly engaged/not engaged? |
| 8 | In what ways can teachers/students support student academic motivation? |
| 9 | Is there anything else you would like to share to help me better understand what influences student academic motivation at your middle school? |

Note. Reprinted from “The Role of Responsive Teacher Practices in Supporting Academic Motivation at the Middle Level,” by Kiefer, S. M., Ellerbrock, C., & Alley, K., 2014, *RMLE Online*, 38, 1.

Appendix J

Administrator Participant Survey

Teacher J1

Administrator Survey

| Question Number | Question |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | What does it mean for students be motivated? |
| 2 | What does it mean for students to be academically motivated at your school? |
| 3 | Tell me about a time when you felt students were academically motivated this year. |
| 4 | In what ways can students maintain/increase their academic motivation in school? |
| 5 | In what ways do leaders/teachers support student academic motivation in school? |
| 6 | Talk to me about a time this past year when you witnessed students highly engaged/not engaged in coursework. |
| 7 | Why were students highly engaged/not engaged? |
| 8 | In what ways can teachers/students support student academic motivation? |
| 9 | Is there anything else you would like to share to help me better understand what influences student academic motivation at your middle school? |

Note. Reprinted from “The Role of Responsive Teacher Practices in Supporting Academic Motivation at the Middle Level,” by Kiefer, S. M., Ellerbrock, C., & Alley, K., 2014, *RMLE Online*, 38, 1.

Appendix K

Data Analysis Sample Chart

| Excerpts | Code Name | Code i |
|--|------------------------|--------|
| What would you say might help to increase your academic motivation in school? | | |
| I would say, adults at school, and home should put more effort to helping us students see the bigger, brighter future, even though the students don't really have a dream. | encouragement | E |
| My classmates help me understand a subject in a way where I don't feel dumb but want to find out more | encouragement | E |
| fun activities like piano, art, dance | interesting curriculum | I |
| What would might help me increase my academic motivation is help from students, friends,family,etc. | encouragement | E |
| What would help me increase my academic motivation is that there is no stress about it and that you don't have to work extremely hard to finish your homework | access to curriculum | A |
| to try harder in school and to do well in classes and get tutoring to help me | Access to curriculum | A |
| teachers who are easy to talk to and make you feel comfortable | relationship (other) | R |
| to offer of a reward or something of that sort | reward (other) | W |
| If we get a uniform day off | reward (other) | W |

Appendix L

IRB Approved Email

Form C: Dissertation Committee Assignment

Student Name: **SOFIA KIND**E#: **E 00211733**Date: **1/27/2017**

Title of Preliminary Dissertation Proposal:

Academic Motivation at the Middle School Level and the Function of the Responsive Teacher

The following committee has been assigned to administer your oral defense of the dissertation proposal and to supervise the dissertation.

Blanca Quiroz, PhD
Committee Chair (Print)

Blanca Quiroz
Signature

Cheryl E. Williams
Committee Member (Print)

Cheryl Williams
Signature

Kellie Albrecht
Committee Member (Print)

Kellie Albrecht
Signature

Please contact each member to inform him/her of their membership on your dissertation committee and to secure their respective signatures to verify their willingness to serve on your committee.

Sofia Kind
Signature of Student

1/27/2017
Date

For Doctoral Program Office:

Approved by: _____

Date: _____

