

David C. Virtue, Ph.D., Editor
University of South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina

2014 • Volume 38 • Number 1

ISSN 1940-4476

The Role of Responsive Teacher Practices in Supporting Academic Motivation at the Middle Level*

Sarah M. Kiefer, Ph.D.
University of South Florida

Cheryl Ellerbrock, Ph.D.
University of South Florida

Kathleen Alley, Ph.D.
Mississippi State University

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to investigate the ways teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation in one large, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. Data included individual interviews of 24 participants (18 students, 5 teachers, and 1 middle school assistant principal). Findings suggested that the following may support student academic motivation: teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations, and instructional practices responsive to students' basic and developmental needs. Further, the potential for educators to meet students' needs and support their motivation may be maximized when such expectations and instructional practices are implemented within the context of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Drawing on the perspectives of both students and educators, these findings extend current research on academic motivation at the middle level by capturing the complexity of the phenomenon. An implication for educators is to understand the ways all three practices may help foster an environment responsive to students' needs and support motivation. Findings inform middle level educational research and practice, especially in urban, ethnically diverse middle schools.

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, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2006). Teachers play a vital role in supporting young adolescents' academic motivation (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Schmakiel, 2008) and in fostering responsive middle level schools (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Hughes & Chen, 2011). According to *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, successful middle level schools have teachers who value young adolescents, who engage them in active, purposeful learning, and who challenge them by holding high expectations (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). However, many young adolescents do not experience such responsive teaching practices, and this may result in a mismatch between students' school experiences and their basic and developmental needs (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). This mismatch may lead to declines in academic motivation, especially in urban, ethnically diverse school contexts (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013).

* Accepted under the editorship of Dan Bauer and Joanne Previts.

Although researchers have investigated the ways teachers support student academic motivation using quantitative methods (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009), some have called for more qualitative work that includes multiple participants' perspectives to best capture the complexities of student motivation in school (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Kaplan, Katz, & Flum, 2012; Schmakel, 2008). Additionally, student academic motivation in urban, ethnically diverse school contexts has been under-examined, especially at the middle level (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Matsumura, Slater, & Crosson, 2008). The current study used a qualitative case study approach to address these limitations and extend research on motivation by listening to the voices of students and educators in a large, urban, ethnically diverse middle level school.

Review of Literature

Supporting Motivation by Meeting Basic and Developmental Needs

Together, stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) provide an integrated framework for understanding how motivation may be enhanced when young adolescents' basic and developmental needs are met within a responsive school context. Stage-environment fit theory posits that educators foster a responsive environment when they provide a match between students' developmental needs and the opportunities afforded within the classroom and school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Eccles et al., 1993). 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 the students mature. (pp. 125–126)

Eccles and associates' seminal work on stage-environment fit theory suggests that students exhibit a decline in motivation and engagement when they experience a mismatch between their desires and the opportunities they have to fulfill those desires within the classroom and school contexts (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993). Teachers can foster a responsive learning environment that supports

adolescents' evolving cognitive, social, personal, and emotional needs by providing increasingly sophisticated and challenging curriculum, active and relevant instruction, high-quality relationships characterized by care and trust, and opportunities for exploration (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2010).

Self-determination theory proposes that individuals have basic psychological needs for (a) competence, or a sense of efficacy; (b) autonomy, or a sense of personal control and direction; and (c) relatedness, or a sense of connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Meeting these basic needs supports motivation and high-quality learning (Deci et al., 1991; McHugh et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2011) and may vary depending on the extent these needs are fulfilled within the context of school (Deci et al., 1991). Teachers can provide young adolescents with opportunities to “develop their cognitive abilities and competence, to gain independence and autonomy, and to connect positively with adults and peers” (Meece, 2003, p. 112).

Teacher Practices That Support Young Adolescent Motivation

Teachers may support students' needs and their motivation in school through their teaching practices (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Eccles, 2004; McHugh et al., 2013; Meece, 2003). Some of the ways teachers can take into consideration young adolescents' unique characteristics include engaging in practices that promote respectful and caring relationships, encouraging and challenging students, and implementing authentic learning activities (APA Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs [APA], 1997; Meece, Herman, & McCombs, 2003). However, teacher practices do not always reflect the increasing cognitive sophistication, changing relationships with non-parental adults, and dynamic motivational needs of young adolescents (Murray, 2009). Further, many students experience teacher-student relationships based on control rather than mutual trust and encounter schoolwork that lacks challenge, relevance, and authenticity (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Responsive teaching begins with the promotion of teacher-student relationships grounded in care and connectedness (Davis, 2003; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Noddings, 2005; Roorda et al., 2011). Middle level students view teachers as “caring” if they model caring behaviors, including connecting with students by getting to know them personally; value and model empathy in interactions with students; treat

students with respect, fostering a socially supportive classroom environment; and provide constructive feedback and support (Cushman & Rogers, 2008; Wentzel, 1997).

An important reason youth may be motivated to learn and experience success in school is teacher care (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Schmakel, 2008; Wentzel, 1997), especially in ethnically diverse, urban schools (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Murray, 2009). However, not all teachers purposefully build close, high-quality relationships. Davis (2006) found that more than one-third of middle school homeroom teachers were uncertain as to whether developing such caring relationships with students was their responsibility, or they were unaware of the potential impact such relationships have on student motivation and achievement.

Although teacher-student relationships lie at the heart of responsive teaching, additional teacher practices may help to support student motivation. One aspect of responsive teaching, communicating high academic expectations for each student's success, is considered best teaching practice especially for students in high needs, urban school settings (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Matsumura et al., 2008). Students are more likely to be motivated when their teachers hold high expectations for them and believe in their capacity to succeed (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Brophy, 2004; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). Teachers can demonstrate high expectations by establishing clear standards for success, making learning goals explicit to students, demanding effort, and exhibiting appropriate levels of assertive behavior and cooperation (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Anderman et al., 1999; Corbett et al., 2002; Marzano & Marzano, 1993). However, if students perceive teacher expectations as too high or unrealistic, motivation may decline (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009).

Further, recent qualitative and observational research indicates that instruction is responsive when teachers meet student needs and provide opportunities for engagement and motivation. Teachers may engage in responsive instruction when they tailor lessons to promote student learning, monitor student understanding, scaffold learning, encourage strategy use, provide constructive and accurate feedback, and clearly communicate learning strategies (Anderman et al., 1999; APA, 1997; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Meece, 2003; Meece et al., 2003; Raphael, Pressley, & Mohan, 2008; Schmakel, 2008). Further,

authentic, autonomy-supportive instruction that affords student choice may support motivation (Reeve, Nix, & Hamm, 2003). Middle level teachers may successfully implement challenging instruction by promoting student motivation and by developing caring, trusting teacher-student relationships and supportive peer interactions (Fulmer & Turner, 2014). Teachers and adolescents alike recognize the importance of this type of instruction (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), although perceptions among these two populations may differ (Anderman et al., 1999).

Need for Further Study

Most research examining the ways teachers support student motivation has relied on quantitative or observational methods (e.g., Anderman et al., 1999; Roorda et al., 2011) or has examined motivation from a single perspective (Schmakel, 2008). Anderman and associates (1999) unpacked the instructional practices of four high school teachers who students identified as fostering responsive and motivational classroom learning environments. They found that these teachers purposefully supported student understanding, fostered rapport, and managed their classrooms effectively. Roorda and associates (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of the influence of teacher-student relationships on student engagement and achievement. Their results indicated that student adjustment was enhanced if the teacher-student relationship was of high quality, especially for at-risk, high-poverty adolescents. Schmakel (2008) investigated motivation among seventh-grade students in four urban parochial schools, focusing on perceptions of the relationship between their needs and teachers' instructional practices, and academic motivation and achievement. She found that motivational instruction (e.g., individual help, challenge) and motivational support (e.g., teacher empathy, teacher relationships) influenced students' academic motivation, engagement, and achievement.

Studies using correlational, self-report, and observational measures, such as the ones described above, may not fully capture the complexities of student motivation in the school settings. Kaplan and associates (2012) urge researchers to rely on participants' perspectives:

The researcher is not the ultimate authority on what takes place in the educational context. The researcher has little or no knowledge of the characteristics of the context: the history and characteristics of participants and of the

organization, their values and goals, and the actual and perceived constraints on their decision making and action. It is the participants who have expertise in this information, which is crucial for understanding the motivational processes taking place in that context and for informing practice. (p. 179)

Listening to the voices of young adolescents—along with those of teachers and administrators—may help researchers examine the ways teachers support student academic motivation. As Caskey (2011) suggested, educators should treat adolescents as “honored guests” who are invited into conversations, including discussions on middle level research, and to recognize them as having noteworthy contributions to add.

Research indicates student motivation is often connected to teacher practices (Anderman et al., 1999), and teachers tend to perceive practices responsive to students’ needs as being even more important for students in urban, ethnically diverse schools (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). However, qualitative research on young adolescent motivation rarely includes multiple voices—students, teachers, administrators—limiting its potential to fully capture the complexities of student motivation in school. Despite a substantial amount of extant literature on young adolescent motivation and learning, there is an acute need for additional empirical research investigating student and educator perceptions of these phenomena. This gap warrants an in-depth investigation of the ways teachers support student motivation from the perspectives of multiple key participant groups in the school ecosystem (e.g., students, teachers, administrators). Using a qualitative approach, the present study incorporates the voices of students, teachers, and administrators in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of the ways teachers promote student academic motivation and to offer meaningful recommendations for practice (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Kaplan et al., 2012; Schmakel, 2008).

Method

The aim of this study was to gain a detailed understanding of the ways teachers support young adolescents’ academic motivation in one large, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. We selected a descriptive, interpretive “basic qualitative design” for the study (Merriam, 2009), and we sought to know, “In what ways do teachers support young adolescents’ academic motivation at Sanchez Middle School?”¹ This study is part of a larger, year-long, investigation

of student motivation, engagement, and belonging at the middle level that was implemented in 2010–2011.

Context

Sanchez Middle School is a grades 6-8 school located in a large, socio-economically and ethnically diverse school district in the southeastern United States. This district is one of the 10 largest districts in the United States with 44 middle level schools (excluding charter schools). In spring of 2011 when data for this study were collected, Sanchez Middle School had a total enrollment of 1038 students. The school population was representative of demographics in the school district, in which more than 50% of the students were ethnic minorities and were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. At Sanchez, approximately 42% of students were Latino, 8% were African American, and 10% were either biracial or other ethnic minorities. Approximately 52% of students qualified for free or reduced price lunch.

Identification of Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants to help ensure an “information-rich” case (Patton, 2002, p. 46). A total of 24 participants were involved in this investigation, including 18 students, 5 teachers, and 1 administrator (Tables 1 & 2). Researchers sought a student sample from among those students who returned parental consent forms and who also participated in the larger investigation of which the current study is a part. The student sample selected was representative of the overall demographics of the student population (60% ethnic minorities) and included an equal number of males and females, an equal number of students at each grade level, and an array of perspectives regarding academic motivation based on the larger investigation.

A total of five teachers were recruited to participate in this study, including three social studies teachers, one science teacher, and one language arts teacher. Teachers were recruited in an effort to ensure at least two different subjects were represented at each grade level (language arts and social studies at sixth grade, and social studies and science at both seventh and eighth grades). The assistant principal also participated in the study. The assistant principal was recruited because her daily job responsibilities focused on students’ instructional needs, including student motivation. All participants signed informed consent forms, including parents/guardians of the student participants. Students were read aloud the

¹ Pseudonym was used in place of actual school name.

Table 1
List of Student Participants

Pseudonym	Demographics	Grade
Julie	White female	Sixth
Sabrina	White female	Sixth
Tina	Asian female	Sixth
Mustafa	Multiracial male	Sixth
Paul	Asian male	Sixth
Kirk	Latino male	Sixth
Amy	White female	Seventh
Deidre	Multiracial female	Seventh
Liza	Latina female	Seventh
Adam	White male	Seventh
Damien	Latino male	Seventh
Andy	White male	Seventh
Kaitlin	Latina female	Eighth
Sofia	Latina female	Eighth
Shannon	White female	Eighth
Dominick	Latino male	Eighth
David	White male	Eighth
Derek	African American male	Eighth

Table 2
List of Educator Participants

Pseudonym	Demographics	Position
Mrs. Turner	White female	Sixth-grade language arts
Mrs. Scott	White female	Sixth-grade social studies
Mrs. Barnes	White female	Seventh-grade social studies
Mr. Miller	White male	Eighth-grade social studies
Mrs. Clark	White female	Seventh- & eighth-grade science
Mrs. Foster	African American female	Assistant principal

informed assent protocol and asked to provide verbal affirmation and written consent prior to participating.

Data Collection

Data were collected through 24 individual student, teacher, and administrator interviews, resulting in a theme-based description of the ways in which teachers supported student motivation (Creswell, 2007). All interviews took place on Sanchez’s campus during the school day and lasted between 30 and

60 minutes. A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) guided each interview. Interviewers asked student participants questions such as, “Tell me about your motivation in your academic classes this year?” They asked teacher and administrator participants questions such as, “What does it mean for students to be academically motivated at your school?” All interviews were audiotaped and completely transcribed, totaling 288 single-spaced pages of transcripts (236 pages of student transcripts, 42 pages of teacher transcripts, and 10 pages of an administrator transcript). In an effort to ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for participants and the school.

Data Analysis

The current investigation utilized an inductive approach to data analysis recommended by Hatch (2002). Most qualitative research is analyzed inductively because this method allows participant stories to surface by centering deeply on a particular entity (Hatch, 2002; Mayan, 2009). Like other inductive models, Hatch’s (2002) approach involves looking for patterns in data and making general statements regarding the phenomena. For this study, the researchers began the analysis by reading the entire dataset multiple times to separate data into analyzable parts—called “frames of analysis”—that merited further examination. Researchers independently coded all data into frames and then discussed each frame until a consensus was reached. Framed transcripts were uploaded into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis program, for further analysis. The entire framed dataset was then individually analyzed and coded by each researcher for domains or a set of categories that reflected a semantic relationship represented in the data (e.g., means-end semantic relationship such as X is a way to do Y).

Two domains that addressed the research question initially emerged from the data: teacher-student relationships and classroom instruction. Upon further analysis, classroom instruction was subdivided into two domains—teacher expectations and instructional practices—to provide a more thorough and complete picture of the ways teachers supported young adolescents’ academic motivation at Sanchez Middle School. Each of the three domains were then further analyzed for subcategories, which Hatch calls “included terms” and “cover terms” that named the category in which all included terms were identified (Figure 1).

<p>Domain: Teacher-Student Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cover Term: Responsive teacher-student relationships served as a way to meet students’ basic and developmental needs and support student academic motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included Term: Know, care for, and connect with students <p>Domain: Teacher Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cover Term: Responsive teacher expectations served as a way to meet students’ basic and developmental needs and support student academic motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included Term: Communicate high expectations <p>Domain: Instructional Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cover Term: Responsive instructional practices served as a way to meet students’ basic and developmental needs and support student academic motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included Term: Engage students in hands-on learning activities • Included Term: Provide individualized learning supports

Figure 1. Master outline for the ways responsive teacher practices support students' academic motivation.

As Hatch (2002) recommends, the researchers asked, “How does all this fit together?” (p. 173). The following overarching theme emerged from the analysis: *Teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations, and instructional practices that are responsive to students’ basic and developmental needs may support student academic motivation.* Further, when such expectations and instructional practices are implemented within the context of high-quality teacher-student relationships, the potential to meet students’ needs and support their motivation is maximized. A master domain sheet was created and excerpts were chosen for inclusion in this manuscript.

Bias and Trustworthiness

Multiple methods were used to limit research bias and enhance trustworthiness of the findings. Member checks allowed participants to validate that the research accurately represented their voices. Researchers with expertise in the qualitative methods used in this study performed peer reviews of the data analysis process and crosschecked study results. Finally, the researchers used a research journal to separate their perceptions from the data.

Results

In this study, researchers sought to gain a deeper understanding of the ways teachers support students’ academic motivation at Sanchez Middle School. Three domains emerged: teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations, and instructional practices. Findings suggest teacher-student relationships served as a way for teachers to be responsive to students’ needs for close relationships with non-familial adults through

knowing, caring for, and connecting with students. Teacher expectations served as a way for teachers to be responsive to students’ needs through communicating high expectations. Instructional practices served as a way for teachers to be responsive to students’ needs through engaging students in hands-on learning activities and providing individualized learning supports. However, not all students experienced teachers who engage in these responsive teaching practices.

Teacher-Student Relationships

You have to connect with them. You have to. And you have to love them. If they don’t think you like them, toss the year. It’s done. I mean, just toss it. (Mrs. Barnes, teacher participant)

This quote by Mrs. Barnes highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships in meeting students’ need to be known and cared for by their teachers. Teachers who know, care for, and connect with their students as individuals have the potential to foster high-quality relationships that promote academic motivation (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Roorda et al., 2011; Schmamel, 2008; Wentzel, 1997). However, not all students in this investigation perceived that all their teachers fostered caring connections with them.

Every teacher in this study discussed the importance of building teacher-student relationships grounded in genuine care as a way to set the foundation for student academic motivation. Teachers recognized getting to know students as essential to supporting motivation and engagement in learning. Mrs. Barnes discussed the importance of getting to know and care for students:

My first thing at the beginning of the year...I learn their names as fast as I possibly can. Every time they walk into my door, I say hi and then their name... How are you, how is it going, can I help you with anything? They always know that I care about them.

Teachers noted that listening to students, learning about their families, and hearing what they do outside of school were ways they demonstrated care.

Teachers purposefully established connections with students both outside and inside the classroom. As Mrs. Barnes stated:

I always show up at least to one event of every single thing the kids do. I make sure they see my face at some point, whether it's band, orchestra, all the sporting events, everything. I make sure that I show up to one.

Mr. Miller, a teacher participant, noted knowing and connecting with students as ways to support their motivation:

If you want to motivate kids to do the best in the class, you have to show them that you know things that are in their personal life that are going on. And that goes a long way with kids.

The importance of connection is further highlighted by Mrs. Clark, a teacher participant who said: "Get that relationship; because once you have that relationship with the kids and they have that with each other, they will do anything you ask them to do."

More than half of the student participants ($N = 10$) indicated that they felt a sense of care and connection with one or more of their teachers. Student participants, like Deidre, affirmed the importance of teacher care. "I love Mrs. Clark, definitely. She is one of those crazy teachers that just loves you and she will help you with just about anything." In response to the question, "*In what ways do teachers support student academic motivation in school?*" Derek, another student participant, elaborated on how one teacher demonstrated care:

My seventh period teacher, she's very outgoing, and she'll help other people if they really need to be helped. She's just there to talk to you. She's like a teacher you can go and talk to if you have a problem.

Students, like Deidre, also expressed that they could talk openly to any of their teachers and that the teachers knew them well: "[I]f we have anything going on in our lives, they can tell instantly and ask us 'What's wrong?' and help us get through the situation." As an example, Deidre described a situation in which she had a personal need and benefited from having a responsive teacher-student relationship with Mrs. Clark:

I talked to Mrs. Clark when my grandmother died because I wasn't really doing any of my work, and I was kind of being quiet and not really into classes. She helped me get my work done so I would get back on track.

However, not all students voiced having such relationships with all of their teachers. When Sophia, a student participant, was probed regarding why she preferred some teachers over others, she replied, "I don't really have a connection with them. I get along with them, but not as good as I get along with Mr. Wilson [the teacher she has a strong relationship with]." A few students, like David, voiced that some teachers are unfair and "don't care at all, really." Students stated they want teachers to be more responsive to their needs for being known, cared for, and having a relationship where they are known as individuals. As Damien, a student participant, shared: "[Teachers could] maybe talk to you more and get to know you and be more friendly with you." Another student, Shannon, elaborated:

[Teachers can] see you as an individual, more than just a student. As just a student, you're just part of the class and you're not really like, there's nothing on a personal level.

Mrs. Foster, the assistant principal, attested to the importance of teachers viewing each child as an individual in order to support student motivation:

We have faculty meetings where we speak to the importance of looking at the whole child; not just the performance of the child in your course. I think on a large scale we do a great job to individually motivate students.

Teacher Expectations

The bottom line we learn as teachers is that whatever we expect out of students, they will do. (Mr. Miller, teacher participant)

This quote by Mr. Miller highlights the power of teacher expectations for student success. Teachers who communicate high academic expectations for success have the potential to provide a challenge that promotes motivation (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Brophy, 2004; Matsumura et al., 2008; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). All educators attested to communicating high expectations as a way to meet students' needs and set the foundation for their academic success. However, not all students in this investigation perceived that such high expectations supported their motivation.

Teachers recognized the power of and connection between holding high expectations and supporting student academic motivation. As Mr. Miller stated:

Motivation and expectations kind of go hand in hand sometimes. We have kids who we expect to not do well in classes, and then the kids don't. Then we take kids who are mediocre and we expect them to do well and they do.

When asked in what ways teachers can support student academic motivation, Mrs. Clark shared, "I think one is definitely setting the bar. I mean setting the bar high, and then being consistent at holding them to it...setting expectations and not accepting anything less." Another teacher, Mrs. Scott, voiced the importance of maintaining a classroom environment in which high expectations and student success are the norm:

It's important to maintain the environment that, of course you are expected to do well. It doesn't matter who you are. One time I caught a kid saying this is the boom boom class. I was like, "What are you talking about?" That's not allowed.

Teachers indicated that part of communicating high expectations involves recognizing students who do well, work hard, and improve over time. As Mrs. Clark stated, "We celebrate kids who do well, and not necessarily straight As or kids who are in honors classes. Our ESE department today had a celebration for the kids who turned in their work or who have made gains."

Teachers also communicate high expectations by encouraging students to reflect on their performance and improve in the future, as Mrs. Scott explained:

It's hard on the kid who didn't do well, but then you encourage them. Acknowledging when they are doing well, and talking about okay, what

went right this time, what went wrong this time? Having them look at, "Okay, your grade was this. How come? What did you do that helped you get there? What didn't you do, and you didn't get what you wanted?" To have them think about what they are doing. Not just have me tell them, "This is what you did right, this is what you did wrong."

Mrs. Foster, the assistant principal, discussed how she explicitly communicates high expectations to students:

I call my students professional students. "You're a professional in a professional environment. You have to act and dress in a professional way." And when I speak of dress, I say to them, "Because you're a professional student, you're required to wear a uniform as though you were a nurse or a doctor." They're expected to know how to act according with the ethics of the environment.

High expectations were also communicated implicitly to students, as Mrs. Foster stated, "Even if it's not said to them, it's an unspoken thought or rule that they're going to college, they're going to be successful, they're going to open a business, they're going to do something big."

Students perceived such explicit and implicit acts as ways their teachers communicated care and expressed a desire for them to have a successful future. For example, Amy, a student participant, shared:

The teachers here are kind; they want you to do your best. They want you to have a good future, and they really do want you to pay attention. They don't just teach you, and here you are. They give you everything that they need to give you. They want you to succeed.

Amy further elaborated how one of her teachers communicated respect along with care and high expectations: "He expects respect. And he's not just a friend of yours, he teaches you."

Other students reinforced Amy's thoughts regarding teachers' desires for students to be successful. For instance, Sophia stated:

I told my math teacher I'm not a math person and just don't care for numbers, and he gave me advice. He was like, "If you don't pay attention and if you don't focus, you're not going to do good, and you have to do good to pass this class and bring your grade up." So I think that helped me and I started focusing more [in class].

Derek shared how his teachers encourage him to work hard now to achieve a better future:

They [teachers] said if you want a better future you have to do your work and that it starts here in middle school...This made a difference because it made me think that if I really wanted to do something important in my life, I had to actually keep working for it and try harder.

Two student participants perceived some teachers' expectations to be excessively high, and they expressed that such expectations did not meet their needs and potentially undermined their motivation. For example, Amy shared, "She [Amy's social studies teacher] expects a lot from you, in my opinion. She expects you to have everything every single time, that you understand everything right then and there." Students noted how some teachers expected them to "get their work done" or else they would not do well in class. Students perceived this approach as hindering their motivation. However, students also spoke of teachers who demanded that they "get their work done," which meant submitting anything less than their best work was unacceptable. Students viewed this type of teacher expectation as helping them focus and get back on track; they did not want to disappoint these teachers by doing less than their best work. For example, Shannon said, "I would feel like I was letting them [teachers] down if I was getting an F and they [teachers] were trying their hardest to teach me. They know I can do better."

Instructional Practices

In science we were learning about biotechnology. I was really focused because we were going to do a lab where we were extracting DNA from a green bean and you could actually see all the stringy stuff, and it was really, really cool. I was motivated to actually learn how you do it and all the components and stuff so that when I got to the lab I could extract it with no problem. (Liza, student participant)

As the quote from Liza suggests, adolescents perceived instructional practices that were responsive to their needs to be supportive of their academic motivation. Learner-centered instruction, including active, hands-on learning and individualized learning supports, may help students learn in authentic and interactive ways and support student motivation (APA, 1997; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Meece et al., 2003; Schmakel, 2008).

However, not all students reported that their teachers implemented such instructional practices.

Participants described instructional practices that provided students opportunities to engage in hands-on, interactive learning activities. For example, Mrs. Barnes stated:

You can't say, "Read this chapter and do these questions." It has to be a hands-on activity. I have found the most success in cooperative assignments where they are working together [in] small groups and hands-on interactive stuff.

Most student participants ($N=16$) reported the classes in which they were most academically motivated included those with authentic and interactive learning activities. Half of the student participants ($N=9$) specifically discussed how authentic activities promoted their motivation. As Kaitlin, a student participant, shared:

We had to make a contraption that protected an egg from a two-story drop...I had really worked really hard on the egg drop project. I typed it. I made sure it was really good. I gave it to several of my teachers to check it, and when I got a 100% A on it, I just felt really, really, really successful. I just felt like I worked really hard on it and even though it broke, I actually did the best that I can do.

All students reported being engaged in learning when they were able to interact with classmates. As Amy explained:

The teacher will make us write our own comments about the book we're reading, and we'll be able to share that with our class. So, let's just say I comment, "This is really funny." We'll be able to come together and discuss our opinions. I like that.

Another student participant, Dominick, elaborated: "It's fun and you get more than just one person sharing information. You get a whole group of people just kind of helping you out." However, some students reported instances when such interactive activities may have hindered their learning. Derek shared, "I rely on myself and not on others. If I work in a group, I get off task and rely on them to do it for me."

Students voiced that tasks that are not learner-centered may hinder their motivation. As Adam shared, "We had to spend an hour watching a

PowerPoint on writing techniques. I was just bored out of my mind, and all I wanted to do was get out of the class.” Liza affirmed, “In language arts I was bored out of my mind because we were doing Springboard [a pre-AP language arts program], and for every other word I would just scribble—that’s how bored I was.” Further, Dominick shared how non-learner-centered activities affect his motivation:

I just felt kind of bored [in math]. I zoned out and kind of lost focus. I was really out of it. We were copying down what the teacher was writing down in the notes, and I guess doing that kind of thing made me lose focus.

When asked what teachers can do to help students be more motivated and engaged in learning, more than half of students ($N = 10$), like Deidre, specifically mentioned active instructional practices that involved interaction with classmates. “We could do more activities,” she said. Adam said, “[Teachers] could do more activities. Just actually work with it and get us engaged in it.” Specifically, Damien stated, “We could do more activities that we get to do instead of just going over the book...more of the things to do *with* the class and more involvement *with* the students.”

In addition to hands-on learning activities, teachers provided students with opportunities to receive individualized learning support. Almost all student participants ($N = 17$) recognized and appreciated the various supports teachers provided as promoting their motivation, especially when they were with teachers with whom they had a responsive relationship. As Adam stated:

In math, I was having issues understanding leaf plots, and I for some reason didn’t want to ask any questions ‘cause everyone else had known about it. But the teacher, by my face, my teacher knew that I was having trouble and came over to help me. I was pretty happy because she wasn’t like “Adam” or just had my name spoken out and was like, “Are you having trouble?” [She] sort of kept it confidential.

Further, Damien shared:

Helping me out with my homework and with the subject and getting to know me a little bit better...They pull you aside sometimes in class and ask you what’s going wrong or like they tell you about themselves a little bit more.

Such responsive teacher-student relationships support student learning. As Damien stated, “I think the classes are easier if I have that kind of relationship with the teacher.”

Teachers can also provide individual learning supports within the context of whole class instruction. As Liza illustrated:

In every lesson, she [the teacher] goes step by step, because I asked her to, because sometimes I don’t really understand, just putting it into words. I actually have to see how you do it because I’m a visual learner. And she does that, which I really appreciate.

Amy also shared:

My math teacher is very, very nice. She explains everything that she needs to explain to you. We go very fast because of the state test, so she has to get everything she does in. But if someone is taking a while, she’ll halt the class and say, “Okay, does anyone else not get this?” And she’ll plan out one by one, in steps, so that person or anyone else who has a question will understand.

Teachers also provided students with one-on-one tutoring. A third of student participants ($N = 6$) reported that they received individual tutoring outside of regular class hours. As Tina shared:

You can come by for tutoring in the morning right before class. I’m not really good with algebra, and she starts helping me with [understanding] volume and masses, and it’s pretty easy now. I go to this teacher a lot in the mornings. Since there are not that many kids around in the mornings, she can actually concentrate on what she’s talking about, and then you can concentrate because not everybody’s talking.

However, not all students in this investigation experienced teachers who implemented learner-centered instructional practices that were responsive to student needs. As Amy shared:

It’s almost like she’s trying to teach it her way instead of thinking there are some people who will not get it like that. So she’s like, “I need you to do it this way and this way and this way.” And there are some kids who actually go slower sometimes, and I just feel like she should look at everyone else’s kind of learning ability before she slaps everything down on the table.

Like Amy, David also experienced instructional practices that were not learner-centered:

Usually I like language arts because I like to write, but I had a really bad teacher. His class was horrible. He had a different style of writing. Like, I was used to doing narratives and stuff and there aren't as many limits. He made [it] really strict, like you had to have five lines for this paragraph, seven lines for this paragraph, seven lines for the next and then five lines for the next, and then he made it so organized and boring. Writing is supposed to be kind of like a creative thing.

Shannon reported how a lack of learner-centered instructional practices may hinder motivation and learning. She said:

If a teacher is acting like, 'Oh, I know it all. I'm just going to preach to you and you're going to learn what you're going to learn,' then you know [students] don't have as good of an attitude about it [learning].

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to gain a detailed understanding of the ways teachers support young adolescents' academic motivation in one large, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. Two conclusions materialized from this investigation. First, teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations, and instructional practices that are responsive to students' basic and developmental needs may support student academic motivation. Second, when such expectations and instructional practices are implemented within the context of high-quality teacher-student relationships, the potential to meet students' needs and support their motivation is maximized.

This study affirms that teachers may support student academic motivation, learning, and success in school by being responsive to students' basic and developmental needs (Davis, 2003; Fulmer & Turner, 2014; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel et al., 2010). Students experience this responsiveness through teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations, and instructional practices. Teacher-student relationships in which teachers know, care for, and connect with students have the potential to meet young adolescent needs—especially the need for relatedness and strong connections to non-familial adults—and support motivation. Teachers in this study recognized that developing an authentic connection to students was foundational to enhancing

student motivation, and they made numerous efforts to foster bonds with students, even outside of the classroom. Students and teachers alike attested to the importance of teachers fostering caring relationships with students. It is important for each student to have at least one caring adult—an adult advocate—who knows and shows an interest in them academically and personally (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Murray, 2009; NMSA, 2010; Schmakel, 2008; Wentzel, 1997), especially in large, urban school contexts (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Simply having a cordial relationship is necessary, but not sufficient—there needs to be a deep sense of connection through which students receive the message that teachers care for them (Noddings, 2005). This does not have to be time intensive, but it must be authentic and genuine (McHugh et al., 2013).

Not all students who participated in the study experienced caring relationships with all of their teachers. Some expressed a lack of connection and responsiveness to their needs as primary factors contributing to a lack of a caring relationship. This highlights the critical role of high-quality teacher-student relationships in affecting student motivation and achievement (Davis, 2006; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2006). Many middle school teachers are unaware of the impact high-quality teacher-student relationships have on motivation and achievement, or they are uncertain that building such relationships is their responsibility (Davis, 2006). Teachers should value young adolescents and be prepared to teach them (NMSA, 2010); this includes understanding the importance of building relationships with students, and its role in supporting student motivation and success (Davis, 2006). An implication for educators is that they must make a conscious, purposeful effort to establish a high-quality caring relationship with *each* student to meet student needs and support motivation.

Setting and communicating high expectations may set the foundation for student academic success and is considered a best teaching practice, especially for students in high needs, urban school settings (Corbett, et al., 2002; Matsumura et al., 2008). Teachers in this study recognized the importance of and connection between holding high expectations and supporting student academic motivation. Students perceived high expectations as an expression of care and an avenue through which teachers expressed a desire for them to be successful in school and beyond. These findings complement and extend prior research by highlighting connections between teacher expectations and student motivation (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Brophy, 2004;

Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). Further, the findings suggest that student motivation may be hindered when students perceive a task as too challenging or teacher expectations as extremely high (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). NMSA (2010) reminds us that “learning tasks must be perceived as achievable, even if difficult, reflecting the high expectations held for all” (p. 18). To successfully communicate high expectations, teachers must possess a deep understanding of middle level learning and instruction as well as adolescents’ development and experiences (Fulmer & Turner, 2014; NMSA, 2010). An implication for educators is that they must communicate high—yet appropriately challenging—expectations while simultaneously supporting student needs for connectedness if they are to maximize student motivation and learning.

Teachers may use learner-centered instructional practices to support student motivation because these practices help meet students’ basic and developmental needs. Student and teacher participants recognized that hands-on learning activities have the potential to spur motivation. Almost all students articulated that they were academically motivated when learning activities were authentic and interactive, and half of the student participants provided specific examples of how authentic activities supported their motivation. Some students expressed that interactive activities may have hindered their learning. Students also expressed a lack of motivation when tasks were not learner-centered. Given that instructional activities have the potential to both support and hinder students’ motivation, it is important for teachers to implement instructional practices in ways that students perceive to be motivating (Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2010; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009).

Almost all students recognized and appreciated learning supports in which teachers tailored instruction to their individual needs, working one-on-one or within the context of whole class instruction, to break down what they need to know and understand. Findings reinforce theory and research indicating that learner-centered instructional practices are critical to supporting student motivation and learning (Anderman et al., 1999; APA, 1997; Meece et al., 2003). As noted in NMSA (2010), “successful middle grades schools are characterized by the active engagement of students and teachers,” (p. 16); such practices reflect young adolescents’ needs and the importance of using instructional practices that involve each student personally. Not all student participants reported that they continuously

experienced learner-centered instruction that was responsive to their needs; and, as other researchers have found, this resulted in boredom and apathy (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). As Fulmer and Turner (2014) suggested, an implication is that educators should reflect upon their instruction and consider ways to plan and implement learner-centered instructional practices that make use of hands-on learning activities and individualized learning supports that are truly responsive to student needs and support student motivation.

The second conclusion is that the potential to meet young adolescents’ needs and support their motivation is maximized when high expectations and learner-centered instructional practices are implemented within the context of high-quality teacher-student relationships. High-quality teacher-student relationships are critical in promoting student learning. As the authors of *Turning Points 2000* stated, “For young adolescents, relationships with adults form the critical pathways for their learning; education ‘happens’ through relationships” (Jackson & Davis, p. 121). High expectations are often communicated through the relationships middle level teachers have with their students (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Jackson & Davis, 2000), and this is an important way in which teacher participants in this and other studies have demonstrated care to their students (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). Findings from the current study provide insight into the ways in which high, yet appropriately challenging, expectations coupled with caring relationships may set the foundation for student academic motivation. These findings align with prior research that suggests teachers may have the strongest motivational impact on students when they provide instructional practices within a context of high-quality relationships (Wentzel, 2012; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2006), and when teachers know students as individuals and are available to provide academic support (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Garza, 2007). An implication is that educators must understand the ways *all three* practices are responsive to students’ needs and maximize student motivation, especially in urban, ethnically diverse middle level schools.

Limitations

Although these conclusions are informative and provide valuable insight, this study is not without its limitations. Due to its epistemological focus and case study methodology, the study is based on the voices of a small sample of 24 participants from one school site ($N = 18$ students, 5 teachers, and 1 administrator).

Including more student, teacher, and administrator voices may provide additional perspectives not represented in this study. Further, this study was informed by interview data which were collected during a brief period of time, providing a snapshot of the ways teachers supported adolescents' motivation in one school. Investigating motivation over an extended period of time in multiple schools may reveal additional insights not captured in this study. Although the current study focused on teacher practices, young adolescents play a role in promoting their own motivation (NMSA, 2010), as do parents and peers (Murray, 2009; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel, 1998; Wentzel et al., 2010). Investigating how adolescents may meet their own needs and motivate themselves—and how multiple social relationships (i.e., with teachers, parents, peers) help to meet student needs and support motivation—would provide a more comprehensive understanding of motivation at the middle level.

Conclusion

The middle level school is an important developmental context for young adolescents (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The current study contributes to the literature by providing an in depth understanding of the ways teachers support young adolescents' motivation in one large, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. Although this study focused on the roles of teachers in meeting student needs and supporting their motivation, it is likely that this responsibility is shared between teachers and students. A key characteristic of successful middle level schools is that learning is active and purposeful and that students “play a major role in their own education” (NMSA, 2010, p. 16). Motivation emerges from within the individual as well as the social environment, which includes interactions with teachers (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). It is important to note that teachers set the tone for young adolescents' experiences in school and play a pivotal role in meeting student needs and supporting their academic motivation (Eccles, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000). A challenge for teachers is to implement teacher-student relationships, expectations, and instructional practices in ways that meet young adolescents' needs and help them feel cared for, supported, and appropriately challenged (McHugh et al., 2013). Further research is needed to investigate ways middle level teachers use caring relationships to support student academic motivation. Researchers should continue to include young adolescent, teacher, and administrator voices to fully capture

the complexity of motivation in school (Kaplan et al., 2012). Doing this may help educators better understand the nature of developmentally responsive school and classroom-based interventions and how they may promote motivation at the middle level (Patrick & Mantzicopoulos, 2012).

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by a University of South Florida New Researcher grant.

References

- Adkins-Coleman, T. A. (2010). “I’m not afraid to come into your world.” Case studies of teachers facilitating engagement in urban high school English classrooms. *The Journal of Negro Education, 79*(1), 41–53.
- Anderman, E. M., Maehr, M. L., & Midgley, C. (1999). Declining motivation after the transition to middle school: Schools can make a difference. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 32*, 131–147.
- Antrop-González, R., & De Jesús, A. (2006). Toward a theory of critical care in urban small school reform: Examining structures and pedagogies of caring in two Latino community-based schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 19*(4), 409–433.
- APA Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs (1997). *Learner-centered psychological principles: A framework for school reform and redesign*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bishop, P. A., & Pflaum, S. W. (2005). Middle school students' perceptions of social dimensions as influencers of academic engagement. *Research in Middle Level Education, 29*, 1–14.
- Brophy, J. E. (2004). *Motivating students to learn* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Caskey, M. (2011, November). *Important work ahead: Sustaining our vision and momentum*. William Alexander Memorial Lecture presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), Louisville, KY.
- Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2002). *Effort and excellence in urban classrooms: Expecting—and getting—success with all students*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Cushman, K., & Rogers, L. (2008). *Fires in the middle school bathroom: Advice for teachers from middle schoolers*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Daniels, E., & Arapostathis, M. (2005). What do they really want? Student voices and motivation research. *Urban Education, 40*, 34–59. doi:10.1177/00420859042704-21
- Davis, H. A. (2003). Conceptualizing the role and influence of student-teacher relationships on children's social and cognitive development. *Educational Psychologist, 38*(4), 207–234. doi:10.1207/S15326985EP3804_2
- Davis, H. A. (2006). Exploring the contexts of relationship quality between middle school students and teachers. *The Elementary School Journal, 106*(3), 193–223.
- Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist, 26*, 325–346.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227–268. doi:10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Eccles, J. S. (2004). Schools, academic motivation, and stage-environment fit. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 125–153). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Eccles, J. S., & Midgley, C. (1989). Stage-environment fit: Developmentally appropriate classrooms for early adolescents. In R. E. Ames & C. Ames (Eds.), *Research on motivation in education*, (Vol. 3, pp. 139–186). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2011). Schools as developmental contexts during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 21*, 225–241. doi:10.1002/9780470479193.adlpsy0-01013
- Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., Midgley, C., Reuman, D., Mac Iver, D., & Feldlaufer, H. (1993). Negative effects of traditional middle schools on students' motivation. *The Elementary School Journal, 93*(5), 553–574. doi:10.1086/461740
- Fulmer, S. M., & Turner, J. C. (2014). The perception and implementation of challenging instruction by middle school teachers: Overcoming pressures from students. *The Elementary School Journal, 114*(3), 303–326.
- Garza, R. (2007). “She teaches you like she were your friend.” Latino high school students describe attributes of a caring teacher. *Journal of Border Educational Research, 6*(1), 81–90.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hughes, J. N., & Chen, Q. (2011). Reciprocal effects of student-teacher and student-peer relatedness: Effects on academic self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 32*(5), 278–287. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2010.03.005
- Jackson, A. W., & Davis, G. A. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Kaplan, A., Katz, I., & Flum, H. (2012). Motivation theory in educational practice: Knowledge claims, challenges, and future directions. In K. R. Harris, S. Graham, & T. Urdan (Eds.), *APA educational psychology handbook* (Vol. 2.). Individual differences and cultural and contextual factors, (pp. 165–194). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P. R. (2002). Motivation as an enabler for academic success. *School Psychology Review, 31*(3), 313–327.
- Marzano, R. J., & Marzano, J. S. (1993). The key to classroom management. *Educational Leadership, 61*, 6–13.
- Matsumura, L. C., Slater, S. C., & Crosson, A. (2008). Classroom climate, rigorous instruction and curriculum, and students' interactions in urban middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal, 108*(4), 293–312.
- Mayan, M. J. (2009). *Essentials of qualitative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- McHugh, R. M., Horner, C. G., Colditz, J. B., & Wallace, T. L. (2013). Bridges and barriers: Adolescent perceptions of student-teacher relationships. *Urban Education, 48*(1), 9–43. doi:10.1177/0042085912451585
- Meece, J. L. (2003). Applying learner-centered principles to middle school education. *Theory into Practice, 42*(2), 109–116. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4202_4
- Meece, J. L., Herman, P., & McCombs, B. L. (2003). Relations of learner-centered teaching practices to adolescents' achievement goals. *International Journal of Educational Research, 39*, 451–475. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2004.06.009
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Murray, C. (2009). Parent and teacher relationships as predictors of school engagement and functioning among low-income urban youth. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 29*, 376–404. doi:10.1177/0272431608322940
- National Middle School Association (2010). *This we believe: Successful schools for young Adolescents*. Westerville, OH: Author.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education. Advances in contemporary educational thought* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Patrick, H., & Mantzicopoulos, P. Y. (2012, April). *Understanding teacher motivation to adopt student-centered learning practices*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association (AERA), Vancouver, Canada.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pintrich, P. R., & Schunk, D. (2002). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Raphael, L. M., Pressley, M., & Mohan, L. (2008). Engaging instruction in middle school classrooms: An observational study of nine teachers. *The Elementary School Journal, 109*(1), 61–81.
- Reeve, J., Nix, G., & Hamm, D. (2003). Testing models of the experience of self-determination in intrinsic motivation and the conundrum of choice. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(2), 375–392. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.95.2.375
- Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. Y. K., Split, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students’ school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(4), 493–529. doi:10.3102/00346-54311421793
- Ryan, A. M., & Patrick, H. (2001). The classroom social environment and changes in adolescents’ motivation and engagement during middle school. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(2), 437–460. doi:10.3102/00028312038002437
- Schmakel, P. O. C. (2008). Early adolescents’ perspectives on motivation and achievement in academics. *Urban Education, 43*, 723–749. doi:10.1177/0042085907311831
- Wentzel, K. R. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*, 411–419. doi:10.1037/00220663.89.3.4-11
- Wentzel, K. R. (1998). Social relationships and motivation in middle school: The role of parents, teachers, and peers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 90*(2), 202–209. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.90.2.202
- Wentzel, K. R. (2012). Teacher-student relationships and adolescent competence at school. In T. Wubbels, den Brok, P., van Tartwijk, J., & T. Levy (Eds.), *Interpersonal relationships in education: An overview of contemporary research* (pp. 19–36). Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.
- Wentzel, K. R., Battle, A., Russell, S. L., & Looney, L. B. (2010). Social supports from teachers and peers as predictors of academic and social motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 35*, 193–202. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2010.03.002
- Wentzel, K., & Wigfield, A. (2009). *Handbook of motivation at school*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Wigfield, A., Eccles, J. S., Schiefele, U., Roeser, R., & Davis-Kean, P. (2006). Motivation. In N. Eisenberg (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 3, 6th ed., pp. 933–1002). New York, NY: Wiley.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Questions that informed the current study:

Student Interview Questions

- What does it mean to be motivated?
- What does academic motivation mean to you?
- Tell me about your motivation in your academic classes this year.
- What would you say might help to increase your academic motivation in school?
- In what ways do your teachers, classmates or friends help support your academic motivation in school?
- Talk to me about a time this past year when you were highly engaged/not engaged in a class. What would have helped you to be more interested in the class?
- In what ways can teachers, classmates or friends help support your academic motivation?
- Is there anything more you would like to add that would help me better understand what influences your academic motivation at your middle school?

Teacher Interview Questions

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

Administrator Interview Questions

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