MIDDLE SCHOOL APATHY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY FROM STUDENTS'

PERSPECTIVE

by

Debra Graves

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose for this phenomenological study was to investigate students' perceptions as to why some middle school students lose their intrinsic motivation to learn and develop apathy toward learning while other middle school students thrive. The following question guided the research: Based on students' lived experiences, what are the sources for motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years? Four sub-questions were also used: (1) What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn? (2) What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy? (3) What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation? (4) What do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation? This qualitative study was grounded in the self-determination, self-efficacy, and student apathy theories of Bandura, Frankl, Maslow, and Ryan and Deci. The research will take place in a suburban middle school in central Virginia. The study included 12 middle school students that were identified as highly motivated (six students) and highly unmotivated (six students). Highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students were identified through self-evaluation surveys, grade averages, and teacher/counselor recommendation. Once students were determined as potential participants, parental consent forms and participation forms were distributed. After the consent/participation forms were collected, the researcher assigned an adolescent apathy questionnaire and a learning style questionnaire. The researcher also met with each participant two times, including an introduction meeting and the interview.   The researcher then coded and analyzed the data the participant provided. As a result of analyzing the students' experiences five themes emerged: Organization, self-satisfaction, expectations, goals, and hindrances.

Keywords: Apathy, middle school, student motivation

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Dedication

To my gifts from God, Blaine and Skylar: All I have done in my life is for you both. It is my goal in life to make you proud that I am your mother. To the one that my soul loves, Brad: Words cannot express my love and gratitude for you. Glory to God: who had far more faith in me than I had in myself.

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Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Self-determination theory (SDT)

Total student load (TSL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study offers a comparison of unmotivated students versus motivated students at the middle school level using the students' own verbiage in an attempt to develop an understanding of student apathy. Chapter One introduces the study and provides adequate background knowledge needed to gain an understanding of the problem. Also described in this chapter is the study's purpose and problem statement. Additionally, the research questions and the research plan are also included in this chapter. The researcher also conveys what the students believe are the fundamental reasons for their struggles and successes through their own lived experiences. Despite the commonality of this phenomenon, little research has been conducted to learn about why some middle school students feel they become apathetic while others do not.

Background

At any given time, if one were to walk into any teacher's lounge, one would often hear at least one teacher venting about the frustrations of students not caring about their assignments or grades. Teachers regularly complain that no matter how exciting the lesson is or how many hours were invested in creating the lesson or even the integration of the most up-to-date technology, there are still students that just do not care. This phenomenon of student apathy (lack of caring) sets the stage for low academic achievement and possible failure. The issue of student apathy is not a new phenomenon. In 1972, Pratt wrote, "many students there was a puzzling lack of motivation" (Pratt, 1972, p. 1) and in 1977, Santorelli stated "student motivation is a serious problem" (Santorelli, 1977, p. 53) and "I don't care attitude seems to be the rule of the day for a large number of our student" (Santorelli, 1977, p. 53). Quotes such as these

accurately describe teachers' current frustrations. In recent years, as technology continues to expand, the 1:1 ratio of students to computers is gaining popularity; computers were thought to be the ultimate solution to ensure academic success of all students. This was a great notion and would have been incredible, but unfortunately, student apathy is still a concern despite students' access to technology. Regardless of teacher training for the best teaching practices, focus on building relationships, and integration of technology in classroom, there are still students that are not successful. Handelman (1999) noted, "societal issues during the 1960s lowered meaningfulness and led to 'me-first' attitudes, technology-driven, service oriented world of the 90s" (p. 13). Upon completing research on the topic of student apathy, it was found that there is a fair amount of information relating to the topic. However, there is very little written from students' perspectives. This gap in the literature offers researchers a new facet to investigate.

Teaching today is incredibly stressful due to greater demands on teachers and students. State-mandated test scores and merit pay enhance the importance that every child must succeed. While it is the goal of teachers to help their students succeed, there are things out of the control of classroom teachers such as basic needs not being met, physical abuse, and lack of parent involvement that prevent students from achieving academic success. Despite having the technology that allows parents and students to access student grades, in many school districts across the country teachers alone are accountable for student success. The pressure for students to perform academically despite their individual life circumstances creates tension between students, parents, and teachers. Teachers who can identify and understand why students are apathetic may be able to bridge this gap of student success. If I am successful in the pursuit of this persistent educational issue, it could help teachers alleviate, or at least lessen this frustration, and benefit this segment of the student population.

Education is ever evolving, as are the students. Over the last century, each generation learned differently. Historically, throughout the last century each generation of students had unique characteristics. The Silent Generation, born mid-1920 to early 1940's, respected authority, did what was asked of them, and remained on task until the job was done (Levonius, 2015, p. 1). The Baby Boomers, born early 1940's to the early 1960's, were "confident, independent and self-reliant" (Kane, 2017, para. 5). At the beginning of the Baby Boom, "schools were overcrowded" (Kane, 2017, para. 3). It was in this environment that classroom teachers learned this generation of students needed to be "challenged in order to motivate them" (Pappas, 2015, p. 2). Baby Boomers were "internally focused yet extrinsically motivated" (Levonius, 2015, p. 2).   Within the classroom, students "read books from cover to cover and were taught by lecture" (Warren, 2012, p. 2). Generation X, born early 1960 to early 1980's, were "intrinsic learners who view learning as independent, self-directed activity" (Levonius, 2015, p. 2). The Millennials, born 1981-2000, "were taught in a more constructivist environment. They wonder why anyone would read a book. When they investigate a topic they would most likely turn to a computer" (Warren, 2012, p. 3). Whether one is discussing Baby Boomers or Millennials, teachers have a tremendous impact on student learning. When teachers express care and enthusiasm, students and their learning are impacted in positive ways. As stated by Elias (2013) and Bowen and Madsen (1978), the aspect of teaching that is most valued by students is the amount of caring the teacher expresses, and their level of enthusiasm is most closely correlated with how much students learn (Bowen & Madsen, 1978). Bowen and Madsen went on to state "kindliness, cheerfulness, friendliness, helpfulness, and those teacher behaviors that tend to produce relaxation and decrease interpersonal tension – was significantly correlated with utilization of students' intrinsic motivation" (Bowen & Madsen, 1978, p. 19). Over the last

40 years educators have consistently focused on the student/teacher relationship. Teachers spend hours getting to know students and finding out how students learn as well as building relationships to ensure student success. In 1978, Bowen and Madson stated, when a student feels liked and respected their level of learning increases and in 1997, Wentzel stated, it is a critical factor for middle school students to perceive their teacher's as caring. Regardless of which generation students belong to, students are motivated to do well when students feel their teachers are supportive (Wentzel, 1997). Chamberlin (1976) went on to explain the correlation between success and motivation. Chamberlin stated "success is the greatest motivator in existence" (p. 29) and "the minute the person does something positive, he feels good" (p. 29). If educators focus on tasks that encourage success and students have the opportunity to succeed early on in the course, maybe the lack of motivation would be reduced.

Another interesting perspective is the importance of a mother's education in terms of impacting the next generation of learners.

> Mothers' education may influence children's performance. Educated mothers use more complex language and vocabulary in speaking to and around children, may read to their children more and encourage children to read themselves, may use more supportive disciplinary approaches, and may feel more comfortable participating and collaborating with their children's teachers. (Rothstein, 2013, p. 11)

Not only is it important to educate all children, this perspective emphasizes the importance of targeting females. Essentially, if educators focus on helping to improve females' education, over time both male and female children will be positively impacted in relation to education because well-educated females will then have children that are more likely to be well educated.

This study is not only important to the realm of education but to society at large. There are unmotivated workers just as there are unmotivated students. By unlocking the code to student motivation, one could potentially unlock the code for motivation in general and in all facets where students or workers need to be motivated in order to work to their full potential. Simply put, "motivated workers are the ones who get the work done" (Smith, 2015, p. 1). One factor to whether or not student and workers are motivated is to look at past behavior. Research shows us that a good predictor of future behavior is past behavior. According to Harris, Lee, Thompson, and Kranton (2015), it is possible to predict future behavior based on ones past behavior. Meaning, if someone has been motivated in the past it is likely that they will be motivated in the future. Nichols (2011) stated that four indicators measure how motivated people are in their work place. Those motivating factors include the following; engagement, satisfaction, commitment and intention. Nichols concluded there was not a single factor which motivated all employees but instead discerned it would be advantageous for companies to appeal to all motivational drives of its employees (Nichols, 2011). It is essential for teachers and employers to take the time needed to discover what motivates students and employees because performance and productivity on behalf of the workers is bolstered by motivation (Smith, 2015). The most successful businesses are those that understand and execute how to motivate all workers despite generational differences (Nichols, 2011). The workforce today is predominantly made up of Baby Boomers, Generations Xers, and Millennials. All three of these generations are different and are likely to be motivated using different techniques. "Baby Boomers are patriotic, loyal, polite, fiscally conservative and having faith in organization" (Nichols, 2011, p. 3); "traits of Generation Xers include resourceful, adaptable, independent and innovative"(Nichols, 2011, p. 3); and "millennial workers are more likely to look for meaning and impact in their work and

responds well to encouragement and immediate feedback" (Goudreau, 2013, pp. 2-3). If employers know the make up of these workers they will be more equipped to understand what motivates each generation and can more likely satisfy their needs.

In order for research to be credible it needs to be based in theory. There are several theorists whom study motivation and I have included in this research. According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), being motivated "means to be moved to do something"(p. 54). The theorists used in this research are Frankl, Bandura, Maslow, and Deci and Ryan. Frankl searched for the meaning of life and reported that students with a sense of purpose will be more likely to succeed (Handelman, 1999). Bandura (1986) was responsible for self-efficacy theory. This theory refers to an individual's beliefs in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce results. Maslow's theory of human motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs. The base of the hierarchy contains basic physiological needs. Once an individual's basic needs are met, he or she moves to safety, love/belonging, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Finally, Deci and Ryan's (2000b) self-determination theory states there are three major components: autonomy, competence feedback, and relatedness (p. 68). Autonomy in education and the workforce allows for freedom of choice. That freedom of choice allows for intrinsic motivation, and students that pose intrinsic motivation are likely to have higher quality learning experiences where they can express their creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Situation to Self

As a classroom teacher for the last 18 years, I have become an excellent cheerleader, mother, counselor, educator, and mentor to all my students. Whatever a students' need, I am willing to do to ensure their success. I am an eighth grade social studies teacher in a suburban school in Virginia; in this school there is student support in the form of parental involvement,

caring teachers, and involved counselors. While most students achieve academic success, pay attention, and eagerly complete assignments to the best of their ability, there are always those students, no matter how exciting the lesson is, how much technology is used, or how much creative leeway they have, who just don't care. Those students do not complete assignments on time, do not come for extra help, and often fail. Even with the potential of summer school looming, they refuse to put forth any effort. It is this group of students I find most frustrating and challenging and as a group I struggle to understand as a teacher. Over the course of my teaching career, I have been able to use different teaching strategies to support students, and the majority have found success. However, apathetic students have baffled me. Hence, my desire is to conduct a study from the students' point of view to help gain insight as to what would help students achieve success.

This study's guiding paradigm was constructivism (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Constructivism is a theory developed by Piaget and refined by Vygotsky. Vygotsky's theory of constructivism stated "knowledge leads to further cognitive development" ("Vygotsky's constructivism," n.d., para. 1).   Understanding the essence of students' lived experiences in the classroom may help teachers guide those students towards success. My belief is grounded on the principle that students' motivation is based on one's environment and lived experiences.

For the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study, I attempted to understand and describe the insights of the environmental setting of eighth grade students with both high and low academic motivation. I began my study by describing in-depth the problem of student motivation, and then I used the qualitative research methods I have learned to uncover students' perceptions of student motivation. Throughout my study, I brought my own world views that help shape the direction of my study.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is the lack of information about middle school students' apathy from the student's perspective. Student apathy is a real and frustrating phenomenon for parents and teachers of certain middle school students. Despite years of research, data collection, and teacher training, apathetic students still exist. To make the situation even more trying, there is not a clear answer as to why some middle school students are highly motivated while other students lack academic motivation. A study conducted by Handelman (1999) defined apathy and provided a history of student apathy but did not offer any perspectives from students themselves. Schou (2015) recently completed a three-year study analyzing student apathy and student engagement but did not include students' perspectives. Research completed by Levonius (2015) discussed where and how learners were raised and educated affects how they perceive and engage in learning. Levonious (2015) focused on the learner's background rather than the classroom instruction. Research conducted by Elias (2013) looked by over the last 50 years of education. Elias concluded there were three major things that impacted a student's motivation to learn. The first topic discussed was the lack of character education in schools. Second, was the matter of caring a teacher displayed to his or her students. Finally, the amount of schooling missed during the school year that left students confused about current topics. At no time did Elias address why students themselves felt they were unmotivated.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to develop a better understanding of student perceptions as to why some middle school students lose their intrinsic motivation and develop apathy toward learning. The focus of this study is centered on why some students are apathetic while others are highly motivated. Despite using recognized best teaching practices

and implementing the use of 1:1 technology in classrooms, some students are still failing. At this stage in the research, student apathy is generally defined as "indifference and uncaring attitude regarding their own performance" (Handelman, 1999, p. 14), and student success is generally defined as successfully passing the state-mandated, end-of-year test as well as their end of course grades. The theory guiding this study is self determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2000) as it pertains to a student's motivation to learn.

Significance of the Study

The practical significance of this study is intended to help teachers identify students and offer solutions as to what to do for or with apathetic students. Teacher training programs have offered a plethora of solutions ranging from utilizing Gardner's multiple intelligences (Tamilselvi & Geetha, 2015) to finding a student's "currency" (what students find valuable). The goal of this qualitative study is to offer students' perceptions as to what would make a difference for them personally. Each student will have their own story, but a collective phenomenological study will identify common threads as to why some potentially successful students just do not care whether they are academically successful or not. Students will be studied in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). The practical contributions of this study will be to give teachers knowledge of what to do in their classrooms when they encounter an apathetic student.

The empirical contributions give teachers first-hand accounts that will help them develop strategies they can use with a student that may have a similar story or situation. This study will address a gap in the literature in regards to insight from students' perspectives. Instead of addressing pedagogy, this study will focus on the students themselves. Students will have an opportunity to discuss if they are academically apathetic in all classes or just some classes.

Students will also have an opportunity to explain why they feel there is a difference in classes they feel more or less academic motivation.

The theoretical significance of this study may extend the constructionist theory by developing an understanding of student motivation, and using that information to build upon what has motivated those students in the past and what may motivate them in the future. Once students become aware of what has motivated them in the past, they then can use that information to help them stay engaged and motivated in the future. Likewise, if teachers can uncover what motivates students, they can use what has motivated those students in the past to help formulate a plan to motivate students in their current class.

Research Questions

Why do some students experience apathy towards education during their middle school years? This is the central question for this phenomenological research study. According to Benders (2011), "76% of teachers identify student apathy as problem" (p. 10). To fully answer the central question, the following sub-questions will also need to be answered. The study is centered on students' perceptions as to why some middle school students lose their intrinsic motivation and develop apathy toward learning.

Sub-question 1: Based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years? Moustakas (1994) explained in phenomenological research it is imperative to seek meaning through lived experiences of the participants.

Sub-question 2: What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn? Lobman (2013) interviewed students prior to taking standardized tests and reported students were "nervous, very nervous and scared"

(Lobman, 2013, p. 329). This research seeks to understand if testing anxiety impacts students' motivation to learn.

Sub-question 3: What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy? Pollara and Broussard (2011) conducted research on mobile technology and student learning and discovered a link between mobile devices and learning. "Several benefits of using mobile devices for learning including an increase in achievement, productivity, engagement, and motivation" (Pollara & Broussard, 2011, p. 34)

Sub-question 4: What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation? According to Mari Salmela (2015), students need both human and emotional resources to be successful. Mari Salmela reported that students need the support of teachers and other students as well as emotional resources such as "will power, self-regulation, self-appreciation, and inner motivation" (Mari Salmela, 2015, p. 124)

Sub-question 5: What do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation? According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), a student's effort matters most. When students believe they can learn something and give their best effort, the biggest successes happen (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).

Definitions

1. *Amotivation* - Amotivation is "the state of lacking the intention to act" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 72).

2. *Autonomy* - Autonomy is defined as the "ability to complete a task without extensive help" (Garn, Matthews, & Jolly, 2010, p. 264).

3. *Competence feedback* - Competence feedback "allows students to gain approval and acknowledgment from the teacher or other students" (Garn et al., 2010, p. 264).

4. *Extrinsic motivation* - Extrinsic motivation "refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 71).

5. *Intrinsic motivation* - Intrinsic motivation is the "Inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 70).

6. *Mentoring program* - A "mentoring program involves weekly meeting and are associated with improved academic attitudes, self-esteem and pro-social behaviors" (Coyne-Foresi, 2016, p. 68).

7. *Relatedness* - Relatedness "ensures that the student is completing a task in the same manner as others in the class" (Garn et al., 2010, p. 264).

8. *Scaffolding*: Scaffolding "involves providing appropriate support to help students in figuring out problems for themselves" (Nordlof, p. 45).

9. *Self-efficacy* - Self-efficacy is "one's perceived self-competence, self-efficacy predicts persistence toward a goal and is paramount when facing difficulties in goal attainment" (Dubriwny, Pritchett, Hardesty, & Hellman, 2016, p. 21).

10. *Student apathy* - Student apathy is defined as "indifference and uncaring attitude regarding their own performance" (Handelman, 1999, p. 14).

Summary

Chapter One presented the purpose of this phenomenological study which is to uncover the overarching research question, why do some but not all students experience apathy towards education during their middle school years. The background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, and the guiding research questions were described. The lack of

research regarding students' perceptions of why some middle school students are academically

unmotivated generated the need for this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A review of the literature revealed information about how to motivate students, how to engage them in the learning process, and educational strategies teachers can use to assist students in achieving maximum academic success. After reviewing the articles, a few themes were identified. The recurring topics included: motivation, pedagogy (including use of technology), and family involvement. Numerous articles centered on how teachers can motivate students while others focused on how students motivate themselves. Pedagogy, the art of teaching, was also addressed in many articles, highlighting techniques to increase student achievement through student motivation. The articles focusing on technology were varied in the sense of how technology is used within education. Some articles addressed the use of technology by the students themselves, while others concentrated more on the use of technology within the classroom. Others focused on how technology could be used to communicate with parents. Finally, the articles concentrating on family involvement indicated that a positive link existed when a student's family was engaged in the student's life. Although the literature was thorough, there was a noticeable lack of information from the student's perspective regarding student academic success. This gap in the literature will be the focus of this study. Three theories of motivation organized the information and provided the foundation for the theoretical framework of this study: self-determination, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning, which were consistently mentioned in the examined research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study includes the theories pertaining to student motivation and apathy. The guiding research question focuses on the discovery of personal

perspectives of highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students in terms of academic achievement. Therefore, a basic comprehension of motivational theory is essential to understanding the effect of motivational factors on an individual's desire to learn. More precisely, the researcher will determine the factors that influence students' intrinsic motivation or lack thereof. The three theories that were most prevalent within the literature related to student motivation were human motivation theory, self-efficacy theory, and student apathy theory. Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory set the foundation for other motivational theories including Ryan and Deci's (2000b) self-determination theory, and, as such, will be covered first.

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs. The base of the hierarchy contains basic physiological needs. Once an individual's basic needs are met, he or she moves to safety, love/belonging, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). As lower needs are met, higher needs become the center of focus until ultimately self-actualization or a strong desire to reach his or her potential can theoretically be achieved.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is based largely on Maslow's (1943) research, except SDT theorists rely solely on social environment to reach maximum potential. According to Deci and Ryan (2000b), self-determination theory, there are three major components: autonomy, competence feedback, and relatedness. "Self-Determination Theory is a theory of motivation. It is concerned with supporting our natural or intrinsic tendencies to behave in effective and healthy ways" (Deci and Ryan, 2000b, p.68) There are three major categories of motivation in self-determination theory; they are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is an inherent curiosity that compels one to want to learn. Extrinsic motivation exists when one does not learn for the sake of learning but rather for a reward the

student perceives as valuable. This reward can be as simple as a sticker, a grade on a test, or a piece of candy. Amotivation is the opposite of being motivated; it is a feeling of not caring or a lethargic attitude towards learning.   Garne and Deci (2005) stated, "self-determination theory provides a fuller and more useful approach to understanding the motivational bases for effective organizational behavior" (p. 356). In relation to education, self-determination theorists suggested that as long as students decide to succeed and teachers offer the proper support, there is no reason a student should not find academic success (Garne & Deci, 2005). Garn et al. (2010) expanded this definition to further explain motivation. Garn et al. (2010) stated:

> Motivation is based on the ability of social environments to support three basic human needs: (a) autonomy – desire to self-regulate behavior; (b) competence – desire to interact effectively with the environment; and (c) relatedness – desire to feel a reciprocal connection to others. (p. 264)

Garn et al.'s (2010) expanded definition of motivation is a tool in which classroom teachers can use to better understand disengaged students. According to Garn et al. (2010), the key to motivation is to allow student choice, ensure student success by designing lessons that progressively get more difficult, and allow students to work together to share facts and feel personally connected as they learn. Powell (2011) reiterated the importance of the three basic human needs by stating, "self-determination theory provides a useful framework to conceptualize fundamental adolescent needs in that it identifies three needs that form the basis for an individual's self-motivation and well-being. These needs include competence, relatedness/connection, and autonomy" (p. 246). Powell (2011) went on to explain why providing an autonomous environment is vital to learning. Powell (2011) stated, "self-determination theory posits that autonomous environments promote increased engagement

through increased cognitive involvement, increased effort, and decreased boredom" (p. 251).

Self-determination theory gives teachers a useful understanding of what motivates students to learn so that teachers can design both short and long term lessons plans.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura (1986) was responsible for self-efficacy theory. This theory refers to an individual's beliefs in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce results. According to Bandura, "Self-efficacy theory and its value in stimulating research that clarifies the contribution of self referent thought to human motivation, affect, and action" (Bandura, 1986, p. 359) will produce results. Similarly, Graham (2009) summarized self-efficacy as the "belief in one's ability to accomplish a task" (p. 297). In relation to education, students that can make decisions about their learning to achieve academic success and follow through with those decisions will be successful students. Azevedo & Moos (2009) stated, "self-efficacy is of central importance and is conceptualized as the self-perception of one's capabilities to meet situational demands based on current states of motivation" (p. 578). However, this theory does not address the students that do not care about making goals or exerting effort to be successful. While this theory may work for most students, there is a percentage of the student population lacking in-depth research. These students, the ones that tend to get overlooked, are the non-identified students. For the purpose of this study, non-identified students are students that have not been labeled as gifted or exceptional education students.

Frankl's Student Apathy Theory

Frankl searched for the meaning of life and reported that students with a sense of "meaning for their life" (Handelman, 1999, p. 14) will be more likely to succeed. While students may not discover the meaning of life in a social studies classroom, the same principle applies. If

teachers give meaning to learning or make learning meaningful to students, the students are more likely to buy in to the concept the teacher is trying to convey. For example, if an economics instructor is teaching a lesson about budgets but does so in an abstract way, students will be less likely to see the importance of the lesson on their life. For example, if the instructor chooses to teach the budget lesson using a household budget, something students will not use now, the students may not find the lesson particularly engaging. However, if that same instructor creates a lesson around a realistic part-time job the student has or could have and uses an actual paycheck to create a budget, the student would be more likely to be attentive during the lesson because the students would be able to see how the lesson applies to their life. Hence, the budget the student could apply to their real life holds more meaning. This creates a better understanding and gives students further chances of academic success.

Related Literature

This review of related literature focused on issues that potentially impact student motivation. While a considerable amount of research has been conducted on how to motivate students to learn, a gap in the literature exists when studying motivation from the point of view of the students themselves. In this review, a number of key topics relating to motivation were researched. The researched topics included: reward systems, family influence, student-teacher relationships, highly qualified teachers, student apathy, adolescence, self-efficacy, personal effort, student motivation, autonomy, goal setting, pedagogy, and influence of technology. It was my goal to detect a commonality among highly-motivated students and highly-unmotivated students to help all learners achieve maximum educational success.

Reward Systems

Using reward systems within the K-12 classroom is a debated topic among educators. Contention over reward systems range from if reward systems are effective to the possible negative impact rewards systems can have on intrinsic motivation. Although debate exists over how best to motivate students within the realm of education, there is little argument that some current K-12 students lack motivation. Etuk and Clegg (2012) addressed how students' poor performance is related to lack of motivation and acknowledged the need for teachers to implement strategies to improve student motivation. Research has suggested that students are unable to connect their current effort with long-term outcomes. According to McDowell (2013), students who score higher on test scores are more likely to have improved motivation. Another study indicated high attendance rates in middle school and high middle school grades are correlated to increased high school GPAs (American Institutes for Research, 2013). According to a study conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, students with a high GPA will perform better in college (O'Shaughnessy, 2014). Finally, those students that successfully graduate from college will be more likely to earn higher salaries in the work force. According to Money Magazine, the average college graduate will earn $45,478 (Poppick, 2015). That is $15,478 more than a high school graduate and $24,478 more that someone who does not complete high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

There is lack of connection between success in school and success beyond K-12 classrooms that concerns many educators. To address this problem, educators have developed different classroom techniques such as reward-based education rather than traditional classroom methods (Etuk & Clegg, 2012). Rewards-based education is intended to help motivate students to work harder at school-related tasks while earning tickets or points that can be used to obtain

available items (Etuk & Clegg, 2012). One of the keys to success for this type of reward system

is to stock items students would like to earn. If items available are not what students desire, the

system is far less effective. An effective strategy to combat this issue is to poll students on

possible rewards. It is essential to reward-based education to have student buy-in. In a study

concerning which rewards were most valuable to students, researchers McClurg and Morris

(2014) identified which specific classroom rewards were of most value to students by surveying

the students themselves.

Although advocates of reward-based education believe such systems improve motivation,

opponents of reward-based systems argue that reward systems decrease students' intrinsic

motivation. Shachar (2008) argued, according to self-determination theory, the use of extrinsic

rewards can lower intrinsic motivation. Challengers of reward-based education believe the true

key to motivation is unlocking students' intrinsic motivation. Schlimme (2013) suggested that

when one discovers their own ability, it would lead to greater motivation. One's ability is

reflective of what one believes they can accomplish. If students find success in small tasks or

assignments, they will be more likely to believe they can successfully achieve a task and will be

more likely to attempt difficult assignments because students feel confident they will succeed.

This concept was reinforced by Arkoosh, Weber, and McLaughlin (2009); a student's "self-

concept" and their level of motivation are partially responsible for how well the student will

perform academically. Whether motivation to learn is intrinsic or extrinsic and despite which

position educators align themselves on the issue of motivation, there is little doubt that obtaining

motivation is one of the essential components to academic success.

Family Influence

The influence a family has on student academic achievement can be positive, negative, or a combination of both. How students react to family influence is as diverse as the students themselves. Students can either embrace parental values or reject them. Parents who themselves are educated value education and are likely to instill that belief onto their children. Other parents may have obtained lower levels of formal schooling and therefore are unable or unwilling to instill an appreciation of education in their children. Research has suggested that when parents themselves are educated and familiar with educational institutions, their children benefit from involved parental presence (Wamala, Kizito, & Jjemba, 2013, p. 134). This does not necessarily mean that parents that do not have experience with formal education will not be able to effectively become involved in their children's learning. A parent's own level of education may have an impact on a student's education but is not the sole determination of academic success. Other factors such as socio-economic status, parental involvement, and parental expectations also impact students academically.

A family's socio-economic status is one factor that impacts students' academic achievement, particularly in industrialized/developed nations. According to Shukakidze (2013), "family social-economic status matters more than school-related factors for student learning outcomes in industrialized/developed countries" (p. 136). If socio-economic status was the sole determination of whether students academically succeed or struggle, all of the research conducted about the school's impact would be null and void. Socio-economic status is one factor of student success.

Families with a higher socio-economic status are less likely to lag behind academically than students from low socio-economic status (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009, p.

411). Research has suggested that "family background, parents' education level, number of books at home and student related factors were important contributors in student academic achievement" (Shukakidze, 2013, p. 135). Research has suggested when a parent and child read together at the beginning of the child's elementary education, that child will have higher levels of student achievement over another student where the parent and child are not reading together (Araujo & Costa, 2015). Additionally, Cunningham & Stanovich (1998) stated

> The average child at the 90th percentile reads almost two million words per year outside of school, more than 200 times more words than the child at the 10th percentile, who reads just 8,000 words outside of school during a year. (p. 11)

> The benefits of education range from higher average salaries to greater life satisfaction. Wamala et al. (2013) noted "children of educated parents have a higher level of life satisfaction and fewer problems and are relatively more confident, self-reliant, and free from anxieties and other psychological problems" (p. 134). The National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a) noted that

> In 2013, 71% of the U.S. population age 3 and over used the Internet. The percentage of Internet users in the population 3 and over was generally higher for those with higher family income levels. For example, 72% of people with family incomes from $40,000 to $49,999 used the Internet compared to 85% of people with family incomes of $100,000 or more. (para. 5)

Parenting styles can also impact students' academic success. Garn et al. (2010) suggested that parents who allow their children to have choices and give their children enough space to solve their own problems are better able to help cope with aging. This type of parenting style parallels

best-teaching practices by allowing students to choose which assignments best align with their leaning style as students complete assignments.

Dexter (2000) explained,

Children with mothers with more schooling, or from families with higher incomes, are estimated to start off with slightly higher initial alphabetic skills, and to show growth trajectories that are steeper and more curvilinear than children of mothers with less schooling or low family incomes. (p. 121)

Despite the research that students of higher income earning families have distinct advantages, it is not the only factor contributing to academic success (Balfanz, 2009). While many students from low-income families struggle in school, others thrive. For example, a family where the father works outside the home and the mother is a homemaker would often make less money than the family with two, full-time working parents. However, despite the lack of financial income, many students from said families still do well in school (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2016).

Although a family may not have a substantial income, having at least one parent in the home that is potentially available for both academic and emotional support could have a positive academic outcome. "Positive role models, educational resources and experiences, and social-skill development are vital building blocks to academic and life success" (Foster, 2015, para. 2). Regardless of if both parents work outside the home or at least one parent stays at home, the most important factor is parent involvement. Jeynes (2007) documented the importance of parental involvement stating, "parental involvement positively influenced educational outcomes" (p. 84).

Jeynes (2007) wrote about active parental involvement. Jeynes (2007) discussed that some in the education field have recognized the primary way to raise academic achievement is through parental involvement. While research has suggested parental support is significant, the timing of said support is also a critical factor. From the time children are born, they are learning; this essentially makes the parents a child's first teachers. As previously stated, parents that read to their children have a positive impact on the future academic success of the student. Early parental involvement is optimal considering that

> By the time children go to middle school and high school, they are more convinced of
>
> their academic and physical strengths and weaknesses, and parental involvement,
>
> although perhaps appreciated by teachers and students, may have less of an impact on
>
> student achievement. (Jeynes, 2007, p. 100)

Parental involvement is particularly important during adolescence when students are most likely to lose their intrinsic motivation. Pickhardt (2012) stated "supervisory support of parents to help keep effort up while traditional motivation has temporarily has fallen away" (para. 8).

Not only is it important for parents to be involved in their children's lives, it is also important for those parents to set expectations of academic success. According to Jeynes (2007), parental attendance and participation in school activities had less of an impact than on student success that parents simply expressing their expectation of successes. When parents clearly state their expectations, students are more likely to succeed. Another interesting fact reported by Midrai and Midrai (2011) reiterated that perspective by stating "parents' high expectations can actually overcome the potential negative influences of other background factors such as family size, parents' educational level, and socioeconomic status" (p. 43). Parents that actively monitor their child's grades and upcoming assignments as well as regularly communicate with teachers

can immediately see concerns that would negatively impact student success. This idea is

supported by research conducted by Jeynes (2007). According to Jeynes, parents that supervise

that homework is done completely and conscientiously and is turned in on time are more likely

to experience success (Pickhardt, 2012), and a positive impact on student success can be

achieved. Additionally, when parents and teachers communicate, they develop a positive

relationship, which in turn has a positive effect on grades.

While there is debate among scholars as to which influence impacts students the most,

there is no doubt that "family was emphasized as one of the key factors that should be taken into

consideration by all stakeholders in the field of education" (Shukakidze, 2013, p. 135). When

teachers and parents work together, this can contribute to academic success.

Student-Teacher Relationships

In discussing student academic success, one would be remiss if the relationship between

student and teacher were not addressed. According to Shukakidze (2013), a connection exists

between academic success and/or motivation and the relationship that exists between students

and teachers. Positive student-teacher relationships have been reported to increase academic

success and motivation. Shukakidze (2013) suggested teachers that can make every student feel

valued and unique, which in turn, increases students' motivation.   Students who feel supported

and cared for exhibit greater interest in class and school, and their grades are positively impacted

(Schaps, n.d.). When students are more motivated to complete assignments and study for tests,

they are likely to do better in the class. This leads to a cycle of motivation, higher self-esteem,

and better grades. Better grades help keep students motivated and increase students' self-esteem.

Backed by research, Shukakidze (2013) went on to state "students who are educated in

small classes learn more than students do in the bigger classes" (p. 134); more specifically,

"when a teacher teaches less than 80 students over the course of an academic year, student academic performance is considerably higher" (Shukakidze, 2013, p. 134). While this may be the case in most elementary schools, middle school and high school teachers' average class size in the United States is "26.8 students in public secondary schools" (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b, p. 1). Even accurate data on average class size is misleading because the average is taken from all teachers and students in the building. As Abbott (2014) stated, "A student-teacher ratio of 10:1 does not mean that the average class size in a school is ten students" rather "a school with a student-teacher ratio of 20:1 would likely have an average class size closer to 30" (p. 1).

One reason students may do better in a classroom containing a lower student-to-teacher ratio is the ability of the teacher to offer more concise feedback on student work. As Shukakidze (2013) emphasized, teachers with low student-teacher ratio can give students more meaningful comments which in turn improves students' success on subsequent work. This data is particularly frustrating for teachers that have no control of class size. Researchers have asserted "when the total student load (TSL), is low there is a high probability of developing personal relationships between teachers and students" (Shukakidze, 2013, p. 135), yet class sizes continue to be high.

To combat the challenge of the lack of personal relationships between student and teacher in schools with a high class size, many K-12 schools make use of mentoring programs. Mentoring programs have been included as another way to meet needs for students. Mentoring programs give students an opportunity to connect with an adult at school. This is particularly important in schools with high class sizes where students may slip through the cracks. This one-on-one, personal relationship to at least one adult in the building can improve grades. Often

mentors help students set goals and periodically check in with the student to offer encouragement. If the mentor senses a problem, they can work with both the parents and teachers to collaborate to find a solution. Negative youth outcomes can be overcome through programs such as mentoring which help student develop positive relationships (Komosa-Hawkins, 2009). Mentoring programs have become necessary to help make connections with students in schools where the student-teacher ratio is high. Mentoring programs help develop a one-on-one relationship with an adult in the building which could improve student motivation. Students' academic achievement is also tied to their personal relationship with their teachers. Therefore, a combination of mentoring programs and positive personal relationships with teachers contributes to a student's academic achievement.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Student academic success is not solely dependent upon the teacher, but it can certainly be argued that sound pedagogical techniques offer students a better opportunity for success. Marzano (2003) contended that "when students were enrolled in high achieving schools with the guidance of highly qualified teachers, students overall academic performance was 2.95 times higher" (p. 133). According to Shukakidze (2013), even when a student does not apply themselves at home to studying, a good teacher can overcome the lack of home preparation by utilizing the time spend in the classroom. Because research has revealed parental involvement positively impacts student achievement, it can be deduced that if parental involvement positively impacts student academic achievement then students that do not have involved parents are negatively impacted. This correlation focuses on the lack of parental involvement regarding education. Students that are dealing with other issues such as divorce or uninvolved parents are likely to require more intervention by the school. As with any profession, teachers strive to be

the best teachers they can be. Part of that yearning is to understand how life circumstances can impact a student's academic achievement. While highly qualified teachers cannot erase the negative effects of a student's home life, they can offer those students the best chance of success. A huge drive for highly qualified teachers has taken place over the last 30 years. In 1983, the report "A Nation at Risk" cited the need for highly qualified teachers (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The ever-increasing workload and responsibilities related to teaching directly impacts job performance and often negatively affects students.

A good teacher can be defined in many ways. A teacher who has a combination of good classroom management, sound pedagogical techniques, and a strong content knowledge is likely considered a good teacher. According to Shulman (2007), "good teachers engage the class and motivate student participation" (p. 4). Teachers do not begin their careers being an expert in all three of these areas. It takes years of practice and an intentional refinement to become a master teacher. Teaching is an art form and as with any craft, develops over time. Many teachers have a natural ability to connect with students, and it can be argued that teachers either have that ability or they do not. For the sake of describing a good teacher, the natural ability of connecting with students is assumed. However, the ability to connect with students is merely a starting point.

Once teachers can connect with students, the other key aspects of a good teacher come into play. When a teacher enters the work force and has a classroom of his or her own, he or she discovers their personal strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. As with most professions, many teachers strive to become better. Teachers may have classroom control, but they may want to learn techniques to make their classroom run more efficiently. This desire for improvement leads to those teachers seeking information on better classroom management. In order for

teachers to enhance their effectiveness, they may attend workshops, enroll in a college course, or simply conduct on-line research to learn tools they can implement in their class. All but the latter are likely to cost money to attend, and this is money that teachers are not likely to have based on their current salaries. Furthermore, according to Shulman (2007), a modest "5 percent salary increase -$2,338 for an average teacher- would cost taxpayer more than $8 billion a year" (p. 4); therefore, an increase in salary seems unlikely.

The national starting teacher salary average as of January 30, 2017 was $54,048 ("Public School Teacher Salaries," 2017, p. 1). This leads to another problems, including recruiting and retaining high quality teachers (Shukakidze, 2013). The cost of college increases every year, and many students have to obtain student loans to pay for college. As with other students, teachers who took out student loans must pay back the money they borrow. However, unlike other professions, teachers' salaries are lower than other occupations that require at least a bachelor's degree and, in many cases, a master's degree. Teachers have a difficult time paying living expenses as well as repaying student loans. Low salary combined with exceeding work-load causes teachers to leave the profession. Currently, "17% of teachers leaving the profession within 5 years of starting" (Brown, 2015, para. 3). The teachers that remain in the educational field and are solely responsible for living expenses find it difficult to make ends meet.

Student Apathy

Apathy can be described as a lack of enthusiasm or energy. "Student apathy and noninvolvement are as common as chalk dust in many of our nation's classrooms" (Raffini, 1986, p. 53). Apathy is defined as "indifference" or "lack of emotional connection" (Tita, 2010, para. 1). Another great rallying cry of adolescence is "I don't care." (Pickhardt, n.d., para. 1). Students that use this phrase could be frustrated or, in terms of a middle school student, apathy

can mean poor grades, boredom, and in some cases behavior issues. Any one of these concerns could feasibly contribute to a lack of academic success. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1993), 31.7% of teachers report the number one problem as student apathy. Student apathy surpassed student absenteeism at 22.9%, poverty at 15.2%, and parental alcoholism at 12.5%. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). "Nationally, public school teachers reported students coming to school unprepared to learn as the most prevalent serious problem facing public schools, with 27% of public school teachers reporting this as a serious problem in their school" (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Often, students do not care about their schoolwork and come to class without proper materials; thus, teachers face extraordinary challenges. If students do not bring the proper materials to class, the teachers have the additional problem of supplying those materials for the students. According to White (2016), "on average most spent nearly $500 last year, and one in 10 spent $1,000 or more" (para. 2). As previously stated, teachers struggle to pay essential bills and do not have funds to stock their own classrooms with supplies students should bring on their own.

Upon reviewing the literature on the topic of academic student apathy in education during adolescence, three major themes were identified: motivation, pedagogy, and self-efficacy. One topic that was consistently absent from the research were the studies based on student apathy from students' perspective of why some students are apathetic while others are fanatical about earning the highest possible points on each assignment. Despite extensive research on how to motivate students and the prevalence of best teaching practices, there is a substantial gap in the literature about student apathy, particularly regarding students' perceptions about apathy.

Adolescence

Adolescence itself is an enigma. Some young men and women seem to navigate adolescence with ease while others struggle over hurdle after hurdle. "Adolescence is often a stressful period during development because it involves a pivotal transition from childhood dependency to adulthood independence and self-sufficiency" (Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 1998, p. 670). Adolescence can be a difficult time for both parents and children, as this is also the time when children start to separate themselves from their parents. "Adolescence can be a very self-centered and socially limiting experience in the extreme causing young people to lose empathy for others in their preoccupation with self-interest and confinement to their own small social circle of friends" (Pickhardt, n.d., para. 11).

> During adolescence, grades can be impacted by these changes. Research has indicated: School achievement matters to the adults and usually to the young child who at least wants to do well for them, if not for her. This desire to perform well for parents, however, tends to slacken for many young people when adolescence begins. School achievement of many students tends to fall away-early adolescent achievement drop (Pickhardt, 2012, para. 1).

As students develop during adolescence and do not have the motivation to learn as they once did, some students begin to struggle academically. This struggle may show itself in low grades. Many "students are not willing to accept mediocrity, choosing instead apathy and even failure then 'average' or 'below-average' performance" (Raffini, 1986, p. 54). In other words, if students do not feel they have the ability to be successful they would rather no nothing as opposed to being just average or below average. This choice gives students an excuse for low grades as opposed to receiving low marks in school because of ability.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief that a task can be accomplished. Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) stated, "Self-efficacy was a better predictor of positive attitudes than was actual ability" (p. 53). When a student has confidence that they can successfully complete an assignment, he or she is more likely to stay engaged and less likely to cause disturbances, as noted by Pajares and Urdan (2006); "Students' self-efficacy beliefs exercise an important influence on their behavior" (Pajares & Urdan, 2006, p. 21). Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) stated, "one's effectiveness in performing specific tasks is termed self-efficacy" (p. 45). Regarding academic achievement of middle school students, "adolescents with a strong sense of efficacy for learning are more resilient and better able to resist the adverse academic influences of low-achieving peers than are those with a weak sense of efficacy" (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006, p. 46). As grades drop, students begin to find peers whose grades have also dropped. By middle school, students are often leveled in classes with peers of similar academic abilities. It is possible that students live up to the classes they are in. For example, if a student is moved to an honors level class, they may rise to the challenge. Conversely, if a high-ability student is placed in a lower ability class, their grades could decline. According to Smith (2008), students in high-achieving classes see themselves as bright or smart, and those in low-achieving classes referred to themselves as slow. It is unknown if classes should be leveled by ability or if students should be placed in classes randomly. In accordance to self-efficacy, regardless of where students are placed, if teachers create an environment that all students can be successful, students are more likely to academically advance.

Personal Effort

When individuals discover they are good at something, they take pride in their accomplishments. Once success has been obtained and confidence is built, one can strive to improve or hone his or her strengths through effort. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) stated that personal effort is the most important factor in academic achievement. The term personal effort is a broad phrase and has many implications regarding education. For example, personal effort could mean making the effort to come to school. Simply coming to school may be one factor contributing to academic success, but that is certainly a starting point and not an all-encompassing basis. Other components of personal effort that could possibly increase academic success are organization, reading level, completing homework, studying, paying attention in class, taking notes, and asking questions. However, some students still struggle regardless of how much personal effort they exert. Students often stop trying academically to spare themselves from feeling like a failure if they try and fail (Raffini, 1986). If a student does not try while completing an assignment, they separate themselves from the feelings of failure on that assignment.

Student Motivation

Motivation is what drives people to achieve goals; those goals can be emotional, physical, or academic in nature. According to Webster's dictionary, motivation is "giving of reason to act/ enthusiasm" ("Motivation," 2017). In contrast, "amotivation emphasizes a lack of intention or value for behavior that results in either no action or passive action" (Garn et al., 2010, p. 264). Without motivation, success on any level, emotional, physical, or academic, is unlikely to occur.

On the topic of student motivation, Keller (1987) referred to the heated argument of whether teaching is a learned skill or an inherent art. "Effective teachers foster students' natural inquisitiveness and can harness the energy of learners in a productive manner" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, 68). Superior educators have an innate ability to take a student curiosity and apply that curiosity to an academic topic and engage the students in such a way there is a lack of academic apathy.

The level of impact a teacher has on students is also dependent on the students themselves. For example, in comparison to other groups, gifted students tend to have a higher level of intrinsic motivation (Garn et al., 2010) and may very well thrive regardless of the teachers' ability. According to Rosa and Eskenazi (n.d.), motivation can be defined as what occurs when students make a conscience decision to act. Likewise, until a student makes the conscious decision to act, the student will likely be disengaged in the lesson. To predict such behavior, Rosa and Eskenazi (n.d.) suggested the use of questionnaires be used to better gauge student's current levels. Teachers can predict how motivated a student is by providing the students an opportunity at a self-assessment questionnaire (Rosa & Eskenazi, n.d.,). As Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) stated, "Academic motivation is when students believe that they can perform a task in a proficient manner, they will become more engaged in the activity, work harder, and sustain high levels of effort even when obstacles are encountered" (p. 51). It is important to establish academic motivation in the beginning of the year. If students start the year off failing, they may not be able or will be unwilling to try during the remainder of the year.

In addition to setting the students up for success, schools can establish a foundation of academic achievement. For example, when teachers promote academic motivation and actively engage students within the classroom and combine that motivation and engagement with an

emphasis on academics, both students and schools succeed (Schaps, n.d.). Teachers hold

students to very high standards because they believe it is possible for the students to grow into it.

According to Condron (n.d.), "having someone in your life who holds you to high standards and

believes you can achieve is so critical" (p. 2). Students with apathy are less motivated to learn,

and according to Crotty (2013), motivated students have higher achievement and are more

satisfied with school.

While this type of disconnection tends to begin in middle school, the trend continues into

high school and beyond. Crotty (2013) discovered "upwards of 40% of high school students are

chronically disengaged from school" (para. 1). This trend continues into college where "students

are not only reading less, but also are not practicing quantitative analysis and application in their

coursework and, therefore, leave college without those essential life and work skills" (Ryan,

Moss, & Moss, 2015, p. 281). The research did not, however, suggest reasons for such change.

While it is possible for students to carry the apathy some students develop during adolescence, it

could be possible that outside influences such as technology could have the same negative

impact on student learning.

Autonomy

Autonomy, as it relates to education, is the giving students choices among assignments.

Allowing students to choose assignments gives the students a feeling of independence while

learning. For example, a teacher needs students to understand the functions of the three branches

of government. There are numerous ways in which to teach this material. A teacher could give a

lecture on the three branches of government and expect the students to take notes, give the

students prewritten notes and have the students memorize the material, play a video that

describes the three branches of government, or use a combination of these methods to teach the material. However, the previous examples lack student autonomy.

A more effective scenario would be for a teacher to embed autonomy into the lesson. Beginning the lesson with an anticipatory set allows students the ability to choose how to show their previous knowledge while still permitting the teacher to gauge students' present levels of knowledge. Knowing students' present level of knowledge helps teachers understand areas of weakness students may have. As students respond to the anticipatory set, the teacher can walk around the room and gauge the class' prior knowledge. If the teacher sees that some students understand the concept while others do not, the teacher has a great opportunity to engage the learners by allowing advanced students to share and explain what they already know to struggling students. After students have an opportunity to share their knowledge, the teacher can then fill in the gaps that exist and clarify any misunderstandings.

Once students have a basic knowledge of the material, it is at this point a teacher can then offer students an opportunity to expand their knowledge by means of an autonomous activity. Perhaps a teacher could make available three different videos the students would be able to choose from. The videos essentially contain the same material, just presented in different formats. Allowing students to view the video of their choice will further enhance their learning by giving the students autonomy regarding which video they select. Students are more likely to complete assignments with more engagement if the assignment allows for student choice from a variety of options. Powell (2011) explained why offering choices is beneficial to students by stating that allowing students to choose their seating gives those students a feeling of control, and when they feel they have autonomy through the choice of their seat they will feel more connected to what they are learning. Garne and Deci (2005) offered an alternative explanation by

asserting, "an important aspect of self-determination theory is the proposition that extrinsic motivation can vary in the degree to which it is autonomous versus controlled" (p. 334). In other words, if choice is offered, intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by extrinsic motivation but not the opposite.

The teacher could also use differentiated instruction by providing videos clips with varied difficulty and assigning students to videos clips based on level of understanding. Likewise, "self-determined forms of motivation are also related to high levels of academic self-regulation, whereas controlled forms are linked to academic procrastination" (Garn et al., 2010, p. 264). Allowing students the choice of how they present the information they learned gives them an opportunity to excel regardless of their varying learning styles.

The motivation behind using incentives is to encourage student success. However, when it comes to classroom rewards, teachers need to choose carefully how they will use rewards in the classroom setting (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). A compromise to both satisfy a student's need for autonomy while retaining teachers' authority would be for teachers to offer several possible reward options from which students can choose. To offer items that would be of interest to students, teachers could survey students as to which items they would like to include as rewards. If teachers offer items that appeal to students, the students are more likely to buy into the program. This philosophy is much like how adults function in society; adults work and earn a paycheck, and that paycheck can be used to pay for what they choose to buy. The paycheck does not diminish the workers' intrinsic desire to do their job to the best of their ability. If anything, the opposite is true; the more money one earns to help satisfy wants and needs, the more time and energy one can devote to being the best worker possible, thus increasing motivation.

Not only is it important to give students choice when it comes to learning, but there is research to support the fact that students should be involved in developing projects from the beginning stages, not just completing an assignment designed by the teacher (Powell, 2011). Powell (2011) suggested an excellent way to build autonomy is to offer students the opportunities to choose what they will learn and how they will learn it. Not only is it important to offer students opportunities to choose what they would like to learn, studies have provided evidence that the timing of an opportunity also impacts students. For example, Hafen et al. (2011) suggested students that are given autonomy at the beginning of the year can have a positive impact on students' grades for the remainder of the year (Hafen et al., 2011).

Practical classroom implementation would be for a teacher to create a learning experience where students can choose from a variety of assessments from which their grade will be based. Ideally, this lesson would be presented as soon as possible in the school year. The sooner the lesson can be presented, the better chance the teacher will engage students throughout the year. There are numerous reasons to implement this in the beginning of the year. Hafen et al. (2011) suggested students should be introduced to high-interest assignments that allow for student autonomy within the first few week of a course, which results in students who are more actively engaged throughout the course. Likewise, Powell (2011) advocated in giving students opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, which will increase their autonomy. Also, "adolescents are most likely to succeed and engage in environments that allow for structured autonomy with which to apply their knowledge" (Powell, 2011, p. 251). Powell (2011) suggested that the earlier teachers can engage students in the year, the less likely those teachers will deal with inappropriate behavior. Powell (2011) supported this idea by stating, "adolescents reporting higher school engagement also tend to have more positive peer and parent

relationships and engage in fewer delinquent activities" (p. 245). Finally, motivation increases when students are in an environment that supports autonomy (Powell, 2011). Students that have more motivation to learn the material are more likely to be successful students. Shachar (2008) related motivation to autonomy stating, "autonomy through choice enhance[s] motivation, persistence, performance, and production" (p. 298).

In other words, if a choice is given as it relates to outcomes or rewards, individuals will be motivated to complete the task. A debate currently exists among educators regarding intrinsic motivation and its impact on extrinsic motivation and the degree to which extrinsic motivation decreases intrinsic motivation. Shia (1998) described the impact extrinsic incentives have on intrinsic motivation as "detrimental to education" (Shia, 1998, p. 3). Shia (1998) went on to explain "extrinsic students prove one's competence while intrinsic students improve their competence" (p. 3). Shia (1998) enhanced another dimension to the study of motivation by adding two additional areas that would be beneficial to study: power and fear of failure. Both power and fear of failure are extrinsic motivators that are difficult to detect.

Goal Setting

One way to incorporate autonomy into the classroom is to let students set personal goals for themselves. Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) encouraged educators to help adolescents expand on goal setting and encourage students to self-monitor their progress, focus on time management, and to help student self-evaluate after a lesson or time period. Teachers are needed to facilitate this process, as many adolescents have a hard time setting goals and anticipating challenges that may arise and hinder their ability to accomplish them (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Students can set daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly goals. Locke and Latham (2006) recommended setting goals because the act of setting goals may motivate students to fulfill their

potential but also may give students something of their own choosing to work towards. Students who have been given the opportunity to set goals and predict higher grades tend to be more academically successful compared to students who predict lower grades because those students devote less time and devotion to the course (Guillaume & Khachikian, 2009). Goal setting and self-efficacy are related in terms of one's ability to set and carry out a plan of action to achieve one's goals (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Shachar (2008) went on to explain, "most Americans believe that having choices promotes health and happiness and that making choices is a way to meaningfully define themselves as individuals" (p. 270). The power of happiness and its effects should not be underestimated. Happiness has its roots deeply embedded in the identity of Americans. Thomas Jefferson felt strongly enough about happiness and the ability to pursue happiness to include it in the Declaration of Independence, stating Americans' deep desire to be able to pursue happiness.

Students take control of their learning when they set goals. Azevedo and Moos (2009) summarized Zimmerman's model as "results indicated that students who received the process goal and were asked to do a self-evaluation had the highest computer self-efficacy" (p. 586). This self-awareness is in part the basis of this study. Students that understand cause-effect relationships have a better grasp on the direct impact they have on their own academic success and in turn will more likely achieve higher grades. Locke and Latham (2006) stated that a key element in self-regulation is to set personal goals. Goals are a staple in any K-12 classroom. Teachers set class goals for reading, test scores, and homework completion. Goals are also put into place for teachers themselves during yearly evaluations. Data reveals higher goals lead to higher level of performance, and when someone sets a goal as the primary focus instead of a

reward, this leads to higher self-satisfaction in regards to performance (Locke & Latham, 2006).

By setting goals, individuals have something personal to work for and to strive to achieve.

While it is important for students to take the initiative and personal responsibility by setting and striving to achieve goals, significant adults in the lives of children impact students as well. For example, "parents and other family members contributed directly and indirectly to the goal framing practices of students" (Thomas, 2015, p. 179). Students tend to live up to the expectations set for them. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966) conducted a study to determine the effect expectation had on student achievement. They found that "for the school as a whole those children from whom the teachers had been led to expect greater intellectual gain showed a significantly greater gain in IQ scores than did the control children" (p. 116). Based on this research, children will live up to expectations set for them. These expectations can be from teachers or from parents or guardians. If parents and guardians fail to share expectations with students, the student could be negatively impacted from lack of guidance in terms of goal setting. In other words, teachers and parents or guardians should establish high expectations, and students should set goals based on those expectations.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the art of teaching. Most teaching preparation courses center around the concept of pedagogy. There is an abundance of information regarding teaching strategies. A combination of inspiring students to do their best along with employing sound teaching practices tend to be the focus of research. Keller (1987) summarized that for something to be relevant, it needs to be presented in a manner which is indicative of learning. It does not matter what the content is; a good teacher will find the best method for students to learn. A good teacher can teach just about anything, and as quickly as curriculum guides change year to year, teachers

certainly need to be able to adapt to the continuous changes. Being an expert on a given subject

is only one aspect of teaching. Not only does a teacher need to know the content they are

delivering to students, they also need to be able to hold students' attention, keep control of

classroom discipline, and fill the class time with meaningful activities that will help students gain

the knowledge they need to pass the end of year test required by most states.

Kim and Hannafin (2011) stated, "researchers have developed and refined pedagogical

frameworks and principles for scaffolding problem-solving" (p. 256). This is a key teaching

strategy that gives all students the opportunity to develop their own learning style. Scaffolding

involves building knowledge upon previously learned information. The process of scaffolding

merges existing information with new concepts by slowly linking the two together. The efficacy

of learning new information by connecting to previously taught material is backed by Azevedo

and Moos' (2009) research. Azevedo and Moos (2009) stated, "Students' use of specific

strategies such as metacognitive monitoring and prior knowledge activation is positively

associated with their ability to learn with computer based learning environments" (p. 592).

Expert teachers present a topic, allow students to help form a set meaning based on student input,

introduce new material, encourage students to make connections, permit sharing of ideas, and

add more complex ideas to the original concept.

This process establishes meaningful learning that helps build self-esteem in lower level

students by offering opportunities for success through small, tangible steps. Once foundations of

learning have been firmly established, teachers should move beyond basics to higher-order

thinking strategies. These higher-order thinking strategies include teachers introducing an idea

and then allowing students to think through those ideas, uncovering the problems but also

planning how to solve those problems (Kim & Hannafin, 2011). When students begin to learn a

topic based on their own interests and are given clear and concise guidance about the expectations for learning, lessons can be particularly effective (Kim & Hannafin, 2007). Shachar (2008) reiterated this sentiment by suggesting limiting the amount of choices as too many choices may lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed. Not only should students receive guidance while being introduced to new concepts, the lessons should be scaffolded to ensure students are on the right track and are not overwhelmed by the academic tasks laid out before them. Kim and Hannafin (2011) stated, "Scaffolding objectives are established to help students overcome challenges from each problem solving phase and inquiry activity" (p. 258). Lessons that are scaffolded build upon each other. Students have an opportunity to learn and acquire new understandings before moving on to the next topic.

While teachers are preparing lessons, it would be wise for teachers to make an effort to use a combination of how students learn best based on their particular human intelligence strength (Gardner, 1987). For the greatest amount of academic success, teachers should utilize all students' strengths and "all students' activities involve active cognitive processes such as creating, problem solving, reasoning, decision-making, and evaluation" (Thomas, 2015, p. 9). While it may not be feasible to incorporate these into every lesson, teachers should strive to include as many as possible into their lessons.

Additionally, teachers should allow students to individually find what the most important aspect of the lesson is for each student (Sozer, 2013), which gives the students the autonomy needed to create a deep understanding. Teacher training, along with recruitment for qualified individuals who possess knowledge of curriculum, ability to maintain control of a classroom, manage discipline, and the have the ability to connect with students are more likely to give

students an opportunity at an authentic learning experience. According to Guven and Kelesoglu (2014), there is no substitute for "a passionate and well trained teacher" (p. 358).

While some teachers seem to have a natural ability to teach from the beginning of their careers, others need to learn strategies and develop ways to engage students and run a classroom. Regardless of where teachers begin, there is always room for improvement. Teaching is not just instructing a lesson. The most important thing a teacher can do is to make a commitment to never give up on a child. If teachers are truly giving the students the amount of attention they need, reaching the student where they are, and helping those students to progress no matter what they start, the students will be more successful (Thierolf, 2014). It is essential to keep students' interest while maintaining discipline. "Students who are bored or inattentive or who put little effort to schoolwork are unlikely to benefit from better standards, curriculum, and instruction unless schools, teachers, and parents take steps to address their lack of motivation" (Crotty, 2013, para. 1). Creating a fun, active learning environment also helps establish a positive relationship with students. When students do not feel a teacher cares about them, students tend to stop trying in the classroom setting (Maeroff, 1996). Teachers have the difficult job of balancing learning and discipline in an energetic classroom.

Expert teachers have the ability of teaching in such a way that students are actively engaged in the lesson even when the teacher is lecturing. Holding students' attention through lecturing requires intense knowledge on the part of the teacher and the ability to hold the attention of active students. In addition to lectures, students need to have time to reflect on the material taught and develop their own opinion about how they feel about the material that has been taught (Ryan et al., 2015). To create this type of classroom, teachers often assign additional work outside the classroom. "Middle level of schooling, a significant part of student' academic

work is completed outside of class" (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006, p. 46). When students learn information at home, there is a base of prior knowledge students can use for activities such as cooperative learning or educational games. Many students lack the simple know how to study (Ryan et al., 2015). Ryan et al. (2015) suggested, "Students do not set out to fail. We suggest they haven't been challenged and, often, they don't know how to study" (p. 282). Therefore, in addition to teaching curriculum, teachers must also include lessons and examples of how to study. Even when students know how to study, the drive to study has decreased in the 21st century. Ryan et al. (2015) compared the average time students studied in 1961 to the average time a student studied in 2003. The results were an alarming drop in studying of 10 hours a week. They discovered that between 1961 and 2003, the average college student decreased the amount of hours they study by 10 hours a week (Ryan et al., 2015). However, regardless of how good the teacher is, they

> ultimately aren't in control of whether students succeeds or not. You can't make them do work, you can't make them learn, you definitely can't make them start to care. You can, however, influence all of those things through a caring relationship with your students.
> (Shevrin, 2015, p. 2)

Teachers have quite the task of balancing outstanding teaching practices while also establishing a kind and nurturing classroom environment.

Influence of Technology

In a world that relies on technology for daily communication and day-to-day living, it should be no surprise that technology is a major aspect regarding all areas of education. Teachers reported technology has decreased the amount of time a teacher spends grading and allows teachers more time to invest in creating stimulating and engaging lessons (Zhao, 2007).

Technology gives teachers an opportunity to bring videos and photographs in to the classroom like never before. Technology "open[s] the door to more extended use of video and photographs by both researchers and participants in the exploration of effective pedagogy in schools" (Kingsley, 2009, p. 6). As previously discussed, pedagogy focuses on prior knowledge as an effective teaching strategy in which all students have an opportunity to learn. Implementation or activating prior knowledge and linking that knowledge with technology was researched by Azevedo and Moos (2009). According to Azevedo and Moos (2009), "research has found that students who activate prior knowledge and monitor their emerging understanding tend to develop deeper understanding of challenging topics when compared to students who do not use these processes during learning with computer based learning environments" (p. 577). This indicates that using the computer as another tool to learning instead of the only tool to learning will help students develop a more authentic learning experience.

Current trends in education are heading towards a one-to-one computer to student ratio and increased Internet accessibility to ensure access for educational purposes. This concept is commonly referred to as anytime, anywhere learning. Chesterfield County Public School in Virginia uses this model and have adopted the slogan, "anytime, anyplace, learning" ("Anytime, Anywhere Learning," n.d.). Technology has allowed teachers to feel personally motivated to embrace technology within their classroom (Birch & Sankey, 2008). This motivation along with anytime, anywhere learning essentially gives students access to educational material 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Technology is an excellent way to engage students, but using technology for the sake of simply using it without meaningful lessons is not an effective use of academic time. Assessment-based programs allow students to have immediate, real-time feedback. Students that receive

immediate feedback can review missed questions and ask for clarification if necessary. Instant feedback is also desired of administrators and district leaders. To satisfy this need, standardized testing became the easiest more efficient way to test large numbers of students in the quickest manner possible (Tita, 2010). When instant feedback is available to students, teachers can create future lessons that are adapted to fit this new information and review or re-teach material almost immediately. On the other hand, standardized testing limits how teachers assess the knowledge students have gained. Generally, standardized testing is in multiple-choice format, and the test questions are answered by choosing the best answer. Standardized tests do not allow for essay-type questions or questions that students have to create a final product. Tita (2010) stated, "One might argue that it is the very effort to reinforce standardized tests that has inadvertently given birth to student apathy" (para. 2). When students are limited to standardized testing as the only means to assess their learning, students that test poorly can feel defeated and develop a sense of apathy.

Often the students that do not do well on standardized tests have learned material through the course of the class, but the standardized test reflects the lack of knowledge gained. These lessons, along with originally taught material, should offer authentic learning the students can apply to their life. When students are participating in authentic activities, it has been found they are more engaged and interested than when other forms of information are delivered (Van Horne et al., 2014). An example of an authentic technology lesson would be using the Internet to research two current issues of the student's choice and use the information to compare and contrast the issues. Students can also expand the lesson and write a summary of the two issues and relate those issues with the student's life. "The application of computers to collaborative learning has been considered as a new resource for research in the field, due to their capability of

logging interactions" (Managram & Weber, 2012, p. 354). Students can work cooperatively on an assignment in Googledocs. Googledocs allows more than one student to work on the same document at the same time. The document automatically keeps a running log of student contributions. When students can cooperate in this manner and are individually held accountable, the lesson becomes more meaningful.

Meaningful lessons improve student engagement and decrease classroom disruptions. A classroom riddled with classroom disruptions will cause both focused students and apathetic students to lose their concentration. Apathetic students lack motivation in even the best educational circumstances and much less in less than ideal educational settings.

Summary

Although motivation and pedagogy, including the adoption of technology in the classroom, were most prevalent among the research studied in the literature review, these topics are almost solely covered from teachers' perspectives and implementations. Research has determined teachers who plan active engaging lessons encourage students to remain involved and have a better chance at academic success. Apathy can be described as "indifference and uncaring attitude regarding their own performance" (Handelman, 1999, p. 14). Maclean-Blevins (2013) stated students are less likely to misbehave is they are actively participating and are also less likely to be bored and/or overwhelmed. A student who misbehaves is a student that chooses to do something they know they should not do or a student that chooses not to do something they are supposed to do (Sun & Shek, 2013,). Educators are familiar with student apathy, but many are perplexed as to how to solve the issue of student apathy.

In conclusion, there are several credible theories that could guide teachers to help students succeed. These theories are self-determination theory, self-efficacy theory, and student

apathy theory. However, despite researchers' and teachers' good intentions, there will always be students who have apathy. Scholars will continue to debate why students lack motivation and offer "solutions" that are sure to solve all students' educational issues. Still, without students' perspectives, researchers and theorists will continue to overlook a key component, the students themselves.

Intrinsically motivated students perform tasks because they enjoy it, not because they are trying to earn a reward. In the classroom setting, rewards could translate to grades, homework passes, or tangible rewards. Students who are intrinsically motivated require less time on the teachers' part because they complete the work without the teacher having to create reward systems. A master teacher who establishes the right blend of autonomy and classroom environment can find success with disengaged students. The current school climate in which teachers and students focus on high stakes testing is radically opposite from the school climate which focuses on mastery and learning for the sake of learning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to offer guidance for teachers and help them gain insight as to why some students are apathetic while other students are intrinsically motivated. The researcher described data collection that provided a rich and descriptive voice for five highly-motivated individuals and five highly-unmotivated individuals.

Chapter Three reviews the design of the study, the main research question, the five sub-questions as well as the setting and procedures. The researcher's role will be clearly described, and the data analysis will be defined and trustworthiness will be explained.

Design

This study used a transcendental phenomenological qualitative design to gain insight of students' perspectives as to why they are apathetic or highly motivated. This study combined different methods of teaching to create a dialogue of how students see, interpret, and know material (Maxwell, 2010). Phenomenological studies allow readers to hear the "voices of the students instead of the experts" (Sun & Shek, 2013, p. 2). Instead of learning from the perspectives of experts, the focus was the narratives of the students participating in the study (Sun & Shek, 2013). Aligning this study with Husserl (2001), I believe it was important to hear from students. Husserl (2001) stated that it is important to hear from first-hand experiences and stop the practice of theorizing based on personal opinions. Moustakas (1994) described centering the research on significant statements as essence description. Essence description can be defined as breaking down thoughts and statements to understand the true meaning beyond the words. Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) stated, "We might have a hunch about a phenomenon based on personal experiences and examine representative cases to

document what was conjectured to illustrate the nature of what is happening to readers," (p. 2) but a hunch needs to be supported by data.

Not only is it important to give individual perspectives, it is equally as important to interview subjects with differing point of view. Moustakas (1994) stated the importance of having the ability to reflect upon experiences from different points of view. Researchers should be able to widen the focus of the study, hence widening the scope of understanding. In education, teachers rely on their own personal understanding of students through a combination of the written word and personal experiences with students. However, due to the ever-increasing demands placed on teachers, one-on-one conferences with students may rarely, if ever, take place. It is this personal conferencing or interviewing that may determine what is best for individual students. However, at the very least teachers should give a questionnaire to students to gain insight. Schutz (1962) stated that "we have some rough knowledge" (p. 14) of a phenomenon and to "fill in the gaps with our own stock of knowledge" (p. 14). Interviewing participants ensured, or at the very least decreased, the amount of speculation and helped base the study in facts rather than opinions. The interview questions were open-ended questions regarding the students' opinions about standardized testing, technology, parental involvement, pedagogy, interests, behaviors, attitudes, and student/teacher relationships and offered them a chance to answer why middle school students may or may not have apathy.

Research Questions

The central question for this phenomenological research study was, "Why do some students experience apathy towards education during their middle school years?" According to Benders (2011), "76% of teachers identify student apathy as problem" (p. 10). To fully answer

the central question, the following sub-questions were also needed to be answered. The study is centered on students' perceptions as to:

SQ1: Based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years?

SQ2: What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn?

SQ3: What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy?

SQ4: What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation?

SQ5: What do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation?

Setting

The setting was a suburban middle school (grades six through eight) with students who were 12-15 years old. The school was comprised of middle-class socio-economic students with 25% of the population on free and reduced lunch. The student population was comprised of 20% Hispanic, 30% African-American, and 50% Caucasian; these statistics were sourced from the school/district website, and the URL was withheld to protect anonymity of institution and participants. The school employed 94 teachers and four administrators and served 1400 students. The school district was a public school system managed by the school board. The school system served 58,000 students who attended 62 schools. The school system had 38 elementary schools (grades K through five), 12 middle schools (grades six through eight), 11 high schools (grades nine through 12), and a technical center.

Participants

The participants of this study included 12 students ranging from 13-15 years old from a purposeful sample of middle school students in Dale County, Virginia. Dale County, Virginia is a pseudonym used for this study. The 12 participants included six highly-motivated students (three female and three male) as defined as students with a social studies grade average of at least 90% (A) and six highly unmotivated students (three female and three male) as defined by themselves and a social studies grade average of less than 70% (D). Creswell (2013) stated a good sample size for a phenomenology study is between three to 10, and the general guideline is not the size of the study but rather the extensive detail about each participant. Participants were limited to regular education students for the purpose of this study. Students that had been identified as gifted or exceptional were not included in this study because the characteristics that cause the student to be identified as gifted or exceptional could skew the data collected. Participants were chosen by the researcher and the cooperating teacher based on whether the students are identified as highly motivated or highly unmotivated. The study was introduced to parents and students through class discussions and emails. Individual students who the researcher and cooperating teacher felt were a good match for the study were asked if they would like to be part of the study. Only students that wanted to participate in the study received parent consent and student assent forms.

Procedures

Procedures for conducting the study included applying for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. This approval was obtained before seeking participants (see Appendix A). Permission was obtained from the district and the school principal to conduct the study (see Appendix B). From the observation of student motivation, I identified 12 possible candidates.

By selecting "participants that meet one or more criteria as predetermined" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 248), I used the purposeful sampling strategy of criterion sampling. After potential names of participants were decided upon, I gave each possible participant a recruitment letter (see Appendix A) that explained the study's purpose. Once potential participants were selected and an informed consent (see Appendix C) was signed by the parent or legal guardian, I met with each participant and interviews were conducted. During this interview, I explained the study again, and I asked students to fill out the student assent form (see Appendix D), learning style questionnaire (see Appendix G), and a student apathy questionnaire (see Appendix E). During the meeting, I informed students that participation in this study was completely voluntary and they could stop their participation in the study at any time. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. While conducting interviews, I used voice recordings to ensure accuracy when transcribing student responses. Memoing during the interviews allowed me to make note of the surroundings, facial expressions, posture as well as my thoughts during the interview. All material used during the interview process were stored under lock and key. Once I transcribed the voice recordings, I erased all voice recordings. Upon completion of the interviews, I coded and analyzed the data the participant provides using the program MAXQDA.

The Researcher's Role

My role as researcher and human instrument was to uncover the essence of academic motivation through this qualitative, phenomenological study. Through interviews I collected, I analyzed and interpreted data. Through this study, I hoped to gain a better understanding of student motivation by researching key characteristics that differentiate highly-motivated students and highly-unmotivated students.

I sent an email asking potential eighth grade social studies teachers if they would be willing and able to be my cooperating teacher for this study. The cooperating teacher was chosen from email responses. I did not know the participants prior to this study. I gave the criteria of highly motivated/highly unmotivated to the cooperating teacher, and we worked together to decide which students would be good candidates for the study.

As a classroom teacher for the past 18 years, I have struggled to understand what motivates students. My bias when I encounter one of these students is to assume they do not care or are indolent. However, during the interviews I practiced epoche. By practicing epoche, I bracketed my assumptions about unmotivated students and allow the students' voices to be heard.

Data Collection

In order to better understand the phenomenon of student apathy, I collected data from students' lived experiences. A variety of methods were used to collect data for this study to ensure data triangulation (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Through this triangulation, I intended to identify common themes and patterns of student motivation. These strategies included: (a) questionnaires, (b) interviews, and (c) observations. Working together with a cooperating teacher, we reviewed class grades to determine potential participants for the study. Only students with either an A or a D or a grade below the class average were considered for this study. Once potential students were identified, parent letters of consent and student letters of assent were sent home. Once six highly-motivated students and six highly-unmotivated students were selected and consent/assent were obtained, the study began.

The data collection began by giving students an adolescent apathy questionnaire to determine how the students themselves perceive their level of motivation. This data was used in

conjunction with student interviews to establish possible reasons for motivational level. Students also took a learning style questionnaire, which was used in conjunction with the adolescent apathy questionnaire to gain a greater insight to the commonalities and differences among students with varying levels of academic motivation. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the recordings. After the interview, I coded the data and identified commonalities using the MAXQDA software.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires helped to determine commonalities among the students. The questionnaires consisted of questions about students' learning styles to their level of adolescent apathy. Questions consisted of anything that could have an impact on student motivation. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), the advantage of using questionnaires is it is "relatively unobtrusive and relatively easily administered and managed" (p. 121). I created the questionnaire used in this study. The questions used helped me gain insight as to why some students are apathetic towards education. The questionnaire was developed by researching early indicators of apathy toward education. Validity and reliability were ensured by asking questions about adolescent apathy and learning styles to indicate commonalities among apathetic and highly-motivated students. The face and content validity was established through a piloting procedure. The piloting procedure consisted of giving the questionnaires to my current students I have determined are highly-motivated students and highly-unmotivated students. The piloting procedure was executed on a small scale before all participants took the questionnaire to ensure validity. The students took two questionnaires during the study. The first questionnaire was on learning styles and the second questionnaire was on adolescent apathy. The questions for the questionnaires are listed below.

Table 1

Interview Question Outline

Learning Style Questionnaire

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      (1) I learn best by:
      (2) I remember best by:
      (3) Would you rather:
      (4) During lunch do you:
      (5) When you learn a new game do you:
      (6) When you try to study, do you need:
      (7) When you are mad, you are most likely to:
      (8) When you are happy, you are most likely to:
      (9) When you are in a new place, how do you find your way around?
      (10)   Your favorite class is:
      (11)   When you hear a song you like what are you most likely to do?
      (12)   What would you rather do with your friends?
      (13)   What type of learner are you?
Adolescent Apathy Questionnaire
      (1) I want to go to college.
      (2) I have career plans after graduation.
      (3) I am good at one or more sports.
      (4) I know what I want to be when I grow up.
      (5) I know which college I would like to attend.
      (6) I would rather sleep than go out with my friends.
      (7) My friends thing I am passive (chill).
      (8) I like to argue/debate about topics that are important to me.
      (9) I am an ambitious person (I have goals).
      (10)   I don't care if I miss a day of school or class.
      (11)   I am a disruptive person. My teachers talk to me about interrupting class often.
      (12)   I am a creative, imaginative person.
      (13)   I am an active person (at least 30 min. each day).
      (14)   I think I am smart.
      (15)   I like reading.
      (16)   I study for upcoming tests.
      (17)   I have difficulty making decisions.
      (18)   I enjoy being part of a team.
      (19)   I enjoy activities that I am able to do alone. Running, Piano, Reading
      (20)   I am highly motivated.

Interviews

Secondly, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with participants. The

interview questions were open-ended questions about what students feel motivates them (see

Appendix H). Questions were based on an initial analysis of preceding data collection and grounded in literature. These interviews were audio-recorded; facial expressions, surroundings, and the level of comfort of the student were noted (Van Manen, 1990). Throughout the interview, the technique of memoing and journaling was used. Memoing and journaling are important practices because, according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), "by recording what you are thinking you can capture new descriptors as they emerge" (p. 144). Following the interview, data was transcribed. After I gathered the information the student intended to convey, I coded the data. By coding the data, I was able to "note what is of interest or significance" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 143) within the interviews. Questions were created using a combination of surveys previously completed on student motivation. Questions were created using a combination of questionnaires I have created to determine student motivation that I have used in my classroom. The purpose of the questions was to find commonalities of highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students. Each question on the final questionnaire was focused on the sub-questions previously stated.

SQ1: Based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years?

(1) Please give me a description of your feelings about whether you feel motivated to do well in school.

(2) Please tell me an area in your life that you feel motivated to do your best.

(3) How many times a week do you feel like you do not want to do your schoolwork?

(4) If the answer to question 3 is one or more, what are some reasons you do not like to do your homework?

(5) During your middle school years how would you describe your academic motivation in relationship to elementary school?

(6) If you could choose your motivational level, which would you choose? (highly motivated, somewhat motivated, rarely motivated).

(7) What expectations have your parents given you about grades?

(8) How supportive are your parents when it comes to school? In what ways do your parents offer support if you are struggling?

(9) How supportive are your teachers when it comes to school? In what ways do they offer support if you are struggling?

(10)   What types of consequences do you have at home if you do not make a certain grade?

(11)   How often do you ask questions in a given class period?

SQ2: What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn?

(12)   How motivated are you to earn good grades?

(13)   What would you describe as a good grade in a class?

(14)   What correlation do you see in studying and good grades?

(15)   How do you study for tests? (nightly, before test)

(16)   Describe ways you study for a test.

(17)   Do you feel about the correlation between study time and test scores?

(18)   Please give me a description about your feeling about the SOL's.

(19)   Describe your level of effort on the SOL's?

(20)   What is your goal on the SOL's?

(21)   What score do you usually get on the SOL's (fail, pass, pass advance, perfect)?

SQ3: What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy?

(22)   What types of technology do you use in school (chromebooks, cell phones, etc.)?

(23)   What types of technology do teachers use in school (smart boards, document camera, etc.)

(24)   Do you think using technology in school improves/worsens your grades? Why?

(25)   Are you more/less motivated to complete assignments if you have the option to use technology? Why?

SQ4: What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation?

(26)   What motivates you to do your best (money, praise, self-satisfaction)?

(27)   What resources to you need to stay motivated to do well on a test/class?

(28)   How motivated are you to do well (life and school)?

(29)   How does your motivation change depending on the task?

SQ5: What do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation?

(30)   What challenges hinder (get in the way of) your motivation?

(31)   When you face an obstacle do you give up or work harder?

(32)   Describe your motivational level over the course of your schooling (example: improved/lessen as you have gotten older).

Questions 1-11 dealt with the students' lived experiences during their middle school years. Moustakas (1994) explained in phenomenological research it is imperative to seek meaning through lived experiences of the participants. Questions 12-21 sought to develop an

understanding of how students feel about the correlation between standardized tests and motivation. Lobman (2013) interviewed students prior to taking standardized tests and reported students were "nervous, very nervous and scared" (p. 329). This research sought to understand how testing anxiety impacts students' motivation to learn. Questions 22-25 related to the use of technology and student achievement. Pollara and Broussard (2011) conducted research on mobile technology and student learning and discovered a link between mobile devices and learning. They found "Several benefits of using mobile devices for learning including an increase in achievement, productivity, engagement, and motivation" (Pollara & Broussard, 2011, p. 34).

Questions 26-29 involved the potential benefits of a having the perceived resources student need to be successful met. According to Mari Salmela (2015), students need both human and emotional resources to be successful. Mari Salmela reported that students need the support of teachers and other students as well as emotional resources such as "will power, self-regulation, self-appreciation, and inner motivation (p. 124).

Questions 30-32 addressed what obstacles students feel are in the way of their true success. According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), a student's effort matters most. When students believe they can learn something and give their best effort, the biggest successes happen (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Observations

Lastly, after the questionnaires and interviews were completed, I conducted classroom observations. The observations were scheduled, and I was a non-participant observer. I made one classroom observation at which time I remained in the classroom for 90 minutes. The observation took place after I interviewed the students for the study. I made note of student

participation in the classroom environment to observe whether the students' lived experiences within the classroom were in correlation to the students' perspectives discussed in the interviews. Detailed notes of my observations were written on the Field Notes Form (see Appendix F). By directly observing students in the classroom setting, I was better able to enhance the rich data descriptions for each student. Detailed field notes were transcribed after the observations.

Data Analysis

Throughout the research process, I journaled and coded the data received from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations. It was essential I summarized and documented the findings because "phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entries from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58).

Epoche

Epoche (bracketing) is defined as a "systematic effort to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). It was imperative that I set aside my own experiences (epoche/bracketing), and I needed to be careful to report exactly what participants said through journaling and memoing.

Journaling and Memoing

As I read the interview questions through the final questionnaire, I maintained a journal of experiences as I reviewed the material. I noted a record of ongoing thoughts and ideas in a journal. Journaling was an essential part of the research process because "journaling allows you to be meticulous about keeping an orderly record of your research activities" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 15).

Open Coding

Open coding was used to identify themes and trends among participants. Creswell (2013) described open coding as "the core phenomenon" (p. 86). By identifying the core of the phenomenon, I could identify the most important topic/ideas of the research. I used the MAXQDA program to analyze my data. The MAXQDA program uses technology to effectively code data material. MAXQDA allows the researcher to code each interview separately as well as a whole. Data can be pulled together allowing common themes and trends during qualitative data analysis to emerge. MAXQDA uses creative coding to build categories from open coding. The program uses a visual map to manipulate codes. MAXQDA is supported by research; Patton (2001) used the term inductive analysis in which predetermined categories are used to code data. I included "first-level coding to cluster semantically similar words, phrases, and/or sentences" (Sun & Shek, 2013, p. 2). I became immersed in the data to obtain a clearer understanding of the study. I transcribed the interviews, studied the questionnaires and wrote notes from the audio of the interviews. Interviews were transcribed, surveys were studied, and notes were taken from audio of the interviews. Once themes and trends emerged, I recorded the most pertinent information.

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Trustworthiness

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To increase trustworthiness and credibility, four criteria was applied. Those four criteria are identified as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility

As the researcher as well as a teacher, it is imperative that I did not to bring bias into the study. I feel this study will positively impact frustrated teachers and parents and most importantly, help those apathetic students succeed. The credibility of this study was ensured by

triangulation of data, member checks, and interviews. Using what Creswell (2013) described as the use of thick data ensured the deepest level of understanding.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Transferability allows others to replicate their own study by applying key elements of one study to another.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability of this study will give future researchers the ability to "track the process and procedures used to collect and interpret the data" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113) of this study. Providing a detailed list of dates and times of questionnaires and interviews resulted in an audit trail. I used the program MAXQDA to help analyze the data from the questionnaires and the interviews. Transcribing the interviews and reviewing questionnaires with participants addressed conformability.

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Ethical Considerations

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Ethical consideration focused on precautions that protected the rights of students as well as issues addressed in the research proposal for the IRB. These precautions included but were not limited to informed consent of parents (see Appendix C) and assent of students (see Appendix D). Consent forms and all information relating to students were kept in a locked drawer in a locked room. Student information stored on the computer was password protected. Names of students and location of the middle school were substituted by using pseudonyms.

Summary

This research was conducted in a public eighth grade middle school in a suburban area in central Virginia. Over the course of the study, highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students were interviewed to gain a personal perspective of why those students fall into each category. The results of the study are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the participants in this study and share the results of the semi-structured interviews, two questionnaires, and observations. The phenomenological approach was used to conduct this research study as it gave the researcher the ability to assemble the perceptions of the participants through their lived experiences. In addition, this chapter will include the process for collecting and analyzing the data for this qualitative research study. These findings and results revealed the lived experiences of six highly-motivated middle students and six highly-unmotivated middle-school students who volunteered for this phenomenological study. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were chosen by the participants. Participants were allowed to choose their pseudonyms as a means to develop a rapport with the participants. The data for this phenomenological study was gathered and analyzed with the help of the computer program MAXQDA as well as disaggregating the data on an excel spreadsheet. In order to accomplish this purpose, the following five research sub-questions were asked.

SQ1: Based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years?

SQ2: What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn?

SQ3: What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy?

SQ4: What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation?

SQ5: What do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation?

This chapter presents each of the 12 participants with a rich description. This information adds to the descriptions of this study for the purposes of transferability. Following the introduction of the participants, the research themes are examined. Themes were identified through memoing, open coding, and analysis of the interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The summary delivers the reaffirmation of the results in this study.

Participants

The participants of this study were 12 eighth grade students from a suburban school in central Virginia. They were between ages 12 and 14 years old. There were three highly-motivated males, three highly-motivated females, three highly-unmotivated males and three highly-unmotivated females used in this study. The participants for this qualitative research study were selected using purposeful sampling. There were three sources of data analyzed for this study. By utilizing several methods of collecting data, triangulation was achieved.

Nate

Nate liked to do well in school and enjoys playing baseball and basketball. While in class, he was focused and working. Although he did not raise his hand and ask questions, he seemed to understand what was expected of him and worked nonstop on his assignment. During the interview he was attentive and articulate as he spoke. He described how he pays close attention in class as the teacher is covering the material and how he studies each night by looking over the notes from class that day. He understands the importance of doing well in school and how good study habits now will led to success in high school and college. Nate has not decided what he would like to do when he grows up; he just understood being successful later in life begins by working hard now. He stated his parents were very supportive in regards to his education but also expect him to maintain an A or B average. However, the most important

thing to his parents in regards to his education is that he tries his best. Nate explained how his parents got him a tutor in math when he was struggling. He defined a good grade as an A, but as okay with a B as long as he tried his best. He stated he is very comfortable asking questions in class, and his teachers make a point to ask if there are any questions before moving on. He described the impact of not studying versus studying and how the results are not good when he does not study. He likes to spread out his studying throughout the week so he does not have to cram before a test. Nate said he feels he is most motivated by self-satisfaction and feeling good about himself when he is successful in school. He attributed his ability to stay organized as a key to his academic achievement. He stated his cell phone and his Xbox distract him while he is studying, but he normally chose to complete his homework first then he has time later to play and communicate with friends. He believed his motivational level has improved as he has gotten older because he has the goal of going to college and understands he needs good grades to get into college. He also stated when he faces an obstacle he works hard to overcome it.

Ryan

Ryan was mature for his age and made insightful comments about the world around him. During the classroom observation, he was observed working diligently and raised his hand to answer a question. While he was not loud and boisterous, he was a active participant in the class discussion. He stated he lived by the motto, everything is temporary, and although there may be hard nights, he reminded himself that he needed to look at the big picture. His goal was to go to college, and he had a solid understanding of how his current grades were a predictor of his high school grades. He understood the connection between high grades and college acceptance. Ryan had a desire to improve his motivational level and stated he still had room to improve as he entered high school. A good grade for Ryan is an A, but as long as he tries his best a B is okay

as well. He reported his parents were very supportive and are always willing to help him. He also stated his teachers were helpful, but he was not as comfortable asking his teachers questions as he is his parent's. Both of his parents have college educations and are capable of answering any questions he has. He is also competitive and feels he needs to at least go to college, maybe even graduate school to surpass his parents' level of education. Ryan stated he and his parents were a team. There were no consequences for bad grades because he and his parents were in constant communication. He explained if his grades dropped below a C, they would work together to develop a plan to fix the problem. When he is successful, his parents acknowledge his successes and tell him he did a good job. Ryan saw a positive connection between studying and making good grades. He did not feel cramming is the way to go but rather he preferred to study a little each night and make notecards to help him memorize concepts he was struggling with. While he is studying, he finds noise to be a distraction. He preferred a quiet place to study so he can focus. He felt technology could be an interference if a student is not mature enough to use the technology appropriately. Ryan stated he is motivated by his own self-satisfaction but also craves his parents' approval. He was motivated in all aspects of his life and wanted to overcome every challenge in life. As he has gotten older, his level of motivation has improved. As he has matured, he has come to understand everything has value. He also saw everything as a challenge and because of his competitive nature, he wanted to overcome each of those challenges.

Jackson

Jackson was passionate about working out and doing well in school. He described how going to the gym helps clear his mind and helps him focus. When asked if he ever feels unmotivated to do well in school, his response was thoughtful and mature. He stated he does his

work even when he does not want to because he thinks of the kids around the world that do not have the privilege to go to school. Those children live in war torn countries, and some females do not to get to have an education at all. He said he has a motto he lives by, "I don't have to I get to." When asked how he gained such insight and understanding of worldly events, he referred to his morning routine of watching CNN everyday. Jackson was focused on the future and understood how earning good grades now will lead to good grades in high school. He also understood the link between earning good grades in high school will help him get into a competitive college and will positively impact his long term goals for his future. Although he felt very motivated, he stated there is always room for improvement. He described himself as being organized, and a technique he had for staying organized was to write his assignments in his agenda and check items off as he completed them. Jackson noted how supportive his parents are. His parents' expectations for grades are based on his effort. They have expressed to him as long as he tries his best they will be proud of him. He stated his parents speak to him on a regular basis about school and inquire about struggles he may be having in school. Currently, he has a math tutor because he let his parents know he was feeling frustrated in math. Jackson also reported his teachers were very supportive they answer questions and offer help whenever he needs it. He did see a positive correlation between studying and earning good grades. He defined a good grade as a high C to a 100%. He stated his mother taught him how to study by reviewing his notes nightly to prepare for an upcoming test. Jackson did note in order for him to stay focused when studying he needs a place with no noises or distractions. In terms of technology, his opinion wavers. He stated technology can both improve one's grades as well as decrease one's grades. In his case, he believed technology helps him by allowing him to research topics to develop a deeper understanding but in some cases technology hinders education because some

students are distracted by games. When asked about what his source of motivation was, he referred to having the privilege of knowing he can go to college and the fact that he lives in the United States rather than a country with unrest. He revealed his motivation has improved as he has gotten older, and when he faces an obstacle he works hard to overcome the difficulties.

Reese

Reese was enthusiastic as she discussed school and stated music is her passion. During her classroom observation, she remained in her seat and did not interact with classmates or the teacher during the lesson but was seen smiling and interacting with classmates before and after the lesson. As Reese entered the room, she held her head high and had an electric smile. During the interview, she made eye contact and spoke clearly. She expressed a desire to do well in school but noted that school was not always easy for her and she needed to study really hard in order to do well. Reese shared her desire to go to college after high school and made a connection between her grades and studying by stating how keeping up her current grades as a necessary step to accomplish that goal. She was confident when she spoke and assured me as long as she tried her best whatever the outcome was, she was okay with. When reflecting upon her motivational level, she indicated she had room for improvement because she sometimes waited until the night before the test to study. Reese explained she feels unmotivated to do assignments if she does not really like a subject such as science. She stated science is not her best subject and does not find it all that interesting. However, she also said there has never been a time that she has not completed an assignment. Reese reported being able to combine her love of music and her studying because she can play music in the background while she is studying. When I asked her why she feels the need to complete assignments she did not want to do, she referred to her transcripts. She explained how not completing assignments would make her

grade go down, and she does not want any bad grades on her high school transcripts. She noted how supportive her parents were. Reese referred to her and her parents as a team in regards to her education. She stated her parents were very supportive, and if they were unable to help they would hire a tutor or find someone who can help her. She said there were no consequences at home for bad grades because her parents know she always tries her best. A bad grade would be concerned anything below a B. Reese acknowledged she does not always ask questions in class but assured me she was comfortable asking questions; she just usually did not have many questions. She saw a direct correlation between studying and achieving good grades. She did admit her cell phone caused a bit of a distraction when she was studying, but she stated her chromebook improved her grades by giving her greater access to information. When asked if she would work harder or give up when she faced an obstacle, Reese revealed she would absolutely work harder.

Hazel

Hazel entered the conference room confident with a smile on her face. During the interview, she made eye contact, sat up straight, and was articulate when she spoke. She was not loud or boisterous but self-assured as she answered questions. Throughout the classroom observation she was highly focused as she worked. She did not ask any questions but worked intently for the duration of the class. When asked if she felt she was motivated, she stated she was very motivated and she wanted to get somewhere in life. She explained the way to achieve this goal is to try her best so she can succeed in every way possible. Hazel loved acting and was also on the track team. Her motivation crossed over from academics to her extra curricular activities. She explained how being organized and using her time wisely allowed her to achieve her daily tasks of schoolwork, sports, and acting. Hazel believed her motivational level has

improved over time. She was a hard worker and strived to make the highest grade possible.

School has not always come easy to her, and she has had to work hard to succeed. She shared

that she failed her first two state standardized math tests in elementary school. She described her

disappointment at her failed attempts and how when she finally passed her first state

standardized test, it gave her a tremendous amount of confidence. She explained how hard she

worked to pass the test and how it has given her the resolve to never give up on anything. Hazel

believed her motivation improved as she has gotten older. She said once she started making A's

she strived to get all A's. She reported her parents were very supportive of her education and

offer help anytime she is struggling. There were no consequences at home if she did not make a

certain grade, and she stated she is way harder on herself than her parents could ever be. She

also described her teachers as amazing and that they made her feel completely comfortable

asking questions in class. Her idea of a good grade was an A or B but definitely not a C.   She

made a positive correlation between studying and making good grades. Hazel used several

studying techniques to help her remember material. She stated she needs a place to study

without distractions and she likes to study her notes or complete study guides the teachers have

provided. Technology improved her motivation by allowing her to always have access to her

grades. This access to her grades helped ensure she as on track to meet the educational goals she

has for herself. When she reaches her goals, it gives her a sense of pride and continually

improves her motivation. Hazel as an only child and being the only child allows her parents the

time to focus on her. Her parents were continually discussing her future. When asked if her

motivation changes depending on the task, she reported her motivation did fluctuate because

certain tasks caused her to procrastinate. She said assignments where she was able to use her

creativity or when the teacher broke down big assignments to smaller more manageable tasks

were more likely to be completed. She said her busy schedule is a challenge but when she faces an obstacle, she always works hard to complete the undertaking.

Breanna

Breanna spoke in a quiet tone throughout the interview. During the interview, she sat up straight, and she had a cheerful disposition. Breanna adored dancing and earning good grades in school. She described how her motivation for earning good grades in school was directly connected to her passion for dancing. She and her parents have an agreement; if she tries her best, completes all of her assignments, and maintains an A average she can remain in dance. Breanna was very organized and explained how she uses her chromebook to create assignments and how she can check them off as she finishes them. She maintained a tight schedule and has allotted time to work on homework in between school and dance. She described her parents as very supportive and valuing education. Her parents offered help if she was struggling and the open communication they have prevent any consequences if Breanna's grade drops lower than expected. This immediate intervention helped her to achieve her goal of maintaining an A average. She saw a positive association between studying and maintaining good grades. She studied for tests by looking over her notes each night and making notecards to help her memorize material she needs to know. Breanna was motivated by the positive feeling of self-satisfaction she has when she does well academically. She reported the only obstacle she faces in regards to schoolwork is her ability to remain focused when a friend is texting her on her cellphone. Breanna also stated she was more motivated in middle school than she was in elementary school. She described how much more difficult middle school is than elementary school, and the only way to get good grades is to do all of her school work and homework.

When Breanna faced an obstacle she works harder to achieve her goals. She stated when it comes to school she will do anything to get work schoolwork done and succeed.

Jed

Jed was a self-described unmotivated student in terms of academics. If fact, he seemed rather proud of that description. He was, however, very enthusiastic about playing video games such as Fortnite. During a classroom observation, Jed was turned around talking while he was supposed to be taking a test and was also seen out of his seat instead of being focused on the test he was taking. During the interview, he was pleasant and seemed very comfortable speaking. So comfortable in fact, he slid down in the chair and slouched throughout the interview. Jed stated he has very little motivation, and if he did not feel like doing his schoolwork he just chose not to do it. He said as he has gotten older his motivation has decreased, but he also does not currently have a desire to change his level of motivation. He described how his parents' expectation of grades has declined as he has gotten older as well. His parents used to expect A's and B's but now they expect him to maintain a C average. Jed reported his parents do not directly help him when he is struggling in school but have paid for him to have a tutor. When he has asked for help from his parents, he reported their response was for him to figure it out on his own. He also stated his teachers do not like him and often yell at him for his behavior in class. When asked if there are consequences at home if he earns bad grades, he recounted his phone and video games being taken away. However, he said he was not too attached to anything and he really did not care if his parents took away his phone or video games. He did not see a connection between studying and making good grades because he stated he it did not matter if he studies because he gets distracted when he tries to study or he does not remember it for the test anyway. He expressed his exasperation from doing his homework just to forget it at home or

losing it. When asked about his opinion on whether he felt technology improves or worsens

grades, he stated he did not think technology mattered either way. He also stated other than

video games, he did not have any other sources of motivation to strive for success in school or

extra curricular activities. When faced with an obstacle, he said he had no desire to work harder

and he would just give up. Throughout the interview, Jeb seemed to take pride in his lack of

enthusiasm and his ability not to care for things in life others his age value such as sports and

school.

Pablo

Pablo began the interview a bit nervous. He fidgeted in his seat and often avoided eye

contact. He spoke in a variety of tones throughout the interview. When talking about school, his

voice became muted, but when talking about music or soccer, he became more animated. He

stated he did not feel motivated to do well in school and could not recall a single time he had

studied for a test. In fact, he reported he did not even know how to study. When talking about

soccer and learning a new skill, he sat up straight and looked me in the eye and spoke with

excitement. Upon reflecting on how his motivational level has changed over time, he shared his

motivational level in elementary school was good. He always did his homework in elementary

school, but around sixth grade he just stopped doing it, and he was not sure what brought about

that change. He admitted to not wanting to fail a grade and did understand when his grade falls

below a D he has to do his work to bring his grade up to a passing level. His parents expected at

least a C and if his grade falls below a D, he starts to get stuff taken away. Pablo reported his

parents used to help him in elementary school if he needed it but as he has gotten older his

parents cannot help him like they used to because they do not understand it themselves. In class

he did not feel comfortable asking questions. He described a good grade as a B but then admited

he was not willing to work hard enough to earn it. He was also not able to see a connection between studying and making good grades because he had never studied so he did not know how his grades could be impacted if he studied. He had a desire to go to college but did not seem to understand the relationship between good grades and college acceptance. Pablo reported using technology helped him with his grades. If given the option to complete an assignment on paper or on the computer, he said he is more likely to complete the assignment if he has the option to use the computer. He stated he does not know what self-satisfaction feels like, but he had been offered money for good grades and he admitted to working harder when he is given money as a reward. Pablo concluded the challenges that hinder his motivation were his laziness and finding better things to do like playing video games. When asked if he would give up or try harder if he was faced with a challenge, he stated he would give up.

Michael

Michael was an avid mountain biker and loved to skateboard. During the interview, he spoke in a quiet tone. His eye contact was sporadic depending whether or not the topic was about school or one of his hobbies. When it came to schoolwork, he may or may not do it depending on if he felt like it. He reflected he was more motivated in elementary school but also stated he now has more friends and a phone. His newfound friendships and his phone took up much of his time and provided distractions from his academics. He did have a desire to change his motivational level. He stated his parents expect him to have at least a C average in all of his classes. Michael explained he can maintain a C average without putting for much effort, so he did not feel any reason to change his motivational level. He stated both his parents and teachers were supportive and would help him if he was struggling, but he described himself as very quiet and said he did not like to ask questions. Michael would like to earn good grades but confessed

he was too lazy to put in the effort it would take to accomplish that task. He acknowledged he often zones out while in class and often forgets what he is doing. He also mentioned he does not get much sleep because he is up late playing video games. He said he would like to go to college and become an engineer, but did not know what transcripts were or how they could impact his college admittance. When asked if technology helps or hinders his ability to make good grades, he stated his chromebook and his phone distract him because he plays games instead of focusing on his schoolwork. He also reported checking his phone to see an Instagram post and being sucked in; the next thing he knows it is two hours later. He stated he is motivated by both praise and money, but money is an added bonus. He said his motivational level changes depending on the task. He explained if he is learning a new trick on his skateboard he is super motivated. He elaborated by telling a story of how he was once trying to learn a new trick and he worked on it for two hours straight. In the end he was bruised and battered, but he did not stop until he landed the trick he was determined to do. He also stated he has never worked that hard in terms of school and when he faces a challenge in school he would rather just give up. In terms of organization, Michael did not use an agenda or write down his up coming assignments. He stated his motivational level declined over time and he now has better things to do with his time.

Nicole

Nicole was a soft-spoken young lady. During the interview, she was quiet and made little to no eye contact. In class Nicole was situated in the front row. During the course of the observation Nicole, was out of her seat one time and did not raise her hand or ask questions. She was not observed talking to other students and remained quiet throughout the class. During the interview, Nicole described her level of academic motivation as being in the middle. She stated her level of motivated fluctuated depending on her grade in a class. Nicole expressed a desire to

make good grades in school. She described a good grade as earning at least a D in her academic classes. If her grade was really low and it fell below a D, she felt more motivated to complete her work. She identified organization as an area of weakness and recognized it as a potential area that may impact her level of academic motivation. Nicole reported completing her assignments only to lose them or fail to turn them in. She expressed frustration with this pattern of behavior and admitted feeling as if there was no use even attempting assignments if she was not going to get credit for completing them anyway. When asked if she felt more motivated in middle school compared to elementary school, she was hesitant in her response. She stated she feels more motivated now in middle school but she really did not know. In school she was shy and not comfortable asking questions in class. When given an assignment in school, she said she would be more likely to complete the assignment if she was given the opportunity to do it on the computer. She reported her chromebook was not a source of distraction while she was in class. Nicole felt supported by her parents in regards to her education and noted her parents have gotten her a tutor to help her with her grades. Her parents grow concerned when her grades fall below a D but she reported a C was acceptable. In the afternoons she spends a great deal of time alone in her bedroom. She recognized a connection between studying and academic success and stated she attempted to study by reading over her notes, occasionally making notecards and making quizlets. When Nicole faces a challenge in school she works to overcome the challenge but when she does not find immediate success she often gives up. An area in Nicole's life where she felt highly motivated was in regards to eating healthy.

Amelia

Amelia was identified as academically unmotivated. Amelia spoke in a very quiet voice during the interview. In class Amelia sat in the second row. Throughout the observation, she did

not talk to classmates nor did she ask any questions. She remained seated through the duration of class. Amelia expressed a desire to pass but also said she does not feel motivated to do her work. She had desperation in her voice as she explained that she just wanted to pass the eighth grade. She described herself as being less motivated in middle school than she was in elementary school. She also stated that much of her spare time was taken up by watching television. Amelia reported her only real desire to change her motivational level was so she did not have to repeat the eighth grade. She stated that both her parents and her teachers were supportive and offered help when she is struggling. However, she said she was not comfortable asking questions in class because she was very shy. There were also consequences at home such as her mom turning off the wifi if her grade falls below a C. In regards to organization and her study habits, she reported that she did not write homework in her planner and rarely studied for tests. However, she did admit the more she studied the better she did on tests. Amelia acknowledged her motivational level has decreased over time and when facing an obstacle she is likely to give up.

Jasmine

Jasmine had an upbeat personality and loved to hang out with friends and play sports. She enthusiastically explained her high level of motivation for doing well in soccer, dance, and volleyball. She excitedly described a trick in soccer called the rainbow and how she practiced and practiced until she had perfected it. She also admitted being too lazy when it comes to schoolwork. She described her desire to go outside and play with her friends instead of doing schoolwork. Jasmine expressed a desire to improve her motivational level and reviled her plans for improving her level of motivation in high school, stating she wanted to go to college and she knew she had to pull up her grades to accomplish that goal. The expectations of her parents as to

what an acceptable grade in school is was nothing lower than a C. She described her parents as supportive and willing to help her study for upcoming tests. She has also received consequences such as being removed from soccer and having her phone and television taken away. In school she reported feeling comfortable asking questions in classes she has a relationship with the teacher. She had a desire to do well and make good grades and described could grades an A or a B. Jasmine did not see a correlation between studying and doing well on tests. She described feeling frustrated when it came studying. She explained how she would write down key words, make notecards, and review notes but still did not finding success on tests. Jasmine saw herself as a very motivated person in all areas of her life except school. When asked about her desire to overcome obstacles, she stated she always works hard and hates when people give up.

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Results

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The study's results are presented using two subsections. Those subsections are theme development and the results of the research questions. The process of theme development occurred by analyzing the interviews and questionnaires as well as reviewing the data collected during the classroom observations. A variety of methods were used to collect data for this study to ensure data triangulation (Creswell, 2013). The results of the research questions focused on the responses of the interview questions and which research questions impacted the student motivation.

Theme Development

As discussed in Chapter Three, I aspired to generate themes that summarized the meaning of the perceptions of the students interviewed. The emerging themes for this study were attained after a complete review of the questionnaires and the individual interviews. After transcribing the interviews and analyzing the data from the questionnaires, I read and reread the details of the

interviews and questionnaires and made note of commonly used words and phrases through

journaling and memoing. I then used the program MAXQDA as well as an Excel spreadsheet to

open code the most important topic/ideas of the research. MAXQDA is a computer program to

effectively code data material. Using MAXQDA and Excel, these five fundamental themes

emerged from the data based upon the lived experiences and perceptions of the 12 middle school

students ranging in age from 13 to 14 years old. The list of common words and phrases are listed

in Table 2.

Table 2

Repeated Words and Phrases Mentioned by Participants

Code	Frequency of Occurrence
Try my best	20
Lazy/Give up	14
Work hard/ Study	23
Frustrated	6
Parents/Student team	8
Distraction	13
Feels Good/Self-Satisfaction	8
Organization	11

The following five themes emerged from the overall findings according to the thoughts of

the participating students. The five themes were (a) organization (b) self-satisfaction (c)

expectations (d) goals, and (e) hindrances. Within the themes, the participants also discussed

technology, time management, and parental involvement. The emerging themes were based

upon the participant responses during the individual interview and questionnaires. Table 3

includes a list of the theme along with a description of each theme.

Table 3

Description of Themes

Theme	Description
(1) Organization	Ability to write down assignments and keep a neat and organized binder.
(2) Self-Satisfaction	The feeling of accomplishment and feeling good about oneself after a job well done.
(3) Expectations	What parents believe a student can accomplish, what students believe parents should do to help them achieve, and what students expect of themselves.
(4) Goals	Aspirations about what students hope to accomplish on a daily, weekly, yearly basis.
(5) Hindrances	Things in students' life that prevents them from accomplishing tasks.

Theme One: Organization

The highly-motivated students in this study reported they could not be successful in

school without the help of their teachers and some sort of organizational planner to keep track of

upcoming assignments. Motivated students listed writing homework assignments in an agenda or

planner and even used a program called "tasks" on the computer to stay organized.   The students

also said they needed the help from their teachers and the educational resources those teachers provide them with to stay organized. The resources students felt they needed to stay motivated to do well on a test or in class included relevant class notes and school issued computers. Based on the Learning Style Questionnaire, 50% of the students, both highly motivated and highly unmotivated, reported making notecards and reviewing the material over and over as a way to study for upcoming tests. In order for students to make notecards and review material, the teacher needs to provide notes to the students. During the classroom observation, all students were given a review sheet to help them prepare for the upcoming test. The teacher then reviewed previously learned information using her computer and projector and playing Quizlet. Students reported if the teachers gave them reliable notes and study guides and they kept those materials in an organized neat notebook, they would have what they needed to prepare for their tests. According to the Learning Style Questionnaire, 50% of the students, all highly motivated, studied for upcoming tests. The questionnaire also uncovered that 42% of unmotivated students did not study for up coming tests. This data aligned with the individual student interviews in which 42% of highly-unmotivated students interviewed stated they did not study for tests. The one unmotivated student, Jasmine, reported studying but added, "I try to study for tests but when I take the test I do not remember what I studied." The computers provided to them by the school were used to enhance their learning and provided access to class calendars posted on the Internet by their teachers. Not a single highly-unmotivated student listed any type of planner or calendar to stay organized.

Nate, a highly-motivated student, said he needed his notebook, which contained his notes from class. He also mentioned it was essential he kept his notebook in a "neat and organized manner so all of my notes I need to study were in one location." Jackson and Breanna, both

highly-motivated students, stated not only did they need a planner to help them stay organized, they specifically noted the practice of checking tasks off as they finish them. Jackson stated, "I use my planner to write homework assignments down and then when I get home and finish my work I check off the assignments I have completed so I know what is left." Breanna said, "On my Chromebook there is something called 'tasks,' and I write my assignments there. When I finish I check off the assignments as I complete them." They said this method helps them know what assignments they have completed and which ones they still need to do. Hazel, a motivated female, discussed how technology has helped her stay organized and maintain a high grade point average. She stated, "I use my computer and it allows me to monitor my grades on-line and being able to see my current grade helps to keep me motivated." She also said, "my planner helps me manage my time wisely and I often finish my work in study hall at the end of the day." Amelia, a highly-unmotivated student, on the other hand is disorganized and does not write her homework in her agenda, she stated, "I cannot remember what I am supposed to do for homework after I gets home."

Several students discussed their love of extra curricular activities and their need to stay organized in order to participate in their activities as well as finish their schoolwork. If fact, 75% of the students that answered the Adolescent Apathy Questionnaire reported playing a sport. Breanna, a highly-motivated student, loved to dance. Breanna stated, "dancing comes easy to me but I am only allowed to compete in dance if I maintain good grades." She explained she does whatever is necessary to get her schoolwork done so she can continue to participate in dance. In order to do this, she must stay organized. She completed her homework around her dance schedule. She said, "I often have to complete my homework before or after practice and sometimes I have to wake up early, before school if I need to finish an assignment." Nate played

little league baseball and as on the school basketball team at his middle school. He enjoyed

playing sports and discussed how he has learned to use his time wisely. In order to complete his

assignments he stated, "I need to stay organized and work around my sports schedule." He

planned out when long term and short term assignments were due and did the assignments before

or after his practices and games. Ryan, a highly-motivated student, enjoyed swimming and

spoke of waking up early to go to swim practice before school. Due to his early morning hours,

he went to bed early. He made time for homework and studying when he gets home from

school. Ryan found if he put off his schoolwork, it was harder to get motivated to go back and

finish it. He described days that he really did not want to do his work but he reminds himself to

look at the big picture and remember his goals. He said, "I live by the motto 'everything is

temporary' and that inspires him to get his work done."

Table 4

Where Students Wrote Down Homework Assignments

	Planner	Tracker	Tasks	Chromebook
Highly Motivated Students	2	1	1	2
Highly Unmotivated Students	0	0	0	0

Theme Two: Self-satisfaction

For 60% of the students interviewed, self-satisfaction was the number one answer they

gave when asked what motivates them. According to the Adolescent Apathy Questionnaire,

67% of students reported either agreeing or strongly agreeing they considered themselves smart.

When students perceive themselves as smart, they are likely to have felt the feeling of self-

satisfaction. For example, Nate, a highly-motivated student, said, "it makes me feel good inside when I do well on tests." Ryan, another highly-motivated student, and Nicole, a highly-unmotivated student, listed self-satisfaction as their main source of motivation but also commented they love the approval they get from their parents when their parents say they are proud of them. Jackson and Reese, both highly-motivated students, also listed self-satisfaction as the top thing that motivated them but added they feel privileged to be getting an education in the United States. Jackson said, "I watch a lot of CNN and I appreciate that we do not live in country at war." Reese said, "others around the world do not have the same opportunities to earn an education as we do here in the United States." In contrast, while all highly-motivated students listed self-satisfaction as the top motivator, half of the unmotivated students reported money was the guiding factor in their motivation in regards to education. Pablo stated, "when my parents offer me money for making a good grade I try harder."

Students not only felt self-satisfaction towards school but in other areas of their life as well. All of the students interviewed participated in some sort of extracurricular activities. Every student reported they enjoyed being part of a team, and all but one student also reported they enjoyed activities they were able to do alone as well. Team sports the students enjoyed were basketball, baseball, and soccer. Students seemed to equally enjoy individual activities such as dance, skateboarding, and playing video games. Whether the activities were done alone or as a team, each student expressed excitement when discussing the activities they love. Jed, an academically-unmotivated student, stated he had no interest in studying or trying to make good grades. However, his demeanor completely changed when discussing a new video game he had begun to play and the pride he felt when he would beat the game. He stated, "I am very good at the video game and spend hours everyday when I get home from school and all day on the

weekends playing this game." He even described researching the game on the computer to find ways to become better and improve his odds of winning. Pablo was an academically highly-unmotivated student in terms of his education but who also has a love of soccer. He played on a team and worked hard to be the best player he can be. He described learning a new skill and how he practiced hours to master it. He said, "by the time I finally was able to accomplish the skill I must have done the trick hundreds of times." However, he was determined to become an expert before he would stop. Unfortunately, that motivation for soccer did not transfer to his schooling. Michael was a highly-unmotivated student in terms of academics but was very good at both skateboarding and mountain biking. He described how both activities take practice and how he enjoys learning new tricks. Both activities are very physical and he said, "I work on a new skill for hours often getting scraps and bruises." He also recalled how he would not give up until he was successful. He then spoke of the pride he felt after mastered his task.

Grit and determination were adjectives students used to describe what it takes to learn a new trick on a skateboard or making an A on a test. Students unmotivated in school were no less likely to spend hours learning a new soccer or skateboarding trick then the students who spent hours doing homework or studying for an upcoming test. The difference between the highly-motivated group of students and the unmotivated group of students was where they put their focus.

Table 5

Description of Self-Satisfaction

Code	Frequency of Occurrence	
	School	Outside Activities
Feels good inside	6	10
Approval of Parents	4	2
Privileged	2	0
Determination	2	5
Grit	0	2

Theme Three: Expectations

Several different expectations were discussed during the interviews. Students expressed the expectations their parents had of them in regards to their grades. Students also listed the expectations they had of their parents and teachers. Finally, the students spoke of their own expectations of their grades if they study and what a good grade in class is.

Students were asked what have their parents shared with then about their grade expectations. Every one of the unmotivated students reported an acceptable grade as a C or better. However, the students identified as highly-motivated reported their parents' expectations for them was to simply try their best and did not attach a letter grade to that expectation. All of the highly-motivated students also reported their grades normally fell within an A or a B range. Reese, a highly-motivated student, said, "my parents and I are a team in terms of my education." If she was struggling in any of her classes, her parents were always aware and would work with her until her grade improved. Jed, a highly-unmotivated student, stated, "my parents used to

expect me to maintain an A/B grade average but as my grades started to fall in middle school they lowered their expectations to a C."

Student expectations of what a good grade is in class ranged from an A to a D. Nate, a highly-motivated student, confirmed his idea of a good grade as an A. He said, "if I do not get an A I get a little down but I am okay with a B as long as I tried his best." However, he also admitted if he were to get a C, he would be very discouraged and would make sure he studied more the next time. Ryan, another motivated student, also said, "a good grade for me is an A." Although if it is a class he struggles with, a B or a B+ is okay as long as he tried his best. He did not think a C was acceptable and believed it is not a good standard to have. Reese, a highly-motivated female, said, "a C would be the worst thing ever." She considered a C the same thing as an F. If she were to get a C she would see it as a failure. The highly unmotivated students did not elaborate on why they felt a certain grade was good or bad, they just reported the grade they considered to be good. Half of the highly-unmotivated students determined a B would be a good grade and the other half stated a good grade would be either a D or higher.

Highly-motivated students have more expectations of their parents when it comes to their education. Motivated students expect their parents' help if they are struggling in school. Highly-motivated students reported they work closely with their parents and indicated the parents are supportive in terms of education. Jackson, a highly-motivated student, said, " I can always go to my parents if I am struggling and they will help me or will find someone who can." He spoke of struggles he was having in math and how his parents helped him, but they also got him a tutor in math to improve his confidence. Reese, another highly-motivated student, was also struggling in math and her parents likewise got her a tutor. She said, "I have joined study groups to help me in subjects I am struggling in and my parents always pick me up on days I

needs to stay after." A common consensus among highly-unmotivated students was they tended not to ask their parents for help. Pablo, an unmotivated student, stated, "my mom used to help me when I was younger but after I came to middle school the subjects have gotten harder and now she is unable to help me with my schoolwork." Nicole, another unmotivated student, explained how shy she was class and as afraid to ask questions and said, "by the time I get home I do not even know where to start to ask my mom for help."

Motivated students do not expect to be punished if they do not do well in school unlike unmotivated students who do expect to be punished if they do not meet a grade expectation. Motivated students consistently reported they do not have consequences at home for unacceptable grades. Instead, they worked closely with their parents and developed a plan for success. Ryan, a highly motivated student, described a situation when he was struggling and how his parents helped him instead of giving him a consequence. He stated, "my grade dropped to a C in one of my classes but because my parents and I are constantly talking about my grades it was not a surprise to them." Instead of his parents issuing consequences, he described how he sat down with both parents and the three of them developed a plan to improve his grade. He referred to he and his parents as a team in terms of his education. Reese, another highly-motivated student, said, "there are no consequences at home because of grades, I always try my best and if I am struggling I have already spoken to my parents and they have offered me help or seek out others to help me."

Every highly-unmotivated student stated there were consequences at home if the student received a low grade. The consequences varied from items being taken away to being yelled at. Jed, a highly-unmotivated student, said, "my parents take away my phone for bad grades but I don't really care because I am not too attached to anything." He said his parents have taken

away his phone and video games, but when his parents took away those items he did not care.

He described himself as not clingy to anything so when they take something away, he just moves

on to something else. Nicole, an unmotivated student, said, "I get yelled at for bad grades and

my mom threatens to take away my phone but never actually takes my phone away." Jasmine,

another unmotivated student, reported she has been taken out of soccer, had her phone taken

away, and has had her television privileges removed. She stated, "no matter what my parents

take away from me I just does not care enough to do my work and study because I am lazy."

Motivated and unmotivated students had vastly different experiences with their teachers.

The highly-motivated students reported their teachers were very supportive, answered questions,

and helped them if they are struggling. Highly-unmotivated students revealed that they did not

tend to ask questions in class. The reasons given as to why unmotivated students did not ask

questions in class ranged from their perceptions of the teacher not liking them to not feeling

comfortable asking questions in class. Nicole, an unmotivated student, said, "I am afraid my

teachers will be upset with me if I ask questions in class." Amelia, an unmotivated student,

stated, "I do not like asking questions in class because I am shy and I am afraid to raise my hand

in class." Jasmine, another highly-unmotivated student, stated, "I will ask a question if I am

close with the teacher but some of my teachers make me feel like should have been paying closer

attention." She also stated she is very outgoing and has a lot of friends in her classes and did not

like to ask questions because she did not want to look stupid in front of her friends.

Motivated versus unmotivated students had an extremely different point of view about

their expectations about how their grade was impacted by studying and in particular the

connection between studying and good grades. Every one of the six highly-motivated students

proclaimed they studied on a regular basis and every one of the six highly-unmotivated students

reported either they did not study or even if they study it did not make a difference on their test grades. Nate, a highly-motivated student, stated, "there have been times when I have not studied and the results were not good." Ryan, another highly-motivated student, agreed studying helped him earn good grades but said, "you should not study for a ridiculous amount of time in one setting and cramming the night before is not an effective way to study either." Jackson, also a highly-motivated student, reported studying really makes a difference. He said, "the more I study the more I understand." He also stated, "My mom was the one that taught me how to study." He described how each night he reads over his notes from class to help him refresh his memory. Hazel, a motivated student, said studying definitely helps but also recognized she needs to have the correct information to study. When studying she needs to study in an area without any distractions. She looks over her notes before the test and completes the study guides if her teachers provide one. Another study technique she used is at the beginning of the test she gets out a sheet of paper and writes down everything she remembers that may be on the test. Breanna, another motivated student, stated, "I study at home but I also pay attention in class." She has learned from her mistakes of waiting to study until the last minute or not paying close attention in class as these behaviors have negatively impacted her grade. She studies by making paper notecards or creating on-line notecards. Four out of five unmotivated students stated they do not study, and the fifth unmotivated student, Jasmine, stated, "it does not matter if I studied I still do not do well on a tests." Jasmine explained how she looks over her notes, makes notecards, and writes down important information, but when she goes to take the test she cannot remember any information she studied. She concluded that studying did not make a difference in her grade so she no longer studies. Pablo, an unmotivated student, expressed frustration over not knowing how to study and stated, "no one had ever shown him how to study."

Table 6

Grade Expectations

Grade	Highly Motivated Students	Highly Unmotivated Students
A	5	0
B	1	4
C	0	1
D	0	1
Below a D	0	0

Theme Four: Goals

All students, both highly-motivated students as well as highly-unmotivated students reported they had a goal do well in life. They all conveyed their goals of graduating from high school and eventually living on their own and supporting themselves. All six highly-motivated students had plans for going to college and two of the six highly-unmotivated students also had plans to go to college. The other four unmotivated students stated they would like to go directly into the workforce after high school. According to the Adolescent Apathy Questionnaire, 83% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed they were ambitious.

Students who felt their motivational level has increased mentioned long term goals they were working for such as going to college. For many students attendance is tied to their goals of success in school. Attending school on a regular basis helps students learn the curriculum and thus to well on assessments. For this study students were asked if they were concerned with attendance in school. All six highly-motivated students indicated they would care if they missed a day of school. However, most of the unmotivated students, five of the six, indicated they did

not care whether they missed a day of school. When answering this question, the students' body language conveyed as much as the answers they gave. The motivated students sat up straighter and their eyes widened at the mere mention of missing school while the unmotivated students barely reacted at all; in fact a few students shrugged and waved off the question as if was no big deal.

Earning good grades was a goal for almost all of the students who participated in the study. All but one student reported they wanted to make good grades in school. Nate, a highly-motivated student, stated, "I always try my best and try to get good grades in school." Ryan, another highly-motivated student, reported, "I am motivated to make good grades and really like it when my parents give me a little boost and tell me that I have done a good job." Michael, an unmotivated student, agreed he wanted to make good grades, but he confessed he just did not put in the effort to accomplish it and noted, "I am too lazy to try to make good grades." He also stated he has trouble focusing in class and often zones out and forgets what he is doing. He admitted he does not get much sleep at night and has difficulty concentrating during the school day. Jasmine, another unmotivated student, expressed her desire to make good grades but conceded, "I am just not willing to work for it."

Every student either agreed or strongly agreed they had a goal of attending college after high school. In the interview process some of the unmotivated students reported although they wanted to go to college, they did not really see themselves being able to go. Two highly-motivated students already had an idea of what colleges they wanted to go to and what majors they wanted to pursue. Half of the unmotivated did not have career plans after graduation. However, every highly-motivated student did have career plans after graduation. Every highly-motivated student felt they were ambitious. While the unmotivated students had a varied level of

motivation, none of the unmotivated students stated they strongly agreed they were ambitious. Ryan, another highly-motivated student, contributed an increase in his motivational level to thinking about college and his goals for the future. He stated, "In elementary school it did not really matter but in middle school colleges may look at my grades in middle school versus high school to see growth." Jackson, another highly-motivated student, felt more motivated in middle school than in elementary school because, "now he I make my own decisions and what I do now will determine which direction I go in in terms of my future career goals." Hazel, a highly-motivated student, faced some challenges in elementary school but turned those struggles into successes by setting goals. Overcoming those challenges helped improve her confidence. In third grade Hazel noted,

> I went from making E's and S's on my report card to making letter grades on a grading scale. After I made my first A in a class I really liked how that made my feel and I made a goal to make an A on all of my assignments and report cards.

At the end of third grade when it came time to take her state tests, she did not pass her math test. She described how despite trying her best she did not pass. That failure could have made her stop trying in school but she decided instead to make it a goal to pass the following her. The next year, when she was in fourth grade she worked really hard all year but again that year she also did not pass her end of the year math test. Again, she made a decision to stick with her goal and try even harder the next year. By the time she was in fifth grade, she was determined she was going to pass her end of the year test. She worked with her teacher several times a week before or after school to make sure she understood the math concepts taught throughout the year. When it came time to take the fifth grade end of year math test, she was nervous but confident as she sat down to take the test. All of her hard work paid off, and she finally passed her end of the

year math test and reached her goal. That accomplishment gave her a great deal of confidence. In a situation that could have very easily made her give up on school, she somehow used that situation to motivate herself to work even harder. When asked why she did not give up, her response was I would never give up on anything. Jasmine was the only unmotivated student that claimed she was more motivated in middle school than she was in elementary school. She said she knows there are more things that can be taken away now but she still just does not want to do her schoolwork. She went on to explain, "I do not do most of my work now, I really did nothing in terms of schoolwork in elementary school." She had plans to improve her grades in high school because she has a goal to go to college. Jasmine said she can do anything she puts her mind to but up until that point had not cared about her grades.

A commonality the highly-unmotivated students shared is they did not have goals in terms of their education. If they did not want to do their work or their homework, they simply would not do it. Jeb, a highly-unmotivated student, said, "if I do not want to do the work then I just do not do it." If a teacher asked him to work he might do one problem or question but then he would stop. Michael and Pablo, both unmotivated students, had a very similar viewpoint. They stated they usually did not do their work because they just did not feel like it. Amelia, another unmotivated student, revealed, "I did not do my work but really do not have a reason as to why I do not do my work." She did add, since it is the end of the year she now has to do her work so she can pass. Nicole, an unmotivated student, said, "I usually do my work but I get tired of doing it so I only finish about half of it. Then, I usually lose it or forget it at home so I cannot turn it in, anyway." Jasmine, an unmotivated student, reported she was just too lazy to do the work needed to make good grades, and she would rather hang out with her friends or play sports.

The highly-motivated students all have the perseverance they need to reach their educational goals. Every student in the study reported that at one time or another they did not feel motivated to do their schoolwork. However, the difference in the highly-motivated students and the highly-unmotivated students was they pushed through and always completed their schoolwork. Nate, a highly-motivated student, reported, "there are times when I might put off my work for a while but there has never been a time that I did not finish my schoolwork." Ryan, another highly-motivated student, said, "I have plenty of times I do not feel like doing my work but I power through and I always gives my best effort." When asked why he chooses to power through he said that he thinks about the long term. It might seem like a small homework assignment, but if you ignore that one homework assignment and you miss that one then it will lead to you missing more and more. Jackson, a highly-motivated student, also said, "there are times when I do not always want to do my work but I always do my work because I thinks of kids from other parts of the world that do not have the privilege to come to school." His motto is "I get to, I don't have to." He went on to describe countries like Syria and how they are in the middle of a war and how many women around the world do not even have the opportunity to get an education. When asked about how he gained this perspective, he said he is very interested in current events and watches news channels such as CNN. Breanna, also a motivated student, stated no matter how bad she does not want to do her work she knows the only way to get good grades is to do her work and her homework. She also added she hates to get zeros.

There was a distinct divide between the students who give up or work harder when they face an obstacle that gets in the way of their goals. Some students were adamant they would never give up while others said they would give up at the first sign of a struggle. Ryan, a motivated student, replied, "I would work harder because I see everything as a challenge and I

want to overcome any challenge I face." Breanna, a highly-motivated student, also said, "I would work harder but noted I would never give up and I am willing do anything to get what I need to do done." Pablo, an unmotivated student, said it depended on what the obstacle was. If it is a trick on his skateboard, he said, "I would not give up until I successfully completed the trick but if it was school work I would give up." Both Amelia and Nicole, unmotivated students, reported they would try something but if it was hard they would just give up. Jasmine, an unmotivated student, stated "I would work harder and I hate when people give up" but added there has been times she has worked as hard as she can in school but still does not succeed so she eventually gives up. In the end all of the highly-motivated students said they would do whatever it takes to succeed, and the highly-unmotivated students might try but if they did not face success they would eventually give up.

Table 7

Goals of Students

Goals	Highly Motivated Students	Highly Unmotivated Students
College	6	6
Nightly Homework	6	0
Work Harder (Academics)	6	0
Give up (Academics)	0	6

Theme Five: Hindrances

Challenges that hinder or get in the way of student motivation ranged from cell phones to video games. Almost all students, 92%, said cell phones were their biggest distraction. According to the Learning Style Questionnaire 67% of students said they are not able to study

when they face distractions of any kind. The highly-motivated students were able to overcome the distractions to complete their classwork, but the unmotivated students did not have enough will power to tune out the distractions. Nate, a highly-motivated student, said,

>My cell phone, Xbox, and Fortnite distract me but then I give himself a reality check and make myself finish my homework first because I know those things will still be there when I finish my homework and I can play on them later.

Jed, an unmotivated student, said, "I am just lazy," and he had better things to do than homework such as playing Fortnite. Michael, another unmotivated student, stated his phone is his biggest distraction. He said, "I pick up my phone to check something and the next thing I know it is two hours later and Instagram has sucked me in." Amelia, an unmotivated student, reported, " I feel very tired at the end of the day." She said she does so much work throughout the day she just does not want to do anymore.

Every highly-motivated student declared they are more motivated now than they were in elementary school and four of the six highly-unmotivated students said they were more motivated in elementary school and over time their motivational level has decreased. One of the highly unmotivated students stated she was more motivated now but she still did not care enough to complete her work. The sixth unmotivated student said she was more motivated now but was not able to articulate in what ways her motivational level had improved since elementary school. In many cases the students who lost their motivation indicated other things such as friends, phone, and the television took up their time they used to devote to their schoolwork. Jackson, a highly-motivated student, said, "I am more motivated now because in elementary school I was more focused on making friends." Now Jackson reported he has a lot of friends so he can focus on his future. Michael and Amelia, both unmotivated students, contributed their loss of

motivation to becoming more social as they have gotten older. Michael stated, "I was more motivated in elementary school because in middle school I have made more friends and I got a phone." Amelia stated she was more motivated in elementary school than she is now in middle school. She said, "I am much more social in middle school than I was in elementary school." She also stated there is just too many things on television she wanted to watch instead of doing her homework.

Almost all of the students reported technology in school improves grades if used properly but does have the potential to cause distractions. Nate, a highly-motivated student, believed technology improved his grades. For example, he stated, "the Internet allows students to practice areas they may be struggling with." He further explained how the Internet makes resources available to develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum. Ryan, another motivated student, stated, "technology overall improves grades but depending on the maturity level of the student it may be used inappropriately." Students that are less mature may play games on their computer instead of completing the work assigned to them by their teachers. Michael, an unmotivated student, was the only student who said technology worsened his grades and stated, "the chromebook they gave me at school distracts me." He explained instead of working on his classwork he usually plays games or shops.

Table 8

Words Frequently Used to Describe Distractions/Hindrances

Code	Highly Motivated Students	Highly Unmotivated Students
Cell phone	4	2
Xbox	1	0
Fortnite	1	1
Instragm	0	1
Friends	2	1
t.v.	1	1
Internet	2	1
Games	2	3
Noise	2	0
Sports	6	5
Music	1	1

Research Question Responses

The analysis of the data from individual participant interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations revealed five themes. These five themes revealed key components to developing a deeper understanding of student motivation. This section includes discussion of how the themes described in the Theme Development section were used to answer the research questions. Responses from the research questions proposed in this study are summarized in this section.

Research Question One. Research Question One stated, "Based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years?" Theme 2 and Theme 3 were used to answer this question. Theme 2 was Self-satisfaction. The data on self-satisfaction indicated when students feel good about themselves in terms of education and believe they can achieve, they will be more likely to have improved motivation. Hazel said, "as soon as I realized I could make A's that is all I wanted to make." The better students do in school the more likely they are to stay motivated. Jackson stated, "there are times I do not feel like doing my homework but I would never not do it because doing my homework prepares me for the test." Theme 3 was Expectations. The data reveled 100% of highly motivated students stated their parents' expectation in terms of grades was to "try their best." Breanna stated, "I usually make all A's so my parents expect that now but they always tell me to just try my best." Reese described her partnership with her parents in terms of her education. She said her parents tell her, "if I try my best whatever the outcome is, it will be okay." Reese went on to state, "my parents and I are a team, they are never surprised if I am struggling in a class because we talk about school everyday." Every highly-unmotivated student, said their parents require a certain letter grade such as a "B or C." None of the interviews of the highly-unmotivated students revealed any parent expectation was to "try their best." Pablo discussed how his parents' expectations have decreased over time. He said, "I used to make good grades in elementary school but once I got to middle school I stopped trying." He went on to say, "my parents used to expect A's, now they say a C or a D, as long as I am passing is okay." Students also had expectations of their parents. Hazel reported, "my parents always help me if I am struggling and will get me a tutor if I need one." On the other hand Pablo stated, "my mom used

to help me in elementary school but as I have gotten older the work is too hard for her and she can't help anymore."

Research Question Two. Research Question Two stated, "What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn?" Theme 4, Goals, was used to answer this question. I was surprised to uncover how little of an impact the end-of-year standardized testing has on students' motivation/apathy to learn. While students used words such as "painful," "stressful," and "boring" to describe the tests, their body language during the interview conveyed a lack of interest about the test. Several students thought the tests were easy and 100% of the students claimed to try their best, but only one student appeared to be invested in the test at all. Hazel described how she had not passed a test for a few years and how "excited" she was to finally pass. When speaking to her, she was animated and her voice changed volume as she spoke. The rest of the students spoke in a matter of fact tone and did not seem to care about the test one way or another. Every student did have a personal goal of passing the test, and 58% of the students wanted to make a pass advanced. While students did not seem to be invested in the end-of-year standardized test, they were much more interested in their grade on their report card. As the students spoke about their class grades, the students had more of a sense of urgency about describing what their grades meant to them. While the highly-motivated students reported having a class grade goal of A's and B's, even 83% of the unmotivated students wanted to make at least a C. There was one unmotivated student, Pablo, that said he would be happy as long as he passed with a D. Amelia spoke in a voice of desperation as she stated her goal "is just to pass for the year." All six highly-motivated students set goals of an A for their class average while all

six highly-unmotivated students had goals of C's or D's. Based on this research, students who set higher goals are more likely to be more academically motivated.

        Research Question Three. Research Question Three asked, "What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy?" Theme 5, Hindrances, was primarily used to answer this research question. However, there was some data to support Theme 2, Goals, answering question three as well. The data from this study showed 67% of students stated technology improved their grades when interviewed. However, most students interviewed in this study reported several types of technology as hindrances to their education. Table 7 includes the data that 64% of the distractions students listed are forms of technology. Jed, a highly-unmotivated student, reported being very motivated to play Fortnite on his game system and admitted spending hours each day afterschool playing the game but insisted the time he spends on Fortnite did not impact his schoolwork. Jed also reported feelings of apathy in other areas of his life. He said "if my mom takes away my game, I just move onto something else like my phone. I am not real attached to anything." Ryan, a highly-motivated student, stated, "I feel technology can be an interference if a student is not mature enough to use technology appropriately." Reese described technology as "essential" to help her reach her goals. She spoke of setting goals for her classes and constantly checking her grades on her school-issued chromebook to monitor her progress. She said, "I always want to make an A but if I see my grade is close to a B it motivates me even more to study for upcoming tests." Every student was distracted by at least one form of technology, but the motivated students either had parents that would not allow students to be exposed to the distractions until after schoolwork was done or those students had enough maturity to resist the distractions until after their schoolwork was completed. All unmotivated students interviewed were not able to withstand the temptation

of the distractions or their parents did not have the expectations that homework was to be done before students could be involved with the distraction.

Research Question Four. Research Question Four stated, "What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation?" Theme 1, Organization, was used to answer this question. Organized students have a better chance at success than an unorganized student. Examples of organization in regards to this study include writing down homework assignment in a calendar or planner and keeping an organized binder. All six highly-motivated students wrote down their homework in a calendar or planner daily so they could go back and refer to the assignment to refresh their memory on what they needed to do when they got home. Another trait all six highly-motivated students had was they keep a neat and organized notebook. According to the students interviewed, 75% of them acknowledged studying and good grades were positively connected. However, several of the unmotivated students voiced feelings of frustration from not knowing what they needed to study and where the material they needed to study was because they confessed to not keeping an organized binder. In one such case Jeb stated "I don't bother to study because I can't find what I need to study and I don't bother doing homework because even if I do it I can not find it the next day to turn it in." After this statement I asked about his notebook. He then pulled out his notebook and despite having a notebook, the papers were shoved in in no particular order and half were falling out of the binder. When asked if he has a section in his binder per class he responded "no, I just kinda open my binder and shove my stuff in the front pocket." Nate, on the other hand, contributed the key to his academic success was his ability to stay organized. When asked how he stays organized, Nate said "I write down my homework everyday in class and I always put my papers in the correct section in my notebook." He went onto explain, "I also check off my homework after I complete

my work so I know what I have completed and what I have left to finish." He also described

how he is in the habit of putting his finished homework in his notebook so he knows where it is

when its time to turn in his work the following day.

   Research Question Five. Research Question Five asked, "What do students perceive to

be obstacles that hinder their motivation?" Theme 5, Hindrances, was also used to answer this

research question. While Theme 5 also helped to answer question number three in regards to

technology, technology is not the only distraction that may hinder a student's education. Other

such obstacles come in the way of friends, sports, music, and noise. In terms of technology,

student struggle to maintain focus from the distractions of cell phones, television., games

systems, and computers. Students today are bombarded by a plethora of distractions that can

impede the learning process. The students who are successful at navigating through such

obstacles are the ones that will find academic success. The highly-motivated students

interviewed in this study were either mature enough to resist such distractions or had parents that

required all homework done before students could have their phone or turn on their television.

Nate, a highly-motivated student, is an example of a student mature enough to resist the

temptation of the technological distractions. He said, "my cell phone and Xbox are distractions

for me, but I normally choose to complete homework first then I have time later to play or

communicate with friends." Jackson was a highly-motivated student who described himself as

needing no noise or distractions of any kind so he can study. Another highly-motivated student,

Reese, admitted her cell phone is a distraction when she studies so she turns it upside down so

she can not see the change of the cell phone light when someone texts her. She is another

example of students being able to overcome the distractions of everyday life of teenagers.

Michael, an unmotivated student, was not able to overcome the obstacles of technology and

admited to playing games and shopping online in class instead of doing the assignment the teacher has asked him to do. He also stated, "when a teacher tells me to get back to work I might get back to the assignment for a minute then I am right back to playing the game." Michael was this distracted by technology in school so it was no surprise he was equally if not more distracted at home. Michael reported his parents allow him to use his phone after school, and they do not have a rule about doing homework before using their cell phone or starting a game. Michael said, "when I get home I lay on my bed and check my phone an the next thing I know I am on Instagram and it is two hours later." Michael was also an avid mountain biker and loved to skateboard. He spoke of the long hours he would spend outside on his bike and skateboard instead of doing his homework. Like Michael, Amelia spent hours after she got home in her room after school. Amelia said, "I am so tired when I get home, all I want to do is watch TV." Based on this research, it would be in the students' best interest to limit the amount of distractions students are exposed to until after students finish their homework.

Summary

According to this research, the middle school years are a critical time for most students to either improve their motivational level or develop academic apathy. Based on students' lived experiences, the sources of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years can be found in their ability to organize, feelings of self-satisfaction, expectations placed on students as well as expectations students have, goals students set, and hindrances that cause distractions. The students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards had no real impact to their motivation/apathy to learn. While none of the students particularly enjoyed standardized testing, most of the students stated they have little to no impact on their level of motivation. One student did discuss the pride she felt when she finally passed a standardized test

she had been struggling to pass for two years. The students' perception of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy was both positive and negative. Several students listed technology as a source of motivation. Through technology students could access information to help deepen their understanding of the curriculum as well as have access to current grades. This access to information enhanced students motivation by ensuring students had the correct information they needed to be successful on assessments as well as access to current grades. Students reported if they knew their current grades, it was easier to achieve their academic goals. However, technology also had an impact on student apathy. All of the students in the study perceived some form of technology to be obstacles that hinder their motivation. Whether the distraction came in form of a cell phone, television, or video games, every student struggled to maintain focus when faced with these devices. The students perceived access to relevant class notes and some sort of digital or paper planner to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation. Students reported having notes of material that would be on the test was essential to maintain their motivation. Students found it very frustrating to study material given to them by a teacher only to be tested on different material. Students also noted the importance of keeping a neat notebook so they could find the correct material to study for the test. Equally as important as the correct material was a plan to finish all of the work they were assigned. Students most prepared to achieve this task were students who used a planner. The use of a planner was essential to knowing what the assignments were and developing a plan to get all of the assignments done in a timely manner. These organizational skills students develop in middle school are an essential life lesson that will assist students as they enter high school and beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose this of qualitative, phenomenological study was to offer a comparison of unmotivated students versus motivated students at the middle school level using the students' own verbiage in an attempt to develop an understanding of student apathy. The research and findings were derived from the lived experiences of these students. A review of the literature revealed a gap in research associated with student motivation and student apathy from the students' perspective. This chapter consists of a concise summary of the findings along with a brief discussion of the research questions. This chapter also examines the implications for school administrator, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents. Finally, the delimitations and limitations of this research are discussed followed by recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The five research questions asked in this study were (a) based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years, (b) what are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn, (c) what are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy, (d) what do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation, and (e) what do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation? These research questions along with the themes helped to develop a deeper understanding of what impacts student motivation and/or apathy at the middle school level from the students' perspectives.

Research Question One

Research Question One asked the following: Based on students' lived experiences, what are the source(s) of motivation and/or apathy during the middle school years? The answers to the first research question related to how organized the students were, whether or not the students had ever felt self-satisfaction, what expectation the student's parents had for them, the goals the students set for themselves, and what hindrances got in the way of their motivation.

Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked the following: What are students' perspectives about the intersection of standardized testing and report cards to their motivation/apathy to learn? The research revealed standardized testing had little to no impact on student motivation/apathy, but report cards were related to feelings of self satisfaction to learn through goal setting.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three asked the following: What are students' perceptions of the intersection of technology and motivation/apathy? The research showed an inconsistency of the impact technology has on motivation/apathy. Through the research, students described how technology helped then stay organized and through that organization helped them also reach their goals. However, students also discussed how some forms of technology such as cell phone, television, and game systems hindered their learning by causing tempting distractions from studying and completing homework.

Research Question Four

Research Question Four asked the following: What do students perceive to be necessary resources beneficial to their motivation? Students determined the necessary resources beneficial to their motivation included some kind of planner so they could write down homework and

upcoming assignments, accurate notes from which to study, and both parental and teacher support.

Research Question Five

Research Question Five asked the following: What do students perceive to be obstacles that hinder their motivation? Students mentioned low expectations of parents, lack of feeling of self-satisfaction, and disorganization, but the number one obstacle that hindered a students learning was the lure of technology.

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Discussion

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The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop a deeper understanding of student motivation/apathy from the students' perspectives. The discussion section of this research study will examine the findings of this study in relationship to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It will outline how this study strengthened the previous research as well as how this study deviated from previous research. Finally, the findings of the current study regarding how middle school students perceive their experiences in relationship to their educational successes or lack thereof are valuable to all of the stakeholders involved in the students' educational success.

Theoretical Literature

The first theoretical framework guiding this study was Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. The theory of human motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs. Maslow believed once an individual's basic needs are met one can then focus on higher needs (Maslow, 1943). The results of this study indicated all of the participants of this study had their basic needs met and then could focus on their higher needs. The self-determination theory is largely based on Maslow's (1943) research, except self-determination theory relies solely on social and

environment to reach maximum potential. According to Deci and Ryan's (2000b) self-determination theory, there are three major components: autonomy, competence feedback, and relatedness. Within those components lay three categories of motivation. Those categories are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Although this study did not address intrinsic motivation, this section will discuss the results of this study in relationship to self-determination theory and extrinsic motivation and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is learning for the sake of learning. None of the participants of this study mentioned a love of learning, not even the motivated students. Those students did describe feelings of self-satisfaction. The feeling of self-satisfaction were individual and closely related to intrinsic motivation. Results from this study supported extrinsic motivation and revealed highly-motivated students are focused on their grades, self-satisfaction, and future short-term and long-term goals. This study added to the literature on amotivation by extending the research to include highly-unmotivated students. This study supported amotivation, a feeling of not caring by having a lethargic attitude towards learning and giving an explanation of what might cause a student to be unmotivated. According to this research, unmotivated students do not care enough about their education to be organized, study, or set goals for themselves.

The second theory guiding this study was Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy. This theory refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce results. In other words, one has to believe in themselves in order to be successful. This study supports Bandura's theory as it relates to self-satisfaction and goals. In order to strive for the feeling of self-satisfaction, one has to have achieved success. Once success is achieved, students develop a sense of self-satisfaction. This feeling of self-satisfaction motivates students to try their best at all they do in order to gain that feeling of self-satisfaction again. This feeling

of self-satisfaction related to all students in this study. All students were familiar with the feeling of self-satisfaction through academics or other activities such as soccer, gaming, or bike riding. The highly-unmotivated students often had felt this feeling in other aspects of their life such as sports but consistently lacked this feeling in regards to education. Highly-unmotivated students had also felt this feeling through non-academic activities but not in relationship to education. Bandura's self-efficacy theory also relates to the results of this study concerning goals. Once students feel confident, they will be successful, highly-motivated students that begin to set academic goals. These goals are both short-term and long-term. Short-term goals include such things as doing well on a unit quiz or test or can be as simple as finishing all assigned homework each night. Long-term goals could be making honor roll or even getting into a competitive college. Highly-unmotivated students also set goals but those goals tended to be immediate and non-academic. For instance highly-unmotivated students spoke of learning a new soccer skill or a bike trick. They would work immensely hard on a skill or trick often spending hours at a time until they accomplished the task. However, those same students had set little to no goals concerning their education. Often those students would do the bare minimum to pass and regularly received low grades on tests and in academic classes.

The final theory guiding this study was Frankl's (1963) student apathy theory. Frankl searched for the meaning of life and reported that students with a sense of "meaning for their life" (Handelman, 1999, p. 14) are more likely to succeed. In relationship to this study, apathetic students had not yet discovered the meaning of their life and could not see the meaning behind the assignments teachers gave. As a result unmotivated students had little to no motivation to learn. Student apathy theory also aligned with this study by relating to goals and ones sense self-satisfaction. Results from this study indicated highly-motivated students are students that

understand they can be successful. They have the motivation to set goals and work hard to achieve those goals. Those students also have a sense of self-satisfaction and understand the greater purpose to doing assignments is not only to help them reach their academic goals but also that there is a worth to completing any assignment as it contributes to their overall base of knowledge. Research further indicts highly-motivated students appreciate the opportunities they are given from their teachers and parents and work hard and try their best in all aspects of their life, including academics.

Empirical literature. This study supports the existing literature regarding student motivation in relationship to organization, self-satisfaction, expectation, goal setting, and hindrances. However, some aspects of this study were not supported by the existing literature. The current research and this study do not align in regards to the amount of influence a teacher has on student motivation. The participants in this study made note of their teachers and the students comfort level while in the classroom, but the overall impact on student motivation came from the students themselves as well as the expectations their parents had for them. Most of the existing research focused on strategies teachers could use to execute lessons to motivate students.

With regard to organization, current research by Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) stated, "Self-efficacy was a better predictor of positive attitudes than was actual ability" (p. 53). Meaning students who have a positive attitude going into an assignment and believe they can be successful have a greater chance at success than predicting success on ability alone. Students in this study reported school and more specifically grades did not always come easy for them. Even highly-motivated students noted academic struggles in school. The difference in the academic success of highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students was the highly-motivated students had the ability to organize. Highly-motivated students discussed how they

wrote assignments in some sort of planner then checked off assignments as they completed them. Those students also described how they kept a neat notebook for all of their classes. An organized notebook allowed students to readily access material for upcoming quizzes and tests. When students had the information they needed to prepare for a test readily available, the students were able to prepare for those assessments and reported they earned high marks. Earning high grades on tests gave the highly-motivated students the confidence they would continue to do well if they remained organized and studied. The highly-motivated students reported one of the reasons they did well in school because they had a positive self-satisfaction and their belief in themselves. This is supported in the current research of McDowell (2013). According to McDowell (2013), students who score higher on test scores are more likely to have improved motivation. Likewise, the unmotivated students in this study were consistently disorganized. This disorganization led to feelings of frustration when trying to complete assignments and study for tests. Unmotivated students with high ability often did not find success on tests because they were not organized enough to have the correct material to study even if they wanted to study. Those students lost confidence in themselves and their motivation suffered.

In regards to expectations, the participants in this study noted the importance of parental expectations as well as the expectation students have for their parents. The study participants agreed with the current research of Wamala, Kizito, and Jiemba (2013) as well as Jeynes (2007) in respect to their position of the importance of involved parents. Their research indicated that when parents themselves are educated and familiar with educational institutions, their children benefit from involved parental presence (Wamala et al., 2013, p. 134). Likewise, Jeynes (2007) documented the importance of parental involvement stating, "parental involvement positively

influenced educational outcomes" (p. 84). Jeynes (2007) went on to explain parental attendance and participation in school activities had less of an impact than on student success than parents simply expressing their expectation of successes. The study participants revealed by both highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students parental expectations both improved their motivation as well as assisted in deteriorating their motivation. Highly-motivated students had parents who expected them to try their best. If the student was not successful, the highly-motivated students expected their parents help. Several of the highly-motivated students spoke of themselves and their parents as a team and how they would work together in order to overcome struggles. In contrast, the highly-unmotivated students had parents that had very low expectations or no expectations at all. One of the highly-unmotivated students even explained how as his grades declined his parents' expectations of him also declined. This notion of low expectation leading to low student motivation is supported by current research of Condron (n.d.). According to Condron (n.d.), "having someone in your life who holds you to high standards and believes you can achieve is so critical" (p. 2). For the unmotivated students in this study, they were missing the critical link of parents who held them to high standards.

Information the study participants provided about goals was directly supported by the existing research. Highly-motivated students in this study reported setting daily goals of finishing assignments, short-term goals of doing well on unit tests, yearly goals of passing the end of course standardized tests, and even long-term goals of going to college. Locke and Latham (2006) recommended setting goals because the act of setting goals may motivate students to fulfill their potential but also may give students something of their own choosing to work towards. According to Locke and Latham (2006), self-regulation is a key element to set personal goals. The highly-motivated students in this study set their own personal goals but had

their parents' expectation in mind as they set these goals. Several unmotivated students stated long-term goals of going to college but also consistently did not have short-term goals to help prepare them to reach those long-term goals. Through this study it was discovered there is a distinct difference in the success of highly-motivated students versus the struggles of highly-unmotivated students in relation to goal setting. The highly-motivated students set small attainable goals as stepping-stones to help them reach their longer-term goals. The highly-unmotivated students lacked the motivation to even set short-term goals.

As previously noted, the participants of this study rarely mentioned the impact teachers had on their motivation other than how comfortable the teacher made the environment in the classroom. These finding are supported by the research of Shulman (2007). According to Shulman (2007), "good teachers engage the class and motivate student participation" (p. 4). It should be noted Shulman stated a good teacher motivates student participation, not motivates students. According to the highly-motivated students in this study, they reported feeling very comfortable in their classes. Those students described feeling liked by their teachers and felt comfortable asking questions in class. In contrast, highly-unmotivated students often noted the classroom was a hindrance to their motivation. They felt as if their teachers did not like them and they did not feel comfortable asking questions in class, hence a decreased motivation. These findings of both highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students are supported by the current research of Shukakidze (2013). Shukakidze (2013) suggested teachers that can make every student feel valued and unique, which in turn increases students' motivation.

Other than how a teacher can make a student feel as noted above, the students in this study rarely mentioned the impact teachers had on their overall motivational level. These finding were in contrast to the current research on how influential a teachers' role is regarding

motivation. According to Etuk and Clegg (2012), students' poor performance is related to lack of motivation, and they acknowledged the need for teachers to implement strategies to improve student motivation. This research suggested a students' motivational level is directly tied to strategies employed by teachers. However, this study indicated parents and students have the largest impact on student motivation regardless of the strategies teachers use within the classroom. This discrepancy would explain why teachers often feel frustrated when they have tried several strategies to improve student motivation, but no matter what new strategy they try some students are still apathetic. Another area of research that was also not supported by the findings in this study was in regards to teachers' expectations. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966) conducted a study to determine the effect expectation had on student achievement. They found that "for the school as a whole those children from whom the teachers had been led to expect greater intellectual gain showed a significantly greater gain in IQ scores than did the control children" (p. 116). The students in this study were often from the same class. For example, both highly-motivated and highly-unmotivated students were found in both comprehensive as well as honors classes. The teacher gave all students the same expectations of completing assignments and passing the tests. This research suggested the students will live up to the expectations of the teachers. If a teacher has low expectations of students, those students will not perform as well. This was simply not the case in this study. In this study, the students were given the same expectations, and motivated students lived up to those expectation and unmotivated students did not.

Implications

The significance of this qualitative research study was to provide a voice of the lived experiences of highly-motivated and apathetic students at the middle school level. The focus

was to explore the reasons behind why some students become highly motivated in middle school and why some students become apathetic in middle school. The researchers' purpose was to present the essence of the shared and individual experiences of both motivated and apathetic students (Moustakas, 1994). The study was significant due to the lack of research on motivation conducted from students' perspective. This section discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for all people invested in a student's education. This study on student motivation revealed specific implications that can benefit those who are involved in all aspects of education. Those education stakeholders are administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and the students themselves.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework from this study is based on the theories of Maslow (1943), Bandura (1986), and Frankl. Maslow's human motivation theory led the way for Ryan and Deci's (2000a) theory on self-determination. Theoretical implications resulting from this study encourage the understanding of Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory. The components of self-determination theory are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Students in this study fell in to one of these three categories. School administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents must also understand how self-determination theory applies to education. If these stakeholders understand what helps strengthen student motivation and what contributes to the deterioration of student motivation they may be able to plan early intervention for the latter group. Based on this research middle school is a critical time in which student motivation can strengthen or weaken. Parental involvement is particularly important during adolescence when some students are most likely to lose their intrinsic motivation during their middle school years. Pickhardt (2012) stated "supervisory support of parents to help keep effort

up while traditional motivation has temporarily has fallen away" (para. 8). Theoretical

implications resulting from the data collected in this study include recommendations that middle

school administrators offer training to their staff and workshops for parents to better understand

which students are at risk for amotivation or student apathy during the middle school years. This

early intervention may be able to prevent students from becoming apathetic or at the very least

offer potentially apathetic students a safety net while they navigate through adolescence.

The second theoretical framework from this study was based on Bandura's (1986) theory

of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory applies to those who work directly with students. It is

important for parents and teachers to understand Bandura's work as it relates to students. Self-

efficacy theory can be summarized by students who believe they can be successful are more

likely to achieve success. Classroom teachers can scaffold students' learning so their knowledge

grows as they learn more. Teachers can also review and remediate prior to testing students to

ensure positive results on assessments. Assessments can also be given in small, manageable

doses rather than waiting to test students after larger tests covering more information. Parents

can review daily information at home and encourage students to complete homework before

allowing students access to cell phones, television, and game systems, all of which have the

potential to distract students. If students believe they can be successful and they invest the time

it takes to learn the information presented by teachers, ask questions when needed, and seek out

assistance from parents if they are struggling, they are more likely to find success.

The third theoretical framework from this study is based on Frankl's (1963) student

apathy theory. Student apathy theory relates to the meaning students have about daily life. This

theory applies to teachers in the classroom in the sense they can give meaning to what the

students are learning. If the students feel what they are learning is meaningful, they are more

likely to buy in to the lesson and have more motivation to be successful. Parents can also work with their students a home to help students develop an understanding of the purpose of their life. Students with a sense of the "meaning for their life" (Handelman, 1999, p. 14) are more likely to succeed. Both parents and teachers can work with students to set short-term and long-term goals. Establishing goals will help bring meaning to student's daily life and encourage success by giving the students something to work for.

Empirical Implications

In addition to discussing theoretical implications of this study, it is also necessary to consider empirical implications as they relate to student motivation. This section will address the empirical implications or what incites can be gained through the observations, questionnaires, and interviews of the study participants as they relate to student motivation with a concentration on organization, self-satisfaction, expectations, goals, and hindrances. Empirical implications resulting from the data collected in this study include recommendations that all of these key aspects be offered by an administrator as training for teachers and guidance counselors and hold workshops for parents and students. It is also recommended classroom teachers and guidance counselors can work directly with students to help develop the skills to assist students and be aware of their role they play in the motivational process. Parents can work closely with their children to teach them organizational skills, hold them to high expectations, and help them set and reach for goals.

One of the most important issues to student motivation is organization. Highly-motivated students reported being organized was key to their sustained motivation. Classroom teachers can teach all of their students how to keep a neat an organized notebook as well as require all students to write down nightly homework as well as up coming assignments. Parents can check

binders at home to ensure they are neat and orderly and check at home that homework

assignments are in fact written in a planner or calendar. Students can take responsibility for

themselves by writing down nightly homework and upcoming assignments on their own without

prompting from the teacher. Once an assignment is finished, the student can check off the

finished assignment. Visually seeing which assignments are done will keep the student

motivated to complete the remaining assignments.

Highly-motivated students reported self-satisfaction is another key component of keeping

students motivated. Self-satisfaction is the feeling students get from being successful. Teachers

can assist students' development of self-satisfaction by offering opportunities to learn and be

successful. When students acquire the feeling of self-satisfaction, they will strive to make those

feelings last. Parents can help students review information to get ready for a quiz and test and

help students feel confident they know the material they will be tested on. Students need to take

responsibility for their own learning by keeping a neat and organized notebook, writing down

and checking off assignments and allotting time to study by reading over their notes, making

notecards, and completing study guides.

The students in this study discussed how expectations are yet another key element to

student motivation. This study revealed that parent expectations are a pivotal factor of highly-

motivated students' level of motivation. However, student gave detailed accounts of not only

holding students to high expectations, but parents instilled in children from a very early age to do

their best at all they do including academic assignments and assessments. Parents need to expect

students to try their best at all they do. Parents also need let the students know they will be

proud of them no matter how they do as long as they try their best. Students need to always

work hard to prepare for assessments then try their best. Parents also need to tell students they

are proud of them when they do well on a test or meet a goal. Students reported having improved motivation when they received praise and positive feedback from their parents.

Setting goals was another trait reported by highly motivated students. Teachers can take time out of instruction to establish individual and class goals then acknowledge when students achieve those goals. Parents can work with students at home to discuss both short and long term goals. Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) encouraged educators to help adolescents expand on goal setting and encourage students to self-monitor their progress, focus on time management, and to help student self-evaluate after a lesson or time period.

All students reported hindrances or obstacles were a challenge that had the potential to impact motivation. Teachers need to make sure they provide a safe and comfortable environment for students to ask questions and make all students feel valued. Shukakidze (2013) suggested teachers that can make every student feel valued and unique, which in turn increases students' motivation.   Students who feel supported and cared for exhibit greater interest in class and school, and their grades are positively impacted (Schaps, n.d.). Parents also have the responsibility of removing distractions when students get home so students are better able to focus. Students need to resist the urge to text, go on social media, watch television, or play game systems until after they have completed their homework assignments and study for upcoming tests.

Practical Implications

Practical implications resulting from the data collected in this study include recommendations that school systems offer training to administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents on how to help students stay organized, increase student self-satisfaction, raise expectations, help students set goals, and raise awareness of hindrances to student

education. An important practical implication of this research is for school systems to offer

training to school administrators so they understand the importance of the key components of

this study and can then lead their schools to make these key components a reality in every

classroom. The school system should offer modules and information on their webpage about the

importance of parental expectations as a resource to parents. The school system should also

require teachers and guidance counselors to undergo training on how best to work with students

on organization, self-satisfaction, expectations, goals, and hindrances. School administrators,

teachers, and guidance counselors should to reach out to parents about strategies to improve

student motivation. In particular those strategies should be shared with parents in late

elementary school or early in middle school. The school systems should make parents aware of

the vital role they play. Administration could offer weekly or monthly suggestions in the school

newsletter. Another practical implication of this research is for administrators, teachers, and

guidance counselors to work together to identify struggling students and offer them a study skills

class on organization and goal setting. Teachers are needed to facilitate this process, as many

adolescents have a hard time setting goals and anticipating challenges that may arise and hinder

their ability to accomplish them (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Teachers need to take time out

of their classroom preparation lessons at the beginning of the year to teach how to organize their

binders. Then, teachers need to follow up at least once every nine weeks to ensure students are

staying organized. Teachers should also be on the lookout for special cases that need immediate

attention. Teachers can refer those students to guidance, work with those students one on one, or

have a student buddy work with that unorganized student. Teachers also need to give small

quizzes on material students have mastered to build a students' self-satisfaction. Teachers can

assign study buddies and send home review sheets for parents to go over with students to ensure

they are prepared for the upcoming assessment. Teachers need to set high expectations for

students and offer a welcoming environment for students to come get extra help if needed.

Teachers need to take time out of class continuously to set weekly, unit, and yearly goals.

Teachers then need to check back with students to see if goals have been met and acknowledge

students hard work when students meet those goals. Teachers should also make students aware

of potential hindrances and help students make a plan to avoid such distractions. Guidance

counselors can also be used to work with struggling students in small groups or one on one to

teach students how to organize their binder or use a planner. Additionally, the suggestion should

be made for parents to work with students to develop organizational skills, set high expectations,

and help students set and reach goals, which this study supported. The final practical implication

of this research requires students to take responsibility of their own motivation and apply what

they learn from their teachers, guidance counselors, and parents.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study included one school with a relatively small number of

participants. "One does not need huge sample size to discover underlying and reappearing forms

of social life that, once described, offer new levels of insight for people" (Martinez, Dimitriadis,

Rubia, Gomez, & De La Fuente, 2003, p. 8). This study was limited to the investigation of

students without disabilities in a suburban middle school in Virginia. Another delimitation of

this study was the exclusion of elementary and high schools. The scope of this study included

adolescents between ages 13-14. A delimitation for this study was only one middle school,

which was studied for convenience reasons. Another delimitation was the restricted sample size.

The limitations for this study included time restraints of this study. This study took place

over a few months rather than years. The nature of self-reporting regarding the interview process

relied on students' memory and perception, which may be far different than reality. Another limitation was the developmental level of the students within the study. Unmotivated students may have a difficult time reflecting on why they feel they are unmotivated. Student absenteeism during scheduled interviews was an expected limitation. Therefore, the researcher had alternate students lined up to interview if the original participants were not in school on the day the interviews were scheduled. The demographics of the community produced a participant population of that included students who were all Caucasian, which may have influenced the study findings. It also needs to be noted the researcher had biases against students that do not put forth effort.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose for this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover commonalities in highly-motivated as well as apathetic students. The recommendations resulted exclusively from the lived experiences of the participants in this research study. These recommendations provide information to school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents. The suggestions below can assist stakeholders in supporting unmotivated adolescence as they enter middle school and improve their motivational level as well as recommendations for further research to expand on the data collected from this study.

The first recommendations for further research include expanding the study to other public middle schools as well as elementary and high schools to determine if similar results are found. Data from this research study indicated apathetic students began to lose their motivation in early middle school, but further research of late elementary school may offer a more exact time frame. A study of high school students would be beneficial to see if the lack of motivation

the apathetic students had continued into high school or changed once students matured or faced the reality of graduation and beyond.

The next recommendation based on the data from this research study is to include exceptional education students as well as gifted learners. For the purposes of this study data was only collected from non-identified students. It would be interesting to see if the results of such studies yielded the same results as this study on non-identified students. Would all or the majority of exceptional learners be identified as unmotivated and all or the majority of gifted students be identified as highly-motivated or would similar results of this study be seen in both of these groups of students as well?

This research was completed using 12 students ranging from 13-15 years old from a purposeful sample of middle school students. The pool of students produced Caucasian students, as that was the majority of the student population at the school. Therefore, further research could focus on replicating the study using students with different racial backgrounds.

Other recommendations for future research based on this study include impact of technology, parental involvement, and balancing social and academic goals of students. Studying the impact of technology on student motivation may led to a deeper understanding of how educators and parents can help students create a balance between the positive and negative effects of technology. Based on this research technology has the potential to cause hindrances to student learning as well as help students to organize their assignments. Future research can concentrate on the types of technology that can both help and hinder student learning. In particular, future research should concentrate on how students deal with the distraction of technology and/or how some students make technology work in their favor. Based on this research, parental involvement can have a substantial impact on student achievement. Additional

research on parental expectations of grades, goals, and organization would be beneficial to students. While this study touched on parental expectations, it was not the sole focus of the research. A parent questionnaire as well as a parent interview may offer a deeper understanding of how parental expectations impact student motivation. Furthermore, additional research is recommended to see the most effective way schools can educate parents on just how important their role as a parent is. Parent training as well as workshops for students entering the middle school years should be piloted to see effectiveness of such programs. Students of today have a delicate balance of maintaining their social media profile and academic success. Adolescence is a time when teenagers begin to separate from their parents and friendships and their social status become more important to students. Additional research is recommended to see the impact of social media and discover ways for adolescences to manage their time between social media and academics.

The final recommendation from the data is administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors could work together use these findings to further the development of effective identification tools for early intervention and create opportunities for unmotivated students to develop the skills highly motivated students already possess. These opportunities could come in the form of evening workshops for parents and/or students, classes for unmotivated students during the school day, training for teachers and guidance counselors, and one on one support of unmotivated students from guidance counselors. There also needs to be a plan in place to assist students that begin to lose motivation throughout middle school. Study skills classes should be offered at all grade levels with a well-trained teacher leading the class. This should be a fluid class meaning students can be placed in the class until they learn the appropriate skills needed to be successful on their own and students can enter the class as needed if teachers identify a

student later in the year. The class size needs to be relatively small so the teacher can work

closely with parents as parents play a critical role in the success of students. This study skills

class needs to be focused on the five key areas identified from this research. Those areas are

organization, self-satisfaction, expectations, goals setting, and identification and strategies to

minimize the effects of hindrances.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand and describe

the lived experiences from the perspective of 12 eighth grade students who were either highly

motivated or apathetic in relation to education.

Chapter One of this qualitative research study provided the problem and significance of

this study. The overarching research question that guided this research was, "why do some but

not all students experience apathy towards education during their middle school years?"

Although there is a plethora of information about what motivates students and how to motivate

students, there was a significant gap in the literature regarding what motivates middle school

students from a student's perspective. The lack of research surrounding this question generated

the need for this study.

Chapter Two of this study provided an overview of the literature including the three

theories guiding this research study and a summary of the current literature. The current

literature focused on ways to motivate students from the teacher's perspective. There was

significant debate about intrinsic verses extrinsic motivation and how one impacted the other.

However, there was a gap in the research about what motivates students from their own

perspective.

Chapter Three presented the design, participants, data collection methods, and analysis process for the study. It provided details about the setting and research procedures. The chapter also included the role of the researcher and research on the data collection instruments. Finally, the chapter provided an overview of how trustworthiness would be maintained throughout the study and how ethical considerations would be protected in the study.

Chapter Four presented the participants, procedures for data collection, the results of the pilot study, and the developing themes of this study. The themes developed from the data collected from the lived experiences of twelve middle school students were (a) organization, (b) self-satisfaction, (c) expectations, (d) goals, and (e) hindrances.

Chapter Five was made up of a succinct summary of the findings along with a concise summary of the research questions and themes. Theoretical and empirical review of the literature was likewise included in this chapter. The chapter also included theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this research study. Contained in this chapter was a discussion about the recommendation for administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and students. Finally, included in this chapter was a concise discussion of the delimitations and limitations as well as recommendations for future research.

It is the hope of this researcher that the insight gained from the lived experiences of these students assist administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and students to obtain a deeper understanding of why some students develop into highly-motivated students while others form an apathetic attitude about education during their middle school years.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter

Date: November 11, 2017

Dear School Official,

My name is Debi Graves and I am a graduate student at Liberty University in Virginia. I am working on my doctoral dissertation in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my study is to investigate students' perceptions as to why some middle school students lose their intrinsic motivation to learn and develop apathy toward learning while other middle school students thrive. I will select 6 high achieving and 6 low achieving general education students. High achieving students will be defined as students with at least a 90% class grade and low achieving students will be defined at students with a class grade of below 70%. Selected students will take an entrance survey to measure their perceived motivational level. Based on the student feedback the final 12 students will be chosen for the study. Each student that participates in the study will be asked a series of questions, such as demographic information including, but not limited to: gender, socioeconomic status, participation is school activities, family involvement, and post high school plans. I will be asking consent of the superintendent, the building principal, parents of students involved, as well as each student. Every student will have the choice of whether or not to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity will be kept, as none of the students' responses will contain their names and the school district and building will not be named in the dissertation.

There is no cost to the district and there will be minimal disruption to instruction, I intend to gather information teachers and administrators can use to help identify "at risk" low achieving students so that intervention can be put into place and help all students succeed academically.

There is minimal risk to students as participants feeling uncomfortable may withdraw from the study at anytime. The results of this study will be available upon request.

If there are any questions regarding the purpose and/or procedures of this study, please feel free to contact me, Debi Graves at (804) 920-7053 or my faculty chair, Christy James at (727) 743-2629. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Debi Graves

Appendix B

Superintendent and Principal Consent Form

Letter of Consent

Date: _____

Research Title: Middle school apathy: A phenomenological study from students' perspectives

Principal Researcher: Debi Graves (804) 920-7053, debra_graves@ccpsnet.net

Institution: Curriculum and Instruction, Liberty University

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Christy James at (727) 743-2629

I, the undersigned, do hereby acknowledge that:

1. My student(s) are participating voluntarily and without coercion.

2. The purpose and procedures of the study presented in the cover letter have been explained thoroughly and to my satisfaction.

3. Any unusual risks and benefits that may be expected have been explained.

4. I understand that I may end my students' participation in the study at any time without penalty.

5. I have been informed the results of this study can be obtained by request from principal researcher.

6. My students' anonymity will be protected.

This form will be signed and kept on file for future reference.

Print Name: _____

Title: _____

School Name: _____

Signature: _____Date:_____

Appendix C

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Middle School Apathy: A Phenomenological Study From Students' Perspective

Debra Graves

Liberty University

School of Education

Your child is invited to be in a research study of a study about student apathy. He or she was selected as a possible participant because they meet the requirements of being highly motivated or highly unmotivated as defined by classroom grades in regards to their social studies course. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow him or her to be in the study.

Debra Graves, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of student motivation based on the perspective of the students themselves.

Procedures: If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask him or her to do the following things:

1. Fill out a learning style questionnaire. This questionnaire will help determine similarities amongst highly motivated and highly unmotivated students. This questionnaire should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

2. Fill out an adolescent apathy questionnaire. This questionnaire will help me developed a deeper understanding of why a student might be highly motivated or highly unmotivated. This questionnaire will take 10-15 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in an interview session. The session will be audio recorded to ensure proper transcription of the interview. The session will take 20-30 minutes

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: The benefits involved in this study include the student developing an understanding of how they learn through the learning style questionnaire and their personal level of motivation through the adolescent apathy questionnaire. This knowledge will help students choose learning activities that will be most beneficial to their understanding of new material. There will also be a benefit for teachers and the educational community through developing an understanding of why some students are more academically motivated than other students. Through that understanding teachers and parents may be able to provide support for the less motivated students.

Compensation: Your child will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Questionnaires and interviews will be conducted in an office where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Students will enter through one door and exit from another so the next participant will not see the previous participant leave.

- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked device. Once the recordings have been transcribed the recordings will be deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- A limit of confidentiality within this study may occur, as I cannot assure participants that other interviewed students will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect his or her current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should your child choose to withdraw, any data collected, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Debra Graves You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (804) 541-4700 and/or debra_graves@ccpsnet.net. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Christy James at cmjames2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record my child/student as part of his or her participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Parent   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix D

ASSENT OF CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?

Middle School Apathy: A Phenomenological Study From Students' Perspective, Debra

Graves

Why are we doing this study?

We are interested in studying student motivation so we can help non-motivated students

become motivated.

Why are we asking you to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you are either highly motivated

or highly unmotivated in terms of academics.

If you agree, what will happen?

If you are in this study, you will take two questionnaires and participate in an interview.

Do you have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the

researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You

can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

_____

Signature of Child   Date

Debra Graves, researcher, debra_graves@ccpsnet.net

Christy James, faculty advisor, cmjames2@liberty.edu

Liberty University Institutional Review Board,

1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515

or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Appendix E

Adolescent Apathy Questionnaire

I feel that I am (circle one):   Motivated   Unmotivated

Directions: Rate how much you agree with each of the following statements by circling the

appropriate number.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I want to go to college.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have career plans after graduation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am good at one or more sports.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I know what I want to be when I grow up.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I know which college I would like to attend.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I would rather sleep than go out with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My friends think I am passive (chill).	1	2	3	4	5
8. I like to argue/debate about topics that are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5

9. I am an ambitious person (I have goals). 1 2 3 4 5

10. I don't care if I miss a day of school or class. 1 2 3 4 5

11. I am a disruptive person. My teachers talk to

    me about interrupting class often. 1 2 3 4 5

12. I am a creative, imaginative person. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I am an active person (at least 30 min. each day). 1 2 3 4 5

14. I think I am smart. 1 2 3 4 5

15. I like reading. 1 2 3 4 5

16. I study for upcoming tests. 1 2 3 4 5

17. I have difficulty making decisions. 1 2 3 4 5

18. I enjoy being part of a team. 1 2 3 4 5

19. I enjoy activities that I am able to do alone.

Running, Piano, Reading 1 2 3 4 5

20. I am highly motivated. 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix F

Field Notes Form

Date: _____ Time: _____

Subject being Observed: _____

Observations of events and behaviors:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Comments/Summary:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix G

Learning Style Questionnaire

Directions: Circle the answer that best applies to you.

I learn best by:

Listening to the teacher   Reading   Watching a video   Other: _____

I remember best by:

Writing information down

Making notecards and review the material over and over

Drawing pictures to accompany information

Having someone quiz me

You would rather do which of the following?:

Read a book with lots of pictures   Read a book with lots of words

I do not like to read

During lunch you would rather do which of the following?:

Talk to your friends   Read a book   Move from spot to spot

Listen to the conversations at the table (not do not join in)

When you learn a new game, you would rather do which of the following?:

Get someone to show you how to play it   Read directions

Figure it out on your own

When you try to study, which of the following do you need?:

Silence   Music   Comfortable chair

No distractions

When you are mad, you are most likely to:

Pout   Scream and yell   Slam doors   Cry

Want to be alone

When you are happy, you are most likely to:

Talk to a friend   Sing   Smile ear to ear   Act really hyper

When you are in a new place, how do you find your way around?:

Look at a map   Ask for directions

Just start walking until you find where you are going

Your favorite class is:

Art class   Music class   Gym class   Social Studies class

When you hear a song you like, what are you most likely to do?:

Play it over and over until you learn it   Find a video to go with it

Start dancing

You would rather do which of the following activities with your friends?:

Go to a movie   Go to a concert   Go to an amusement park

Hang out and talk

What type of learner are you?:

Auditory   Visual   Tactile (hands on)

Appendix H

Interview Questions

1. Please give me a description of your feelings about whether you feel motivated to do well in school.

2. Please tell me an area in your life that you feel motivated to do your best.

3. Have you ever felt like you do not want to do your schoolwork? If so, do you not do your schoolwork or do you do it anyway? Why did you make that choice?

4. During your middle school years how would you describe your academic motivation in relationship to elementary school?

5. Do you have a desire to change your motivational level?

6. What expectations have your parents given you about grades?

7. How supportive are your parents when it comes to school? Do they offer support if you are struggling?

8. How supportive are your teachers when it comes to school? Do they offer support if you are struggling?

9. Do you have consequences at home if you do not make a certain grade? If so, what are the consequences?

10. Are you comfortable asking questions in class? Why or why not?

11. Do you feel motivated to earn good grades?

12. What would you describe as a good grade in a class?

13. What correlation do you see in studying and good grades?

14. Do you study for tests? If so, how much (nightly, before test)?

15. Do you feel the more you study the better you do on tests?

16. Please give me a description about your feeling about the Standards of Learning tests?

17. Do you do your best on the Standards of Learning tests?

18. What is your goal on the Standards of Learning tests?

19. What score do you usually get on the Standards of Learning tests (fail, pass, pass advance, perfect)?

20. What types of technology do you use in school (chromebooks, cell phones, etc.)?

21. What types of technology do teachers use in school (smart boards, document camera, etc.)

22. Do you think using technology in school improves/worsens your grades? Why?

23. Are you more/less motivated to complete assignments if you have the option to use technology? Why?

24. What motivates you to do your best (money, praise, self-satisfaction)?

25. What resources to you need to stay motivated to do well on a test/class?

26. How motivated are you to do well (life and school)?

27. Does your motivation change depending on the task?

28. What challenges hinder (get in the way of) your motivation?

29. When you face an obstacle do you give up or work harder?

30. Has your level of motivation changed over time (example: improved/lessen as you have gotten older)?

Appendix I

Recruitment Letter

January 27, 2018

Dear Parent:

As a graduate student in the education department/School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand why some middle school students lose their intrinsic motivation and develop apathy towards learning. The purpose of my research is to develop a better understanding based on students' lived experiences of what the sources of motivation and/or apathy are during the middle school years. Research will also include students' perspectives about how standardized testing and report cards impact motivation/apathy and what impact technology has on motivation/apathy. Finally, students will be asked what resources are beneficial to motivation as well as what obstacles hinder their motivation, and I am writing to invite your child to participate in my study.

If you are willing to allow your child to participate, he or she will be asked to fill out two brief questionnaires and participate in a 30 minute interview. It should take approximately 50 minutes for your child to complete the procedures listed. Your child's name will be requested as part of his or her participation, but the information will remain confidential.

For your child to participate complete and return the consent document to your child's social studies teacher.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to your child's social studies teacher.

Sincerely,

Debi Graves
Researcher

Appendix J

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 9, 2018

Debra Graves
IRB Approval 3187.040918: Middle School Apathy: A Phenomenological Study From Students' Perspective

Dear Debra Graves,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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