

Academic Motivation: Concepts, Strategies, and Counseling Approaches

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# ACADEMIC MOTIVATION: CONCEPTS, STRATEGIES, AND COUNSELING APPROACHES

*Motivation is an important foundation of academic development in students. This article discusses academic motivation; its various component concepts in areas such as beliefs, goals, and values; and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It also presents major, widely studied theoretical perspectives of academic motivation and briefly illustrates strategies for increasing academic motivation. The article addresses the importance of the school counselor's role in student academic development and describes preventive (classroom guidance) and remedial (small-group counseling intervention and individual counseling intervention) approaches that school counselors can utilize for promoting academic motivation.*

Motivation has been widely studied in education and in other fields (Collins & Amabile, 1999; Isaksen, & Treffinger, & Dorval, 2011; Zimmerman, 2008). Motivation is a complex psychological phenomenon; therefore, the absence of one major overarching definition or theory of motivation should not be surprising. Researchers have explored motivation from various theoretical perspectives, such as behavioral (Skinner, 1953, 1978), social (Bandura, 1977, 2011), cognitive (Festinger, 1957), and humanistic standpoints (Maslow, 1968, 1970; Rogers, 1969). In the last few decades, researchers have advanced various dimensions of motivation, such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), values (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), and goals (Ames, 1992; Locke & Latham, 1990), and more comprehensive macro-theories such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986).

Although many significant psychological components influence student behaviors, motivation is considered one of the most important foundations essential for students' academic development (Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009). In keeping with efforts to promote comprehensive school counseling programs that address a full range of developmental domains (American

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School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006), this article focuses on the academic development domain. More specifically, the authors examine academic motivation, a psychological dimension considered important—if not the most important—in human learning and development (Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Scheel, Madabhushi, & Backhaus, 2009).

Research has consistently found that academically motivated students tend to perceive school and learning as valuable, like to learn, and enjoy learning-related activities (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000, 2008). Studies have identified lack of motivation as a primary reason for underachievement (Scheel et al., 2009; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). It is not unusual for school counselors to interact with students who lack motivation to learn or to change behaviors that are self-defeating (Lambie, 2004; Lewis, 1992). Often, school counselors are eager to assist such students, but find themselves lacking understanding of the motivational underpinnings of students' behaviors or unable to determine how best to tackle motivational problems and provide proper guidance for these students. Nevertheless, the ASCA Student Standards (ASCA, 2004) feature several items that point to the need for school counselors' understanding of student's academic motivation, including demonstrating "the motivation to achieve individual potential" (A:B1.1); demonstrating "dependability, productivity, and initiative" (A:A3.4); demonstrating "how effort and persistence positively affect learning" (A:A2.2); and "display a positive interest in learning" (A:A1.2).

Given the recognized importance of academic motivation in school success, it is important that schools find ways to increase student motivation (McCoach, 2002; Wang & Pomerantz, 2009). In the authors' view, school counselors should be at the forefront of this effort. The purpose of this article is to describe (a) conceptual definitions and examples of various motivational components of academic

motivation, (b) various strategies for increasing academic motivation, and (c) counseling approaches for promoting academic motivation.

## ACADEMIC MOTIVATION

Infants and toddlers are naturally motivated to learn the whys and hows of the world around them. With increasing negative experiences in school, some students begin to stop trying hard because they think that effort will not make a difference. Numerous studies have shown that children, as they go through school, lose their motivation to learn school subjects (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001; Hong, Peng, & Rowell, 2009; Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002; Schmakel, 2008; Walker & Greene, 2009; Wang & Pomerantz, 2009; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). Lack of motivation leads not only to disengagement with school in general, but to underachievement and dropping out of school (Azzam, 2007; Glass & Rose, 2008; Janosz, Archmbault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008; Scheel et al., 2009).

Numerous factors have significant effects on learning and motivation. For example, school climate, educators' beliefs and perceptions, and family and social values have been demonstrated as important factors affecting student

it closely relates to school engagement and academic development (Wang & Pomerantz, 2009). School counselors and teachers are positioned in academic settings to spot motivational problems and intervene to improve situations. Thus, they must be prepared to assist students in need of motivational enhancement (McCoach, 2002; Wang & Pomerantz 2009). The sections below introduce various motivational components that have shown evidence of affecting student motivation, followed by a brief introduction of strategies for increasing academic motivation.

### Motivational components in academic learning

During the past several decades, studies have steadily examined motivational foundations of student behavior, with the empirical findings providing evidence of a strong relationship between students' motivation and their academic functioning (Wentzel, 1999; Wigfield et al., 2006). This relationship is evident even when effects of cognitive skills are partialled out (Wigfield & Wentzel, 2007). This article summarizes motivational components (or constructs) that have been found to impact student learning, including beliefs/perceptions, goals, values, and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. The authors first present definitions and research evidence of the relationships of these constructs with learning outcomes, followed by theoretical perspectives of motivation from which these motivational constructs have

## LACK OF MOTIVATION LEADS NOT ONLY TO DISENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL IN GENERAL, BUT TO UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL.

motivation (Eccles, 2007; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Perry, Turner, & Meyer, 2006; Stipek, 2002). Although these elements are immensely important for understanding student behaviors in school, this article centers on the motivation of students as

been derived. For readers who are not familiar with motivation concepts and theories, the new terms may seem overwhelming. However, these introductions provide readers with only brief exposure to these motivational constructs, which are well-documented

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND TEACHERS ARE POSITIONED IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS TO SPOT MOTIVATIONAL PROBLEMS AND INTERVENE TO IMPROVE SITUATIONS.

as effective in learning. The authors' hope is that readers will pursue deeper understanding by additional reading (see appendix for sources). This article presents one construct, attributional beliefs, in more detail to provide examples of counseling approaches discussed in the last section.

**Beliefs/Perceptions.** Personal beliefs or perceptions of motivation include self-efficacy, autonomy, and attributional beliefs. *Self-efficacy*, also called efficacy expectations, is an individual's personal beliefs in his or her ability to perform and accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Students are efficacious or competent when they think they can meet the challenge of their schoolwork. Students with high efficacy expectations take on challenging tasks, put forth efforts, persist when faced with difficulties, and believe that they will succeed in the future (Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Students with low self-efficacy for learning tend to avoid trying tasks, avoid making an effort, and readily quit when they encounter learning difficulties (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1991).

*Autonomy* is a term that signifies personal beliefs that individuals have control over their own learning and decision making. Students' psychological need for autonomy can be met by classroom teachers and other school personnel creating an autonomy-supportive environment by providing choices for learning activities and by students experiencing initial success with their choices. When the autonomy need is met, students tend to be more actively engaged in their learning activities and willingly devote time and energy to learning as learning becomes self-endorsed and self-determined (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000b, 2006).

Students' answers to such questions as "Why did I fail to accomplish the task?" suggest beliefs about the causes of an outcome, which are termed *attributional beliefs*. Attributional beliefs are personal theories regarding why things happen in individuals' lives and how they explain other people's success or failure. Understanding how students attribute their success and failure in school, that is, how students explain an outcome or their understanding of why certain achievement outcomes happen, sheds light on the source of their subsequent actions (Weiner, 1985, 1994, 2005). Three dimensions of causality classification explain attributional beliefs: locus of control (internal and external), stability over time (stable to unstable/changeable), and controllability or responsibility of the student (controllable to uncontrollable). These components—internal (ability, effort) and external (luck, task difficulty); stable (ability, task difficulty) and unstable (effort, luck); controllable (immediate effort, getting help from counselor, mood) and uncontrollable (ability level in general, task difficulty)—become essential constituents of students' beliefs. For example, when students attribute their academic success or failure to internal, unstable, and controllable causes such as effort, they will more likely remain positively motivated.

Realizing how much effort the student needs to expend or what ability level is required to achieve a certain outcome is a continuous process. That is, like other motivational constructs introduced in this article, personal beliefs are changeable. Furthermore, educators can better understand students' personal beliefs when they also consider other motivational constructs such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988), task value (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990), goal orientations (Dweck, 1986), and

perceptions of ability (Nicholls & Miller, 1983), as well as students' attributional beliefs (Weiner, 1986).

**Goals.** Goals provide a framework within which a person responds to events and results in a unique pattern of cognition, behavior, and affect (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Goals can be short term (proximal goals) or long term (distal goals) with a few sub-goals that can be used to assess progress toward a final goal (Alderman, 1999).

Two types of *goal orientations* discussed widely are mastery (or learning) goal orientation and performance goal orientation. Mastery goal-oriented students are those academically oriented to learn and master materials and to demonstrate their competence by performing well (Ames, 1992; Pintrich, 2000). These students define academic success as learning something new, thus facilitating the development of competence and task mastery. They tend to believe that abilities are changeable and tackle challenging tasks (Dweck, 1999). Students with performance goal orientation, on the other hand, demonstrate their competence relative to others (Midgley & Urdan, 1995). These students tend not to take academic risks. Although both goals can increase achievement, mastery goals are positively related to intrinsic motivation and steady learning outcomes, whereas performance goals tend to be negatively related to intrinsic motivation (Colquitt & Simmering, 1998; ValldeWalle & Cummings, 1997).

*Goal setting* involves establishing a target to serve as the purpose of an individual's actions (Schunk, 2004). A student who sets a goal to attend a university will commit to study hard to learn and to receive good grades, which helps the student achieve the goal. That is, the goal directs behavior and helps the individual monitor his or her learning progress, and tends to increase learning and achievement. When their progress is evaluated as positive, their competence increases, thus helping to sustain motivation (Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham,

1990, 2002). Although difficult goals tend to enhance performance level, especially when the task was chosen by the student, setting realistic goals based on the student's competence is more effective than setting goals that are easy or too difficult to accomplish (Locke & Latham, 1990). Informative feedback on learning progress regarding whether students are on the right track toward meeting their goals is helpful for students to achieve goals, as it suggests whether changing the course of action is needed.

**Values.** When students perceive learning activities and materials with an attitude of "It's not worth it," they will likely not expend efforts to learn. The amount of time and effort spent on an activity depends on how much students value the work, as well as "I can do it" self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Valuing learning tasks implies students' reasons for engaging in learning activities. Students perceive task value from different viewpoints, including whether materials or activities are interesting (*intrinsic value*), important (*attainment value*), and useful (*utility value*) to them (Eccles, 2005; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For example, students who view homework as not interesting but still think the homework useful may engage in completing homework (Hong et al., 2009). Students who value tests and testing more demonstrate higher test performance than those who value less (Hong & Peng, 2008). That is, students put forth effort to pursue and accomplish a task they value.

**Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation.** The various motivation components discussed above help educators understand whether students are or will become intrinsically motivated for learning. Individuals with *intrinsic motivation* engage in activities, in the absence of external incentives, for the inherent challenge and curiosity, and prefer tasks that are inherently interesting (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). On the other hand, individuals with *extrinsic motivation* engage in activities to obtain some outcomes, such as achieving rewards

or avoiding punishments, separable from the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

The internalization of extrinsic motivation is very important for students who do not perceive learning activities as inherently enjoyable or interesting. When some of the motivational needs discussed above are satisfied, internalization of extrinsic motivation occurs.

## UNDERSTANDING HOW STUDENTS ATTRIBUTE THEIR SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL, THAT IS, HOW STUDENTS EXPLAIN THE OUTCOME OR THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF WHY CERTAIN ACHIEVEMENT OUTCOMES HAPPEN, SHEDS LIGHT ON THE SOURCE OF THEIR SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS.

That is, although intrinsic motivation is most helpful in achieving goals, students can progress from being entirely extrinsically motivated (i.e., students' behaviors are externally regulated) to being gradually less regulated by external conditions, to eventually achieving intrinsic motivation for learning with no external regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). For example, students who may value learning activities but do not have competence find it difficult to reach the point of enjoying learning. Similarly, if students fail in a test and attribute their failure to the test difficulty, it is not likely that these students will be motivated to study harder.

In summary, comprehending the underpinnings of these motivational components provides school counselors and teachers with tools to understand which aspects of academic motivation individual students need to improve. With the goal of helping students enhance academic motivation, educators should equip themselves with knowledge regarding motivation and its relationship with academic development. They may align various aspects of motivation with their knowledge of students' lack in certain

areas of motivation to eventually help students engage in learning activities deeply, fully endorsed by themselves, and enjoy learning. Educators also should understand and reflect on their own motivational tendencies and motivating approaches. A controlling school and classroom environment, for example, diminishes students' internalization of extrinsic motivation; on the

other hand, when students learn in an autonomy-supportive classroom environment, chances increase of students developing intrinsic motivation (Reeve & Halusi, 2009).

### Theoretical Perspectives of Academic Motivation

The motivational components discussed above (beliefs, goals, values, and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation) are mostly based on two related theoretical perspectives that have produced significant empirical evidence supporting the theoretical assertions. They are the social-cognitive theory of self-regulated learning (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1989, 2000) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to the social-cognitive view, academic self-regulation consists of motivation and cognitive/metacognitive components (Hong, 1998; Hong & O'Neil, 2001) and is represented by individual learners' thoughts, affects, and behaviors used to attain learning goals (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-regulated learners enlist self-reactive influences to motivate their efforts and employ appropriate strategies to attain success (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). From the motivation side of academic self-regulation, self-regulated

learners are motivated because they view tasks associated with learning as valuable, are highly self-efficacious, expend effort to achieve goals, and demonstrate persistence when they encounter difficult tasks (Bandura, 1993; Corno, 2001; Pintrich, 2000). From the metacognition side of academic self-regulation, self-regulated learners use effective metacognitive strategies such as planning learning activities, monitoring learning processes, and regulating the use of cognitive strategies (Hong et al., 2009; Pintrich, Wolters, & Baxter, 2000), which is another important topic but is beyond the scope of the current article.

self-regulators for their learning and performance in school.

### Strategies for Increasing Academic Motivation

Studies of academic motivation have indicated that educators can influence student motivation (e.g., Ames, 1992; Perry et al., 2006; Stipek, 2002; Wentzel, 2002; Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998). They can influence motivation negatively by exercising external controls, close supervision and monitoring, and using rewards or punishments following evaluations. Although these strategies most likely are applied with good intentions to make

success was due to their efforts can boost the perception of self-efficacy. Talking with students about their interests, likes, areas of strengths, and areas needing improvement, and providing them with information on the kind of support they need to be successful also will enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

**Help students develop attributional beliefs that lead to successful outcomes.** Before addressing the importance of effort, persistence, and progress, school counselors and teachers should ascertain how students interpret their school achievement to identify students' attributional beliefs. Students with high academic achievement and positive self-concept tend to attribute academic success to their ability (internal, stable, and uncontrollable factors) and effort (internal, unstable, and controllable) (Weiner, Heckhausen, Meyer, & Cook, 1972). This type of student tends to attribute failure to either effort (internal, unstable, controllable factors) or task difficulty or teachers' instruction (external, unstable, uncontrollable factors). As low achievers tend to doubt their ability and attribute success to luck or task difficulty level, they tend not to think it is themselves who made it happen even when they succeed. For these students, success does not help them increase confidence. Thus, helping students experience success, followed by assisting students to attribute their success to effort, rather than ability, will increase chances for students to develop positive attributional beliefs (Dweck, 2002). However, students also need to perceive that they have the ability to be successful. Providing positive feedback following success could help students enhance perceptions of their ability (Barker & Graham, 1987) and help them understand that skills and ability are developed, not fixed (Dweck, 1999).

**Help students see task value.** Educators can help students increase personal relevance of learning and activities by clarifying the relevance of tasks. Explaining the purpose of as-

## ALTHOUGH DIFFICULT GOALS TEND TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE LEVEL, SETTING REALISTIC GOALS BASED ON THE STUDENT'S COMPETENCE IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN SETTING GOALS THAT ARE EASY OR TOO DIFFICULT TO ACCOMPLISH

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) is based on the assumption that human beings are naturally curious about their environment and interested in learning (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). The theory postulates that human motivation can be developed toward intrinsic motivation, internalizing external motivation by becoming gradually more autonomous in the level of external motivation (from external regulation to introjected regulation, to identified regulation, and to integrated regulation) and strengthening self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Both intrinsic motivation and autonomous extrinsic motivation are conducive to engagement and learning in educational contexts (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Critical to this theory is school counselors' and teachers' support of students' basic psychological needs for autonomy (choice), competence (efficacy in engaging), and relatedness (feeling connected with peers and teachers/counselors) to facilitate students' efforts to become more self-determined and autonomous

sure that students learn, they create a climate that negatively affects students' academic motivation. Provided below are a few instructional strategies that are evidenced as helping students attain positive academic motivation. Many of these strategies are applicable to several motivational components, all toward helping students become more autonomous learners. That is, an intervention strategy can promote academic motivation in various ways.

**Enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs and competence.** School counselors and teachers may provide students with opportunities to experience success on different kinds of tasks and help students experience mastery of knowledge and skills. When students have studied hard for an exam and succeeded, the experience will improve their self-efficacy beliefs. School counselors may introduce activities that are optimally challenging to allow students to expand their academic competencies and provide informative feedback—what and why some actions worked or did not work—to promote success. Pointing out that students'

signments and tasks can help students see the relationship of the task to their personal interest and goals. School counselors and teachers may design learning activities that are grounded in authentic problems to generate students' personal interests and values (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Encouraging students to talk about things that they enjoy and what they do well, followed by encouragements to pursue their strengths, will help students connect their interests with learning. Discussions with students about their career interests and how school helps them reach their goals directly and indirectly will help them see the connection. School counselors and teachers may provide tasks that are challenging conceptually and meaningful to students to increase motivation for and valuing of learning (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Wigfield et al., 1998).

**Help students develop mastery/learning goals.** First, school counselors and teachers need to understand their own goal orientation. Teachers who promote learning goals tend to structure classroom environments that require student involvement, encourage student interaction, emphasize effort, and describe learning as an active process. On the other hand, teachers who focus on performance goals tend to concentrate their efforts on formal assessments, grades, and the relative performance of their students (Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, & Midgley, 2001). Educators can help students value the process of learning and focus on developing new skills and acquiring new knowledge by emphasizing effort expenditure. Specific comments are more effective than general comments (e.g., "Good job"), because specific comments help students see their progress. Extra support from school counselors and teachers is important for students in need of basic skills or learning strategies (e.g., remedial class, peer tutoring). School counselors and teachers may design tasks that are reasonably challenging and that

increase curiosity and interest in students. These tasks will help students put forth effort as well as experience success, which, in the end, will help students develop mastery goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Nolen, 1988).

Help students set realistic goals. Realistic goals promote progressive feedback and effort expenditure, and help students experience an initial sense of self-efficacy in achieving goals. Goals should be meaningful to students, to generate interest in achieving them. Helping students relate learning activities to long-term goals so they can see the benefits of the current activities is an important part of the work of school counselors and teachers. Providing students with timely feedback is also important because it helps them see whether they are making progress toward meeting goals (Bangert, 2004; Locke & Latham, 1990; Wang & Lin, 2007). Feedback that includes information students can use to improve the progress is useful because it assists them in adjusting the direction or level of their effort. Students' active participation in goal setting and evaluating progress is effective; participation in decision making with choice of goals and changing the action when needed will help students obtain a sense of responsibility and independence (Ames, 1992; Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002).

**Help students develop autonomy.** Providing choices and options for academic activities and making them accessible to students is a step toward helping students develop autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). Determining learning activities that are proper to students' levels of knowledge and skills is also important for helping develop student autonomy. School counselors and teachers can help students perceive that they have choices and options; asking students about preferred projects is one way of motivating students. Students may start with activities that they value and that are optimally challenging. Reducing evaluative pressure and avoiding using rewards are essential because these procedures tend

to control students' behaviors rather than foster greater autonomy (Black & Deci, 2000; Levesque, Knapp, & Fisher, 2010; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Ryan, 2004).

**Help students relate to peers and school staff.** Counselors and teachers may promote and facilitate interpersonal involvement with peers and staff in an effort to improve motivation in academic activities by creating opportunities for academically stimulating conversations (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This can be achieved by providing students opportunities to involve, participate, and collaborate with their peers in various learning activities. Further, assisting students in collaborating with each other and seeking help from others will facilitate learning. School counselors should create safe and trusting environments for counseling sessions and help students develop trust that counselors can relate to their academic struggles. Peer support programs such as peer counseling and peer tutoring are successful in promoting supportive relationships among students (McCombs & Miller, 2007; Wentzel, 1999, 2002).

To sum up, the strategies above can be used either in classrooms or as components of whole school programs for increasing academic motivation. The next section discusses how school counselors can use some of these approaches to academic motivation in the context of service delivery within comprehensive counseling programs.

## COUNSELING APPROACHES FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC MOTIVATION

Promoting academic motivation is a challenging task with students who have developed negative attitudes and behaviors toward school and are unmotivated to change their behaviors.

It is difficult especially in high-stakes testing environments where the focus of schooling is hinged on test performance. School counselors willing to be part of solutions to these challenges find it difficult to authentically counsel students due to lack of time tied to unrealistic student-to-school-counselor ratios and the burden of non-counseling related duties (Lambie & Rokutani, 2002; Morrow, 2001). Administrators and teachers may or may not understand the counselors' role (Reiner, Colbert, & Pérusse, 2009). Nevertheless, it is also school counselors' responsibility to assert themselves regarding what they have

with unmotivated and low-achieving students (Lambie, 2004). In an effort to provide initial sources for school counselors, this article introduces one preventive and two remedial counseling approaches to promoting academic motivation. Counselors need the proper level of knowledge about academic motivation to implement these approaches effectively. The current article and the references it provides are a good start for increasing knowledge regarding academic motivation and its various components. Although the many components of motivation presented here may be overwhelming to some readers, the authors hope

outline essential steps. The classroom guidance activity presented here is based on a one- or two-session guidance lesson presented to each class of a target grade, depending on time availability and the number of motivation components to address. The procedure can be used from upper elementary to high school students, with modifications in specific lesson content based on developmental levels of students. Counselors provide a handout in advance, along with a visual presentation of what attributional beliefs mean with the three attributional dimensions addressed above. The counselor may prepare hypothetical profiles of students with various combinations of attributional dimensions. For example, examples of students who attribute their success in a test to their effort or luck, students who attribute their failure to their ability or task difficulty, and other combinations of attributional dimensions, can help students situate themselves in similar situations to understand the tendency of their causal attribution.

A guidance lesson may include the following. First, provide examples of explanations that school counselors or teachers hear from students regarding why they did or did not do well at tasks (e.g., homework, exams). Next, illustrate the importance of perceptions and beliefs because they influence individuals' feeling of confidence, expectations for future outcomes, and motivation to accomplish tasks, then introduce the relationship between attributional beliefs and success in school. Next, go over handouts of causal attribution dimensions prepared in advance, explain what they mean, and present hypothetical profiles of students with various attributional beliefs. Have students think of their own attributional beliefs and select a few volunteer students to present their cases and discuss as a group how the specific examples help or hinder learning. Last, the school counselor may encourage students to be aware of their tendency for causal attributions and present ways students can enhance their tendency to promote success in

## LOW ACHIEVERS . . . TEND NOT TO THINK IT IS THEMSELVES WHO MADE IT HAPPEN EVEN WHEN THEY SUCCEED.

been trained to do and to take their place at the "educational forefront" (Sink, 2005, p. 134) regarding their role and potential to contribute to student success.

School counselors are well positioned to offer interventions with students, as teachers and parents often request assistance from counselors when students' academic motivation and performance declines (Bleuer & Walz, 2002). Counselor effectiveness is "increasingly judged by the degree to which they contribute to learning" (Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007, p. 2) and one of the most significant issues in counseling has been identified as motivation intervention (Klose, 2008). Therefore, taking on approaches to prevent or remediate motivation declines is a timely action for school counselors. Furthermore, counselors are expected to use the school database to identify students who have difficulties with academic tasks and help them enhance their academic motivation (Stone & Dahir, 2006).

However, enhancing students' academic motivation and achievement introduces enormous challenges to school counselors. School counselors often are deficient in counseling strategy training for working

that a counselor could focus on one or more aspects when he or she prepares to help students who are in need of improving academic motivation. This article focuses on attributional beliefs to illustrate three service delivery approaches appropriate for school counselors.

### Preventive Approaches to Promoting Academic Motivation

Preventive approaches frame the focus of school counseling from crisis response to preventive strategies for academic as well as personal/social development (The Education Trust, 2003). Researchers have highlighted the importance of counselor interventions for underachieving students to succeed in school (Bleuer & Walz, 2002). The current article introduces a strategy that can be used by counselors implementing classroom guidance.

**Classroom guidance.** Classroom guidance is a key element in the delivery system called for in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). Although little literature exists to guide counselors in the planning and delivery of classroom guidance (Akos, Cockman, & Strickland, 2007), major school counseling texts (e.g. Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Myrick, 1997)



school. The activity provides students with the opportunity to reflect on their own attributional beliefs. Students' recognition of their own tendency can help them reflect on the areas in need of improvement.

Applicable to attributional beliefs and other motivational components, the authors recommend that the school counselor prepare a handout with specific suggestions for improving motivational strengths and enhancing areas of motivational weaknesses. In the best scenario, a team of school counselors and teachers who have worked together in assessing need in relationship to motivation and planning for the logistics of the classroom guidance would prepare the handout. A prepared packet for each teacher whose class receives the lesson also would be helpful, with copies of all the materials used in the guidance lesson. A further helpful step might be to provide parents with information about the guidance lesson, including a handout that could be posted at home as a helpful guide for enhancing motivational strengths (Floyd & Vernon-Dotson, 2009). Of course, to really maximize the potential of parent involvement, the school counselor could organize a parent workshop on motivation in conjunction with the guidance lesson (Floyd & Vernon-Dotson, 2009; Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). Educators could include data collection and analysis in conjunction with the classroom guidance intervention by using action research (Clark, Flower, Walton, Oakley, 2008; Mason & McMahon, 2009; Rowell, 2005, 2006).

Although either teachers or school counselors can be the catalyst for this endeavor, having a counselor provide classroom guidance can be particularly effective, especially as the first step in the process of enhancing student motivation. Teachers would, ideally, participate in staff development (see below) to increase their knowledge about dimensions of causal attribution or other components of academic motivation and use it in classroom practices. The authors anticipate that this

will further strengthen the effect of the classroom guidance lesson provided to students by school counselors.

### **Remedial Approaches to Promoting Academic Motivation: Small-Group Counseling Intervention and Individual Counseling**

Students showing declines in academic performance or motivation are often referred by teachers or parents for intervention by school counselors (Bleuer, Palomares, & Walz, 1993; Bleuer & Walz, 2002). Unfortunately, referred students are largely not motivated to change their behaviors (Lambie, 2004). Graduates of school counseling programs are trained for group work and one-on-one counseling for helping individuals to identify and solve problems. Depending on the numbers of students referred, the severity of the academic problems, and other contextual considerations, school counselors select small-group or individual counseling approaches.

**Small-group counseling intervention.** Group work has been called an essential element in transforming the practice of school counseling (Pais-

guidance lessons or an independent intervention, depending on the situation of the school.

Once participants have been selected and screened, a small-group intervention may include the following. First, discuss the importance of motivation in general for learning and achievement in school. Next, focus on one or two components of academic motivation, such as attributional beliefs and self-efficacy, and illustrate fully the psychological underpinnings of the selected components, providing examples of student behaviors and consequences in student outcomes. In a small-group format, school counselors can likely address more than one related motivational component. Next, focusing on the selected motivational components, have students volunteer to share their own personal stories and how they see themselves in relationship to their own motivation to learn (e.g., how attributing failure to lack of effort helped them study more after failing a test), followed by discussion among the group (e.g., stories of expending effort, succeeding, and gaining confidence). Still focusing on

**EDUCATORS CAN HELP STUDENTS VALUE THE PROCESS OF LEARNING AND FOCUS ON DEVELOPING NEW SKILLS AND ACQUIRING NEW KNOWLEDGE BY EMPHASIZING EFFORT EXPENDITURE.**

ley & Milsom, 2007). With growing evidence of its effectiveness in schools (e.g. Smith, Davis, Bhomik, 2010; Stephens, Jain, Kim, 2010; Bruce, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009), group counseling may be an increasingly necessary tool for school counselor involvement in addressing student motivation. For students who have persistent low achievement scores or negative attitudes toward learning or school, and who are referred by classroom teachers, the counselor can form groups of 5 to 10 students. Small-group counseling may be a follow-up to classroom

the selected motivational components, encourage student members to discuss barriers to learning, their perceived weaknesses, and how the weaknesses deter them from having successful learning experience. Then, explore possible creative solutions with all group members. After the session, encourage group members to observe their own motivational ups and downs after the session and apply the solutions discussed in the group session.

Subsequent group sessions would include discussion of the progress the students are making in relationship

to the solutions developed within the group and how this progress is impacting their academic achievement. Many variations of this procedure can be utilized, depending on the individual needs of group members and the severity of the motivation problems. In general, the process outlined above combines elements of education groups and support groups (Jacobs, Masson, Harvill, & Schimmel, 2012). The focus on creative solutions is intended to generate a spirit of hopefulness and “mattering” (Dixon & Tucker, 2008) among group members and is consistent with new conceptualizations of a “psychology of possibility” (Langer, 2009, p. 15) and overcoming mindless learning (Langer, 1997).

**Individual counseling intervention.** Individual counseling may be called for with students who have shown negative attitudes toward school and continued failure to improve academic performance, demonstrating a more profound sense of disengagement from school. A case scenario could be a student, John, who has been a successful learner in the past, but recently received a failing grade on a science exam. Why did John fail the test? Will

components needs to be tackled first; for example, relations with teacher, peers, or parents; learning materials are just not interesting or useful to him; or inadequate basic skills to learn complex materials. In this example, assume that John’s major difficulty is his causal attribution in that he is attributing his failure in the science test to the task difficulty, which is an external and uncontrollable dimension of causal attribution beliefs. He is also attributing his failure to a general lack of ability in the subject of science. He reports that the failure happened after he studied hard and spent time and effort to do well on the test. In this initial meeting, the focus is not on finding or proposing a solution. Rather, the emphasis is on listening and providing the student an opportunity to reflect on his performance and his views of causal attribution in relationship to the exam. Such an interview can be completed in 15-20 minutes by a skilled counselor.

In a subsequent session, the school counselor may begin by using a technique for individual counseling such as motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002), which places impor-

are hindering the student’s learning (e.g. the test was “just too hard,” or “I just don’t get science”) the counselor might provide alternative explanations to help the student redirect attributional beliefs. This effort should focus on unstable and controllable attributes (effort, use of learning strategies) and not on factors that the student has little control (task difficulty, luck, and innate ability), so the student becomes more hopeful about future outcomes. The counselor should address the idea that ability and skills are developed and are not fixed.

School counselors are extremely pressed for time, particularly during periods of cutbacks to school counseling (Morrow, 2001), and follow-up sessions with individual students can be particularly problematic. Thus, individual counselors must use their own knowledge and practice wisdom to assess the extent to which follow-up activities are possible. Suggested in this article is a two-step process intended to provide a very brief individual intervention. In instances in which follow-up does take place, the authors suggest that the school counselor use a mixture of assignments, reflection, and encouragement in relationship to the selected motivational component being addressed.

To the extent possible, and with the permission of the student, the progress being made should be discussed with the student’s teacher or teachers. Ideally, the school counselor and at least one teacher can collaborate on developing learning materials that reflect personal relevance and value to the students. In John’s instance, the counselor may suggest that the teacher help by preparing learning materials that facilitate this student experiencing success and thus improve his perception of his ability. Providing the student with choices for learning activities can further successful experience.

A report system may be established in which the student reports back to the school counselor and reflects on successes and challenges he or she has encountered. Moving forward, a key to this suggested approach is that the

## TAKING ON APPROACHES TO PREVENT OR REMEDIATE MOTIVATION DECLINES IS A TIMELY ACTION FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

he study harder for the next exam? John’s answer to these questions reflects his beliefs about the causes of his performance and helps establish the context for the individual counseling.

In light of the motivational constructs presented in this article, individual counseling for John might proceed as follows. Assuming a safe and caring environment for counseling and a good working relationship between John and his school counselor, the counselor will talk openly with this student in an effort to determine the source(s) of disengagement, finding which of the motivational

tance on a collaborative relationship between the counselor and student and on clarifying the differences between the student’s behaviors and his or her goals and values. Although the motivational interviewing (MI) technique has been mostly used in relationship to health-related behaviors (Brody, 2009; Flaherty, 2008; Miller & Rollnick, 2002), MI has been utilized in educational settings (Atkinson & Woods, 2003; Kittles & Atkinson, 2009), such as for reducing truancy (Enea & Dafinoiu, 2009).

Instead of challenging John’s current attributions that the counselor thinks

counselor and the student begin to develop next steps together, and that students begin to make decisions to help them experience ownership of their own learning. A variety of ways to tackle students' needs may arise, depending on the areas of need that individual students bring to counseling sessions. In most occasions, attributional redirection attempts should be paired with other support, such as test-preparation strategies, valuing the subject matter, self-efficacy, and/or goal orientation. That is, the counselor, in collaboration with classroom teachers, needs to establish a climate for success by understanding the student's psychological needs and developing the tools and procedures for helping students succeed, so a failure can be a source for success with redirection.

## CLOSING REMARKS

This article explored the school counselor's role in intervention for promoting academic motivation as part of counseling program activities in the academic development domain, along with concepts and strategies to enhance student motivation. School counselors are well positioned to take leadership in tackling motivational problems (Sink, 2005). Counselors have group counseling skills that can be applied to a variety of types of groups. Furthermore, knowledge of students' academic backgrounds and the backgrounds of families and friends helps counselors assess the barriers to learning that particular students face and helps point to possible reasons for lack of motivation in learning. With knowledge of academic motivation and students' background information, counselors, along with students themselves, can identify interventions that work well for individual students who are experiencing motivational problems in school and learning. In the authors' view, school counselor utilization of the information in this article is an effective first step to assist students with their academic development. The role of the

school counselor can take a variety of forms such as a provider of resources to teachers, a facilitator of individual or group interventions for students experiencing problems in academic motivation, or an instructor in classroom guidance activities for all students, providing lessons on motivation.

Helping students in need of developing academic motivation may seem an overwhelming task, but when understood as a high priority component of academic development, working with students on their academic motivation can be a transformative experience for

## WORKING WITH STUDENTS ON THEIR ACADEMIC MOTIVATION CAN BE A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

school counselors. Counselors are required to have a good knowledge base regarding the motivational underpinnings of behavior; to be patient, caring, and accommodating; to develop and implement effective academic plans with students; and to be good communicators with students, teachers, and parents. Although this article barely touches on parental involvement in promoting academic motivation, parents are an essential element for any intervention to be effective and successful.

School counselors will continue to provide required services under the reality of not-much-time-for-anything-else. Challenging themselves with the important, if not the most important, factor of success in school—academic motivation—is an important professional decision that school counselors can make. School counselors today work in difficult times and under difficult circumstances. Perhaps taking on challenging projects such as promoting academic motivation can renew counselors' motivation—the very reason they chose to become school counselors a few years or many years ago—all the while helping students in need of improving themselves. Sup-

porting counselors' motivation and autonomy is another important topic that warrants an examination and serious discussion.

Substantive knowledge about motivation is essential for the school counselor; otherwise, he or she will have difficulty seeing the patterns in problems and determining strategies that incorporate creative solutions. Counselors are encouraged to explore further in social-cognitive (Bandura, 1986) and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) perspectives to expand knowledge on academic motivation,

one of the most important constructs in schooling and one of the most important areas inviting school counselor involvement. The authors have included a few sources to support school counselors' efforts to promote academic motivation in students. Books and handbooks on learning and motivation are listed in the appendix. The references provided below are also excellent sources for learning about motivation. ■

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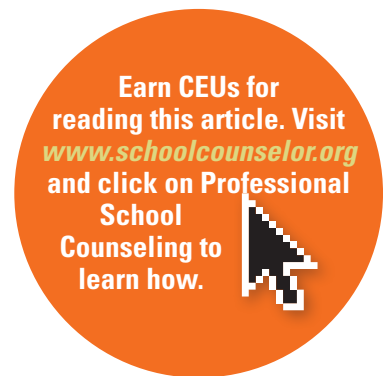
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## APPENDIX BOOKS AND HANDBOOKS ABOUT ACADEMIC MOTIVATION

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