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Voices of Summer: Interviews with Middle School Students Repeating Academic Courses in Summer School

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VOICES OF SUMMER: INTERVIEWS WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

REPEATING ACADEMIC COURSES IN SUMMER SCHOOL

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Administration and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

VOICES OF SUMMER: INTERVIEWS WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

REPEATING ACADEMIC COURSES IN SUMMER SCHOOL

By James Calvin Frye, M.Ed.

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Administration and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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As the needs of society changed, states faced increasing pressure from the federal government to raise educational standards. States adopted rigorous standards, however many students failed to meet defined proficiency levels, necessitating summer school attendance or grade retention. Factors associated with academic failure have been extensively documented in the academic literature. The factors identified in the research can be organized into six categories, including motivation, age and ability, withdrawal from school, parents and guardians, school practices, and teacher practices.

The purpose of the current study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of factors which contributed to the academic outcomes necessitating enrollment in academic courses in summer school, and what factors they believe could have made a positive impact. This study focused on the following research questions: How did middle school students, enrolled in one or more academic courses in summer school, perceive (1) academic outcomes and to what these were attributed, (2) the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome, (3) sources and levels of motivation, (4) sources and levels of school bonds, (5) interactions and relationships with school personnel, and (6) the role and level of involvement of adults in their academic lives?

A qualitative, ethnographic design, with detailed descriptions of the methodological considerations and rich, thick narrative, was used to explore the research questions. Seventeen middle school students, repeating academic courses in summer school, were interviewed. Emergent themes were identified from inductively coded interviews.

The analysis revealed that participants primarily accepted responsibility for academic outcomes but also identified distractions as a contributing factor. Teachers were seen as playing a role in both creating and removing distractions. Participants perceived work ethic as positively correlated with intelligence, and perceptions of ability tended to be related to duration of exerted effort. Negative social bonds were perceived as adversely affecting participants' academic performance, and participants reported few positive interactions or relationships with school personnel. Negative consequences were the primary means used by adults to motivate participants, and too little, too late characterized

active adults engagement in participants' academics. Perceived levels of effort exerted and concern exhibited by an adult paralleled academic outcomes.

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

Although individual school divisions or districts determine educational proficiency levels, teacher and course requirements can vary both between and within schools. The successful completion of course work in the areas of English, math, science, and social studies, hereafter referred to as academic courses, is often a requirement for promotion to the next grade level. Each year however, students fail to meet defined proficiency levels for one or more academic courses in which they were enrolled for an entire year, necessitating these students to repeat failed courses during the summer or be retained in the same grade the following year.

The failure rate of students enrolled in academic courses is not readily available. However, because students attend and pass summer school and are subsequently not retained, one could surmise that more students fail one or more academic courses each year than are actually retained in a grade. Therefore, in addition to historical trends, data, and research related to student failure, grade level retention research offers a conservative estimate of the number of students who fail each year and provides defining characteristics and potential outcomes of failing students.

In this chapter, an historical overview, related literature, and research methodology are summarized. The historical overview contextualizes the current problems associated

with student retention and low achievement. Research and data related to national, state, and local retention trends are discussed to emphasize the significance of the problem and make a case for studying students repeating academic courses in summer school. Literature related to low-achievement is then summarized to set the stage for introducing the research questions. Finally, the research methodology is briefly discussed. Both the literature review and research methodology discussed in this chapter are expanded upon in later chapters.

Historical Overview

Rural Schools

Prior to the 1890's, the curriculum of rural schools was often whatever books were available, and these were decided upon by the schoolmaster. Students were, more often than not, children of farmers. Student attendance was voluntary, and the qualifications of the schoolmaster uncertain. Educational reformers of the time found these conditions incompatible with the industrializing world. Industrialization meant standardization. Machines started doing the work of many men, and the output could be calculated and charted. Efficiency and accountability became the base of industrialized society. In order to accommodate the demands of industry, labors needed to change (Tyack, 1974).

Agricultural laborers of the time had a very different skill set than what was required of a worker in a factory. Farmers worked at a relatively slow pace, keeping time by the day and the season. Daily life revolved around the needs of the seasons. In contrast, factory life required a much different mentality. It meant arriving at work, which was no longer just outside your door, at an exact time to relieve another shift of workers. It

required discipline to stand in a factory all day doing the same monotonous job day after day. Working with others to perform tasks and following specific directions, which could be evaluated, characterized a good factory worker, but this was foreign to the rural worker (Tyack, 1974).

Education Reform

Reformation of education was considered the way to bridge the gap between agrarian labor and urban-industrial order. Attitudes, work habits, and time orientation of pre-industrial society needed to be modernized. Leading educators of the early nineteenth century preached replacing the heterogeneous, one-room schoolhouse with standardized homogenous grouping of students and promotion policies based on the Prussian model. In the early 1890's, the National Education Association continued the centralization trend by recommending consolidation of schools to standardize educational practice (Tyack 1974).

In 1916, there were 200,100 one-teacher public schools in the United States. By 1944, there were less than half that number, and by 1993, there were only 430 one-teacher schoolhouses in the U.S. (Goldin, 2006). Going from one-teacher classrooms with 30 students of various ages and abilities to 30 teachers teaching homogenous groups of 30 in each class required a degree of bureaucracy to maintain order. Setting standards for initial placement and eventual promotion of students the following year became essential for a centralized school system to function (Tyack, 1974).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, school attendance was not required. The first compulsory school attendance was established in Massachusetts in 1852. Attendance laws spread across the United States, and by 1918, all states had compulsory

attendance laws. It was not until after World War I that state governments began trying to enforce the laws (Rothstein, 1994). Though compulsory attendance laws existed and standards for promotion were continually being refined, grade retentions were most likely not a common occurrence after eighth grade because of the opportunities for high school non-completers to find a job. Although retention records for secondary school during the time-period are difficult to obtain, Rose (1983) estimates that half of the students in the United States were retained at some point during their first eight years of school during this time. An examination of the labor statistics during this time gives some indication of retention trends.

Education Becomes a Necessity

The majority of the jobs in the early twentieth century did not require a great deal of education. Therefore, students were likely promoted as long as they met the requirements of the grade. Because a great deal of education was not needed to make a living, most students likely found a job or apprenticeship if they were not promoted. Looking at U.S. Census estimates of labor participation rates gives some indication of this. In 1940, male civilians, ages 25 to 64, with less than a 12 years of education had a labor participation rate of 94% (Sorbeck, 2006a). This shows that almost all the males in that cohort with less than a high school education had a job. Those having four years or more of college had a 95.3% labor participation rate that same year, indicating staying in school did not improve one's chances very much of having a job in 1940 (Sorbeck, 2006b). Therefore, students probably saw little advantage of repeating a grade once they were of working age.

At the onset of World War II, the U.S. military began testing recruits and found that thousands were illiterate. As a result, education became a matter of national defense (Administrator's Manual, 2007). The 1944 G.I. Bill was enacted and would eventually send eight million veterans to college. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first satellite into space. This heated up the Cold War and pushed Congress in 1958 to pass the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) with the hopes of keeping up with the Soviets by increasing support for education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

It was during this time of increased consolidation of schools by states, enforcement of compulsory attendance laws, leaps in technology, and the fear of falling behind in the science and technical fields that more education was seen as a necessity. This is evident from the changing high school non-completion rates and labor participation rates. From 1931 to 1940, 48% of white males did not complete high school, yet they had just as good of a chance finding a job as did college graduates. After WWII, drastic drops were seen in non-completion rates, down to 19.7% of 19 year olds born between 1971 and 1980 (Sobeck, 2006b). This is mirrored by the labor participation rate of high school non-completers dropping below 80% (Sobeck, 2006a).

Because of the large number of students being retained, the pendulum began to swing away from grade retention as concerns mounted that it might be damaging to a child's social and emotional development. This sparked a wave of social promotions whereby students were promoted based on age. Through the 1970s, social promotion was the main course of action for students not meeting standards (Westchester Institute For Human Services Research).

A Nation at Risk

During the early years of the Reagan presidency in the early 1980's, The National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE, 1983) issued the report "A Nation at Risk." Its findings concluded that the schools of the United States were not adequately preparing students. The report's findings addressed the problems faced by America's education system. Problems were identified in the areas of content, expectations, time management, and teaching. The report cited a major problem was the dilution of the curriculum to the point that fewer students were on vocational or college preparatory tracks, preferring instead to take a more generalized curriculum, including electives and remedial classes. Expectations about time spent on homework, graduation requirements, number of hours spent on math and science courses, and instructional materials were also reported to be declining (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Federal legislation, including the Improving America's School Act of 1994 and Goals 2000: Educate America Act, sought to promote more school accountability but left most of the implementation to the states. The 1990s marked an era of educational accountability as President Clinton (1997, 1998, 1999) called for an end to social promotion in several State of the Union Addresses (Jimerson, 2001a). This was immediately followed by the election of President George W. Bush in 2000, and the subsequent reauthorization of the National Education Act known as No Child Left Behind. The 2002, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) was signed into law to address the perceived problems of the education system in the United States (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2006).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

NCLB legislation attempted to address four goals or "pillars" for the improvement of the education system in the United States. The first goal of NCLB was to close the achievement gap between various groups of students, including but not limited to economically disadvantaged, ESL, ethnic, and special education students. Under the legislation, school districts and states were required to report their progress yearly, and those not making strides to close achievement gaps had to offer services to reach their goals. Second, NCLB sought to give states and communities the ability to move up to 50% of their federal funds toward other needs. This allowed states and districts to direct money toward programs and personnel as they saw fit to meet their educational goals. Third, NCLB encouraged the use of scientifically researched educational programs. Federal funding was directed to schools using programs which research had shown to be successful. Finally, NCLB gave parents the option of removing their children from low performing schools and placing them into a higher performing school of their choice if progress was not made for two consecutive years. Additionally, in schools not meeting goals for three consecutive years, students were entitled to receive additional educational services (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

As the federal government increased pressure to make states more accountable and their educational standards more rigorous, most states adopted grade and subject level educational standards (Glidden, 1998). In Virginia, to measure the extent to which these standards are followed, yearly state assessments have been given to middle school students in the areas of math, English, reading, and social studies in grades 6th, 7th, and 8th and

science in 8th grade. To remain accredited, Virginia schools must have an overall pass rate of 70% in each academic discipline tested (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). This could means that up to 30% of a school's student population, who did not meet the state educational standards, would also not meet course proficiency requirements.

Although failing a course does not always result in retention, Thompson and Cunningham (2000) estimated that 15% or more students were retained in a grade each year, and as many as one third of all students would be retained at least one time in their school career, underscoring the prevalence of academic failure. Additionally, in the school district in which this study will take place, between 4.1% and 5.0% of the student population was retained for each of the past 10 years. Therefore, the problem is that students continue to experience academic failure despite the efforts of school divisions and government at different levels.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of middle school students enrolled in academic courses in summer school regarding academic outcomes the previous year. The study hoped to examine the degree to which variables, identified in previous research as contributing to student success, are applicable to the perceptions of these students. The lens through which student perceptions were framed included: a) attribution of academic outcomes, b) effort expenditure as a product of expectancy of successful and value of reward, c) sources of motivation, d) sources of school bonds, and e) involvement and interaction with adults in their academic lives.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

National

This study will examine the perceptions of students who did not meet promotion requirements and as a result are attending summer school to repeat one or two academic courses. Although these students have the opportunity to be promoted upon successful completion of summer school, grade retention research gives some indication of the extent of the problem. Exact grade retention figures are not readily available (Hauser, Frederick, & Andrew, 2005), but as discussed earlier, Thompson and Cunningham (2000) estimated that 15% or more of students are retained in a grade each year, and as many as one third of all students will be retained at least one time in their school career. Because many students attend and pass summer school and subsequently are not retained, it can be assumed that more students fail one or more courses each year than are actually retained. Hence this study has national significance.

State

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) reported that the average expenditure per pupil each year in the state of Virginia was over $8886 for the 2004-2005 school year. According to the Virginia Department of Education (2009), the fall membership for students in grades six through eight in Virginia was 277,032. Retention of only five percent of these students at the 2004-2005 rate would cost the state over 123 million dollars. Therefore, the cost benefits of reducing the retention rate at the state level could have a significant impact on the state education budget.

Local

Receiving an end-of-course grade above 69.4% in all core academic subjects (i.e., English, math, science, and social studies), in the school system in which this study was conducted, is the minimum requirement for promotion to the next grade level. Students not meeting this requirement in two or fewer core subjects have the option of retaking the course(s) during summer school. However, this option is dependent upon parental willingness or ability to pay the $180 tuition for each course taken. There are a limited number of scholarships available, and applicants need only fill out a form and submit it to their school's principal. Because the criteria for applying for tuition assistance are not specified and documentation of hardship is not required, assistance is granted on a first-come basis to those aware of its availability.

The researcher is aware of several cases in which students were retained after failing a single class, and for reasons unknown, did not repeat the course in summer school. Ultimately, students' ability to pay the tuition and their success during summer school determines whether they will be promoted. As mentioned earlier, approximately five percent of the student population in the school district in which this study was conducted was retained each year. Data was not available that disaggregated yearly retention to determine the number of retained students who were 1) non-summer school completers, 2) unable or unwilling to pay for summer school, or 3) number of classes in which promotion requirements are not met. However, it was assumed that the majority of students are retained because they did not meet the academic requirements in three or more academic courses, which would eliminate summer school as an option.

Middle school students' perceptions of their academic career may give insight to the web of factors occurring over the course of a school year, which resulted in their current reality.

Previous Studies

Beyond the financial benefits to the student and the school district when students are not retained, research has shown a positive correlation between grade retention and drop out rate, and the negative effect of grade retention on development (Jimerson, 2001a). Even with the many benefits associated with decreasing the failure rate of students, studies have not addressed the perceptions of students who have not met their school's requirements for promotion.

Previous studies, which will be discussed, have described factors affecting the academic outcomes of academically unsuccessful students. However, these studies often only examine specific tasks or outcomes and are often not conducted in a natural setting. A holistic approach in a natural setting, using the perspectives of relevant subjects, has not been used to determine how, and the degree to which previously studied and significant variables played a role in outcomes resulting from 36 weeks of cumulative effort. The perceptions of middle school students, who have not met promotion requirements in one or more academic courses as the result of multiple tasks over an extended period of time, may illuminate the interaction of factors which had a greater impact on their current reality. In addition to adding to the literature, this study has the potential to direct future studies toward variables yet to be significantly attributed to student failure.

Review of Literature

A review of the current literature on student outcomes related to students not meeting academic course requirements shows the overlap one would expect when studying a complex event. When viewed holistically, related research paints an impressionist view of reality. The image can be seen, but the veracity and story of the participants are elusive. The current study hopes give to dimension to the currently segmented research by placing it within the context of participants' perceptions.

As will be discussed, factors related to performance outcomes are often conceptualized in terms of single tasks over a relatively short time-period. Similarly, the associated rewards are relatively concrete and timely. Application of related theories to less concrete and timely rewards in which effort and motivation, age and ability, participation, and adult interaction are variables over an extended period of time adds dimension upon which multiple theories can interact. To illustrate this, several theories of motivation are defined and discussed.

Achievement Factors

Motivation and effort. Tollefson (2000) explained expectancy theory in terms of a model where effort is a product of an individual's expectation for success and their perceived value of the reward. Based on this model, he predicted that a student will not even attempt a task if they expect to fail, regardless of the amount of effort exerted or the potential rewards.

Weiner (2000) refers to "locus of causality" as an individual's theory as to the source of outcomes. Attributions can be both internal and external which are often determined by self-serving bias, where successes are attributed to internal factors and

failures are attributed to external factors. Weiner argues locus, stability, and controllability of attributions will predict an individual's motivation, and as a result, the effort exerted on a task.

Goal orientation theory postulates that negative and positive emotions effect motivation (Nichols, 2003). Individuals receive cues which produce these emotions from a variety of sources, including the situation, self-concept of ability, self-awareness, psychological needs, values, and socially constructed meanings (Covington, 1992; Dweck, 1999; Garcia & Pintrich, 1993; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007). Therefore, the cues received affect an individual's motivation to learn which in turn determine the educational goals established.

Perceived self-efficacy is beliefs about one's capabilities. Bandura (1977) constructed a framework for describing how individuals' level of self-efficacy is developed through performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. His theory is based on the premise that goals are set based on the level of past accomplishments, and these goals become an individual's standard for evaluating their own performance. One's beliefs about their own capabilities predicts the amount of sustained effort will be placed on a task regardless of outcomes.

Each theory of motivation and effort has common elements and somewhat overlapping themes. In each, motivation and effort is a product of reward and self-confidence. Rewards are perceived differently by different individuals and thus have different values. Likewise, self-confidence develops over time and comes from a variety of sources.

Age and ability. Miller and Nicholls (1986) argued that children's concept of the relationship between effort, ability, and outcome develops over time. Students initially equate effort with intelligence. As they grow older, intelligence is seen as inversely proportional to the effort required to complete a task. Eventually, children come to believe that outcomes are related to ability and have a ceiling, which cannot be surpassed even with increased effort.

Students' evolving sense of ability as it relates to effort and outcomes hints at the emergent nature of self-concept described by Bandura (1977) and locus of causality discussed by Weiner (2000). As a children grow, their perceptions of causes of outcomes change from external to internal, which in turn reinforces their self-concept.

Withdrawal from school. Theories related to students withdrawing from school, leading to poor academic outcomes, include: a) frustration self-esteem theory, b) participation-identification theory, c) social capital theory and d) school engagement theory. The frustration self-esteem theory, as Finn (1989) describes it, relates to low academic performance leading to an impaired self-view of one's ability, causing oppositional behavior toward academics.

The participation-identification theory proposes that school bonding is both behavioral (participation) and psychological (identification). The theory predicts that a student is more likely to remain in school if both elements are present. Active participation in related activities and internalized belonging and commitment to school increase the chances of positive academic outcomes (Finn, 1989).

Social capital refers to the relational resources a student has and their effect on self-regulation. Positive social bonds contribute to an individual's ability to restrain from self-gratifying activities as a result of social pressure to behave and perform in a prescribed manner (Hirschi, 1969).

Each of the theories involving student withdrawal from school has overlapping themes which could be termed as school engagement. Farrell (2003) states that school engagement is made up of five factors: a) relation dimension of school, b) sense of alienation, c) school belonging, which was perceived from teachers, d) attitude toward school and e) feeling of school importance. Farrell argues that each factor is independent and can have different degrees of effect on individual students.

Adult Involvement

School. Sutherland and Oswald (2005) contend negative teacher-student interaction becomes cyclical and predictive, resulting from negative actions of a student, which results in, not only reciprocal responses, but also more harsh responses toward students previously identified as having problematic behavior. As a result, student interaction with teachers impacts academic outcomes by affecting the students' learning environment.

Parents and guardians. Jimerson (2001a) states that parental involvement in their child's education increases the chances of academic success. A weekly routine, structure and use of time out of school, homework practices, and family attitude toward education have been shown to contribute to academic success (Jimerson).

In the current study, participants have exerted effort on multiple tasks with varying degrees of difficulty, attributed success and failure to a variety of sources, received both

positive and negative stimuli, and have had an evolving self-concept over the course of the school year. There seems to be some face validity in the suggestion that expectancy, attribution, self-concept, and goals setting are dependent on, if not synonymous with, some yet-to-be named panacea. One's expectation for success must be a product of one's self-concept, which in-turn must be dependent upon their locus of causality. For example, attributing outcomes to external sources would increase self-concept, although cues received could mediate both.

Additionally, theories related to withdrawal from school could be applied to a single academic course rather than school as a whole. Adult interactions could be a dimension of school belonging and/or mediate the effects of self-efficacy or social bonds. By examining these factors within the context of a school year through the perceptions of middle school students, the interaction of these theories may be viewed holistically.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of factors which contributed to the academic outcomes necessitating enrollment in academic courses in summer school, and what factors they believe could have made a positive impact. This study focused on the following research questions: How do middle school students, enrolled in one or more academic courses in summer school, perceive:

1. academic outcomes, and to what these were attributed,
2. the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome,
3. sources and levels of motivation,
4. sources and levels of school bonds,

5. interactions and relationships with school personnel, and

6. the role and level of involvement of adults in their academic lives?

Literature Related to Research Methodology

Design

A qualitative, ethnographic design was used to analyze the perceptions of middle school students enrolled in one or two academic courses in summer school. Spradley (1979) suggests that an ethnographic design is a useful tool for learning about how people view their experience rather that just studying their experience. Ethnographic interviews of participants, using open-ended questions, would allow the researcher to gather information on what students perceive to be factors contributing to academic outcomes experienced the previous school year.

Site Selection

Although the participants will not know the researcher in the context of his administrative role, the power differential inherent between middle school students between the ages of 11 and 14 and an adult male researcher will undoubtedly be increased.

Scott (2000) and Green and Hart (1999) noted that a school setting tended to formalize the interview process, and Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, and Britten (2002) suggested the balance of power between researcher and child must be equalized as much as possible when conducting research with children. They recommended a setting outside the school in an informal atmosphere where seating arrangements, terminology, and first names usage would reduce the hierarchical relationships experienced between adults and children.

Because of the age of the participants and the requirements of the school system in which the study was conducted, interviews took place while summer school was in session and at the summer school site. To increase the informal atmosphere of the interview, a school lounge with couches was used to conduct the interviews and only students who do not know the researcher in his role as an administrator were invited to participate. Additionally, the researcher intended to "dress down" and have food available to help facilitate a relaxed atmosphere.

Purposeful Sampling

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) stated that probability sampling may not be appropriate in situations where only a small portion of the population is relevant to the study. They recommended using purposeful sampling to study a smaller number of relevant cases within a population in depth to obtain insight specific to the area of study. This study hoped to collect the rich narratives of middle school students who failed one or more academic classes. Therefore, only students enrolled in one or two academic courses in summer school were solicited to participate. Data and research related to retention in The United States and to the district in which the study occurred was used to determine the criteria for participant selection.

Retention in the U.S. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006) reported that of youth, between the ages of 16 and 19 who had ever been retained during their school career as of 2004, males were more than twice as likely to be retained as females. Black students were also twice as likely to be

retained as white students, and students whose family's income were in the lowest quartile were four times as likely to be retained than those in the highest quarter for family income.

Although the data indicates that black males whose families are in the lowest economic quartile are at increased risk of being retained, limiting the study to students with these characteristics was not feasible or desirable. First, access to students' records to determine their families' incomes was prohibited. Secondly, the stories of females and students of other races could contribute to the overall understanding of similarities and differences experienced by these groups. Accordingly, race, gender, and socioeconomic status was not used as a criteria for participant selection.

Local retention rates. Raw retention data for the school district in which this study was conducted was available from the 1998-1999 school year through the 2008-2009 school year. During this ten-year period, retention rates for the division ranged from 4.1% to 5.0% each year in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Although data are not available on how many of these students attended summer school but were still retained, anecdotal evidence from summer school administrators suggested that such retention does occur.

Local summer school rates. During the 2008 summer school sessions, 58 students repeated one academic course and 20 repeated two at the first summer school site. Data from the second summer school site was not available. Within the subpopulation at the first site, a portion of the students attended the middle school at which the researcher was employed. Elimination of these students from the first site limited the number remaining to solicit participation. It was therefore estimated that only between 8 and 15 participants would assent to participate, but this was greatly underestimated.

Selection criteria. Based on these findings and the limited number of students who attended summer school, participants were invited to participate who had the following characteristics: 1) were in middle school during the 2008-2009 school year, 2) were enrolled in one or two academic courses in summer school in 2009, and 3) had not been in contact with the researcher in his role as an administrator.

At the beginning of each summer school session, students were given a letter explaining the purpose of the study, an assent form, and a consent form. Once parental consent and student assent were given, interviews began during non-academic time at the summer school sites. Times were chosen by the student and guardian and included before school, after school, and snack time options. A total of 38 students volunteered to participate in the study. Of these, 17 were selected to be interviewed based on logistical and time constraints, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Researcher's Role

The researcher acted as the interviewer during this study. As a school administrator, the researcher had an interest in students having a successful school career. Because of the researcher's role as a school administrator and the primary source of disciplinary consequences in a particular school, participants that knew the researcher in this role were not selected.

Data Collection Strategies

Prior to data collection, permission from both the school district and the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. Reviewed literature relating to relationships between academic outcomes, student characteristics, and

physiological theories were used to inform the interview protocol. An initial interview protocol, consisting of six broad categories and approximately 41 questions, was formulated around related readings. This was given to educators and appropriate school district personnel for review and appropriate modifications were made based on their recommendations. The original interview questions were then grouped into categories related to the research questions. The final interview protocol consisted of six broad questions, each having additional follow-up questions (see Appendix A). Interviews lasted for between 40 and 60 minutes. Interviews were electronically recorded and transferred to qualitative analysis software. The researcher took field notes immediately after each interview, detailing perceptions of the participants' comfort level, appearance, and the researcher's overall impression of the interview.

Analytical Induction

Data analysis began with initial coding of participants' interviews into the six broad categories developed by the researcher. Additional themes that emerged were added as needed. The researcher sorted statements by code and reviewed the grouped responses to ensure coding consistency both across statements and within the parameters of the researcher's defined codes.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the historical context from which retention and promotion evolved. The historical overview revealed the problem that neither federal nor state attempts to improve the rigor of the curriculum and the accountability of schools have had an effect on the failure rate of middle school students. This was supported by national and

district data, such as Thompson and Cunningham (2000) estimates of national retention rates of 15% and retention rates that averaged 4.4% over 11 years in the district in which the current study took place. As a result, a segment of the population continues to fail academic courses, thus being exposed to the potential negative consequences associated with retention.

This study hoped to lend insight into the reasons for students not meeting academic requirements by analyzing the perceptions of middle school students enrolled in one or two academic courses in summer school. Literature related to retention and low academic performance was summarized to demonstrate the factors that might affect the participants in the current study. Based on the literature review, research questions were developed that related to psychological theories (age and ability, motivation and effort, and withdrawal from school) and adult involvement. Finally, a summary of the major methodological aspects of the current study were review.

CHAPTER 2 Review of Literature

The plethora of variables contributing to students' academic failure has been extensively documented in the academic literature. The goal of this chapter is two-fold. First, the argument is made that certain academic outcome variables reported in research overlap and can be used interchangeably when reviewing the literature for factors related to academic failure. From this discussion, a definition of academic failure evolves. Second, from the vast corpus of student achievement literature, research is organized into six categories, including motivation, age and ability, withdrawal from school, parents and guardians, school practices, and teacher practices. While describing the research, a tapestry is woven in order to see the realities of student failure holistically so their voices are not lost amongst the minutiae.

Defining Academic Failure

Believing academic failure, retention, and dropping are fixed variables, rather than degrees of failure, limits ones ability to have a broader understanding of what it means to be unsuccessful in school. Consolidation of terms, which denote unsuccessful academic achievement, would allow one to draw upon a larger body of research. The purpose of delving into grading and failing policies, retention, and dropping out in the following discussion is to make the argument that each is a degree of academic failure in order for the current study to make comparisons to a broader the scope of research.

Grading and Failing Policies

Austin and McCann (1992) describe grades as shorthand for communicating to the public evaluative information. As such, grades are only as good as the degree to which there is shared understanding about what they mean. As will be shown, the degree to which there is shared understanding is practically nonexistent.

National level. A report by U.S. Department of Education (1994), stated grades received by students differ depending on school characteristics. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88) report found that student reported grades corresponded to scores on the NELS:88 math and reading tests for the school. Students reporting higher grades in school scored higher on the NELS:88 than those reporting lower grades. However, when the same comparison was made across affluent schools (those with 10 percent or fewer students receiving free or reduced lunch) and high poverty schools (those with over 75 percent of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch) the results were very different. Students in the high poverty schools reported that they received mostly "A" in English scored about the same as self-reported "C" and "D" students in the affluent schools. Similarly, self-reported "A" math students in the poverty schools scored closely to "D" students in the affluent schools on the math portion of the NELS:88 test. The report also found that "B" and "C" students' scores in poverty schools compared to "D" and "F" students' scores in the affluent schools.

The report speculated that these differences could come from the teachers' appraisal of student work compared to other students in the class. This indicates that what

constitutes level of achievement varies among schools and is not a normative value from which comparisons could be made.

Policy level. In a study of policy documents, district guidelines, teacher handbooks and departmental (math and English) guidelines from 144 school districts in an unidentified state, Austin and McCann (1992) found considerable variation in the grading policies across the districts. They found that 46 out of 71 school level guidelines provided by districts did not provide clear criteria for assigning grades. Factors such as performance, participation, attendance, attitude and discipline were mentioned as potential criteria. As a result of the lack of direction, Austin and McCann reported that some 17 percent of the reporting districts used performance as the only criteria for assigning grades, whereas 75 percent asked teachers to use multiple sources of information when assigning grades. Austin and McCann also reported inconsistency in what districts defined as a failing grade, finding that numerical values for passing ranged from 60 to 70 percent.

Retention

According to the NCES (2006), 12 percent of youth ages 16 to 19 enrolled in 2004 had been retained at least once in their school career. Summarizing the literature on retention, Bowman (2005) stated the reasons given for retaining students included student immaturity, the school's belief that an additional year of schooling would produce successful academic outcomes, student failure to meet criteria for promotion, and attendance issues.

In a survey of 85 large school districts, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 1997) reported that seven of the districts did not have a written promotion policy. The AFT

found the remaining 78 districts used teacher-assigned grades, standardized test scores, social/emotional development, attendance, and teacher recommendations as evidence upon which to make retention decisions. At the elementary level, teacher-assigned grades, developmental factors, and teacher recommendations were cited most often as the primary evidence for retention decisions. Teacher-assigned grades were cited by middle schools 58.8% of the time as the main source of evidence for making retention decisions, and 64.7% of high schools reported using the same criteria for making retention decisions.

The AFT study also found that districts placed limits on retention. For example, the number of times a student could repeat was limited. Other factors like grade level and student characteristics (age, special education status, limited English proficiency status, and at-risk status) contributed to districts' decisions to retain students. Many districts referred to mandatory promotion as "placements."

Of the districts surveyed, the AFT found that only 48.2 percent mentioned summer school as an alternative to retention. Several districts required payment to attend summer school with some offering scholarships for needy students. Other alternatives mentioned included tutoring, reassignment to special education, and reassessment the following year.

The above research supports the argument that the difficulty with relating academic outcomes to what researchers believe to be mediating factors is the lack of a definitive definition of what constitutes success and failure. Failure on a single assessment or multiple assessments, which could lead to failing the course, is the product of instructor subjectivity, in both assessment difficulty and relative value. Beyond individual assessments, schools and districts have different criteria for promoting students. As a

result, the line between passing and failing, and promotion and retention are not clear-cut.

Dropping Out

NCES (2006) defined dropping-out as not being enrolled in school and not having earned a high school credential, such as a high school diploma or equivalent. Based on this definition, NCES reported that 10 percent of 16 to 24 year-olds were dropouts in 2004. The report associated academic achievement with dropping-out, stating that 15 percent of students in the bottom quartile in mathematics achievement, as opposed to 2 percent in the top quartile, dropped out as of 2004. Students who had been suspended or put on probation were also five times more likely to dropout. Reasons given by students for dropping-out included having missed too many school days (43%), believing it would be easier to get a GED (40%), receiving poor grades and failing (38%), and not liking school (37%).

Dropping out, skipping classes, truancy, disruptive school behavior and juvenile delinquency, stated Finn (1989), have been shown to be related to poor academic performance. However, Finn declared that studies have failed to link school processes to school failure. Finn broadly categorized dropout studies into two types, ones which seek to precisely estimate the dropout rate and others which analyze correlations to race, SES, ability and performance. Finn argued that these studies do not take into account developmental processes, which eventually lead to students dropping out.

Finn (1989) described the frustration-self-esteem model and participation-identification model as developmental processes. Each model contained similar aspects and was cyclical in nature. Finn contended that academic antecedents determine the valence of the cycle. For example, an inadequate degree of academic success would

perpetuate a negative cycle, whereby students become frustrated and less involved. This would lead to low self-esteem and decreased identification with school. Conversely, if the student experienced academic success, each model could be viewed in positive terms. The students who enjoyed academic success would feel encouraged, have high self-esteem, participate, and identify with school.

Academic Failure Defined

When a student fails a single assignment or assessment, he or she experiences a small degree of academic failure. Multiply this experience several times in the same class and course failure results. The student may opt to retake a failed course in summer school. However, if more courses are failed than can be retaken during summer school or the student cannot afford to pay to retake the course, grade retention is the result. When a student decides to drop out of school, one could classify this as the ultimate academic failure. Therefore, as researchers have sought to find correlates to failure, retention and dropping out, it is understandable that a great deal of overlap exists.

For the purposes of this study, research on failing, retention, and dropping out was viewed as degrees of academic failure and used holistically to identify factors to include in an interview protocol for students enrolled in one or two academic courses in summer school.

Factors Associated with Achievement

Various theories have been developed and studies conducted involving student characteristics, instructional theory, cognitive science, failure, grade retention, and dropping out, in attempts to explain different academic outcomes. An examination of the

research reveals overlapping themes. Effort has been studied in relationship to students' confidence in their ability (Feather 1969; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1996), goal orientations (Covington, 1992; Dweck, 1999; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Nicholls, 1984), the concept of ability that emerges with age (Nicholls, 1978; Nicholls & Miller, 1983), and attributions for success and failure at academic tasks (Weiner, 1979). Withdraw from high school has been related to family factors (Rumberger, 1983, 1995), low SES (Cairns et al., 1989), neighborhood-level variables (Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson, 1996), gender (Fine, 1989), ethnic minority status (Oakland, 1992), and low parental education (Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989). Dropping-out, which could be considered the ultimate negative academic outcome, has been correlated to achievement and failing grades (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Ensminger & Slusarick, 1992; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997; Lloyd, 1978), and related to physiological models, such as the frustration–self-esteem model (Finn 1989), the participation-identification model, (Mahoney & Cairns 1997; McNeal, 1995), and the social capital model, (Gottfredson et al. 1994). When viewed holistically, one begins to see the overlap in some areas and a picture of the of a whole student in the jig-saw puzzle of research coming into focus in other areas.

Motivation

Attribution theory. Weiner (1979) theorized that an individual's explanation of their performance was related to their effort exerted on a task. Attributions for performance outcomes, Weiner argued, have three dimensions. Stability, locus of causality, and controllability contribute to attributions of successes and failures. Stability refers to the

degree to which attributions are perceived as fixed or temporary. If, for example, failure at a task is attributed to innate inability, then the cause of the failure is stable. However, when poor performance is attributed to transient factors, such as being unprepared, the causes are unstable and are not perceived as predictive of future performance on similar tasks.

Butkowsky and Willows' (1980) findings in a study of students with various reading abilities and their attributions to success and failure on manipulated tasks were consistent with the notion that stability perceptions are predictive of future performance expectations. Relatively poor readers in the study attributed failures to lack of ability (a stable factor) and success to factors outside their control (unstable factors). Locus of causality refers to an individual's attributions to internal or external factors and controllability refers to the perception of whether the causes are within one's own control.

Weiner (1979) classified cause of success and failures in terms of these three dimensions. For example, luck is an unstable, uncontrollable, and external attribution. One who attributes performance to luck cannot predict his or her future performance on similar tasks which in turn keeps his or her self-concept intact. Immediate effort, Weiner explained, is conceived as unstable, internal, and controllable. Explanations of performance based on effort allows an individual to aspire to future successes. However, Weiner warned that consecutive failures attributed to effort may transition to ability attribution, which is internal, stable and uncontrollable. Failure then is seen as inevitable and effort expenditure not worthwhile.

For instance, Banks and Woolfson (2008) gave 53 students, between the ages of 11 and 14 years and identified by their teacher as having high ability and others identified as

having low ability, two unsolvable puzzles to compare failure attributions of the two groups. They found students that rated themselves as low achievers, regardless of whether this matched their teacher's rating, attributed failure to less controllability. Although this study was limited by the small sample size, it generally supports the notion that attributions of failure are related to the dimensions Weiner (1977) described.

Expectancy-value theory. Feather (1969) proposed the expectancy-value theory to explain differences in the amount of effort given to a task. The theory is based upon confidence in one's ability to perform a task and the value placed on the potential rewards associated with task completion. The degree of effort exerted to accomplish the task is dependent upon expectation of success and the value of the reward. If the reward is valued and the expectation for success is high, effort will be exerted to complete the task. However, if the opposite is perceived, then very little, if any, effort will be devoted to the task. Even if the value of the reward is very high, effort may not be exerted if confidence in successful completion is very low. The theory predicts that there exists a point at which the product of expectancy and value will equal the effort required to complete a task.

Applying expectancy-value theory to explain why students expend different amounts of effort to academic tasks, Tollefson (2000) used course assignments as the task to be completed and positive or negative consequence of the grade received as the related reward. Tollefson expanded the concept of valued rewards to include both external rewards, such as grades received, and internal rewards, such as emotions related to task completion. Value could be from either positive or negative and internal or external rewards. For example, a student may place value on the positive aspects of receiving a high

grade or positive interactions with parents, or a student could value avoiding the negative consequences of receiving a failing grade.

A student who has had a history of difficulty with certain academic tasks would predict similar results and have little confidence in their ability. A student who has very little confidence in their ability to complete the assignment, Tollefson (2000) explained, may choose not to do so because the positive rewards of receiving a passing grade or avoiding a failing grade may not be enough to reach a critical point needed to trigger exerting the required effort. However, if the value of removing a negative consequence is great enough, the student may be inclined to exert a minimum amount of effort to complete the task.

For instance, in a study conducted with undergraduate psychology students, Vollmer (1986) used past achievement, perceived ability, time spent studying for an exam, effort expenditure on an exam, grade expected, and actual grade to examine the idea that students calculate expenditures of effort based on perceptions of task difficulty and ability. Results showed that time studying and expected grade was predictive of expected grade. Expectancy-value theory would predict expected grade and effort expended on the exam would be related, however only a weak relationship was reported.

The difficulty with applying Vollmer's (1986) study to expectancy-value theory is in his choice of participants and the constructs used. College students represent the upper limits of any notion of high academic achievement. Vollmer's construct of expectancy, perceptions of task difficulty, past achievement, and perceived ability, and construct of effort, time spent studying, and number of words on the exam essay, are practical, but the

constructs for value and reward are flawed. Unlike the theory, which postulates that expectancy of success and value will produce effort, in Vollmer's study, students' self-reported grade expectation and actual grade are post-perceptions of a reward which they based upon a known degree of effort exerted and perceptions of their ability after task completion. One would expect, as Vollmer reports, that students could predict their own exam grade, knowing the time they spent studying and their own ability. Additionally, this study involves effort on a single task over a relatively short time-period, which does not address cumulative effort over many tasks.

By identifying middle school students who have failed some academic courses and passed others, the current study hopes to identify the role student expectations for success (perceived course difficulty), value of reward (passing the course), and effort expended played in differing individual student outcomes. Additionally, students who fail one or more academic courses do so as a result of many tasks over an extended time period. Students' perceptions of academic failure and how these students perceive multiple tasks and effort expenditure over an extended time period, it is hoped, will add to the understanding of expectancy-value theory as it relates to failing students.

Goal orientation theory. Kaplan and Maehr (2007) stated that the original definition of goal orientation focused on how and why individuals set goals and the purposes of achievement behavior. Mastery goals, also called learning goals by Dweck (1986) and task-focused goals by Anderman and Maehr (1994), are perceived as gaining skills and emphasize achievement of the goal. Summarizing related research, Kaplan and Maehr (2007) argued mastery goal orientations have been shown to make students more

likely to invest in a task, seek challenges, feel positive about the task, be more productive and persist longer at a task.

Performance goals, also called ability-focused goals by Nicholls (1984), emphasize outside evaluation. Kaplan and Maehr (2007) stated this can be problematic especially for students who lack ability and are concerned with failure. Kaplan and Maehr concluded that little attention has been given to changes in goal orientation over an extended period of time and even less attention has been given to this during the engagement of a task. Reviewing the research, Kaplan and Maehr developed six possible perspectives from which future research could study and interpret motivation as it relates to goal orientation.

The first was that goal orientations are based in situation-schemas (Garcia & Pintrich, 1994). This conceptualization suggested individuals receive cues from the environment, indicating goal importance, which drives their thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward the goal. Kaplan and Maehr (2007) explained that situational schemas come from the environmental domains of task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, and time. Depending on the setting, these domains produce the perception and formation of performance or mastery goals.

The second possible determinant of goal orientation discussed by (Garcia & Pintrich, 1994) was a self-schema. The beliefs one has about his or her abilities and his or her own theories of intelligence contribute to the formation of goal orientations. When children see ability inversely related to effort, or believe intelligence is unchangeable, they are more likely to have a performance-goal orientation, whereas an undifferentiated concept of ability and effort, or belief that intelligence is incremental, produces a mastery-

goal orientation (Covington, 1992; Dweck, 1999).

The remaining four possible foundations of goal orientation Kaplan and Maehr (2007) developed give researchers additional avenues to explore. Frameworks included goal orientations which originated form self-awareness, psychological needs, values, and socially constructed meaning. Each proposed construct had implications as to how students would perceive goals as performance or mastery oriented. Reviewing the classroom implications of goal orientation, Kaplan and Maehr argued that mastery and performance goals could potentially differ in the motivation produced by each. This distinction, they contended, is of particular importance to failing students.

One can assume that in most circumstances middle school students, at the beginning of an academic school year, develop goal orientations through one of the aforementioned frameworks predicted on the expectation that they will pass all academic subjects. In other words, students do not begin with failure as the goal. According to Kaplan and Maehr (2007), the question of how did the goal orientations of failed middle school students evolve over the course of a school year needs more study. Additionally, they stressed the importance of dialogue with similar areas of study in order that goal orientation one day will be a more generalizable model of motivation. They insisted that multi-method inquiry guided by both basic research in areas such as cognitive science and practical research, such as instructional theory, could provide additional information on human motivation as it relates to goal orientation theory.

Thus, a qualitative, ethnographic study of middle school students enrolled in one or two academic summer school courses, in which related theories, including goal orientation,

come together to form the basis of an interview protocol could give a holistic view as to how these theories interact with regard to these students.

Self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1993), self-efficacy beliefs operate in attribution theory, expectancy-value theory and goal theory and contribute to motivation in several ways. Bandura (1977) conceptualized self-efficacy as developing from various sources of information conveyed by direct and mediated experiences, unlike previous theories which viewed efficacy originating almost exclusively from one's own experiences. Based on accomplishments and failures, Bandura (1977) hypothesized that individuals build beliefs about their abilities which determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained. It is these beliefs, he argued, which make up one's self-efficacy.

In an analysis of the responses on the Motivated Strategies Learning Questionnaire of 173 seventh-grade, predominantly white, middle school students in science and English classes, Pintrich and De Groot (1990) found significant correlations between self-efficacy and high performance on academic course work. They concluded that students who believed they were capable also were more likely to persist at uninteresting, difficult academic tasks. However, when cognitive engagement variables were added to the regression analysis, self-efficacy was not significantly related to performance variables. Pintrich and De Groot suggested this implied cognitive engagement may be more important in improving performance, but self-efficacy beliefs could mediate use of these strategies.

Bandura's (1977) hypothesis that personal efficacy determines whether coping

behaviors will be initiated parallels Pintrich and De Groot (1990) suggestion that high efficacy expectations promote cognitive engagement. For example, a student with high self-efficacy beliefs, faced with an academic task, would initiate a coping behavior, such as cognitive engagement.

The sources of efficacy expectations, according to Bandura (1977), develop from performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal and vary in magnitude, generality, and strength. Successes and failures at tasks begin to build expectations about future performance on similar tasks. For example, continued successful performance at similar tasks over a period of time develops strong self-efficacy beliefs generalizable to similar tasks and gives confidence to attempt more difficult tasks. Bandura stated that, once established, strong efficacy beliefs based on repeated success are not likely to be diminished by occasional failures.

Vicarious experiences offer another, but weaker, source of efficacy expectations (Bandura, 1977). Witnessing others successfully perform a task creates a social comparison which can produce an expectation that improvement is possible with persistence and effort. Bandura argued that self-efficacy from vicarious experiences alone is weaker and susceptible to change because it is less reliable than personal accomplishments. Individuals also receive information about their abilities from others by verbal persuasion. Bandura argued that disconfirming experiences could easily erase mastery expectations based on verbal persuasion. However, social persuasion could have a positive effect on efficacy expectations if conditions were arranged to facilitate successful outcomes.

Emotional arousal is another source of information upon which self-efficacy beliefs are established. Individuals who experience stress prior to performing a task, Bandura (1997) asserted, would interpret the emotion in terms of their personal competency. For example, the lack of negative emotional responses to a task increases confidence and efficacy expectations regarding the task. This is supported by the negative relationship between test anxiety and self-efficacy reported by Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) in their analysis of seventh-grade, middle school students' responses on the Motivated Strategies Learning Questionnaire discussed above.

Bandura (1977) explained that magnitude, strength, and generality of these sources of information were dependent on other aspect of the experience as well. Amount of effort required, attribution to internal or external forces, and perceived task difficulty helped define the experience, resulting in self-efficacy being reinforced or diminished.

In a study of 279 students in Rome with a mean age of 12 years and their parents, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (1996) found parental academic efficacy, parental aspirations for their children, children's self-regulatory efficacy, social efficacy, and efficacy to manage peer pressure were related directly or indirectly to academic achievement. The findings demonstrated the many avenues through which students' efficacy beliefs contribute to their academic achievement.

Studies by Bandura et al (1977, 1986, 1993, 1996, 2003) related perceived self-efficacy to various other efficacy constructs, motivational processes, and behaviors. The only discussion of limitations, with regard to his work with efficacy expectations, were those associated with self-report data from questionnaires (Bandura et al.,1996). He

quickly dismisses this potential limitation, arguing self-beliefs were subjective and therefore were attainable through self-reports.

Although interviews, such as the ones used in the current study, are also a form of self-reporting, they allow for a more holistic approach to identifying efficacy beliefs, sources of these beliefs, and deeper understanding of student perceptions. By allowing the students to answer questions in their own words and giving the researcher the opportunity to ask for clarification, interviews have the potential to be holistic and be more informative than a survey instrument. Additionally, the research done thus far has centered on groups of individuals with heterogeneous performance variables. The present study hopes to explore how self-efficacy and other theories, which have been related to performance, are applicable to middle school students who have experienced academic failure.

Age and Ability

Miller and Nicholls (1986) differentiated achievement motivation from other types of motivation because of the rewards associated with it. Competence, or the perception of confidence, is the incentive for achievement. Based on this line of reasoning, Nicholls and Miller theorized that motivation to achieve was developmentally linked to reasoning about ability. They argued that, unlike adults who differentiate ability, effort, luck, and task difficulty, the concept of ability develops in four stages for children.

Around age five, students are at what Miller and Nicholls (1986) designated level one. Students at level one associate increased effort with intelligence even if they score lower that other students. Additionally, level one students link higher scores to increased effort even if additional effort was not expended relative to others.

Level two students also correlate effort with outcome, but they see it as a direct cause-effect relationship. When level two students observe what appears to be a negative correlation between effort and outcome (specifically when low effort produces a high score), these students reason the difference resulted from some compensatory action. For example, if a student is observed exerting little effort toward the completion of a task, which resulted in a high score, it is reasoned that the student compensated by trying really hard. Likewise, if high effort resulted in a low score, the level two student reasons that mistakes must have been made.

At level three, students begin to realize factors, other than effort, can play a role in outcomes. Ability is seen as both compensating for less effort and as a limitation to what effort can produce. Miller and Nicholls (1986) asserted this is possibly a transition level because level three students continue to maintain their belief in equal intelligence, between individuals receiving similar scores, even though unequal effort was applied to the task.

At level four, reached around age 11 or 12, students clearly differentiate effort and ability and view them as interdependent. Ability is seen as innate and inversely proportional to the effort expended. For example, students are perceived as intelligent if they receive high scores from low effort.

The participants in the current study were middle school students between the ages of 11 and 13. Miller and Nicholls (1986) research would suggest that these participants would have a level four mentality regarding the relationship between effort and ability. Understanding students' perceptions of effort and ability at different developmental levels, gave the researcher additional insight that enhanced follow-up questions during the

interviews.

Withdrawal from School

Frustration self-esteem. According to Finn (1989), the frustration self-esteem model identifies school failure as the precursor to events, which lead to students' rejecting school. Finn identifies three components found in most studies linking poor school performance to problem behavior. Below average performance leads to lower self-view which leads to the student opposing school. Over 5 to 10 years, Finn states, the lack of positive reinforcement from academic indicators, teachers, and parents causes students to become frustrated and embarrassed. Studies have operationalized self-view as self-esteem, self-concept, academic self-concept, or personal agency beliefs. Skipping classes, truancy, disruptive school behavior, and juvenile delinquency are manifestations of the resulting oppositional behavior with dropping out being the result (Finn, 1989).

Participation-identification. Finn (1989) proposed that there are two elements to school bonding, participation and identification. He suggested that participation represents a behavioral aspect, while identification represents a psychological aspect. The participation-identification model predicts that students' are more likely to remain in school if they are involved in multiple school related activities. Being engaged in both academic and school related activities, such as sports and social events, constitutes the participation element of the model.

Finn described participation as a developmental process consisting of four levels of behavior related to the student's age. A student's identification or frustration with school depends on their experiences at each level. At level one in the primary grades, participation

may only be acceptance of the need to attend, be prepared, and responsive to directions and questions. Initiating questions, conversing with the teacher, and spending additional time in the classroom characterize the second level of participation. The third level involves student participation in non-academic, school related activities, such as social and athletic events. Involvement in school governance and academic goal-setting constitutes the fourth level of participation.

In a study of 1,803 minority, low SES students, Finn (1997) found academically successful school completers exhibited more school engagement, such as participating in class and avoiding being disruptive, than poor academic performers and dropouts, even when controlling for home background and psychological characteristics.

Finn (1997) stated that identification is an internal, psychological element comprised of two parts. The first is internalized belongingness to the school environment, such as affiliation, attachment, and bonding. The second is commitment in the form of acceptance of academic values and school importance. In a study examining sources of alienation using open ended questions, Rosenblum and Firestone (1987) found two distinct types of student commitment: commitment to place (e.g., liked coming to school) and/or commitment to learning. This in combination with the negative terms, alienation and withdrawal, Finn (1989) stated provides a good working definition of identification.

Social capital. Hirschi (1969) proposed the social capital model to explain causes of delinquency. The theory suggests that relationships with teachers, parents, and other students determine how students self-regulate their behaviors. Emotional attachment to others and concern for their opinion, commitment to acceptable goals and behavior,

involvement in conventional activities, and belief in rules and norms constitute the primary elements of social bonds. These bonds tend to suppress self-gratifying behaviors of students because they care about what others think. Delinquent behaviors are outside of what is socially accepted; therefore, individuals with strong social bonds feel pressure not to engage in related behaviors.

Based on this theory, retention could have the positive effect of strengthening social bonds due to the increased academic ability during the repeated year. The opposite effect may be seen if the retained student's self-perception is that of a low-achiever and negative school attitudes form (Gottfredson, Fink, & Graham, 1994). Although the Gottfredson et al. study of 12 and 13 year old, black students in an urban setting did not support the theory that retention weakened students' social bonds. One could argue that, based the fact that only 47% of the entire school population was on grade level at the time of the study, the stigma associated with grade retention, resulting in weakened social bonds, was not present.

School engagement. Identification with school has been described in both positive and negative terms. Affiliation, involvement, attachment, commitment, and bonding have been used to produce positive connotations, while alienation and withdrawal have been used to denote a negative reflection of the same construct (Finn, 1998). Consequently, Finn argued, identification of common themes within the research literature is difficult given the myriad of similar behaviors being described in various ways.

Similarly, in a review of related literature on school bonding and engagement, Farrell and Morrison (2003) determined that there seemed to be a considerable amount of

overlap in terms associated with these constructs. Reviewing instruments used in previous studies to examine school belonging, social support, self-concept, class participation, future aspirations, and parental-school supervision, Farrell noted that many of the questions were similar from instrument to instrument.

Matching the similar questions and administering a combination of all six instruments to a primarily low SES, Latino group of 543 students in grades four through six and using factor analysis on the results, Farrell found that all questions loaded into five factors. He described the factors as: a) relation dimension of school, b) sense of alienation, c) school belonging, which was perceived from teachers, d) attitude toward school, and e) feeling of school importance.

Farrell argued that consensus must be reached on a definition for school bonding and that there appears to be five dimensions to school engagement. Therefore, it is not an all or nothing construct, but rather multidimensional, where students may answer "yes" to some dimensions and "no" to others. Farrell concluded that future researchers will need to identify specific aspects of the all inclusive terms school engagement and school bonding.

Parents and Guardians

Parents have a great impact on their child's academic growth through both the value they place on education and the support they provide. The value parents place on schooling is conveyed through beliefs in their child's and their own intellectual ability, advocacy of high educational aspirations, and participation and support of school related functions (Georgio,1999; Bandura, 1996). Parents provide support for their child's

intellectual growth through encouraging academic development at home, enforcing good at home study habits, and monitoring academic progress (Jeynes 2005; Kean 2005).

Value placed on schooling. Students, ages 16-19 in 2004, in the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile repeated a grade at a rate of 16.9 percent verses 3.9 percent for students in the highest quartile (NCES, 2006). Bandura (1996) argued that the relationship between SES and academic achievement is not direct, but rather mediated though the academic aspirations of the parents. The higher a family's SES, the higher the academic aspirations they will pass on to their children. Likewise, parental belief in their own scholastic aptitude is transmitted to their children. Therefore, parents who believe they can help their child be academically successful do so by providing high educational aspirations and by increasing the academic self-efficacy of their child. This is probably due to the fact that parents who believe they are important to the success of their child in regard to school showed more attention to their child's school work (Georgio, 1999).

Support for intellectual growth. Jeynes (2005) found that parents who communicated with their child about school had a significant impact on their child's academic performance. Attending school events showed a lesser degree of significance, but monitoring homework did not have an effect on academic performance. Jeynes speculated that this was the result of struggling students needing more parental supervision of schoolwork than high achieving students. Kean (2005) findings that time spent by the parent doing homework with their child was negatively related to academic measures tends to support Jeynes' speculation. Jeynes proposed that a possible explanation for parental discussion having a greater effect on academic outcome is that communication is a daily

form of parental involvement whereas parental attendance at school events is sporadic. This would indicate that day-to-day parental involvement is more important than occasional parental involvement. Kean also found that a parent's achievement beliefs and stimulating home behavior indirectly influenced their child's achievement.

Teacher Practices/Quality

Teacher-student interactions. Although deficiencies in instructional school practices and programs are often cited as causes for academic failure, Finn (1989) argued it would be more productive to examine the interactions of students with their school and out-of-school environments. Sutherland and Oswald (2005) contend that negative teacher-student interactions becomes cyclical and predictive, resulting from negative actions of a student which results in, not only reciprocal responses, but also more harsh responses toward students previously identified as having problematic behavior. The findings of Skinner and Belmont (1993) show that teachers' interactions with students predict both emotional and behavioral classroom engagement, which in turn impacts the students' perception of the teacher. Teacher praise of students' correct answers and task engagement has also been found to decrease disruptive behavior, while decreased opportunities to respond to teacher questioning increased negative behavior (Sutherland, Alder, & Gunter, 2003).

Each of these studies examined problematic behavior and their impact on teacher-student interactions. The resulting negative nature of the cyclical interaction between student and teacher is not studied in the context of negative behaviors which are not necessarily problematic to classroom instruction, but rather are problematic for student

success, such as low levels of self-advocacy and self-efficacy. Although advocacy and efficacy are not addressed, the studies suggest a transactional framework around which student perceptions of teacher-student interactions may be studied.

Teacher behaviors and student perception. Good (1981) developed a model to guide his review of research related to how teachers may influence student behavior. The model consisted of five sequential events which he predicted would create differential treatment of high and low achieving students by the teacher. First, the teacher would expect varied behavior and achievement among the students taught. Second, the teacher's behavior would differ depending on his/her expectations. Third, the students would perceive the differential treatment, and as a result, the student's self-concept, motivation, and aspirations would be affected. Forth, if the teacher's behavior continued over time, the student's achievement and behavior would change according to the perceived expectations. Finally, the longer this persisted, the more engrained the student's behaviors will become. Based on this model, Good reviewed related research and identified several way in which high and low achievers were treated by their teacher. Of relevance to the current study, Good noted that research tended to focus on direct effects of differential teacher behavior (i.e., the amount of work given) rather than indirect effects (i.e., student perceptions of teacher behavior).

Good (1981) research findings indicated that low-achieving students were often seated away from the teacher and were given less attention in academic situations. Low-achieving students were called upon less often, and when they were called upon, they were given less wait-time, fewer clues, and more criticism for incorrect answers. These students

also experienced more interruptions, less feedback on academic progress, and less demanding expectations.

In a study of 277 Greek, elementary teachers, Georgiou (2002) found that teachers' behavior toward failing students was related to the teachers' attribution of student outcomes. The study indicated that teachers responded with more pity and additional effort to help the student improve when a student's low achievement was attributed by the teachers to ability. However, when low achievement was attributed to lack of effort, teachers responded with anger and there was the tendency not to provide additional support for improvement.

Summary

Despite this extensive research, little is known about the perceptions of students regarding failing. Their story is lost amidst the numerous clinical-like studies, which attempt to correlate internal or external variables to failure. By employing qualitative methods, the current research hopes to, as Corbin and Strauss (1990) phrase it, produce findings not arrived at by statistical procedures. Spradley (1979) recommends an ethnographic approach to understanding how other people see their experience and learning from people rather than studying them. Based upon commonalities found in the research literature an informed interview protocol was constructed so that, not only did this approach give a holistic view of the perceptions of failed middle school students, but also it provided depth and insight into participants' responses. Identifying shared perceptions of middle school students, who have experienced academic failure over the course of a school

year, may yield insight into the interconnectivity of the plethora of factors contributing to this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3 Methodology

In this chapter, the research questions are stated, followed by an argument that the selection of an ethnographic, interpretive approach is appropriate for addressing the research questions in the current study. National, state, local, and past summer school data are reviewed to describe trends and characteristics of students who were to be represented in the current study. The described population is then compared to the 17 participants selected to be interviewed out of the 38 that volunteered. The case is made that, although some of the participants' demographic data is inferred, its presentation demonstrates the diversity of the sample and adds to the transferability (external validity) of the findings. An exhaustive description of the methodological considerations and procedures used in the study, including the research design, implementation, data gathering, and evaluation of the process, are described to support the current study's dependability (reliability). Finally, elements of the current study that promote mutual meaning between the participants and the researcher are described to enhance the study's credibility (internal validity) and limitations are discussed.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of factors which contributed to the academic outcomes necessitating enrollment in academic courses in summer school, and what factors they believe could have made a positive

impact. This study focused on the following research questions: How did middle school students, enrolled in one or more academic courses in summer school, perceive:

1. academic outcomes, and to what these were attributed,
2. the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome,
3. sources and levels of motivation,
4. sources and levels of school bonds,
5. interactions and relationships with school personnel, and
6. the role and level of involvement of adults in their academic lives?

Appropriateness Of The Research Approach

If it is true that individuals are greater than the sum of their parts, then they are certainly much greater than a single factor studied in isolation. The experiences of middle school students over the course of a school year in which they failed one or more academic classes, when studied, is often reduced to statistical analysis of demographics, physiological concept, or educational experience. Verschuren (2001) stated that the real question is "whether a reductionistic approach leaves underexposed aspects of social reality" (p. 390). The fear was that when researchers look at small parts, they lose sight of the whole object both historically and contextually. Verschuren argued that even though a reductionistic approach has its place, a holistic picture developed from looking at as many aspects as possible simultaneously has a better opportunity to obtain new and unexpected findings. Bandura (1993) hinted that factors which have been studied independently are interconnected, stating self-efficacy beliefs operate in attribution theory, expectancy-value theory, and goal theory and contribute to motivation in several ways. As the overlap in

prior research suggested, these factors are likely to work in concert to produce the observed academic outcome.

Additionally, prior research in this area has focused on single outcomes over the course of a short period of time. Studying students' cumulative effort over an extended period of time, as was the case during the regular school year which resulted in academic failure, may yield additional insight not found in studies of short term failures. For example, expectancy-value theory, as Feather (1969) proposed it, was based upon the premise that effort put forth to accomplish a goal was a function of both an individual's perception of his or her own ability and the value of the reward. If the reward comes after a prolonged period of time, such as is the case with promotion to the next grade, and ability is measured against multiple tasks over the school year, how a middle school student determines the amount of effort to exert may be quite different than when attempting to reach short term goals.

A qualitative, ethnographic approach was employed to analyze the perceptions of middle school students who failed one or more academic core subjects the previous school year. Spradley (1979) suggested that an ethnographic design is a useful tool for learning about how people view their experiences rather that just studying those experiences. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (1995) stated that a topic is appropriate for qualitative research when: 1) "work requires in-depth understanding that is best communicated through detailed examples and rich narratives," 2) "you need to bring some new light on puzzling questions," 3) "the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships and slowly evolving events," 4) "you want to learn how present situations resulted from

past decisions or incidents," and 5) "explore[ing] the broader implications of a problem and place[ing] it in its historical, political, or social context" (p. 51).

An ethnographic, interpretive approach to interviewing participants in which open-ended questions are used, allowed the gathering of information on what students perceived to be factors contributing to failing one or more academic core courses during middle school. Patton (1987) argued that open-ended responses provide answers from participants, from which the researcher can interpret respondents' emotions, organization of the world, thoughts, experiences and basic perceptions. Additionally, Rubin and Rubin (1995) argued that people's understanding of events differ, and therefore, research should focus on their perceptions of reality.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants within this subpopulation for the study in preference to probability sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) stated that probability sampling may not be appropriate in situations where only a small portion of the population is relevant to the study. They recommended using purposeful sampling to study a smaller number of relevant cases within a population in depth to obtain insight specific to the area of study. Prescribing to this philosophy, participation was solicited from middle school students, repeating one or two academic courses and attending one of the two summer school sites in the district in which the study was conducted.

Population

Demographic and statistical data related to the population to be studied was researched. National, state, and local retention data, as well as previous summer school data, are presented. Based on the research, parameters for choosing participants were

developed. Additionally, the data on the low-performing population also served as a basis to compare the 17 students interviewed. Comparing the purposely sampled group to the larger population adds an element that assists in judging transferability.

National

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2006) reported that, of youth between the ages of 16 and 19 that had been retained during their school career as of 2004, males were more than twice as likely to be retained as females. Black students were also twice as likely to be retained as white students, and students whose family's income were in the lowest quartile were four times as likely to be retained than those in the highest quarter for family income.

State

Taking into consideration student mobility and changes in student enrollment and allocating more time for some students with disabilities and limited English proficient (LEP) students, the Virginia Department of Education (2008) reported that of the first-time 9th graders in the 2000- 2005 cohort 81.3% graduated on time in 2008. Of these students, females (84.3%) had a higher on-time graduation rate than males (78.3%), and white students (85.3%) had a higher on-time graduation rate than black students (72.6%). LEP and students with disabilities had respective on-time graduation rates of 68.5% and 81.1%.

Local

Raw retention data from the school district in which this study was conducted was available from the 1998-1999 school year through the 2008-2009 school year. During this

ten-year period, as shown in Table 3-1, retention rates for the division ranged from 4.1% to 5.0% each year for grades K-12.

Table 3-1:

Promotion/Retention Trends for the School Division.

School Year	Promoted (% of Total)		Retained (% of Total)		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Membership	Retained
1999	18325 (49.7)	18567 (50.3)	713 (36.3)	1251 (63.7)	39119	5.0%
2000	19021 (49.8)	19192 (50.2)	678 (36.2)	1193 (63.8)	40361	4.6%
2001	19413 (49.8)	19577 (50.2)	650 (36.0)	1155 (64.0)	41173	4.4%
2002	19863 (49.6)	20146 (50.4)	694 (35.5)	1260 (64.5)	42005	4.7%
2003	20303 (49.5)	20696 (50.5)	693 (35.6)	1252 (64.4)	42944	4.5%
2004	20978 (49.6)	21304 (50.4)	700 (35.3)	1285 (64.7)	44267	4.5%
2005	21579 (49.5)	22013 (50.5)	651 (34.8)	1218 (65.2)	45461	4.1%
2006	22095 (49.6)	22496 (50.4)	738 (37.0)	1258 (63.0)	46587	4.3%
2007	22266 (49.4)	22782 (50.6)	758 (36.3)	1332 (63.7)	47138	4.4%
2008	22504 (49.3)	23134 (50.7)	701 (36.7)	1207 (63.3)	45638	4.2%
2009	22774 (49.2)	23501 (50.8)	507 (33.6)	1001 (66.4)	46275	3.3%

Note. Unpublished raw data from division level "Promotions/Retentions (End-of-Year Membership)" reports dated 1999 through 2009.

Summer School

In summer school, English, math, science, and social studies were taught to 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students who failed one or two of these academic subjects and were able to arrange payment for the courses. Data was unavailable for the 2009 summer school cohort. However, data from a 2008 summer school site, representing four of the middle schools from which the current study solicited participants, was available. The 2008 data were valuable for estimating participation, determining typical courses taken by students, and deciding on the number of summer school sites to include in the study.

In 2008, the summer school cohort at one site consisted of 143 students from four middle schools in the district in which the current study took place. Two academic courses were repeated by 29% of the cohort. The percent of the cohort repeating each academic courses was: English (32.8%), science (27.5%), social studies (11.6%), and math (28.0%). Of the 143 students that comprised the 2008 summer school cohort at this site, approximately half knew the researcher in his roll as an administrator. Based on this information, and other considerations discussed later, it was decided to solicit participants from two summer school sites in 2009. These sites represented students from six middle schools.

Participation

Based on these findings, participants were selected who had the following characteristics: (a) were middle school during the 2008-2009 school year, (b) were currently enrolled in one or two academic courses in summer school in 2009, and (c) did not know the researcher in his role as an administrator. As previously discussed, the

researcher was an administrator at one of the summer school sites at the time the study was being conducted; therefore, participants were only selected from the remaining schools that fed into that site. It was expected that the number of participants would be limited by students' willingness to volunteer. After all, the students were being asked to either give-up two of their snack times with their friends or stay after school for an hour after already spending five hours in class. Under these conditions, eight to fifteen participants were envisaged.

Eager Volunteers

During the data collection phase of the study, 38 students volunteered to take part. Parents and their children were eager to be involved. Two staff members, who registered students for summer school and distributed the study fliers and forms, reported that several parents mentioned that it would be a good idea to have their child reflect on the prior school year. Two parents, after being informed that there were not enough interview slots for their children to be interviewed, suggested times on Saturday. Arrangements were made to accommodate this request, and back-to-back interviews were scheduled. Interestingly enough, neither child showed-up for the interview.

Students also showed their enthusiasm. For example, while waiting for a scheduled interviewee to arrive to an after-school session, one female student came to talk to the researcher and was very upset and disappointed when she learned that she would not have an opportunity to be interviewed. She began to blame the summer school teachers and administrators for not turning in her signed forms fast enough, which she believed was the reason she had not been chosen to participate. Although it was explained that her parent

was never contacted to confirm the after-school session time, she continued to press the issue and stated that her mother knew she was staying after school to be interviewed. Fortunately for her, the individual scheduled for that session was sent to the wrong location by his summer school teacher, and she was able to contact her parent and stay. After the interview session, she explained that she really wanted to have the chance to talk to someone about the circumstances that led to her attending summer school. She said, "the boys in my class said they wanted to volunteer to get the free snack, but I really wanted to talk about my year."

This intriguing statement led to the addition of, "Why did you volunteer to be interviewed?" to the interview questions. With the exception of two participants, and this will be addressed in greater detail later, the responses of the other participants were similar. Every participant expressed a desire to talk to someone. As one male participant phrased it, "I just wanted to share my story." It was unfortunate that more students volunteered than could be accommodated within the summer school time frame.

Absent Participants

On two occasions, participants scheduled to be interviewed during the morning session were absent. By the time this was determined by the individual delivering the pass and conveyed to the researcher, it was too late to substitute another participant to be interviewed. There were, however, more students that either volunteered to participate during the second summer school session or were enrolled in both sessions at the first summer school site. As a result, more interviews took place at the first site during the second summer school session.

Demographic Data

During the course of this study, demographic information on the participants was not provided by the school division nor intentionally collected through the questions asked. However, a sizable amount of demographic information was determined through inferences made by the interviewer and recorded in the field notes. The relevance of the data derived not from attempts to make comparisons, but rather came from the ability to describe the diversity of the participants interviewed. Information determined through the course of the interviews included ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, family background, disability status, gender, grade, and course(s) repeated in summer school.

Ethnicity, Age, Socio-economic Status, and Disadvantaged Status.

Ethnicity data was gathered simply by making an educated guess. Participants were identified as White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian. The age of participants was more difficult to collect. During the warm-up questions at the start of the interview, only 5 of the 17 participants gave their age when describing themselves.

Additionally, the original intent was not to gather information regarding a student's socio-economic status (SES). At best, the information collected was unreliable. In the state in which this study was conducted, disadvantaged was defined by enrollment in the federal free or reduced lunch program. The interview protocol did not address this directly or indirectly. "Disadvantaged" was entered as a code when one participant, early in the interviews, indicated that summer school was paid for by someone other than his or her parent. Therefore, "disadvantaged" as a code did not have the same meaning as the stated

definition. It simply meant, in the context of this study, that the participant indicated some degree of financial difficulty.

Essentially, reporting as much information as available, regarding participants' ethnicity, age, SES, and disadvantage status, was a judgment call on the part of the researcher. If the demographic data were necessary for addressing the research questions, the accuracy of such data would be paramount; this was not the case in this study. Although inferential and sometimes incomplete, the data demonstrates the diversity of the participants interviewed.

Family Background

Participants made frequent remarks regarding their family, even though such information was not sought directly in the interview protocol. Often when describing themselves, discussing study habits and parental reactions, participants would mention a step-parent, grandparent, or foster parent. From these clues, guardian status could be inferred. For example, if a participant mentioned that his or her stepmother was very upset at having to pay for summer school, and also discussed their father, it could be reasonably assumed that there are two adults in the home. When only a mother was mentioned in the context of home and studying was done at the father's house on the weekends, it could be inferred that there was one guardian at home, and the parents were separated. In some cases, participants were very specific about the status of their family. This often occurred when participants believed their family arrangements contributed to their academic outcome, which provided the reason for recording it.

Disability Status

Disability status referred to whether a student had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or had a disability under Section 504 of IDEA. Again, this was not information obtained directly through the interview protocol, but could be inferred through comments made by participants. For example, while talking about difficulties with assessments, one participant alluded to being taken to another room by a second teacher in the class to take the assessment. The reference to a second teacher indicated that the participant was a member of a collaborative class, and being taken to another room to take an assessment indicated the participant had modifications through special education.

Equally telling were references to Virginia Grade Level Assessment (VGLA) followed by a detailed description. In some special education circumstances the VGLA takes the place of the statewide assessment for students having an IEP, which indicates difficulty with multiple choice assessments. Less telling, but still suspect, were comments that indicated enrollment in a class of fewer than 10 students. Classes of this size are often termed "self-contained", and students must have an IEP to be enrolled.

Again, the collection of data related to disability status was not intended. It was the product of participants' responses to open-ended questions that allowed information to be inferentially collected. As a result, the data collected was not complete or verifiable, but it contributed to the parameters around which themes were developed.

Participant Identification

The demographic information provided in this study was collected to show the diversity of the participants who were interviewed. Because of the limited number of participants, the data was placed in a table to ensure confidentiality (Table 3-2). If placed

in a matrix table, it might be possible to identify individuals by unique combinations of characteristics. Of the information provided, only gender and grade are unequivocally accurate. The remaining demographics were based upon a combination of inferences and direct statements made during the interviews.

Table 3-2:

Factual and Inferential Demographics of Participants

Demographic	Categories	N
Gender	males	11
	females	6
Grade	6th	5
	7th	3
	8th	9
*Ethnicity	black	9
	white	4
	Hispanic	3
	Asian decent	1
*Special Education		4
*Socio-economic status	disadvantaged	1
*Guardian	mother only	4
	mother/unknown	5
	mother/father	3
	mother/stepfather	2
	father/stepmother	1
	grandparent	1
	foster care	1
**Age	12-14 years old	17

* Contains a combination of inferred and participant stated data
** Based on the statements of five participants

The problems associated with making such assumptions as the ones discussed thus far are obvious, but again, the information collected allowed for a degree of confidence in the fact that a diverse sample of participants was interviewed. Although participants volunteered and were then selected primarily on the basis of scheduling constraints, Table 3-2 indicated the sample was demographically diverse.

The demographic information was not intended to be used to make comparisons between groups. However, when common themes emerged from the analysis of the coded interviews, the relevance of this demographic information was realized. Common themes transcended specific demographics and indicated shared beliefs or experiences between students repeating academic courses in summer school.

Pseudonyms were randomly assigned to each participant, using the most popular names in 2008 according to the U.S. Social Security Administration. This was necessitated by nature and analysis of the data. The data from this study came from over 1000 quotations emerging from interviews with 17 participants. The analysis of the data framed within the context of the participants gave each a voice to tell his or her own story, while at the same time preserving confidentiality.

To facilitate data conceptualization and bring participants' story to life, Table 3-3 was created to show the participants' pseudonym, gender, and course(s) repeated in summer school. Additional demographic information was removed and aggregated in Table 3-2 to maintain anonymity.

Table 3-3:

Participants' Pseudonym, Gender, and Course(s) Repeated

Pseudonym	Gender	Course Repeated in Summer School	Course Repeated in Summer School
Alexander	M	English	
Anthony	M	English	Math
Ava	F	Social Studies	
Christopher	M	English	
Daniel	M	English	
Emily	F	English	
Emma	F	English	
Ethan	M	English	
Isabella	F	Social Studies	
Jacob	M	Math	Science
Jayden	M	Social Studies	
Joshua	M	Social Studies	
Madison	F	Science	
Matthew	M	Math	
Michael	M	English	
Olivia	F	English	
William	M	English	

In summary, the information provided thus far was intended to illustrate the demographic diversity of the participants and to aid in the conceptualization of a composite middle school student from which common themes emerge. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to discuss aspects of their experience that were significant to them. Each fragment of demographic information that emerged from the interviews was relevant to the participants' stories. The shared perceptions and experiences that emerged crossed these demographic boundaries. Participants' demographic information was reported to demonstrate the diversity of the middle school students studied, allow for the comparison to the larger population, and give additional information to practitioners and researchers who want to determine the degree to which the findings of the current study are transferable to their own situation or research.

Methodological Considerations And Procedures

Procedural Overview

Prior to data collection, permission from both the school district and the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. Reviewed literature relating to causes of failing, characteristics of unsuccessful students, and physiological theories related to why students may experience academic difficulty were used to inform the interview protocol.

The researcher identified himself in an information letter sent home with students attending summer school as an employee of the school district and a doctoral student at a state university. An overview of the purpose of the study, time requirements for participants, interview procedures, and confidentiality arrangements were shared. Participants were given the option of being interviewed before or after their summer school

class or over two sessions during their break-time. Interviews were targeted to take 45 minutes.

Participants were greeted at the designated interview area of the participants' summer school site. A sign stating that a meeting was in progress was placed on the door to reduce interruptions. Participants were invited to sit on the couch or chair perpendicular to where the interviewer was seated. Seated in this way, participants were not required to have direct eye contact with the researcher, which seemed to make the interview more like a casual conversation rather than an inquisition. Drinks and snacks, appropriate for the time of day, were arranged on a table at the entrance of the room. Participants were encouraged to eat and drink at the start of the interview. The researcher also ate snacks throughout the interview.

The purpose of the electronic recording device and the interview was reiterated before starting each interview. Participants were reminded of the researcher's role, confidentiality of the interview, and the purpose of study. The researcher stated that the purpose of the study was to understand middle school students' perceptions of why they had an unsuccessful school year, and what factors they believed could have helped them be successful. Interviews started with warm-up questions designed to make the participant feel comfortable, such as "so, tell me about yourself and what you like to do?" Once participants show signs of being comfortable with the conversation, the researcher asked, "so, tell me about school last year."

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked not to share the content of the discussion with other students attending summer school so as not to bias

other potential interviewees. Field notes were taken at the conclusion of each interview to record perceptions of such things as the participants' level of comfort, possible follow-up questions, and other aspects of the interview which may not be apparent from the recording. During the analysis of data, identifiers, such as participants' names and references, which identify them, the study location, friends, and family were replaced with pseudonyms. Data was housed on two external flash drives, one of which was kept on the researcher's person and the other in a locked fire safe at the researcher's home. A third copy of the data was kept on the password protected hard drive of the researcher's computer.

Setting

The school district in which this study was conducted is located in central Virginia and, as Table 3-1 shows, had an end-of-year membership of 46 275 during the 2008-2009 school year. Middle school students, failing one or two academic courses and selected for the current study, were bused from their school zone to one of two summer school sites in the district.

Both 2009 summer school sites were similar campus-style middle schools, each consisting of approximately 13 buildings, situated on roughly 22 acres, and centrally located within the school district. The buildings were single-story structures with classrooms opening directly outdoors onto paved walkways. These covered walkways connected the classroom buildings, as well as the library, office building, gymnasium, and three cafeteria buildings. Students attending summer school were assigned to a single building to attend class and a specific cafeteria in which they had snack time. Summer

school classes were held in three to four of the buildings at each site, and the summer school office was located outside the school's normal administration building at one site and within the administration building at the second site. The researcher's office was located in the administration building at one site, but he was not involved in the summer school process.

Scott (2000) and Green and Hart (1999) noted that a school setting tended to formalize the interview process. Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, and Britten (2002) suggested the balance of power between researcher and child must be equalized as much as possible when conducting research with children. They suggested a setting outside the school in an informal atmosphere where seating arrangements, terminology, and first names are used to reduce the hierarchical relationships experienced between adults and children. Although interviews were conduced in a school setting, at one site they were held in a lounge which offered an atmosphere atypical of the normal school setting. At the second site, an unused classroom was used.

Interviews conducted during summer school took place at the far end of the first summer school site's administration building. At this location, couches were arranged in the interview room around a small coffee table. The researcher sat perpendicularly to the interviewee with the electronic recording device situated off to one side but between the researcher and participant. At each meeting, a "Meeting in Progress" sign was placed on the door to reduce interruptions, and water and snacks were provided for the participants.

Although the participants did not know the researcher in the context of his administrative role, the power differential inherent between middle school students

between the ages of 11 and 14 and an adult male researcher was undoubtedly an issue. In an attempt to reduce the power differential between the adult researcher and the middle school interviewees, the researcher dressed casually in jeans and t-shirts.

Site challenges. Participants were interviewed at one of two summer school sites at which they were enrolled. Seven participants interviewed attended the first summer school site and 10 attended the second site. Each summer school site drew from three middle schools, resulting in a sampling of participants who attended six middle schools during the regular 2008-2009 academic year. At both summer school sites there were two sessions, each lasting for 14 days.

Site one. Several logistical challenges were faced at the first summer school site. For example, two snack times were held at site one, and students attended based on their room number. Eleven out of the 14 students that volunteered at site one during the first summer school session were in a series of rooms that attended snack time at the same interval. This meant that there were only a few opportunities at site one to conduct back-to-back interviews, using both of the available snack times during the first session. Also, because the snack times were the same at both sites and the sites were a 20-minute drive apart, two snack time interviews could not occur on the same day during the first session.

At site one, the process of delivering passes to participants to attend the interview sessions was not consistent. Two individuals associated with summer school were available and willing to carry out this task, but timing was never as good as it was at the second site. In order to complete two, 30-minute interviews, participants needed to be collected from their class immediately at the beginning of the snack time and returned at

the conclusion. On at least three occasions at site one, classes had already been dismissed to snack time before passes were delivered. This resulted in lost time as participants had to be found in the cafeteria. Fortunately, the summer school teachers were very cooperative and gave assurances that the participants would not miss instructions if they continued interviewing passed the designated snack time.

Site two. At site number two, students were reminded several times by a school counselor to return the study paperwork if they were interested in participating. As a result, the bulk of the consent/assent forms were returned within the first few days of the first summer school session. This allowed interviews to begin within five days of summer school starting. Additionally, a high school student volunteer was assigned to deliver passes to participants and bring them to the interview room. With her help, participants were efficiently rotated between classes and interviews. As an interview came to a conclusion, she was at the door with the next participant and ready to take the first one back to class.

At site two, attendance during snack time was based upon grade level. Students taking a sixth grade class attended the first snack time, and seventh and eighth graders attended the second snack time. The grade distribution of the16 student volunteers at the second site allowed many more opportunities to conduct two interviews during the school day. Additionally, a greater number of participants volunteered to be interviewed after their class for an hour at site two than did at the other site during the first summer session. As a result, during the first summer session, two, half-hour interview sessions in the morning and one full hour session in the afternoon could be completed on most days at site two

during the first summer school session. The success in scheduling interviews experienced at this site during the first summer session was due in large part to the exceptional cooperation by the summer school staff.

Data Gathering

Scheduling interviews. The many variables involved in scheduling interviews (site location, interview session chosen by participants, distribution of snack times, grade level, summer school session attended, and room number) were managed by entering the information in a spreadsheet (see Appendix A). The spreadsheet allowed volunteers' information to be sorted and arranged to efficiently schedule interviews. Although 38 students volunteered to participate in the study, only 17 were interviewed due to logistical constraints and absences as explained above. What the spreadsheet revealed was that multiple interviews could be conducted most days at summer school site number two, and one, half-hour session could be conducted most days at site one. There were a few opportunities to conduct a morning interview at one site and an afternoon interview at the other site, but this was not the norm.

Number of participants. By entering the participants' variables into a spreadsheet and looking for the most efficient way in which to schedule interviews, it was originally estimated that 20 of the 38 volunteers could be interviewed for a total of one hour each. If an additional 30 minutes were allotted for follow-up questions, then there would only be time to interview 10 or fewer participants. Decreasing the number of participants would not only decrease the chance of reaching response saturation, it would also decrease the diversity of the participants.

Decision not to conduct follow-up interviews. As discussed earlier, the logistical constraints limited the number of participants that could be interviewed over the course of the two summer school sessions. While working out the interview schedule and before the first interview took place, it was realized that a choice had to be made between having follow-up sessions with all the participants or having more participants to interview. The number of participants and the possible value of follow-up sessions were factors considered when making the decision.

Value of follow-up sessions. Another consideration was the potential value of follow-up sessions. The majority of the volunteers selected 30-minute slots during their snack time to be interviewed, requiring two sessions. The second session was intended to be used as a time for follow-up questions if needed. Additionally, given the non-linear way in which interviews progressed, participants were choosing the direction of their interview and thus the questions asked. It was decided that questions generated by the flow of one participant's interview could be leading if posed to other participants in follow-up interviews. Each participant discussed events and factors important to their story, so to impose questions on participants generated outside their own interview could have the effect of centralizing the responses. Based on these two lines of thinking, it was decided that follow-up interviews would not be held, and that each interview would be held to a total of 60 minutes.

Addition of questions. It was decided that on only two occasions would follow-up sessions have added to the richness of the data. On those two occasions, participants made intriguing statements that generated questions that would have been interesting to ask all

participants. Fortunately, this occurred early in the interviews and only three participants were not asked the additional questions.

The first additional question was generated by a student while discussing his academic performance at an early age. The statement was made that he was not as smart now as he once was. Wanting clarification, the participant was asked why. The response given was essentially that participant's definition of intelligence. The second question was generated by a participant at the end of an interview who stated that the boys in her class just wanted to be interviewed to receive the free snacks, but that was not her reason. She stated that she wanted someone with whom to talk. These two responses were so intriguing that the questions "define smart" and "why did you volunteer to be interviewed?" became the final two questions at end of each subsequent interview.

Planned interview structure. Initially, possible interview questions were created while researching theoretical variables related to unsuccessful academic outcomes. These were categorized around the research questions and reduced to six open-ended questions related to each of the research questions. The original questions were kept as potential follow-ups. The belief was that participants' answers might be brief and having follow-up questions that could address whatever direction answers took could help keep the interview going. This assumed a linear interview model whereby each of the six broad questions could be explored in their own good time. The concept behind the plan was not supported in practice.

Participant guided interview structure. Ultimately, the interviews were driven by the first question: "Tell me about school last year?" Participants responded in multiple

ways, and instead of giving the expected brief answer, they often touched upon areas that, according to the interview protocol, were intended to be addressed later. It was apparent after the first question posed to the first participant that the interview protocol could not be used linearly, but rather needed to be used as a source of follow-up questions dependent upon initial responses. For example, a participant could respond by discussing friends, a teacher, and a consequence received for a specific behavior. Another participant might respond with thoughts about family, failing, and school activities.

Although the request for participants to "tell me about school last year" was not specific to the circumstances which led to the participant repeating one or two academic courses in summer school, the participants appeared to know that the question was directed toward their academic achievement. Therefore, it was decided by the interviewer that the thoughts the participant chose to share when responding to the first question should chart the course for the remainder of the interview. So, if the initial response to "tell me about school last year" included friends, teachers, and behavioral consequences, follow-up questions explored each of these facets. As a result, the line of questions was not a line at all, but rather an ever expanding cascade originating from a single point.

Relevance of literature review. It was earlier argued that the purpose of the literature review in this study was to inform the interview protocol. In other words, to develop a line of questioning, it would be essential to understand the various theories related to academic outcomes. This became even more pertinent as follow-up questions were used to clarify and expanded participants' thoughts rather than continuing using linear questioning. For example, comments like, "I used to think I was smart in elementary

school…" may not have been homed-in on had the theory relating age to perceptions of intelligence not been reviewed.

Interview Routine. The purpose of describing the interview routine is to illustrate the challenges faced by the researcher. Had these factors been apparent during the planning phase of the study, issues could have been anticipated. At the same time, much of the planning for the interviews worked well.

Clothing. A routine was developed to prepare for each interview. This proved to be integral to the success of the study because of the distance between sites, the number of participants, and the interview schedule. The first part of the routine involved changing into casual clothes. To increase the comfort level of participants, it was decided, among other factors, to dress casually as a university student might. To this end, a university hat and three university shirts were purchased to wear while interviewing. Deciding what to wear to each interview was more entailed than one might suspect. Given that there were three shirts from which to choose, one to three students being interviewed in a given day, and the potential for students to have seen a particular shirt at the first interview, it took a considerable amount of planning to get dressed. The point of this exercise was to make the participants feel comfortable and to remove a potentially distracting question from their minds: why does he always wear the same clothes?

Supplies. Interviewing also required a considerable amount of supplies. An ample supply and variety of snacks and drinks, a computer, a notebook, and cooler needed to be carried to each site. To accommodate all the interviewing supplies, a large storage container with wheels was purchased. This acted as a large, covered wheelbarrow to tote

supplies from vehicle to site office, to check-in to the interview room, and back again. Once inside the interview room, the supplies could quickly be arranged for the arrival of the participant. By the last interview, the small plastic wheels of the container were worn away.

The cooler was just large enough to carry six drinks. Two of each, water, blue Gatorade, and red Gatorade, were carried in the cooler. To maintain a casual atmosphere, the interviewer planned to eat and drink with the participant throughout the interview. Beside the fact that this meant eating up to three snack foods each interview day, choosing which drink became part of the planning. For example, if two interviews were to be held back to back, it was important to allow the participant to choose a drink first. Whatever the participant chose, the interviewer had to choose something different in order to have the same variety for the next participant. This was one of the many small challenges that resulted from traveling from site to site. With all the supplies in one container, set-up for the interviews was relatively easy.

Arrival. Arriving 20 to 30 minutes early to an interview was the norm. Between checking-in at the site office, arranging for participants to be brought to the interview room, and setting-up the snacks and computer, the extra preparation time was vital. Factoring set-up time into interview calculations, was not originally foreseen. Therefore, the average 30-minute interview, not including travel time, required 50-60 minutes of commitment.

Playing the part. During the interview, the researcher slumped in his chair and placed his feet up when possible. Snacks and a drink were consumed throughout the

interview and questions were memorized by the researcher to conjure an atmosphere of casual conversation. These actions appeared to reduce the formality of the situation considerably and place the participants at ease. The comfort level of each participant was estimated at the end of each interview on a scale of one to five and recorded as part of the field notes. Aspects of the participants' mannerisms, like tone, length of answers, and eye contact, were used to estimate comfort. Several participants indicated that they were more comfortable talking to the researcher about the events that led to attending summer school than their family, friends, or teachers. Only one of the participants was ranked below a three in comfort level at the first half of his interview, and only one other actually said she was "a little nervous." Her nervousness passed quickly though as evidenced by her lengthy contribution.

Post-interview notes. Post-interview notes were written after each interview session, and this proved to be a great help. Reviewing the notes before the second interview session helped the researcher remember the participants, their line of thinking, and background. Notes were also taken regarding themes, which began to emerge with each interview. Many of the recurring themes recorded in the post-interview notes became initial codes for data analysis. Other notes were reminders of decisions made during the interview process and thoughts the interviewer had during an interview. The notes also provided a place to record demographic information from observations or shared accounts.

Trustworthiness

Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) stated that differences exist between quantitative and qualitative research which make the application of rigor different for each.

For example, unlike a quantitative study, qualitative data is studied holistically due to the belief that multiple realities exist, which are socially constructed and time and context bound. Additionally, qualitative inquiry is not generalizable because of the relatively small sample size, but the findings may be applicable to similar contexts. Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) asserted that the question of rigor could be addressed in a qualitative study by parallel criteria, broadly described as trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of a qualitative inquiry, Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba argued, could be evaluated by assessing its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) stated that credibility is analogous to internal validity. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) describe the validity of qualitative design as the degree to which mutual meaning was found between the participants and the researcher. To enhance credibility (internal validity) in qualitative research, Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) and McMillan and Schumacher recommend a number of strategies, of which the following are relevant: prolonged fieldwork, multi-method strategies, participant verbatim language, low-inference descriptions, mechanically recorded data, participant researcher, and member checking.

Prolonged fieldwork. According to Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, are collectively described by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) as prolonged fieldwork, are "lengthy and intensive contact with the phenomena (or respondents) in the field to assess possible sources of distortion and especially to identify saliencies in the situation" from "in-depth pursuit of those elements"

(Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, p. 18). The current study was conducted over a period of approximately eight weeks. Time spent with participants lasted for between 45 and 60 minutes. It was expected that the researcher's knowledge of the practices, policies, and culture of the school district in which the study was conducted would reduce the need for additional time in the field which might be required by other researchers who are less familiar with the setting and population to be studied. The 19 years the researcher has been an educator, five of which were spent working with academically unsuccessful students at the middle school level as an administrator, proved relevant, not only to the setting, but also to the age level of the participants.

Multi-method strategies. In addition to interviews conducted by the researcher, field notes and a limited amount of student data, which was shared or observed, increased the researcher's understanding of the participants. Field notes contributed to the richness of transcribed data and brought the researcher closer to participants' beliefs and feelings by recording his own. The researcher's thoughts that were recorded in the field notes at the time of the interviews detail what Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) called "mutual and simultaneous influence[s]" which are "prized" because of what can be learned.

Participant verbatim language, mechanically recorded data, and low-inference descriptions. Participants' interviews were electronically recorded by the researcher. The ATLAS.ti software allowed the researcher to use the electronically recorded interviews in their natural form rather than using transcriptions. By transferring electronically recorded interviews to the qualitative analysis software, the researcher not only was confident that verbatim language was used during analysis, but also the difficulties associated with

transcribing aspects of an interview, such as inflections and pauses, were avoided. This gave the researcher the opportunity to review and reflect on interviews as specific quotations were coded.

Participant researcher. To be a participant researcher would require becoming an insider within the context of the group being studied in order to develop an intuitive understanding. In this study, becoming an academically unsuccessful middle schools was not possible. Although the study did not involve the researcher being a participant other than the interviewer, his background as an educator and administrator provided first-hand knowledge of the population from which participants were selected. This strength was also potentially a limitation. As an administrator, who works with students having many of the characteristics that research indicated correlated with academic failure, these interactions potentially introduced bias into the theoretical constructs derived from participants' quotations.

Member checking. The process of continuous participant review of the analysis, confirmation of its accuracy, and final review of the report is termed member checking (Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba, 2007). The realities of interviewing middle school participants attending summer school and related research led to the researcher not using this technique to enhance the study's credibility. Morse (1998) criticized member checking, arguing that the product of qualitative research is the synthesis of multiple participants, which a single participant cannot evaluate. Theory, he contended, is decontexualized, abstract and not modeled after a single participant, therefore, it should not be expected to be an exact fit to a particular participant. Morse maintained that the

researcher was responsible for the product and must remain in control of the research questions and focus because of the multiple views of reality participants may have.

Sandelowski (1993) went a step farther and said that member checking may undermine the validity of the research and produce errors as a result of trying to find consistency among all stories. Sandelowski gave an example of a participant saying that she had never felt the way the researcher had described in the synthesis. This demonstrated that participants had difficulty relating their own concrete experiences to variations experienced by others or to the larger theory. Additionally, Sandelowski argued that stories are not just communications which can be checked by the participant. They are time-bound to the feelings, emotions, and context of the interview. Even checking transcripts for accuracy could result in the participant changing his or her perspective and/or influence future aspects of the study. Sandelowski addressed another difficulty, which may be particularly relevant to the current research. She stated that members may not want to participate in a formal checking process and may only do so to be good participants. Even then, they may be unwilling to disagree with the researcher's analysis. Given the age of the participants, the potential power differential between participants and the researcher, and scholarly language used in the analysis, middle school participants were likely to fall into this category. Based on these considerations and the additional time required of participants, member checking was not used as a strategy to improve credibility.

Transferability

Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) argued that, given the nature of the time and context bound qualitative inquiry, transferability is preferable to generalizability.

Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba stated that transferability is achieved through thick, descriptive data which is "developed about the context so that judgments about the degree of fit or similarity may be made by others who wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere" (p. 19). To this end, the researcher has provided a detailed account of participants' demographic information. Additionally, in the next chapters, thick, rich narratives of the participants are presented to put the analysis and discussion into context so practitioners and future researchers can make judgments about the degree to which the findings of the current study are applicable to their own situation.

Dependability and Confirmability

Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) argued that a dependability judgment could be made through examination of the process by the establishment of an audit trail. Summarizing what constitutes an audit trail, Shenton (2004) stated that it should include the research design, its implementation, a detailed account of data gathering, and a reflective appraisal of the study. Confirmability judgments are made through the examination of the study's product (Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba, 2007). Ultimately the researcher must demonstrate that the findings are the product of the participants rather than investigator bias, emphasizing the importance of the audit trail as an essential tool for making confirmability judgments (Shenton, 2004).

Audit trail. Sandelowski (1993) and Koch (2006) argued that auditability may be the most appropriate strategy for validating the findings in qualitative studies. To this end, care was taken to describe the research design, its implementation, data gathering, and researcher's thought processes. The current study relied heavily on detailed accounts of the

methodological and analytical process used to interpret data. The audit trail, linking each phase of the study, was intended to add to the study's credibility and dependability by guiding the reader through the researcher's thought processes. Argen (2000) argued that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know, and as a result, interpretations will always be debatable. Through the researcher's openness about his or her own values and methodological decisions, the moral soundness of interpretive studies becomes the basis upon which they can be judged. The openness to which Argen referred is an audit trail of decisions made by the researcher. The auditability of a researcher's interpretations, Guba (1989) contended, is important when attempting to support the analysis in a study.

The trustworthiness of the study then becomes more a matter of making the decision process visible and practicing good science rather than relying on rules applied universally for every study (Sandelowski, 1993). Koch (2006) agreed, stating the audit trail left throughout a study, which accounts for decisions, regarding theoretical, methodological, and analytic choices, provides readers a basis upon which to judge the researcher's interpretations. Although the interpretation of data may not be agreed upon by all readers, an understanding of the researcher's decision-making process within the context of the study should be clear.

Intra-coder reliability. In the next chapter, a detailed description of the researcher's analytical inductive coding process is presented. It involves the researcher inductively coding units of meaning and listening to them multiple times over an extended period. By setting aside the data for several weeks, the researcher was able to analyze it again with a fresh perspective.

The units of meaning captured by the researcher were the product of the participants' perceptions and the experiences and reviewed literature of the researcher. To enlist a disinterested auditor and train him or her to the same degree of the researcher, as Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) prescribed, to recode interview data would have been difficult. As Sandelowski (1993) stated, when attempts are made to show reliability in this way, what is being sought is a consensus about the nature of reality. This, she argued, is in opposition to the "naturalistic/interpretive paradigm" in which "reality is assumed to be multiple and constructed" (p. 3).

Limitations

As is the case with all studies, limitations exist in the current study. With the possible exception of site triangulation, other methods of triangulation were not available. Participants originated from seven schools within the district in which the study took place, and the themes that emerged crossed these boundaries. However, specific analysis of data for similarities among sites was not performed. Additionally, because of the nature of the inquiry and the ages of the participants, other materials, such as report cards, were not available to cross-check data.

The current study was also limited by the inherent flaws of the researcher, who as the interviewer was the instrument. Although being in an educational setting for 19 years had the advantages of being familiar with the population and organization, it also contributed to the possibility of the introduction of researcher bias. The researcher had worked with at-risk middle school students for five years as an administrator, and as a result, undoubtedly brought preconceived notions of the factors affecting the achievement

of this population. Participants, for the most part, determined the direction of the interview. However, topics of interest from which follow-up questions were created came from the researcher. Attempts were made to combat this by listing topics hit upon by participants during extended discourses. Bias may still have been introduced by the simple fact the researcher choose the topics to revisit.

The number of participants and the time spent with each was also a limitation. Although seventeen was a respectable number of participants given the nature of the study, whether or not data saturation was achieved is unknown. Transferability of the data to the larger population of academically unsuccessful students was not achieved, but again, that was not a goal of the current study. Transferability of findings to smaller groups is left to the judgment of others. The time spent with participants was also a limitation that resulted from a small time frame in which participants were available to be interviewed. As previously discussed, the choice had to be made between follow-up interviews and more participants. It was decided that additional participants was the best option. However, if time was available, follow-up interviews might have yielded additional insight.

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of factors which contributed to the academic outcomes necessitating enrollment in academic courses in summer school, and what factors they believe could have made a positive impact. Although not necessarily a limitation because of the stated purpose, the absence of negative cases prevent the researcher from determining if participants' perceptions were unique compared to students performing at different levels. The addition of negative cases in future studies might yield additional insight

Summary

A qualitative, ethnographic design was used to examine the perceptions of middle school students, who had failed one or more academic courses during the 2008-2009 school year. Site and interview challenges were overcome through both detailed initial planning and flexibility. Participation was solicited from middle school students, grades six through eight, who had not had contact with the researcher in his role as an administrator. Additionally, to help diminish the power differential between the researcher and participants and relax the atmosphere, participants were encouraged to eat snacks with the researcher.

ATLAS.ti software and an Excel spreadsheet were used to organize data into related themes from which interpretations could be made. The credibility of interpretations came from prolonged field-work, verbatim language from participants' electronically recorded voices, and the audit trail created by the researcher. By using this approach, participants' rich narratives provided insight into the complex interaction of factors that contributed to their not meeting the academic, promotion requirements without attending summer school. Ultimately, the trustworthiness of the current study relies on the description of the processes from which judgments can be made by practitioners and other researchers.

CHAPTER 4 Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study in light of the decisions made by the researcher in analyzing the interviews, because in a qualitative study, such as this, the researcher is the instrument. The chapter is divided into three main sections. First, the analysis process is discussed. The steps taken to segment interviews into units of meaning, develop codes, and find relationships is detailed. Second, emergent themes are framed within the context of the research questions using the thick, rich narrative from interviews with 17 middle school students repeating one or two academic courses in summer school. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

Analysis Process

In this section of the chapter, the analysis process will be discussed so conclusions can be drawn about the study's credibility and to add to the literature related to the analysis of interviews. Initially, interview protocol development is revisited to demonstrate the researcher's intent to decrease his influence on participants' responses. The techniques of recording interviews, creating primary documents, and determining units of mean are then described. The process of assigning codes to units of meaning and then checking the fidelity within codes is discussed. Finally, the way in which the researcher audited codes for meaning is addressed.

Interview Protocol Development

Before conducting the study, the researcher reviewed related research on the causes of academic failure, characteristics of unsuccessful students, and psychological theories related to motivation, effort, and goal setting. An initial interview protocol, consisting of six broad categories, corresponding to the research questions, and approximately 41 questions, was originally formulated around related readings. To increase face validity, the initial interview protocol was given to middle school educators for review. Based on their recommendations, adjustments were made to make questions more open-ended, enhance the age-appropriateness of the language, and improve the overall quality of the questions. The recommendations from those solicited lead the researcher to reduce the interview protocol to six broad questions. The intention was to allow participants to offer their own insights rather than direct their responses with potentially leading questions (see Appendix A). This approach was supported by Verschuren (2001) who suggested that decreased verbal stimuli would increase the holistic nature of the study and decrease the tendency for the researcher's perspective to diffuse into the participants' responses.

Recording

Interviews were recorded on an Apple iBook G4, using Garage Band software. These were then saved in MP4 format and transferred to a PC computer. For added security, external hardware was added which continually backed-up computer applications and data. Atlas ti was installed and used for analysis.

The analysis process started with learning how to operate the software. As a whole, ATLAS.ti was relatively easy to use with only one minor limitation. The version of ATLAS.ti used for this study did not have the capability of synchronizing transcribed text

with its corresponding audio. Not being able to read the text as it was listened to was a minor limitation, which only had the effect of slowing down the checking of fidelity within codes. This resulted from the greater amount of time required to listen to audio segments assigned to specific codes than it would have been needed to read and compare the same segments. Other than that, the audio preserved many more of the nuances of the interviews than would have been possible from transcripts alone, and it avoided potential transcription errors that might occur during transcription. The research questions were used as an initial reference point for identifying themes within data. Field notes, taken by the researcher immediately after each interview, detailing the researcher's perceptions of the participants' comfort level, appearance, and overall impression of the interview were included when interpreting and coding interviews.

Primary Documents

Once ATLAS.ti was learned, the audio files of the interviews were loaded as primary documents into the program. Documents were named using the participants' pseudonym and interview date. Using the open coding feature, initial codes were added to the code manager. These were based on comments made by the interviewer in the post-observation field notes and on the study's research questions. As codes were added, a short definition was added to each, ensuring consistency of use of the codes.

Units of Meaning

For the purposes of this study, a "unit of meaning," or "quotations," was defined as one or more sentences uttered by a participant, during an interview, which conveyed a complete thought. Using headphones, the primary documents were opened and reviewed.

The program window, which played the audio, functioned much in the same way any computer-based audio player might, having play and pause buttons and a tracking bar. Two additional buttons were used to mark the beginning and end of audio segments to be coded. ATLAS.ti calls these segments quotations. As participants expressed ideas and made statements, each quotation was given an ID number that corresponded to the time interval within the primary document. These ranged from 20 seconds to several minutes.

The difficulty in this process was determining when an interviewee had reached the end of a thought. It was discovered that a quotation could be more efficiently marked, if after marking the beginning, the end button was continually hit at the end of each audio pause while allowing the interview to continue to play. Although this may sound insignificant, the time required to code audio was nearly 2:1. In other words, it required approximately two hours to initially code one hour of recorded interview. By continually marking the end of a quotation at each pause, it could be determined if the next sentence was also part of the current unit of meaning.

Analytical Inductive Coding

Analytical inductive coding was used to create code as units of meaning were identified. Once the units of meaning were created, there were several ways to assign them a code. An already established code could be assigned or a new code created, using the open coding feature. Additionally, multiple codes could be assigned to one quotation. Often two or more units of meaning were related in some way. For example, if an idea, already captured as a quotation, was later expanded upon, this also could be captured as a quotation and linked to the original statement. This was a very useful feature, as

participants often addressed several ideas within a single answer and later went back to expand upon each.

When a unique unit of meaning was found within an interview, a code was created and named to house similar quotations. Each code was named with one or more descriptive words, and the parameters of its meaning were defined. Every statement made by participants conveyed units of meaning within a particular context that was related to a broader theme. For example, when a participant reported being distracted by a student in the class in which he or she failed, the quotation was coded as a distraction. It was also coded in relation to the theme of attributions for failing and within the context of the failed class. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, almost every statement made by participants was coded, whether or not the relevance was know at the time.

This strategy had three primary benefits. First, the researcher was confident in the fact that all units of mean had been captured and assigned to a code. This helped to ensure that, initially imperceptible but relevant, details were not overlooked. Second, related-minor themes and information were discovered that might not have been if all comments had not been coded. For example, coding units of meaning coding found in participants' responses to the warm-up questions yielded a surprising amount of demographic information. Finally, once units of meaning were coded for all the interviews, the necessity for reviewing entire interviews for a second time was decreased because essentially all the participants' thoughts had been coded. When the researcher checked for fidelity within and across codes, it gave the researcher the opportunity to assign, remove, and/or link units of meaning in relation to codes.

Checking for Uniqueness Across Codes and Fidelity Within Codes

Because each unit of meaning expressed by participants was coded, regardless of its known relevance at the time, it could be reasonably assumed that all data contained within the interviews was captured and assigned one or more codes. By the time all the interviews were reviewed, units of meaning had been assigned to 86 different codes. With this many codes, there were two primary concerns. First, the possibility existed that some of the codes were redundant. Second, the fidelity of the units of meaning within each code was a concern.

Uniqueness across codes. To begin to address these issues, an Excel spreadsheet was created in which the code names and their corresponding descriptors were entered (see Appendix B). For example, the code "barriers to passing" and its descriptor, "what lead to failing (single test, project, lack of EC) the make or break event," was entered into the spreadsheet. Two additional columns were then added to the left, entitled "Theme" and "Context." Under theme, each code was assigned a word which represent an underlying idea. With the exception of three codes, the 86 original codes were assigned one of fifteen single words: adult, attribution, behavior, bonds, challenges, classroom, environment, interaction, intervention, interview, motivation, outcome, self-perception, student, and teacher. For example, codes having to do with motivation were labeled as such. Some of the codes were also assigned a context. As the name suggests, codes were assigned a word that described the context in which an event occurred. For example, the source of motivation for participants could have occurred in the context of either the passed or failed class.

By assigning a theme and context descriptors to each of the original 86 codes in the spreadsheet, codes could be sorted by common theme or context. One advantage in doing so was that similar codes could be grouped and reviewed for uniqueness. The first two codes to be reviewed in this way were "attribution to failing" and "contributed to failing." At first glance, these codes were suspect. Even if they were found to have subtle difference, it would make a good place to begin checking for fidelity within each code. This process of checking quotations within codes also helped to establish the parameters and more accurately depict the meaning of each code. By the end of this process of code checking, 84 codes remained. "Contributed to failing" was merged with "attribution to failing," and "value of failed class" was merged with "long-term goals." As a result, the uniqueness of codes was reasonably ensured.

Fidelity within codes. Once the researcher was satisfied with the uniqueness of each code, fidelity within each code was addressed. Initially, units of meaning assigned to each particular code were reviewed. This involved listening to units of meaning contained in codes to determine the similarity of the units of meaning and the degree to which each fit within the parameters of the code's description. For example, within the code "distractions," units of meaning were first checked against the code's descriptor: "factors that participants stated diverted their attention from educational activities."

Then the determination was made if a unit of meaning also could be, if not already, linked to an additional code. For example, if a specific distraction was also reported as a major cause for the participant failing, then the unit of meaning was also linked to the code

"attribution to failing." This was essential to ensure that units of meaning, initially captured and assigned to one code, could be linked to related codes created later.

The data was then set aside for approximately one month. These was done out of necessity, but it had the added benefit of allowing the researcher to review the data again from a fresh perspective. This analysis involved again reviewing units of meaning for code fidelity. Overall, very few codes were moved or linked to additional codes during this round of analysis.

The final stage of analysis involved the researcher assigning codes to each research question and immersing himself into the related codes. The Excel spreadsheet, which initially aided in checking for uniqueness across codes, had the second advantage of being able to sort codes by theme and context descriptors (see Appendix B). This allowed the researcher to match codes with individual research questions and develop underlying themes. Units of meaning within each code related to a specific research question were again analyzed and many were transcribed. The researcher's immersion in units on meaning related to each research question was the basis for the following analysis of emergent themes.

Emergent Themes Related To The Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of factors which contributed to the academic necessity of enrollment in academic courses in summer school, and what factors they believed could have contributed to a different outcome. This study focused on the following research questions: How do middle school students, enrolled in one or more academic courses in summer school, perceive:

1. academic outcomes, and to what these were attributed,
2. the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome,
3. sources and levels of motivation,
4. sources and levels of school bonds,
5. interactions and relationships with school personnel, and
6. the role and level of involvement of adults in their academic lives?

The circumstances to which participants' attributed their performance were subsumed under nine themes. Emerging themes represent the shared beliefs of a minimum of four participants.

In the analysis of data that follows, emerging themes are related to the research questions. As the data were analyzed, quotations were either paraphrased or written verbatim. The preferred method of analysis was to use verbatim quotations to preserve the rich narrative, but at times, it was necessary to paraphrase participants' non-continuous thoughts. Multiple quotations are presented to convey the sense of each emerging theme.

Academic Outcomes and Their Attribution

Academic outcomes were divided into two types: passing and failing. Participants frequently attributed their academic outcomes to both internal and external sources. Of these, the code, "attribution to failing," contained factors that participants described as having a significant impact on their negative academic outcomes, resulting in attendance in summer school. Overall, participants made 58 statements, which attributed academic outcomes to various factors.

Table 4-1 lists to what participants attributed poor academic performance. The reasons varied greatly, and they frequently attributed failure to more than one source. The 58 quotes, attributing academic outcomes to factors, were broadly categorized into six attribution sub themes, consisting of teachers, students, behavior, distractions, assignments and assessments, and academic resignation.

Table 4-1:

Attribution Sub Themes

Attribution Sub Themes	Participants' Attributions for Negative Academic Outcomes
Teacher	assessments were more difficult than what was taught perception that teacher wanted the student to fail inadequate teacher explanations nothing done in class the last week of school which prevented raising the grade
Students	not doing homework laziness concentrated on the class the student liked not doing everything asked not enough studying procrastination not paying attention lying to parent about academic performance
Behavior	behaviors which resulted in missing class gang activity
Distractions	drama in school friends in the class students talking students throwing paper balls boredom playing music magic tricks

Assignments and Assessments	a single assignment, weight of assignments specific topics in the curriculum information learned was in a different format on assessments writing essays group work failing state assessment did not bring homework to school test anxiety a single grade
Academic Resignation	giving-up
Other	hospitalization due to depression illness. personal issues moving to new area where the school was ahead of previous school internal struggle family situation

Student. Teachers were not often primarily blamed for academic outcomes. As Jacob stated, "my teacher was cool and all; I just didn't pay attention." This, he said later, was because he was being the class clown. Additionally, Jacob admitted that he lied to his mother about his performance, and had he not done so, he would have passed: "It was more that I was lying that kept me here. If I didn't lie to her, I probably wouldn't be here right now… because she would have forced me to do my work." By the time his parent started monitoring his grade, Jacob stated he had dug such a deep hole that he could not recover.

Another student, Anthony, was asked what he would need to help maintain a passing grade. He listed areas where he should improve and refrained from citing external

causes. Anthony said, "I don't think it was my family or my mom's fault. I think it was my fault because I should have paid attention and done everything they asked me."

All but one participant, Isabella, pointed to themselves as the primary reason for their academic outcomes. Poor work ethic, lack of attentiveness, and problematic behavior were most often cited as personal traits that contributed to failing. As Emma said, "if I had not been lazy… [and had] avoided drama…, controlled my anger, and done my work, I wouldn't be here right now." Similarly, Madison stated that "some of the courses [at her school were] hard, but that was just because most of the time [she] didn't turn in most of the stuff."

Christopher also declared the schoolwork to be difficult and came to a similar conclusion. Moving into the school district from out of the state in which this study was conducted, Christopher described how his current school was much more demanding than his former school. He said, "for the first two [nine-weeks], I was way behind. By the time I caught up in the second semester, it was really just about too late." However, in retrospect Christopher said, "I could have probably put in more studying time than I did… I don't think I finished as much homework as I could have. I kinda laid it off for a day… and then was in a rush to finish it."

As the data illustrated, participants overwhelmingly faulted their own actions or inactions for the academic outcomes earned. Poor work ethic, inappropriate behavior, and lack of attentiveness were most often cited as personal, contributing flaws. Participants asserted that had they studied more and/or done their homework outcomes would have been different. Inappropriate behavior, such as lying and disrupting class, were also

reported as causes of academic failure. Finally, the many forms of "drama" and distractions at school added to the difficulty of some students to be academically successful.

Behavior. Ten participants attributed their unsuccessful academic outcomes to their problematic behavior. Participants' descriptions of their own behavior ranged from talking in class to gang activity. Madison summarized this when she said, "what affected my grades was me being a teenager." She went on to list aspects of teen life that affected her grades, such as, personal issues with her family, peer pressure, girlfriends, and boyfriends. Participants' relationships with other students affected their academic lives. Interactions with others sometimes became so all-consuming that participants could not focus on schoolwork, which led to low academic outcomes.

For example, Emma asserted that personal issues with other students were such a distraction that it was one of her primary reasons for falling behind academically. She said, "I wouldn't do my work 'cause like school, I only came here because I liked getting in drama… I should have avoided drama.., and if I had done that… I would have done my work, and I would not be here right now." As her statement illustrated, the distraction became the reason for coming to school. Emma described the circumstances by which the drama, as she called it, would consume her thoughts and divert her attention from the tasks at-hand. Emma gave an example of the drama saying, "I was taking this test when this girl came up to me and tell me that the girl she, um, had said something about me, and I was like, oh my goodness I've got to talk to her and deal with this with her because I am tired of this stuff. I was focusing on the problem… and I failed the test."

In retrospect, Emma realized the effect this had on her grades, saying, "I was too busy always trying to confront her and tell her to stop; and since I was too busy doing that, um, it made me get bad grades 'cause instead of focusing on my work and school I was focusing on me, and that did a lot of bad things to my grades." Later in the interview, one of Emma's strategies for success the following year was to reduce the personal interactions and the subsequent "drama."

The negative effect social interaction had on the academic performance of some participants was strengthened by one of Ethan's stories. During the first nine weeks, Ethan had few friends, but as the year progressed the number of friends he had increased along with his problematic behaviors which led to his frequently being removed from the class. Ethan said, "they would throw stuff, and I would throw it back. And I would get caught…. It started in the second, because in the first nine weeks I really didn't know much people, but then I knew more people…. I had like As for the first, second, and third. But when I got used to it and stuff, it dropped to Ds and then went to an F."

Extreme examples of negative social interactions, which affected academic outcomes, were provided by Anthony and William. Both boys presented themselves as self-reflective thinkers. Each reflected between sessions on their first interview and wanted to share more of their stories. During one of his insightful moments, Anthony described a situation in which academics affected his behavior rather than the reverse. He stated, "… I punch[ed] him… because I didn't really want anyone to talk to me because I was frustrated because I had to go to summer school…"

William provided another example of the potential for social interactions to have a negative impact on academic outcomes. At the beginning of his second interview session, William stated that there were "things [he] forgot to mention about why [he] was doing so bad." He went on to recount how the combination of playing a video game and talking to a relative lead to him becoming involved in a gang at the age of ten. "I was going around telling people, and it kinda got me in trouble 'cause fights and people not liking me. And it affected my school work 'cause I thought because I was in some big gang, I didn't have to do nothing." Looking back, William said that his grades were so "bad" that he did not know how the teachers passed him. Although William reported having since left the gang, it continued to influence his performance. "I have been trying to put that behind me, but still a little of that stuff is in my head, which is affecting me, and that's why I am here right now… that's what's messing up my school work." Although his rejection of negative social influences was beneficial, the "stuff" on William's mind continued to be a distraction for him throughout the year.

Madison summarized it best, stating "what affected my grades was me being a teenager." Personal issues with family, peer pressure, relationships with other middle school students, and the "drama" of it all lured participants away from their academic goals. Participants were cognizant of the effect these behaviors had on their academic outcomes in retrospect, but it was unclear if they were aware during the course of the regular school year.

Distractions. Beyond William's internal struggles to remain focused, he stated that a "normal" day consisted of student disruptions followed by teacher responses, which were

just as distracting. William named four students and stated that on a regular day, in the class in which he failed, the named students mocked what everyone said, and the teacher was constantly yelling at them. William was not the only participant to associate poor academic outcomes with distractions. Eight participants alluded to distractions 28 times while discussing their academic outcomes. Participants alluded to being distracted by such factors as other students talking, students throwing paper balls, their own friends, boredom, playing music, and even magic tricks. Participants often described the consequences given to the offenders as being additional distractions. Teachers dealt with the distractions by moving the offending student to a different seat, sending him/her to the principal's office, sending him/her out of the room, talking to him/her outside the classroom, or giving him/her two choice, either behave or be sent out of the class.

For example, Jayden stated that he was primarily responsible for his academic outcome; however, 10 of the 28 quotes coded as distractions came from his interview. According to Jayden, two students often disturbed the class. As a result, Jayden said, "the teacher, instead of teaching, he would be like arguing with them, and that took time from us learning the stuff." This affected him academically, he said, because "it was a really hard [class]… all those interruptions and misbehaviors, I couldn't really get what I need to learn. So here comes the tests and quizzes, and I didn't know what most of the answers were."

Like William and Jayden, Anthony mentioned being distracted by other students as a reason for not doing well in class. He said, "kids throwing paper balls wouldn't allow me to pay attention because I would get distracted or just play with them." Anthony went on to

say that "the teacher gives warnings, and the third one you get sent to the principal." Despite this, Anthony estimated that distractions still occur during fifty percent of the class.

In two cases, distractions that affected participants' academic outcome were student responses to negative perceptions of the teacher. Isabella asserted that "it is the students and the teachers… the students get to the teacher, and the teacher fusses back and writes [the students] up." Isabella believed that a more effective way of dealing with distracting students would be to give them one warning and then send the offending student out of the class.

The same notion that both the students and the teacher can cause distractions which influence academic outcomes was echoed in comments made by Daniel. He stated that students would intentionally cause distractions to produce negative teacher responses. The teacher, in turn, "yelled at the class" and made them work without teacher assistance. "Some kids just get her mad 'cause she doesn't like people whistling, so kids would whistle in class, and she would get mad at us," said Daniel. When asked "why do you think kids where trying to make her mad?" Daniel responded, "I think they just like to do that." However, when asked if students did it in the class he passed, Daniel said "no, 'cause they knew she was a nice teacher…. sometimes when you don't like a teacher you do something that annoys her."

Participants reported distractions affecting academic outcomes to various degrees. Interestingly, teachers appeared to promote distractions in several forms. The reported methods of handling distractions were either ineffective or created additional interruptions.

In both cases, instruction time and lesson continuity were sacrificed. Equally intriguing was evidence of cyclical, teacher-student disruptive behavior. Participants reported cases in which either the students' or teacher's behavior elicits an even greater, distracting response. Ultimately, the examples suggest that the way in which distractions were dispatched affected the learning environment as much as the original disruption.

Assignments and assessments. Participants frequently believed that a specific event or assignment dealt the final blow to their grade. For example, an incomplete test grade, not understanding one topic, group work, one packet at the end of the year, one project, not studying for a test, homework, and a pop-quiz were cited by participants as events which ultimately resulted in repeating the course in summer school. Additionally, participants expressed difficulties with certain types of assignments or assessments as a primary or secondary cause for their academic outcomes.

For example, Matthew stated that the majority of the material taught was relatively easy. The difficulties emerged in the quizzes and tests when the teacher "switched it around to trick you" that he became confused, and his grade began to drop. He went on to say that, unlike most peoples' knowledge that was localized, his was "scattered all over the place" and "deep in there." Daniel expressed similar difficulties explaining, "the quizzes are what messed me up. They were harder than what we learned. She taught us something, and we got quizzes from something else." He believed that he could have passed if he "thought harder and worked harder."

Although the participants took responsibility for non-completion of assignments or not studying, it was common for them to describe how they underestimated the impact of

their inaction. Jacob said, “I really didn’t do the homework, and it really wasn’t that we had a lot of homework, but it counted for so much…” When Jacob was asked how much the homework counted, he responded, “I don’t know, a lot… because in fifth grade I didn’t do homework and I still passed it, but this times I failed.” Madison came to the same conclusion saying, “since I didn’t really turn in all my homework; that’s what held me back.” She also realized too late the significant weight that assignments carried saying, “the only thing I regretted was not turning in the homework when I did because if I would have, I would have had like a ‘C’ and… wouldn’t be [in summer school].”

The examples demonstrate that the participants believed that a single event resulted in them failing and being forced to attend summer school. It could be termed the “last straw” reasoning. Participants did not acknowledge multiple academic indicators from which their grade was derived. They only recognized the one which could have made the difference. In other words, only the last straw placed on the camel’s back was attributed for its breaking, rather than the entire load.

Teachers. Only one participant, Isabella, primarily faulted the teacher for her failing the class. She stated that, “I don’t know why the teacher wouldn’t tell me my grade; if I had a low grade… [she] should have told me… so I could bring my grade up.” Although Isabella made this argument, in the school division in which this study took place, students and parents had access to class grades via a password protected website.

Isabella went on to describe an argument she had with the teacher whose class she failed only days before the end of the school year. During the argument, she confronted the teacher, saying she was only one to two points away from passing. “That’s how I knew

[the teacher] wanted to fail me because if I am only one or two points off why can't I just finish [the worksheets]?" Throughout Isabella's interview, she referred to this teacher as "the teacher that failed me."

One could derive from the comments of other participants that they secondarily faulted the teacher for their academic outcomes. For example, although they held themselves accountable for their academic outcomes, two students described how they had told their parents "about the teacher," and stated that their parents were not angry about their academic performance. This was interpreted as indicating that, to some degree, both of these participants and their parents believed the teacher was at fault.

Teachers' ability to educate was also called into question as a secondary attribution for participants' failure. While describing the characteristics of the perfect teacher, Emma emphasized that a teacher's ability to present information was crucial, stating "that is what happened to me… the teacher wouldn't explain stuff the correct way, so I would do my work the wrong way." Daniel also asserted that "we don't have many smart people in the class… it was mostly the teacher because she doesn't teach that well."

All except three participants in this study believed that the teacher, in whose class they were unsuccessful, disliked them. Most did not indicate that this had an impact on their grades. In two extreme examples, however, participants or their parents alluded to race as a secondary reason for academic outcomes. Emma stated that at first she believed her teacher was racist because he was always "mean" to her, but in retrospect believed that "he had all the right to get mad at her" because she did not do her work. William also attributed the drop in his grade from a B to an F to his teacher's disliking him. Discussing

this with his father, William interpreted of their conversation to mean that his father believed the teacher was racist. William disagreed, responding to his father, "I don't think it is anything like that; I don't think he likes my attitude or the way I encourage myself."

As the examples demonstrate, the majority of participants did not directly attribute failing to their teachers. However, teachers were not portrayed as inculpable either. Not only did participants insinuate teachers contributed to their academic outcomes, but also there were indications that parents reinforced the notion. Although "lack of concern for the student" was not specifically stated, this can be derived from each of the participants' statements. Statements containing "disliked" and "racist" indicated the participant perceived the teacher as not caring for his or her well-being. The same holds true for Isabella's perception of the events surround her failing. She does not understand why her teacher would not warn her that she was endanger of failing nor allow her to earn the one to two points necessary to pass. She does not understand because a caring individual would not act in the described manner. The theme, "lack of concern," emerged from participants almost as an afterthought. Participants accepted primary responsibility for their academic outcomes, but the perception that teachers' concern for them could have influenced academic outcomes lingered amongst some.

Passing. To this point, the analysis has focused on the factors to which participants' attributed their being academically unsuccessful. When asked to discuss how their school year went, participants primarily focused on negative, rather than positive, academic outcomes. Given their situation at the time, it was not unexpected that there would be more references to negative outcomes. However, eight participants stated reasons

for academic success while making comparisons between classes. Common among participants' comments was that they attributed positive academic outcomes to a teacher or the assistance of another adult.

For example, comparing her performance during the regular school year and summer school, Madison attributed passing summer school to the teacher. She described the teacher as fun, and stated that he explained topics in a way that, not only she but also, the entire class could understand them. Likewise, Matthew stated that the reason he and the entire class passed one particular academic class, during the regular school year, was the incentives given by the teachers. These incentives involved earning tickets that could be redeemed for candy. Michael also attributed passing two courses to the interventions of his teachers. He said the teachers took him aside and told him he was in danger of failing. One of the teachers, Michael explained, allowed him to redo assignments, retake assessments, and mapped out the remaining assignment that needed to be completed successfully in order for him to pass the course.

Emma stated that the reason she passed one of the difficult academic courses was because an adult, non-family member picked her up each Saturday the last six weeks of school and tutored her. Emma said, "I guess that is why I passed [that course] and not [the other subject] because… the stuff the teachers explained to me, but I didn't get… so I asked him, and he would explain it to me a little bit more clearly." In another academic course she passed, which Emma described as her favorite, she said that the teacher was the type "that wouldn't just let you fail a grade." Emma said he would make statements like "you are going to do your work; you've got to turn it in." She continued, saying "if he saw

you just sitting there, he would [say] 'do you need help in anything; are you OK, and if you said 'no,' then he would [say] 'do your work then 'cause I know you don't want to see me next year.' That's why I think I passed."

Jacob abridged the sentiment of the participants, saying, "I found that when I had more people watching over me, like my mom helping me with tutoring…, more people looking over me, it helped me want to do better then just barely passing, and that's how I started to pass." Participants did not attribute academic success to their own efforts. Instead, they acknowledged the efforts of the teachers in the passed classes or an outside adult. The common theme that emerged from the examples was that participants associated the efforts of a caring adult with their academic success.

The analysis of the participants' statements regarding to what they attributed outcomes revealed several themes. Participants primarily accepted responsibility for academic outcomes, and occasionally pointed to distractions and their own behavior as contributing factors. One prominent theme that emerged in each case was the effect the teacher could have on academic outcomes. To an extent, teachers were seen as playing a role in both creating and removing distractions which disrupted the learning environment. Also, the perception that the teacher or another adult exert effort and exhibited concern for the participant was credited for participants' academic success, while the lack of effort or concern from teachers paralleled academic failure.

The Relationship among Ability, Effort, and Outcome

Applying the expectancy-value theory, a student should exert enough effort to obtain a reward if he or she believed the task at-hand could be accomplished. In this

situation, confidence to complete the task would originate from the concept of his or her academic ability. The reward would be derived from passing the course and avoiding the negative alternative of attending summer school. Therefore, a student should exert enough effort to pass an academic course if the belief existed that he or she had the ability.

Determining the relationship among participants' reported ability, effort, and outcome. It was not unexpected that the participants in this study, with the exception of Alexander and Emma, did not concisely link ability, effort, and outcomes in one unit of meaning. The relationship between these factors, for the majority of participants, could only be analyzed out of context from one another. For example, participants did not directly report that they lacked the intelligence to pass the course during the regular academic year and therefore did not expend the necessary effort.

However, participants frequently reported on their ability and effort independently. The summer school courses in which they were enrolled and the consequence received served as outcomes. For example, participants alluded to their ability, both when describing the difficulty of the schoolwork and when assessing their own intelligence. They also frequently addressed their own effort on tasks and in the courses.

As a result, the majority of the data representing ability, effort, and outcome were independent units of meaning. Although the factors were not frequently found together, participants' beliefs regarding each could be analyzed. For example, if several participants' statements indicated a low concept of his or her ability, minimal effort, and subsequent low academic performance, an emerging theme could be suggested. To that end, a combination

of direct quotes and paraphrases related to ability, effort, and outcome were organized in a table so that emerging themes could be conceptualized (see Appendix C).

Ninety-nine quotes, originally coded as self-perception, were reviewed to identify participants' perception of their own ability, the origin of positive perceptions of their ability, and the origin of negative perceptions of their ability. Quotations coded as effort were also then reviewed. There was not a specific code for outcome; however, codes, which were identified as outcome related in the codes spreadsheet, were reviewed to identify participants' beliefs about their own academic outcomes.

Specifically, quotes that were concrete examples of academic outcomes, rather than to what outcomes were attributed, were used. For example, when the participants learned they must attend summer school, the inevitability of failing, and statements regarding final grades were noted. The codes used to identify outcome related quotes were failure realized, grade performance insight, past performance, recognition of performance, time, and performance. Additionally, the fact that all the participants were repeating one or two academic courses in summer school spoke to the overall, long-term outcome which all experienced.

Ability, effort, and outcome themes. Viewed holistically, the charted statements of participants revealed a pattern. Participants tended to fall into two camps, those that believed they had ability and those that did not. Participants who reported positive perceptions of their own ability also believed that increased effort during the prior school year would have changed their academic outcomes. Additionally, this group reported that to some extent intelligence correlated to the individual's work ethic. For example, Jayden

stated that he believed he could be as "intelligent" as others in his classes if he works harder. This mentality was typical of all the participants who made statements that indicated a positive concept of their own ability. Interestingly, these individuals also tended to report exerting effort in the course, in which they eventually failed, longer than did their counterparts. Matthew, for example, said he found out only two days before the end of school that he would have to attend summer school. Michael also did not know he had failed until the last day of school despite being cognizant of the failing grade two week before the end of school.

Participants who reported attendance at summer school was not realized until the end of the year, also tended to have a positive concept of their ability. This was in sharp contrast to the statements of participants with negative self-concepts. Participants, like Olivia, Emma, and Joshua, whose remarks indicated a negative self-concept, tended to use "gave-up" in their statements, and indicated that they believed at an earlier point that failure was inevitable. With the exception of Emma, participants with a negative self-concept stated they had not "tried hard enough" and linked this to their academic outcomes. Like the participants with a positive self-concept, these participants also believed that intelligence correlated to work ethic. As Olivia stated, she could be intelligent, but she did not apply herself.

Alexander. When alluding to ability, Alexander often had contradictory perceptions of himself. For example, he casually mentioned that he had been identified as gifted and continually built the persona of an underachiever, but ended the interview by defining smart in terms of someone not like himself. Alexander continued to stress the

point that he only did enough in school to "get by." Attending summer school contradicted this assertion, because he obviously had not done enough to pass, resulting in considerably more work than what would have been originally needed to pass. This begged the question: Did Alexander's effort calculations include summer school? When asked, he simply said, "no, I don't really think about that…. I don't think about if I don't do this then I will have to do that…. I think if I have to do that, I will, but I don't have to I won't." Alexander may not be the optimal example of how participants viewed the relationship between ability, effort, and outcome because the degree of effort he exerted may have been more of a product of his rebellion against his family, which emerged in other statements, rather than his perception of his own ability. When asked how did he know how much he needed to do to "get by," Alexander responded that he would check his grade online, and he said, "in the areas I needed to improve, I would put in a little more effort and just get by."

Emma. After listing all her siblings, who receive above average grades in school, Emma said, "I feel like I am the dumb one in the family 'cause I am the only one that doesn't get good grades… I wish I was as intelligent as they are, 'cause I know if I had their mind, I would be able to do good, but with the mind I have, I can never do nothing." Comparing her academic outcomes with those of her siblings, Emma determined that her own ability was inadequate to be academically successful. Again, Emma related her ability to an inevitable outcome by asserting "I am always saying, I am not going to pass the grade. I can't do this because I am dumb, and I can't do it. I am not smart enough; this is for smart kids." Not only did she believe that academic outcomes were a product of her ability, but she also believed that her ability could not be improved. This was clearly voiced when

Emma said, "even if I try hard to not say bad stuff about myself, I can't change myself." Emma did not, however, directly link ability and outcome to effort. The link was derived from the analysis of additional segments of her interview.

Emma gave the impression that she exerted a minimum degree of effort in order to pass the courses in which she was successful. Emma wondered, during the course of the interview, how she passed one class, which she described as regular to hard in difficulty. The other course she passed was described as easy and one in which she never studied. Overall, Emma acknowledged that she felt sorry for herself because of the minimal effort she exerted toward school. As she later stated, "since the beginning of the year, I didn't want to do my work, and I didn't feel like doing it."

Academic resignation. Participants identified a point during the year at which they academically shut down. This usually occurred after they presumed failure was inevitable at some point during the second semester. Faced with difficulties they felt powerless to overcome or the inevitability of failure, all the participants pinpointed when they academically resigned from the course. One participant proclaimed he felt that he could not pass as early as the beginning of the second quarter. However, the remaining participants recalled low academic performance during the first semester, followed by a period of increased effort which eventually resulted in the realization that summer school was in their future.

A prime example came during Olivia's second interview session. Olivia stated that three weeks before the end of school, she thought "oh well, I will just do it in summer school." After being offered a cell phone by her mother if she passed, Olivia tried for the

next two weeks to improve her grade. However, when her attempts to raise her grade four points to an 80 percent failed, Olivia said, "I gave up the last five days of school." In this situation, the 75.6 percent Olivia said she had at the end of the forth quarter was a passing grade; therefore, one might speculate that she was trying to earn an 80 percent to obtain a passing average for the year. Olivia regretted her decision, saying, "I wouldn't be here if I had kept trying, and if I would have asked for help more often… instead of giving up."

Anthony's description of how he turned his attention to another class provided additional insight as to how, at least in his case, a participant reallocated effort when passing no longer seemed to be possible. He explained, "I think I did bad because… my teacher gave a lot of homework… so I first got a thirty. So I didn't do those homeworks, and I just paid more attention to the other subjects- the ones I liked." Michael, on the other hand, believed school was over before it ended, stating "all we did the last week was watch movies, so there was not much I could to raise my grade up."

Examples indicate that when participants believed that an academic outcome was inevitable, they no longer exerted effort toward the unrecoverable course; they academically resigned. Participants reported turning their energies toward other endeavors in some cases and being subjected to consequences in others. Regardless, all reported a sense of hopelessness and gave no reason why they should continue to exert effort toward a lost cause if the consequences of failing would not be lifted.

A theme emerged from the analysis of the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome reported by participants. Whether charted or directly expressed, participants who believed they had academic ability exerted effort longer than those who lacked confidence

in their ability. Those with a positive perception of their own ability also believed that academic outcomes were a product effort. With the exception of Emma, participants who lacked confidence in their ability also tended to believe that increased effort would have improved their academic outcomes. Regardless of the academic self-concept reported, participants agreed that work ethic was positively correlated with intelligence.

Sources and Levels of Motivation

Each of the 17 participants commented on their motivation, and a total of 68 quotes were coded accordingly. Descriptions of circumstances that enhanced motivation fell into six subcategories, including education importance, parent consequences, goals (long term), goals (needed to reach), family involvement, and parental inconsistency. Participant were motivated by a range of factors. Participants reported varying degrees of motivation ranging from "I just do enough to get by," as was the case with Alexander, to Madison, who said, "I don't want to disappoint my parents."

Again, Alexander was the extreme case. Significant effort went into his self-portrait as an under-achieving sloth. When directly asked what motivated him, Alexander responded, "nothing really. I'm not really that motivated type of person… I don't like doing work. Work is boring; it's just something I have to do if I want to get into a good college… [highly regarded medical college]." Alexander commented that he had also attended summer school last year. When asked if attending summer school was something he considered as he started school last year, Alexander nonchalantly replied, "no… I just thought the same thing I think every year. Just keep going." Earlier statements he made indicated he was compliant with requests made by teacher, such as doing assignments

when given to him in school. However, he made it clear that school-work was for school, and after school was his time. Asked what his school could have done to help him pass, Alexander stated, "I don't think it has any influence over my grades or anything."

At another point in the interview, Alexander discussed, unprompted, the change in his performance in elementary school and its connection with moving in with his mother. When questioned about his decline in performance, which coincided with the move, Alexander acknowledged that there was a change in his motivation when he went to live with his mother, and that he no longer had someone there to motivate him. With the exception of Isabella, whose statements indicated a belief that intrinsic motivation correlated to her mood, motivation was derived from external sources for the other participants. Participants described being motivated by their own interests, other individual, consequences, and long-term goals.

Interests. When asked what motivated him, Anthony replied, "I think about it first. If I like it, I do it, and if I don't like it, I don't do it." He gave soccer as an example. Because he liked the sport, he was motivated to do better. Anthony listed classes which interested him, and each were ones in which he was successful. He said that even the class, which he failed, was interesting until his grades declined, and then he "changed his mind." This was echoed indirectly in the statements of other participants. When discussing courses, in which they were successful, participants remarked that they liked the content of the course. Like Anthony, other participants discussed a relationship between their grade and interest level.

However, interest-driven motivation alone was not enough in all circumstances. Ava remarked that she was very interested and engaged in the class in which she now found herself in summer school. However, for her, interest was not enough. Ava's personal and health problems, she stated, kept her away and distracted her from school. Even though members of the school staff were what Ava described as supportive and nurturing, neither interest in the course nor the available support, were enough to ensure her academic success.

Other Individuals. Upon receiving a failing grade and experiencing notes being sent home to her parents, Emma said that she tried hard in the class in which she failed, but in the end, she still was not successful. Her motivation to succeed may not have been as great as she stated however, because during the second half of her interview, Emma said she knew she would fail the class. By contrast, Emma said that in one of the academic classes that she passed, she was motivated by the encouragement of the teacher. The teacher, she stated, was always standing, helping the students, and pushing them to do their best. Another academic teacher, whom Emma described as her favorite, was a motivating force for the entire class. Emma stated that she would work hard to make sure she passed and that she did not want to disappoint this particular teacher. The following year, Emma's younger sibling was to attend her school, and she said the thought of being in the same grade with him would motivate her to be successful next year.

Jacob echoed Emma's sentiment of not wanting to disappoint someone, saying that he did not want to disappoint his mother after she had helped him; he wanted her to be

proud of him. Toward the end of the school year, however, Jacob said he knew he was going to fail. At this point, he gave up and did not work at home.

Joshua also derived motivation from a relative. A grandparent, whom he often spoke to on the phone, would tell him that he was better than this. Joshua stated that he had heard this from others but "for some reason…coming from her mouth it sounded way better because she never lead me wrong and taught me to do the right things." Quoting the 91st Psalm that his grandparent often referred to on the phone, Joshua said his grandparent motivated him to continue to strive for what he wanted and to never give up.

Madison also implied that she was motivated by a relative, but in a different way. She said next year she would earn at least a B-, and if she did not, she would "keep asking that teacher for extra credit until he gave it to her." Like Emma, Madison said she did not like having her parents disappointed, Adding that if her real father knew she was in summer school, she would wish she had never been born.

Daniel's motivation came from both internal and external sources. His desire to pass the class motivated him to try harder, but he stated that his friends and parents also played a role. His friends, he said, pushed him to finish his work in school so he would have more time to skateboard afterwards.

Like Daniel, Ethan stated that he did well in one academic class, in which he had not been successful in the past, due in part to his peers. By sitting away from his friends and around those that "did their work and [told him to] stop talking," it motivated him. He said the students around him would say "you should start doing your work more instead of talking all the time and do your homework," and when he did not understand the work,

they would help him. Because he had alluded to being motivated, Ethan was asked what else motivated him. He responded that seeing others receiving good grades and rewards significantly motivated him.

As the examples illustrated, other individuals, especially adults, academically motivated the participants in this study. The desire not to disappoint a significant adult who expressed concern and/or exerted effort on the behalf of the participant was a common theme. Each participant, including Ethan who reported being supported by peers, was extrinsically motivated by the examples set by individuals who showed a positive connection and stake in the participants' academic outcome.

Consequences. Epitomizing consequences as motivators, Matthew stated, "there is always something on the line when you do a test or quiz. If you fail, and your mom finds out, something is going to happen to you or something is going to get taken away… and you don't want that. But if you do good… everyone is happy: win, win." Participants reported that negative consequences tended to only have a short-term effect on motivation. Although participants did not give examples of receiving positive consequences or rewards, some suggested that rewards or praise would have been more affective than the negative consequences they received.

For example, Matthew said the thought of attending summer school and having his belongings taken away if he failed motivated him for a bit, but ultimately he said "I already had lost everything I had to loose." Ethan stated that the school and parental consequences motivated him briefly, but it would "just slip out of his mind the next time it happened." As a consequence, his parent would take away something of supposed value, like a game

system, as a motivation, but Ethan said this only "kinda" motivated him because he "didn't play the video game or watch TV much… I'd go outside and play with my friends, so that didn't really do anything." In contrast, a monetary reward of fifty dollars for passing, Ethan said, would have motivated him.

Christopher stated, "I was already feeling kinda bad about my grades for the year anyways, but whenever they [his parents] punished me instead of helping me it made me feel worse." Christopher said this resulted in his grades fluctuating, but "the yelling didn't help at all." He continued by saying that his parents would only look at the bad grade and ground him. For example he said, instead of "supporting me, they would say, you got a good grade there, but look at these grades. They wouldn't focus on my good grades. They only cared about the bad ones." At this point and heavy-hearted, Christopher said this made him feel "really bad." The progress reports and the thought of spending his summer in school, he said, were sources of greater motivation than his parents' verbal exhortations. However, these sources did not sustain his efforts. Christopher commented that he should have continued to focus on his work, but after a week, "it would get less and less, focusing on what I was doing and then back to my old habits." What Christopher said he would have preferred was an unqualified response of "good job" for his successes from his parents or monetary compensation.

In addition to Matthew and Christopher, Olivia regarded summer school as a source of motivation. Olivia was told three weeks before the end of school that she was on the verge of failing. Initially, she was motivated, saying, "I'm going to pass this so I don't have to go to summer school." When asked if it was possible to pass with only three weeks

left in school, Olivia said that her mother said it was, but her teacher told her it was unlikely.

Of the 17 participants, only two discussed extracurricular activities as a source of motivation. For example, in addition to being motivated by a grandparent as previously discussed, Joshua also stated that he would work harder next year "so they wouldn't take away football again," showing that extracurricular activities also had an impact on his motivation. For Michael, like Joshua, the realization that he might not get to play a sport motivated him to work harder- a realization that was reached after a conference between his parent, teacher, and school councilor. Both Michael and Joshua's accounts, however, carried a connotation of a negative consequence. Participants did not discuss involvement in the activity as a reward, but rather as a privilege that potentially be returned.

Common among participants was their parents' use of ineffective negative consequences as a source of motivation. Participants reported that such consequences had, at best, a short-term affect. Either there was nothing else to be taken away, or the consequence had relatively little value relative to the effort needed to remove the consequence. Participants reported that positive consequences, such as a reward for academic success, would have had a greater impact; although none reported such an experience.

Long-term goals. Although Daniel said he was motivated by his friends, his parents continued to remind him of the importance of attending college. The value of an education was not lost on Daniel, and it was a noteworthy source of motivation. He said that most students did not like school, but he did because "if you quit school, you would

probably work at a McDonald's, while other people work good jobs… I want to be one of the people that gets a good job."

Attending college and making a better life for themselves was a recurrent theme among participants. Madison affirmed at the end of her interview that next year she intended to be successful as she had in the past in order to attend college. Emma too wanted to go to college, not only to pursue a career, but also to help her family. Jayden viewed education as a means to "have a house, good job, and settle down." William's motivation to get out of the gang and do well in school, also emerged from his desire to eventually have a good life. He stated that he did not want to get "to the part where [he] had to actually kill somebody… I didn't want to be in it no more 'cause I wanted to have a good life… go to college, have a nice family."

Long-term goals were a source of motivation, as the examples demonstrated. However, participants did not report that long-term goals motivated them to the extent that they would have affected the outcomes experienced in individual classes. Additionally, the source of the goals seemed to be planted by parents who participants reported would recount their importance at opportune times.

Sources and Levels of School Bonds

The fifth research question broached the subject of connections, or bonds, summer school students might have had during the regular school year, and the impact these bonds had. This connectivity with school was broadly reported originating from three sources: friends, activities, and school personnel. Consequently, as participants discussed connections to their school, these bonds were coded as friends, activities, and staff (see

Appendix B). Eight-five quotes were assigned to the school bonds (friends) code. Only 35 quotations were coded as school bonds (activities). The code, school bonds (staff), best addresses the research question dealing with interactions and relationships with school personnel, and thus it is discussed later in the chapter.

By far, participants identified school friends more often as bonding them to school than activities or school staff. When remarking on what they liked about school, friends were a common theme among participants. The social bonds participants described had both positive and negative aspects. Positive and negative social bonds were not coded independently, but they are discussed here based on the effect they had on participants' behavior and academic outcomes. Bonds which motivated, increased self-confidence, decreased delinquent behavior, or improved academic outcomes were considered positive. Negative bonds had the opposite effect. Interestingly enough, five participants indicated that they had from one to three friends who accompanied them to summer school.

Positive social bonds. Madison said that her friends at school were the closest thing to her family, and after a pause said, "my motivators… they're the main ones why I like going to school because when I come to school there's really nothing to [look forward to].., but then when you have friends that are right beside you in class, it helps you out because you have someone to smile with, play, and do all the stuff you do with your family at home." Madison drew support from her friends both emotionally and academically. Madison said the smiles from her friend would lift her up when nothing else would, and when she did poorly on a test, her friends would offer to be her tutors.

A positive influence could also be detected in William's story. A family member initiated William into a gang, and it was a friend that helped him decide to quit. "My best friend, when he first found out, he started to cry because he thought that because I was in a gang that we would not be tight anymore," said William. "I didn't want him to think that, so that was another reason I didn't want to be in a gang no more 'cause I didn't want our friendship to end like that." For both Madison and William, pre-existing friends provided positive support.

In Anthony's case, he asserted that he sought out positive social bonds. Discussing how he makes friends, Anthony explained, "I always find the best people to be friends with. I try to be friends with smart people." He said that he was able to identify these students by observing their actions. Once identified, Anthony's friends became part of his study routine. Anthony maintained that his friends, and sometimes their parents, helped him study. Similarly, Daniel stated that he and his friends worked together inside and out of class to finish their work, resulting in successful outcomes. "if one day, the teacher was talking about something, and he didn't get what she said, I would help him. If I didn't hear something he would help me." In the class which Daniel failed, he related that the combination of few friends in the class and the teacher's unwillingness to allow them to work together contributed to failing grade. Later, Daniel mentioned that his friends from the failed class were also in summer school.

Alexander did not say he had friends, but rather that everyone knew him because of his hyperactivity. In contrast, Christopher said he knew everyone in his grade, and Joshua asserted that he was the most popular student at school. However, Joshua also said that he

was not looking forward to seeing his friends the following year because he wanted to focus on school.

As the examples illustrated, participants believed that in some cases their friends contributed to their motivation, academic success, and positive choices. For participants, like Madison and William, their friends had a powerful influence on their attitudes about school and the decisions they made. Although Daniel reported that his friends helped him pass one class, they did not have the same affect in the failed class. Therefore, friends played a positive supporting role in various areas but not to a large extent in the realm of academic outcomes.

Negative social bonds. Other participants indicated their friends were either a negative influence or a distraction, which contributed to their lack of success. For example, social bonds at school played a significant role in Emily's life as shown by the fact that of the 85 quotations coded as school bonds (friends), 10 originated from her. The social aspects of school apparently contributed to Emily's academic difficulties. Unlike Daniel, whose friends were a positive influence during class, Emily often discussed talking in class and avoiding class in context with friends. Emily gave the example of a friend who sat in front of her who often turned around to talk during class. She did not place the blame on the friend; instead, she admitted reciprocating until being moved by the teacher. Two of these friends, Emily said, were also in summer school.

Emma's friends also had a negative academic impact, but unlike Emily, they were a distraction because of the "drama" they created. She related incidents in which her friends

would tell her rumors, which in turn made it difficult to concentrate in class. Emma identified continual "drama" as the primary cause for failing.

Ethan also acknowledged his interaction with friends as a reason for his not being successful. When he was new to the school, Ethan said he did well. It was not until he developed a number of friends that his grade declined. Like other participants, he took responsibility for his behavior and did not blame his friends for his current situation. Ethan raised an interesting point, later, about the relationship between school bonds and academic outcomes. As mentioned earlier, Ethan was unsuccessful in a specific academic class until he was moved away from the negative influences of friends and placed amongst students that motivated him to be successful.

Ava stated that she chose not to have many friends. However, many of her anecdotes involved students whom she described as friends. So, even though she may have had only a small circle of friends, to her, school experiences were viewed within the context of her friends. When describing teacher-student relations at her school, rather then using herself, she describes what she observed happening to others. For example, she talked about how administrators "looked down on us," and how a teacher ignored a friend whose hand was raised to go to the restroom.

Olivia was the only one to frame it in terms of peer pressure. Olivia said, "I think I was trying to fit in with people, like I wasn't being myself… I was trying to be what people thought I could be, and that got me going down hill." She went on to describe how conforming to make friends meant emulating their mediocre study habits. Olivia said, "I was trying to be like them so they would be my friend… They were not trying at school…

going to the mall every other day, the movies… and not doing their homework, but they were passing two classes; I was passing three." Additionally, Olivia recognized that when her friends were around, she hurried through assignments in order to leave class with them and socialize.

As the analysis indicated, participants described engaging in negative behavior in collaboration with individuals that were themselves negative influences, resulting in inadequate academic outcomes. Matthew distilled the essence of the influence negative social bonds had on some participants like him, saying that when a friend was moved into the class he "broke bad." Participants recognized the negative effect of some social bonds, but they continued to accept responsibility for failing.

Activities. Of the 34 quotes coded as activities, 13 of the 17 participants alluded to school activities. Of these, only two participants actually were involved in a team sport, and only one was involved in a club. The other activities mentioned were either elective classes or activities in which they wanted to be involved but could not due to being academically ineligible. The desire to play school based team sports was a source of motivation to some. For example, Joshua remarked that he planned to focus less on his friends and more on his studies so he could participate in more activities. Likewise, Michael said that his intention was to do better next year in order to play a sport.

Activities in which some of the participants were involved tended to have a positive impact. Even Alexander, who went to great lengths to describe himself as one who does just enough to get by, touted his above average grade in chorus and bragged about having been selected for a solo. Anthony and Joshua also mentioned music and drama electives as

interesting or as a reason they came to school. Generally though, the males cited sports activities, connecting them to the school and motivating them to do well. Conversely, female participants listed activities that were more social and informal in nature. For example, talking at snack time, yearbook, and dances were mention by three out of the four female participants whose quotes were coded as school bonds: activities. Olivia was the only female participant to discuss playing a sport, commenting that she expected her coach to encourage her to complete her work.

As the examples demonstrate, participants who were involved in activities were positively impacted. Activities were a source of positive interaction with the school that possible were not found elsewhere. Such was the case for Alexander. It was reported that the desire to participate in school sports the following school year was a source of academic motivation, but the participant was not actually engaging in the activity at the time he failed.

As a whole, participants reported being bonded to their schools both socially and through activities. Social bonds had positive and negative affects on participants. Positive social bonds gave participants an extended family, motivation, academic help, and a conscience to make better decisions. Participants also reported that social bonds negatively impacted academic outcomes. Friends often distracted participants from academic pursuits and exerted negative influences on their decisions. Activities were associated positively with school, but few participants were actually involved in school activities. Overall, the analysis of participants' statements regarding school bonds suggested that positive social

bonds and activities had an inconsequential affect on their academic outcomes. However, negative social interactions profoundly contributed to low academic performance.

Interactions and Relationships with School Personnel

Quotations related to interactions and relationships with school personnel were coded as "school bonds (staff)." The code's name could be misleading and should be clarified. When participants' remarks indicated a neutral to positive relationship or a complex interaction with a staff member, the quotations were coded as school bonds (staff). This should not be confused with participants' stories of their favorite or best teacher. Interviews were littered with these anecdotes, which generally centered around educational practices affecting the entire class. Participants did not frequently indicate relationships or complex interactions with the teacher. For example, Emma stated that she liked all of her teachers, but a relationship or complex interaction was never indicated. Only two participants, Ava and Olivia, described a relationship with one or more staff members that could be touted as a bond that had an impact on their connection with the school. Of the two, Olivia was the only participant who reported having a positive, complex relationship with a teacher. She gave examples of this teacher talking to her outside of the classroom setting, helping her prepare for other classes, and giving her incentives for doing well in school.

Ten participants discussed bonds with school staff. Of the 30 quotes from this code, Ava contributed 11. She was one of the two participants to share what could be considered a bond with a staff member, but the majority of her interview, and consequently quotes coded as school bond (staff) attributed to her, were her opinions regarding student-staff

bonds. As noted earlier, Ava only attended the first interview session because she did not return to summer school afterwards. Ava's interview focused less on the perceptions of her own circumstances and more on what she believed staff-student relationships and interaction should look like.

Interactions. Alexander stated that he did not know his teachers well, and besides the occasional, superficial "how's it going" from an administrator and a "fine" reply, no one knew him. Alexander said that other than the fact that they were teachers, "they were just fine." Perfunctory interactions like the one depicted by Alexander typified other participants' perceptions. For example, Joshua stated he was really close to the assistant principal because she was the one he went to when he was about to be suspended. Michael continued this theme by saying "we have four or five administrators… I have not been to a detention or anything like that, so I don't know if they are that nice or mean."

Daniel related an intriguingly complex interaction he observed in the class in which he failed. He discussed how students tried to annoy teachers they did not like but did not carry out the annoying behavior in the class they liked. Daniel elaborated, "sometimes when you don't like a teacher, you do things that annoys her… and she gets angry, red faced, and gives us a lot of work." In this particular case, students took turns whistling around the room to annoy a teacher they did not like. When asked if students did this in the class he passed, Daniel said, "no, because they liked her." This type of behavior was confirmed by another participant who admitted disrupting the class in which he failed and behaving appropriately in the class he passed.

Daniel was asked if there were teachers at school who were concerned about him or his grade. Daniel simply responded, "not really." Later, Daniel recollected being helped by a school counselor who would often call him from class and give him "hints" about school. Other than that connection, Daniel did not feel close to the adults in his school. Michael, like four other participants, did have at least a small connection with his school counselor. He remarked that she helped him "get through" being new at school and, upon seeing him, would always say "hello."

As the example illustrate, the participants did not report that they had complex interactions with school staff with the exception of school counselors. School counselors appeared to have engaged in more one-on-one interaction with the participants in this study than any other group. The analysis suggested that the participants did not have adults at their school with which they could talk or confide.

Relationships. Identifying bonds between school staff and participants was difficult. For example, the closest resemblance of a bond with a teacher that Emily discussed was that the teacher and she "didn't have any problems with each other… because [the teacher] didn't bother [Emily] like some of the other teachers did." Ava believed that bonds with teachers would have a positive impact on students. She stated, "it would have helped more if I was actually connected to my teachers."

Ava said, "I tend to talk to adults more like a friend than an authority figure, and that's my own fault.., and they would take it the wrong way." She felt that teachers spoke to her "like [she] wasn't really a person to them; like [she] was just a student." Ava went on to describe this phenomenon as "a lack of connection," and she emphasized that

students should be able to talk to a teacher on the same level without fear of receiving a detention. Describing how strong teacher-student bonds could be beneficial, Ava declared indignantly, "so, I just feel like they look at us… as a lot less mature, less sophisticated then we can be. I think if they treated us with that authority, then maybe we would mature more."

Ava often alluded to her personal and health problems. The only staff members that she believed were supportive were in guidance. She stated that her teachers "didn't seem to care," and when she wanted to go to school counseling, she was not allowed to because she did not have a pass. The only other connection Ava made was with a new teacher. Ava reasoned that because the new teacher had not been in the school long enough to be influenced by "[their] way of teaching" and because he had previously taught high school, he treated students like young adults.

Olivia was the only participant to describe what could be called a strong bond with a teacher. She said that one of her academic teachers called her and four friends "the cats." Olivia described him as "crazy," and stated he would often check up on them, saying "if you ever need help or are having any trouble, just come to me." When asked how he checked-up on them, Olivia said he would check their grades, and in order to continue to "be members of his crew," they had to maintain passing grades. He also helped her in other classes. However, in the one class she failed, this teacher's intervention did not work because, as Olivia reported, he never did well in that class either.

The analysis of participants' relationships with school personnel indicated that this phenomenon was rare. Ava articulated how students would benefit from teacher-student

relationships and defined what was sought within other participants' interviews. Olivia was the only one that reported a teacher-student relationship like the one Ava prescribed. The benefits Olivia received extended to the limits of what the teacher was capable of offering. As a result, the teacher-student relationship did not prevent Olivia from failing one academic course. However, Olivia reported the relationship that she and her friends had with this particular teacher helped and connected her to school.

The fact that participants' rarely reported interactions and relationship with school personnel was conspicuous, especially in light of Ava's declaration of their importance. In this particular case, the theme that emerged from the analysis was the absence of reported interactions and relationships with school personnel by participants. In the one instance where a substantial teacher-student relationship was reported, the participant believed it had a positive impact on her academic outcomes. Based on the analysis, the absence of interactions and meaningful relationships with school staff was indicative 16 out of 17 participants.

The Role and Level of Involvement of Adults in Their Academic Lives

Parental involvement. Several codes contained quotations linked to parental involvement in the education of the participants. Codes in which educational involvement of adults in the lives of summer school participants could be found included: "parental involvement," "parent consequences/motivators," "parent inconsistency," "parent reaction to summer school," "parent/school communication," and "parent-studies." Parental involvement had several facets, some of which were positive, while others were negative.

Alexander was one of only two participants who proclaimed themselves as apathetic and as avoiding work at all costs. Even though Alexander proudly portrayed himself as someone who did "just enough to get by," a potential underlying reason for this persona emerged as he recounted past performance. Alexander told how he was originally identified as gifted and had earned high marks through fifth grade. It was not until sixth grade that his academic performance dramatically declined. Contemplatively, Alexander identified moving in with his mother as coinciding with the decline in his grades. When asked, "how would location…?" Alexander abruptly interrupted and answered, "I have no idea, maybe it is the people I live with have a negative or positive influence on me."

Participants did not directly attribute negative academic outcomes to their parents. However, they often indicated that, had their parents more actively monitored their academic progress, outcomes would have been different. Alexander took full responsibility for failing, but he implicated his mother. While contemplating the change in his grades he experienced after moving, Alexander stated that he needed someone to force him to complete his work, but "my mother," he said, "she doesn't care." Alexander was later asked what he needed in order to pass all his subjects? Alexander replied, "I need someone to actually pressure me into doing my homework. I mean…someone to motivate me. Like before, I had my step mom who would yell, scream, or beat me if I didn't do my homework or any of my work, and here's my mom who doesn't do anything."

Thirteen participants echoed this thought in less extreme fashion, saying either that their grades improved when parents began monitoring them, or that they wished their parents had started monitoring them at the beginning of the year. The degree of parental

involvement covered the spectrum from Isabella's parents, who viewed her grade on interims and report cards, to Madison's parents, who came to every parent-teacher conference and viewed her grades on-line. Common to all the participants' parent's involvement was its timing: in each case, parental involvement commenced at a point after the participant was failing. Christopher's story, though unique, typified the level and timing of parental involvement.

Christopher stated that his parents required him to study one hour each day. Occasionally, his mother would check his work, but Christopher said she was "incredibly busy," and his stepfather came home late. "They really weren't home a lot when I was studying, and I kinda put it off and didn't pay attention like I should have until the end of the year when they actually started making sure I did the work." He continued, "I had *nobody* following me" Christopher emphasized. "They just checked my grades. They wouldn't go behind me to see if I did it right." Through the third nine weeks marking period, Christopher said that being yelled at by his parents for receiving low grades did not help; it only made him feel worse. It was not until his grade was almost unrecoverable that his parents added more structure to his study routine and closely monitored his work. Christopher acknowledged that he wished this were the case from the beginning of the year. As a result of his parents' increased involvement, Christopher stated that his grades were "like the stock market instead of going straight down."

The same desire for and poor timing of parental involvement was heard in the statements of thirteen participants. Like Christopher, who compared his grade to the stock market with its ups and downs, Jacob said his grades were like a rollercoaster. Jacob

admitted that he had lied to his mother about his progress in school. He stated that his mother would ask almost every day if he had homework. Eventually, Jacob said, his mother started to catch on, but his response became a reaction, "she'd ask, I'd say 'no;' she'd ask, I'd say 'no.'" During his interviews, Jacob took full responsibility for failing, saying "It was more that I was lying that kept me here. If I didn't lie to her, I probably wouldn't be here right now… because she would have forced me to do my work." It was not until near the end of the first semester, Jacob said, that his mother caught on and started monitoring his daily progress. When this occurred, Jacob said, "I found that when I had more people watching over me, like my mom would help me with tutoring... it helped me want to do better than just barely passing, and that's how I started to pass. That's definitely how I passed [academic subject named]." However, by the time his parent started monitoring his grades, Jacob said, he had dug such a deep hole that he could not recover in the class in which he failed.

Later, Jacob stated that because of the help he received, he did not want to disappoint his parent. Other participants made similar remarks. When an adult devoted energy to the academic success of participants, the desire not to disappoint was expressed. Another example was Madison, who said, "my parents showed up to every school conference 'cause they wanted to know everything. They checked [my grades on-line], and that's what made me get back on track 'cause I don't like my parents being disappointed."

According to two participants, they would have welcomed additional parental involvement, but that would have been difficult. Daniel stated that his parents did "enough" for him regarding his studies. He related how hard his parents worked, saying

that his father had two jobs and would often get home late from work. Emily faced similar difficulties with her mother monitoring her academics. Her mother also had two jobs and often came home very tired from work. Next year, however, Emily expected her mother to monitor her more closely because of her new employment.

Quotes coded as parental involvement came in all forms, and some forms would be problematic in terms of producing positive academic outcomes. For example, Olivia mentioned that she depended on her parents. When asked in what ways did she depend on her parents relative to school, she said, "they threaten me. They say they will beat me if I don't do my work, but they never do. They pay for my books and give me lunch money. If I am having trouble with the teacher, them putting their thing in my face and stuff, they [parents] come and talk to 'em about that and take care of the principal." Olivia's statement characterizes two additional categories of parental involvement raised by participants: problematic parental involvement and the parental inconsistency.

Problematic involvement. Daniel reported that his mother was not angry that he had failed because he "told them what happened, and she wasn't mad at me 'cause of the teacher." Likewise, Anthony's parent did not focus on his academic outcome, but rather the financial impact. Anthony told of how his mother became upset during a conference with his teacher upon learning about summer school tuition. Anthony stated that she continued to be angry and argued until the school agreed to give him a scholarship. This was reminiscent of Olivia's example of how her parents' involvement only occurred when school staff needed to be "take[n] care of." Comments that William reported his father made could also be placed in this category. His father initially attributed William's

academic decline in one class to racism. Although William said he quickly dismissed this as a possible cause, the father's involvement did not have the potential to positively influence William's academics.

Parental inconsistency. Stories of parental inconsistency, another category of parental involvement, came from six of the participants. These include anecdotes about parents not following through with consequences and sending mixed messages. For example, Olivia said her parents threatened to "beat" her if she did not complete school assignments. Although an inappropriate consequence for non-completion of homework, her response, as she smiled, that her parents never followed through with the consequence, was indicative of parental inconsistency cited by participants. Participants frequently indicated that they knew their parents would not follow through with threatened consequences, and as a result, the parental involvement did not impact academic outcomes.

Emma stated that, after her father received a note from her teacher during the third quarter, he placed her on a strict study schedule. Emma said this was "a good thing because they could help [her] with [her] work." Apparently, this did not last long. Like anecdotes of other participants, Emma's father told her soon after implementing the strict study schedule that he was "tired of wasting his breath on her," and that he had no intention of paying for her to attend summer school. So, Emma said, "my mother had to pay for it."

Another example of parental inconsistency took the form of mixed signals or indirect connections between participants' actions and resulting parental consequences. Matthew told the story of how he would come home and find that some of his belongings

were missing. Each day, a portion of a wall display or an electronic game was missing. Eventually, Matthew asked his mother about the disappearances. She responded that she had taken the items because of his low grades. Because he was left with nothing to occupy his time in his room, he asked to go outside. His mother said, no, because your grades are low. When he finished telling the story, Matthew looked up, puzzled, and said, "the thing is, I just went outside the other day. That's what she does; she toys with you, makes you get confused."

Alexander provided an example where inconsistency was found in both his parent and teacher. Alexander asserted that he never did homework at home, and his teacher, at first, attempted to change his behavior by calling home. He said, "[the teacher] kept telling me that I need to start doing it. Whenever I didn't do my homework my [academic teacher] would call home, but then, finally, she quit doing that because it wouldn't have an effect; my parents wouldn't do anything about it."

As the examples demonstrated, parental involvement varied. The predominant theme echoed by several participants was the lack of parental involvement in their academic lives. Often this assertion was followed by the expressed desire to have participants' parents more involved. Participants believed that additional parental attention given to their academic progress could have resulted in a more favorably outcome. Instead, participants reported problematic parental involvement and parental inconsistency, both of which did not have a positive influence on participants' academic performance. The problematic parental involvement consisted of negative interaction with school personnel or the conveyance of negative perceptions of the school. Neither of which contributed to

participants' academic performance. Additionally, participants were confused by and took advantage of the inconsistencies orchestrated by their parents. Failure to link consequences to participants' actions and not following through with consequences or academic monitoring typified parental inconsistencies reported by participants.

Teacher involvement. For the purposes of this study, the presentation of lessons and various learning assessments given to the entire class were not considered teacher involvement. In order for a teacher's actions to be considered involvement in this study, participants must have indicated that their teacher provided one-on-one intervention. Interventions were defined as teachers' actions toward below average performing participants that were meant to impact an individual student's performance. Multiple students could benefit from interventions, but to be coded as such, the actions must have been intended for average performing students. Examples of actions coded as interventions included: consequences for poor academic performance, supplementary assessments, tutoring, parental contacts, parent-teacher conferences, and student-teacher conferences.

Participants reported teacher interventions in both failed and passed classes. During coding, the distinction was made between interventions associated with failed classes and those in the passed classes. Although coded separately, analysis and comparison of intervention in failed classes with those in passed classes revealed little difference between them. Consequently, the following analysis and discussion juxtaposes interventions from both failed and passed courses to illustrate congruency of methodologies but not of outcomes.

The only intervention unique to teachers, whose classes participants failed, was the use of consequences for poor academic performance. Discussing the consequences for not completing homework, Michael said, "if you miss one, she talks to you. If you miss two, it's a lunch detention, and the third one is an after school or before school detention." Likewise, Ethan stated that students ate lunch with the teacher once a week if homework was not completed. In both cases, participants were not academically successful.

Regarding both the passed and failed classes, participants indicated that their teachers had little to no involvement. Discussing the teacher whose class she failed, Emma said, "he didn't really do much of anything to help me. All he said was that I had to try hard to do my work or else I would be seeing him next year." Joshua had a similar story from the teacher in one of his passed classes. When Joshua performed poorly on an assessment in the class he passed, his teacher would say to him, "look at this grade. Do you think this is you? You just try better next time." Neither Emma nor Joshua indicated substantial teacher involvement, but the result was different in both cases.

Student conferences also produced mixed results. In the class Jacob failed, he said the teacher would conduct teacher-student conferences at the teacher's desk. During these meeting in class, the teacher discussed missing. Jacob's response to the teacher was to declare that he left it at home. Jacob reported that, in fact, he really had not done the work. When asked if the teacher would ever pressure him to turn in work, Jacob said, "no; well, at the end of the year, they really, really did." Similarly, Jayden said, "If I had done really bad on a test… they would talk to me individually about the potential I had to figure out what needed to be done and move on."

Christopher stated that he was very appreciative of his teacher's communication of his grade. Of the teacher in the failed class, Christopher stated, "she would take me to the side and say I had not done a few assignments, give me a make-up work packet, give me half credit for it since it was late, and whenever you would get an interim or report card, it would have 'in danger of failing the semester'" written on it. Christopher said this was an improvement over his previous school where "all you could do is hope for a good grade." Like the others though, Christopher's performance did not improve.

Brief conferences at the teacher's desk had a different effect on one academically unconcerned participant. Alexander remarked, "talking about my grades… that happened all the time with my [passed course] teacher. She'd say, look [Alexander] the way this is going, you're not going to pass. She'd keep saying that and keep bringing me over." This may have been an effective intervention for Alexander because it gave him the information he needed to "do just enough to get by."

As with Alexander, teachers notified parents when participants were failing, but these too produced different results among participants. When asked if the teacher in the class she failed ever tried to meet with her parents, Emma said, "no." Three weeks before the end of school, however, the teacher sent home a note which stated that she must raise her grade 10 percent or go to summer school. The teacher in the class Joshua failed also communicated through notes. When he received a failing grade on a test, Joshua said, the teacher "would tell you to sign a sheet of paper at the bottom. They would ask you to get a signature from your parents to show them your test grade." In the class Olivia passed, her teacher checked to see if students' wrote the assignments in their agenda and would email

parents the second time homework was not completed. However, contemplating what she had said, Olivia remarked that that the majority of the assignments were completed during the class.

Several participants discussed how teachers offered tutoring. Daniel said, "my [teacher] sent a tutoring slip home, which I went to every [session]. I did lots of work in there, but it did not pull up my grade." Madison gave the impression that the teacher in whose class she failed went to great length to make flash cards used during tutoring, but like Daniel, it did not change Madison's academic outcome. Jayden said, "my teacher would recommend that I should stay after school, [and] they would be there to help me," but he and Michael both stated they could not remain after school. Conversely, Jayden remarked that his teacher, whose class he passed, helped him when he did not understand, but rarely did he receive assistance outside the class. When Jayden did remain after school with his teacher, he said the quiet time was just as helpful as having the teacher present. Likewise, Madison stated that if a teacher believed a student needed additional help, the teacher would send a tutoring form home to be signed. Madison reported being given multiple opportunities to receive tutoring after school, which gave her teacher additional time to explain the material until she understood.

The opportunity to make-up or retake assessments was another teacher intervention used with mixed results. Jayden said he was occasionally given retakes, but stated that he "kept getting mixed up on other things." According to Jayden, the retakes were administered during class, and he was often distracted. Matthew, too, was sometimes given the opportunity to do a retake after being told to "review the material." If the grade was in

the 50 percent range, Matthew was told he could return during his school's equivalent of study hall. Matthew said he came several times, but the teacher was not there. He did receive help once, but the second time Matthew came, the teacher said the practice was discontinued.

Making-up work and retaking assessments had positive results for Michael and Emma. Michael said his teacher would allow him to retake a test if he was not successful. Additionally, in the classes he passed, the teachers would map out for him what was necessary for him to pass the course. Remarking about the teacher in a class she passed, Emma said the teacher was her favorite. Three to four weeks before school ended, Emma said her teacher gave her "a whole bunch of extra work" and said, "do this so you can pass the grade, and I'll give you the credit." Emma stated, "she tried hard to help me, so when I wouldn't do my work, I felt bad for her and me 'cause I hurt her because she gave me the work to do it so I could get a grade on it." Unlike teacher involvement discussed thus far, a distinct, but subtle, difference can be heard here. Jayden and Matthew described the process by which their teachers allowed them to complete supplementary work, whereas Michael and Emma recognized the additional effort expended by the teacher. Emma's insightful comment delved deeply into what could be the underlying difference among possible teachers' interventions. More than other participants, Emma was cognizant of how her work ethic was emotionally tied to that of her teacher's. It demonstrated how interventions in combination with the students' perception of the teacher have a greater impact than either taken singly.

There were 42 quotes from 14 participants regarding teacher intervention in failed courses, and 21 quotes from 13 participants coded as interventions in the passed courses. The impact teachers had on participants was not directly apparent when comparing the intervention practices of teachers in the failed classes with those in the passed classes. Not only could differences between quotes in the two coded groups not be determined, but also many intervention strategies were the same across the two groups. Given the amount of time spent with participants and their roles in schools, teachers were involved in the academics of participants to a large degree. However, the impact of teachers' interventions and involvement on the academic performance of participants in this study was unclear.

Summary

Analysis Decisions

The analysis of the data started with decisions made regarding how and what data would be examined. Using ATLAS.ti as the primary tool to code data and an Excel spreadsheet to aid in the search for common themes, units of meaning (quotations) were identified and assigned to codes. Because participants' interviews were almost entirely broken into units of meaning, regardless of their apparent relationship to the research questions, unexpected data surfaced. The decision was made to report participants' demographic and other information in order to better describe the demographic diversity of the sample. It was argued that, although sometimes incomplete and inferential, describing the participant sample was essential to demonstrate that the emerging themes were not isolated to specific populations. It was also argued that since this was not comparative study, flawless assignment of demographic information to specific data was unnecessary.

Findings

Academic outcomes, and to what are they attributed. Data were presented in terms of the research questions originally posed. The value of the data was in the rich narrative of the participants. As a result, multiple quotations from various participants were presented to frame emerging themes. Major themes emerged around each of the research questions.

Participants attributed academic outcomes to six categories, including students, behavior, distractions, assignments and assessments, academic resignation, and teachers. Primary responsibility for their academic outcomes was assumed by the participants themselves, citing distractions and their own inappropriate behavior as contributing factors. However, teachers were indirectly acknowledged for the effect they could have on academic outcomes. For example, disruptions to the learning environment could be amplified or squelched by the actions of the teacher. The most interesting theme that emerged, due to its association with other research questions, was that effort exerted in combination with concern exhibited for participants by a teacher or other adult translated to credit being given to the adult for the participants' academic success. In contrast, the lack of effort or concern from teachers paralleled academic failure.

The relationship among ability, effort, and outcome. Participants' thoughts regarding their ability, effort exerted toward academic tasks, and academic outcomes frequently were not contained within single units of meaning. To overcome this, independently expressed quotations related to ability, effort, and outcomes were charted. The pattern that emerged indicated that participants who believed they had academic

ability exerted effort longer than those who lacked confidence in their ability. Additionally, those with a positive perception of their own ability also believed that academic outcomes were a product effort. Generally, participants who lacked confidence in their ability also tended to believe that increased effort would have improved their academic outcomes, and intelligence, or ability, was associated with work ethic by all the participants whom addressed the question.

Sources and levels of motivation. Participants reported being motivated by interest in the task, other individuals, consequences, and long-term goals. Of these sources of motivation, a theme related to other individuals was the most compelling. Again, the notion that adults influenced participants' outcomes by expressing concern for their performance and/or exerting effort on their behalf emerged. This represented the second time concern and effort showed a positive connection to participants' academic outcome. Both incidences apparently stemmed from participants' desire to reciprocate so as not to disappoint the significant adult.

Sources and levels of school bonds. Participants reported being bonded to school through activities and friends. Activities were not cited as often as friends as a source of school bonding, but when reported, they were discussed in positive terms. Friends, on the other hand, were reported to have both positive and negative affects on academic outcomes, while at the same time anchoring the participants to their school. Most notable in relationship to academic outcomes were negative social bonds. These bonds increased participants desire to attend school but negatively impacted their performance. Although participants took responsibility for failing one or more academic courses, they

acknowledged how distracting, negative peer interactions affected their academic performance.

Interactions and relationships with school personnel. The glaring theme that emerged from participants' discussion about interactions and relationships with school personnel was that they had none. Only one participant described a teacher-student relationship, and she attributed positive school variables and outcomes to it. Another participant spent the majority of her interview discussing how she felt that positive interactions and relationships with teacher would benefit all students. Her unsolicited, well articulated discourse on the topic emerged as if in response to her own plight as well as others in a similar situation.

The role and level of involvement of adults in their academic lives. Teachers and parents were the adults most often discussed in relationship to academic involvement. Concisely stated, neither the involvement of teachers nor the parents meaningfully influenced the academic outcomes of the participants. Reported interventions of teachers in both failed and passed classes were almost indistinguishable.

Parental involvement was also reported not to have had an effect on participants' academic performance because of the inconsistencies related to consequences and problematic involvement. When parents started to monitor participants' academic performance with positive results, frequently it was characterized by too little, too late. Participants reported that by the time their parents were involved to the degree that it would make a difference, their grades were almost unrecoverable. Even when there was the possibility for academic success, parental involvement was reported to be inconsistent.

An emerging theme, echoed frequently by participants, was their desire to be closely supervised by their parents.

Participants' acknowledgements that increased parental involvement would have contributed to their academic success parallels another theme discussed. Concern for participants' outcomes in combination with effort exerted, resulting in increased motivation and effort on the part of the participants, surfaced during the analysis of two of the research questions. This was strikingly similar to participants' desire for increased parental involvement. Both themes represented the expressed need and value participants believed adults could have had or did have on their academic performance. This and other major themes that emerged during data analysis will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of factors which contributed to the academic outcomes necessitating enrollment in academic courses in summer school, and what factors they believe could have made a positive impact. This study focused on the following research questions: How did middle school students, enrolled in one or more academic courses in summer school, perceive:

1. academic outcomes, and to what are these attributed,
2. the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome,
3. sources and levels of motivation,
4. sources and levels of school bonds,
5. interactions and relationships with school personnel, and
6. the role and level of involvement of adults in their academic lives?

Prior to the current study, researchers had not conducted one-on-one interviews with middle school students repeating one or two academic courses in summer school. By analyzing participants' perceptions, this study intended to add to the available research by giving insight into the web of factors which resulted in the participants' current reality. In doing so, not only did the current study add to the research, but it also gave a voice to a group of at-risk student who are often overlooked.

In this concluding chapter, emergent themes are discussed in relationship to the research questions. The organization of this chapter parallels the methodology of chapter four with one exception: poignant quotations replace second and third level headings used in the previous chapter to put into context and bring to life the discussion. The major

findings related to each research question are juxtaposed with current research to accent similarities and subtle differences. Implications for at-risk students are addressed, and recommendations are made. Based upon this, areas are suggested for future research.

Factors to which participants attribute their academic outcomes are initially discussed. In brief, participants primarily took responsibility for their academic performance but were also aware of the influence of other students, distractions, and teachers. Ability, effort, and outcomes are then discussed as they relate to the unique population involved in this study. Although participants generally agreed that ability was a product of effort, additional dynamics were detected. Variables reported that affected participants' motivation are then discussed. Parental inconsistency, a topic originally analyzed in relationship to parental involvement, is added to the discussion of motivation because of its importance for the participants. School bonds are then addressed with particular emphasis on negative social bonds which were common amongst participants. An interesting teacher-student interaction is discussed, as well as, the impact of the absence of meaningful relationships with teachers. A discussion of the influence parental involvement had on the academic outcomes of the participants is presented. This chapter concludes with the argument that consistent adult caring and listening could have the greatest impact on at-risk middle school students.

Academic Outcomes And Their Attribution

Students accepted primary responsibility for their academic outcomes. Participants' performance was often attributed aspects of teen life, such as their behaviors and

distractions. A discussion of factors associated with the aspects of teen life that emerged during the interviews and their implications follows.

Academic failure was also attributed to poor performance on specific assignments or assessment and academic resignation. Participants identified points in time that poor performance on a specific assignment or assessment made the difference between them passing and failing. Academic resignation closely followed. Although participants attributed their performance to both events, each is addressed later in the chapter because they were found to be associated with perceptions of ability, effort, and outcomes. Academic performance was also attributed to teachers, and this too is discussed later in this chapter in the context of interactions and relationships with school personnel.

"What Affected My Grades Was Me Being a Teenager"-Madison

Aspects of teen life were perceived as exerting a large, influence on the academic outcomes of the participants in this study. Personal issues with family, peer pressure, relationships with other students, and classroom distractions weighed heavily against participants. In retrospect, participants recognized the effect these variables had on their academic performance, but it is unclear if it was apparent to them during the course of the school year. Statements made during the interviews indicated that the source of at least a portion of these attributions originated from adults. Comments like, "my mom told me that if I had just…" emerged in some of the interviews. Therefore, participants' insights into their own behavior may have been, to some extent, the product of adult lectures. For the majority, however, this may not have been the case. The multiple, vivid examples given to illustrate the impact teen life had on academic outcomes suggested that participants were

self-reflective. Often participants expressed the desire to avoid the negative aspects of teen life the following school year.

Weiner (2000) described participants' reflections in terms of an intrapersonal and interpersonal attributional perspective. Weiner suggested that when an outcome is negative, unexpected, and/or important, individuals usually search for answers, and conversely do not question outcomes when they are positive, expected, and/or unimportant. Participants in the current study experienced an important, negative outcome-the failing of one or two academic courses. Low academic performance had been experienced by most of the participants in the past, so their current performance was not entirely unexpected. When successful, participants in the current study often attributed their success to the interventions of a caring teacher.

Participants attributed performance to innate factors. Participants believed that internal factors, such as teen variables and behaviors contributed to academic outcomes, which were outside their control. Participants' attribution of success to external factors, such as the teacher, further suggests that they believe they have little control over outcomes.

Participants' attributions were also found to a lesser degree to originate from interpersonal perspectives. Weiner (2000) suggested that an individual's attributions can stem from external sources, such as was the case in the current study. Participants reported that their teachers and parents had their own hypotheses for participants' performance. The majority of these related to the participants' work ethic and motivation, again contributing to self-related perceptional causes of outcomes. Ultimately, attributions were verbalized as

controllable. This allowed participants to maintain a degree of positive self-concept by attributing outcomes to behaviors, which were controllable, rather than to ability, which was not.

"Instead of Teaching, He Would be Like Arguing With Them, and That Took Time From Us Learning Stuff"-Jayden

Distractions were reported as a major impediment to participants' academic success and originated from two primary areas. Peers distracted participants directly by inappropriately interacting with them during instructional time. This included the stereotypical turning around in their seats to talk during instruction. Indirectly, the drama between participants and their peers redirected participants' thoughts away from instruction to previous and future interactions with their peers. Teacher-student interactions also had a profound affect. Student misbehavior during class required redirection by the teachers. Participants reported that, even though they were not often the targets of the teacher's negative attention, the teacher's redirection of students, and the misbehaving student's response distracted the entire class and significantly decreased instructional time. Often the teacher-student interaction was described as cyclical and ongoing. Student misbehavior elicited a negative teacher response which continued to escalate future responses from both the teacher and the student. These exchanges reportedly caused more distraction than the student's original behavior had. Therefore, teachers were described as both creating and removing distractions.

Implications and Recommendations

Because participants in this study generally attributed their academic outcomes to internal factors, they may expect future performance to be similar. Additionally, because poor academic performance was attributed to controllable internal factors, such as behaviors, participants may not want to risk exerting additional effort for fear that continued failure would confirm that their performance was due to ability rather than effort. This could then perpetuate low performance. Weiner (2000) suggested that continued failure might lead to dropping out of school.

It is recommended that educators be more cognizant of to what they attribute low student performance. Student academic outcomes should not automatically be verbalized to the student in association with effort. A student that is met with failure after exerting what he or she believes to be a great deal of effort may avoid exerting effort in the future to maintain a positive self-concept. Therefore, simply saying that a student is intelligent and that he or she needs to study more may result in decreased effort. As long as the student maintains intrapersonal and interpersonal attributions that associate lack of effort to low academic performance, the question of ability does not arise. It is only when increased effort is associated with low performance that ability is called into question.

Analyzing task completion may be a better strategy than suggesting the student exert additional effort. Additional insight into performance would come from analysis of the student's method of preparation, materials used, learning style, knowledge of expectations, and time spent on the task. For example, increased effort would still result in poor performance on an assessment if the materials studied were incomplete or the method of preparation did not match the learning style of the student. Ensuring that the student's

method of preparation, materials used, learning style, and knowledge of expectations in combination with supervised effort could increase the potential for positive academic outcomes.

Distractions have implications for all students. Decreased learning time and the negative impact on the learning environment have significant ramification on the efficiency of the learning process. Distractions may be unavoidable, but the number of occurrences and duration could be decreased. Teachers may have the greatest influence on reducing distracting teacher-student interactions.

Although discussed in detail later in the chapter, providing a caring classroom environment may decrease negative student behaviors and the resulting teacher redirection. As participants reported, students did not misbehave in the classes of teachers they liked. However, students will inevitably need to be redirected when they misbehave. Therefore, thought must be give as to how to limit the distraction this redirection will cause. A well-prepared and publicized discipline plan may be the best strategy. This would eliminate the time required to administer redirection and increase perceived equity. Teachers should also be aware of the potential for the escalation of the situations by continued engagement with the offending student and giving impression that he or she is angry. This escalation usually occurs when the offending student debates the validity of the accusation and/or the consequence. A discipline plan should include a procedure to address this contingency. For example, a procedure for the student to appeal outside instructional time would eliminate a debate which would become distracting and detract from the instructional time.

Suggested Studies for Future Research

Additional research should focus on variables associated with the attribution-effort stalemate. For example, what are the best methods for teachers to address academic performance in order for students to avoid the risk of attributing outcomes to ability? Additional attention should also be give to distractions resulting from negative teacher-student interaction. For example, how do student perceptions of classroom rules and their enforcement contribute to negative teacher-student interaction? What differences exist between classrooms with varying numbers of negative teacher-student interaction?

The Relationship Among Ability, Effort, And Outcome

With the exception of two participants, perceptions of the relationship among ability, effort, and outcome were not concisely stated. Therefore, independently reported factors were analyzed by grouping them together. In this manner, a participant's perceptions of ability, effort, and performance outcomes were compared. From the charted statements emerged patterns relating perceived ability to work ethic and sustained effort.

"I Believe I Can Be Smart"-Jayden

Ability was believed to be a product of work ethic for the majority of participants in the study. All but two of the seventeen participants echoed the same thought: if I work harder and spend more time studying, I will be smart. Although they used the words, "smart" or "intelligent," participants were alluding to their perceptions of their own ability. This paralleled Miller and Nicholls (1986) assertion that children initially equate effort with intelligence. However, Miller and Nicholls found this to be the case for children around the age of five. Graham and Barker (1990) and Miller and Nicholls (1986) found that by the time children are in middle school, ages 11-13, they begin viewing intelligence

as inversely proportional to the effort required to complete a task. At this age, the researchers found that students correlate intelligence to higher scores from minimal effort.

Although the participants in this study believed that additional effort would increase their intelligence, only half of them described themselves as intelligent when interviewed. Given the fact that, at the time of the interviews, all the participants were repeating an academic course in summer school, describing themselves as intelligent showed a high degree of positive self-perception. Those who described themselves negatively did so with a heavy heart which could be seen in their expressions and heard in their voices. Even though both groups believed ability was a product of effort, differences in sustained effort emerged in statements.

Participants, who believed they were intelligent, reported expending effort for a longer duration in the class in which they eventually failed then participants with a negative impression of their ability. Participants with a positive perception of their ability described sustained effort to within 14 days of the end of school. Some even stated that it was not until the last day of school that the prospect of failing was accepted or realized. On the other hand, participants with a negative perception of their ability reported giving-up as early as the beginning of the second semester.

This seems to coincide with the expectancy-value theory. According to expectancy-value theory, effort is a product of ability and the value of the reward or the strength of the aversion associated with a negative consequence (Tollefson, 2000). Applied to this situation, the reward would be promotion to the next grade level or avoidance of summer school. Expectancy-value theory would predict that the participants would exert effort

toward reaching the reward as long as they believed they had adequate ability. This appears to be the case for this group of participants. Those who believed they had ability continued toward their goal, and those who had a negative impression of their ability stopped exerting effort earlier and accepted the consequences- summer school.

One dimension irreconcilable in terms of expectancy-value theory was participants' belief regarding the relationship between ability and effort. The majority believed intelligence, or one's ability, was positively correlated with effort. This was somewhat of a contradiction for the participants who had a negative perception of their ability and academically resigned early in the school year. If they believed increased effort improved ability, then why did they report giving-up earlier than others in the study did? Several possibilities could explain this. Participants may have reported positively on their ability but truly doubted their own ability. One could imagine that these students were in fact skeptical of their intelligence but had been told multiple times by others that they were "smart," which the interview evidence supports. Participants often described how parents or teachers told them that they were "smarter then this" or that they were "smart but not trying."

According to Bandura (1977), an individual's perceived level of self-efficacy is developed through performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Of these, verbal persuasion has the least affect on altering an individual's self-efficacy, while performance accomplishments have the greatest impact. This would suggest that participants who reported themselves as intelligent and academically resigned prematurely might have been echoing the verbal

persuasions of others. They might have been told they were intelligent without this being affirmed through their own performance.

All but one of the participants in this study asserted that increased effort would improve their academic outcomes. Weiner (1979) argued that this mentality allows individuals to aspire to future successes. However, if an individual continues to experience failure over a period of time, outcomes begin to be attributed directly to ability. This echoes the previous discussion of the attribution-effort stalemate and supports the connection between participant attribution and ability.

"I can't do this because I am dumb…"-Emma. Ability attribution was predicted to occur at middle school age by Graham and Barker (1990) and Miller and Nicholls (1986). This was not the case with the majority of the participants in this study but was expressed by one of the participants. Emma believed she had low ability relative to classmates and siblings and that academic failure was inevitable. Unlike other participants who believed intelligence could be improved by exerting additional effort, Emma perceived her ability as innate. Weiner (1979) described this perception as stable, internal, and uncontrollable. Stability referred to an individual's belief that the locus of causality was internal and therefore could not be change. As a result, ability was uncontrollable and additional effort would not have an effect. Miller and Nicholls (1986) described this as Emma reaching what the researchers called level four where ability is seen as fixed and inversely proportional to effort.

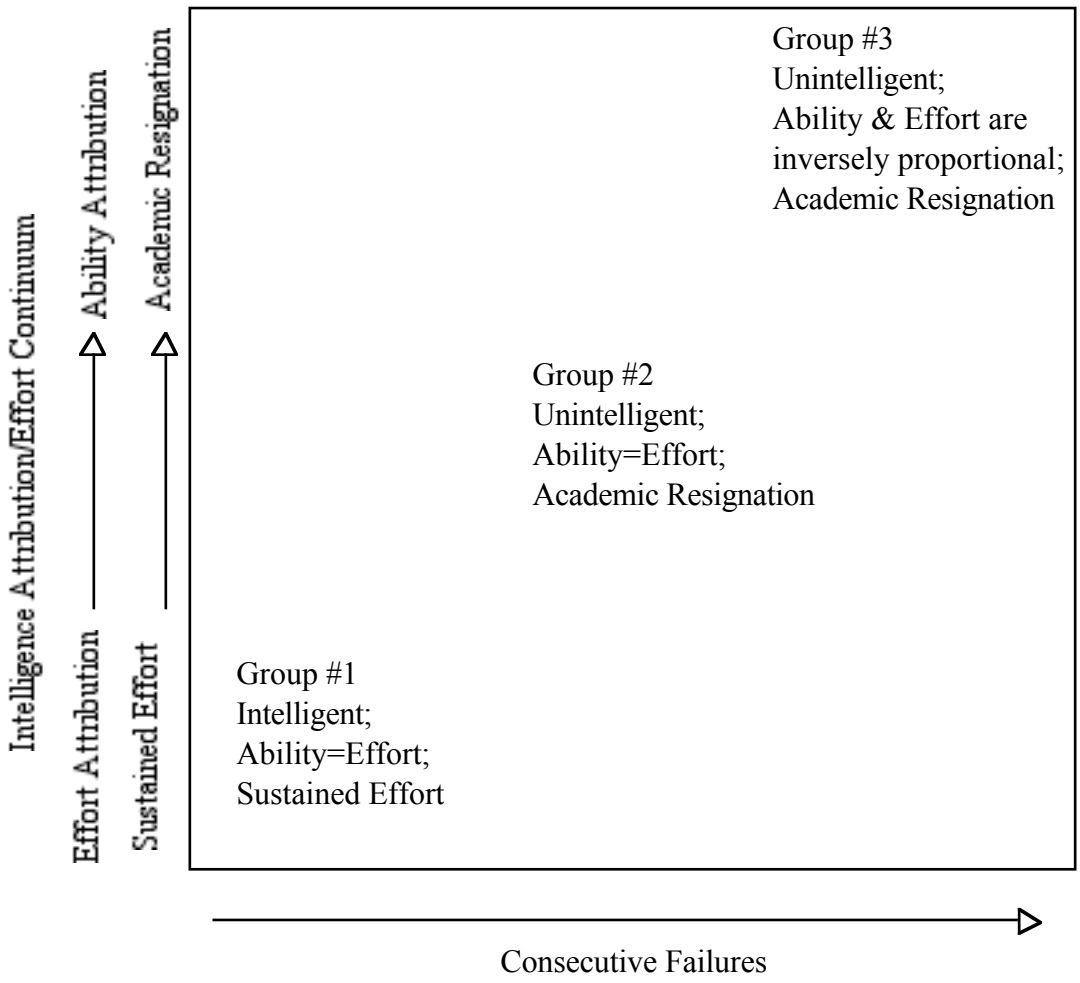
The differences observed between Emma and the other participants could be explained by applying the theories of Weiner (1979) and Bandura (1977). According to

Bandura (1977), self-efficacy beliefs emerge from accomplishments and failures. Weiner (1979) described how consecutive failures attributed to effort might lead to attributing outcomes to ability. Merging these theories provides a possible explanation for the relationships among ability, effort, and outcome found in this study (Figure 5-1).

The graph (Figure 5-1) shows that as failures increase, participants increasingly attribute outcomes to ability, and the academic resignation becomes more likely. Groups of participants are placed on the graph to demonstrate how the theories work together to explain the finding of this study. Group #1 believed increased effort would improve ability, believed they were intelligent, and exerted effort for a longer duration that the others. Group #2 also believed increased effort would improve ability, but they did not believe they were intelligent nor did they report sustained effort through the end of the year. At the far end of the continuum, participants in group #3 attributed outcomes to ability, believing that ability was inversely proportional to effort. Perhaps their perception of their academic performance indicated that they did not have the ability to pass the course, and they concluded that exerting additional effort would not improve their performance. This might explain why they academically resigned early during the school year.

Figure 5-1:

Application of the theories of Weiner (1979) and Bandura (1977) to illustrate the different perceptions of ability, effort, and outcome found in this study.



Although data on participants' past performance was limited, one could conjecture that the majority of the participants in the study may not have reached a critical number of failures after exerting effort required to change their belief in the relationship between ability and effort. On the other end of the spectrum, Emma may have observed her younger

sibling succeeding with little effort, but experienced continued failure herself, resulting in a transition to equating outcomes exclusively to her ability rather than her effort.

"Oh well, I will just do it in summer school"-Olivia. Academic resignation occurred when participants presumed failure was inevitable. The timing of the event varied among participants, but as stated earlier, seemed to correspond to perceptions of their own ability. When participants believed failure was inevitable, they often reported directing their energy toward other classes. Common among these participants was a feeling of hopelessness. Regardless of the value of the reward or severity of the consequence, participants did not expend effort in classes in which they believed failure was inevitable. For a few, this meant being disengaged for nearly half the year.

Participant often identified the point in time and a specific event related to academically resignation. A single assessment or assignment was often identified that dealt the final blow to their grade. The termed "last straw reasoning" was coined in this study to describe how participants identified a single event which "broke" their grade, rather than seeing the cumulative effect of all performance indicators as determining their final grade. This may indicate that participants did not understand the complexity of how final grades were calculated. Changing a marking period grade by five or more points in the last weeks or days of school is not an easy task. As the number of assignments increase throughout a marking period, the influence that a single assessment has on the average grade decreases participants may have identified that last straw assignment, but it may not have had the impact that they attributed to it.

Implications and Recommendations

Academic performance tends to build an expectation for future performance. When performance continues to be low, the student begins to question his or her ability. Once it is decided that ability is constant and low performance is inevitable, the duration of effort decreases. To combat this self-reinforcing behavior, educators should provide opportunities for success. This could be accomplished by substituting performance goals (or ability goals) for mastery goals (or task goals).

Ames and Archer (1988) operationalized performance goals as having characteristics, such as high grades, normatively high ability, and doing better than others. In contrast, mastery goals were described as and based upon improvement, effort, how students learn, and learning something new. When students engage in performance goal orientation they seek to show academic competency relative to other students. In contrast, mastery goal orientation fosters intrinsic satisfaction that comes from working to improve competency (Alderman & Midgley, 1996). Thompson and Musket (2005), studied students with a view of ability similar to the participants in the current study. They found that the performance of students in their study improved, whether they believed ability was fixed or could be improved incrementally, when they where primed with mastery goals. Therefore, when working with students, similar to the ones in the current study, teachers might be able to combat decreased student effort by setting mastery goals.

Suggested Studies for Future Research

Participants in the current study had passed some academic classes but were repeating others during summer school. Future studies should continue to examine this group's perceptions of ability, effort, and outcome as they relate to effort/ability attribution

in conjunction with academic resignation. For this population, how do the perceptions of these factors differ when related to the passed as opposed to the failed courses? There were indications that the participants in the current study attributed passing the academic courses to external sources, such as the teacher. Did participants' knowledge of their performance, goal orientation, or some other variable affect performance attribution? It would be particularly interesting to analyze the perceptions of the same population against those of their parents and teachers. Such a study could compare what each group attributes student performance in both the passed and failed courses. Ultimately, the population represented in the current research needs additional investigation related to how perceptions of ability influence effort and influence performance.

Sources And Levels Of Motivation

The source of and the degree to which participants in the current study were motivated varied. Intrinsic motivation was lacking and most participants reported being motivated by other individuals, consequences, interests, and long-term goals. The most notable source of motivation for participants was derived from wanting to please adults who had shown concern and invested time and energy into participants' success.

"I Even Thought Math was Interesting, but When I Started Getting Low Grades I Changed My Mind"-Anthony

Interest alone was not enough to motivate participants in this study to increase academic performance. This was not a major theme in this study, but it may be an area of interest for future studies. Motivation to exert effort toward an academic course may derive from both an individual's interest and success. As was the case with Anthony, interest in a

topic may not continue to fuel the motivation needed to exert effort toward a task if the rewards of being successful are not eventually realized. This would suggest that, regardless of how entertaining a course of study is at-risk students might lose interest if mechanisms are not in place to ensure a measure of success.

Success may also foster interest. Participants stated that they were interested and enjoyed the classes in which they were successful. In some cases, participants stated that they did not like the course of study prior to the school year in which they were successful. At least for the participants in this study, a positive correlation existed between interest and performance.

"I Already Had Lost Everything I Had to Loose"-Matthew

Negative consequences were the primary method used by adults to influence participants in this study, but negative consequences tended to have a short-term and inconsequential impact on academic outcomes. As Matthew stated, "there is always something on the line when you do a test or quiz." Participants' personal possessions and privileges were "on the line" and dependent on their academic outcomes. Electronic devices, the ability to participate in school sports, and free time were most often cited as being taken away as a result of poor academic performance. This usually corresponded to each four and one-half weeks progress report sent home. Participants stated that the negative consequence of having something taken away only motivated them for a short time. Negative consequences were reported to be ineffective because participants turned their attention to other activities or because they had nothing else to lose. For example, when an electronic game was taken away as a consequence, watching television, playing

outside, or one of the many other possibilities were substituted. Once all possessions and privileges were taken, nothing was left "on the line" to motivate participants to exert effort to improve academic performance.

This tends to support expectancy-value theory. The reward or consequence will only be motivational if the value is great enough to justify the effort needed to complete the task and there exists an expectation for success. It was not unexpected that the participants reported that negative consequences had little impact on their effort or performance. The consequences held practically no value to the participants. Additionally, participants' expectation for success was relatively low. Given the low value of the reward and the low expectation for success, participants were not motivated to exert the effort needed to positively influence their academic performance.

Negative consequences were not only ineffective, but they also tended to have negative side effects. As Christopher stated, "whenever [my parents] punished me instead of helping me, it made me feel worse." As the quotation demonstrates, the emotions associated with being academically unsuccessful tended to be amplified by receiving negative consequences. When the expectation for success is low, the prospect for having the negative consequence removed in the future is also low. One could speculate that this would produce a feeling of hopelessness and inevitability.

Participants generally agreed that positive consequences would have been more effective. For Christopher, parental acknowledgement of his satisfactory grades instead of narrowly focusing on the unsatisfactory ones would have motivated him. Other participants suggested material rewards as a source of motivation, but one example

indicated this might not be effective in all circumstances. One participant described being offered a new cellular telephone as a reward for passing. She emphasized her desire for the phone, but explained why she gave-up. Even though the value of the reward was high, effort was not sustained because her expectancy for success was low. The reward was offered with only a few weeks remaining in the school year to raise her grade several points. She reported initially exerting a great deal of effort, but quickly realizing that her efforts were futile, she quit trying. Again, this illustrated that both the value of the reward or consequence must great enough and the expectation for success must exist in order for effort to be sustained to accomplish a task. Had the cellular telephone been offered as a reward earlier (when success was still possible) the effort may have been sustained and outcome may have been different.

Although the findings support expectancy-value theory, they suggest that the way in which consequences and rewards operated may have been different, at least for the participants in this study. Parents and guardians who attempted to change the academic outcomes of their children almost exclusively used negative consequences. Based on the fact that participants ultimately repeated the academic course(s) in summer school, suggests that negative consequences have only a short-term affect. A plausible explanation could be that the value of negative consequences has a ceiling whereas the value of rewards may not. Unlike consequences, rewards may not have a maximum value, making it possible to balance the expectancy-value equation. Consequences at the disposal of participants' parents, on the other hand, have a ceiling. As Matthew stated, he had nothing else to lose.

"They Say They Will Beat Me if I Don't do My Work, but They Never Do"-Olivia

Adults' inconsistent treatment of participants' academic behaviors was apparent in most interviews. Although beating a child for poor academic performance is not condoned, Olivia's statement typifies the reported inconsistencies. Participants stated that they knew their parents would often not follow through with consequences, resulting in the hollow threats having little to no impact on effort or performance. Cases in which strict study regimens were instituted as a consequence were reported as initially having a positive impact. However, participants described how as parental resolve decreased, so did their grades. In another case, the lack of a clear action-consequence connection diminished the motivational value of the consequence. In one case, the lack of parental involvement resulted in inconsistency from the teacher. Alexander described how his teacher stopped calling his mother when he did not do his homework because it did not change his behavior. Instead of trying another consequence or reward system, his teacher stopped calling.

"I Have not Investigated That, but That's What I Want to Do"-Anthony

Long-term goals as motivators were not a major theme that emerged, but it warrants discussion as an area requiring additional research and attention in schools. Most of the participants in this study reported having career goals, such as becoming a doctor, nurse, pilot, business owner, or professional athlete. However, participants' study habits and knowledge of how to achieve their long-term goals was lacking. Participants did not seem to correlate current performance with goals, nor did they have a plan for attainment. A prime example came from Alexander, who proclaimed that he only did enough to get by

and in the same breath stated he was going to be a doctor. For the participants in this study, the process of goal attainment may be so obtuse that the long-term goal did not motivate them. For example, a student being told that he or she must do well in school may not be focused enough to be motivational.

"I Don't Want to Disappoint My Parents"-Madison

The most intriguing and powerful source of motivation for the participants in this study originated from the desire to please other individuals. Generally, parents, relatives, and teachers motivated participants to improve academically, but not all adults were a source of motivation. The difference seemed to stem from the participants' perception of caring or concern from the adult. Adults who devoted time and energy to improve the success of the participant were seen as caring. "I didn't want to disappoint…" was often the antecedent to descriptions of the caring, work ethic of others. When a teacher was perceived as doing everything in his or her power to ensure the success of the participant, motivation and performance was high. In these cases, the participants believed they were "liked" by the teacher. Participants supported their assessments by citing examples of how the teacher had been helpful and caring. In contrast, when teachers were perceived as disliking participants, examples of how their success was impeded were given.

Although parents and teachers were often the source of motivation, examples of friends and relatives motivating participants were also found. In these cases, verbalized concern for the success of the participant was enough to be motivational. Regardless, the common thread tended to be the perception of caring.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications of the findings are particularly relevant to the population represented in this study. Often times, negative consequences are used as a means to motivate low performing student. Failing grades, summer school, lose of privileges, and reprimands are the common negative incentives given. As the current study demonstrates, by both the statements of the participants and the fact that they ultimately failed one or two courses, these measures have limited value.

The current study reveals that the population in this study was motivated by caring individuals. Although most adults may want students to be successful, the means by which this is expressed may need to be considered. Developing a caring environment for all students may increase motivation and thus performance. Examples given by participants would suggest the teachers who show a high degree of work ethic devoted to the success of their students motivate them to exert the same amount of effort. Additionally, verbalizing that failure is not an option followed by interventions to improve the chances for success reinforces the perception of a caring environment and motivates the students.

Suggested Studies for Future Research

Additional research in this area should focus on factors that at-risk middle-school students identify as characteristics of a caring teacher. What are the perceived differences in caring between the teachers in the courses at-risk students pass and fail, and what examples do the students use as evidence? Additionally, is performance a product of the perceived caring environment or does the perception of the caring environment change based on performance?

The current study focused on middle school students repeating one or two courses in summer school. Negative consequences were reported as not influencing performance as much a caring individual. Is the same true of students who are generally high achieving? It would also be of interest to determine the degree to which positive incentives are used by parents and teachers to motivate students who are academically similar to the ones in the current study and the effectiveness of these positive incentives. The current study would predict that positive incentives are rarely used.

Sources And Levels Of School Bonds

"[My Friends] Are the Main [Reason] Why I Like Coming to School"-Madison

Social bonds were the primary source of school bonding for the participants in this study, far out weighting bonds associated with school activities or staff. Social bonds had both positive and negative influence on participants. Friends of a participant who increased motivation, increased self-confidence, decreased delinquent behavior, or improved the academic performance of the participant were considered source of positive social bonds. Negative social bonds had the opposite effect.

"[If my friend] didn't get what she said, I would help him…. if I didn't hear something he would help me"-Daniel. Dramatic stories emerged from the interviews of how positive social bonds changed the course of participants' academic lives. However, positive social bonds accounted for a small but meaningful fraction of the school bonding reported by participants. As was the case with Daniel, some friends not only supported his learning of the content but also pressured him to remain focused. This was the exception

however. Generally, the friends of participants were described as a bad influence that could not be overcome without assistance.

Participants knew the negative influence friends sometimes had and reported that when negative influences were removed, performance improved. Absent the negative social bonds, participants described aligning with the classroom norms due to pressure from other students. The effect of positive social bonds was powerful but rare for the participants in this study. Overall, the current study suggests that positive social bonds reported by participants had little impact on their performance. However, negative social bonds and interactions with other students considerably contributed to participants' low academic performance.

"I only came here because I liked getting in drama…"-Emma. As mentioned above negative social bonds were more prevalent among the participants in this study and strikingly contributed to low academic performance. For example, social interactions motivated Emma to attend school, but these interactions were all consuming. Instead of concentrating on academic endeavors, Emma described stewing over a social interaction for an entire class period. Distracting interactions with other student was cited by several participants as a primary cause for poor academic performance. "Drama" was portrayed as both a source of distraction and a reason to attend school.

Participants were often distracted, encouraged to misbehave, and pressured to avoid academic pursuits by their friends. In several cases, participants even stated that these friends were also attending summer school. Though cognizant of the negative influence these social bonds were having, participants seemed unable to break the bonds or lessen

the impact. Only one participant described being moved away from the negative influence of a friend by a teacher. When placed amongst motivated and successful students, his academic performance improved.

Hirschi (1969) suggested that delinquent behavior would decrease as social capital increased because the behaviors would be outside of what was socially acceptable. Relationship with teachers, parents, and other students comprise one's social capital and set the boundaries for self-regulating behavior. Participants in this study did not indicate social relationships with teachers, and their social capital was derived primarily from friends at school. Participants reported that their friends engaged in "drama", and creating class disruptions, and ultimately attended summer school. Some examples of social capital derived from family members had the same negative influence. Participants reported a degree of parental acceptance of academic failure and summer school because other family member had attended summer school. Evidence from these participants suggests that participants' behavior and academic performance was in accord with their social capital. This finding would reinforce the expectation that social capital alone does not prevent delinquent behavior. The behavioral norms of individuals comprising their social capital only define the limits of what is socially acceptable by reference to the behavior deemed acceptable by the individual(s) from whom that capital is derived.

Implications and Recommendations

The current study would suggest that students, similar to the participants, are readily influenced by their social bonds and the parameters under which they operate. This has implications for how students could be academically advantaged by astute class

placement. Often low performing students are grouped purposefully or indirectly. Grouping is done purposefully with the hope that the common needs of the low performing students can be addressed. Students are indirectly grouped because of complex scheduling issues and the level of classes offered. For example, high performing students may take a limited offering of advanced level classes which in turn drives their placement in the remaining courses. This results in low- performing students having similar schedules to other low-performing students.

Therefore, consideration should be given to way in which social norms within low performing classes are established. Teachers have typically tried to address this reality using seating charts to separate negative social bonds. Without experiences to foster new, positive social bonds, the negative influences still exist across the classroom. By developing classroom based performance and behavioral norms where students are dependent on each other, at-risk students may benefit.

Suggested Studies for Future Research

Future studies involving a similar student population to that focused on in this study could examine what drives social bonding between at-risk students. Are the bonds between low performing students a product of similar interests or the physical proximity of similarly performing students? Elementary classes may be academically more heterogeneous than middle school classes. So, did social bonds and norms change as students moved up in grades? Additionally, does placement of at-risk students among high achieving students with positive social norms improve performance? The negative social

bonds of the participants in this study had a perceived influence on their performance, and additional research is warranted.

Interactions And Relationships With School Personnel

Teacher-student relationships were defined as appropriate interactions between a student and teacher, which resulted in mutual understanding of background and a personal connection extending beyond one academic course. Substantial interactions and relationships between school personnel and participants in this study were conspicuously rare. The single reported relationship a participant had with a teacher profoundly affected her academic performance in several classes. She attributed most of her academic success to that relationship. In this particular case, the teacher's involvement and assistance extended beyond the teacher's own curriculum. Despite the relationship described, the participant still failed one course. The student believed that the relationship she had with the teacher would have also helped her pass the one failed class had the teacher been proficient in that subject.

Despite the potential benefits of positive social interactions with teachers acknowledged by participants, they overwhelmingly reported not being connected to their teachers. Individual teachers of specific were seen as caring, which tended to positively impact performance in that particular class. As a result, participants believed the teacher wanted the students in the class to be successful, but students did not know these teachers beyond the context of that specific classroom.

"It Would Have Helped More if I Was Actually Connected to My Teachers"-Ava

It is unclear if the absence of teacher-student relationships extended to students beyond the ones in this study. However, this absence is conspicuous and could benefit from additional study, especially given the emphasis on its importance expressed by one participant whose comments extended beyond her situation. Ava's comments and supporting examples stemmed from her own observations of students throughout the school. She described what she had referred to as a "lack of connection," which she attributed to teachers not caring for their students. Ava believed that if teachers understood their students' background, showed respect, and spoke to students as adults, positive relationships and academic outcomes would result.

"That's how I knew [the teacher] wanted to fail me…"-Isabella. When participants believed a teacher cared for them and was exerting effort to ensure academic success, they were motivated and were ultimately successful in those classes. On the other hand, the perception that a teacher disliked a participant was a predictor of failure in that class. The accuracy of participants' reports of being liked or dislike by their teacher was outside the realm of this study. However, the inability to establish the teacher's perspective is of little significance, since the participant's perception of the teacher-student relationship was each participant's reality hence potentially more predictive. This assumption is supported by Feldman et al. (1989) who found adolescents' "subjective" perceptions of caregivers' behavior to be more predictive of social and emotional outcomes than "objective" observation reports.

Wentzel (1997) studied the perceptions of middle school students to determine what perceived characteristics exemplified a caring teacher and the extent to which these

perceptions predicted performance. Wentzel's subjects' responses describing a caring teacher as "demonstrating democratic interaction styles, developing expectations for student behavior in light of individual differences, modeling a 'caring' attitude toward their own work, and providing constructive feedback" (p. 416). Examples of caring, democratic interactions styles from Wentzel's study included statements that the teacher talked, paid attention, asked questions, and listened to students. On the other hand, yelling, ignoring, and embarrassing the students characterized non-caring teachers. The current study provided some of the same examples, though most participants were describing the non-caring teacher in whose class they were unsuccessful. It was apparent in the current study that the perception of care correlated with positive academic achievement. Participants gave multiple examples of how teachers in the classes in which they were successful expressed care. Both an overall culture of caring and caring directed toward a specific individual were described. Teachers who were perceived as not accepting failure and giving multiple opportunities to students to be successful were seen as caring for their students. This also paralleled Wentzel's (1997) findings related to students' perception of care derived from expectations based on individualized expectations.

The additional effort exerted by the teacher to make learning fun or to give additional, individualized assistance also did not go unnoticed by the participants. The perception of care tended to increase participants' motivation as a result of not wanting to disappoint the teacher. Comments like "he was always standing up, asking the kids if they needed help, if they understood… he encouraged me that way" demonstrated that participants in the current study perceived the teachers' work ethic and were motivated by

it. In contrast, participants characterized teachers in the unsuccessful class as often sitting down and distributing worksheets. Similarly, Wentzel (1997) found that teachers who were perceived as caring about what they taught acted as a model for their students. As was found in the current study, Wentzel's subjects described caring teachers as ones who exerted special effort and make the class interesting. The activities and interactions generated by the teacher gave rise to the perceptions of caring that were derived in the participants' successful classes, but were absent in the descriptions of the failed classes in the current study. Both Wentzel's study and this current study found that teachers in the failed classes were often described as less helpful and their lessons as boring. Unlike the teachers whom participants perceived as caring and whom they did not want to disappoint, the failed teachers were not observed as investing as much energy into lessons and student success.

"Sometimes when you don't like a teacher you do something that annoys her"- Daniel. Student/teacher interactions can be vengeful, disruptive behaviors resulting in the potential side effect for teachers of being perceived as non-caring and not liking their students. As confirmed by two participants in this study, the behavior described by Daniel above may be more widespread than indicated in these data. For example, a teacher once reported to the researcher that students took turns on a daily basis to annoy a teacher they disliked. The students' behavior likely elicited additional responses from the teacher, which further degraded students' perceptions. The potential for escalation of behaviors from both the students and teacher and the loss of instructional time is obvious.

Sameroff and Mackenzie (2003) described this mutual interaction as a transactional process. They defined transaction as the process by which the "activity of one element changes the usual activity of another" (p. 5). Each response can vary in degree or create a new response, which in turn may fuel subsequent responses. According to Sameroff and Mackenzie (2003), transactional models have been used in multiple studies to describe the dynamic, reciprocal occurrences between individuals and their experiences. Although Sameroff and Mackenzie attempted to provide guidance in the application of a transactional model to quantitative experiments, they concluded that, "under real-life circumstances, the best we can do is description" (p. 22).

The bidirectional interchange, like the one reported between Daniel and his teacher, has only one solution, the teacher. Students are often told that if they behave during class the teacher would not be required to be as strict, where "strict" is interpreted by students as "mean." The difficulty with this assertion is that the students would not be able to reframe from the aforementioned behaviors. They would continue to respond to the teacher's behavior. On the other hand, through education, maturity, and professionalism, a teacher could be expected to break the negative spiral by changing the environment to which the students are responding. Simply put, teachers would be well-served to portray themselves as likable and caring. This is not to say that students' misbehavior should be ignored, but rather that the way in which it may be addressed could be altered. As the teacher builds a positive persona, student behavior should improve. As Daniel stated, students do not deliberately misbehave in the classes of the teachers they like.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications of the findings related to caring teachers, which supports previous research, are clear. Nothing seemed to motivate and have a positive impact on the participants in this study like the perception of care. This was seen in relationship to parents, other individuals, and teachers. The obvious difference between the classes in which participants passed and failed was the presence or absence of care. Based on the findings from this study and previous research, teachers and other school personnel would do well to reflect on the academic advantage of students' perceptions of care. It is not enough for school personnel to have internalized caring beliefs. Appropriate markers, which stimulate perceptions of care, must be evident to the students. For example, few students would interpret a teacher's "yelling at" the class to maintain order as a caring action regardless of the intent.

Suggested Studies for Future Research

Additional research should focus on the relationships among the perception of care, and students' motivation, effort, and performance. Examples given by the participants in the current study demonstrate the impact of perceived care on motivation. The mediating factors among these variables, however, are not clear and would benefit from additional study. For example, what markers do students observe that produce perceptions of care and how many are required? Additionally, the negative transactional cycle experienced in some of the classes in which participants were unsuccessful was interesting. Establishing the extent to which this phenomenon occurs and its relationship to the perception of caring would contribute to the development of appropriate interventional strategies.

The Role And Level Of Involvement Of Adults On Participants' Academic Lives

Participants in this study took primary responsibility for their academic outcomes, but they were cognizant of the influence that adults could have. Parents and teachers were the adults most often mentioned as playing a role in the academic lives of the participants in the current study. Teacher interventions were widely discussed by participants, but the impact of these was not apparent. A comparison of teacher interventions between passed and failed classes for these participants revealed few differences.

"Maybe it is the people I live with that have a negative or positive influence on me"-Alexander

Evidence of parental involvement that would positively influence the performance of participants was lacking in this study. Often, parental involvement was problematic and characterized by negative interactions with the school. When parents or guardians were perceived as concerned, performance improved. However, sustained parental concern was often characterized as "too little, too late."

"She wasn't mad at me 'cause of the teacher"-Daniel. Problematic parental involvement emerged during several of the participants' interviews. This type of involvement was characterized by interventions that would be unlikely to produce positive academic outcomes. Such cases involved parents projecting negative perceptions of the school and/or staff to their children, resulting in a shift of academic responsibility away from the student. Although participants generally took responsibility for their academic outcomes, they reported that their parents often held the teacher responsible. For example, academic failure was attributed to racism by one parent. That parent's child reported this

was not the case, but it illustrates parental involvement which does not address factors that would have the potential to make a positive impact.

In another case, parents only became educationally involved when school staff need to be "take[n] care of." The participant seemed to conclude from this that her actions were always correct, and when academic indicators dropped, it was the result of the teacher. In other cases like Daniel's, parental discontent with their child's academic outcome was directed toward the school or staff rather that toward their child. Participants described experiencing very little negative feedback from parents as a result of poor academic performance. This was sometimes followed by observing their parent(s) becoming angry with school staff. Participants' perceived this as their parents not holding them responsible for academic outcomes. In other words, some participants received signals from their parents that the responsibility for academic outcomes was outside the participant's control.

Participants expressed a desire to have positive parental involvement in their academic pursuits, but often this was not the case. Instead, parental involvement had a negative effect. Although most participants accepted responsibility for their academic outcomes, problematic parental involvement left participants with the perception that outcomes were to some extent out of their control. In other words, for a large number of participants, parents shifted responsibility to teachers rather than hold their children accountable.

"My mom, she really doesn't care"-Alexander. The idea that a caring adult could have an impact on academic outcomes emerged multiple times during data analysis. Participants often expressed the desire to have their parent(s) or guardian(s) more closely

monitor their academic progress. Participants believed in a positive relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. The rational for the connection between adult involvement and performance stemmed from two sources: the perception of parental concern and parental pressure.

The perception that parents were concerned about academic performance motivated participants to perform. Participants perceived varying degrees of parental concern. Alexander represented one extreme. He believed that his mother did not care about his academic performance, and as a result, he had very little motivation to academically excel. Generally, for these participants, parental concern was intermittent and paralleled academic progress reports sent by the school. Academic improvement briefly followed times when parental concern was shown. Participants were cognizant that their parent(s) or guardian(s) were not expressing enough concern. As one stated, regarding his poor academic performance, "she wouldn't really react that way you would think a parent would react."

When parents and guardians showed concern, a dramatic difference was seen in participants' statements regarding their motivation. When an adult devoted time and energy to the academic success of a participant and/or expressed concern, participants felt obligated to reciprocate. Not wanting to "disappoint" the adult who had invested in their academic success, participants reported exerting more effort and being more motivated.

Parental pressure to improve performance was also perceived as a form of parental concern. When parents established study regimens and helped with academics, participants believed parents were concerned about their academic performance. The effort shown by parents tended to be reciprocated by participants. This was often driven by the desire not to

disappoint the significant adult exerting the effort or establishing the routine. This is not to say that the established study regimens did not have an impact. Participants stated that they did. However, motivation to exert effort toward academics tended to be derived, not from the structured study time, but rather the perception of parental concern.

"The end of the year when they started actually making sure I did my work… it was too late to change my grades"-Christopher. "Too little, too late," was the predominant theme of parental involvement for the participants in this study. Participants' parents and guardians waited until they were failing, late in the academic school year before action, if any, was taken. By the time parent(s) or guardian(s) became involved, action was too late to significantly influence their grade. To make matters worse, the action taken was frequently inconsistent.

As previously discussed, parental concern and oversight of academic performance varied in degree and was intermittent, paralleling the four and a half week academic progress reports. This produced undulating academic outcomes which participants likened to the stock market and a rollercoaster. Many lamented that their parent(s) had not monitored their academic progress from the beginning.

As the analysis suggests, the participants in this study would have benefited from consistent parental monitoring from the beginning of the school year. As Christopher stated, he needed his parents to do more than just check his grades. In order for him to be successful, he needed them to "go behind [him] to see if [he did] it right" throughout the year. This was echoed by the majority of the participants. They lacked the motivation necessary to self-monitor in all academic classes, but they desired to be academically

successful. As Jacob stated, “I found that when I had more people watching over me… it helped me want to do better…”

Implications and Recommendations

The current study suggests that if adult involvement reaches a critical mass it may produce positive academic outcomes for the participants in this study. Participants described a particular point in time when the opportunity to be academically successful was still available, but adult intervention fell short of what was necessary. Had critical mass been reached, as was the case in successful classes, the participants may not have failed. As Jacob asserted, the more caring and supportive individuals he had, the more motivated and successful he became. To ensure that students receive enough adult support, at-risk students should be identified earlier in the school year. Once identified, these students would benefit from consistent and structured parental oversight beginning as early as possible.

Identification of at-risk students could occur as early as the first interim reports, which are typically generated for the patents of middle school students within the first three to four and one-half weeks of school. Once identified, school staff could focus on these students and give them the attention they need to be successful. This may be the rudimentary concept behind many attempts to help low-achieving students. However, the additional ingredient that may be missing, as the current study suggests, is a perceptible ethic of care. Educators may care about the students they serve, but their students must believe.

Simply meeting with low-achieving students on a regular basis and applying interventions may not be enough to create the perception of care needed to motivate them. Too often, educators attempt to standardize the means by which low-achieving students are addressed. I doing so, the ability of students to perceive the teachers' ethic of care may be lost amidst the systematic process. Some educators have the ability to project their ethic of care to individual students or the entire class. In these cases, students' perceptions seem to drive their motivation. Therefore, as educators institute programs to tackle the problems associated with at-risk students, consideration should be given to how students will perceive the interventions.

Suggested Studies for Future Research

Several themes emerged during the course of this study, and each could have implications for future research. However, the most dramatic and exciting theme that came from the current study was the impact the perception of care could potentially have on students' motivation and academic outcomes. Participants wanted adults in their lives to care about their academic performance and help them to be successful. Future research in this area could well concentrate on adult interventions related to the perception of caring, including the marker(s) students associate with caring teachers in whose classes the students are successful. Also of potential benefit would be research into determining the critical mass of adult involvement needed by at-risk students in order for them to be successful.

"I Wanted To Share My Story…" Anthony

The researcher initially assumed that the free snacks would entice middle school students to participate, but it became clear early during the interviewing that another motivational factor was at work. While packing up the remaining snacks, a participant, Isabella, lingered in the room and remarked that the reason she wanted to participant in the current study was to share his story. The interview had concluded, the recording was turned off, and the researcher had not asked a question, yet he felt compelled to share his motivation for participating. This was an intriguing notion, but in retrospect, maybe it should have been expected.

As a result of this event, at the conclusion of each interview that followed, one final question was asked: Why did you agree to be interviewed? The majority of the participants expressed a desire to talk to someone about their experiences; they wanted to share their story. For some, expressing themselves to a stranger was somehow safer or more comfortable than talking to friends or family.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) argued that one primary means of determining whether a topic is important for research is if "it makes an invisible problem clear or gives a voice to a voiceless people" (p. 52). The participants in the current study were academically unsuccessful middle school students who were required to repeat one or two academic courses in summer school in order to be promoted the following year. The multitude of students each year that find themselves in the same situation go unreported to state educational agencies and are largely unnoticed by researchers, making the problems of these middle school students invisible. In addition, as the current study showed, these

students want to share their story. It is hoped that this study encourages practitioners and future researches to listen to the voices of summer.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

The following are base questions to be asked during interviews with 6th- 8th grade students who are enrolled in one or two academic classes during summer school. In order to better "hear the students voices," six open-ended questions will be asked. Depending on participant responses, additional follow-up questions will be asked. Potential follow-up questions are listed below each of the six primary questions.

Warm- up questions:

a. So tell me about yourself.

b. What do you want to do when you grow up?

c. What class or classes are you taking in summer school?

1. How did school go last year?

    a. What things do you believe may have contributed to you failing (*insert name of failed class*). (Possible prompts: life events, family, work habits, illness) Are the factors you described still going on?

    b. Tell me three things, which you believe you could have done that would have helped you pass last year? Why?

    c. Tell me three things, which you believe the school/ teachers could have done that would have helped you pass last year? Why?

d. What are the differences between (*insert name of failed class*) and the other academic classes? What did you do differently? Did you like one more than the other? Differences in teachers?

e. Tell me about things which help you focus at school and things which distracts you.

f. Tell me what you do to get ready for a test.

2. How did you come to be in summer school?

a. At what point during the school year did you decide that you were not going to pass (*insert name of failed class*)? Why at that point? Tell me what you did after that point. Follow ups: Did anyone after that point tell you that you could still pass? Did they tell you what you needed to do.

b. Was (*insert name of failed class*) hard? On a scale of 1 to 10. What made it hard.

c. When you are working on school work, what do you do when you get stuck?

d. What gives you the most confidence that you will be able successfully at completing a homework assignment, project or doing well on a test? (past performance, modeling, verbal persuasion or your emotions).

e. Do you sometimes feel anxious or tense in school? Before tests, for example, or in particular subjects? Explain.

f. Tell me how you work through a problem (Prompts: do you ask for help? From whom? How long do you persist?).

g. How do you learn new things? Is it easy/hard? Tell me about things which are easy to learn about and things which are hard. Why do you think that is so?

h. Define "smart." Out of about 400 students in your grade at your school, where would you rank yourself (1 is the top). Why?

3. What motivates you?

a. Tell me about things which motivate you to do school work? How do you motivate yourself? How does your parent motivate you?

b. Tell me about your plans after you finish school.

c. Do you believe (*insert name of failed class*) will help you in the future?

d. Was (*insert name of failed class*) interesting or boring. Why?

e. Tell me about how the year went in (*insert name of failed class*); how did it start off as opposed to how it ended (Prompts: Describe your feelings, effort, difficulty of the material, teacher, etc).

4. What do you like and dislike about school?

a. After a weekend or holiday, how do you feel about coming back to school?

b. If you could chose any middle school, which on would you attend? Tell me why?

c. In what school related activities have you been involved? Sports, clubs, electives

d. Tell me about your friends. What do they like to do? Are they involved in sports, clubs etc.

e. What do your friends like to do?

f. Do you have more or less friends then other students? Why do you think that is? Tell me how you became friends with them.

g. Tell me about adults at school who you like. How often do you see them? Why do you like them?

h. How do you think teachers would describe you? What about other students?

i. Did you get into trouble a lot at school? In the class in which you failed? How about your friends?

j. Give me examples of things which friends, parents and teachers say to make you feel good. Examples of things which make you feel bad.

5. Tell me about your teachers from last year?

a. How did your (*insert name of failed class*) teacher react when you made a grade below a "C?" Ask the same question regarding other academic classes.

b. Describe your (*insert name of failed class*) teacher from last year; teaching style, assignments ect. (directed to the teacher whose class was failed). Describe your relationship with the teacher? Ask the same question regarding other academic classes.

c. On a scale of one to ten, how much did you like your (*insert name of failed class*) teacher? (10 is the best).

d. Describe a teacher you liked. Did you get a good grade in his/her class?

e. Tell me about a time when you were successful in (*insert name of failed class*). (If not in the failed class then one of the others). What did the teacher do? Your parents?

6. How were your parents or other adults involved in school last year?

a. When you need help with school-work, who do you go to? Why?

b. How do your parents/ guardians fell about your school? Give me an example of that?

c. How do you parents react when they found out about grades below a "C" on assignments and at progress reports?

d. How does your parent know how you are doing in school? How often do they check?

e. Tell me how your parent communicates with the school?

f. Tell me about the day when they found that you did not pass one or more classes?

g. What has your parent said will be different next school year?

h. What does your mother/ father want you to be when you grow up? How do you know and why do they want you to become that?

Appendix B

The Frequency of Quotations Assignment to Codes and Their Description Sorted Alphabetically by Theme

Theme	Context	Code	Quotation Frequency	Description of Code
Adult		parent(s) reaction to summer school	1	Parental response when informed that participant failed and must attend summer school.
Adult		parent support college	3	Parent(s) commented on the value of college.
Adult		parental involvement	38	Parent(s) took action related to their child's education (e.g., contacts the teacher, imposed consequences, and created structures).
Attribution	Academic resignation	responsibility taken by student	26	Participant took responsibility for his or her academic outcome and/or behavior.
Attribution	Behavior	behavior: performance related	20	Participant expressed that his or her academic performance and behavior were related.
Attribution	Behavior	distractions	28	Factors that participants stated diverted their attention from educational activities.
Attribution	Fail	attribution to failing	58	Factors the participants attributed to failing and/or influenced their ability to pass?

Attribution	Outcome	ability/effort/outcome-	5	Participant described how outcome was related to ability/effort.
Attribution	Pass	attribution to passing	13	Factors the participants attributed to passing and/or influenced their ability to pass?
Attribution	Pass	barriers to passing	17	Participant indicated that a single event or graded schoolwork lead to failing (e.g., test, project, lack of extra credit).
Attribution		placing blame	6	Participant indicated that their academic outcome was the result of one or more individuals' negative actions.
Attribution		racist	2	Participant believed race was a factor.
Behavior	Attribution	avoidance/lying	4	Participant admitted not telling the truth.
Behavior	Attribution	behavior at school	59	Participant described their behavior at school (e.g., good/bad and consequence).
Behavior	Attribution	gang activity	16	Participant described his or her involvement in a gang.
Behavior	Pass	discipline in passed class	1	Participant describes disciplinary action that occurred in the passed course.

Bonds	Influence	school bonds (friends)	85	Relationship described with other students in school.
Bonds	Influence	school bonds (staff)	29	Discussed a positive or negative relationship with school personnel.
Bonds	Motivation	family member in summer school	4	Participant discussed a family member in relationship to summer school, poor academic performance, and/or dropping out.
Bonds	Student	school bonds (activities)	35	Participant discussed involvement in school activities: sports, clubs, or elective classes
Challenges		bullied	2	Participant described persistent emotional or physical attacks, which interfere with schoolwork.
Challenges		challenges	21	Factors brought up by the participant which research indicated could influence performance (e.g., single parent, homeless, adopted, drugs, ExEd, ELL, and SES).
Challenges		difficulties	13	Participant expressed a personal difficulty with learning.
Classroom	Fail	class/teacher attributes: failed class	98	Participant described class, teacher's attributes, and/or feelings related to the failed class(es).

Classroom	Pass	class/teacher attributes: passes class	60	Participant described class, teacher's attributes, and/or feelings related to the passed class(es).
Classroom		difference in P/F class	33	Participant described differences between the passed and failed classes.
Environment	Student	likes/dislikes: school	37	Participant described what he or she liked or dislikes about school.
Environment		perception: other staff	11	Participant described school staff other than the participant's teacher(s).
Environment		perception: school environment	4	Participant described the school environment.
Interaction	Adult	conflict with guardian	5	Participant described disagreements or arguments with his or her guardian(s).
Interaction	Interaction	negative interaction with school	8	Participant described negative interaction at school.
Intervention	Adult	family involvement in studies	8	A member of the participant's family helps him or her to prepare for school.
Intervention	Adult	parents-studies	8	Participant described parental involvement in preparing for school (e.g., help with studying

				and homework).
Intervention	Communication	parent/school communication	36	Participant indicated communication took place between parents and school staff.
Intervention	Fail	teacher intervention: failed class	42	Participant described teacher interventions intended to promote success by the teacher(s) in the failed class(es) (e.g., tutoring, allowing to redo work and or tests).
Intervention	Pass	teacher interventions: passed class	21	Participant described teacher interventions intended to promote success by the teacher(s) in the passed class(es) (e.g., tutoring, allowing to redo work and or tests).
Intervention	Student	study habits	59	Participant described his or her routine at home (e.g., study, play, environment for studying, chores).
Intervention		interventions by others	2	Participant described interventions intended to promote success by sources other than school or family (e.g., tutoring).
Intervention		needs: others	12	Participant expressed a need, usually of family, that may have been academically beneficial.

Intervention		needs: school	35	Participant described possible interventions school staff could have provided. This included participant's inability to recognize additional services that could have been provided.
Intervention		student initiated help	3	Participant sought help preparing for school.
Interview		comfort level	2	Participant expresses his or her comfort level during the interview.
Interview		interview- why vol.	9	Participant stated the reason why he or she volunteered to be interviewed.
Motivation	Adult	parental inconsistency	8	Participant described parent not following through with stated consequences or actions.
Motivation	Intervention	family involvement	7	Participant described a family member who is an influence on his or her performance or behavior.
Motivation	Student	goals: long term	15	Participant expressed goals/aspirations for the future (e.g., college, work).
Motivation	Student	goals: needed to reach	4	Participant described the steps necessary to reach stated goals.
Motivation		education importance	7	Participant stated that education is important.

Motivation		motivation	69	Participant described sources of motivation.
Motivation		parent consequences/ motivators	52	Participant described positive/negative parental motivators (e.g., consequences, rewards).
Outcome	Fail	failure realized	16	Participant indicated when he or she believed failure was inevitable, and/or how he or she was made aware.
Outcome		effort	14	Participant expressed the degree of effort he or she exerted toward a subject/activity.
Outcome		grade performance insight	45	Participant indicated that he or she and/or his or her parent had knowledge of academic performance.
Outcome		past performance	37	Participant described his or her academic performance during previous year(s).
Outcome		time	4	Participant indicated that the long-term effect of his or her actions on grades were realized at some point during the regular school year.
Outcomes		performance	33	Participant described his or her academic performance during the

				2008-2009 regular school year.
Self-perception	Fail	teacher(s) description: failed class	17	Participant described how he or she believed the teacher in the failed class(es) would describe him or her.
Self-perception	Pass	teacher(s) description: passed class	10	Participant described how he or she believed the teacher in the passed class(es) would describe him or her.
Self-perception		intelligence defined	42	Participant defined "smart" or "intelligent" in relationship to himself, herself, and/or others.
Self-perception		self-perception	100	Participant described himself or herself.
Student	Challenges	disadvantaged	1	Participant alluded to a factor, which indicated that he or she meets the State guidelines for being disadvantaged.
Student	Challenges	ex.ed.	7	Participant indicated that he or she was in exceptional education.
Student		emotion expressed	8	Participant became emotional or expressed that he or she had an emotion related to an event.
Student		family	37	Participant described family relationships (e.g., parent, step-

			parent, grandparent, foster parent).
Student	interests	31	Participant described an interest within or outside school.
Student	nonchalant	9	Participant indicated that he or she is unconcerned with academic outcomes.
Student	reflections between meetings	12	Participant discussed thoughts that pertained to the first interview session.
Student	responsibilities at home	1	Participant indicated that he or she had responsibilities around the home beyond schoolwork.
Student	term defined	11	Participant defined slang words he or she used during the interview.
Student	belief	8	Participant described a belief, characterized by statements which started with “sometimes I believe…” or “I think…”
Student	learning style	2	Participant described ways he or she prepared for assessments and/or the preferred instructional strategy.
Student	nervousness	7	Participant expressed nervousness during interview.

Teacher	Fail	perception of teacher: failed class	54	Participant described his or her perception of teacher or classroom behaviors in the failed class(es).
Teacher	Pass	perception of teacher: passed class	19	Participant described his or her perception of teacher or classroom behaviors in the passed class(es).
Teacher		perfect teacher	3	Participant described the "perfect teacher."
	Student	strategies for next year	20	Participant described how next year would be different.
		state assessment	9	Participant mentioned state assessment.
		students: other	19	Students, other than friends, were discussed by the participant.
		summer school	25	Participant discussed summer school.

Appendix C

Analysis of Participants' Self-reported Ability, Effort, and Outcome

Participants	Exemplar Quotations and Paraphrases
Alexander	
Self-perception (ability)	"I don't really think I am smart." Defined smart, in part, as someone not in summer school. "Use to be smart, but is losing my touch."
Effort	He would check his grade online and "in the areas [he] needed to improve, [he] would put in a little more effort and just get by."
Outcome/ Consequences	He calculates how much is "just enough to get by." "When I realized that my grades were going down it was too late for me to do anything about it. I could try all I wanted, but I couldn't get my grade up enough that I could pass."(determined this the last month) Had attended summer school the prior year. "I did horribly in all my subjects... I only failed one." He stated that he did not look ahead and consider possible consequence. "If I have to, I will; if I don't then I won't." "My mom, she really doesn't care."
Anthony	
Self-perception (ability)	Believes he is "kinda smart" in some areas because he does not do all thing correct. Believes he is smart in one academic course.
Effort	"I feel so bad for myself, because I was trying so hard." "I thought [failed subject] was interesting, but when I started getting low grades, I changed my mind."
Outcome/ Consequences	Grades started to fall in May or June as tests, quizzes, and projects were being assigned. Told by one of his teachers on the last day of school that he did not pass. In the other class he failed, Anthony stated that the teacher stood up in front of the class and told him he did not pass for the year. Stated that his mother was not upset about him attending summer school.
Christopher	

Self-perception (ability)	Believes he is smart.
Effort	"When nothing ever happens with my good grades, it made me feel like why should I even try to make good grades if your not going to do anything about it."
Outcome/ Consequences	Stated that he was behind during the first semester, and by the second semester it was too late. Was warned at each interim that he was in danger of failing. Attended summer school the prior year. "…fussed at, grounded, couldn't go anywhere with friends, had to sit home, more study time, take everything from my room."
Daniel	
Self-perception (ability)	Smart in certain courses in which he does well.
Effort	
Outcome/ Consequences	Learned he was to fail with three weeks remaining. First time in summer school. "Stated that his mother was not upset with him about attending summer school.
Emily	
Self-perception (ability)	"At some points." Smart in courses in which she does well.
Effort	Believes that increased effort will increase performance (smart).
Outcome/ Consequences	Learned she was to fail three days before the end of school. Said she checked her grade almost every day. Began feeling that she would have to attend summer school at the end of the first semester. Stated that she was doing well at the beginning, but her grade went up and down the remainder of the year.

Emma		
	Self-perception (ability)	Does not believe she is smart. "I am always telling myself that I am dumb." "I tell myself that I am stupid and will never achieve good grades." "Even if I try hard to not say bad stuff about myself, I can't change myself."
	Effort	Felt sorry for herself because she never put much effort into the work. "I tell myself that I am stupid and will never achieve good grades." She described one of the classes she passed as regular, hard, and not liked, but she could not explain why she passed because she did not try. The other passed class was described as easy and liked, and she "never studied." Said it was so easy because she liked it. "Since the beginning of the year, I didn't want to do my work, and I didn't feel like doing it."
	Outcome/ Consequences	"I am always saying, I am not going to pass the grade. I can't do this because I am dumb and I can't do it. I am not smart enough; this is for smart kids." A letter was sent home three weeks before the end of school, stating that she must raise her grade from a 60 percent to a 73 percent in order to pass. Learned three days before that she did not pass. "Toward the end of the year, I knew I wouldn't pass." "My mom screamed at me and said…, just wait until your dad comes home…" Emma's father arrived home late and tired and nothing happened.
Ethan		
	Self-perception (ability)	
	Effort	
	Outcome/ Consequences	Failing the last two weeks of school. "an A was four dollars, a B is three and a C is one; if I get a D, I owe them fifty cents, and if I get an F, I owe the on dollar and fifty cents." Video games taken away, but does play the games. Says this did not work. Grounded 1 to 2 days.
Isabella		
	Self-perception	

(ability)	
Effort	
Outcome/ Consequences	On the last day of school, she found out from a teacher other that the one whose class she failed that she did not pass. Reported that upon asking the teacher of the class in which she failed, why was she not told sooner, the teacher replied, "you are suppose to ask me what your grade is." Stated that mother would tell her to pull up the grade before the end of the year, but she was not upset.
Jacob	
Self-perception (ability)	Doesn't always feel smart.
Effort	"I thought it was pretty basically easy. I just didn't do the work and stuff."
Outcome/ Consequences	He believed he would fail at the beginning of the third marking period. Was given a progress report every two weeks. Stated that his grade was like a roller coaster.
Jayden	
Self-perception (ability)	Knows he has it [intelligence] but does not show it. "I believe that I can be smart. I believe that I can get smarter if I put myself to the test. Working harder and studying harder, I could be as smart as some people."
Effort	"I wasn't trying as hard as I could, so I got about a B or a C." After a conference his grade started going back up.
Outcome/ Consequences	"I started to notice at the beginning of the second nine weeks that my grade was going down." "she would tell me, but she wouldn't really react that way you would think a parent would react." Received consequences the first three time only. Doing everyone's chores and not allowed to go outside until they are done. Sent to bed earlier.
Joshua	

Self-perception (ability)	"I knew I wasn't using it to my full potential. I only use it when I want to because I always wanted to play around with my friends."
Effort	"I knew I wasn't using it to my full potential. I only use it when I want to because I always wanted to play around with my friends." "I never got the chance to do her work because I was trying to do study and other project for other classes."
Outcome/ Consequences	He stated that he did not know that he was failing until the third marking period and was told on the last day of school when he arrived home that he did not pass. Had a 69 percent at the third nine weeks. Stated that he would not be allowed to play sports the following year and no summer activities.
Madison	
Self-perception (ability)	Not a good test taker. "I don't know why cause all the answers I know, but when it comes to doing it on a test, I do horrible." "Since I moved here, I lost faith in myself and so did my parent a little because when I was in [last school division] I got straight As. I never got below an A minus." She attributes this to having learned the material in elementary school that is being taught now, and she has forgotten it. "My brain, it has..., I don't know what's wrong with it. I have a lot of problems with it though." "I know I'm smart. Its just that I don't do everything the same way they do here."
Effort	"…the courses here are hard, but that's just because most of the time I didn't turn in my stuff."
Outcome/ Consequences	Made all As at her prior school. Phone taken away, cannot go shopping, on TV, can not go anywhere with friends.
Matthew	
Self-perception (ability)	"I'm an average student…I'll get above average grades.' "I know I'm not very good in every subject, but the subject that I know I can nail is [academic subject named]."

Effort	"[tests] were fairly easy" except when it was "turned around to trick you."
Outcome/ Consequences	Found out two days before the end of school. Overall grade was 67 percent. Relative became very mad. Computer taken away and no TV for four weeks.
Michael	
Self-perception (ability)	"In some things I am smart…. Like in sports I'm smart. Sometimes in [academic course passed named] I'm smart. Different things I can be smart at." He lists skills in the academic course, in which he passed and is proficient, as reasons he believes he is smart in that area. "I can be smart when I want to be." Mentioned that most of his friends knew more then he did.
Effort	"I'm pretty confident in school cause I just keep trying to do it cause I don't want to repeat the same grade. So, I will do whatever it takes to pass." "I can do the stuff. It's just sometimes I am too lazy to do it." "…most of the stuff we go over is pretty easy, and I can do it fast...[lists several topics in academic course passed]."
Outcome/ Consequences	Two weeks before the end of school, he looked at his grades on-line and realized that he was failing. The teacher called after school ended to inform his parent that he must go to summer school. Started to drop because of homework. He indicated that he did not know why how the final grade was derived. Stated that his grade was coming up but there was not enough time. "My mom wasn't all that mad."
Olivia	
Self-perception (ability)	Does not believe she is smart. Believes she could be smart if she "studied a lot and read a lot, I guess."
Effort	Says she really does not put herself "toward things." Otherwise, she would be smart. "I just gave up… the last three days of school." "I don't think I really tired. I think I was trying like, to fit in with people. Like, I wasn't being myself… that got me going down hill, and I thought, I'm not going to try."

Outcome/ Consequences	Grade would not go up from a 73.5. Started receiving Ds and Fs after the first semester. Parents threatened to beat her if she did not do her work, but never did.
William	
Self-perception (ability)	Felt "smart" at one point in two academic classes. Feels smart now because he is passing summer school.
Effort	Believes his efforts toward getting on "the right track" will be under-minded by karma.
Outcome/ Consequences	Parent received a call from his teacher, who said William was failing. Reflecting on past years, William did not know how he passed based on his grades. Was talked to by his father when emails were received by a teacher for poor performance.

VITA

The research, James Calvin Frye II, was born in Roanoke, VA on January 22, 1967. He attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University from 1986 through 1990, graduating with a bachelor of science in secondary science education. A master of education in administration and supervision was earned from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2001. He taught science for 14 years, at both the middle and high school level before becoming a middle school assistant principal in 2004.