Adolescent Motivation

From a Neurological and Adlerian Perspective

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Abstract

This paper examines adolescent motivation from neurological and developmental perspectives. The intent of this paper is to identify information and interventions related to adolescent motivation that are useful for educators. The paper discusses motivational factors such as achievement goals, task value, self-efficacy, attributional beliefs, sense of belonging and sense of autonomy both in general, and as they relate to motivation in the classroom. The paper also identifies interventions, using the response to intervention model that may be implemented by school counselors.
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Research Question or Problem

Adolescence, though challenging, represents the time of greatest cognitive flexibility (Crone, & Dahl, 2012). Neurological research has shown that it is the time when educators have the opportunity to have the greatest, and most lasting impact on their students. Unfortunately, historically there has been a lack of training for educators on adolescent development, in particular the areas of decision-making and motivation.

“Motivation is considered one of the most important foundations essential for students’ academic development” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 158). For many educators, the basics of motivation such as its concepts, theories and principles were topics covered only briefly in a fundamentals of educational psychology course (Ames, 1990). As is the case with adolescent development, traditionally very little training regarding real world implementation of these strategies has been provided. Therefore, many teachers may feel uninformed or ill equipped to both identify and address motivation-related issues that occur within their classrooms (Ames, 1992). One facet of motivation that receives even less focus is addressing the needs of students who appear to lack or have minimal motivation.

Due to lack of training on this material, many may be unaware of the neurological changes adolescents undergo. Examining the differences between the adolescent and adult brain will give educators a better understanding of their students’ current behavior, as well as identify ways in which they can better address the motivational goals of their students.
Rationale for Research

Student motivation has consistently been cited by teachers and educators as one of the greatest challenges in education (Ames, 1992). Of particular concern are students who consistently avoid challenges, and seek to withdraw or disengage from academic settings. Students who focus on avoiding negative outcomes or consequences, rather than obtaining positive ones, are described as having an avoidance motivation orientation (Shim & Ryan, 2005).

“Academic motivation is considered important--if not the most important--in human learning and development” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 159). Educators at all levels will be faced with avoidance motivated students. However, the issue is especially problematic during preadolescence and adolescence (Gillet et al., 2012). Research has shown that there is a “systematic decrease in intrinsic motivation from age 9 to 12 years” and “a slow stabilization until 15 years old, followed by an increase after that point” (Gillet, Vallerand & Lafrenière, 2012, p. 77). This decrease in motivation has been shown to begin as early as 3rd grade and to continue to decline through the 9th grade. A publication from the American School Counselor Association indicates that these patterns may have lasting negative consequences for some students, stating that a “lack of motivation leads not only to disengagement with school in general, but to underachievement and dropping out of school” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 159).

Purpose of Research

“School counselors and teachers are positioned in academic settings to spot motivational problems and intervene to improve situations” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 160). A primary goal of educators is to find the proper balance between the challenge and support they provide for their students (Rowell & Hong, 2013). Avoidance motivated students, or those whose actions
are driven by a desire to avoid a punishment or consequence, may be particularly challenging for teachers.

One of the most effective ways that school counselors can affect motivation in schools on a large scale is to serve as motivational consultants for other educators. “A practical consultation theory includes: an understanding of human behavior, a procedure that helps the consultant to accurately communicate this understanding to others, and operational knowledge of how to implement or put this understanding into practice” (Dinkmeyer Jr., Carlson, & Michel, 2015, p. 44). A primary goal of this paper will be to highlight relevant developmental and motivational factors in a way that is useful for other educators. This paper will also provide interventions and professional development opportunities for educators that will focus both on preventative and responsive motivational interventions.

**Adolescent Brain**

“Effective teachers are those who develop goals, beliefs and attitudes in students that will sustain a long-term involvement and that will contribute to quality involvement in learning” (Ames, 1990, p. 410). Educators are able to be most effective when they understand their students, more specifically, why students “do what they do.” Recent neuroplasticity research offers insight into the minds of adolescent students, and provides educators with useful information that will assist them in both understanding adolescent behavior, as well as identifying effective ways to increase motivation and engage students.

**Brain Development Overview**

Most educators are aware that adolescence is a time of significant physical, social and emotional changes. However, fewer are familiar with the neurological growth that occurs in this time period. “The changes the brain undergoes during adolescence pave the way to adulthood,
priming the young person for life away from home and for finding unrelated mates. But this plasticity also can open the door to poor decision making and risky behavior” (Giedd, 2009, para. 1).

Brain development begins at birth, when the brain often weighs less than 500 grams. The brain continues to grow until late adulthood when it often weighs around 3 pounds. This significant growth and development is the result of the “generation of nerve cells (neurons) and their supporting cells (neuroglia)” (Dawson & Guare, 2010, p. 3). Axon and dendrite branches develop within the brain, giving cells the ability to communicate with one another.

Neuroplasticity refers to the flexibility of the brain and its capacity to develop and repair critical circuits across the lifespan. At first any new experiences will cause the brain to change. Simply being exposed to new experiences promotes this change early in development. However, as an individual gets older and it passes significant developmental periods, it becomes more difficult to change the brain.

Two significant periods of growth, followed by periods of ‘pruning’ or refining connections. The first occurs in early childhood, before age 5, and the second begins around age 11 or 12. The second, later growth period is focused primarily in the frontal lobes (Dawson & Guare, 2010). The thought is that these pathways are developed and made stronger with more frequent use, making it more difficult to change habits, or establish new paths in adulthood (Dawson, 2016).

**Adolescent Brain Development**

The changes that the brain undergoes during adolescence are important factors that have a significant impact on student mindset and behavior. Recent studies have revealed that adolescence is a critical period of neurological development. “They are finding that an
adolescent’s brain undergoes a previously unsuspected biological makeover—a massive growth of synaptic connections between brain cells” (Kotulak, 2006, para. 3).

Research has identified the interpretation of risk versus reward as one where the adolescent and adult brain differ significantly. A study by Richards, Plate and Ernst (2012) found that “adolescents display preferential recruitment of the reward system over the cognitive control system when processing appetitive stimuli” (p. 513). This heightened sensitivity to rewards exists in both the short and long term. The study by Richards et al. (2012) went on to state that “adolescents are more sensitive to the effects of incentives on sustained attention compared to adults” (p. 513). This idea is supported by recent neurology scans that show that the portions of the brain that control “executive functions,” such as impulse control and the ability to consider long-term consequences, are among the last to develop.

Cognitive control abilities, which emerged in early childhood, continue to increase and develop through adolescence. In fact studies have shown that certain cognitive control functions such as task switching and working memory, are more engaged during childhood and adolescence than they are in adulthood (Crone & Dahl, 2012). Adolescence is also thought to be a time when “excess gray matter is pruned out, making brain connections more specialized and efficient” (Giedd, 2009, p. 1).

**Period of neurological opportunity/malleability.** Recent research suggests that adolescence may present an opportunity for significant growth known as a sensitive period. Researchers describe this sensitive period during adolescence as a time of heightened neural malleability that functions differently than earlier periods of developmental sensitivity such as early adolescence (Sanders, 2015). “We think about it as a period of specialization,” Sanders (2015) goes on to state that “up to that point, you’ve been building up brain structure and
abilities, and now you’re specializing to fit your particular environment. This is when brain processes become more committed” (Para. 12)

While this theory is still being tested, recent studies have found that adolescent brains are following patterns unlike those seen in childhood, or adulthood, and are functioning in ways uniquely their own (Sanders, 2015). One of the most noticeable differences is in adolescents’ response to fear. Studies have found that adolescents hold on more strongly to fear associations than children or adults (Sanders, 2015).

Cognitive flexibility “is defined as the ability to switch one’s thinking (cognition) (or train of thought) as an adaptation to the demands of stimuli” (Raao, 2016, para 1). Without cognitive flexibility we cannot change our minds, shift attention or perspective, flexibly adapt to changes, see another point of view, solve problems or be creative (Margolies, 2015). Research by Giedd (2009) “points out that the brain’s plasticity allows adolescents to learn and adapt, which paves the way for independence. But it also poses dangers.” (para. 2)

While much of the recent neurological research provides information that may be helpful in understanding the adolescent mind, these studies highlight three facts that are of particular importance for educators. The three most relevant findings for educators include the following; cognitive flexibility is an essential neurological function during this period of extreme changes and required adaptation; adolescence is a time when individuals are particularly sensitive to both incentives and rewards; fear is a factor that impacts the behavior of adolescents more strongly than that of adults.

In other words adolescence is the time when individuals will be required to be the most adaptive. It is also the time when their decisions are most heavily influenced by either incentives or fear. The next section of this paper will examine the effect that these finding have on the
development of motivational patterns during adolescence, as well as identify the opportunities and potential concerns for educators.

The motivated adolescent brain. “Our brains become fine-tuned through experience” (Stickel & Callaway, 2007, p.7). Motivation stems from exposure and a subsequent reaction to stimuli. Ernst, Pine and Hardin (2006) describes motivated or goal directed behavior as a spiral involving a series of stages and opportunities for intervention;

Individuals are first exposed to stimuli, which represent options from which one needs to be selected. Upon exposure, individuals evaluate the stimuli options, and form a preference (stage 1). Based on preference, they select a course of action (stage 2), and execute the action (stage 3). If the result of their action occurs with a delay, subjects anticipate the outcome to their action, and finally experience the feedback (stage 4). (p. 21)

Motivation can be separated into two categories, approach and avoidance, based on two opposing orientations. An approach orientation refers to individuals whose actions are driven by a desire to obtain something positive, such as a reward. An avoidance orientation focuses on the avoidance of a negative outcome, such as a punishment or consequence.

By looking at the two motivational orientations as they relate to the “motivation spiral,” we are able to highlight key differences between the orientations. After exposure to a stimuli, an individual with an approach orientation would evaluate the stimuli options and be more likely to form a preference, and then base subsequent action on the pursuit of a reward, prize or perceived value. An avoidance orientation however, would be more likely to view and evaluate the stimuli as a potential threat. This orientation would likely base their future actions on the strength of their desire to avoid potential consequences, or negative outcomes.
Ernst et al. (2006) highlights several key differences in adolescent motivation. “The passage through adolescence is characterized by typical patterns of motivated behavior, namely risk-taking, sensation/novelty/reward seeking, and impulsivity” (p. 2). Recent neurological research has shown that adolescent brains may be hardwired to be able to do just that. This suggests that the majority of adolescents would be biologically predisposed to adopt an approach of reward seeking, motivation orientation.

**Avoidance motivation adolescent brain.** The teen brain appears to be hardwired to both learn and to take risks. However there are exceptions to this pattern. Avoidance motivated students are those who process risk and reward in significantly different ways. Rather than focusing on the potential reward, avoidance motivated students are instead focused on avoiding potential negative outcomes.

From a neurological perspective, this perception of threat is thought to “deny entry of new information to the cortex.” Not only can the negative signals trigger a desire to disengage, they also impede productive cognitive engagement, and disrupt focus and engagement (Stickel & Callaway, 2007, p. 3). While working with adolescents who take less risks may not seem like a problem, the mindset and pattern of thinking developed during adolescence has the potential to negatively affect these individuals throughout their lifetime (Hauser, Iannaccone, Walitza, Brandeis, & Brem, 2015, p. 347). “Adolescence is a time when many things change at a very high pace” (Hauser et al., 2015, p. 347). “All of these changes demand to flexibility adjust to the new requirements, to disengage from previous and to engage in novel targets.” Avoidance motivated individuals who focus on preventing negative consequences, rather than obtaining rewards, are at risk of not adapting or progressing with their peers.
Highlights for Educators

Adolescence is a time of great neurological activity and growth. During this time there is an increase in the production of nerve cells which allows for the development of neurological pathways and better communication between cells. The pathways that are formed and strengthened in the brain during adolescence establish behavioral patterns and make change more difficult later in life.

In order to adapt to these changes, adolescent brains must have more cognitive flexibility than adult brains. The adolescent brain is particularly sensitive to incentives or rewards, as well as fear. The influence of these two factors can often be seen in the motivation orientation of an adolescent. Those who focus on potential rewards or incentives are more likely to adopt an approach orientation. Adolescents who have had negative experiences, or are more impacted by the fear of potentially negative outcomes are more likely to adopt an avoidance motivation orientation.

Neurological research has helped identify both opportunities and risks associated with the development of the adolescent brain. This research also helps demonstrate the neurological differences between an avoidance and approach, motivated individual. However in order to understand the implications of the adoption of an avoidance motivation orientation it is important to have a better understanding of the factors that affect their development and maintenance.

**Motivational Factors**

While research is beginning to shed light on the plasticity of the human brain, this information alone isn’t enough. Understanding the future implications for the development of maladaptive tendencies in adolescence, helps us understand the importance of supporting
students at this particularly sensitive neurological period. However, it does not tell us how to identify specific motivational issues, nor does it tell us the best ways to address them.

In order to truly understand the motivational needs and ways to increase levels of motivation in the classroom, educators must also understand what factors affect the development of motivational styles and approaches. There are six factors that are essential to understanding the development and maintenance of individual motivation style: self-efficacy, attributional beliefs, task value, achievement goals, student autonomy, and a sense of belonging.

**Achievement Goals**

In terms of academics, achievement goals refer to “a schema or a cognitive framework that encompasses beliefs about purpose, competence, and success that influence a student's approach to, engagement in, and evaluation of performance in school” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 109). Achievement goals can be split into two categories based on their orientation towards either mastery or performance. “Mastery goals have been labeled task-goals and learning goals, whereas performance goals have been labeled ego-goals and ability goals” (Ames, 1992, p. 262). A mastery goal focuses on “developing competence and gaining understanding or mastery” (Shia, 1998, p. 2). Mastery goals are associated with an approach oriented motivation style.

**Mastery goals.** Mastery goal orientation focuses on developing one’s skills, and aims for “a deep, comprehensive understanding of the material” (Cerasoli & Ford, 2014, p. 268). “Mastery, or task orientation refers to the student who engages in an activity simply to gain skill, knowledge, or to contribute to the field of knowledge” (Shia, 1998, p. 2). Mastery goals are associated with an approach oriented motivation style.
Those that approach goals from a mastery orientation “define academic success as learning something new” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 160) and demonstrate their competence by performing well. This belief is associated with a growth mindset and the belief that abilities are changeable. Therefore, these individuals are more likely to engage in challenging activities.

**Performance goals.** Performance motivated individuals have outcome or result focused goals. These goals can be broken down further by their goal orientation of either approach, or avoidance. An approach orientation with relation to performance goals is associated with a desire to participate in an activity or demonstrate a skill, or ability to perform a specific task.

People with performance oriented goals tend to view their performance as the result of a fixed, internal ability. In the case of academics this most often refers to intelligence. Performance focused goals operate with the mentality that this intelligence is fixed, and may experience feelings of either pride or shame based on the outcome. This is where the adolescent brain’s sensitivity to both incentives and fear can be most clearly seen.

**Achievement Goals - Educational Environment**

In spite of the benefits provided by adopting a mastery over performance approach, educators tend to move away from mastery focused goals as students progress in school. “Elementary school teachers are more likely to use instructional practices that emphasize mastery goals than middle school teachers” (Mensah, 2015, p. 20). High schools typically place even less emphasis on the mastery focused goals.

One example of the systemic educational transition away from mastery goals can be seen by examining the changes in grading criteria that occur between elementary and high school. High school student report cards (Figure 1 A in the appendix) typically include a list of the classes taken, the letter grade received for each class, as well as a running grade point average.
Elementary schoolers, like older students, receive report cards. However the grades or feedback that students receive differs significantly for younger students (Figure 1 B in the appendix). Elementary report cards include evaluation of multiple tasks for each subject area. For example, the writing category includes evaluation of the students’ ability to express ideas clearly, organize ideas in logical order, etc.

The way that students are evaluated on these forms also differs from that of older students. Elementary students typically receive letter or number grades indicating their current level of task competency. In the elementary example provided, numbers 1-4 were used to indicate whether the student exceeded expectations, met expectations, was progressing to meeting expectations, or did not meet expectations or needs improvement.

One could make the claim that elementary report cards represent similar grading systems to high school (4=A, 3=B). However, the simple inclusion of phrases like progressing to meet expectations implies a focus on developing a particular skill or competency. This manner of evaluation, combined with the fact that students are evaluated on specific tasks, highlights the tendency of elementary schools to promote mastery goals.

High schools, however, tend to promote performance goals--goals that are focused on demonstrating competence. Students must be able to demonstrate their ability to apply course material in order to earn a letter grade. Classroom curriculum is also more regulated at the high school level. A study by Martin (2006) found that a mastery focus helped not only students, but benefited teachers as well. “Teachers’ perceptions of student’s mastery orientation was the strongest correlate of teachers’ enjoyment of teaching” (p. 85).

**Approach versus avoidance orientation.** The motivational factor where approach and avoidance motivated students most significantly differ, is in terms of their achievement goals.
Some research has linked this approach to a strong individual motivation for power (Shia, 1998). Shia goes on to describe a student motivated by power as “one who feels the need to control his/her environment” and believes that the most effective way of doing this is by demonstrating or “proving their competence to others” (Shia, 1998, p. 4).

Approach oriented performance goals, like mastery goals, describe those who are motivated to approach or engage in activities. Unlike mastery focused goals where an individual is motivated to approach a task to develop competence, those with approach style performance motivation are interested in demonstrating their ability or skill.

Avoidance motivated students are far more likely to adopt performance, over mastery, goals. Perhaps more concerning is the fact that they are also the most likely to regularly adopt maladaptive performance-avoidance achievement goals (Shim & Ryan, 2005). Often avoidance motivated students may appear apathetic or “lazy” when in fact they may be just as motivated as their approach oriented peers. The difference lies in what they are motivated or driven to act by, as well as their perception of their environment and their ability to successfully perform a task. It is important to note that even high achieving students can be avoidance motivated (Eccles, 2008, p. 20). “Rather than responding to a challenging task with greater effort, these students try to avoid the task altogether in order to maintain both their own sense of competence, and others’ perception of their competence” (Eccles, 2008, p. 20).

Performance avoidance goals are focused on escaping or avoiding potentially negative outcomes. Shia suggests that the focus or motivational drive for these individuals is ego, a preservation of self (Shia, 1998, p. 4). Failure is seen as threatening and individuals with an avoidance approach have developed a fear of failure or, as they may see it, exposure of personal deficiencies or inadequacies. “The only way to avoid failure is to avoid achievement tasks”
(Shia, 1998, p. 4). Individuals who fear failure will feel threatened by challenging situations. Even success in challenging situations is not viewed as demonstration of skill or ability.

**Impact of fear and reward sensitivity.** When adolescents do not embrace change, or have more limited cognitive flexibility, they are more likely to be affected by their brain’s tendency to be driven by rewards and/or fear. Those with an approach orientation, who focus on potential gains or incentives are more likely to be affected by their brain’s reward sensitivity. While avoidance motivated individuals who focus on avoiding potentially negative outcomes, are likely to be more affected by their brain’s sensitivity to fear. These two orientations are not mutually exclusive, adolescent brains are influenced by their sensitivity to both fear and rewards. In order to help understand why individuals with opposing orientations tend to focus on one sensitivity over another, we must consider the other motivational factors.

**Task Value**

Task value refers to the usefulness, or potential benefits that an individual believes will be earned as a result of engaging in an activity, or performing a specific task. If students do not believe that what they are learning is “useful, important and relevant to them or to the world in general”, they will be far less motivated to engage in the task or to complete the challenge (Martin, 2006, p. 77).

Failure to see the value or potential benefit of completing a task is consistently listed by students as reason for not engaging, or for putting forth minimal effort to complete a task. Task value is affected by a variety of environmental, social, socio-economic, and other factors. The difficulty associated with accounting for the influence of so many factors, makes addressing the issue of increasing task value for all students one of educators greatest challenges
Expectancy value theory. Expectancy value theory describes a relationship between several motivational factors, as well as offers insight into reasons why students may choose not to engage in a particular task. This theory holds that if at any point performance expectation or the potential value of success become zero, then overall task motivation also becomes zero (Osborne, 2012).

The potential value factor in this equation relates to the task value motivational factor. In order to increase the task value side educators must focus on increasing the intrinsic or utility value and/or decreasing the perceived cost of performing the task. Task value represents only one side of the expectancy times value theory, the other tasks listed all contribute to the expectancy variable in the equation. Failure to see the potential value in a task will negatively impact that desire to participate for any student, regardless of their motivation orientation.

Task Value in the Classroom

“No work is ‘effortless’” (Berkman, 2015, para. 16). There are a variety of factors that can decrease task value such as limited interest in or connection to the task or reward, distant deadlines, or “the simple fact that work takes effort” (Berkman, 2015, para. 17). The article by Berkman (2015) goes on to discuss the negative impact that mental effort has on intrinsic motivation, and the increased likelihood that an individual would procrastinate, or avoid engaging in a task, the harder they expect the work to be.

In order to increase a task’s value, effective educators employ a variety of techniques including: the incorporation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators: skill acquisition, or rewards such as grades or prizes. While these techniques are effective at boosting the perceived task value for many students, they may still be unsuccessful in encouraging avoidance motivated students to participate.
**Task value - avoidance motivation.** Avoidance motivation is characterized by a focus on potential negative outcomes or consequences, rather than on potential rewards. Often this makes extrinsic and intrinsic rewards employed by teachers ineffective for avoidance motivated students. Rather than focusing on the potential benefits they may get from engaging in an activity, avoidance motivated students are more affected by the effort a task may require, or what they may miss out on by choosing to engage in an activity or task.

Berkman explains that “the more effort a task requires, the more someone stands to gain by putting the same amount of effort into something else” (Berkman, 2015, para. 19). In the face of tasks that require significant effort, avoidance motivated individuals may have trouble seeing the potential value of completing the task, especially one that has a distant deadline, or is a long-term goal. Instead they may become fixated on avoiding negative consequences or punishments, such as missing out on social time with friends, or missing their favorite show on television, that may result from engaging in the activity.

By nature individuals with this orientation tend to see ‘value’ as the successful prevention of a negative outcome. Therefore it can be difficult to identify ways of increasing the value of a particular task. Given the nature of the avoidance motivated mind, and its inclination to focus on avoiding negative outcomes, it may be most effective to focus on decreasing the *perceived* cost associated with a specific task.

As educators it is important to acknowledge the influence that social factors have on our adolescent students. As frustrating as it can be when students chose to connect with their friends instead of using class time to work on a science project, the increased value, or importance placed on social interactions is developmentally normal. There are several ways to in which educators can attempt to increase task value such as making curriculum relevant to the student
(using real world situations, or applications of knowledge), making it personal for the student (incorporating topics and people that are interesting or relevant for the student), etc.

**Highlights for educators.** Student motivation is directly impacted by their perception of the potential value of engaging in a given task. Low task value or high perceived cost often results in students disengaging or putting forth minimal effort to complete a task. Avoidance and approach oriented students often use different criteria to evaluate a task's value, and therefore will require different approaches to increase the perceived task value.

Educators must not assume that the simple inclusion of a lesson or task into the curriculum will create a sense of value or relevance in the minds of our students. The majority of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards commonly used in education such as grades, feedback, or prizes typically do not have the same impact on avoidance motivated students.

It is important that value is intentionally created and demonstrated to students regularly in the classroom. Task value should be established using a variety of methods including the incorporation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, demonstration of task relevance or significance, as well as decreasing perceived costs when possible.

**Self-Efficacy**

Martin (2010) defines self-efficacy as ‘students’ belief and confidence in their ability to understand or to do well in their schoolwork, to meet the challenges they face, and to perform to the best of their ability” (p. 77). As the description suggests, the term refers to task-specific confidence, and not confidence in general. For example, students with high self-efficacy may see themselves as ‘capable of earning an A on a Math exam’, rather than simply ‘smart’ or ‘good at math’.
“Self-efficacy is often a critical factor predicting children’s task choices, willingness to try and persist on difficult tasks, and even actual performance in many classrooms” (Ames, 1992, p. 412). Students who have confidence in their abilities are far more likely to put forth more substantial and continued effort, and are less likely to quit when faced with a challenge.

**Expectancy value theory.** According to expectancy value theory, self-efficacy is another motivational factor that directly influences an individual’s decision to engage, or not to engage in a particular task. The idea that if at any point *performance expectation* or the potential value of success become zero, then overall task motivation also becomes zero. If a student believes that their likelihood of successfully completing a particular task is zero, then according to the theory, their motivation for engaging in the task would also become zero, regardless of the value they perceive the task to have. This demonstrates the importance of not only making tasks relevant in the eyes of students, but also making sure that students feel capable of performing the task.

**Self-Efficacy in Education**

“Personal efficacy regarding academic work has been shown to be an important predictor of academic achievement among academically struggling minority youth and other students who have difficulty mastering the school material” (Eccles, 2008, p. 8). Self-efficacy tends to be a fairly stable motivational factor, especially when it is low. Unfortunately, unless it is directly addressed, self-efficacy is not likely to improve on its own. For example a student who believes he struggles in Math and has low self-efficacy, will be more likely to accept a failing grade on a current test, as well as expect a low grade on future tests.

In order to effectively improve a student’s sense of self-efficacy, an educator must make sure to focus on increasing task specific confidence, rather than confidence in general. In a report to teachers, Carol Ames (1990) uses the following example:
Consider for example where a teacher tells all her students that everyone’s story is going
to become part of the class newspaper. Although all children can expect success in
going their stories ‘published’, a child may still harbour intense doubts about whether he
or she can write a story. (p. 412)

It is important for educators to know that the doubts described in this example may affect
students in significantly different ways. Approach motivated individuals would tend to focus on
the potential gains or incentive of having their story published. Their tendency would be to think
about the potential praise or pride they may receive as a result having their story published.
Conversely avoidance motivated students would tend to focus on the potential embarrassment or
criticism they may receive after having a story published. Not surprisingly, the reaction and
resulting behavior of each type of individual would be significantly different.

**Self-efficacy - avoidance motivation.** Avoidance motivated students tend to have
significantly lower levels of self-efficacy than their peers (Shim & Ryan, 2005). This is often the
result of diminished levels of self-confidence after repeated and often increasingly frequent
negative experiences with school. “Failure or potential failure to reach a goal or standard will
have important implications for the perceptions of self” (Stiles, 2008, p. 3). Individuals with low
self-efficacy are likely to view themselves as less capable of completing tasks, this makes
engaging in these tasks extremely ‘costly’, and may help explain why many of these students
appear eager to find alternatives.

The example described above illustrates a time when an avoidance motivated student
may choose to completely ignore the assignment, or they may wait until the last minute and/or
turn in work that was thrown together and that they know is below their ability level, rather than
risk receiving negative feedback that might further damage their self-confidence.
Low self-efficacy is related to the adoption of maladaptive attitudinal beliefs; “With increasing negative experiences in school, some students begin to stop trying hard because they think that the effort will not make a difference” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 159). Studies have shown that these students are more likely to lose motivation to remain engaged and to learn school subjects (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 159). The key to supporting self-efficacy in students is directly addressing task specific concerns or lack of confidence.

**Self-efficacy highlights for educators.** Self-efficacy levels are indicative of a student's response to challenges in the classroom. Students with high self-efficacy that feel confident in their ability to successfully perform a task, are far more likely to initially engage in the task, and to remain engaged in the face of challenges. Levels of self-efficacy are directly affected by past experiences. Negative experiences, especially those that elicit feelings of shame, are likely to lower levels of self-efficacy, shift focus from reward to fear, and encourage the development of an avoidance motivation orientation. Low levels of self-efficacy are often self-perpetuating and difficult to change without external interventions.

**Attributional Beliefs**

Attributional beliefs are “personal theories regarding why things happen in individual’s lives and how they explain other people’s success or failure” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 160). The brain is constantly changing and adapting to information we learn from new experiences. In terms of motivation the most important attributional beliefs we hold are determined by our perceptions of the locus of control (external and internal), the stability of these beliefs over time (fixed or changeable), and the personal responsibility felt (controllable or uncontrollable) (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 160).
**Locus of control.** The locus of control describes who/what students feel is responsible for their performance or behavior. To illustrate the perceptual differences between these two beliefs take for example a student’s thoughts after failing a Math test. A student with an internal locus of control may attribute this failure to personal low skills in Math, or not having spent enough time studying for the exam. An external locus of control may view their failure as the result of a particularly hard Math test, or lack of sufficient preparation from their teacher.

**Stability of beliefs.** The stability or flexibility of these beliefs over time refers to the degree to which an individual believes the locus of control is likely to change over time. Stable beliefs may include the perception that Math is and always will be difficult. Unstable beliefs would be more dependent on luck or effort, such as not having focused on the right review materials before the test, or having been too busy to properly study for the exam.

Both types of performance focused individuals (approach and avoidance) view success/failure in terms of ability or lack thereof. While both see them as indicative of an internal fixed attribute such as ability, their interpretation and response to feedback will be significantly different.

**Personal responsibility.** The amount of control that a student feels that they have over their scores on Math tests will impact how they choose to respond to this failure. Students with a high level of controllability or responsibility feel that they have the ability to alter future test scores by increasing their immediate effort or seeking extra support (Rowell & Hong, 2013). Students with low perceptions of responsibility or controllability may believe that ‘they just can’t understand Math’, or that the task or concepts are simply too difficult for them to overcome.
Attributional Beliefs - Avoidance Motivation

Attributional beliefs are of particular importance for avoidance motivated students. Avoidance motivated students are focused on avoiding potentially negative outcomes. This fixation on the negative leads them to view interactions, daily tasks and challenges as potential threats. In order to avoid exposing perceived weaknesses or deficiencies.

**Locus of control.** Avoidance motivated students tend to respond to potential threats in one of two ways. Some students may focus on or attribute a poor performance to external factors, as a means of safeguarding themselves. Others who maintain an internal locus of control may attribute any failure or shortcoming to their personal weaknesses or lack of ability. Students who maintain this internal attributional belief often have strong feelings of shame (Stiles, 2008). Shame is a particularly concerning emotion, as it has the potential to perpetuate a negative self-image that can have a damaging effect on adolescents.

**Stability of beliefs.** Avoidance motivated students tend to have stable beliefs, especially in relation to their perceptions of their abilities. Negative feedback or perception of failure, especially that which the individual related to their ‘global self’, may invoke self-conscious feelings ranging from embarrassment to shame.

In an article about motivations Stiles (2008) clearly distinguished the differences between shame and embarrassment; “Shame is elicited by the realization that others regard oneself as deficient, while embarrassment stems from the awareness that others’ view one’s *presentation* of self as inappropriate” (p. 3). This feedback reinforces the individual’s low perception of personal capability, and encourages an individual to seek to avoid and withdraw further.

One may assume that positive feedback or experiencing feelings of success would be an effective means of combating fear of failure and a desire to avoid challenging situations.
However, research has shown that even positive feedback is not interpreted as demonstrating competency or ability, as does with performance-approach oriented individuals. In this case even positive feedback is viewed in terms of failure and rather than demonstrating competency, “positive feedback is interpreted as “not failing” or “not being the worst””, and does not encourage the individual to adopt an approach or mastery orientation (Shim & Ryan, 2005, p. 337).

**Personal responsibility.** As is the case with the ‘locus of control factor’, avoidance motivated students who feel incapable or inadequate, too often adopt one of two maladaptive mentalities with regard to personal responsibility. The first way that students with a low sense of responsibility may respond is by giving up or withdrawing. These students may feel that it is pointless to study as they will never be able to do well. Another approach that students with low levels of personal responsibility may adopt is attempting to get others to do the work for them. For example a student may feel that it is the duty of others, such as the teacher or a parent, to ‘help’ them. However, in the case the student may be motivated to require help to the point that another person is actually doing the majority of the work for them.

**Attributional beliefs - highlights for educators.** Attributional beliefs reveal quite a bit about the motivation and subsequent behavior of students. Awareness alone of an individual’s attributional beliefs may help educators identify where or why students are getting stuck, as well as the best way to help them overcome these challenges. Attributional beliefs are closely tied to the other motivational factors, and often reveal which is most problematic for an individual.

Educators can have a positive impact on a student’s attributional beliefs by “assisting students to attribute their success to effort rather than ability” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 162). If educators are able to combine this shift in attribution, with positive feedback they can increase
the chances that their students will develop positive attributional beliefs as well as a belief in their ability to be successful, both of which are necessary to increasing student motivation (Rowell & Hong, 2013).

**Sense of Belonging**

Adolescence is a developmental period in which the need for both separation and independence is particularly important. As previously discussed in this paper it is also a time when the brain’s plasticity allows adolescents to learn and adapt, paving the way for independence (Giedd, 2009). According to Erikson’s life stages theory adolescence is focused on establishing “a feeling for who one is and one’s place in the larger social order” (Crain, 2011, p. 291). While adolescence is a time where individuals this independence, their need for support and a sense of belonging is not diminished. During this time period adolescents tend to rely more heavily on peers, teachers and other supports outside their family unit to meet these needs.

Students that do not develop a sense of belonging at school, or have poor school bonding are more likely to present a variety of academic concerns including lower GPA, truancy, higher levels of disengagement or withdrawal, as well as being less likely to graduate with their peers (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). According to recent research a lack of connection at school is linked to other negative or risky behavior in the following years. This research also seems to indicate that adolescence is the time when school connectedness, or lack thereof, tends to have the most significant impact. One study found that “school misbehavior in 7th and 9th grade predicted serious delinquency outside of school 1 year later” (Henry et al., 2012, p. 158). While another study found that “school connectedness at 14 predicted alcohol and drug use two years later” (Henry et al., 2012, p. 158).
Peer support. Adolescence is a time when “peer relationships change markedly and it becomes more important to please peers than to obey the parents” (Hauser et al., 2015, p. 347). Taking this shift into account, it may not be surprising to learn that peer support plays an influential role in an adolescent’s academic interest, level of psychological distress at school and self-concept (Song, Bong, Lee, & Kim, 2015).

Promoting the development of positive peer relationships is essential to supporting adolescents need to develop a sense of belonging. “Social support contributes positively to adolescent motivation and learning at school” (Song et al., 2015, p. 821). While this support from peers in early adolescence is of equal importance to both genders, cultivating positive peer relationships in late adolescence is of particular importance for female adolescents.

Highlights for educators. Adolescence is a developmental period in which individuals seek independence as well as form personal identities. As previous neurological research has shown it is a period of great opportunity and vulnerability. As adolescents become more independent, their need for a sense of belonging outside their family units grows. Often the majority of adolescents’ time outside the family unit is spent at school and with their peers, making these two of the most important sources of support and connection.

One of the most pertinent findings for educators may be the effect that school connectedness, or sense of belonging has outside the classroom. Students that do not develop strong connections of sense of belonging at school are far more likely to withdraw further, engage in risky or violent behavior outside the classroom, as well as drop-out of school entirely. The problem is often compounded due to the fact that these subsequent behaviors such as dropping out of school, are linked to higher probabilities of other, riskier behaviors such as violence, theft, incarceration, and drug use (Henry et al., 2012). Educators may help support
adolescents by establishing preventative programs that intentionally address the issue of school bonding.

**Sense of Autonomy**

“According to self-determination theory, motivated behaviors vary in the degree to which they are autonomous or controlled” (Diseth & Samdal, 2014, p. 270). Autonomy support in the classroom involves providing a student with options, giving them some choice or say, and including them in decision making (Gillet et al., 2012, p. 79). Both parents and teachers are able to provide autonomy support for adolescents.

**Autonomy- in the classroom.** To students, autonomy support in the classroom involves 3 key sentiments, “students ‘feel understood’ by the teacher and the teacher ‘conveys confidence’ in and ‘encourages, listens and understands’ them” (Song et al., 2015, p. 837). It may be surprising to learn that traditionally autonomy support has decreased as students got older, while teacher control within the classroom has increased (Gillet et al., 2012, p. 79). While this seems to imply that High School students, or those with the highest sense of independence and capability, have the least control over their learning environment, it is important to note that the levels of autonomy support as perceived by the student (not the educator) what is measured.

“Teaching styles that provide autonomy support are a positive predictor of classroom engagement and achievement in adolescent learners” (Song et al., 2015, p. 837) Autonomous learning environments have been shown to have a positive impact on teachers as well, as studies have shown that teachers feel more confident when their students are engaged (Martin, 2006). Regardless of whether low perceptions of autonomy support in High School are due to increased educator control, or simply increased student expectations, they represent a missed opportunity.
**Sense of autonomy - avoidance motivation.** Avoidance motivated students tend to respond to educational support in a unique way. While their peers may be craving additional freedom and responsibility, they often will become more dependent on the support of parents or educators. When students do not see the value of performing a task, or do not believe they are capable of successfully completing that task, they may seek to avoid engaging in it, in a unique way, by soliciting others to do it for them.

Both educators and parents must be careful not to take on too many of the students’ responsibilities when attempting to ‘help’ them. It is important that they maintain high expectations for the student. This is evidenced by study conducted by Froiland (2011) which found that “Parent autonomy support for homework predicted positive academic outcomes, whereas more parental homework involvement in general was related to negative outcomes” (p. 138).

**Highlights for educators - autonomy support.** Autonomy support focuses on providing students with opportunities to develop a sense of control or stake in their own learning environment (Rowell & Hong, 2013). Students who feel that they have more control, or autonomy, “tend to be more actively engaged in their learning activities and willing to devote time and energy to learning” (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 160).

For avoidance motivated students, autonomy support can be a particularly complicated issue. It can be difficult for both educators and parents to find the appropriate balance between supporting and challenging their students. In these situations it is important to provide students with adequate support, with also keeping expectations high. Encouragement and providing choices are two of the most effective ways that educators can provide autonomy support in schools.
Highlights and Best Practices for Educators

Understanding adolescent behavior and motivation is a complicated and heavily researched topic. While there is no magic solution that will resolve all motivational issues, recent studies have provided a wealth of information that can assist educators in accomplishing this task. The previous sections in this paper explained motivation as it relates to students. However, the following section will focus on the effect that these motivational factors have on educators and the classroom. The following sections will include a review of the essential motivational concepts, as well as identify research and theory based best practices with regard to cultivating motivation in the classroom. The following sections will include a review of the essential motivational concepts, as well as identify research and theory based best practices with regard to cultivating motivation in the classroom.

Understanding Motivation - Recap

Researchers have found that an awareness of the six motivational factors (self-efficacy, attributional beliefs, task value, achievement goals, student autonomy, and a sense of belonging) that influence an adolescent's behavior and motivation in school, will increase the likelihood that educators will identify and address the motivational needs of their students.

Another important finding was the identification of differing thought processes and response to challenges in the academic environment. Students may develop an approach or avoidance motivation orientation, and educators must be prepared to meet the motivational needs of both types of students. Below is a table containing a review of the information covered above, including the six motivational factors, researched best practices or areas of concern, as well as the motivational needs unique to each motivation style.
Motivational Factor | Definition | Educator Goal
--- | --- | ---
Achievement Goal | a cognitive framework that encompasses beliefs that influence a student's approach to, engagement in, and evaluation of performance in school | Mastery over performance focused
Task Value | the usefulness, or potential benefits that an individual believes will be earned as a result of engaging in an activity, or performing a specific task | Increase task value; decrease perceived cost
Self Efficacy | Personal belief and confidence in an one’s own ability to understand, do well or to meet the challenges they face | Increase task specific confidence
Attributional Beliefs | Personal theories regarding why things happen in individuals lives, as well as their explanation of the success and or failure of others. | Focus on controllable factors such as effort rather than ability
Sense of Belonging | A feeling for who one is and one’s place in the larger social order | Promote development of personal identity and sense of belonging
Sense of Autonomy | Personal beliefs that individuals have control over their own learning environment | Keep expectations high while providing appropriate levels of support

**Motivational Best Practices**

There are a variety of ways that educators can try to address motivational challenges in schools. The following sections will build on the information presented earlier and focus on the application of this information by educators. They will highlight best practices identified in current research, as well as apply ideas from additional theories, such as Adler’s Individual Psychology, to current motivational issues.
**Know your mindset.** Motivation is an important educational concept that affects much more than a student’s desire and drive to perform in school. Student motivation and engagement play a large role not only in a student’s interest and enjoyment in school, but also in the enjoyment felt by their educators and peers (Martin, 2006).

It is interesting to note that it is a teacher’s *perception* of student motivation that is of critical importance. As figure 3 shows, motivation and perceptions of motivation are part of the same cycle, and have a direct impact on the development and maintenance of one another. Teacher’s that view their students as motivated and engaged, are more likely to feel more confident and get more enjoyment from teaching.

As an educator, what you think matters. This is often something that is easy to lose sight of when students misbehave, especially if that misbehavior involves defying or ignoring instructions. However, it is important to recognize the importance of an instructor's mindset. A text by Dinkmeyer et al. (2015) state “the influence of a teacher’s belief about self and students cannot be overemphasized. If a student is in a classroom, the influences of the teacher’s beliefs are inescapable” (p. 90).
Encouragement “According to Adler, when we feel encouraged, we feel capable and appreciated and will generally act in a connected and cooperative way. When we are discouraged, we may act in unhealthy ways by competing, withdrawing, or giving up” (Adler Graduate School, 2016, para. 2). Encouragement is one way in which teachers can positively influence the motivation of students in their classrooms.

Encouragement can be used to “stimulate student’s courage and social interest,” as well as “to help students become more optimistic about solving problems” (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015, p. 122). Dinkmeyer et al. goes on to describe 3 guidelines related to using encouragement in the classroom: 1. identify positive behaviors, traits and efforts. Build on teachers’ strengths. “Look for positive efforts as well as results” (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015, p.102); 2. Focus on the deed not the doer; 3. Implement by using the language of encouragement.

Encouragement may be particularly helpful when attempting to address the needs of avoidance motivated students. “Avoidance processes in children are often an opportunity for encouragement. Sometimes children do not see how they can achieve a goal or accomplish a task so they avoid it” (Bitter, 2011, p. 219). Encouragement provides additional support for a student, without taking over, or ‘doing for’ the student.

Provide choices. The nature of adolescent development makes the perception of autonomy felt by students one of the most important motivational factors for this time period. “When teachers are more controlling, students tend to show less mastery motivation and lower confidence” (Martin, 2006, p. 75). Achievement goals are not the only motivational factor that is impacted by the amount of choice that is offered to students. Autonomy support and task value are two other factors that are directly impacted by the inclusion or exclusion of choice.
Teachers can promote the increased levels of academic motivation in their students by providing opportunities for choice. Students who are given more choices or autonomy support are more inherently likely to choose projects and activities that are more intrinsically motivating. Task value and perceived cost are also affected by the inclusion of choices for students, as students are more likely to choose either tasks that they perceive as more valuable, and/or tasks that they feel will ‘cost’ them less to perform. Research has shown that allowing students to have some say or choice in their learning environment has a positive impact on their motivation to learn, the degree to which they are engaged, as well as the behavior in the classroom (Rowell & Hong, 2013).

**Promote horizontal striving.** Often individuals who struggle excessively with feelings of inferiority, will seek to overcome these feelings by proving that they are the ‘best’ or ‘better than’ others. Adler called this behavior vertical striving, or striving for personal superiority. He described this behavior as an individual seeking to overcome feelings of inferiority by demonstrating superiority *over* other individuals (Mitchell, 2006).

Performance goals promote the existence of vertical striving among students. “When students strive for grades as a means to impress others, or to avoid failure, learning becomes valued only to the degree that it serves to enhance one’s ability status, not for any merit of the material being learned.” (Covington & Mueller, 2001, p. 167). As mentioned earlier in the paper Mastery goals, which focus on “developing competence and gaining understanding”, help mitigate avoidance motivation (Covington & Mueller, 2001, p.158). Conversely, performance goals, or goals that “focus on demonstrating competence”, promote avoidant behavior as well as vertical striving (Shim & Ryan 2005, p. 335).
Teachers can promote horizontal striving by incorporating cooperative learning activities into their instruction. Research has shown that “providing students opportunities to involve, participate and collaborate with their peers in various learning activities” is an effective way of promoting the adoption of positive motivational goals (Rowell & Hong, 2013, p. 163).

Recent research has also shown the negative impact that vertical striving has in the classroom, as well as the value of adopting a mastery orientation. A study by Midgley et al. (as cited in Eccles, 2008) showed “age-related declines in both the value students attach to doing their school work and in their confidence in their ability to master their school subjects are linked to teachers’ increasing stress on doing better than other students, rather than working for one’s own increased understanding and competence” (p. 14). Promotion of horizontal, rather than vertical striving, encourages students to work both independently and collaboratively towards a common goal. In this case a striving to overcome refers to an ability to overcome obstacles, or for self-mastery, rather than to prove competency to others (Mitchell, 2015).

One intervention that has been shown to promote horizontal striving is the incorporation of service learning into the curriculum. One study by Eccles (2008), found that “adolescents who had this experience over an extended period of time showed an increased commitment to their own academic performance as evidenced by increases in their grades and high school graduation rates” (p. 16).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Adolescence is a time of great possibility and vulnerability. The motivational patterns developed during this time have the potential to have a lasting impact on individuals throughout their adult lives. Meeting the motivational needs of students is a complicated, but undeniably important task that we as educators must be capable of taking on.
In order to support educators in meeting the motivational needs of students a systematic approach should be put in place that facilitates the identification and response to these needs. Response to interventions or RTI “is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs” (RTI Action Network, 2016).

There are “four essential components of RTI: 1. A school-wide, multi-level instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure 2. Screening 3. Progress Monitoring 4. Data-based decision making for instruction, movement within the multi-level system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law)” (Special Education Programs, 2010).

A School-Wide, Multi-Level System

Applying the RTI model to addressing motivational needs in schools requires the implementation of a school-wide, multi-level system aimed at meeting the needs of students, providing necessary academic support, and ultimately preventing failure or dropout (Special Education Programs, 2010). This RTI model is designed to include 3 tiers or levels of intervention.

The primary level consists of core instruction and curriculum that are to be provided for all students. This level of intervention is meant to be proactive and preventative in nature. The goals of providing this level of intervention are to provide a solid base of knowledge and understanding, incorporate scientifically proven best practices into the curriculum provided to all students, as well as collect baseline data that can be used to identify outlying needs or areas of concern.

The secondary level is supplemental to the primary level, and meant to provide additional, targeted instruction to students in need. This level of support is most often provided in small group settings. Typically educators should expect a smaller section of at-risk students to
need supplemental, small group instruction. (Special Education Programs, 2010). Even fewer students will receive the third level of intervention. This level is the most intensive and often consists of individual or very small group instruction (Special Education Programs, 2010).

RTI has proven to be an effective model of identifying and addressing the needs of students. Traditionally this method has been used to create appropriate and effective interventions for students. However, RTI may also address student needs and create motivational change by using the RTI model to create interventions and supports for teachers.

**Motivational RTI**

School counselors play a unique role and are a primary resource in addressing motivational needs within schools. Administration and teachers frequently seek out counselors when faced with difficult motivational issues. Historically, interventions focused on addressing motivational issues or concerns have been primarily reactive, and are often done on an individual level. By applying the RTI model and creating scaffolded levels of intervention and support for teachers, school counselors have the ability to take a more proactive approach to providing this type of support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Who Receives Intervention</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>100% of Educators</td>
<td>Taught Goals of Misbehavior and Motivational Best Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>10-15% - small group - weekly meetings</td>
<td>Taught to look at adult’s own feelings and reaction to student’s misbehavior; student behavior - goals of misbehavior; weekly conferences with teacher to review past week’s plan, review what worked/didn’t, discuss student behavior (misbehavior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>5-10% - individual consultations</td>
<td>Consultation Training- addressing individual student needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level 1 - Curriculum**

Instructors will watch a brief presentation covering key aspects of student motivation including: the development of the adolescent brain, approach versus avoidance motivation styles, academic factors that influence motivation, as well as motivational best practices. Handouts including the goals of misbehavior chart, and motivational best practices will be given to all teachers.

**Goals of misbehavior.** Motivation itself can be a difficult factor to measure. Historically failing grades, poor attendance and number of office referrals/suspensions have been three factors most consistently used to identify ‘at-risk’ students (Lucio, Hunt, & Bornovalova, 2012). Each of these is the result of a student behavior and/or response to a challenge in the academic environment.
Both approach and avoidance motivated students may at times display any/all of the goals of misbehaviors. There are, however, patterns that emerge for both orientations in terms of the misbehavior, and goals of that behavior that they most frequently select. It is also important to note the differences between the goals and behaviors of the two orientations, even when pursuing the same goal.

The focus of this level of intervention will be providing a basic knowledge of the goals of misbehavior, specifically the feelings and response of the adult (in this case the instructor). Level one of RTI is prevention focused. This level of intervention is focused on providing instructors with information that will help them recognize and address ‘misbehavior’ within the classroom based on their reaction or response.

**Level 2 - Small Group**

Instructors who self-identify as in need of motivational and behavioral resources will participate in small group sessions that dig deeper into the goals of misbehavior. The focus in these groups will be on examining instructor beliefs and responses to misbehavior, learning who should own the problem, and separating the person from the problem. This level of intervention may include handouts with examples and/or case studies of common problem behavior, as well as real-world examples shared by members of the group.

**Response to ‘misbehavior’**. Adler contends that the driving forces in individuals’ lives are self-selected goals. He believed that the key to understanding an individual's behavior was to understand their personal goal or force driving their action. Goal orientation refers to the “future-oriented striving toward a goal of significance, superiority, or success.” of each individual (Adler Graduate School, 2016, para. 9).
According to Adlerian psychology all behavior, including misbehavior, is purposeful. By examining teacher’s responses, feelings and reactions to student’s ‘misbehavior’ we are able to identify the goal of the behavior as well as identify effective behavioral interventions.

**Small group intervention.** The group will use examples to walk through a two-step method used to identify specific goals of misbehavior. Step one discuss the instructor's reactions to the child’s misbehavior. Asking questions about both what they feel and what they do when the child misbehaves. Step 2 involves asking the instructor about the child’s response to that behavior.

The group will employ and apply the motivational best practices of knowing your mindset, encouragement, autonomy support, and promotion of horizontal striving described earlier in the paper. Group members will have the opportunity to practice these techniques in a group setting while discussing and problem solving with other group members.

**Knowing and using your mindset.** The ‘inability of a teacher's mindset not to affect the students in the classroom provides a great opportunity for educators (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015). This inherent ability of teachers to influence the students in their room, is a power that is all too often overlooked in education. Small group discussions will focus on identifying teacher mindset or beliefs as well as the impact those beliefs had on the motivation and behavior of students and the classroom in a variety of case studies.

**Owning the problem.** “The one who wants change can create it” (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015, p. 17). Faulty points of view take far too much power away from teachers, who are actually in the best position to create change within their classrooms. The most common faulty beliefs held by teachers view the child as the problem, believe that an outside source such as a parent, counselor or principal can fix the problem, and/or the teacher has no or a limited part in the
repair process (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015, p. 90). Small group discussions will focus primarily on identifying effective ways that teachers can create change and address motivational issues in their classroom.

**Level 3 - Avoidance Motivated Students**

This level of intervention focuses on helping educators address the needs of withdrawn or avoidance motivated students. This may include observations of classroom and teacher student interactions, working through specific goals of misbehavior with students and teachers, and creating action plans for addressing these goals.

**The challenge.** Avoidance motivation is a behavioral pattern that is rooted in self-doubt and a fear potentially threatening or negative outcomes. Avoidance motivated students are more likely to withdraw and have ‘misbehavior’ that falls into the display of inadequacy category of the goals of misbehavior chart. Withdrawn students represent those farthest down on the goals of misbehavior chart, and thus requires educators to have the greatest working knowledge of the goals and their corresponding behaviors.

**Individual consultations.** Consultations with teachers and administrators provides alternative ways in which school counselors may address motivational issues. Especially complex motivational concerns such as avoidance motivated, or withdrawn students. Effective consultation with teachers is focused on helping the consultee “directly understand self, others, the relationship between self and others and the procedures to modify both” (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015, p. 44).

Consultations will focus first on helping the teacher understand themselves as well as their own beliefs and views. In their role as a consultant, one of the counselor's primary tasks will be to listen carefully to all consultee statements. The counselor should listen for underlying
beliefs which they can then use to help the individual recognize and discuss their beliefs (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015).

In addition to helping the consultee identify underlying beliefs, it is also important for the consultant to help the consultee understand the student’s beliefs and needs. The consultant may use information in presented in the goals of misbehavior chart, developmentally relevant neurological information presented earlier in this paper, or other information that would help identify the beliefs and needs of the student.

Future Implications

The significance of motivation in the academic environment has made it a topic that has been and will likely continue to be heavily researched. Some of the most significant recent advances have focused on developing a better understanding of motivation from a neurological perspective. However, there have been far fewer studies focused on making this information applicable within the classroom.

While many researchers agree that both teachers and counselors represent those with the greatest ability to influence the motivation of their students, teachers are typically still provided very little education or training on motivation. School counselors tend to receive more training on addressing motivational issues in schools. However, the majority of these interventions are student-focused and very few identify ways to engage teachers, and other educators in supporting motivational needs in the classroom.

While many studies have shown that “the influence of a teacher’s belief about self and students cannot be overemphasized” (Dinkmeyer et al., 2015, p. 90). Schools may be more effective in supporting the motivational needs of their students if teachers are given the opportunity and ability to take a more deliberate and active role in this process. This would
require providing teachers with relevant research and training on understanding the
developmental role of motivation, creating environments that promote the development of
positive motivational patterns and approaches, identifying and addressing motivational concerns,
and perhaps most importantly understanding their role in the motivational process.
References


Dawson, P. (2016). Smart but scattered: Executive dysfunction at home and at school. [Powerpoint slides].


Appendix

Figure 1A

![Image of a report card from County Public Schools, High School, with grades listed for various subjects.](image)

Figure 1B

![Image of a grade report for Grade 3, with columns for reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science, along with comments and grades.](image)