Enhancing Student Motivation through the Pursuit of Possible Selves

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Abstract

Enhancing the academic motivation and commitment of students who have lost the desire to engage in learning in a meaningful way is a major challenge for many teachers, counselors, and parents. In an effort to address this challenge, the Possible Selves Program was developed to nurture academic and personal motivation in elementary through post-secondary students. Program activities guide students through the process of thinking about their hopes, expectations, and fears for the future. The program includes activities that help students identify short and long-term goals that they value and to develop and pursue action plans that lead to goal attainment. Studies conducted with middle and high school students and university student-athletes indicate that Possible Selves can be effective in increasing the number of roles students identify as possible for them in the future and the number and diversity of career, learning, and personal goals they wish to achieve. Also, Possible Selves has resulted in higher academic performance, higher retention rates, and higher graduation rates for university student-athletes than for student-athletes in control conditions.

"I'm going to play professional football. Ever since I was a little kid my dream has been to be a great tailback. And that's what I think about all the time. Nothing else matters that much, especially school! Don't bother me about learning all this stuff. I just need to get by until I'm ready for the NFL."

8th Grade Student

The Challenge

The statement above may sound all too familiar to teachers, counselors, and parents. While having a hope or dream to enter a highly competitive career field is admirable, limiting the scope of possibilities to one area may not be entirely wise. For example, only 250 out of approximately 1,000,000 high school football players actually end up playing in the NFL (NCAA, 2001). The odds are 6,000 to 1 that the young athlete quoted above will actually play in the NFL. Thus, limiting one's goals, commitment, and effort to one domain may close the door to other equally rewarding experiences and careers, especially if the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and learning how to learn are foundational to entry into these other areas.

Teachers report that one of their biggest frustrations is the challenge presented by students who seem to be academically unmotivated (Bogner, Raphael, & Pressley, 2002; Davis & Wilson, 2001; Garber, 2002; Graves, 2001). They are frustrated by students who passively or overtly refuse to participate or engage in educational activities even when learning activities are well-designed and reflect scientifically proven practices (Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Reyna & Weiner, 2001). They recognize that the effectiveness of instruction with students who are reluctant to commit time and energy to learning is limited at best and completely ineffective at worst. Additionally, the challenge presented by academically unmotivated students has significant implications for a nation committed to No Child Left Behind legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) and improving student performance on high-stakes measures of academic competence. Closing the literacy performance gap for underprepared students who lack the personal commitment to learn essential skills and knowledge is an exceedingly difficult task. Borkowski, Day, Saenz, Dietmeyer, Estrada, & Groteluschen (1992) captured the essence of this point when they wrote,

> As we were teaching reading strategies, we noticed that many students failed to see how strategies were relevant to their long-range goals. In fact, we came to realize that students did not see many, if any, relationships between the things they were learning in school... and their dreams and expectations for the future. (p. 15)

While every teacher has experienced first hand the central role that motivation seems to plays in the learning process, it is significant to note that volumes have been written on motivation theory and special issues of journals on academic motivation are common (Pressley & McCormick, 1995). The attention that has historically been given to motivation and the growing body of current research on the topic verifies what teachers have known for years: unless the motivation of students is deliberately accounted for in the instructional planning process and during actual instruction, outcomes will be less than optimal (Cruickshank, 1990). The American Psychological Association underscored the vital role that motivation plays in learning in its 1997 document entitled *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles: A Framework for School Redesign and Reform* by highlighting two areas of particular importance in the learning process that have emerged through research on motivation. First, motivation

to learn is influenced by the individual's emotional stress, beliefs, interests, goals, and habits of thinking. For example, intense negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, panic, insecurity) and related thoughts (e.g., worrying about competence, fearing failure, etc.), generally detract from motivation and interfere with learning and contribute to low performance. Second, acquisition of complex knowledge and skills requires extended learner effort and guided practice. Without a learner's motivation to learn, the willingness to exert effort without coercion is unlikely. Thus, educators need to be concerned with facilitating motivation by using strategies to enhance learner effort and commitment to learning and to achieving high standards of comprehension.

The National Research Council 2000 volume entitled *How People Learn* further reinforces the direct linkage between motivation and the amount of time students are willing to spend learning. This work underscores the repeated finding that appears in the research literature that learners of all ages are more motivated when they can see the usefulness of what they are learning and when they can use the information they are learning will lead to something of significance for them and others. In short, when learning is effectively tied to future purposes and outcomes, motivation to set goals and invest the necessary effort to meet goals is enhanced (e.g., Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Without this commitment, significant numbers of will learners will be left behind.

Because of this crying need, research over the past decade has focused on the development of programs to help students become committed to taking part in the academic journey. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and discuss one such program, The Possible Selves Program (Hock, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2003). This program was designed to give teachers and counselors a tool for increasing the academic motivation and focus of students. In order to understand the Possible Selves Program, the foundational theory and research that underlies the program must first be understood.

Academic Motivation

A great deal of knowledge about academic motivation has been acquired over the years. For example, we know that most students begin their formal school experience motivated to learn. In fact, they seem to have a natural desire to learn (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989; Pressley & Ghatala, 1989). Additionally, most students have high expectations for success. That is, when children are given an appropriate learning task, they have great confidence that they can do it (Pressley & McCormick, 1995).

Not only are younger children motivated to learn, they tend to remain motivated. Even when young learners encounter frustration and failure, they demonstrate remarkable resilience. They continue to work at being academically successful even in the face of failure, at least for awhile (Clifford, 1978; Pressley & Ghatata, 1989). However, for many learners, motivation and optimism begin to diminish with repeated failure. By the upper elementary grades, teachers begin to see "unmotivated" students (Stipek & Maclver, 1989). Teachers and parents begin to hear, "I don't want to do this. I don't care. I hate school. Don't bother me!" Once students begin to believe they cannot perform certain tasks or do well academically, teachers and counselors must take steps to rekindle the "motivational fires" that support instruction and learning success.

Increasing Academic Motivation

Several validated interventions have been shown to be effective with learners in certain situations and under specific circumstances with regard to enhancing academic motivation. For example, positive reinforcement (Brophy, 1981; Bandura, 1986; Lepper, Green, & Nisbett, 1973), communication of high expectations to students (Brophy, 1987; Pressley & McCormick, 1995), rewarding personal improvement (Ames & Archer, 1988), making academic tasks more interesting

(Anderson, Shirey, Wilson, & Fielding, 1987), teaching attribution alternatives and self-advocacy (Bandura, 1982; Borkowski, Weyhing, & Carr, 1988; Reid & Borkowski, 1987; Carr & Borkowski, 1989), nurturing student hopefulness (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997; Snyder, 1994; Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997) and orchestrating success through cognitive and metacognitive learning strategy instruction (Borkowski, et al., 1992; Deshler & Schumaker, 1988; McCombs & Marzano, 1990) have been reported as being effective with regard to academically motivating students.

Many of theses motivational interventions are closely related to cognitive goal theory (Blumenfeld, 1992). Cognitive goal theory holds that much of student behavior, mastery, and performance is the outcome of the desire to attain individual goals (Seifert, 1995). Increasingly, academic motivation seems to be directly related to the pursuit of meaningful and specific goals (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, Cobb, Wood, Yackel, & Patashnick, 1990). Conversely, academic underperformance or resistance to academic engagement may be due, in large measure, to a lack of goals in the domain of learning. In remarks to an audience of educational practitioners, Richard Lavoie said that students are not so much unmotivated as they are not motivated to do what we want them to do (Tollefson, 1998). In other words, having goals not aligned with learning outcomes may be related to academic underachievement due to disinterest and lack of effort in course work perceived to be unrelated to personal goals (Blumenfeld, 1992; Davison-Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth, & Thomas, 1999).

In contrast, students who see learning as a way to acquire skills and knowledge that will increase competence in goal areas ***they*** value are more likely to put forth the effort needed to attain those goals (Bandura, 1982; Blumenfeld, 1992; Borkowski, et al., 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). These students are often labeled intrinsically motivated and are said to be mastery oriented (Ames & Archer, 1988). That is, they are driven to put forth the effort necessary in academic situations because the reward they seek is directly related to what they personally value. In effect, the process and goal attainment related to learning is the reward (Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992; Lepper, 1988; Maehr, 1989; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000). On the other hand, learning for the sake of achievement is driven more by extrinsic factors (Dweck, 1986; Lepper, 1988). Students who are motivated to achieve to get a certain grade, for example, could be called extrinsically motivated. Unfortunately, if these students believe that high levels of achievement and performance are beyond their reach, they may disengage from learning. Thus, helping students think in terms of mastery goals that are related to what they personally value and that help them attain the future selves to which they aspire seems helpful.

Recently, conceptual thinking and research has tied goal attainment theory to the construct of hope. Rick Snyder (1994) and colleagues at the University of Kansas have developed hope theory that states, in part, that human action is goal directed, and the level of hope that one has for the future is the result of the interaction between willpower (agency) and way power (pathway) for goals. That is, if individuals have the willpower to put forth effort to reach a goal, and if they have a plan that will help them reach a goal, they will have high hope. Hope can also be measured, and more importantly, nurtured, in low-hope individuals (Babyak, Snyder, & Yoshinobu, 1993; Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, Sigmon, Yoshinobu, Gibb, Langelle, & Harney, 1991; Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, & Higgins, 1996; Snyder et al., 1997). Having high hope is useful because research conducted by Snyder and associates has found high hope individuals are more successful in life. For example, they recover from accidents and illness faster, they perform at higher levels athletically, and they experience more academic success than low-hope individuals. Interventions related to helping students think about

possible future selves with its focus on future hopes, expectations, and fears may be one way to nurture hope (Snyder, 1994).

Let's return to the student quote that opened this chapter. This student could very well be the product of motivationally undermining experiences. For example, at some point in his educational experience, his academic performance may have been constantly and publicly compared to the performance of his better performing peers to the point of ridicule. If a student such as this student seems academically unmotivated, unwilling to risk failure again, and focused on limited goals, a response focused on goal setting related to personally valued outcomes seems required if this student is to become "intrinsically motivated." A way must be found to surface the student's personal goals, and help the student create a pathway or plan for reaching the goals, thus making learning more meaningful. Based upon the body of knowledge about goal theory, educators must recognize that students are motivated by personal goals and that having hope involves three critical elements. First, students must identify individual goals that are valued and attractive to them. Second, they must believe that the goals are attainable with reasonable effort. Finally, they must develop specific plans that lead to attainment of the goals (Levine, 2002; Seifert, 1995).

Developing Possible Selves to Nurture Student Motivation

One way of helping students surface goals related to future learning involves the analysis of "Possible Selves." Hazel Markus, professor of psychology at Stanford University, has drawn recent attention to the term "Possible Selves." Markus said that *Possible Selves are ideas about what one might become in the future* (Markus & Nurris, 1986). Markus and her colleagues reported that ideas about one's self in the future can be very motivating. That is, individuals with clear ideas and goals about what they want to do, be, and be like seem more willing to put forth the effort needed to attain these hoped-for ideals. For example, a student who has identified becoming an emergency medical technician as a possible self is more likely to work hard to graduate from high school and get the necessary training for that career than a student who has never thought about a career. Additionally, Markus reported that some individuals will work just as hard to avoid the possible selves that they fear. For example, students who have thought about the possible self living on welfare with no money to support a family may be more likely to work hard in school to avoid that possible self than students who have not seriously considered such outcomes. In either case, possible selves can increase one's motivation to work hard to attain specific goals because possible selves are an essential link between self-concept and individual motivation (Cross & Markus, 1994; Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; Oyserman & Markus, 1990b).

Several descriptive studies have been conducted that detail the nature of hoped for, expected, and feared possible selves for specific groups. For example, Markus and Nurius (1986) found that possible selves could be assessed in college students. That is, most, if not all, college students have some conceptual knowledge of what they hope, expect, and fear in the future. Additionally, there is a positive bias in these thoughts about possible selves. Most individuals identify more positive possibilities for the future than negative possibilities. Importantly, future possible selves are different than current possible selves and individuals believe they can change and attain hoped-for selves.

Similar findings were reported for youth between the ages of 13 and 16 years of age. Youths attending a public school had no problems explaining what their possible selves were, and their explanations were diverse in nature. This finding also held true for youths who had been adjudicated and placed in delinquency programs. However, the nature of the possible selves of the groups differed. The adjudicated youth were focused on feared possible selves more so than hoped-for or expected possible selves, suggesting less balance between positive and negative selves and a sense of

hopelessness (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a). In another study designed to assess the relationship of possible selves and self-schema to performance, college students were classified as being schematic (good problem solvers) or aschematic (not-so-good problem solvers). While the performance on problem solving measures did not distinguish between the groups, those who were schematic and endorsed more positive possible selves enjoyed attacking problem-solving tasks and required less failure feedback than did the aschematic group (Cross & Markus, 1994). Other researchers have reported that the use of open-ended questionnaires seems to be an effective way to surface current and future possible selves (Anderman, Hicks, & Maehr, 1994; Day, Borkowski, Dietmeyer, Howsepian, & Saenz, 1994; Garcia, Lissi, Egan-Dowdy, Davila, Matula, & Harris, 1995), and that associations can be made between positive visions of one's self in the future and academic performance and deep processing strategy usage (Anderman, 1992; Anderman et al., 1994; Day et al., 1994; Leondari et al., 1998).

In a related study, Estrada (1990) developed an intervention designed to build awareness and bring clarity to the possible selves of Hispanic students in 2nd through 7th grade. The intervention consisted of career, family, leisure, and friends awareness activities, discussion of the relationship between possible selves and high school graduation, how to deal with negative feedback, and coping with failure. The effects of the intervention were described as moderate with most gains in the number and specificity of roles and goals identified as possible for the learner. Effects for increased self-efficacy and academic performance were not evident.

The Possible Selves Program

Based on the research described above, the possible selves concept seems to be a promising one in terms of helping students become more motivated to learn. However, although several individuals have reported interventions based on the Markus possible selves concept, no one has developed a program that can be used by educators at all levels of schooling to enhance the academic motivation of students, especially those students who are having difficulty in school. As a result, the Possible Selves Program (Hock et al., 2003) was born. The Possible Selves Program is designed to increase student motivation by having students examine their future and think about goals that are important to them. Specifically, students participating in the program think about and describe their hoped-for possible selves (selves **they** would like very much to create; a wish or a dream), expected possible selves (selves **they** are fairly sure they can create), and feared possible selves (selves they wish to avoid). Once students describe their possible selves, they create a Possible Selves Tree (Borkowski et al., 1992; Day et al., 1994; Estrada, 1990), a drawn picture of a tree which has branches and other elements representing their possible selves. The tree is used as a metaphor to help students examine the key roles they will assume in life, their hopes, expectations, and fears for the future, and the overall condition of their "tree." In effect, students examine their personal tree and are challenged to evaluate and take action to nurture their tree so it can become a strong, well-balanced, beautiful tree. Finally, they set goals related to the actions they need to take to nurture their trees, make plans for reaching the goals, and then work toward those goals.

Researchers have suggested that once students have examined their possible selves (i.e., hoped for, expected, and feared), they are more inclined to believe that they can do well in school and in life (Day et al., 1994; Estrada, 1990; Hock et al., 2002a). In effect, they begin to view learning as a pathway to their hopes and expectations and as a way to prevent feared possible selves from materializing. Thus, learning becomes more relevant, and students increase their willingness to put forth effort and commit to learning.

There are six components in the Possible Selves Program. The first component, **DISCOVERING**, helps the student answer the question, "What are my strengths and interests?" During this phase, the teacher engages students in activities designed to help them identify areas in which they have interest and skills and feel good about themselves. The goal is to find an area in which each student has had positive experiences and about which is willing to share those experiences. For example, a student skilled at soccer or playing computer games will, in all likelihood, have much to talk about and share with others in this strength area. By finding an area about which the student feels positive, the "pump is primed," and the student becomes more willing to share information related to areas about which he or she may not feel so positive (e.g., learning).

THINKING is the second component of the program, and it is designed to help the student answer the question, "Who am I?" Here, the student completes a structured but open-ended interview with a teacher or counselor, either individually or as part of a group. In the interview, students are asked to identify words or phrases that describe them in targeted areas (as a learner, person, worker, and in a strength area). They are also asked to define their hopes, expectations, and fears for the future in each area. In this way, an outline of the current self and possibilities for the future is developed within each area. Sample interview questions are: What statements or words best describe you as a learner? What do you hope to achieve as a learner? What do you expect to achieve as a learner? What do you fear as a learner? The targeted areas and number of questions within the interview can be modified to fit the age and interests of the students (see page 30 for a sample Possible Selves Interview).

As the student responds to questions and describes himself or herself, the student writes down answers to the interview questions. Additional questions about the student's hopes, expectations, and fears for the future in at least three domains (learner, person, and worker (or an individually selected strength area) are asked, and these responses are also recorded. Figure 1 represents responses to questions from a first-year university student-athlete, a 6th grade student, and an 8th grade student.

Figure 1

Responses to: What do you **Hope** to achieve as a learner?

University Student	**8th Grade Student**	**6th Grade student**
-Not to flunk out	-have the grades to go to college	-graduate from high school
-get a 2.5 G.P.A.	-learn more science, history, reading	-be a successful student
-be eligible to play sports		-pass English
-really want a degree		

Responses to: What do you **Hope** to achieve as a person?

University Student	8th Grade Student	6th Grade student
-be more responsible	-earn lots of money	-have lots of friends
-take care of my responsibilities	-help out in the community	-have a decent home
-take care of details as expected	-have self-respect	-be a good person
	-be trustworthy	

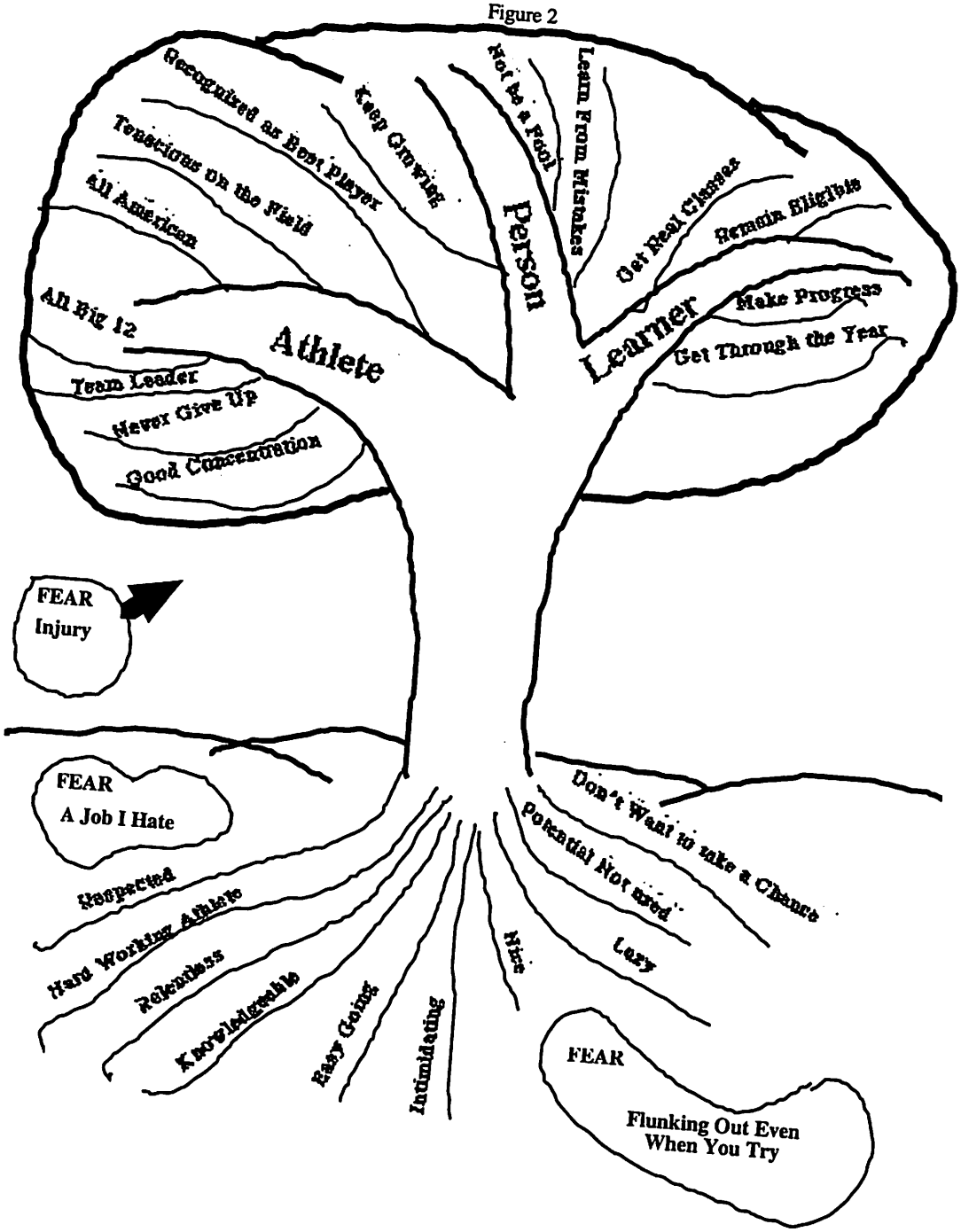
Once the interview has been completed, the third component of the Possible Selves Program is introduced. It is called **SKETCHING**. It helps the student answer the question, "What am I like and what are my possible selves?" During this activity, the student draws a Possible Selves Tree. The teacher begins by stating something like, "You've listed a lot of important information about yourself. Now, you're going to pull that information together by creating a Possible Selves Tree. The tree will have limbs that represent you as a learner, person, and worker (or in a strength area). It will have

branches that represent your hoped-for and expected possible selves in those areas. You will represent your feared possible selves with dangerous conditions for your tree (lightning, termites, poison in the soil). You'll use the exact words you recorded in the interview to add branches and roots to the tree and the dangers around it. You can add to or modify the statements you made. Later, I'll ask you to evaluate your tree and tell me if it really represents the ideas you shared."

Next, the tree is drawn and evaluated, and preliminary goals are discussed concerning how to keep the tree strong, make it fuller, protect it from fears, and provide it with nourishment. In short, the student is asked to briefly think about the tree and ways to nurture it.

Figure 2 is an actual tree completed by a university student-athlete. Notice the unbalanced nature of the tree. The athletic limb is much fuller and contains branches with very positive hope statements. The learner limb is less full, and the words are not nearly as positive. The roots of the tree on the athletic side are deep and strong. On the other hand, the roots for the learner side are short and weak. Fears have been added to the picture as toxins in the soil that threaten the roots or as a strong wind able to break a limb off the tree.

Figure 2


Person
Athlete
Recognized as Best player
Keep Growing
Not be a Fool
Learn From Mistakes
Tenacious on the field
All American
All Big 12
Team Leader
Never Give Up
Good Concentration
Learner
Get Real Classes
Remain Eligible
Make Progress
Get Through the Year
FEAR
Injury
FEAR
A Job I Hate
Don't Want to take a Chance
Potential Not used
Lazy
FEAR
Flunking Out Even
When You Try
Nice
Intimidating
Easy Going
Knowledgeable
Relentless
Hard Working Athlete
Respected

The fourth component of the program, **REFLECTING**, helps students answer the question, "What can I be?" It provides an opportunity for the student to evaluate the condition of his or her tree and set goals for the future. During this activity, for example, the student who drew the tree in Figure 2 would realize that nurturing in the learner and person areas is needed if balance and fullness are to be achieved. This reflection activity can include a discussion of how learning can support the total tree. Since athletic hopes will be lost without improved academic performance because the student cannot achieve in this area if he is academically ineligible to participate in sports, the student may be more inclined to commit time and energy to learning if the direct relationship is clarified. For example, if the student expresses the hope to remain eligible for sports, he might set goals to attend class regularly and earn a 2.50 in all his classes.

The fifth component, **GROWING**, helps the student answer the question "How do I get there?" It is utilized to get the student to start thinking about specific ways to nurture and "grow" his or her tree and attain identified goals. If, for example, a student identified the of hope for a career as the owner of a trucking business during the Reflecting component, the student and teacher can take the short and long-term goals that are necessary to attain this "possible self" and develop a plan to reach these goals. Hopefully, the student will discover (with teacher guidance) that learning how to problem solve, earning a high school diploma, learning business math skills, and learning different reading strategies in order to comprehend important material support the attainment of the student's hopes and expectations for the future. In addition, the student may discover that these same goals help the student avoid the "feared selves" that have been identified (e.g.. no job, no money, no friends). In short, during the Growing activities, a well-developed Action Plan is constructed by the student. The Action Plan will list a specific hope, a short-term goal underpinning the hope, the specific tasks that must be completed to reach the goal, and a timeline for completing all of the tasks. The action plan provides "pathway" to support the attainment of long-term goals and hopes for the future.

The sixth and final component is **PERFORMING**. It helps students answer the question, "How am I doing?" During this phase, the Possible Selves Tree, the goals established to "nurture" the tree, and the action plans are revisited regularly. Task completion is reviewed, goals and action plans are modified, goal attainment is celebrated, new goals are added, and hopes, expectations, and fears are continually examined. In addition, whenever the value of learning is questioned, the tree can be used to demonstrate how specific learning experiences and student effort contribute to the strength of the student's tree (i.e., future).

Research Supporting the Possible Selves Program

A few studies have been conducted on the effects of the Possible Selves Program with university-level student-athletes and middle-school students. Two studies were conducted with freshmen university student-athletes, including student-athletes who were not well prepared for the academic demands of college. In the first study, 60 student-athletes were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (Hock, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002a). For the control condition, 20 students received tutorial support from trained tutors and academic advising from athletic department counselors. Tutorial support consisted of unlimited access to subject-area and academic skills tutors as needed. Academic advising was delivered by athletic department counselors and consisted of bimonthly meetings during which students' academic progress was monitored and discussed. Counselors encouraged students to put forth effort and achieve success in their classes. The 20 students in the career-counseling condition received the same tutoring and counseling services as students in the control condition with the addition of six to eight hours of career-counseling activities over the course of a

semester provided by staff associated with the university's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Specifically, these students were administered the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, and the results of the inventory were discussed with a CAPS counselor in one-to-one sessions. Students then explored possible careers using CAPS resources. The 20 students in the Possible selves condition received the same tutoring and counseling services as the control group, and they participated in the Possible Selves Program that consisted of the Thinking, Sketching, and Reflecting components (i.e., the students did not receive the Discovering, Growing, and Performing components). The Possible Selves Program took about six to eight hours of time and was presented to students in one-to-one interactions with a sport counselor or other athletic department staff member. There were no statistically significant differences among the three groups' ACT scores, ethnicity, reading comprehension achievement scores, or gender.

The results of this study showed that, at the end of the first semester of the freshman year, students in the Possible selves condition scored significantly higher than students in the control group on measures of goal identification. That is, they identified more goals beyond the field of athletics as possible for them in life. Interestingly, the number of goals identified by students in the other conditions actually declined over the course of the first semester in the athlete and learner areas, while the possible selves group increased slightly or maintained. Thus, freshman student-athletes at a mid-western Division 1 university reported fewer athletic and academic goals than they did on pretests administered at the beginning of their first semester at the university. Also, at the end of six years, the possible selves students had earned higher grade-point averages (GPAs) than the students in the other groups: The mean GPA for the possible selves group was 2.65. The mean GPA for the control group was 2.25 and the mean GPA for the career-counseling group was 2.41. Moreover, 75% of the possible selves group had graduated from the university, compared to 45% of the control group and 60% of the career-counseling group. The overall graduation rate for all students entering this university was 54%. Thus, student-athletes who participated in the Possible Selves Program graduated at a rate that was 21% higher than the general student population and 30% higher than student-athletes in the control group.

For another study, the original Possible Selves Program that was implemented in the first study was revised to include additional steps (Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2002b). The two new steps included developing elaborate goal-directed action plans (Growing) and periodic monitoring and feedback on the completion of tasks and action plan goals (Performing). In this study, 32 freshmen student-athletes, matched for ACT scores, sport, gender, and high school GPA, were randomly assigned to either a control or an experimental group. Fifth-year student-athletes (hereafter called "peer mentors") were recruited and taught how to guide others through the Possible Selves Program. Two peer mentors were assigned to each group of four to six student-athletes who had been assigned to the experimental group. Each group met for one hour a week for 12 weeks during the fall semester. The peer mentors taught the possible selves lessons during that time. The control students met individually with sport counselors during the same time period and for the same number of hours.

Students in the Possible Selves Program significantly outperformed the control group on measures of role identification and goal setting in the areas of athletics, academics, and personal life. That is, the possible selves group identified significantly more roles for themselves as athletes, learners, and persons than did the students in the control group. Additionally, they identified more goals for themselves as athletes, learners, and persons, and the goals they identified were more specific than the goals identified by the control group. Finally, retention of students at the university was greater for the possible selves group than for the control group. Although students in both conditions still had one

year left in a 6-year time period in which they might graduate at the time of this printing, 75% of the students in the possible selves group were on track to graduate or had graduated, and 56% of the students in the control condition were on track to graduate or had graduated. Thus, the retention results for the Possible Selves Program as taught by peer mentors with small groups of students are similar to the retention results of the original possible selves study where academic counselors and other athletic department staff members worked individually with students. Interestingly, the peer-mentored student-athletes in the second study identified significantly more roles and goals than did the counselor led possible selves students in the original study.

In a third study, 52 middle-school students, including students with disabilities, participated (Hock, 2003). These students attended an urban school that serves a diversity of populations. Ten of these students were served in a self-contained special education classroom, and 21 students were served in an inclusive career-orientation class. These 31 students were the experimental group, whereas 21 students in another section of the same career-orientation course, taught by the same teacher, participated as a comparison group. Students in the experimental group participated in the Possible Selves Program over the course of the fall semester during approximately two class sessions each week for 12 weeks. The Possible Selves Program was revised from the second study to include the Discovering component. Students in the comparison class received the traditional career-orientation curriculum adopted by the school district. Results showed that the students who participated in the Possible Selves Program identified significantly more roles they hoped to play in the future than did students who participated in the traditional career orientation curriculum. Additionally, these students identified significantly more goals as learners and persons, and these goals were much more specific than the goals identified by comparison students. Finally, the experimental students and teachers reported that they were highly satisfied with the Possible Selves Program. Some students and teachers reported using goal and action-plan information resulting from the Possible Selves Program activities during IEP and transition conferences held at the school.

Conclusion

The Possible Selves Program shows promise as an intervention designed to enhance academic motivation and improve student performance across different instructional levels on key outcome measures. Specifically, students who participated in the Possible Selves Program identified more life roles and goals than did their peers, and these goals were significantly more specific in nature than the goals of other students. Additionally, university-level student-athletes earned higher GPAs over extended periods of time and graduated at a higher rate than did other student-athletes with similar profiles. Thus, the Possible Selves Program seems to be an effective intervention that increases the type, number, and specificity of goals students identify. In turn, these goals may be important in enhancing academic motivation and performance by making school experiences and learning activities relevant to students' hoped-for future possible selves. Once students begin to see the relevance of academic skills, knowledge, and effort as the means to attain what they have identified as important hopes for the future, commitment to learning may follow. Hopefully, the student described at the beginning of this chapter and others like him will hold on to their dreams of success as athletes, lawyers, doctors, business people, and rocket scientists and will also expand the vision of what is possible for them in the future to include goals for becoming good people, learners, family members, and workers. As a result, the outcomes that students achieve may be markedly enhanced in a way that makes a difference in the quality of their lives.

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Possible Selves Questionnaire

What words or phrases best describe you in these areas? Respond verbally or write down your responses to the questions. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions so respond honestly and to the best of your ability.

Section 1: Individual Strength

1. What's one thing that you are **really good at doing**?
2. What are some of the things you ***hope to achieve*** in this area?
3. What are some of the things you ***expect to achieve*** in this area?
4. What are some of your ***fears*** in this area?

Section 2: Learner

1. What words or phrases best **describe** you as a **learner**?
2. What are some of the things you ***hope to achieve*** as a learner?
3. What are some of the things you ***expect to achieve*** as a learner?
4. What are some of your ***fears*** as a learner?

Section 3: Person

1. What words or phrases best **describe** you as a **person**?
2. What are some of the things you ***hope to achieve*** as a person?
3. What are some of the things you ***expect to achieve*** as a person?
4. What are some of your ***fears*** as a person?

Section 4: Worker

1. What words or phrases best **describe** you as a **worker**?
2. What are some of the things you ***hope to achieve*** as a worker?
3. What are some of the things you ***expect to achieve*** as a worker?
4. What are some of your ***fears*** as a worker?