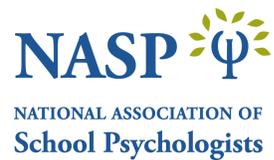


# Communiqué

## PRESENTERS IN FOCUS

By Gerald Gill Strait



## School-Based Motivational Interviewing: Promoting Student Success One Conversation at a Time

pp. 31-32

Volume 47 Issue 2

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Motivation is essential to changing behaviors, overcoming challenges, and achieving goals. School psychologists can play an important role in helping students, particularly those who are struggling, to develop the motivation to adopt the academic enabling behaviors they need to succeed. In this “Presenters in Focus” Q&A, convention presenter Gill Strait discusses how motivational interviewing can be used to help adolescents—and the adults working with them—to adopt behaviors consistent with their long-term goals and core values (NASP Practice Model Domains 3 & 4). He will describe these concepts in more depth during his Field-Based Skills Session, *School-Based Motivational Interviewing: Promoting Student Success One Conversation at a Time*, at the 2019 national convention in Atlanta.

### Briefly, what is motivational interviewing?

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a guiding and client-centered counseling approach used to motivate adults and adolescents to adopt healthy and constructive behaviors consistent with their values and reduce harmful or risky behaviors inconsistent with their values (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Many of the tenets, principles, and hypothesized mechanisms of MI overlap with humanist (e.g., empathy, unconditional positive regard, and autonomy) and cognitive-behavioral (e.g., eliciting change talk) approaches to counseling.

### What are some misconceptions about motivational interviewing?

Often, people believe that MI is used to persuade or trick adults and adolescents into adopting behaviors they do not want to do. However, MI's purpose is to help people adopt behaviors consistent with their long-term goals and core values. Ultimately, we are guides trying to help others safely and efficiently achieve value-based goals. Relatedly, people often think that MI is easy to learn and will work for everything and everyone (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). However, MI, like other therapeutic approaches, requires practice with feedback, and its effects vary across individuals, behaviors, and contexts.

### What are some common applications of MI?

School-based mental health researchers and school psychologists have started using MI to motivate students to adopt academic enabling behaviors (Strait et al., 2012; Terry, Strait, Smith, & McQuillin., 2013) and to motivate parents and teachers to adopt positive behavioral support strategies (Frey et al., 2011; Reinke, Herman, & Sprick, 2011). The former is referred to as student-focused MI and the latter is referred to as consultative MI.

### **Does student-focused MI differ based on age?**

Currently, there is growing experimental evidence that student-focused MI is useful in helping adolescents improve academic grades (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013) and reduce risky behavior (Jensen et al., 2011). In addition, there is evidence that MI works well with adolescents in conjunction with other evidence-based academic interventions. For example, two studies (McQuillin, Strait, Smith, & Ingram, 2015; McQuillin & Lyons, 2016) found that a school-based mentoring program (i.e., Academic Mentoring Program for Education Development) infused with MI and the Homework, Organization, Planning, and Skills Intervention (Langberg, Epstein, Becker, Girio-Herrera, & Vaugn, 2012) produced significant improvement in middle school students' academic grades in comparison to a school as usual control group. In this type of format, school psychologists could use MI to motivate students to set and commit to an academic goal while using other interventions to support their goal attainment.

In terms of younger students, school psychologists should exercise caution against using student-focused MI directly with elementary school students because there is limited research and younger students likely lack some of the cognitive skills (e.g., long-term planning) necessary to benefit from the discussion (Strait, McQuillin, Smith, & Englund, 2012). Instead, school psychologists should consider using MI with parents and teachers to promote behavioral management strategies. In fact, researchers have demonstrated that consultative-based MI increases teachers' adoption of positive behavioral supports, resulting in reductions in disruptive behavior (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008).

### **Can MI be implemented in groups or only with individuals?**

There is an abundance of research on using group MI with adults. For example, Lundahl, Kunz, Brownell, Tollefson, and Burke (2010) conducted a meta-analysis and found that group MI interventions for adult substance abuse produced outcomes similar to individual MI. In regard to student focused MI, research is limited to several small but promising pilot studies (Reich, Sharp, & Berman, 2015; Strait, William, & Peters, in press). Taken together, group student-focused MI has a bright future, especially considering its potential to maximize school psychologists' reach and impact while minimizing the time required to provide the intervention on a large scale.

### **What are some of the systemic barriers that may prevent school psychologists from engaging in MI at schools?**

In my opinion, the greatest barrier to school psychologists and their use of MI is finding the time to participate in MI training and then practicing and honing their MI skills after their initial exposure to the approach. In addition, there is a need for researchers to fully understand the mechanisms of MI and tailor trainings to teach providers how to fully harness these active ingredients. Currently, there is research demonstrating the positive effects of training on school-based MI providers' skills (Small et al., 2014; Simon & Ward, 2014), yet there is no research linking those improvements to client (e.g., students, teachers, parents) outcomes. This is an essential step in the development of school-based MI (i.e., consultative and, especially, student-focused MI) given the need to match intervention components with the cognitive development of young people (Strait et al., 2013).

## How much training, practice, and supervision would a typical school psychologist need before competently engaging in this strategy?

MI is similar to other complex tasks in that it often takes direct instruction (or an introduction to the approach), modeling, and repeated opportunities to practice with feedback. According to Madison, Loignon, and Lane (2008), most MI studies include 9 to 16 hours of training. Ultimately, school psychologists need to learn the underlying principles, processes, and skills related to MI and then seek out ample opportunities to practice these skills and receive feedback (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Thus, attending workshops, reading books, and visiting websites on MI are typically the first steps in learning MI, followed by practice and feedback. Quality workshops incorporate ample opportunities for attendees to practice and receive group level feedback; however, MI learners must practice after initial training and seek feedback. There are several ways to do this: (a) develop MI practice groups with colleagues, (b) attend small group trainings, (c) arrange to send recordings of practice sessions to competent MI providers and trainers, and (d) set up online feedback sessions with MI training providers. The Field-Based Skills session on school-based motivational interviewing at the NASP convention is an opportunity for school psychologists to take the first step (i.e., direct instruction/overview and opportunity to practice basic MI skills) in developing MI skills and overcoming the initial barriers to implementing MI in the schools.

## What online resources are available to interested school psychologists?

Readers interested in obtaining school-based MI resources can visit the following websites: [studentcheckup.org](http://studentcheckup.org) and [miforschools.org](http://miforschools.org). The [studentcheckup.org](http://studentcheckup.org) site provides free access to a semistructured student-focused MI intervention that has undergone multiple randomized control trials (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013), and it includes information for obtaining additional MI training, including workshops and individual MI practice/feedback sessions (conducted online or in person). The [miforschools.org](http://miforschools.org) website provides an overview of MI skills and principles. It also includes additional MI training resources (e.g., card sort activity, links to videos) and an exhaustive list of school-based MI trainers.

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# Using Motivational Interviewing to Help Your Students

*by Lisa A. Sheldon*

**M**y goal as a teacher is to facilitate student learning, encourage academic momentum, and promote goal attainment while teaching about human nutrition. On many occasions, though, there have been opportunities for students to learn life and career lessons far removed from my nutrition curriculum. The key to developing this other kind of learning has been within the framework provided by motivational interviewing.

Motivational interviewing, which began as a counseling technique in addiction recovery, is a client-centered tool for making changes, increasing helpful behaviors and decreasing unhelpful behaviors.<sup>1</sup> It relies on an individual's intrinsic motivation and interest in change, using a non-confrontational approach to frame goals in a practical, attainable fashion.<sup>2</sup> Teachers who use motivational interviewing enhance their listening and problem-solving skills to become more effective communicators and as a result create better rapport with students.<sup>3</sup>

In my experiences, what separates successful students from the less successful is their ability to navigate obstacles and maintain motivation toward their goals. Getting “derailed” is a common problem for many college students, either in individual courses, for a semester, or even longer. For some of these students, a professor who can guide them toward their goal, despite unforeseen obstacles, is the key to success. Motivational interviewing is an invaluable tool toward this end.

The essence of motivational interviewing is captured by the two acronyms OARS (open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening, summary statements) and FRAMES (feedback, responsibility, advice, menu, empathy, self-efficacy). Here are examples:

Open-ended questions are those questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no. They allow the student to “tell his/her story” and provide

you with information about the student as a learner, how best to meet his/her needs or about the issue of concern. For example:

“Tell me more about \_\_\_\_.”

“What happened next?”

Affirmations are useful for strengthening the professor-student relationship. Sincerity and careful judgment in the use of affirmations shows your interest and concern, while disingenuous or trite comments can erode the relationship and create negativity. These morale-boosting statements can help build confidence and increase feelings of empowerment in students, and they can also be used to encourage specific behaviors and recognize students’ hard work. For example:

“You did very well on the last exam.”

“I noticed that you arrived to class on time, I appreciate that.”

Reflective listening enables students to hear their comments aloud though another person’s voice. It shows that you are listening and understanding what the student is telling you. This tool can draw attention to inconsistencies in behavior and goals without judgment. Varying your technique can keep your conversation more interesting and less programmed. Some examples:

“It sounds like you want to create new study habits, but you don’t know where to start.”

“If I am hearing you correctly, you prepared for the exam by reading the chapter notes, but that was not enough.”



“Earlier you said that you were completely prepared for the exam, but it sounds like there might have been some additional steps you might have taken.”

Summary statements bring the conversation to a conclusion. They need not be elaborate and you can start by simply saying that you want to summarize the conversation. For the student, it is chance to correct things and provide additional information. The statements can also be a reminder of action that needs to be taken. An example:

“So, today we discussed some possible solutions to get you to class on-time, and learned that you want to take action to help solve the problem.”

Start by using one or two of the OARS components and expand your repertoire to include all four techniques. Knowing which tools will be most effective at any moment requires practice and careful listening.

Using the FRAMES (feedback, responsibility, advice, menu, empathy, self-efficacy) construction, teachers, advisors and others can help students take action and move forward. One of the tenets of motivational interviewing is to engage with positive momentum. Stay focused on moving forward to prevent getting stuck on issues in the past or stuck in thinking that is counter-productive.

Feedback must be delivered in a clear, non-judgmental way that articulates discrepancies in the current behavior and the goal or new behavior. These are best stated as facts rather than opinions, which might be dismissed as “just an opinion.”

Responsibility links the problematic behavior with the action of the individual. It can be a clear reminder that the behavior is “owned” by the student and therefore, is up to the student to change if they choose to.

Advice can be used to provide alternatives to the undesirable behavior, to help negotiate challenging situations, or to build paths around an obstacles. But, like any advice, it is up to the individual to consider the advice and decide whether or not to take action. Avoid becoming emotionally invested in whether or not a student accepts your advice. Your role is to simply provide a new perspective or an option to consider.

Menus offer more than one solution to a problem and allow the individual to choose the path that will potentially be the most effective and helpful for the current challenge. Do not discount any potential solution as unworkable; it is up to the student to make that judgment.

Empathy allows you to build rapport by acknowledging that change can take effort and work, although this is not the case for all individuals, so it must be used with caution and sincerity.

Self-efficacy increases the likelihood that the individual will feel empowered and capable of making a change and following through with a new behavior long-term. Express your belief that the individual has the

potential to be successful and that he or she has your support. Support is good; cheerleading is often seen as overkill. Words of encouragement can be very helpful, as are words of praise, when used with care.

Here are some specific examples of motivational interviewing, taken from conversations I've had with my students.

#### SAMPLE DIALOGUE 1:

When a student was upset about her performance on a recent test, we had this discussion:

PROF: "You seem upset by your exam performance."

STUDENT: "Yes, I can't believe how poorly I did."

PROF: "Let's see if together we can find some ways to help you to do better on the next exam. Tell me about how you prepared."

STUDENT: "I read the chapter and looked at my notes."

PROF: "Okay, so you prepared using the text and your notes. Have you thought about trying some other study techniques?"

STUDENT: "Yeah, I could try using flash cards for the vocabulary. I used to study with my friends and we would quiz each other. That helped a lot in my anatomy class."

PROF: "Flash cards, studying with your friends, reading the text and reviewing your notes—that's a nice list of options. What will you try for next time?"

STUDENT: "Maybe I'll still read the chapter and review notes, but make the flashcards and see if my friends want to study together."

PROF: "Okay, You've put together a solid plan that you are very capable of doing. Let's see how it works out for the next exam and we can talk again."

#### SAMPLE DIALOGUE 2:

Here is the exchange with a student who was arriving to class ten minutes late each day, disrupting other students and underperforming:

PROF: "When you arrive late to class, it disrupts other students who trying to learn. And, I think you miss some of the important parts of the class which affects your ability to do well. Earlier in the semester you were arriving on time, what has changed?"

STUDENT: "Yeah, sorry about that. I stayed up late, and then this morning I overslept and missed the bus."

PROF: "That situation does present some challenges, let's work out a solution to get you to class on-time and ready to learn. What do you think about that?"

STUDENT: "Okay, I know I just need to get up earlier. Then I can make the bus."

PROF: "So, what steps do you need to take? How can you make it happen?"

STUDENT: “I can make sure the alarm is set a little earlier and probably, I need to get more rest so I am not so tired, but I like to stay up late. Maybe I could take a nap during the afternoon. Next time I won’t sign up for such an early class.”

PROF: “Sounds like morning classes are going to be a challenge for you, but since you are already enrolled in my morning class, how do you feel about getting up earlier or getting more rest?”

STUDENT: “It might work, but I’d have to give up some of my personal time. I’ll try setting the alarm earlier.”

PROF: “It looks like you have come up with a plan to get to class on time. I look forward to seeing you on time next class.”

### SAMPLE DIALOGUE 3:

This discussion centers on a student who was repeatedly arriving to class unprepared to learn and contribute to the class community:

PROF: “Being prepared for class is critical for you to gain a complete understanding of the material and for you to be a contributing member of class. I am concerned that you might not be taking as active a role as you might if you were fully prepared.”

STUDENT: “I didn’t have time to complete the reading because I had to work a double shift.”

PROF: “I understand how that work schedule could interfere with your school work and make class preparation challenging. How do you think it can be negotiated in the future?”

STUDENT: “I could do the reading during my breaks and dinner hour.”

PROF: “That sounds like a workable solution. Are you willing to try that solution for this coming week? I’ll follow-up with you next week to see how the idea worked out.”

Keep in mind that resistance is normal, and events, tasks, and challenges sometimes provoke opposition to change. The motivational interviewing approach would suggest that it is fine to acknowledge reluctance to change, but avoid confronting it head-on as this only feeds resistance and deepens resolve that the resistance is the root of the problem, not the behavior itself. Motivational interviewing places responsibility for educational success in the hands of students. At the same time, the frameworks increase opportunities to communicate with students about what they can do to be successful, and let them know that they have opportunities in every educational setting to practice the skills that can bring about success.

Interactions with students can become more focused and helpful not only to the student but also for the professor. Motivational interviewing can increase student competency as students take steps that help them to real-

ize both short- and long-term goals for learning, careers, and life. Motivational interviewing has deepened my understanding of challenges facing my students, helped me develop stronger communication skills, and better equipped me to motivate and guide students. Carefully guided discussions can help to move a student from a place of frustration and academic despair to one of hope and encouragement. What may be most helpful for students is the opportunity to discuss an issue with someone who is really engaged and listening. Despite busy schedules of teaching and research, this is a gift we can give our students which is not soon forgotten. 

## ENDNOTES

Note: To learn more about motivational interviewing, visit [www.motivationalinterview.org](http://www.motivationalinterview.org) and the American Academy of Family Physicians: [www.aafp.org/afp/20000301/1409.html](http://www.aafp.org/afp/20000301/1409.html).

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## Conversations about Change

It really all depends on how the teachers and students interact.

—A student, in answer to the question  
“What is a good school?”

**M**otivational interviewing (MI) focuses on improving motivation to change, and it does this through conversation. This book is about how the conversation skills you already have can be refined to inspire change in classrooms, corridors, and cafeterias. It’s about how to improve student motivation, behavior and growth.<sup>1</sup> It’s also about how you can enjoy your conversations, be more efficient, conserve your energy, and have a greater impact. In the end, it’s about how well-known principles of good education can be realized through more effective conversation.

Attending to student behavior is no easy task. For example, in the United States, one recent year (2006) saw 7% of students suspended at least once, amounting to 3.3 million youth (Losen, 2011). In another analysis over a million students walked out of their school before graduating, never to return (Datiri, 2013). At the milder end of the spectrum, efforts to improve performance are often based on the idea that with

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<sup>1</sup> This book focuses on primary and secondary schools. However, it’s a fairly short step into the world of higher education. The style and techniques of MI will endure across settings even if the content of the conversations might be a little different.

sufficient pressure and reinforcement, student motivation will improve. Loud encouragement, and often coercion, is the norm.

MI offers an alternative strategy. It has been refined over the last 30 years to produce a strengths-based vehicle for you to support students in finding their own routes to change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). It can be useful whether you are a teacher, administrator, counselor, or coach. MI offers tools for responding effectively to situations like these:

A 9-year-old student is downhearted, struggling with a math problem and says, “I just don’t get it, I never do.”

A girl of 12 ambles casually into the classroom, late again. You ask why and the reply is “Dunno.”

You are discussing progress with a 15-year-old student and her father, and he says, “This kind of performance is unacceptable. She’s just not applying herself like she should.”

The conversations that unfold in the above scenarios will all focus on change, whether in behavior, motivation, or learning. If you could wave a magic wand, you would make students instantly motivated and ready to change their attitudes or behavior. Instead, such change takes effort, both yours and the student’s. What would you say next in each of the above conversations?

### The Righting Reflex

A common response in situations like those above is to use what we call the “righting reflex.” It’s a well-intentioned inclination to fix the problem for the person. It works sometimes, like when a student asks for advice. It’s essential too when you need to provide information, address something quickly, or when students have no choice but to follow the rules. But for lifting a student’s motivation to change, it’s not very successful. Here’s what the righting reflex could look like in each of those three scenarios:

The student who says, “I just don’t get it, I never do” might hear something like, “If you sit down and really concentrate you will find a way to solve this, and your grade will improve.”

The girl who says “Dunno” when asked why she is late might be met with, “Well, that’s twice this week and the next step will be detention, so make sure you are on time.”

And the father and daughter might hear, “Have you thought about staying after school each day and going for extra help?”

Trying to lift motivation with the righting reflex takes effort and time on your part. So how do students respond? One can predict a defensive reaction, with the word “but” appearing soon, either out loud or more quietly. If the conversation were a dance, then surely some toes are being stepped on.

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*The righting reflex: an inclination to fix the problem for the student.*

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## Ambivalence

A student’s ambivalence about change is often close to the surface of the exchanges we’ve been discussing. One part of the student’s mind might want to change, hearing all the reasons *for* it; another part hears the opposite, reasons *against* change. Ambivalence is a very common and normal human experience, characterized by a sort of internal mental chatter: “Should I change, or keep things the same?”; “I want to”; “I’m not sure”; “I’m getting there”; “It’s not worth it”; and so on, back and forth. If motivation—the incentive and enthusiasm—is the drive to do something, the voices in favor fuel it, and those against hold it back.

When the righting reflex meets with ambivalence in the student, the conversation takes an unfortunate turn. What students hear from you is the case for change, one side of the ambivalence they feel; their response is quite predictably to voice the other side, to defend the status quo. For example:

The student struggling with math might say or think, “Yes, but . . . I’ve tried and it never works.”

The girl who is late might say, “Yes, OK,” and think to herself, “I don’t like this place, so why should I bother?”

And the daughter of the annoyed father might say, “But I don’t want to.”

It seems like the harder you try to instill motivation, the more students resist. You and the student feel stuck. It’s like a dance that’s going wrong, and your head hurts trying to find the next clever move.

In each of the above examples, the student is saying why change is *not* a good idea. That's a signal worth noting. It would make much more sense if the student, not you, were to make the case for change. MI is designed to do just this.

There's an inclination in all of us to provide solutions, toughen up, talk straight, or tighten disciplinary boundaries. Students, particularly those who are not doing

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*What students hear from you is the case for change, one side of the ambivalence; their response is to voice the other side.*

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so well, often hear this forceful language of reward and punishment. One teacher described it as a traffic light system: Green means, "Go here, yes that's right, well done, you will get good grades and do well in

life," while Red means, "No, stop, don't go there, you'll get punished and . . ." The effect on student motivation of repeatedly hearing "do this, do that" messages might well be a negative one (DeCharmes, 1968; Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Valerand & Bissonnette, 1992). Put bluntly, it's very hard to instill motivation in someone else. We like a decision to change to come from within us, not from outside pressure. Children are no different.

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*It's hard to instill motivation in someone else.*

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When they reply with a shrug of the shoulders, or a more strident expression of why they won't or can't change, what's next?

## What MI Is

MI is a style with a set of skills used to have a conversation in which the student voices the case for change, what we call "change talk." Change is more likely to occur because it comes from students as an expression of what they want or need.

Rather than hearing you make the case for change, the students hear themselves make it, and this experience makes it easier for them to resolve their ambivalence and make a decision to change. They take charge of the decision making. A new world opens up, their motivation improves, and, bit by bit, conversation by conversation, better outcomes are seen. The more you show respect for the unique potential and strengths of students to change, the more likely they will be to do just that. You will recognize this approach in the principles of student-centered teaching practice, with children of all ages. MI merely

provides the conversational tools for doing this, even in very tough situations.

The energy that drives change comes from within students themselves, with you as their support and guide, working with their strengths and aspirations. MI is founded on the conviction that students *can* change. This involves a shift in your conversation style, from instilling to eliciting, acting more like a guide than an instructor, and is the foundation for all that follows in this book.

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*MI is a style for having a conversation in which the student voices the case for change.*

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Is MI easy to learn? Yes and no. The style of conversation involved can feel a little different than that you are used to. Learning requires practice. When you start to settle into the style, and feel pleased about your progress, you can find things moving quite quickly.

### What MI Is Not

MI is not a panacea, but merely a way of having a constructive conversation. Forces outside of your control, like students' friendships and their home life, often hold sway over them and prevent your best efforts from having an impact. It would be unrealistic to elevate MI beyond its place, but in its place it can be a powerful tool, or, as one colleague put it, "a powerful ingredient in the fuel that drives good practice" (David Olds, personal communication).

Using MI need not be time-consuming, and it is not a form of counseling in which you passively absorb whatever someone says.

MI is not a behavior change technique, trick, or strategy done *on* or *to* students, but rather something done *with* them, or on their behalf. It's certainly not a way of getting someone to do something he or she would not otherwise want to do. It's best not viewed as a behavior management technique, but as a way of helping someone make decisions. MI is something practiced with students to help them see the paths in front of them and choose those leading to positive growth and fulfillment. It's not just for troubled students, though it will certainly help them; it's something that can and has been used to inform conversations in all corners of school life.

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*MI is practiced with students; it's not done to or on them.*

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## MI in Schools

The underlying style and techniques of MI can be used in a class with a group of students as well as with individuals. MI can also be adjusted to take into account the developmental age of a child. The way we relate to students of any age can affect their motivation to change. MI, with its emphasis on supporting autonomy, is certainly well suited to adolescents. It is also the case that young children, with their lively imaginations, would benefit from a warm and accepting approach that allows them to consider their own reasons for change. Guidelines for helping younger children are highlighted in Part II.

Our experience with students, and with MI in other settings like health care, is that MI crosses cultural boundaries with little difficulty. One overview of research suggests that, in the United States, it is more effective when used with minority populations, primarily Hispanic and African American communities (Hettema, Steele, & Miller, 2005).

MI is compatible with good teaching practice, where one person takes the role of helping another move from indecision to action, from feeling stuck to feeling more motivated to change.

The overlap between MI and conversations in schools are striking:

- The word “education” is derived from the Latin verb *ducere*, “to lead or guide,” which points to the value of a teacher who “draws forth” learning from students. MI focuses on the conversation techniques for exactly this “drawing forth,” to enhance motivation to change. We call it evoking, a refinement of what has been called a Socratic style of education.
- Experience in the classroom, supported by evidence, tells us that students learn best when they actively participate and willingly take responsibility for their own behavior and learning, supported by skillful teaching techniques. This is easier said than done. Students often seem ambivalent about participating and taking responsibility for themselves or downright opposed to the idea. MI provides the tools for encouraging participation, resolving ambivalence, and helping students to verbalize their own routes to change.
- There is solid evidence that giving students specific, accurate, and positive feedback increases motivation. “Affirmation” is a highly tuned way of doing just this and a core skill in MI.
- Respecting and encouraging autonomy is a part of MI and is supported by educational research. Students perform better on

tests, and feel more competent and motivated to learn, when teachers actively support their autonomy.

- Teachers routinely ask open questions. In MI, open questions are followed by the use of further skills like reflective listening that encourage more discussion. If open questions are like knocking on a door, the other skills help you walk inside with greater ease.

It's worth noting here that Carl Rogers, who conducted pioneering work on education, is the same person who developed client-centered counseling, upon which we based our account of MI. Listening sits at the center of Rogers's last book, *A Way of Being* (1980), and the work of some of his students, such as Thomas Gordon (2003). Understanding what listening really means, and how it can be used, is one of the main threads running through this book. Our hope is that MI will provide you with the tools you need to use listening and other skills creatively, and with a productive focus on change. Motivation to change is clearly influenced by rewards, punishment, test scores, and so on, but the internally driven aspirations of the student are powerful, and your conversations, informed by MI skills like listening, can help students to tap their aspirations.

## The Evidence

The wider research literature on MI beyond the school environment includes over 200 controlled trials and evidence for efficacy in a wide range of settings (Miller & Rollnick, 2013), including successful applications with adolescents (Naar-King & Suarez, 2011). Generally, MI's school-based applications have either been student-focused, designed to directly help those with a particular change problem, or consultative, where MI is used to help an educator or parent adopt a strategy when working with a student(s) (Strait, McQuillon, Terry, & Smith, 2014). In the most recent review of MI applications among school students, Snape and Atkinson (2016) classified 8 out of 11 studies as "best evidence," 3 were randomized trials, and all but one study yielded positive findings.

Many of the studies on MI in schools have looked to improve student health. School nurses have utilized MI to address complex problems such as obesity (Bonde, Bentsen, & Hindhede, 2014) and asthma (Blaakman, Cohen, Fagnano, & Halterman, 2014), as well

as to help students increase their physical activity (Robbins, Pfeiffer, Maier, LaDrig, & Berg-Smith, 2012; Robbins, Pfeiffer, Wesolek, & Lo, 2013). Studies have also shown promising outcomes when using a school-based MI approach to help students decrease drug or alcohol use (Barnett et al., 2014; Hall, Stewart, Arger, Athenour, & Effinger, 2014; Hamilton, O'Connell, & Cross, 2004).

Research on the use of MI for academic and behavioral improvement is also growing. For instance, two randomized controlled trials showed that even a single MI counseling session (50 minutes with a trained provider) for middle school students (typically ages 11 to 13) led to improvements in class participation, academic behavior, and higher math grades (Strait et al., 2012; Terry, Smith, Strait, & McQuillin, 2013). Another randomized trial found that two group sessions based on MI led to better math, science, and history grades than for students attending a single session of MI (Terry, Strait, McQuillin, & Smith, 2014). One pilot study has looked at truancy and found that a hybrid intervention of MI and other methods was successful among adolescents ages 16 and 17 (Enea & Dafinoiu, 2009). Encouraging research is also underway to explore how school consultants can use MI to aid teachers and parents to adopt effective strategies to help students improve their learning and behavior (Herman, Frey, Shephard, & Reinke, 2013).

We have supported MI training in at least 47 languages worldwide. The interest is there, and colleagues in countries like Estonia, Wales, and Poland are looking at adaptation in school to everyday teaching practice.

MI is complementary to whatever else you do to encourage change in students. In fact, most of the above applications are examples of MI *in combination with* one or more other interventions. This is consistent with how MI is often used in other settings and with other age groups.

## Relationship

Promoting change has relationship at its heart, and motivation to change is the everyday challenge faced by all who wish to make things better for students. As the quotation that opened this chapter put it, "It really all depends on how the teachers and students interact." The next chapter provides a more detailed overview of MI, and acts as a map for the chapters to follow.