This transcendental phenomenological study set out to determine the nature and extent of influence on student success, as perceived by selected rising seventh-grade students at a particular mid-West middle school (grades 6-8), through analysis of a student-centered narrative. In particular, this study sought to ascertain how and why certain students believe they were successful, and how students perceive home, school, and community people and places to be positive and negative influences on their success in and outside of school.

Analysis revealed that students see themselves (“self”), as well as individuals and places outside the home and school (“places and faces”), along with rewards and punishments (a “double-edged sword”), as combined influences on their success. Analysis of the student narrative also led to the development of an ecological footprint for the selected school, which revealed more influence from the macro-system than previously suggested by prior research. As such, it may be wise for schools, families, and community agencies, programs and individuals to develop mental health and coping strategies and programs to promote student success.