Strategies to Motivate Disengaged/ Struggling Learners

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Abstract

This Master of Teaching Research Project is a qualitative study that suggests a variety of strategies to use with students who are disengaged. The purpose of this research is to assist educators facing challenges with student engagement. This study is guided by the following question: What strategies are teachers using to encourage students to become engaged in the primary and junior grades? How do they know if these strategies are really working? I compiled a series of questions and conducted face-to-face interviews with consenting participants, regarding motivational strategies used within the classroom to assist struggling learners. Questions asked were pertaining to the teachers’ personal values of self, specific techniques, and different types of reward systems used within the classroom. The interviews were used as a means of identifying a variety of ways to assist with student engagement in the primary/junior level. A number of findings were discovered through the interviews, such as the importance of teacher incentive on student engagement, specific engagement strategies used in the classroom environment, strategies to engage students with exceptionalities, independent and group goals, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Interest and praise were two themes that were consistently discussed through the interviews.

**Key Words**: Motivation, engagement, strategies, goals, disengaged, extrinsic, intrinsic, interest, praise, struggling.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

As I begin to take on the roles and responsibilities of a teacher I have become interested in understanding how to provide the proper motivational tools for students that are disengaged. I feel it will be beneficial to discover and understand the ways to motivate students, especially when they are struggling. Personal experience has shown that some students in the primary and junior grades display a lack of engagement towards learning when they are not interested in a topic or subject. Experience has also demonstrated a lack of engagement when students feel some type of inadequacy towards the topic or subject. This can create challenges for teachers as it might become difficult to implement the appropriate motivational strategies that will be helpful towards student learning. It is crucial that the student receive the proper amount of attention and encouragement needed in order to assist them with their challenges. This can often be challenging when in a classroom with numerous differentiated learners with diverse needs. Students who are not engaged deserve the appropriate amount of support from their teacher. I have noticed that teachers seem to praise and pay most attention to students who do well academically and socially (Ames, 1992; Schwartz & Polishuke, 2013). These are usually the students who are intrinsically motivated to achieve academic success (Ames, 1992; O’Donnell, 2013). The intention of this research study is to explore the different strategies teachers use within their classroom to motivate disengaged students. It goes without saying, that if a student is lacking incentives it is helpful to find ways to engage him or her; the issue is finding the right ways to engage the student, all while ensuring successful learning is the final outcome. If teachers assist with student motivation they may be able to teach some form of resilience at a young age.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to learn about a variety of engagement strategies that teachers can use to assist with students learning outcomes. It has come to my attention that there are some students who seem to be disengaged within the classroom. Students might not be disengaged throughout all subjects; however, there may be certain subjects where they lack interest. The rationale of this study is to assist educators in understanding the importance of motivating disengaged students and keeping students engaged when they are unwilling to learn. As an educator it is important to know how to effectively deal with these kinds of situations. There may be a student within the classroom who lacks interest in school. Trying to engage students may be challenging for teachers. A teacher may feel as though their efforts are not leading to improvement which can become frustrating. It is crucial for teachers to remain on task while avoiding negative energy in the classroom. The focus of this paper is on strategies to use with disengaged learners. The research will also examine how teachers use motivational strategies within their classrooms and how these strategies have worked. Emphasis will be placed on which strategies are deemed as useful or beneficial toward student learning. In light of this, it is important to become aware of the diverse strategies teachers are using to increase student incentives. Social contextual clues will be examined as well, for example classroom management styles and classroom environment.

It is important for teachers to identify engagement strategies. When a variety of engagement strategies are discovered and used the struggling student may become engaged and want to complete tasks that are challenging. Motivation becomes a crucial part of one’s life as it has a major impact on the outcomes individuals choose (Gillet, Vallerand, & Lafreniere, 2011; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; O’Donnell, 2013). It is helpful to influence motivation at a young age.
As a result students may be encouraged to continually succeed in other aspects. Self-identity is an important component in regards to motivation. The ideas and beliefs one has about themselves have a direct impact on personal behaviour and even how certain situations will be approached. For example, if a student believes they are able to play a game of basketball well, they will approach the game with confidence. This confidence will be reflected through the way they approach the game and play the game. Alternatively, if a student approaches the game with negative perceptions, they will approach the game with negativity. Their negative outlook will most likely be reflected through their performance. The lack of confidence will reflect throughout the game as well. It is essential for teachers to influence a positive sense of self-identity in their students. For example, if a student has a negative self-image the teacher can implement some type of classroom initiative that will assist with the student’s self-image (Supporting Minds, 2013). A strategy to assist students can be encouraging them to write letters of appreciation or create a chain reaction of kindness (Alexitch, 2005). While doing so, they will tell at least one student something positive and kind about that individual. This may assist the student who lacks confidence and may lead to reflection on their own self-identity.

This is an important topic to study within the educational community as there are many students who simply do not enjoy school. If a student has this type of attitude then why not find ways in which we can allow that student to find enjoyment from being in school? It is crucial for teachers to explore the ways in which they can bring students’ interests in the classroom. Teachers may perhaps change the classroom environment to fit the needs of disengaged learners.
Research Questions

What strategies are teachers using to encourage students to become engaged in the primary and junior grades? Sub questions that will be explored include: How do they know if these strategies are really working? What types of strategies does the teacher model within the classroom that display forms of self motivation? What kinds of strategies are teachers using to engage struggling readers?

Background of the Researcher

During past practicums there were some students who appeared to lack motivation within certain curricular areas. It is often difficult to motivate these students to want to learn and participate, especially when they feel they have inadequate skills. It is important that I try to identify as many different strategies as I can that will assist student engagement. I consider myself to be intrinsically motivated and I would like to model this within my classroom. As an undergrad student I studied psychology with a focus on motivation. It is a very interesting topic and I would like to discover a much as I can about it. I believe it is important to understand how to motivate students when they are struggling. I want my students to do the best they can and I want this achievement to be displayed throughout our class. The only way I can ensure this is if I know of specific techniques that can assist students, as well as myself. I found it very difficult to engage students in work they were not interested in during practicum. I am curious as to how I can get these students engaged in difficult and non-interesting work, without making them feel pressured to do work. When I was in elementary school I found that I was unmotivated to complete certain tasks because of a lack of interest. Because I was not interested I did not care about doing well, I only cared about getting it done. When I look back on this, I realized how
much of an issue it is. During my high school years it was difficult for me to stay engaged in classes that I was not interested in, such as English. I realized the reason I was not interested was due to the way teachers had been teaching the subject. The English teachers did not show any incentive towards making the topics more interesting. I want to ensure that student interests’ are consistently recognized in my classroom.

Overview

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and the purpose of this study, research questions, as well as how I came to be interested in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature looking particularly at the expectancy value theory, self determination theory, achievement beliefs, various goal theories in regards to motivation, self-efficacy, teacher support, value, task avoidant behaviours, and declining student engagement. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will be looked at in regards to how students are motivated and the ways in which motivational types can affect their learning outcomes. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the participants, data collection instruments, ethical review procedures, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 identifies the research participants and describes the data as it addresses the research questions. Chapter 5 includes what was learned, insights, as well as recommendations for practice and further study. References and a list of appendices follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Engagement

There are various forms of motivation that will be discussed which entail why and how students become motivated and what it is that keeps them motivated to learn and achieve academic success. The issue is how to properly motivate students who are not task-oriented or who lack competence beliefs and expectancy beliefs. The expectancy values, self-determination, mastery beliefs, performance goals, self-efficacy, teacher autonomy support, and self-competence all influence an individual’s motive to overcome a challenge (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; O’Donnell, 2013; Gillet et al., 2011; Dweck, 1986; McCombs & Perry, 2008; Xiang, McBride & Guan, 2004; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Freeiberger, Steinmayr & Spinath, 2012). When an individual has high self expectations along with a variety of self achievement values they are usually successful at fulfilling certain tasks (Wiggins & Eccles, 2002). They become successful at fulfilling tasks because they believe they have acquired the necessities needed to overcome a challenge (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). When an individual is not task–oriented and has difficulties with self expectations or has a low self-concept it becomes rather difficult for them to succeed with a challenging task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Freeiberger et al., 2012). Consequently, they begin to use avoidance and negativity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Freeiberger et al., 2012). Attempts to try become replaced with images of failure and these images or reminders of failure lead to a lack of motivation. The literature review examines different theories in regards to what motivates students to learn and to want to achieve academic success, as well as how to encourage disengaged learners. Students can be intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated when it comes to school work; both are influenced by their own self beliefs or concepts (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Freeiberger et al., 2012; O’Donnell,
Webster’s dictionary defines intrinsic motivation as personal satisfaction that is self-initiated (2013). O’Donnell (2013) defines intrinsic motivation as a natural tendency that captivates one’s interests in order to apply and develop one’s capacities. When a student is intrinsically motivated they partake in tasks in order to increase their self-desired skills. They are motivated to better themselves.

O’Donnell (2013) defines extrinsic motivation as arising from outside incentives and consequences. Students that are extrinsically motivated work hard only for a reward or to avoid punishment. They usually do not take an interest in the task at hand; they are more interested in gaining a reward. Investigation needs to be focused on how to influence students to remain intrinsically motivated to achieve academic success. If external motivation is the only way students are going to engage in class then there needs to be change because one cannot give rewards to students all the time.

Expectancy-Value Theory

When an individual desires to attain a specific outcome they will act in ways to achieve personal fulfilment. They strive for personal fulfillment when they believe they have an ability to achieve a desired outcome (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For example, if student is a working on an art project and art is not their strongest subject, however they believe that they are able to make it into a masterpiece they will work towards their desired outcome in order to fulfill their personal beliefs. When students set a specific goal and work towards that goal with enthusiasm and determination, they create willpower to succeed (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Dweck, 1986). Controversially, when a student engages in a situation with anxiety or any apprehension towards a specific goal this can lead to poor performance (Beilock & Willingham, 2014). Poor
performance or low achievement is related to a lack of motivation (Dweck, 1986; Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Using the previous example, it should be noted that if the student approached the art project with feelings of tension or distraction it would most likely lead to poor performance (Beilock & Willingham, 2014) due to their negative self-expectancy. Anxiety or worry can lead to a lack of motivation and personal fulfillment (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Supporting Minds, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Individuals, whether young children or adults, conquer specific outcomes usually due to various rewards, whether it is for personal satisfaction, or for a period of glory. One theory which Wigfield and Eccles (2000) discuss is the expectancy-value theory. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) suggest that an “individual’s choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity” (p. 68). Students’ expectancy-value theory plays a significant role within their own perceptions of how well they are able to achieve academic success with challenges. What needs to be further investigated is how to get these students motivated to accept difficult and challenging tasks, while believing they have the skills needed to successfully complete them. It is important for teachers to ensure that students understand and accept their expectancy beliefs and apply their perceptions to challenges within the classroom. As a teacher, it is important to provide positive praise to students to assist with their own self-beliefs. Ability beliefs, according to Eccles et al., (1983) are an individual’s own perceptions about their current concepts of competence (as cited in Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Their ability beliefs stem from their own expectancies about success. Students’ belief in their success and achievement plays a large role within motivational theories (Wigfield & Ecceles, 2000). When students acquire positive beliefs about what they can accomplish they put their beliefs into action in order to see successful results. Eccles et al. (1993) and Wigfield et al.
(1997) conducted a study which showed students’ ability beliefs declining in math across the elementary school years (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The intentions of this study were to discover why and how ability beliefs and student engagement are decreasing at the elementary level. As an upcoming teacher, it is crucial to determine the various ways in which educators can instill and maintain these ability beliefs within their students’ perception of their own personal successes. As an upcoming teacher I want to guarantee I know how every student feels about themselves. This can be done at the beginning of the year through a survey. This way if there are any self-reported negative beliefs, I can try and change them.

**Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory as defined by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) suggest promoting students’ interest in learning as well as promoting confidence in their own capabilities. As educators we should be promoting confidence and competence skills, especially for young students that are lacking these qualities. Providing students with the appropriate influential skills can assist with their personal beliefs in regards to learning and achieving. Katz, Kaplan & Gueta, (2010) cites Deci & Ryan (2000) and states three types of psychological needs that are interrelated with self-determination theory. These three needs are based on “innate psychological nutriments that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being” (p.250). If changes occur within the classroom support of psychological needs then a change will occur with student engagement as well (Katz et al., 2010. A strategy that can be used to promote confidence and competency is modelling the appropriate behaviour in class (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013). It is beneficial for students to see teachers model behaviour that is expected of them (Supporting Minds, 2013). Sometimes a reluctant student simply needs to be reminded of their worth and the abilities they are capable of. Self-determination theory explains
motivation as intentional or deliberate, which is a brilliant way to view motivation (Deci et al., 1991; Katz et al., 2010). If a student believes there is a purpose to their motive, this alone may influence them to achieve success with their learning process.

Self-determination theory also states that motivation becomes internalized (Deci et al, 1991). Goals and achievement of success become a part of the student. It is the responsibility of teachers to instruct the skills needed to foster determination (Deci et al, 1991; Growing Success, 2010; Irons, 2008). Self-determination shows links to various educational outcomes (Deci et al., 1991). Students are found to engage more meaningfully in learning when they acquire intrinsic motivation (Katz et al., 2010). Positive educational outcomes are also correlated to the fact that teachers give students appropriate feedback that assists with self-competence (Deci et al, 1991; Growing Success, 2010; Irons, 2008). Feedback is an essential tool when it comes to learning as it allows room for improvement and provides students with an outline of improvement. When a student has a desire to improve this is related to a leaning goal. If students believe that they are able to improve their skills they may try harder to attain those skills or goals.

O’Donnell (2013) defines learning goals as “an intention to learn, improve, and develop competence.” If a student has self-determination and a set of learning goals it can lead to success. A study conducted by Katz et al., 2010 looked at self determination theory in regards to students’ independent motivation for homework; the study focused on the role of teachers’ support for students’ needs. It is understood that some students complete homework as they feel a sense of duty and they want to avoid punishment (Katz, Kaplan & Gueta, 2010). I want to change this idea and would like my students to feel they can complete their homework due to a desire for learning and success.
Achievement Beliefs

If an individual has high personal achievement beliefs their optimism may lead them to succeed at the task at hand (Hirvoven et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The same can be said for students. Achievement beliefs are defined by Ames (1992) as “an integrated pattern of beliefs, attributions, and the affect that produce the intentions of behaviour” (p. 261). Having said that, when an individual has doubts about their level of achievement these doubts can lead to poor performance (Ames, 1992; Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Hirvoven et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). It is important to help students dismiss their negative doubts and to try acquire increased confidence levels. In a study conducted by Hirvoven et al., (2012) they found that students’ achievement beliefs correlate with their mathematical skills. When a student believes they can do well through the acquirement of skills, they usually prove themselves right, mostly because they are determined to do so (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Deci et al, 199, Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). When a student feels apprehensive in regards to their mathematical skills and worry takes place, low performance and poor achievement occur (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Wigfield & Meece, 1988). Once a student feels apprehensive towards a specific task motivation decreases (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Hirvoven et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Not only are students lacking interest but they also try and avoid the entire task. The issue is trying to get rid of those apprehensive thoughts; this can be done through a variety of encouraging methods. What happens when the apprehensive student does not want to apply themselves at all when it comes to mathematical concepts? How can educators change this?

Achievement and confidence. A desire for academic achievement is said to be strongly influenced by achievement and competence beliefs (Freiberger, Steinmayr, & Spinath, 2012), which are two prominent factors involved with motivation. If a student believes they have what
it takes to complete a challenge, along with intrinsic motivation, this alone should provide the adequate motivational strategies to complete the task (Freiberger et al., 2012; Gillet et al., 2011; McCombs et al., 2008; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). They gain a sense of confidence which allows them to pursue the task at hand in order to achieve. It seems pretty straightforward, if a student thinks they can do well and has confidence they will remain motivated to perform well. The issue is dealing with the students who are not encouraged to perform well. This may stem from their outside environments or upbringings, making it all the more challenging for teachers to find effective strategies. The struggling student may have had difficulties with confidence or high achievement beliefs. How can teachers change this belief? Confidence and self-fulfilling beliefs are difficult characteristics to acquire if they have been missing for quite some time. It can be a struggle to teach students how to gain confidence. The Supporting Minds (2013) document provides methods that can be used in the classroom to assist with behavioural or negative self thoughts. However, not all students are the same, therefore making it difficult to apply general strategies towards differentiated learners.

**Motivation and Various Goal Theories**

Motivation allows students to prosper and flourish in the best ways they can. Being enthused gives a sense of adrenaline and once an individual is able to conquer a challenge they want to pursue more in order to achieve success (Dweck, 1986; Hornstra et al., 2013; McCombs et al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013). Part of the foundation in regards to motivation is based upon student effort and goal directions (Ames, 1992; O’Donnell, 2013). Factors such as self-efficacy, mastery beliefs, attributions, goals, and self regulation can be forces of inspiration for an individual’s perception (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; O’Donnell, 2013). Each one of these factors can be directed by a teacher (Ames, 1992, Katz et al., 2010; O’Donnell, 2013). Support from the
teacher is crucial as it offers a safe environment embedded by guidance (Ames, 1992; Gillet et al., 2011). There are various ways to encourage students (Ames, 1992; O’Donnell, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). It is beneficial for educators to model and teach mastery goals as opposed to performance goals. When a student has mastery goals it is because they want to further their abilities, attain competence, and strive for success in their challenges in order to achieve mastery (Dweck, 1986; McCombs et al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013). Practising mastery goals within the classroom can allow students’ who are influenced by performance goals to see the importance of the intentions of learning, the importance of self improvement, and can lead to a developed sense of competence (Dweck, 1986; McCombs et al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013). A study by Ames and Archer (1988) shows that students’ who acquired mastery goals were attracted to challenges as opposed to being threatened by them. When and if students become threatened by a challenge they become drawn away (Ames, 1992; Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Deci et al, 1999; Dweck, 1986; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Eventually this leads to avoidance, which may lead to a state of eventual anxiety or carelessness towards the challenge, or any other curricular challenge (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Deci et al, 1999; Dweck, 1986; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield & Mcece, 1988). It is up to teachers to change this notion. Dweck (1986) states students who maintain, advocate, and attain personal challenging goals acquire an adaptive motivational pattern (O’Donnell, 2013). Students who use effort and incentive are said to be more likely to do well and succeed with learning tasks (Hirvonen et al., 2012). The struggle within a classroom is to get the disengaged student engaged and on task with activities. Cunningham (2005) suggests getting to know what the students are interested in. If a teacher is able to understand the interests of a student and incorporate that into the lesson, the student can demonstrate signs of performance improvement.
Task-Orientation

Mastery approaches are correlated with better performance with challenges (Dweck, 1986; Hirvonen et al., 2012; O’Donnell) as well as positive ways about thinking about oneself and is considered a feature of learning (Ames, 1992). Students’ are typically task-oriented when they set constructive and encouraging learning goals (Hirvonen et al., 2012; O’Donnell). When a student is task-oriented they become more engaged with task achievements (Hornstra, Van der Veen, Peetsma, & Volman, 2013). When students are involved with performance goals they care more about rewards and judgements rather than self competence or self appraisal (Dweck, 1986; McCombs et al., 2008; O’ Donnell, 2013). Students with performance goals often develop maladaptive patterns of behaviour (Dweck, 1986; O’ Donnell, 2013; Wigfield & Eccels, 2000) and tend to view challenges with avoidance thereby perceive the goal or task at hand as completely out of their reach (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Dweck, 1986; O’ Donnell, 2013). I am curious as to how teachers come about changing these maladaptive views and from these views stem from.

Self-Efficacy and Success

Albert Bandura believed that every individual has the capacity for self-efficacy, a judgement of how well or how poorly one could cope with different situations (O’Donnell, 2013). High self-efficacy allows students to feel that they are able to complete a task at hand, but students with low self efficacy feel they are inadequate to perform. O’Donnell (2013) suggests that “self-efficacy predicts the quality of student functioning.” If a student has low self-efficacy they experience anxiety and negative thinking which leads to a poor performance, therefore leading to a lack of determination with the task at hand (Beilock & Willingham, 2014;
Dweck, 1986; O’Donnell, 2013; Supporting Minds, 2013). Hence, the importance of creating a positive classroom environment. If a student is low in self-efficacy, avoidance becomes their first intention towards the particular task (O’Donnell, 2013). Having self-efficacy is a motivational tool of resilience, it allows students to use self-efficacy during difficult situations and it ensures a “quick recovery of self assurance” (O’Donnell, 2013). If students are high in self-efficacy they should be able to face challenging tasks with more difficult subjects by becoming resilient to several unwanted challenges. If a student feels good about themselves and is confident, they should have minimal issues with the completion of difficult tasks.

Bandura also suggested that there are three different educational outcomes related to self-efficacy beliefs (O’Donnell; 2013). The first educational outcome is defined as particular activities and environments the students’ selects. If the environment the student is involved in is safe, welcoming, and positive they should be able to face activities and challenges without feeling frightened or worried (Gillet et al., 2011; O’Donnell, 2013; Supporting Minds, 2013). If the student is apprehensive they will not be motivated to complete the task as best as they can. The second educational outcome is the effort and persistence the student puts forth (Gillet et al., 2011; McCombs et al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). When a student has confidence, along with positive self-beliefs and a high sense of self-efficacy they become further inspired to face difficult challenges with persistence. Efforts and persistence relate to learning goals which entail students to work with the best of their abilities in order to increase their skills (Gillet et al., 2011; McCombs et al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The last educational outcome Bandura speaks of is a student’s quality of thoughts and feelings during their performance (O’Donnell, 2013). If students encompass positive thoughts about the activity or challenge, this will assist in achieving success with the task (Gillet et al., 2011; McCombs et
al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Optimism and motivation work hand in hand. Students’ avoid activities that can overwhelm them. It makes sense that they would rather spend time on activities that they feel they are capable of handling. When a student avoids particular situations it is typically due to a lack the confidence or courage to face that particular task (Gillet et al., 2011; McCombs et al., 2008; O’Donnell, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For example, if a student is avoiding a math assignment within the classroom it may be because they feel they lack the confidence needed to overcome that assignment (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Deci et al., 1999; Dweck, 1986; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield & Mcece, 1988). A student may feel like this because it is the only way they are used to feeling. If a student has a negative view on a task they may view all tasks like that leading to a state of avoidance. The state of avoidance may be related to repeated failures of that specific task. This is where teachers step in and assist the student in any way possible. A teacher can try and provide a different outlook towards the task at hand and try to have students look at it in a positive manner (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013; Supporting Minds, 2013). I want my students to look at difficult situations with a sense of confidence and optimism in order to help the student conquer particular challenges. When avoidance begins to increase it becomes essential to eliminate any state of avoidance for the benefit of the student. In this case, it is up to the teacher to ensure students feel comfortable in subjects that breed anxiety, such as mathematics (Beilock & Willingham, 2014). Teachers need to approach these subjects in a well-defined way in order to keep students intrinsically motivated to want to learn and perform well. Having the ability to prompt students in wanting to learn in these harder subjects sets a great example for students in the real world. If they have the ability and persistence to use mastery goals within these subjects, their mastery goals can and will be pushed over into greater concepts. This allows them to feel they are able to
conquer difficult situations with a little bit of perseverance. When students experience success with prior learning it can lead to a positive self-concept. As such, students can create positive expectations for themselves when working on difficult tasks. When a student has a negative self-concept, usually formed because of failure, this leads the student to have low motivation and task avoidant behaviour (Hirvoven et al., 2012). In order to avoid this situation, it can be beneficial for teachers to try and create situations and activities in which extrinsically motivated students feel they will be able to succeed, this may help to slowly increase their negative self-concepts.

**Teacher Autonomy Support**

It is helpful for teachers to implement a mastery modelling program for their students, especially for students who have negative self-concepts (Gillet et al., 2011; O’Donnell, 2013; Supporting Minds, 2013). Having a teacher work with a group of unmotivated students to show them how to effectively cope with difficult situations can be beneficial, as the students will be able to see they can approach difficult challenges by disregarding avoidance or pessimisms (Gillet et al., 2011; McCombs et al., 2008). Steps of encouragement can give students the incentives which they are lacking. The teachers caring nature encourages students to strive for achievement (Gillet et al., McCombs et al, 2008, O’Donnell, 2013). When an individual is supported throughout a task or challenge it becomes much easier for them to commit to that specific challenge (McCombs et al., 2008). They are able to gain a sense of competence. A study conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968 (Alexitch, 2005) suggests that when teachers have high expectations for students, whether they are performing above or below standards, this motivates them to perform much better at the task at hand. The teacher’s expectation of the student allows the student to alter their academic self-concepts. If the student has relatively challenging material to learn, more feedback about their school work, and more of
an opportunity to respond to any challenges in regards to material within class time, the student may benefit in self achievement (Deci et al, 1991; Growing Success, 2010; Irons, 2008). A study discussed by Deci et al., (1991) states that teachers who display autonomy support within the classroom lead students to obtaining higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Teachers can implement a variety of techniques within the classroom to assist with student engagement. Teachers must model these various forms of motivation techniques (Simmons & Page, 2010). For example, it would be imperative for a teacher to model self-determination within his or her personal life and within the classroom in order for students to see the benefits. Deci et al., (1991) studied in a classroom environment with two groups of children. One group was extrinsically motivated and less self-determined where as the second group was intrinsically motivated and self-determined. It was found that teachers acted more controlling towards the extrinsically motivated group and allowed more autonomy towards the intrinsically motivated group. Various studies have shown that when a teacher is more controlling over the student it influences their behaviours negatively toward the situation. The student begins to devalue themselves, bringing on anxiety or a state of failure (Ames, 1992; Deci et al., 1999; Gillet et al., 2011; Katz et al., 2010).

**Classroom Structure**

Ames (1992) suggests the structure of a classroom can have varied impacts on different students. The structure of a classroom can influence different goals to be more important than others, which affects the ways in which students think about themselves and the task at hand. Ames (1992) compares mastery goals with performance goals, and states that both signify two types of approach tendencies, which are triggered by the classroom environment and the teacher’s instructions. Each type produces different motivational patterns.
**Autonomous versus controlled classroom.** In a Ted Talk (2012), Deci discusses promoting motivation, health, and excellence within students’ self perceptions. Deci (2012) talks about the importance of motivation throughout individual’s lives. He discusses the importance of an autonomy supported classroom. What this implies is that it is important to create an autonomous classroom as opposed to a controlled classroom. When students are in an autonomous environment it helps them to stimulate themselves. The video also explains the importance of high-quality relationships with students as this facilitates the autonomous classroom. This may allow students to feel more comfortable within the classroom, allowing them to feel they are able to succeed with the challenges in regards to learning. In order for high-quality relationships to occur between students and teachers it is important to ensure an autonomous classroom environment. The autonomous classroom entails recognition of the importance of quality over quantity. What this means is that students prefer quality; they would rather learn about topics that interest them as opposed to an amount of specific information (Cunningham, 2005; Deci, 2012). This is important when it comes to motivation because when a student wants to learn because of quality over quantity it allows the individual to gain more skills. It is a chance for them to improve what they are learning and they do so in order to benefit themselves. They become self-determined to understand and gain a variety of knowledge in order to benefit themselves. When this occurs it keeps the individual engaged in their learning.

**Support and belonging.** Teacher support along with student competency beliefs can influence students’ motivation and achievement especially with more difficult subjects, such as mathematics (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Deci et al., 1999; Dweck, 1986; Freiberger et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield & Mcece, 1988). Teacher support is crucial for the
disengaged learner, it plays a role with psychological needs that are related to motivation and development (Katz et al., 2010). Lower teacher support is associated with negative motivational processes; this is a serious issue as the study conducted by Katz et al., 2010 found that teacher support decreases within the junior grades, allowing students to be more disengaged with learning.

Simmons & Page (2010) state a sense of belonging within a classroom created by the teacher, and within groups, leads to student success (Ames, 1992). When students that are less motivated are placed in groups they crave a sense of power within the group, which inspires them to work harder (Simmons & Page, 2010). A student who is extrinsically motivated avoids challenging tasks and provides little effort to achieve success (Dweck, 1986; O’Donnell, 2013). Nonetheless when a student of this sort begins to work within a group framework their contributions begin to matter, giving them a boost in confidence. When working collaboratively there is a gain in power and freedom (Simmons & Page, 2010).

**Task Structure**

Students should be given tasks that are appropriate for their own abilities, especially for students who lack motivation (Cunningham, 2005). Student engagement is dependent on task structure as well as how the task is explained and delivered by the teacher (Ames, 1992). To get extrinsically motivated students to participate with confidence, reinforcements or praise may prove useful (Dweck, 1986; O’ Donnell, 2013). Ames (1992) cites Brophy who states praise is not evenly distributed within classrooms and praise is understood differently by students. Teachers need to make sure that this does not happen within their classroom. In order to
understand student motivation teachers must understand how the student perceives their classroom (Ames. 1992) and the methods that the teacher uses.

Value

Internalization and integration leads to student valuing in regards to the learning process, valuing of achievement, and the value of accomplishments in regards to topics and activities that students do and do not find interesting (Deci et., 1991; Hirvonen et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). When a student faces a challenge and that challenge becomes internalized, then that individual becomes more interested in the challenge because it is a personal value now. When students are learning and facing challenges it is fundamental to incorporate value and significance as this will motivate students to achieve success. When a student has values, whether it is to acquire additional skills or to improve within a subject, it will be beneficial. Deci et al., (1991) state in order to acquire values one must accept their personal values as their own, this can include their self-concepts as well as self-determination.

Task Avoidant Behaviour

Task avoidant behaviour occurs when students feel apprehensive and not interested in specific tasks. A study conducted by Hirvonen et al. (2012) in regards to task avoidant behaviour and mathematics from kindergarten to grade four showed that more students showed task avoidant behaviour the more they became less involved with improvements in math. Apparently, task avoidant behaviour plays a dominant role within the learning and development of mathematical skills (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Wigfield & Meece, 1988). The lack of motivation from students can lead to difficulties with skill development, as it reduces the chance for students to use their own skills as well as the opportunity to acquire new skills. Task
avoidant behaviour has been suggested to be related to feelings of anxiety, which can be problematic for students trying to learn mathematics (Beilock & Willingham, 2014; Hirvonen et al., 2012; Wigfield & Meece, 1988).

**Declining Engagement**

As students reach middle school or high school their goal orientation begins to change and they become encouraged by performance as learning becomes more focused on grades, evaluations, and standardized test scores (O’Donnell, 2013 & Hornstra et al., 2013). At this point students care more about the rewards as opposed to self improvement. If we as educators want our students to strive and use motivation as a successful tool it may become important for secondary teachers to try and assist students with their engagement capacities. Studies show that competence beliefs experience a decline in the later years of elementary school, which means teachers need to continuously act as positive role models for students in order to ensure their competence and confidence levels remain stable through their teenage years. Doing so can play a major influence on students’ future. Harter (2011) also suggests that intrinsic motivation decreases from grade three to grade six (Gillet et al., 2012). Therefore, it is becomes extremely significant for teachers to continuously encourage their students throughout the primary and junior grade levels as well. It is important to make an attempt to gear students away from the development of task-avoidant behaviour, all while steering them in the direction of being intrinsically motivated to achieve academic success.

**Conclusion**

The literature analyzed suggests that students’ are motivated to learn and achieve academic success based on a variety of factors influenced by their self-identity. Students’ who
have positive self concepts are motivated by learning goals as opposed to performance goals have been found to perform better in regards to academic achievement and academic success (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Deci et al., 1999; O’Donnell, 2010). Most theories found through the literature suggest the desire for achievement is heavily influenced by the student’s self beliefs and self expectancies. When a student has confidence and competence in themselves and towards a difficult task they become motivated to overcome the challenge they are faced with (Hirvoven et at., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). On the other hand, students’ who lack motivation towards challenges within the classroom avoid difficult tasks in order to avoid failure (Ames, 1992; Hirvoven et at., 2012; O’Donnell, 2010; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Students that lack motivation seem to believe they will continuously fail at tasks, which is the reason they are lacking engagement. There is plenty of research regarding student motivation and academic achievement. The majority of the research is conducted on students who already have intrinsic motivation. This is ironic because the students that need the most attention and assistance in increasing their self-identities, in order to become motivated, are not receiving it. Teachers must ensure they are acknowledging the students who lack the motivation to achieve academic success so they can influence a positive approach to the difficult task, while attempting to encourage the student to change their beliefs and expectations into positive, achievable outcomes.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The Master of Teaching Research Project was conducted for the purpose of obtaining qualitative research on motivational strategies used within a classroom to assist students that are disengaged. The purpose of this research project was to provide myself and educators with valuable information that can provide assistance while teaching. This research project was approached through careful examination of the literature, in regards to motivational techniques that influence students’ desires to achieve academic success, especially during times of struggle. Forms of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were examined in great detail. Self-expectancy theories, achievement beliefs, self-efficacy theories, teacher autonomy support, and various goal theories were also examined to help demonstrate an understanding of how to effectively encourage students. Qualitative research is based on the foundation of observing individuals within their natural setting (Creswell, 2013). It requires the gathering of multiple sources of data. For the purpose of this research I drew on characteristics from narrative and case study approaches. The study used a narrative approach as I studied more than one individual through an interview process (Creswell, 2013). A case study approach was also used as the research focused on an in-depth understanding of a case (Creswell, 2013), which dealt with motivational techniques used within the classroom. Data collection involved an examination of the literature and semi-structured interviews. For this research two interviews were conducted with two teachers. The data collected is beneficial for teachers as it can assist with encouragement strategies and can be utilized within classrooms. The interviews were used as a means of determining attitudes, beliefs, and motivations of the teachers themselves. Questions asked were pertaining to the teachers’ personal values of self motivation as well as how they use
inspirational procedures in relation to student achievement and academic success in the classroom. Questions were also asked about the types of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards used in the classroom. Inquiries were also made about student goal orientation. Interviews were approximately forty five minutes to an hour. Interviews were also recorded for the purpose of analyzing data. After examining the answers provided by participants the interviews were transcribed and coded in order to obtain the final results.

**Instruments of data collection**

The instruments used for the purpose of data collection were informal, semi-structured interviews conducted with two educators. The semi-structured interviews were beneficial for the researcher as it allowed for an opportunity to add questions, based on the participants’ responses. Questions asked throughout the interview were open-ended questions. The interview questions were centered on a variety of motivational techniques used by the teachers in their personal life as well as strategies used with students’. Examples of questions asked throughout the interview are:

- “What goals, including career goals and personal goals, have you set for yourself?”
- “Do you provide daily, weekly, or monthly goals for the students? If so, are they the same goals for the entire class, or do different students have a different set of goals they are trying to obtain? How is this working for the students? To what extent has it been beneficial?”
- “How do you motivate yourself with a specific task, when you have failed at it more than once?
- Do you use the previously mentioned technique with your students? Explain.”
- How do you assist a student who is constantly struggling with reading and has no desire to read at all?
Once the interviews were completed, each interview was transcribed and coded. Then the codes were compared with one another in order to develop themes. Appendix B has a full list of interview questions.

**Participants**

For this research project a small sample of interviews were conducted and it was essential to identify and select participants that had an ample amount of experience in teaching. It was also imperative to select teachers who used fundamental motivational strategies within the classroom as well as within their personal life. Participants included in the study had strong initiative towards self motivation; this allowed for an in-depth look at their personal beliefs, which is reflected through their style of teaching. Two participants were interviewed for the purpose of this research. Obtaining educators with various years of teaching experience allowed the research to demonstrate a diversity of approaches that are used or not used within the classroom in regards to motivation.

The first participant, Tiffany, which is a pseudonym, has been teaching for eleven years. She has taught in the York Catholic District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. She has taught in several different schools and different grades in the primary and junior level. She is currently teaching special education and travels between two schools. Teaching special education has been one of her long-term goals, this is the first year she is teaching special education. Tiffany offered very insightful techniques that can be used when trying to engage students’. Her work with students with exceptionalities also provided valuable strategies that can be used to increase engagement.

The second participant that was interviewed, Rachel, which is also a pseudonym, has been teaching for ten years. She is currently teaching for Peel Catholic District School Board, and has been teaching at the same school over the years. She is currently teaching grade five and
her classroom is filled with diverse learners’. Over the years, she has taught different grades but has taught grade 4/5 for the last couple of years. Rachel is currently getting her masters, which has been a long-term career goal for a while. Eventually she would like to teach high school English. She is constantly attending Additional Qualification courses. During the interview process, Rachel’s passion for teaching was demonstrated through her answers and discussion of teaching. Rachel presented a variety of engagement strategies that could be used to assist struggling learners’.

I chose Tiffany and Rachel as my research participants based on the discussions through email. I obtained their contact information through recommendations from friends and peers. They both seemed very interested and willing to participate in the study. Both participants wanted to share their ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and strategies in regards to motivation. I chose Tiffany and Rachel because of their years of experience and their passion towards teaching. I was privileged to interview both of these amazing teachers. I also chose Tiffany because she has experience with teaching special education. I was interested in discovering a variety of strategies that could be used to assist students with exceptionalities. The classroom is filled with diverse learners’ and I thought it was important to identify different ways to engage students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected for the purpose of this research was done so through an in-depth literature review. Informal interviews were conducted with educators who employ motivational techniques for the benefits of their student’s success. Prior to interviews being arranged, permission and consent were obtained from each of the participants. Interviews that were conducted were analyzed thoroughly in order to ascertain the various strategies educators use to
keep students motivated to achieve academic success. Interviews were recorded which allowed for repeated and continuous analysis, and for the interviews to be transcribed and then coded. When transcribing the data I wanted to ensure that I was not missing any valuable information. I was constantly pausing and rewinding the interview to ensure the participants answers were transcribed correctly. Once the interviews were transcribed, coding began. I carefully read through each answer the participant had provided and developed codes based on their answers. There were numerous codes. Each code was related to the overarching research question. The codes were then placed into categories. Themes then emerged from the categories. Different themes were continually coming up and were altered throughout the coding process. A variety of strategies were identified through the transcribing and coding process.

Once all data was transcribed and coded, it lead to the final results. A strong rapport was built with the participants in order to ensure quality and purposeful data. It was imperative to gain the confidence and assurance of the participants while collecting data.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

Participants were notified and given a copy of a consent form proposed through the University of Toronto (Appendix A). The consent forms were discussed and reviewed with all prospective participants before receiving their signature and approval of participating within the research study. A copy was left with the participants and with the researcher. Specific attention was geared toward the section of information which entailed that participant’s answers would be audio recorded, given their permission. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study subsequent to consent. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they had in regards to the following study. The candidates involved in the study were
also advised that their names would remain confidential, and would not be mentioned in the research process. Participants were aware that pseudonyms would be used throughout the research paper when referring to them. Participants were given the contact information of the researcher, research supervisor, and course instructor, in case there were any questions or concerns with the observation and interview process.

**Limitations**

The Master of Teaching Research Project was designed and set out accordingly by the guidelines of the Master of Teaching Program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education of The University of Toronto. The purpose of this study was for educators to assist graduate students with valuable information particularly towards a specific topic of interest, which would benefit the researcher, as well as other upcoming teachers. There were, however, many limitations of the study that must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the constrained amount of time given for the completion of the work as much more time could have been addressed and acknowledged towards the interview. There is an immense amount of literature available in regards to motivation that explains many different findings and theories. To create an extensive overview of the literature would have been impossible. Therefore, specific studies were analyzed with great detail as well as recognized theories within psychology. However, the information that was obtained from the studies provided the researcher with purposeful information in regards to the study.

Another limitation was the number of participants included within the study. Although it was a reasonable choice, it may have been beneficial to interview a variety of participants. School principals, school administrators, special education teachers, education assistants, and
student interviews or observations could have further enriched the data collected. However, for the purpose of this study, participants were limited to create a more inclusive and personal perspective of the data collected. This allowed for an in-depth perspective on participants’ values, efficacy beliefs, concerns, goal theories and motivations.

The nature of the interviews may have shown bias from the perspective of the participants. Only one interview was conducted with each participant that lasted about forty five minutes to an hour. Interviews could have occurred more than once, where specific questions could have been asked yet again, in order to see if responses had altered at all.

The researcher was unable to examine self-efficacy values and achievement beliefs of the students. This may have lead to different results. If students were observed and interviewed as well there may have been more of an insight on what motivates students to want to achieve success.

Strengths

Nonetheless, despite the aforementioned limitations, the present study provides useful and informative insights with regards to student motivation and engagement. The information provided can be a useful resource for the researcher and is also intended to assist upcoming educators with ways in which they can keep their students motivated. The proposed research may be helpful for educators who are having difficulties with a struggling student. The information provided by the participants in this research allows for a more personal perspective, allowing educators to relate to the proposed motivational strategies, therefore allowing them to use specific strategies in relevant situations.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present data collected through two face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Both participants currently teach at the elementary level. Tiffany is now teaching special education and Rachel teaches grade 5. Findings were established through data analysis of transcribed and coded interviews. Prior to conducting interviews there was a review of the literature in regards to motivation styles and techniques. The interviews explored a variety of strategies that teachers can use within their classroom to motivate disengaged learners. Participants were asked questions about their attitudes and beliefs in regards to motivation. Questions were also asked about the ways in which teachers promote student engagement when there it is lacking. Various motivational strategies were discovered through the interviews. I was introduced to several innovative approaches that I would use in a classroom to assist with student engagement.

The findings resulting from the interviews provide useful guidelines and techniques that can be used with students in the primary and junior division. Findings also demonstrated ways to engage students with exceptionalities and with students who require accommodations. It was interesting to discover the different responses each participant had. Although there were a lot of similarities there were also quite a few differences in regards to teaching methods, attitudes and beliefs when engaging the disengaged learner. Findings indicated the importance of differentiated instruction as well as recognizing individual student needs.

Key Themes and Findings

There were five overarching themes that were identified through the coding process; each will be discussed in detail. The first theme identified was teacher incentive. The second theme
that will be discussed is motivational strategies, there are four subthemes related - specific engagement strategies used in the classroom environment, interest, praise, and engaging strategies for reading and math. The third theme found - strategies to engage students’ with exceptionalities. The fourth theme discusses independent and group goals. The final theme discusses extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in the classroom.

- Teacher Incentive
- Motivational Strategies
  - Specific Engagement Strategies Used in the Classroom Environment
  - Interest
  - Praise
  - Engaging Strategies for reading and math
- Strategies to Engage Students' with Exceptionalities
- Independent and Group Goals
- Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

**Teacher Incentive**

Tiffany and Rachel have both been teaching for at least ten years. Both participants also discussed remarkably similar methods in regards to classroom management. When asked if their classroom environment was more controlled or more flexible and liberated, Rachel stated “I’ve been told that I am very fair.” She goes on to describe her classroom as “welcoming, supportive, and helpful.” Yet, students are well aware of her expectations. Rachel also mentioned, “I try to encourage different ways of showing me the answer.” She allows her students to choose their preferred way of presenting work. This way, students maintain interest and engagement in the specified topic. Rachel’s classroom management style depicts one in which there seems to be control in various aspects yet students have the flexibility to choose ways of demonstrating their work. Tiffany and Rachel both described a classroom environment that was well structured yet followed a specific routine.
When Tiffany described her classroom she stated,

> Based on previous [experience], it’s controlled in that kids know what is expected of them…routines. But then when it comes to the last few years, I really changed the way that I taught. I made them more responsible for their learning, like show me how *you* want to present this information. Giving them choice in how they want to show their learning.

The findings show that Tiffany and Rachel incorporate both a controlled yet somewhat liberated classroom environment. Both of their approaches to classroom management are very similar.

Tiffany and Rachel also discussed their own forms of motivation. They both demonstrated a high sense of self-motivation. Both participants rely on themselves as a primary source for motivation. However, they also mentioned they are motivated and supported through support staff. When Rachel talked about her own motivation she used her students as a source of motivation. She discussed implementing her strategies in her classroom; her motivation seems to be fostered by becoming a better teacher for her students. Rachel mentioned “I also stay motivated by trying to create new lessons rather than using my old stuff. So I’ll take concepts and tweak it, so I’m always trying something new.” Rachel is constantly trying to incorporate her students’ preferences to create meaningful and engaging lessons in order to maintain student interest.

Both participants have made long-term career goals for themselves which were discussed during the interviews. Tiffany’s long-term goal was to teach special education and she has attained her goal.
Teaching special Ed was a goal, when I moved schools about four years ago, I wanted it then, but I wasn’t sure if it was the right time and after being at the school for three years, like last year, I knew this was the time. I’m ready, I wanted it.

Tiffany seemed very passionate when talking about her teaching career. She also stated that the ways teachers motivate their students depends on their own forms of motivations. This did not surprise me. At the end of the day it is up to the discretion of the teacher to inspire their students to do their best.

Rachel is currently studying to obtain a Masters Degree in education with hopes of eventually teaching high school. Teaching high school has been one of her long-term goals for a few years now. She described how different skills and different classroom structures are needed to teach at the high school level. “So I would just want to be at the point where, I don’t know…maybe my confidence level is higher to work with high school students.” When Rachel spoke about her own perseverance in regards to motivating herself at a task when she’s failed more than once she states, “I always reflect upon what happened, what was working, what wasn’t working. But I really believe you need to work with your support staff.” She also has her students engage in self-reflection.

**Motivational Strategies**

Numerous engagement strategies were discovered through this process that can assist student motivation. The findings from the two interviews were very similar. Tiffany and Rachel both stressed the importance of student independence and responsibility, differentiated instruction, the use of different methods for individual students, parent communication, and self-
reflection. Consistency among each of these factors is crucial. When Rachel was asked about techniques used to assist students with a task when they have failed more than once she replied,

I’m trying to make them advocate, not only advocate, but they have to self-regulate. I’m trying to teach them the strategy of looking where they may need areas of help and going to get that help. Rather than me hunting them down.

The findings demonstrated the importance of self-regulation and self-reflection. When students have the chance to self-reflect it may increase their own motivational process. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure their students are receiving the attention and motivation they need to get through a task.

Specific Engagement Strategies Used in the Classroom Environment

During the interview process both teachers mentioned a variety of different strategies they each use within the classroom to assist with student engagement.

Mrs. Rachel’s money/bank system/ The apple seed

Rachel mentioned a strategy she had used over the years with her students. It is a bank system where students collect “money,” and use this “money” towards different reward incentives. Not only are students responsible for their own money calculations but they are keeping a record of positive behaviours. Rachel has incorporated using math skills within her motivational strategy. Throughout the year, Rachel will open up a store, where students can use “money” and make purchases. Items that are available include erasers and pencils, “so that just keeps them pretty much motivated but it also helps them with ownership because when money is deducted, for let’s say, not doing their homework, they start understanding that is the
consequence of not being responsible, that kind of thing.” This strategy has helped disengaged students through the reward process, even though Rachel isn’t big on external rewards.

The Apple Seed strategy is used to help students acquire ownership; students are in charge of tracking their own behaviour. This consists of a mini-package; there is a title page with an apple and about 100 seeds. Next, is a graphic organizer with a point system, from 10 to 0. If a student doesn’t have homework completed or their agenda signed, for example, then they must track their behaviour and provide an explanation. The goal of this strategy is for students to have all the apple seeds coloured in. Once this is achieved they are able to choose a non-tangible reward. “Because they eat in dispersed lunch rooms they get a choice to bring a friend to eat with them, or lunch with the teacher, snack with the teacher. So those kinds of things or 5 minutes free time in the class where they can read their own book or draw a picture or something like that.”

*We recommend ball*

Tiffany used this strategy with a grade one class in the past. The “we recommend ball” was a technique used to help assist disengaged readers. Tiffany was getting her students to read books that they weren’t interested in. However, as they were reading they were given sticky notes. They would write about something interesting that they had read, and would place the sticky note in the book. They would also recommend the book to a friend, so if they read something that a friend would like they would place the sticky note in the book with an explanation. Tiffany’s strategy worked for her students as they became engaged in the process. They were able to discover their own interests along the way as well.
Interest

Student interest was a theme discovered throughout the interview process. Tiffany and Rachel both mentioned numerous times how crucial it is to find out what your students are interested in. When you discover your students’ interests you can incorporate them into lessons thereby increasing student engagement. Tiffany does two surveys throughout the year, one at the beginning and one after first term to see if students’ interests have changed at all. Since she is working in the special education section she described a situation where it is difficult to get a student to write, so she used something he was interested in to get him writing. “So you just have to figure out what works for him so this kid right now is into Minecraft---- so to get him to write about something is difficult, he had to write something and didn’t want to. So in order to get him to write we had him write about that topic. If that’s what it will take you kind of have to let him win there.”

Rachel also conducts surveys with her class throughout the year. She also mentioned, “as the months or the seasons change they might suddenly tell me they’re interested in a sport, or something changed. So then to keep it going, because I do care about them, we do this little good news/bad news, we usually do it on a Friday before home time and we’ll go around the room and they will share good news/ bad news or something that they achieved or something they like or something they are looking forward to.” Using strategies like these helps the teacher to get to know their students. It also helps students realize that their teacher has an interest in them and wants to get to know them. Knowing student interest benefits the teacher and student in many ways. When a student is disengaged, you can use their interests to motivate them in a specific task. But you really have to get to know your students to make this work.
Praise

Positive praise was a theme that both Tiffany and Rachel mentioned quite often when discussing ways to engage students. They believe in using positive praise to create a positive classroom environment. Praise is a strategy of engagement; when students are praised for their good work or behaviour it motivates them to keep achieving. Tiffany described using praise to assist with student engagement,

“You know, praise a lot of good choices and behaviour. Some might actually need a physical reward, things like that. But the older the kids get and the more they realize if I continue doing the same thing, this is what my goal looks like. For example, if they are having trouble writing, it’s hard to get kids to do that, so they need a lot of praise and strategies.”

Tiffany also mentioned communicating with parents about positive praise because it allows the student to feel good about themselves. When they feel good about themselves and acknowledged it can lead to more class involvement. She stated “kids like knowing that they are doing good”.

Rachel also uses positive praise everyday in her classroom “so just a lot of praise and showing them that you are aware of what they are doing, it’s very helpful.” When a student is struggling and they show that initiative to overcome the difficulties, positive praise can help lead to that perseverance. It is that extra push that comes from the teachers’ encouragement. You want to motivate students to achieve the best that they can and using positive praise in the classroom is one way to benefit them. Helping students’ understand that they can overcome a difficulty is a great stepping stool to prepare them for other grades. Rachel also described a situation with a student who has an IEP. She stated that she chunks work for him and he has a visual schedule on his desk. Once he completes a task she uses positive praise. “So what I do is
after each task that he completes, there is again positive praise. So I will explain that we are working towards being independent or whatever the case is like I’ll tell him the main goal and then I’ll say once you have this done then you can have a mini break and the break could be something as tiny as maybe he wants to go get up and get his bottle of water or something like that.”

**Engaging Strategies for Reading and Math**

Struggling readers can become especially disengaged if they do not receive the proper assistance from their teacher. I discovered various methods to incorporate in the classroom to assist struggling readers. Once again student interest was a topic that was brought up during this discussion. Having a variety of books in the classroom that students are interested in helps with engagement.

Both Tiffany and Rachel have a variety of books in the classroom, ranging from fiction to non-fiction with a variety of themes, some of which relate to unit topics and different genres. Rachel likes to provide options for her students when presenting what they read. This gives students a chance to present in ways that are best suited to their learning. Rachel has class discussions about why we like to read and why we seem to abandon books. As a class they create anchor charts on the topics discussed. She states, “I really chunk down every section of reading and then we talk about book choices and after we go through all of this I ask them to bring, as a book talk, a book that they’ve read and they’ve liked…I do this to see the type of book they think is suited for them and then I slowly introduce independent reading.” Again, Rachel is looking for student interest to find books suited to their liking. She identified that reading is an important part of the day. She went on to say,
“The disengaged students… when I do see them, obviously I call it pretend reading. So when I conference with them, I’ll talk to them about trying to find a book of interest and we’ll go through every genre, thinking of ways to find a book. And sometimes it is successful and sometimes kids will be honest and say I don’t like reading. So at that point, that’s when you notice you also need a home-school connection.”

Rachel mentioned that sometimes the student won’t straight out tell you the reason as to why they are not engaged. When this situation arises she does a reader response letter with the students.

“So what I do is I keep conversation or dialogue going through their letters. So I noticed for instance, if a kid is not really reading or really into a book I will ask questions through my letters, like it’s all personal and I will be like... you know....well I try to use higher-order thinking questions but I’ll say something like what would you do if you were blah blah blah, or I might ask a character question. It depends. But trying to get them to say the reason as to why they are not interested.”

When discussing how to motivate a student who is struggling in math both Tiffany and Rachel mentioned making real life connections and using manipulatives. Tiffany and Rachel also mentioned using a four step plan to help break down the math problem. Rachel started to incorporate TACK (thinking, application, communication and knowledge) into student assignments and tests. This way her students can see which section they need to improve on. “I don’t believe you should just mark a test out of 25. They have to understand why they got that mark and where they need to improve. So when you break down a test or an assignment, with TACK it’s more visual for them.” Rachel reminded me of how important it is to always make sure that you are providing students with feedback. When they have a visual of what to improve on it can help with engagement.

Strategies to Engage Students' with Exceptionalities
Tiffany stated that each student has different goals to work on throughout the weeks, some may be academic, behavioural or social. She described a situation with a student who has autism who has trouble socializing at recess. They created a goal which is for him to “play with a friend at recess, at least for one of the recesses throughout the week”. She went on to explain,

We teach them how to ask questions--- ask what do they want to play? So now it’s like you spent all this time doing that so now you need to kind of address the fact that you don’t need to play with a friend at every recess. Sometimes they need their own thing. But for lunch recess because it is longer, they need to actually make a plan, so who are you going to ask, what are you going to play? And then there is a little self reflection piece--- what did you like about recess? What did you not? What would you do differently? So teaching them that metacognitive…. “Did I do that well?” “What can I do better next time?”

Both Tiffany and Rachel stated that visuals should be used as often as possible when working with students with exceptionalities. It will be challenging to engage them when they have no desire for school. But incorporating interests is one strategy that is work a try.

Tiffany uses rewards with students who are in the special education program. “Usually there are kids who need this [rewards], usually kids who are in special Ed, they need extra or preferred activities.”

**Independent and Group Goals**

Creating goals is an immense factor in regards to motivating students. While Tiffany is working with students in special education, she states they each have individual goals that they are trying to attain. Both Tiffany and Rachel use goals to help make their students accountable and responsible. Tiffany mentioned that she incorporates student interest within their goal attainment. There is one student she is working with who is in grade 6; he is having difficulty doing his homework and it takes him a long time to fill in his agenda. She has allowed him to
bring his iPod into the classroom so he can take pictures of the work he has to complete, which she has found helpful.

Rachel provides daily goals for her students. She and her students discuss and create learning goals and success criteria before each lesson. Her students also write the success criteria in their notebooks. She also has a visual schedule with a daily goal written on top of it in regards to task completion. Rachel provides her students with a choice board. With this strategy, they all have the same goal in regards to task completion but they get to choose a way in which they would like to present their work; she is really big on differentiated learning. Rachel went on to say that all students do have different goals as well, which depends on IEP’s, accommodations and modifications.

Both Tiffany and Rachel were unfamiliar with the terms mastery and performance goals, which were two themes discussed in the literature review. I was unable to have a discussion with them about these terms.

**Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation**

Tiffany and Rachel both use forms of extrinsic motivation; the bank system is one form of extrinsic motivation that Rachel uses. Tiffany used forms of extrinsic motivation with students however, she tries to gear away from this. She stated, “When they are younger, I try not to use external motivators. If you are trying to get a student to read you can give them all the stickers you want but they have to get over the hurdle and learn how to read. If you are trying to change a behaviour it might be effective but again depends on the behaviour you are trying to change. I try and stay away from external motivators.” Tiffany also mentioned that she uses a reward system for her whole class. For instance, she was trying to change the language her
students were using, instead of saying yeah she was trying to get them to say yes. She used a name jar to try and change this behaviour. Whenever a student would say yes, she would put their name in a jar and when she felt the jar was full enough she would pull a name and give them a reward. “So because they did not know when it was coming they would always try… making good choices, always. I don’t say okay only on Fridays, so they wait until that day to change behaviour.”

Both Tiffany and Rachel stated that a reward should be given to the student immediately after otherwise it loses its meaning. Rachel tries not to use extrinsic rewards with her junior classroom. However, she does use the bank system/apple seed to assist with student engagement when she feels it is lacking. Rachel uses rewards more for her whole class as opposed to rewarding individual students. She feels that her students are too old for rewards and tries to teach them to have a desire for learning without rewards.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Implications/Recommendations

While conducting research and interviews on student engagement I have found a significant amount of effective strategies to use when trying motivating students. From the literature review, I have learned a tremendous amount in regards to different motivational theories. I have understood the importance of creating a classroom structured around teacher autonomy support. This way students have clear expectations set by their teacher all while having some type of freedom and choice while developing work habits. Teacher autonomy support correlates with the theme “teacher incentive.” It is important for teachers to have a supportive classroom environment that incorporates routine and allows student choice. Examining this research has also assisted with my understanding of including student interest into lessons and activities. I have realized in order for lessons and activities to be meaningful for students they need to make connections in one way or another to the topic, this shows that you value the student. When students are able to make personal connections with lesson content they internalize that information creating an appreciation of the learning process, which can in turn influence their self-esteem (Hirvoven et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

I was fortunate to learn a great deal from both of my participants, Tiffany and Rachel. Their differentiated use of motivational strategies has really impacted the types of strategies I will be willing to use with my own practice. I feel my practice will be influenced based on the findings of this research. I was always a little confused about the proper ways to engage students, considering that some students would be more challenging to motivate than others. I have realized that there is no “proper” way to engage students. Student engagement varies, and
it is up to the teacher to implement motivational strategies that may work with the student. I have learned that engagement techniques should be suited towards student interest. Seeing that interest is such an important component with teaching, I want to ensure that I am getting to know each and every one of my students in the best way possible. This will start prior to the beginning of the year, by making phone calls to parents and learning a little bit about their child. This way when the students enter the classroom on the first day they will appreciate that I already know a little bit about their interests. Surveys will be completed throughout the course of the year so I am aware of any changes in regards to student interest. This also allows for new, engaging ideas to be implemented in the classroom. Discovering student interest relates to Deci’s thoughts about quality over quantity in the autonomous classroom, as noted in the literature review. If student interest is incorporated into class lessons and activities, the quality of the lesson may be more meaningful to students if taught in an interactive and engaging way as opposed to dragging the lesson on for a number of periods.

Teacher incentive toward student engagement is a big stepping stone towards motivating a disengaged student. As a teacher there should be genuine care towards your student progress and achievement (Gillet et al., McCombs et al, 2008, O’Donnell, 2013). When a teacher uses the expectancy-value theory with their students they are providing their students with positive scenarios that can lead to success. It is up to the teacher to ensure that their students know they are able to achieve success throughout their schooling. Providing students with goals as well as implementing characteristics of confidence and competence can lead the student to become more engaged. As a teacher you take on the responsibility of ensuring that each student acquires behaviours that will lead to an independent and responsible student who takes on ownership through their work habits. Acting as a positive role model who takes on these characteristics is
one way to influence students. Positive and supportive teacher encouragement can not only
build on confidence and student engagement but is also correlated with positive praise used by
the teacher.

Positive praise was another topic mentioned very often during the interviews. I was not
surprised when hearing about using positive praise as a form of motivation. It can be easily
understood as to why praise works for students’ who are not engaged. When somebody receives
positive praise it makes them feel good. This is true for me as well. When somebody praises or
compliments something I have done it makes me feel good and valued. It also motivates me to
be better at that specific task. I can see how this would work with students as well. Sometimes
telling a student something like, “that is really good work,” can motivate them as they are able to
understand or be reassured that they have the capability to overcome the task at hand. I,
personally, try to use positive praise as much as I can when in the classroom. If you are able to
make a student feel good about themself, then you should do so. This can also assist with
student self-esteem. During each practicum block, I used forms of positive praise with students,
even it was something as simple as sharing an answer or opinion. I would simply thank them for
sharing their answer or give them a compliment on their answer. Positive praise links with self-
expectations, self-esteem, and self-achievement. When providing students with positive praise
you are complimenting them. Wiggins & Eccles (2002) state when a student has high self-
expectations, which can stem from positive praise, they are usually more successful at
completing tasks. If teachers use positive praise with their students they are setting them up for
success by approving or acknowledging the necessities that student needs.
Both participants were very keen on differentiated instruction, as am I. I believe teaching is enhanced by differentiation. Every student learns in a different way and their learning styles should be accommodated to lessons. I was very happy to hear that students’ are given the option to show their learning in ways that suits their learning needs, this was something both Tiffany and Rachel mentioned often when looking for student engagement. I believe it is important for teachers to provide their students with a variety of choices for assessment. When students have a choice, differentiation is there. Their freedom of choice can lead to more engagement due to interest and preferred style. Providing choice allows students to choose an assessment or learning style that is suited to their own abilities. Cunningham (2005) suggests that this a great way to motivate students who are disengaged. Differentiated learning is something I strongly believe in as a teacher candidate. Part of this stems from the classroom environment as well as teacher support. Both participants explained that although there was a choice there were still expectations and guidelines for students to follow. Providing students with some choice and freedom in the classroom relates back to the literature review and teacher autonomy support and classroom structure.

Rachel discussed in great detail the Money/Bank System/The Apple Seed strategy. This was a fascinating approach. Students are able to acquire ownership, while keeping track of their own behaviour and their own money. I had never heard of this motivational technique before and I am glad that Rachel shared it because it is something I may use one day. I was also very impressed when I heard that Rachel used non-tangible rewards for her students. I had always thought that external rewards were in the form of tangible objects. The use of non-tangible rewards will definitely be used in my practice as I think it is important to motivate students through various approaches. During the final practicum block, I used a form of non-tangible
reward system with a few students who were not completing their homework, which I learned from Rachel. I offered them the opportunity to sit down and have lunch with me, providing they had completed all the work they were supposed to over the weekend, as they had difficulties with completing homework. I thought this was more valuable than providing students with a prize, there is more meaning attached to the situation. Doing so also provides support and care, the student is able to appreciate the time the teacher has set aside for them. It may lead the student it feel valued and confident in themself.

Through research and experience I have realized that numerous students are struggling with reading or disengaged. The interviews helped me understand the importance of ensuring student reading comprehension. There should be a continuum of asking questions and using reading strategies to assist with reading comprehension. I believe conferencing with students is such a crucial part of the school day; this way teachers are able to identify where the student is struggling. It is important to find the root of the cause as to why they are not engaged. During my practice I plan to have a diverse reading section set up within the classroom. I would like to create a comfortable reading area for my students (this will vary based on classroom size). After conducting an initial interest survey at the beginning of the year, I will be able to bring in books that are suited to student interest level. Depending on the units being taught, there will be fiction and non fiction books related to these themes so that students will be able to further their knowledge in regards to that topic. Rachel recommended the strategy reader response when students are struggling or not interested in a book. This is a strategy I would definitely use with students. The We Recommend Ball, a strategy motioned by Tiffany, is another strategy I would like to use with students. The fact that students are able to place sticky notes in a book with their areas of interest is a great strategy. They are also able to place sticky notes with sentences of
why they believe a friend would be interested in the book already allows for a higher likelihood of engagement. Now the student is able to connect with a friend in the classroom and offer text that they think their friend would be interested in.

It was very helpful when interviewing Tiffany, her recent specialization in special education provided me with valuable strategies to use with students with exceptionalities. Tiffany mentioned creating different goals with students. She mentioned one outside of the classroom, which deals with social skills and creating recess plans for students who are lacking social skills. I think it is so important to teach students social skills when they are lacking. I really enjoyed how Tiffany and the student created the goal together, with a reflection piece. The student has direction but yet there is a sense of independence. Plenty of times I have seen students on the playground by themselves for most of the recesses. If I were to see this occur I think now I would speak to their teacher and encourage them to come up with some type of recess plan.

**Implications/Recommendations for the Educational Community**

Throughout the Masters Program I have learned an extensive amount of information and strategies in regards to teaching. I learned a lot during practicum blocks where I was able to work directly with students in a classroom, trying different forms of engagement strategies. During my pre-service I did learn an extensive amount of information however I did not hear of many motivational techniques to use with struggling learners. I am glad that I chose this as an MTRP topic as I was able to identify many effective strategies. I believe that teacher candidates should be introduced to a variety of motivational techniques that they will be able implement in their practice. In-services in regards to motivating students and engaging students can be
something that takes place in schools. For example, if a teacher has discovered a new great
strategy to use with disengaged students, it may be beneficial to run an in-service to inform other
teachers. A teacher may have found an amazing technological advancement that helped her class
become engaged in a specific topic or subject, these are all ideas that can be shared during in-
services or meetings. The educational community should be truly based on a community, where
teachers and colleagues are able to share ideas and effective strategies to assist other classrooms.
When an educational community shares ideas and strategies it can only be beneficial; I am so
thankful to all the teachers I have met in the past that provided me with effective strategies that
may assist with student engagement. Furthermore, student engagement and disengagement
should be a topic that is continuously explored. It may be beneficial for student disengagement
to be looked at with regards to exceptionalities. It would be very helpful to identify specific
strategies that could be used with students with exceptionalities.

Limitations

The limitations of this research were the constrained amount of time given for the
completion of the work as much more time could have been addressed and acknowledged
towards the interview process. There is an immense amount of literature available in regards to
motivation that explains many different findings and theories. To create an extensive overview
of the literature would have been impossible. It may have been beneficial to interview more
participants and a variety of participants such as school principals, administrators, special
education teachers, education assistants, and students. There may have been bias in the
participants’ answers in regards to their own motivational habits. I was also unable to examine
self-efficacy values and achievement beliefs of the students. This may have lead to different
results.
Further Study

For further study, I feel that more investigation should be implemented in order to more deeply understand motivation and student engagement. Since motivation is such a broad topic, it was very challenging to cover all components. I believe it would be useful to further study this topic in order to assist teachers and students. More research in regards to student motivation, self-efficacy, self-expectancy, and achievement beliefs may be beneficial. This research study is primarily focused on teacher perspective and teacher strategies to use with students. It would be beneficial to understand motivation from diverse student perspectives in order to gauge an understanding of their personal concerns and challenges as well as what may have worked for them and what did not work. Another idea for further study could be delving into a longitudinal study which examines student engagement over time. It is always useful to continue studying this topic as a numerous amount of strategies can be identified over time that can assist teachers with student engagement. I think it may be beneficial to continue studying the reasons as to why student engagement begins to decline during the junior years and what kinds of strategies teachers can use to assist with continuous engagement.
References


Cunningham, P. (2005). "If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good?" The Reading Teacher, 59(1), 9-11.


Date:

Dear ,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. I am studying motivational strategies used within a classroom environment that assist students with academic success for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 30-45 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher Name: Vanessa Rachiele
Phone Number, Email: 416-708-0076, vanessa.rachiele@hotmail.ca

Instructor’s Name:
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Vanessa Rachiele and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature:

Name: (printed) ____________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B:

1) How long have you been teaching?
   a. Have you taught any other grades? If so, which grades?
   b. Have you taught at other schools? If so, which schools?

2) How would you describe your own motivation?
   a. What goals, including career goals and personal goals, have you set for yourself?

3) How would you describe your own perseverance in regards to motivating yourself with a
   specific task, when you have failed at it more than once?
   a. Do you use the previously mentioned technique with your students? Explain.

4) Do you provide, daily, weekly, or monthly goals for the students? If so, are they the same
   goals for the entire class, or do different students have a different set of goals they are
   trying to obtain?
   a. How is this working for the students?
   b. To what extent has it been beneficial?

5) Are you familiar with mastery and performance goals? Explain.
   a. Do you model mastery or performance goals in your classroom?

6) Do you incorporate students’ interests into your lessons? How do you discover their
   interests?
   a. When conducting literacy lessons, and students are provided with reading time,
   what kinds of books do you bring it to the classroom to assist the
   struggling/disengaged reader?

7) How do you help struggling readers? What kinds of strategies are you using to encourage
   them?

8) What kinds of strategies do you use for students who are disengaged?
   a. What happens when it is really difficult to engage a struggling learner, and
   different methods have already been employed?

9) If a student is constantly struggling in math, how do you provide support for that student?

10) When a student has no motivation to complete work activities how do you motivate him
    or her to get started? Do you find that this works?

11) Which do you feel provides better success results, extrinsic motivation or intrinsic
    motivation? Do you use these types of motivation within your classroom?

12) Do you use any type of reward system to assist in student engagement?
   a. How has that worked for you?
b. Do you find that the student only applies him or herself because of the specific reward? Would this be beneficial and how?

c. What would happen if that reward were removed, does the student still apply him or herself?

13) Describe an experience you have had where you struggled to encouraged the motivation of students? Explain the results of this situation.

14) How would you describe your classroom environment? Do you find you are strict with the students or do you allow them to have some freedom? (controlled VS autonomous). Explain.
   a. How does this impact student engagement?

15) Do you attend any professional development meetings?
   a. What kinds of strategies or information are discussed during professional development meetings based on engaging students?
   b. Who attends these meetings? And what happens after the meetings (do teachers come back to the next meeting and report what has worked and what has not worked to help the struggling learner)

16) Studies show students motivation and goal orientation begin to decrease as students reach middle school and high school, in which ways have you been trying to prevent this? Explain.