Breaking Down the Classroom Walls:
Teacher Perceptions of Student Motivation in a Non-Structured School Environment

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Abstract

Motivation plays a significant role in student learning and success. However, keeping students motivated is often a struggle for schools. In traditional secondary schools, students are given pre-determined class schedules and deadlines to help keep them on track, but how would a school without schedules and deadlines affect the motivation of students? This qualitative research study explores how teachers perceive and reportedly foster student motivation in a non-structured school environment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers from a self-directed secondary school in Ontario. Findings suggest that, from these teachers’ perspective, the lack of structure seemingly increases student motivation as it promotes student autonomy. Other findings suggest that teachers perceive a growth and success mindset to be crucial to student motivation and that a positive relationship developed between teacher and student can supposedly serve as a strong motivator in student learning. My findings imply that the rigid structures of traditional schools may be a major cause to the lack of student motivation in secondary schools, thus I recommend that all teachers try to incorporate more autonomy into their classrooms as a way to foster student motivation.

Key Words: motivation, secondary school, self-directed learning, autonomy
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Motivation plays a significant role in student learning and achievement no matter the educational context. The two primary forms of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, can both support student achievement; however, their long-term effects differ greatly. Although extrinsic motivators, such as grades and teacher approval, promote student engagement in school work, the students who are motivated solely for external benefits seldom exert more than the minimal effort needed to meet their goal (Brewster & Fager, 2000). External rewards may increase and sustain productivity for a period of time, but they often decrease students’ long-term interest in learning (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999). Therefore, educators strive to promote intrinsic motivation so that students not only achieve greater academic success, but also value and pursue lifelong learning well beyond the formal school setting (Bolkan, 2015).

The structure and operations of a school along with what teachers do and say in the classroom can have powerful effects on student learning and academic motivation (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio & Turner, 2004). With most secondary schools operating under a traditional model with schedules and deadlines, it seems appropriate to investigate into how a non-traditional school affects student motivation. Student intrinsic motivation has been found to be multidimensional and context-dependent (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). This means that motivation in each student is not an inherent stable trait, but rather depends on many factors within and outside the classroom. Although there are many factors outside the scope of a teacher’s control that can diminish students’ willingness to learn, there are a multitude of educational practices that can deepen the level of student engagement and increase their intrinsic motivation.
1.1 Research Problem

Although motivation is crucial to student learning and success, teachers are constantly faced with the challenge of maintaining students’ interest in school and motivation to succeed (Brewster & Fager, 2000). As students move from elementary to middle school, many students’ lack of interest in schoolwork increases and dropout rates in high school provide evidence that many students are not sufficiently motivated to do well in school (Brewster & Fager, 2000). This brings us to the question of why many students, especially in high school, lack academic motivation. According to Lumsden (1994), younger children tend have high expectations for success even after repeated failure because of their optimistic views regarding their own abilities. However, older students tend to respond more negatively to failure and lower their expectations after failing, or they would simply not put in effort because failure without effort does not undermine their abilities (Ames, 1990). Aside from fear of failure, there are a great many other variables that contribute to low intrinsic motivation among many high school students.

Most schools in Canada operate under a very traditional education model of having set class schedules and deadlines in which students move from class to class at the ring of a bell and are expected to do what they are told to do within a certain timeframe. One of the key factors that lead to a lack of motivation in many high school students is the low levels of autonomy support in schools (Legault, Greene-Demers & Pelletier, 2006). A lack of autonomy may mean that students are stuck with doing uninteresting academic tasks which leads to academic disengagement and fosters avoidance behaviours, potentially resulting in a deterioration in student motivation (Brewster & Fager, 2000). School practices that fail to interest and engage learners also lack value to these learners (Legault et al., 2006). It seems then, that the structure of
the school along with the level of autonomy and flexibility allowed in learning may greatly affect student motivation.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how secondary school teachers working in a self-directed learning program perceive and reportedly foster intrinsic motivation in students studying under this alternative system. To explore this topic, I will interview a small sample of teachers regarding their perceptions of student motivation in a self-directed secondary school versus a traditional secondary school and the strategies they reportedly use to increase student motivation in a non-structured school system. Different types of teaching practices can lead to different outcomes in student motivation, thus depending on how the school and teachers present the curriculum, students’ intrinsic motivation to learn and engage with the material will greatly differ (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Although using reward systems in the classroom is a common practice among teachers today, students who are merely motivated by extrinsic rewards tend to have lower interest and decreased long-term engagement with learning (Brewster & Fager, 2000). On the other hand, intrinsically motivated students obtain numerous lifelong benefits such as the ability to problem solve and use critical thinking within or outside the school setting (Herman, 2012).

Schooling has the potential to promote value, curiosity and interest in learning but can also do the exact opposite and stifle all those things (Brewster & Fager, 2000). However, when students are provided autonomy to direct their own learning, this can ‘put a new spin’ on how students perceive school and schoolwork. Teachers need to consciously and continuously re-evaluate how the school structure and academic tasks move students towards the end goals of learning. Is the traditional education model of schedules and deadlines truly the best way for
students to learn or is there a better system that can help foster student learning and motivation? Hence, through my research, I aim to explore and identify teacher perceptions of student motivation in a non-traditional, self-directed learning program.

1.3 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is: how do Ontario secondary school teachers working in a self-directed learning program perceive and foster students motivation under this alternative education model? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- According to these teachers’ perceptions, which factors influence student motivation in a self-directed setting?
- How do these teachers perceive the level of student motivation at this school in comparison to traditional schools?
- What are some strategies these teachers reportedly use to foster student motivation?

Sub-question one of my study will investigate into the factors that teachers perceive as being influential to student motivation. Subsequently, sub-question two will examine how teachers perceive student motivation levels at the self-directed school, whether it is higher, lower or about the same as in traditional schools. Moreover, sub-question three will explore pedagogical strategies teachers use to foster student motivation at this school.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

Motivation has always been a field of study that deeply intrigued me. As a student, I have always been motivated to do well in school because I love learning and enjoy challenging myself. For secondary school, I attended a self-directed learning school where I was given almost complete control over my studies. I did not know about the self-directed program before enrolling in the school, and the only reason I attended it was because it was located across the
street from my house. This school’s self-directed learning program (of which every student partakes in) grants its students almost full autonomy in regards to when and where they learn, though within the boundaries of the school. I had no class schedules or deadlines and was able to even choose when to write my tests. Although this school is unique in its structure and operations, it has no special requirements for entry and follows the Ontario curriculum.

From what I have learned about motivation through various psychology courses is that autonomy support is a powerful tool in fostering motivation. My secondary school strongly supported student autonomy and although I have never attended a traditional secondary school and thus have nothing to compare my experiences with, I can still safely say that my experiences at the self-directed learning school were overall very positive because of the control I had over my own learning. I liked having the choice of where to go and what to do with my day. Even though many students fell behind on their school work due to the lack of structure, most students, from what I observed, seemed to have enjoyed their time at the school and the vast majority were able graduate, even if it meant staying on for a fifth year, for some. Often I wonder if my schoolmates and I were just intrinsically motivated learners to begin with, but then I think about the school itself and think that maybe the program deserves some credit for our success. This is the reason why I am interested in studying how teachers working in a self-directed school perceive student motivation. Do their perceptions align with our experiences? Or is it a whole different world from their point of view?

1.5 Preview of the Whole MTRP

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers from a self-directed learning school in Ontario in hopes of gaining some insight into their perceptions of student motivation at the school as well as
strategies they use to support student learning. In Chapter 2, I review the literature to explore what has already been discovered regarding motivation in North American students. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design and then in Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature. In Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teaching practices and for the educational research community. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, state the limitations of this research and point to areas of further research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in areas pertaining to student intrinsic motivation, reasons for lack of motivation, factors that affect motivation and pedagogical strategies to increase student intrinsic motivation. More specifically, I review the importance of motivation for academic achievement, how classroom structures influence student motivation, and teaching practices that enhance intrinsic motivation. I start by using the literature to define student intrinsic motivation as well as identify various reasons to why intrinsic motivation is important. Next, I review the causes for the lack of motivation in many secondary school students. Following that, I explore the various factors of the classrooms and academic tasks that influence student intrinsic motivation. Finally, I will provide an overview of pedagogical practices that have been demonstrated through research to increase student intrinsic motivation.

2.1 Student Intrinsic Motivation

Student intrinsic motivation is defined simply as a propensity to engage in academic activities for the pleasures derived from the learning process itself (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). It is both “general”, in terms of a disposition towards learning for its own sake, as well as “situational”, meaning high motivation in one area does not necessarily translate to another (Gottfried, 1985). Intrinsic motivation is therefore not a stable trait within individuals, but can vary depending on the situation and context. Intrinsically motivated students actively engage in learning due to their interest, curiosity and enjoyment of the learning process as well as a desire to achieve personal or intellectual goals (Brewster & Fager, 2000). According to Dev (1997), “[a] student who is intrinsically motivated will not need any type of reward or incentive to initiate or complete a task. This type of student is more likely to complete the chosen task and be excited
by the challenging nature of an activity” (p. 13). Student intrinsic motivation therefore lines up well with the goal of the education system, which is not only to produce students who can achieve high academic success, but also to foster and promote a genuine enthusiasm and commitment to lifelong learning (Bolkan, 2015).

### 2.1.1 Importance of intrinsic motivation

Although student motivation is not synonymous with student achievement, motivation still plays a significant role in student academic success. Research (Dev, 1997; Gottfried, 1985; Legault et al., 2006; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) has found that intrinsically motivated students generally earn higher test scores, feel more confident in their academic abilities and persist longer in their learning. Students with high intrinsic motivation also tend to retain information longer and are more likely to be lifelong learners, continuing to educate themselves long after external motivators such as grades are removed (Kohn, 1999). Academic intrinsic motivation is also associated with reduced high school dropout rates (Kushman, 2000) and helps students feel less anxious about school, which promotes positive mental well-being (Gottfried, 1985).

Having only strong intrinsic motivation does not necessarily lead directly to high academic achievement. Students also require cognitive skills in order to do well in the classroom; thus, there is a need for both “skill” and “will” to achieve high success (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). That being said, most students who are motivated to learn and see schoolwork as interesting and important tend to be more cognitively engaged, hence motivation could lead to higher cognitive skills (Stefanou et al., 2004). Students also tend to perform better during cognitively-demanding tasks such as problem solving and thinking creatively when they are intrinsically motivated to complete the task (Herman, 2012). Overall, student intrinsic motivation
is extremely important to the quality of student learning and academic success, more so than the teacher’s mastery of content or techniques (Herman, 2012).

2.2 Causes for Lack of Academic Motivation

While elementary school students often find classroom activities engaging and interesting, student motivation and engagement in school tend to drop as students get older (Anderman & Midgley, 2000). Young children tend to have more optimistic views about their abilities, high expectations for success and a resilience after failure (Stipek, 1984); however, older students respond more negatively and often will lower their expectations after experiencing failure (Ames, 1990). This tends to decrease levels of motivation because they fear that failing after putting in effort will degrade people’s perceptions of their abilities (Covington & Omelich, 1979). There are numerous reasons as to why older students may experience a lack of motivation including lack of interest in class materials, negative perceptions of their own abilities (Legault et al., 2006) and other external factors.

2.2.1 Lack of ability and effort beliefs

Some students appear to have a complete lack of motivation, known as amotivation. Amotivation in students includes four different dimensions: ability beliefs, effort beliefs, characteristics of the task and value placed on the task (Legault et al., 2006). Students who have poor beliefs about their academic competence and ability to initiate and maintain the efforts required by academic tasks can experience academic disengagement (Legault et al., 2006). Unlike younger children who tend to believe that effort equates ability, older children tend to understand effort can increase the chances of being successful, but ability still sets the limitations to what one’s effort can achieve (Covington & Omelich, 1979). Therefore, students who have low perceptions of their competence may demonstrate avoidance behaviours (Greene, Miller,
Crowson, Duke & Akey, 2004) and students who have positive self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to work harder and remain intrinsically motivated (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Therefore, students who believe that they lack the ability and necessary effort to do well in school may have diminished intrinsic motivation to actually do well.

### 2.2.2 Lack of value and interest

A lack of intrinsic motivation can also stem from students not seeing value or being interested in academic tasks (Legault et al., 2006). In order for students to be motivated to initiate and complete a task, they have to value the task or the outcome of the task along with believing that their effort can be linked to success (Ames, 1990). If students are able to perceive that completing schoolwork is instrumental to their personal development and future success, then they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to carry out the work (Miller & Brickman, 2004). Consequently, characteristics of a task that are unappealing to students would not motivate the students to complete them, but rather can lead to academic disengagement and fosters avoidance behaviours (Ainley et al., 2002). Often it is not that some students by nature have a disposition towards amotivation, but rather that students are just not motivated to do what teachers want them to do (Ames, 1990). Often, therefore, a decrease in student motivation and engagement could be attributed to school practices that simply fail to interest and engage all learners (Brewster & Fager, 2000).

Student intrinsic motivation to engage in schoolwork largely depends on their perception of the academic task as being significant to their lives (Greene et al., 2004). Studies have shown that perceptions of classroom tasks as meaningful, relevant, and interesting are influenced by the extent to which students perceive current learning as instrumental to their current and future success (Greene et al., 2004). Many would argue that providing students with choice is the most
influential factor on student intrinsic motivation; however, some educational researchers have found that the need for freedom of action as less important than the extent to which one’s actions reflect personal goals, interests or values (Stefanou, 2004). Other ways to highlight significance in school involve ensuring course materials are relatable to student lives and can be applied to situations outside the school environment. Ultimately, students need to feel that schoolwork is significant, valuable and worthy of their efforts.

2.2.3 Other factors

Lack of academic motivation is quite complex in that its factors stretch beyond school walls to the broader social context each student is embedded (Gottfried, 1985). Academic attitudes and behaviours are significantly influenced by members of students’ surrounding environments, such as peers, teachers and parents (Legault et al., 2006). Students who interpret their environments as conveying negative information about the value of school are more likely to develop motivational problems (Murdock, 1999). Peer groups are important for the socialization of student motivation, hence students with high-achieving friends tend to have greater motivation to do well in school compared to students with lower achieving friends (Ryan, 2000). This is because individuals often shy away from displaying beliefs and behaviours that are discouraged or received negatively by peer groups, so students who associate with friends who have negative attitudes toward school tend to have decreased motivation and satisfaction in school (Ryan, 2000). Also, support from parents and teachers can greatly influence student intrinsic motivation in that students who perceive parents and teachers as caring and supportive of their learning tend to be more intrinsically motivated to do well in school (Reeve, Bolt & Cai, 1999).
The factors discussed within this section seek to explain why some students are not academically motivated to do well in school. These include a lack of belief in one’s ability to succeed, a lack of interest in the schoolwork as well as various other factors outside of school including home environment and peer groups. The following section will delve deeper into some of the major factors that affect student intrinsic motivation.

2.3 Major Factors that Influence Student Intrinsic Motivation

There are various factors within a school that affect a student’s intrinsic motivation to learn, including student autonomy, the types of tasks to be completed as well as feedback received from teachers. Research (Greene et al., 2004; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990) has shown that student perceptions of classroom structures are connected to their degree of motivation. Although interest has been deemed a key determinant of student motivation, relying solely on student interests to propel them towards deep and meaningful engagement with academic tasks may not be the most effective approach (Stefanou et al., 2004). From starting an academic task to the time it takes to finish, opportunities to engage in more interesting activities may arise, and consequently the academic material may be perceived as less interesting and less relevant than anticipated (Wolters, 1999). The learning material may also become difficult and frustrating halfway or the task becomes too simple (Wolters, 1999). Thus, the literature has shown various factors other than student interest that play a role in promoting student intrinsic motivation. These are: autonomy, teacher feedback, task complexity and variety.

2.3.1 Autonomy

Autonomy, simply defined, is the level of choice provided to an individual. When students perceive that teachers support their autonomy, they are likely to place greater value on academic tasks and experience more positive feelings towards them (Assor, Kaplan & Roth,
Student perceptions of autonomy support were found to be positively related to grades, perceived self-efficacy and perceived instrumentality (Greene et al., 2004). However, not all levels of autonomy have the same effects. Autonomy support can be manifested in the classroom in three distinct ways: organizational autonomy, procedural autonomy and cognitive autonomy (Stefanou et al., 2004). Organizational autonomy allows students to make choices in regards to classroom structures, such as developing class rules or choosing assignment due dates.

Procedural autonomy encourages student ownership of form, such as the ability to choose the type of media for their presentations. Lastly, cognitive autonomy encourages student ownership of their learning, by allowing them to come up with their own solutions and justify their choices of action. Teachers who provide organizational autonomy may encourage a sense of well-being and comfort in the classroom and teachers who provide procedural autonomy may support initial engagement with learning activities; however, only cognitive autonomy has been found to foster a more enduring investment in deep-level thinking (Stefanou et al., 2004).

Some researchers (Assor et al., 2002; Burger, 1989; Stefanou et al., 2004) argue that autonomy is not necessarily always motivating, rather it is only motivating when the options are relevant to students’ interests and goals. What students perceive as being highly valuable is likely not the mere act of choosing, but rather the value of the options (Katz & Assor, 2007). In a correlational study, Assor et al. (2002) assessed the types of teacher behaviours that increase engagement and motivation in third- through eighth-graders and concluded that clarification of relevance to students’ goals predicts engagement better than the amount of choice given to students. So it appears that the sheer act of picking an option does not guarantee an increase student intrinsic motivation if the options do not allow expression of students’ desires or preferences.
2.3.2 Feedback

Feedback is the information provided to an individual regarding aspects of their performance or understanding. Receiving feedback is a critical component of student learning as it allows students to reflect upon their work and their strengths and weaknesses (Brophy, 2013). The kinds of feedback that tend to motivate students are those that are informative, meaning students are not simply told whether they did well or poorly, but understand the specific areas in which they did well and where there needs to be improvements (Brophy, 2013). Helpful feedback also stresses the important connection between effort and outcome (Brophy, 2013). Since teacher feedback can directly influence student intrinsic motivation through affecting their perceptions of their own competence and self-efficacy (Kusurkar, Croiset & Ten Cate, 2011), positive feedback may lead students to choose more challenging tasks due to their increased feelings of self-efficacy (Brophy, 2013). In turn, choosing to work with more complex tasks encourages acquisition of skills and can lead students to feeling more competent in their abilities, thus leading to greater motivation and the cycle continues.

2.3.3 Complexity and variety

The complexity and variety of academic tasks have also been found to play a significant role in motivating students intrinsically (Linnenbink & Pintrich, 2002). Tasks that seem impossible can easily discourage students, as do those tasks that are rote and repetitive (Dev, 1997). Studies have shown that remedial programs that limit students to repetitive basic skill activities actually decrease student motivation and engagement in their schoolwork (Brewster & Fager, 2000). Instead, academic tasks that are moderately challenging and allow students to use a great variety of skills tend to motivate students more. Even something as simple as providing a variety of homework assignments throughout the year can prevent homework from becoming
boring or monotonous (Patton, 1994). Tasks that involve variety and diversity are also more likely to facilitate an interest in learning and a mastery orientation, meaning students are focused on mastering the task or a certain skill (Ames, 1992).

The difficulty and complexity of schoolwork should reflect students’ age and cognitive abilities. This idea is closely related to Vygotsky’s (1980) theory that teaching is most effective and motivating when directed towards students’ zone of proximal development. Thus, optimal challenges are neither too difficult nor too easy and can make students feel competent in their learning, which leads to greatly enhanced intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In order for individuals to feel competent, they also have to feel capable of mastering challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, if students do not have a high perception of their own competence, then they may easily avoid challenges and prefer tasks that ensure success, although this does not lead to higher intrinsic motivation (Ames, 1990). There is a myth that teachers can reduce workloads and create easy assignments as a way to promote higher student motivation. However, according to Marsh (2001), this is a myth because difficult and challenging courses tend to be evaluated more favourably and if success is too easily gained as a result of easy work, students may not feel a high sense of accomplishment and instead may lose interest in the material and not value such learning. Humans by nature have a desire to overcome challenges and students may often use their desires to overcome challenges as a way to motivate themselves to persist in completing a task (Wolters, 1999). Thus, having an optimal amount of challenge in schoolwork as well as allowing students to use a variety of skills in the academic setting is a strong intrinsic motivator for students to engage with and complete schoolwork.

This section concludes how the factors in a classroom affect student intrinsic motivation, including the autonomy given for students to explore their interests, the feedback provided to
students as well as the complexity and variety of academic tasks. The next section seeks to explore what research has found regarding pedagogical strategies that foster student intrinsic motivation in the classroom.

2.4 Pedagogical Strategies to Foster Student Intrinsic Motivation

The literature makes many suggestions and recommendations to teachers in regards to strategies that foster student intrinsic motivation. Since the learning environment can greatly shape students’ motivation and engagement, educators are encouraged to consider ways to socialize students’ intrinsic value for school (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Also, since student motivation is conceived as being inherently changeable and sensitive to the context, this provides hope for teachers that instructional efforts and design of classrooms and schools can make a difference in motivating students towards academic achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002).

2.4.1 Tap into student interests

There are two broad categories of interests that every individual has: personal interest and situational interest. One way to capitalize on students’ personal interests is to allow them to choose their own topics for class projects or reports (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Undoubtedly, it would be difficult for a teacher to teach a class that will suit the personal interests of each individual student in the classroom; therefore, educators should consider ways to enhance students’ situational interest as well (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). According to the literature, an effective strategy to keep students interested in school activities is to arouse students’ curiosity about the topic under study. Teachers can use the mystery approach by offering students pieces of information or contradictory statements, of which the students must examine the available information and come to conclusions on their own (Brewster & Fager, 2000). Overall, students who are genuinely interested in learning or are curious about a topic
tend to invest more time and effort into activities surrounding those topics and will also be more attentive during class (Kusurkar et al., 2011).

2.4.2 Promote student self-efficacy

Confidence in one’s ability to be successful in school is one of many indicators of high intrinsic motivation in secondary school students (Greene et al., 2004). Teachers must recognize the self-efficacy concerns that students have in regards to different learning activities (Greene et al., 2004). Students are often motivated when they believe they are able to succeed at a given task, therefore teachers need to encourage their students and to an extent, convince them that they could be successful (Brophy, 2013). Students who have more positive self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to work harder, persist longer and eventually achieve at higher levels (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). One way in which student self-efficacy can be fostered is through regular interactions with teachers who provide positive feedback and express their faith in students to do well.

When students are successful, teacher feedback should emphasize that their success is attributed to their ability and effort (Brophy, 2013). However, any failures should be attributed to a lack of relevant information and/or effort but not a lack of ability so that student self-efficacy is not negatively affected (Brophy, 2013). Ames (1990) highly recommends that teachers develop a habit of saying positive things about their students’ work. Reinforcing students’ work even if it involves a small aspect of the total effort would be a step in the direction of giving students more confidence (Ames, 1990). Unfortunately, teachers often provide positive feedback on aspects of the task that are unimportant or irrelevant, which actually may be interpreted by the students that they are lacking the ability to carry out the main focus of the task (Ames, 1990). Therefore,
positive feedback should always be contingent on students’ effort or performance quality rather than the nonessential features of the work.

2.4.3 Highlight significance in schoolwork

Having students’ personal goals reflected and made relevant in school will undeniably have a positive effect on student motivation and engagement. When teachers introduce activities to students, it is important to highlight how these activities are meaningful and relevant to student interests and goals (Greene et al., 2004). Teachers must try to understand their students’ interests, goals and values and then help students to see the connection between those and schoolwork (Assor et al., 2002). Since teachers have the autonomy to decide how to deliver the curriculum, they should always attempt to relate course materials to real-life situations (Lumsden, 1994). Asking students to apply course concepts to their own lives is a great way to help them see the significance in their learning (Bolkan, 2015). When students can build on their prior knowledge and see connections between what they are learning and the world they live in, that is when motivation will be enhanced (Brewster & Fager, 2000). Since it is unlikely that all school activities will be interesting for every single student, teachers should communicate the value of doing uninteresting activities rather than just saying that students must complete the work because they are told to do so (Kusurkar et al., 2011). This means that teachers must be prepared to provide rationales for asking students to engage in requested activities and if these rationales allow students to understand the value of studying certain subjects, they may become more motivated to engage with these subjects (Kusurkar et al., 2011).

2.4.3 Support student autonomy

Autonomy can be provided to students in a large number of ways. Some say that simple autonomy, such as giving students choice between various assignments, letting them choose their
groups and allowing them to evaluate their own progress, is sufficient to enhance student intrinsic motivation (Anderman & Midgley, 1998). However, others argue that it is not enough to give students simple choices regarding their work but that the options should be consistent with students’ personal goals and interests (Stefanou et al., 2004). Unfortunately, observations in the classroom have led researchers to conclude that teachers often offer students choices over only irrelevant aspects of the learning activity (Cordova & Lepper, 1996). These types of choices known as organizational and procedural autonomy may be necessary to provide students with initial feelings of control, but are insufficient for maintaining long-term intrinsic motivation and deep-level engagement in learning (Stefanou et al., 2004). Autonomy supportive teachers also tend to listen more to their students, hold instructional materials less and resist giving solutions to their students so they can work out the problems on their own (Reeve et al., 1999). These teachers also tend to verbalize fewer instructions, ask more questions about what students wanted to do and are more responsive to student-generated questions (Reeve et al., 1999).

This section wraps up the literature review with some key pedagogical strategies to help teachers foster student intrinsic motivation in the classroom. These strategies include tapping into student interests, promoting student self-efficacy, highlighting the significance in academic tasks as well as supporting student autonomy. The next section concludes this literature review with some overall insights and introduces the upcoming chapter.

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, I explored the current research on student intrinsic motivation, causes for lack of motivation, classroom factors that influence motivation as well as pedagogical strategies that foster intrinsic motivation. This review illuminates the extent to which attention has been paid to the importance of student intrinsic motivation on academic success as well as
lifelong positive attitudes towards learning. What we currently know about student intrinsic motivation is that there are various distinct factors, such as autonomy, student interest, teacher feedback and task significance and complexity, that directly affect student academic motivation. However, there has not yet been a study on teacher perspectives on how student motivation is influenced by the structure of the school, namely comparing perceived student motivation in a non-traditional self-directed school and the traditional schooling model of structured classes and deadlines.

The topic of student intrinsic motivation raises questions about how the structure of a school or classroom can directly or indirectly affect student intrinsic motivation and points to the need for further research in this area. A student that is given greater autonomy in their learning may have higher levels of motivation, but having only autonomy enough? Do teachers perceive student motivation in the same way that students do? In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn more about how teachers perceive and foster student motivation in a self-directed learning program, so I will interview two teachers working at a self-directed secondary school to gain insight on their perspectives, understandings and practices in regards to this topic. The next chapter discusses the methodology for this research.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology and elaborate on the various technical aspects of this project. This research study was established according to the guidelines set by the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The intent of this project is not to collect and analyze quantitative data, but to draw on the experiences and expertise of a small number of teachers to gain insight into their perceptions and practices regarding student motivation. In this methodology chapter, I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments, before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews guided by a prescribed set of questions that were digitally recorded and later transcribed and coded. Following this, I will explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. Then, I will highlight a range of methodological limitations, but I will also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research project was conducted as a case study at Silver Birch Secondary School (pseudonym to keep the school anonymous), a public secondary school in Ontario that operates under a self-directed learning program. I used a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with two teachers. Qualitative research is defined as exploratory research, in which different perspectives are recognized and analyzed as well as including the researcher’s own reflection as part of the process of knowledge production.
(Flick, 2009). A case study research is a type of qualitative research strategy in which a bounded system with set parameters is observed through detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). As a type of research that produces results not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification, qualitative research allows me to deeply examine teachers’ lives, experiences, perceptions and emotions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The purpose of my research study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of individual teachers on the subject of fostering student intrinsic motivation, thus only a qualitative approach would allow my participants to provide detailed insights. Interviews are most appropriate where little is already known about the phenomenon under study or where detailed insights are required from individual participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). My research study strongly satisfies both of these requirements, as no studies have been done on self-directed learning secondary schools in Ontario and in order for me to gain an understanding of this topic in depth, I needed to have detailed insights from each of my teacher participants. There is great complexity in the phenomenon of motivation, thus qualitative research allows me to dig deeper into the subject.

To successfully complete this research project, I interviewed two high school teachers from Silver Birch S.S. to develop an understanding of how these teachers perceive and reportedly foster student intrinsic motivation in a self-directed learning environment. Using a qualitative study allowed me to focus on central key issues by sitting down to chat with each teacher individually to gage as much depth as I can into their experiences. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded and along with the data collected from the interviews, I combined the information with supporting literature to better understand how teachers perceive and seek to foster student motivation a self-directed learning environment.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study was the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B). As a midpoint between a fully-structured and an unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to design and plan out the interview process that attends to their research focus and questions, while leaving room for participants to elaborate on specific topics or even redirect attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer. A fully-structured interview only allows for limited participant responses and does not permit much exploration with its set of predetermined questions that have little to no variation (Gill et al., 2008). An unstructured interview, on the opposite end of the spectrum, is conducted with no organization and have little guidance from a lack of predetermined questions (Gill et al., 2008). Both fully-structured and unstructured interviews were not appropriate for my research purposes because I had several key areas to explore; however, I needed flexibility in my approach to allow for further elaboration.

For my semi-structured interviews, I asked a series of open-ended questions to provide my participants with flexibility in their responses, but I also had prompts ready in case I would like to steer the interview into a certain direction. My interview protocol was organized as follows. To start off, my questions began with asking about some background information of each participant, such as how long they have worked at the school under study, whether they have worked in traditional schools and their reasons for pursuing education. Following that, I asked a few questions on the school context to gain an understanding of how teachers perceive this alternative school environment to be different or similar from traditional schools. I also probed about what a typical day is like at the school through the eyes of a teacher. Next, I asked various questions related to motivation, where participants could shed their insights on their
perspectives and techniques to foster intrinsic motivation in students who are studying at their school. To end off, I concluded with some questions regarding advices these teachers may have for new teachers and to share their final thoughts on student motivation in the classroom. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes long per participant and was recorded on an electronic device to be transcribed manually shortly afterwards.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment and I highlight how I recruited my teacher participants. I have also included a section where I will introduce each of the participants and another section where I introduce the school under study.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The teachers I wanted to interview for my research project were those who had at least two years of teaching experience at a secondary school with a self-directed learning program – which I will refer to with the pseudonym Silver Birch S.S. – as well as at least two years of teaching experience in a traditional school setting. I describe the school in further detail below. Because my project focuses on such a small sample of research participants, it was essential for me to identify and select candidates who have had experience working in both a traditional school setting as well as at a self-directed school to shed insight on similarities and differences between the two education systems. Having at least four total years of teaching experience ensured richer discussions in the interviews as candidates had many years of experiences to share and were able to articulate what worked for them over the years and what did not. They would also have had multiple opportunities to refine their teaching strategies accordingly.
3.3.2 Sampling procedures

To recruit participants, I contacted Silver Birch S.S.’s principal to provide an overview of my research study and to share my participant criteria with the school’s teachers. The principal agreed to help distribute my information and thus my information was provided and made available to all teachers of the school so that whoever was interested in being a participant could contact me directly. Rather than asking the principal to provide me with the names and contact information of teachers they thought would be suitable for my study, I only asked the principal to share the information I provided. This helped to ensure that teachers were volunteering to participate rather than feeling pressured or obligated to participate.

I used a purposeful sampling method because my research was a focused case study sited at a particular secondary school. All of my participants had to be teachers from the same school and even within the school, my selection criteria did not permit me to just interview any teacher since they had to have been teaching there for a certain number of years as well as at a traditional school. Sampling procedures are always intended to maximize efficiency and validity (Palinkas et al., 2015). Since my participant pool was extremely small, random sampling would not have been a viable approach because it would have lacked validity (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Having purposeful sampling allows researchers to choose the most appropriate cases for a given research strategy (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). In order to obtain rich information, this involved identifying and selecting teachers who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with teaching in a self-directed school setting, but who also have had experience teaching in a traditional school setting so that they were aware of the particularities of the self-directed environment.
3.3.3 Participant biographies

Alex (pseudonym) is the department head of the science department at Silver Birch S.S. She had been working at this school for almost twenty years by the time of the interview and had also worked at a traditional secondary school prior to that. She has bachelors and masters degrees in addition to her education degree. Alex chose education as her profession after working at a bank for a few years, when she realized she was more of an academic and had a love of learning and teaching.

Casey (pseudonym) is a religion teacher at Silver Birch S.S., but previously taught music at this school for many years. He has also been teaching at Silver Birch S.S. for almost twenty years up to the time of the interview. Prior to this school, he taught at a traditional high school and in elementary schools, while playing music professionally. He completed his undergraduate degree and teaching degree after teaching as a non-certified itinerary band teacher in elementary schools. Casey chose education as his profession when he realized he really enjoyed teaching band in elementary schools. After realizing he was going to stay in this field, he decided to get his teaching certification and then transitioned into teaching high school.

3.3.4 Background of the school

There are quite a few key differences between Silver Birch S.S. and traditional secondary schools. Firstly, the self-directed learning model that Silver Birch S.S. operates under means that students at this school do not have a set academic schedule to follow each day. Instead, they decide what their schedules will be day by day depending on what subjects they want to work on and where they want to work. Not only do these students plan out on their timetables daily, but they also set their own deadlines for school assignments and projects. Each course is organized into units, with the final unit being the final exam, which students generally write at the same
time at the end of the term. All other units consist of tasks and assessments that students must complete in order to move on to the next unit. When all units are completed and passed, the student will obtain the credit for that course.

During the school day, teachers will be available in their respective classrooms at predetermined times. Thus, if students would like to consult their teachers, they know exactly when and where to find them. Above all this flexibility, there is one structure keeping this school intact and that is the Teacher Advisor (TA) program. Each student is assigned to one teacher when they enter Silver Birch S.S. and this teacher will be their TA for all their years at that school. Students are required to check in with their TAs every morning, lunch and after school and would have TA interviews every two weeks to discuss progress and to co-construct next steps.

3.4 Data Analysis

A major difference between qualitative and quantitative data analysis is that the data tends to be textual, rather than numerical (Schutt, 2011). The text in the case of this research study were transcripts of interviews. Analyzing these interview texts allowed me to understand what my participants reportedly thought, felt or did in some situations, at some point in time. The text becomes a way to see the richness of social experience (Schutt, 2011). Textual data collected from the interviews were analyzed in relation to the participant, their background, and the school setting as a whole. Most phenomena cannot be explained in isolation as a result of their complex nature, thus objects are not reduced to single variables, but represented in the entirety of their everyday context (Flick, 2009). The whole is always understood to be greater than the sum of its parts, and so the social context surrounding each teacher, such as events, thoughts, and actions becomes essential for interpretation of data (Schutt, 2011).
In qualitative analysis, the researcher is an active participant in the in-depth, comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, as compared to the quantitative data analysts’ role as a distant investigator of specific relations among discrete variables (Flick, 2009). Qualitative research often calls for ongoing analytical processes during data collection, thus data analysis does not wait for data to be gathered in order to begin (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). Such continuous analysis is almost unavoidable in qualitative research because the researcher is in the field collecting data, so it is nearly impossible not to think about what is being heard and seen (Pope et al., 2000).

In the present study, data analysis began during the interview; however, the data collected from the interviews was analyzed in much greater depth after both interviews were over. Data from this research study were preserved in their textual form, as I transcribed each interview to prepare for further analysis. Transcripts and notes are the raw data of the research and provided a descriptive record of the interviews, but they cannot provide explanations; thus, each transcript was coded individually using my research questions as an interpretive tool. The data were read and reread to identify themes and categories that centered on particular phrases, incidents, or types of behaviour. Then, relationships among the data were examined as they were central to the analytic process. Relationships analysis allows the researcher to move from simple descriptions of people and settings to explanations of why things happened the way they do (Schutt, 2011). After identifying themes within categories, I read the categories and themes alongside one another and synthesized themes where appropriate. At a later stage, I created meaning out of the themes and findings from the interview process, data collected as well as what existing research has already found (as noted in my literature review).
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Qualitative interview research involves quite a few ethical risks including protecting the anonymity and welfare of participants and the ease at which data can be misinterpreted or manipulated (Flick, 2009). There is also often the ethical dilemma of needing to weigh the research interest against the interest of participants (Flick, 2009). Sometimes, the kind of information a researcher looks for may confront people with things they are not comfortable with, causing an internal crisis for these people, so the researcher often has to consider if it is ethically correct to take this risk for the sake of one’s research (Flick, 2009).

The Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at University of Toronto collectively obtained ethics approval for this Master of Teaching Research Project. All students in the program were allowed to interview educators for their research purposes. As with any research study, there may be concerns about confidentiality and consent. Thus, right from the beginning of the recruitment process, potential participants were made aware that their identity would remain completely anonymous and that all data obtained from the interviews would remain confidential. To ensure anonymity of each participant, all participants are assigned a pseudonym and any identifiable factors related to their schools or students were excluded. They were also notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research process and that they could also request the researcher not to use any of the data collected from them thus far.

There were no known risks to participation in this study and all participants were made aware of that. The data was collected in the form of audio recordings and those were stored on my password protected phone and will be destroyed after five years. Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) before the interview to give their consent to be interviewed as
well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies the expectations of participation being the one roughly 60-minute semi-structured interview. The consent letter was reviewed by each participant in its entirety before they sign off on it. Throughout the entire research process, the participants were encouraged to ask any questions they may have. All participants were provided the contact information for the researcher and course instructor in case they had questions or concerns during any stage of the research process.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Qualitative research has many strengths as well as limitations. One of its major strengths is that it has the ability to study social relations, individual perceptions and ways of living, in ways that quantitative research cannot do (Flick, 2009). The study of subjective meanings and everyday experience and practice is essential to understanding concepts that cannot be measured and tested in a lab (Flick, 2009). Limitations of qualitative research, on the other hand, is its subjectivity as the researcher is an active participant within the research context rather than objectively observing as an outsider (Flick, 2009).

Given the ethical parameters that this research study has been approval for, the researcher can only interview educators and thus, it is not possible have access to students or parents or to conduct classroom observations. The purpose of this project is meant to inform the practices of the researcher and has the potential to be informative to other educators as well. However, there are various limitations of this project due to the boundaries of our approved methodology. Being allowed to only interview educators greatly limits us to the wealth of information and insight that can be shed on this topic through the perspectives of students and parents. Both parties play a significant role in education and student motivation that to exclude their views is quite
unfortunate. Also, even though our ethical parameters allow us to interview educators, which is in itself already a rich source of information, the number of teachers that I can interview is quite limited. Thus, I must acknowledge that while my findings can inform my teaching practices and the topic of motivation, they cannot be used to generalize the experiences of all teachers working in non-structured, self-directed schools or even in the same school as the one under study.

Another limitation of this research project is that the qualitative nature of interviews as a method of data collection leaves much room for misinterpretation. To best minimize this, I put in great effort to ask participants to clarify and elaborate on their answers. On top of that, the responses will likely all be based on the participants’ opinions and personal experiences, thus bias in the information will be unavoidable. The amount of available literature on overall student academic motivation is vast and contains many mixed findings. Thus, to produce a comprehensive overview that represents the entire body of literature would be nearly impossible.

However, looking beyond the limitations of this research study, there are various strengths that make this research extremely valuable and rich, still allowing it to serve as a great resource to inform the practices of the researcher and other educators. There is a wealth of information that teachers can provide when it comes to educational phenomena. Teachers are in the school setting day to day and interact with students on a regular basis. Having the ability to interview teachers in this research study certainly allowed me to learn much more from their experiences and insights than a survey or questionnaire would allow for. Interviews create a space and freedom for teachers to speak to what matters most to them when it comes to the topic in discussion. My research interview protocol allowed me to validate teacher voices and experiences as well as provided me an opportunity to make meaning from these teachers’ lived experiences. Interviews also allow teachers to reflect on their own practices and to express in
their own way how they conceptualize particular topics in theory and practice. Overall, every research study has both limitations and strengths, and it is up to the researcher to make the most of it in order to make a positive contribution to the field of education.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I clarified my research approach and procedures for my research study, outlining the values of qualitative research as well as why it is the appropriate methodology given my area of research. Next, I expanded on the use of semi-structured interviews and justified why it was appropriate for my specific research project. Then, I discussed my recruitment strategy and briefly highlighted sampling criteria and procedures that will make this research project efficient and effective. I then provided brief biographies of the participants to provide a snapshot of their experience and how they are suitable for this study. Following that, I described how I will analyze the data and then I reviewed the ethical review procedures of this study, clarifying the importance of confidentiality and consent in this project. Lastly, I touched upon various limitations and strengths of conducting a research project through a qualitative approach as well as within the parameters set by the program. In Chapter 4, I will report the research findings.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present my research findings and discuss the prominent themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with two teachers at Silver Birch S.S., a secondary school located in Ontario that operates under a self-directed learning model. The two teacher participants interviewed for this study have been working at Silver Birch S.S. for almost twenty years and have also had experience teaching in traditional classrooms. These participants will go by the pseudonyms Alex and Casey to protect their identities. Before delving into my findings, I will briefly highlight what has been covered in the first three chapters. Chapter 1 emphasized the purpose of this study, which is to gain insight into how secondary school teachers working in a self-directed learning environment perceive and seek to foster student motivation. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature in terms of what is already known about student motivation and the importance of this issue. Chapter 3 elaborated on the qualitative research methodology used in this study and why this method was most appropriate and effective in carrying out this research.

Before I present the findings and themes of my research, I will recap some basic background information on key differences between Silver Birch S.S. and traditional secondary schools. To start off, students at Silver Birch S.S. do not follow a predetermined academic schedule. Instead, they plan their schedules day by day and decide where they will go each period and what subjects they will work on. There are no assignment deadlines and the students can individually determine when they will write their tests. The only assessment they have to write collectively is the final exam for each course. Every student is placed into a Teacher Advisor (TA) group upon their initial entry into the school and will remain under the supervision of this TA (a teacher in the school) for the entire duration of their stay at Silver Birch S.S. Students are
required to check in with their TA every morning, lunch and after school as well as participate in TA interviews every few weeks to discuss their progress.

To shed some further insight into the operations of the school, the following is a response by Alex when asked what a typical day at Silver Birch S.S. looks like:

Every day is different. I cannot prepare for a class. There is no preparation that I do like in a traditional school. For a seminar I do, but in general, if I’m on the floor, there is no preparation that I can do because any student can come to me at any time and ask me any question. It can be about chemistry, biology, physics, whatever is on the table at the time. I might have to say I don’t know the answer many a times, but that’s the really great thing about working here, is that it’s not the same every day. It’s very flexible and that can create a lot of chaos too. So if you don’t like chaos, you probably wouldn’t like being here.

Even though teachers experience much flexibility at this school, students appreciate it even more. Alex said that, in her view, “students probably have a little more flexibility than even a teacher does, because I have to be somewhere on the floor, in a place at a particular time, whereas a student can choose to do whatever they want and whenever they want.” This unique structure of Silver Birch S.S. made it a very interesting school to in which to study teacher perceptions and experiences of student motivation.

After having interviewed teachers Alex and Casey from Silver Birch S.S., I conducted thorough data analysis on the interview transcripts and was able to organize my findings into three major themes:

1. Lack of school structure and its effects on student motivation
2. Importance of a growth and success mindset for student motivation
3. Effects of the teacher-student relationship on student motivation

For all themes, participant responses will be discussed and connections will be drawn to the existing literature.

4.1 Lack of School Structure and its Effects on Student Motivation

My participants believe that motivation levels among students at Silver Birch S.S. are generally quite high because the self-directed nature of the school fosters motivation in students. The participants defined student intrinsic motivation as a love for learning and a drive towards academic success. Both participants stated that intrinsically motivated students take the initiative to ask questions and have a positive attitude towards learning. Alex said that motivated students look like they are filled with energy and have enthusiasm for what they are learning, that “you can tell something lights them up”. Casey also added, “they offer their own opinion. They show evidence that they’ve thought about something and that they have an opinion on it.” The lack of school structure at Silver Birch S.S. reportedly increases student motivation by allowing students to be more autonomous in their learning and thus provides greater opportunities for them to explore their own interests and curiosities.

I became curious about whether already intrinsically motivated students self-select to come to this school or their parents send them to this school knowing about the self-directed program, but both participants responded “no” to this question because Silver Birch S.S. is a neighbourhood school. Casey said, “I don’t know that they’re coming here knowing about the program. I think most kids think ‘eh Silver Birch S.S., okay I heard it’s different, well we’ll find out.’ Then they come here and they start to grow into a self-directed learner”. Alex also expressed how she does not believe students come to Silver Birch S.S. because they are already motivated, but that the program fosters that motivation in students. When asked why students
seem to be more motivated at this school than in others where he has worked, Casey responded, “the freedom of choice changes the culture. And I think students start to embrace that and become more mature because they realize the choices they make have consequences, so they make better choices or at least they learn to.” Overall, these teachers perceive that the autonomy provided by this school fosters motivation and a sense of ownership in its students. My participants’ responses align with findings from other studies (Assor, Kaplan & Roth, 2002; Perencevich, DiCinto & Turner, 2004; Reeve, Bolt & Cai, 1999; Stefanou) which have found that students with greater autonomy in their learning also tend to have higher intrinsic motivation.

Having worked at traditional schools prior to Silver Birch S.S. along with hearing about experiences from friends who currently work at traditional schools, the two participants were able to make comparisons between their perceptions of student motivation under both education models. Alex believes that “the self-directed nature of this school is developing that intrinsic motivation in students” and that “[some] students are not motivated in a traditional setting because [they] have no choice. [They] have to do what [they] are told, but here, [they’re] not stuck”. Casey perceives that the freedom of choice provided to students at Silver Birch S.S. allows them to manage their own learning and take responsibility for their own education. He believes that this has a positive effect on student motivation because with autonomy comes ownership and an understanding among students that their education is in their own hands.

Both teachers mentioned that, over the years, Silver Birch S.S. has been trying to incorporate more autonomy and flexibility into its assignments and assessments. For example, when Alex was sharing about a conversation she had with teachers in the religion department, she said, “they’re trying to say to students, ‘okay, well if you don’t want to do it this way, choose something else’”. Casey currently works in the religion department and he talked about how
students can now propose a way to demonstrate their learning if the tasks in the units do not appeal to their interests. As long as they can show that their work meets the unit requirements, teachers can approve a whole array of assignments to give students more opportunities to be autonomous. With freedom of choice and “creative license” provided to these students, not only will they be more motivated at school, but they will also “become more responsible for their own learning” as mentioned by Casey. Both participants believe that when students are not restricted to just one way of learning, they will have more opportunities to learn in a way that suits their needs the most.

My participants’ belief in the strong connection between autonomy and student intrinsic motivation aligns with the literature. In a study looking at the effects of teacher behaviours on students’ perceived autonomy, Assor, Kaplan and Roth (2002) found that when students perceive teachers support their autonomy, they are more likely to put greater value on academic tasks and experience more positive feelings towards them. However, Casey also mentioned during the interview that sometimes when students are given too much choice, they do not like it because they have so many things to do and would prefer to just be given the instructions so they can be done with the task as soon as possible. In these cases, autonomy reportedly becomes overwhelming as students are required to make many choices and often do not know where to start. Thus, the motivational benefits of autonomy are thus context-based. Some researchers (Anderman & Midgley, 1998) argue that simple autonomy, such as giving students choice between assignments and letting them choose their groups, is sufficient to enhance student motivation, while other researchers (e.g., Stefanou et al., 2004) argue that the choices offered to students must spark some kind of interest or curiosity in order to motivate them to further pursue the topic (Stefanou et al., 2004).
A major benefit of having autonomy is that it opens doors for further explorations of interests and curiosities. According to my participants, a motivated student is full of energy and curiosity. Although a motivated student may not necessarily be the best academic student, it is their interest and curiosity that demonstrates whether they are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to learn. Brewster and Fager (2002) found that students become intrinsically motivated to engage in learning due to their interest, curiosity and enjoyment of the learning process. Because intrinsic motivation is situational and context-driven (Gottfried, 1985), students who lack motivation are likely not innately unmotivated but are just unmotivated to do what their teachers tell them to do (Ames, 1990). Thus, giving students autonomy seems crucial to their motivation because it allows them to not only take ownership of their learning but also gives them the flexibility to pursue their own interest.

I was surprised to see that relevance of the learning material was not touched upon by my participants as this was a significant motivating factor mentioned in the literature (e.g., Assor, Kaplan & Roth, 2002). A few researchers (Burger, 1989; Stefanou et al., 2004) have found that autonomy is only motivating when the options are relevant to students’ interests and goals, however the participants of my study did not dive into this aspect of motivation. The key takeaway from my research findings is that my participants perceive that the self-directed nature of Silver Birch S.S. fosters motivation in students due to the autonomy it provides to students. The upcoming section will discuss the importance of a growth and success mindset to a student’s motivation and success.
4.2 Importance of Growth and Success Mindset for Student Motivation

Both participants believe that it is vital for students to have a growth and success mindset in order to be motivated and successful in a self-directed learning environment. When asked about the definition of academic intrinsic motivation, Alex said,

I think a student would have to be internally motivated, that they want to do well and they want to succeed and because of that, then they are motivated to do the work that brings them to a goal. So, they have an internal sense of where they want to be and that motivates them to move towards the goal.

The want to learn and to succeed is one of the main driving forces for student motivation (Brewster & Fager, 2000) and in a school environment that lacks deadlines and schedules, it becomes easy for students to slip behind the radar and to not do anything. However, since the participants perceive that motivation levels at Silver Birch S.S. are generally quite high, this may suggest that students at the school generally want to grow and to succeed.

Students not only need to have the desire to grow and succeed, but they must also believe that they have the ability to grow and succeed. Alex said, “it’s just the mindset of I can grow, so I will grow” that pushes students forward in their learning. The literature also speaks to the importance of self-efficacy, the belief in one’s ability, as students who have positive self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to work harder and remain intrinsically motivated (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Casey thinks that “there isn’t a human being on the planet who doesn’t like to learn new things, because learning is growing.” He believes that all students want to learn and grow, and when children begin school in kindergarten and grade one, there is a lot of freedom and play-based learning, which piques their interest and curiosity. However, eventually kids get placed into desks and rows with papers and worksheets and then it just gets boring and dull.
Casey concluded these thoughts by saying, “so I don’t think students ever lose the love of learning, however, they might not love school because in school, they’re being forced into only one kind of learning.” Thus, the fact that Silver Birch S.S. does not force students into one kind of learning means that the school is trying to foster that growth mindset and motivation in students.

When students lose motivation, it becomes a big issue for their academic success. Casey believes that one of the reasons why students are sometimes unmotivated is that they do not believe they can be successful:

One reason a student is not intrinsically motivated is because they don’t believe they can be successful…I think. They think there’s way too much work, I can’t get this done or I don’t understand it. For whatever the reason they’re not feeling confident. So I think one thing is to help show them that I believe they can be successful.

When students lose motivation due to a lack of confidence in their own abilities, it becomes important for teachers to support and encourage them, as will be discussed further in the next section. Alex shared about her experience working in the gifted program at Silver Birch S.S. and noted that some gifted students were often unmotivated because they have a fear of failure and thus have a diminished growth mindset. According to Alex, “they’re frequently told they’re really smart, so they try to prove that they’re really smart by staying within a small box”. This aligns with the literature findings which stated that as students get older, they develop a fear of failing because they think that failing after putting in effort can degrade people’s perceptions of their abilities (Covington & Omelich, 1979). Alex perceives that some gifted students choose to stay within their comfort zones and not challenge themselves in order to keep up their ‘smart’ status. Students who exhibit these behaviours seem to have lost that growth mindset, even if their
goal is to succeed, or rather to succeed in the eyes of others. Thus, Alex believes that by avoiding challenges and seeking out tasks they are already good at, these students can ensure success, though that takes a toll on their intrinsic motivation. So, this finding suggests that having only a success mindset is not enough to sustain student motivation but that the success mindset must be coupled with a growth mindset in order for motivation to be increased or maintained.

In a school where students are expected to direct their own learning, students who lack a growth and success mindset may also lack the motivation to do well in school. The next theme will delve into the importance of teacher student relationships at Silver Birch S.S. as a strategy to increase student motivation and success.

4.3 Effects of Teacher-Student Relationship on Student Motivation

Having a supportive, caring adult in the building can give students a sense of comfort and confidence; thus teacher care is reportedly a central strategy used by teachers in fostering student motivation at Silver Birch S.S. Alex and Casey report that a very positive and nurturing relationship is developed between students and teachers through the Teacher Advisor (TA) program at Silver Birch S.S. Both participants spoke very fondly of the TA program, as Alex said, “I think everybody would agree that this is the cornerstone of this program. It can’t work without it.” When working as a TA with their students, teachers at Silver Birch S.S. seek to “give [students] a little guidance in their self-direction”, as Alex puts it.

The teacher-student relationships that emerge from the TA program reportedly create a positive culture within the school where students know that there is a supportive adult in the building. Alex explained the TA program in this way:

The TA program creates a culture where there is a lot of bonding and certainly the students know that there’s a caring adult in the building. And not to say that that doesn’t
happen in traditional classrooms, of course it does. But it’s almost formally written here, that they have this caring adult. Whereas in a traditional classroom, if you find one, that’s great and often it does happen and a lot of teachers want to be that, but the students have to find it.

The fact that each student at Silver Birch S.S. gets assigned to a TA when they enter the school and remain with this TA for the remainder of their stay at the school, reportedly provides ample time for a positive, supporting relationship to develop between the students and their TAs. Like Alex said, even though students can find a supportive, caring adult in traditional schools as well, it is a lot more difficult because students would have to actively seek them out and maintaining frequent contact also poses as a challenge when they change teachers and schedules every semester.

Casey also spoke very highly of the TA program and believes that the relationship between students and their TAs creates a different dynamic between teachers and students at Silver Birch S.S. because of the close and trusting relationship that develop. Casey stated,

I think there’s a different kind of relationship that you have with your adult teachers in the building. Because you have this relationship with your TA and because of self-direction, it’s just a different relationship with teachers in the building. You know, it’s not so much I’m controlling you, I’m telling you what to do and what to think, but instead here, it’s what do you think of this? Learn how to think for yourself. So it sets up a different dynamic.

He also perceives a lack of a power struggle between students and adults in the building because teachers are not required to control 30 students at a time and, as a result of the self-directed learning model, students are free to do what they wish. Instead of being a “sage on the stage” as
Alex puts it, these teachers can function more as facilitators and coaches in their students’ learning process.

One way that these teachers demonstrate care and support for their students is by explicitly expressing their belief in their students’ ability to succeed. Students with poor beliefs about their academic competence can experience academic disengagement and demotivation (Legault et al., 2006). When Casey was asked what strategies he used to support unmotivated students, he said that he would express to his students that he has total confidence in their ability to be successful. Casey thinks that when students hear their teachers’ belief in their success, then they are more likely to believe in their own abilities to be successful. Alex also shared a similar outlook as she talked about her role as a cheerleader in motivating her students. She said, “I’m the motivator. I’m the cheerleader. I’m the one to say ‘you’ve got this’ and hope that that flips into some intrinsic motivation”. When students see their teachers cheering them on and supporting their success, they may feel more confident in themselves and work harder towards that success. Brophy (2013) recommends that teachers encourage their students and, to an extent, work to convince them that they can be successful because ultimately, belief in one’s ability to succeed is a very important indicator of high intrinsic motivation among students (Greene et al., 2004).

Besides believing in students’ ability to succeed, teachers also reportedly show care and support by actively helping their students through their problems and struggles. Alex said that this may mean meeting with the students more often and sometimes involving their parents or a guidance counselor. She expressed the importance of seeing the whole child and to take in all the factors that these students are dealing with. She said, “We do whatever it takes to get students towards a goal…any goal, with small steps at a time.” Alex shared an experience with a student
who for the first two years at this school was just “lethargic” and after having multiple meetings with that student, it turned out that there were a lot of things happening in his life outside of school. Once some issues were identified, Alex was able to help him get the support he needed and difference was astounding. Alex proudly said, “He’s exercising, eating better, probably sleeping better, staying off the web and then his academics, you know, is doing better as well. He’s just feeling better overall. And that gives him a little more intrinsic motivation to do better”. Alex’s caring attitude towards the student has reportedly helped turn his situation around for the better.

Casey also gave an example of a TA interview he did with one of his students who was feeling stressed with a project he had to do. It was a big project and not every step was clear cut, so the student felt overwhelmed with the ambiguity. Casey reported that, when there is a grey area in an assignment with unclear steps, his students tend to exhibit avoidance behaviours, leading to the procrastination and demotivation. So, as a caring TA, Casey sat down with the student to figure out what needs to be done step-by-step. After coming up with a clear agenda for the project by the end of the interview, the student was reportedly able to see a clearer picture of how he can organize his time and make the task more manageable. The student can now take those organizational skills and apply them to his next task. By working with this student and breaking down the task into “bite size pieces”, Casey was reportedly able to help the student gain more motivation and confidence in his ability to complete the project.

Teacher care is an important aspect of fostering student motivation and success and while I expected to hear a greater variety of strategies like those highlighted in the Chapter 2 literature review, I was pleased to find that teacher care was reportedly at the centre of these teachers’ approach to supporting student motivation at Silver Birch S.S.
4.4 Conclusion

This chapter summarized the findings from my two interviews, of which three major themes emerged. Firstly, my participants believe that motivation levels among students at Silver Birch S.S. are generally quite high as a result of the autonomy provided by the self-directed learning program. Secondly, I discovered that teachers perceive a growth and success mindset in students at Silver Birch S.S. to be crucial for their motivation and success. Lastly, these teachers perceive that the relationship between teachers and students greatly influences student motivation at Silver Birch S.S. A positive relationship with care and support can highly enhance a student’s motivation to learn and succeed in school. Overall, the structure of Silver Birch S.S. seemingly has a very positive effect on student motivation as many boundaries of a traditional school model are broken down by the self-directed nature of this school. My findings point to ways in which teachers perceive the structure of a school to influence student motivation and learning, which has not been studied before at this local level. In the next and final chapter, I offer implications and recommendations for the educational community on the merits of self-directed learning and I also point to further areas of research.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will summarize the key findings of my research and discuss their significance to the realm of education. Then, I will present various implications from my findings for the broad educational community as well as for my own professional development as a teacher and a researcher. Next, I will provide recommendations for various stakeholder groups in education and lastly, I will make suggestions for areas of further research as well as conclude with some final comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

According to my research findings, teachers at Silver Birch S.S., a self-directed secondary school in Ontario, perceive that student motivation is heavily influenced by the structure of the school, the students’ disposition for growth and success along with teacher care and support. My participants gave much insightful data on their perceptions of how the self-directed learning program at Silver Birch S.S. influences student motivation as well as how their own practices have an effect on student motivation. The interview responses were transcribed and coded and after detailed analysis, three major themes emerged from the data.

Firstly, both participants strongly believed that motivation levels among students at Silver Birch S.S. are generally quite high because the self-directed nature of the school fosters motivation in students. The lack of structure at this school, in terms of schedules and deadlines, reportedly allows students to be more autonomous in their learning and thus gives them the opportunity to direct their own learning and to pursue their own areas of interest. Autonomy paired with student interest is perceived by my participants to be the greatest factors that enhances student motivation. This is a significant finding as most traditional schools do not offer
much autonomy to their students. At the ring of a bell, students move from class to class and follow a strict schedule given by their teachers. Thus, the merits of autonomy and self-direction are strongly supported by my findings.

The second theme discovered from the data collected was my participants’ belief that in order for students to be successful in a self-directed learning program, they must have an intrinsic drive for growth and success, whatever that success looks like to each student. In a non-traditional school without set classes and deadlines, it becomes easy for students to fall behind and to slip through the cracks as students are not required to see their teachers on a regular basis. Thus, in order for students to find success in a self-directed learning environment, my participants believe that a growth and success mindset is vital.

Lastly, my participants reported that their best method of fostering student motivation and learning is explicitly caring for their students and providing support in any way they can. Since each student has a teacher advisor (TA) at Silver Birch S.S., the TA acts as a ‘caring adult’, as termed by participant Casey, for the entire duration of a student’s stay at the school. Every teacher is a TA for a group of students and many will conduct frequent TA interviews to get updates on their students’ progress and to offer assistance in any capacity. Many positive things reportedly happen during these interviews as students are receiving support and feedback from the teachers and can express their concerns in their academics or other aspects of life. This finding is significant as it shows that teacher care and support can be a strong motivating factor for students in school. This section sums up the three major themes from my study and the next section will highlight broad and narrow implications from my research findings.
5.2 Implications

In this section, I will discuss various broad implications concluded from my research findings for different stakeholders of the educational community. I will also include implications of how my findings influence my own professional identity and practices as a teacher and a researcher. These implications will then be followed by some of my recommendations for actions that each stakeholder should take to improve on their practices for fostering student motivation.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational community

My findings suggest that some students in traditional classrooms may be perceived as unmotivated and unengaged in school due to a lack of autonomy in their learning. In traditional classrooms, students are put into predetermined schedules, having to be at a certain place at a certain time, doing whatever the teacher gives them for the period while juggling deadlines for all their other classes as well. In an environment that is very structured, students may feel trapped within a system that does not support their own learning needs. However, at Silver Birch S.S., if a student is having trouble with a particular subject, they can choose to spend a longer time in that department so that they can get the help they need before moving on to the next subject. In some cases, schools with a traditional structure may need to incorporate more flexibility to better foster student motivation and learning.

Another broad implication from my findings and as mentioned by both of my participants is that their students generally want to learn and want to be successful, but their learning environment can either support or suppress that drive. When success to students becomes solely about getting high grades, the lack of the growth mindset may become detrimental to a student’s intrinsic motivation. This was the case when Casey shared about her experiences working with
students in the gifted program. Thus, a good balance of growth mindset and success mindset may be required for students to not only be successful in a self-directed learning environment, but in any form of learning environment.

Lastly, my research findings suggest that some teachers in traditional schools may not have enough time or resources to interact with or assist their students on an individual basis. With classes of up to 30 students, it may be difficult to get to know each student one-on-one and thus, unmotivated students may not receive the support that they need. Through TA interviews, my participants were often able to identify students who were unmotivated and thus, were able to provide care and support to help increase these students’ motivation. However, in traditional schools, unmotivated students often slip through the cracks because they move through the educational system unnoticed or teachers do not have enough time to properly assist them. So perhaps if teachers took more time to talk with their students one-on-one, that may help teachers identify which students need more support so that they can better foster these students’ learning and motivation.

5.2.2 Narrow: My professional identity and practice

The implications of my findings made me reflect on my own professional identity and practice in regards to the ways I want to teach students in my own classroom. The purpose of schooling, I believe, is to foster a love for life-long learning in students and in order for students to want to learn, they have to be first motivated to learn. Whether I work in a self-directed learning school or a traditional classroom, I would like to put student motivation and engagement at the forefront of my pedagogy. This would mean that I give students more autonomy in their learning and that I would be a facilitator in the classroom, rather than a “sage on the stage”, as Casey puts it. To me, equity in education means that every student has equal opportunities to be
successful, and as a result of my findings, I believe that having a classroom environment that supports student autonomy will allow each of them to learn in a way that suits them best.

In my opinion, a teacher’s most important role is to foster student motivation and to advocate for student success. I aim to do this by building a positive one-on-one relationship with each of my students, so that I can better understand what their goals are and help them achieve success in their own terms. My work can inform other teachers on the importance of student motivation as well as encourage other teachers to take more time to get to know their students, because I believe the positive relationship between teacher and student is the cornerstone to student motivation and success. As a researcher, I will continually investigate the merits of self-directed learning in the classroom and will attend and perhaps share my insights in Professional Development opportunities to further improve and expand my pedagogical practices at future workshops and conferences. This section sums up the broad and narrow implications from my research findings and the next section will suggest some recommendations for various stakeholders in the educational community.

5.3 Recommendations

My participants’ perceptions of the positive effects of self-directed learning on student motivation lead me to first and foremost recommend that teachers provide more autonomy to their students no matter the educational context. There are various ways to support student autonomy in a traditional classroom as well, such as allowing students to work on long-term projects based on their own interests, set their own goals and deadlines with the guidance of the teacher and having a voice in how they are to be assessed. As my findings suggest, students who have a sense of ownership in their learning may be more motivated to learn and to succeed in school. Giving students greater freedom in their learning might also encourage them to pursue
their interests and thus increase their motivation to learn. Although providing students with more autonomy may make teachers feel like they are losing control in the classroom, sometimes it is important to let go of some control in order to allow for something to grow.

My second recommendation is for teachers, administrators and other school staff to get to know students better in whatever capacity they can. Teachers, who interact with students on a daily basis, should particularly strive to speak with their students more frequently one-on-one. Although this may be difficult to implement in a traditional classroom, I would recommend that during work periods, teachers schedule five minute meetings with each student to discuss their progress and any concerns they may have and if the student needs more time with the teacher, they can meet during lunch or after school. Having these one-on-one sessions with each student will make sure that every student’s voice is heard and sometimes students may be shy to take the first step in approaching the teacher. Having more frequent meetings with the parents and student will also be a tremendous help in supporting student learning. A foreseen issue with this recommendation is that traditional school workloads and scheduling may restrict teachers from implementing this practice. However, I strongly believe that if teachers are able to implement this, the support and care from the school staff and family members will greatly enhance student motivation.

Lastly, as a long term goal, I think teacher education should make pre-service teachers more aware of the idea of self-directed learning and teach them how they can incorporate this into their classroom. Although my research was conducted as a case study in a self-directed secondary school, the practices of that school can be extended to traditional classrooms as well. Self-directed learning may not only enhance student motivation to learn, but I believe it is an essential life skill for students outside the classroom as well. Although we often use terms such
as inquiry and project-based learning in teacher education, much of what is happening in schools is still very much teacher-directed. I believe that in order to reap the benefits of self-directed learning in secondary school education, teachers need to be trained how to implement self-directed strategies so that students gain the very necessary skills to direct themselves outside of the classroom and into the future beyond.

This section provided some recommendations from the researcher as a follow-up to the implications concluded from the research findings. The next section will highlight areas of further research to expand the scope of this research study.

5.4 Areas of Further Research

This research study was quite limited in the participant sample size as well as the type of participants we were able to interview. Further research can be expanded to other schools with similar self-directed programs to see if the findings are supported across schools of a similar education model. Educational researchers should also direct their attention to studying student perspectives on the same issue, because perhaps there may be a discrepancy between teacher perceptions of student motivation and a student’s self-reported experience of motivation. I would also like to know the parents’ perspectives as well, whether they were aware of the self-directed program and chose to send their child there and if they notice any changes in their child’s behaviour and habits as a result of attending a self-directed learning school. Lastly, I think it would be very interesting to conduct a longitudinal study to look into graduates of a self-directed secondary school and to study how having participated in such a school system may have influenced their future lives in post-secondary and adulthood.

Some questions I still have at the end of my research is whether there are any long term effects to having attended a self-directed secondary school. I also wonder about the students who
the self-directed learning model failed to serve. It would be interesting to interview students who decided to switch schools after attending a self-directed one and learn more about their experiences and reasons for leaving.

5.5 Concluding Comments

My research placed an emphasis on teacher perceptions of student motivation in a self-directed learning environment and their reported practices to foster student motivation. This research is significant for not only teachers working in self-directed learning schools but also for traditional classroom teachers who may be having a hard time keeping their students motivated. Since motivation is an issue that all teachers must deal with, the findings of my study will hopefully help teachers working in all education models.

It is my hope that teachers recognize the importance of student motivation in the classroom and will actively improve on their teaching practices to foster student motivation and learning. It is also my wish that teachers take more time to get to know their students so that they can support their students in as many ways as possible. According to my participants, and from my own experiences as well, teacher care and support is a fundamental strategy to enhance student motivation. Lastly, as a graduate from a self-directed secondary school myself, I have experienced the merits of learning under my own self-direction and of receiving the required support from my teachers. The long-term benefits for having participated in such a program are still to be determined, but from where it has taken me so far, I would say the future looks optimistic.
References


Appendix A – Consent Letter

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date ____________________

Dear _____________________,

My name is Ellier Leng and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research study will focus on how teachers working in an alternative school system perceive and foster intrinsic motivation in students. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have worked at least two years in a self-directed learning environment as well as at least two years in a traditional schooling system. I think that your knowledge and experiences will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve an approximately 60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for 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. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected phone and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Ellier Leng
**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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Ellier Leng and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ___________________________

Name: (printed) _______________________

Date: _______________________________
Appendix B - Interview Protocol

Background of interviewee:

1) Can you start by describing your current job and responsibilities?
2) Can you tell me a bit about your formal training: where did you study?
   a. When did you get your degree?
   b. How long ago have you completed your schooling?
3) What motivated you to choose education as your profession?
4) How long have you worked at this school?
   a. How long have you worked at traditional schools?

School context:

5) Could you describe a typical day for a teacher at Silver Birch S.S.?
   a. Prompts (about classes, breaks, transitions, extracurriculars, planning time, etc.)
   b. How about for a student?
6) What makes this school different from other schools or places you’ve worked?
   a. School culture
   b. Student attitudes towards education
   c. Colleagues
7) When you first began teaching at Silver Birch S.S., was there an adjustment period?
   a. Can you describe this adjustment period?
8) What do you enjoy about working at this school? What are some challenges?

Motivation in students:

9) How would you define academic motivation?
10) In your experience, what does an intrinsically motivated student ‘look like’ in the classroom?
   a. Prompts (about behaviours, attitudes, academic achievements)
11) Have you recently worked with an unmotivated student?
   a. Can you tell me about this student?
      i. Prompts (about behaviours, attitudes, academic achievements)
   b. What differences did you notice between this student and their motivated peers?
   c. What strategies have you used to support students who aren’t intrinsically motivated?
12) What factors do you think affect the motivation levels of your students at Silver Birch S.S.?
   a. Classroom factors
   b. Relationships with classmates, teachers
   c. Factors outside of school
13) Do you notice difference in student motivation between Silver Birch S.S. and other more traditional schools you have worked in?
   a. Can you describe some of these differences?