You Are Not Alone: Promoting International Adolescent Students’ Learning Motivation Through Peer Support

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements For the degree of Master of Teaching

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Abstract

The present qualitative study examines the question: How can teachers help build peer support to promote international adolescent students’ learning motivation. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two Ontario certified teachers working in the Greater Toronto Area who have experience both in teaching adolescents from different countries and in working as host teachers. This study aims to explore different strategies teachers use in classroom to facilitate group work so that international adolescent students and native students can both benefit from working with each other. One outstanding strategy both participants highlight is the role of students who have similar background with the international students. Even if they don’t speak another language than English, they still play important role in helping international students get engaged in different learning activities. Findings also suggest that teachers face challenges from both international and native students, and even some native students’ parents. The implications for the education community and personal practice are discussed, and recommendations are made for teachers better facilitate both international adolescent students and native students through group work.

Key Words: International Adolescent Students, peer support, learning motivation
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and extend my sincere gratitude to the many people who helped to bring this research project to fruition.

First and foremost, I wish to thank my academic instructors, Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic and Sarah Cashmore, for their care, commitment, continual support, and guidance throughout the research process.

I would also like to show extensive gratitude to all of the research participants who warmly contributed their stories and experiences. Without this willingness to share, the research would not have been possible.

Meanwhile, I am extremely grateful for the MT P/J-251 cohort for their support, kindness and positive vibes. Spending our two years together has been a true pleasure and a blessing for me.

Last but certainly not least, I am forever indebted to my loving family and my friends for their unconditional understanding, constant support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study. Without their unconditional love, I would not have been able to continue in my educational pursuits and make a dream come true.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction: Research Context

International students visit Canada from all over the world. Canada remains a very attractive destination for international students when they seek a suitable country for pursuing international education at the postsecondary level. In the Canada First 2009 Survey (CBIE 2009), over half of student participants in the survey (53%) replied that Canada was their first choice of destination for pursuing their post-secondary education. Almost all student participants said that they thought of Canada as a place to reach their educational potential. Several factors influenced international students’ choice of educational institution, but the most important one appeared to be the quality of education the student would get from the relevant institution, followed by the availability of the desired program at that particular institution. From survey respondents, almost 9 students in 10 were satisfied with their decision to come to study in Canada, and over 80% said they would recommend Canada as a study destination to friends in their home country.

Altogether there were more than 218,200 long-term (staying for at least six months) international students in Canada in 2010 (Kunin, 2009), it is noticeable that among these students, 16.1% of them were in secondary schools or less (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). In other words, more adolescents from other countries are coming to Canada to study, which highlights the importance of teachers’ preparation to meet the rapid increasing needs of ELL students at adolescent level.

Adolescence is a crucial period. During adolescents’ transition to middle school, they
confront a series of new social and educational demands and dramatic challenge, one requiring adjustment to change in themselves, in their families and in their peer group (Lerner & Galambos, 2000). There has been considerable evidence that the academic and social climate of middle schools influences students’ adjustment across multiple domains (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). Because adolescents are going through a period within the life span when most of their biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered childlike to what is considered adult. There are many factors that impact the adolescent’s developing sense of self, such as maturation, school environment, parental influences, social class and peer relations (Dusek & Guay-McIntyre, 2003).

However, when international adolescents come to Canada, they are far away from their families, likely to be exposed to a language different from their first ones, and thus lacking communications with their teachers and peers in Canada, which will be very likely to have a negative effect on their living and learning experience in Canada.

1.1 Research Problem

Motivation is usually defined as an internal state that arouses, directs and maintains behavior (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2012). It is an attempt to explain the reasons for certain behavior (Hayward & Gorman, 2004). In other words, when we ask a person why he/she acts in a particular way, we are essentially asking about his/her motivation. Some other researchers explain motivation as ‘the willingness to attend and learn material in a development program’ (Cole, Feild, & Harris, 2004, p. 67). They illustrate that though ability and intellect influence
what students can do, the level of motivation influences students’ focus and level of effort expended on a given learning activity (Cole et al., 2004). However, when international students come to Canada, especially when they come to Canada when they are just entering their adolescence, they sometimes are at risk losing their learning motivation due to many reasons (Lan, 2014).

International students, in particular those from a home where a language other than English is spoken, i.e., English-language learners (ELLs), are faced with many challenges in high school. The vast majority are inadequately prepared for the literacy demands and are at immediate academic risk on almost every subject (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). The challenges for English-language learners are especially difficult, because many aspects are included, such as low performance and slow improvement, measurement accuracy, instability of the ELL subgroup and factors outside of a school’s control (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). Among all these challenges, limited English proficiency (Kanno & Kangas, 2014), different classroom structures (Greene et al., 2004), culture shock or adjustment difficulties (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005), fear of failure (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002), and isolation (Zhao et al., 2005) are the most common barriers that hinder their academic improvement, have negative impacts on their learning motivation, and can be noticed by teachers. Among all these factors, as an international student in Canada myself, I mainly focus on how the peer relationship will influence those international adolescent students’ learning performance, especially when they arrive in Canada when they are just entering their adolescence.
The changes in social environment that occur during adolescence might interact with increasing executive functions and heightened social sensitivity to influence a number of adolescent behaviors (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Considering the fact that the influences of peers on adolescent behavior have been found to be quite significant (Berndt, 1979; Cheung & Ng, 1988; Mussen, 1983), how to help international adolescents quickly find new peers and feel the sense of belonging remains a task to be further studied.

Although the significance of adolescent peer groups has been studied, one important limitation of previous research is that they highlight the negative impacts peers can have on adolescents, while the supportive and reformatory educational functions peers possess have not been discussed enough, let alone the potential benefits international adolescent students can get from their peers. Adolescents obtain the sense of belonging to their peers based on their peers’ acceptance; while some scholars just state that the beneficial effects of peer belonging result from students’ personal feelings (Goodenow, 1993). Teachers tend to spare more effort on detecting problems or troubles among peers and thus conduct regulation to help get rid of them. However, it is more significant when teachers realize the importance of the positive and supportive peer groups and take advantages of them, especially in helping students whose first languages are different from English to obtain the sense of belonging. Research indicates that peers are powerful socialization agents, alternatively promoting social competence and positive school engagement or, less often, amplifying risk for social exclusion, problem behavior, and school disengagement (Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2011).
Adolescents from other countries are faced with more challenges and thus have more needs. Their poor English proficiency may be obstacles when they communicate with their teachers and their peers. Considering the interrelationship among the learning motivation, academic achievement, English proficiency and peer influence, how to help international adolescents better adapt to a new environment and deal with all the changes and challenges has become every teacher’s primary concern.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research is to learn how teachers can promote positive peer influences in the school context when there are international adolescents in their classes, because support from teachers and peers can have some profound effects on students’ success (Wang & Eccles, 2013) and their overall adjustment in school (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010). Students’ interaction with teachers and their peers play a significant role in supporting young adolescents’ academic motivation, classroom engagement, and their sense of school belonging (Wentzel 2012). However, considering international adolescents’ level of English proficiency, their needs of communication with peers, and unstable social and emotional relationship with others, it is not easy for teachers to help them build up positive relationship with their peers.

Adolescents are going through a period when they are forming their independent social circles. Thus, peers begin to have a greater impact on them than adults. Research has illustrated that peer academic support and emotional support can both promote students’ motivation, engagement, and be associated with positive academic and social outcomes (Wentzel et al.,
Therefore, how to take advantage of peer groups to subtly influence adolescents is what I am going to study in this research. In this research, I also aim at figuring out strategies teachers can utilize to affect peer groups either directly or circuitously to help build up a supportive and beneficial atmosphere for adolescence’ growth and development. It is my hope to facilitate further development of adolescents by enhancing feelings of acceptance and support in their peer groups.

1.3 Research Questions

The principal question instructing my study is: how does a sample of teachers promote positive peer influences in the school context to support international adolescents’ development, especially when they are concerned with poor English proficiency and lack of learning motivation? Subsidiary questions to further guide this research include:

- What indicators of “lack of learning motivation” do teachers recognize from students?
- What range of instructional approaches and strategies do teachers take to stimulate students' learning motivation in ways intended to support their social-emotional well-being?
- How, if at all, do teachers collaborate with peers to support adolescents from other countries?
- What role, if any, does relationship building with peers play in teachers’ responses?
- How do peers respond to teachers’ approaches?

This study also aims to stimulate awareness of the importance of teachers’ influence on
adolescent peer groups and inspire teachers to be mindful of their significance in building beneficial and inclusive peer environment.

1.4 Background of the Researcher and Reflexive Positioning

As someone who has taught students ranging from 15 to 18 for 12 years, I am concerned that students are rather vulnerable in this period, especially when they are sent to another country to study. Away from their families and friends, communicating with others in a different language which they are not yet familiar with, they are in a dilemma that on the one hand, they are immature and thus unconsciously desire caring and patience from the adults; while on the other hand, they are considering themselves as adults who hide their emotions underneath and lay too much stress on how others, especially people at the same age see them. It is difficult to construct good interpersonal relationship with adolescents especially when teachers even cannot communicate with them in their first language; to destroy it, however, is rather easy. Sometimes, a harsh sentence or even one single word will instantly break the connection between teachers and students. Therefore, it is important for me to find out the effective strategies neither compromising on matters of principle nor causing counter consequence. In addition, peer ecology is an essential supplement element. International students are very likely to have difficulty getting along and working with their native peers. How to make full use of peer influence is a question I keep asking myself. Adolescents tend to consider themselves as independent people who should be responsible for themselves. The reality is that they give high credits on their peers. Peers’ judgement and attitudes will highly impact their self-esteem. In
view of this complex situation, I am committed to supporting adolescents’ growth.

1.5 Overview

This research project is organized into five chapters. I review the literature in the fields of motivation, including how different kinds of motivations will influence students' academic achievement, challenges international students face and the significance of peer groups in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I concentrate on the research design, including methodology and relevant information. In Chapter 4 I review the findings and speak to their significance in light of the literature. In Chapter 5 I discuss the implications of the findings for the education and research communities and my own teaching practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the area of student’s learning motivation, how motivation influences academic achievement, challenges that ELL students face and factors that influence their learning motivation. More specifically, I review themes related to how peer acceptance affects adolescents from other countries, especially in terms of their learning motivation. I start by reviewing the literature in the area of motivation, including intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and I consider how they are interrelated and have impacts on students’ leaning efforts and effects. Next, I review research on factors that have influence on ELL students’ learning in order to target the key elements that have the most significant effects on their academic achievement. In addition, I review studies about the features of adolescents’ self-esteem. From there, I review research studies about the connection between the peer relation and learning performances. Finally, I further review the crucial benefits adolescents get when they have their peers’ acceptance.

2.1 Motivation

How individuals choose to spend their time, how much effort they put in any given task, how they feel about and value the task, and how long they persist at the task are influenced by their motivation, which is a complex part of human psychology and behavior (Urdan & Schoenfelder 2006). Wentzel (2012) states that motivation is a set of beliefs that drive and maintain behavior and is am significant precursor to students’ learning and success in school.
Some other researchers explain motivation as ‘the willingness to attend and learn material in a development program’ (Cole, Feild, & Harris, 2004, p. 67). They illustrate that though ability and intellect influence what students can do, the level of motivation influences students’ focus and level of effort expended on a given learning activity (Cole, Feild, & Harris, 2004).

### 2.1.1 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations

One popular motivation theory divides human motives into two types, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Reiss, 2012). Intrinsic motivation refers to the natural human tendency to look for and conquer challenges because the activity itself is rewarding or satisfying (Anderman, Anderman, & Gimbert, 2010; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Reiss, 2012). For example, when a child plays basketball for no reason other than because that is what he wants to do, we see intrinsic motivation in this child, as intrinsic motivation is commonly defined as doing something for its own sake (Reiss, 2012). Therefore, intrinsic motivation is usually associated with many positive outcomes in school such as academic achievement, creativity, reading comprehension and enjoyment, as well as using deep learning strategies (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, & Hayenga, 2009).

In contrast, Reiss (2012) states that extrinsic motivation refers to the pursuit of an instrumental goal, which means when people are doing something to earn a grade, avoid punishment, please the teacher or for some other reasons that have very little to do with the task itself, they experience extrinsic motivation. In other words, extrinsic motivation is basically exemplified through a person’s desire to obtain some external again or an extra outcome, in this
case, at school, students are motivated by some extrinsic rewards or reinforcers (Hall & Marshall, 2015). As a matter of fact, many researchers state that extrinsic motivation is associated with negative emotions, poor academic achievement, and maladaptive learning strategies (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, & Hayenga, 2009).

Based on these definitions of motivation as well as different interpretations of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, the essential distinction between these two types of motivations is the student’s reason for acting, that is, the location of the cause to a certain action is internal or external-inside or outside the person (Reeve, 2002; Reeve & Jang, 2006).

However, as I think about the intrinsic/extrinsic concept of motivation, I find it impossible to tell just by looking if a behavior is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. For example, a student may freely choose to work hard on activities they don’t find particularly enjoyable because they know the activities are important in reaching a valued goal. In this case, we say this student has internalized an external cause (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006).

Another interpretation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is that they are two independent factors and at any given time people can be motivated by some aspects of each (Covington & Mueller, 2001). Therefore, teachers have to encourage and nurture intrinsic motivation, at the same time ensuring that extrinsic motivation supports students’ learning (Anderman, Anderman, & Gimbert, 2010; Brophy, 2003).

2.1.2 How much does motivation influence academic achievement?

The contrast between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is meaningful partly because of
their academic correlates (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, & Hayenga, 2009). It has been studied that promoting students’ intrinsic motivation will foster their school persistence, in other words, being motivated in an intrinsic manner is directly associated with greater school persistence intention (Renaud-Dubé, Guay, Talbot, Taylor, & Koestner, 2015).

Usually, when considering academic motivation, there is another useful way to identify it, that is, motivation is classified into two kinds: one based on the expectation of long-term rewards (e.g., fulfilling curriculum expectations) and one based on the rewards of ongoing experience (e.g., enjoying the activity itself) (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014). As a matter of fact, the first type of motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014). Therefore, motivation has been considered as a crucial predictor of academic achievement (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Walker & Mansell, 2006, Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014). Essentially, motivation is considered as a critical issue for academic performance (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000).

First, there is a relation existing between choice of direction and intrinsic motivation (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). When individuals find a task particularly enjoyable or identifiable with themselves, they are more likely to fully accept and participate in the task (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). As for students, those who are intrinsically motivated have been noticed to more actively engage in learning and teaching, while those who are extrinsically motivated instead tend to be more passive (Benware & Deci, 1984).

Secondly, individuals who find a task more intrinsically motivating tend to expend a
higher degree of intensity or effort in its production (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). For example, students’ enjoyment of learning new material and updating skills has been connected to the level of effort they expend under complex learning situations (Simons, Dewitte, & Lens, 2004).

Finally, levels of intrinsic motivation is also associated with academic achievement through their impact on motivational persistence, in other words, when people find a task enjoyable or interesting, they will be engaged in the task for longer periods of time, persisting beyond the point where they are rewarded (Deci, 1972). For example, intrinsically motivated students are likely to persist longer on learning tasks, which yields better academic achievement (Gottfried, 1985) and test performance (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006), among others.

Given this reasoning, researchers believe that higher levels of intrinsic motivation lead to higher academic achievement (Cerasoli et al., 2014).

However, many researchers argue that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is invalid because motives cannot be divided into just two categories (Reiss & Havercamp, 1998; Reiss, 2012). The first reason is that universal human motives are multifaceted and do not divided into simply two types (Reiss, 2014). In addition, different measures of intrinsic motivation, such as cognitive and behavioral measures, often receive different or even opposite results (Eisenberger, Pierce, & Cameron, 1999). Another reason is that almost every experiment on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation failed to control for reward novelty and virtually every demonstration of reward undermining intrinsic motivation can be
reinterpreted as evidence that students do not enjoy learning activities when they are distracted (Reiss, 2014).

Considering all above, Reiss (2009) illustrates six motivational reasons for low school achievement: fear of failure (high need for acceptance), incuriosity (low need for cognition), lack of ambition (low need for power), spontaneity (low need for order), lack of responsibility (low need for honor), and combativeness (high need for vengeance) (p. 219).

2.2 Factors that will Have Impact on International Students’ Learning in High School

International students, in particular those from a home where a language other than English is spoken, i.e., English-language learners (ELLs), are faced with many challenges in high school. The vast majority are inadequately prepared for the literacy demands and are at immediate academic risk on almost every subject (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). The challenges for English-language learners are especially difficult because many aspects, such as low performance and slow improvement, measurement accuracy, instability of the ELL subgroup and factors outside of a school’s control (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). Among all these challenges, limited English proficiency (Kanno & Kangas, 2014), different classroom structures (Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004)), culture shock or adjustment difficulties (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005), fear of failure (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002), and isolation (Zhao et al., 2005) are the most common barriers that hinder their academic improvement, have negative impacts on their learning motivation, and can be noticed by teachers.

2.2.1 Language influence
Languages play a paramount role in any society in general and in education in particular. Students who enrolled in a school where a different language is in contact will soon realize that society, family, peers and school all place significance on this different language, thus their own assessment, together with the context, the information, and the knowledge they acquire will shape their attitudes toward this new learning environment, their general set of values, their philosophy in life, and their motivation in learning (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2014).

When studying abroad, students learn a different language not only to understand it, to accomplish a task, or to appear more able than others; they learn it for reasons such as using that language to learn other subjects, passing exams and applying for higher education, together with reasons such as making friends with the people who speak the language (Dornyei, 1990; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Therefore, the English proficiency will have great impacts on their learning motivation to think about the meanings and implications of the learning task and not just about meeting the requirements (Al Rifai, 2010).

Study has demonstrated that educational outcomes for students who are not proficient in English are left behind those of students whose primary language is English (NCELA, 2007). ELLs’ English-reading proficiency predicts not only literacy learning performance, but also math tests scores as well as many other subjects (Beal, Adams, & Cohen, 2010). In California in 2007, ELLs score lower on end-of-year achievement tests and are more likely to drop out of high school than English-proficient students (California Department of Education, 2007). The data shows that in California in 2007, only 25% of the ELLs who graduate from high school have
successfully completed all the courses required for admission to the state university system (California Department of Education, 2007).

Usually, poor English is considered as a literacy problem, thus merely drawing attention on how to help ELLs develop reading skills (National Center for Education Evaluation, 2007). Actually, growing evidence has illustrated that limited English proficiency also has implications for high school students’ success in math (Beal et al., 2010).

However, there has been relatively little investigation into how limited English proficiency affects students’ learning motivation. Still research has explained that if students cannot easily understand the teacher’s explanations or the textbook materials, they will not benefit from the instruction to the same extent as English-proficient students (Guerrero, 2004), and therefore, their learning motivation will certainly suffer from this.

2.2.2 Peer influence

Adolescents support their peers’ adjustment by meeting their basic and developmental needs (Deci et al., 2000). This is especially true when they need the sense of relatedness and acceptance (Ashmore, & Brown, 2007). Students, adolescents in particular, their perceptions of peer support are associated with their success in school (Anderman, 2003). Therefore, how to help provide students with their peers’ support is importance for teachers. And to do that, teachers first need to understand who can be considered as peers and what kinds of influence peers can have on students.

2.2.2.1 Peer
Peer is defined as a person who is the same age or has the same social position or the same abilities as other people in a group (Cambridge Dictionary, 2013). Research illustrates that peers are powerful companions that can either promote competence and positive school engagement or amplify risk for exclusion and school disengagement (Rubin et al., 2011). As in this study, peers refer to adolescents who study together in one school or live nearby in one community.

2.2.2.2 Peer influence

School life involve students in a process of moving away from the closed environment of the parental home where they are greatly influenced by their family to a social world where they are among peers and have to begin to make independent choices (Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore et al., 2007), and this is extremely true when international students come to Canada during their adolescence, thereby, along with their growth, they are transferring their social focus from parents, family relatives and friends to peers they get along during school time and in community. Since they are at the similar age and share friends and topics, they are having closer connection and thus having stronger influence on one and another.

The influences of peers in school have been found to be quite significant because students learn as much from each other as they learn from teachers or textbooks (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Regarding academic outcomes, during adolescence, peers can both promote and discourage academic attitudes and behaviors that contribute to school success, partly because a lot of school assignments are done in groups (Lynch, Lerner, & Leventhal, 2013). In fact,
students tend to select peers who demonstrate similar levels of academic achievement and school engagement (Lynch, et al., 2013), in other words, students at similar academic level are more likely to learn and work collaboratively better.

Research in the field of peer relations has pointed out that social relationships are potential sources of influence on students’ motivation to learn (Berndt, 1999). Adolescents who believe they are valued and respected by their peers are more likely to demonstrate more achievement motivation which is also associated with having a good quality friendship with peers who value academic (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). Therefore, having peer friends has been positively related to grades and test scores in high school, together with students’ involvement in school-related activities (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Otherwise, when students are at a time when peers are becoming highly valued but virtually have few opportunities to collaborate with peers on meaning activities, they may start to doubt their ability to make achievement and their intrinsic motivation to learn often declines (Stipek, 1998). In addition, due to the increased public evaluation that takes place in many middle schools, adolescents often experience increased self-consciousness and a dropping confidence, thus feeling safe from being put down is an important component of peer group environment that supports students’ risk-taking and active learning (Covington, 1992; Brophy, 2013).

Considering the impacts that peer groups have on students’ academic achievement, since teachers have the opportunity to create inclusive classroom environment which can help low-accepted students to develop new social status and thus enhance their peer relationships, and
to promote communicative interaction among the students in the class (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Wentzel, 2003). One possible approach research studies have proved is that teachers can seek to promote students’ academic performance through their impact on the quality of students’ peer relations (Kiuru et al., 2015). A good combination of teacher and peer relations can positively promote learning motivation and affect academic skill development (Kiuru et al., 2015). After all, how students’ academic performance is early in a new school will have long-term impacts on their learning motivation, academic and mental health outcomes (Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999).

2.3 Adolescent Self-Esteem Features

During adolescence, one essential development for adolescents is to establish a realistic and coherent sense of identity in the context of relating to others (Nyarko, 2012). Identity includes two concepts: one is self-concept, which is the set of beliefs one has about oneself, including beliefs about one’s attributes (e.g., tall, smart), roles and goals (e.g., occupation one wants to have when grown), and interests, values, and beliefs (e.g., religious, political); the other is self-esteem, which involves evaluating how one feels about one’s self-concept (American Psychological Association, 2002; Gupta, & Thapliyal, 2015).

Self-esteem is one of the most vital personality elements, which has a long-lived relevance through the whole life of a person. Psychologists believe that self-esteem remains as a significant criterion of individual’s development through different age groups, as well as while their life goals, accomplishments and needs are developing (Meskauskiene, 2015).
Adolescence is believed to be a critical time for the development of one’s self-esteem (DuBois & Tevendale, 1999; Feldman & Elliott, 1990; McGuire, Neiderhiser, Reiss, Hetherington, & Plomin, 1994), particularly because adolescents are rapidly approaching adulthood, and beginning to assume adult roles and responsibilities (Chen & Farruggia, 2002). It has been hypothesized that events in adolescence can have a great impact on later adult behaviors, and mental health (Pergamit, Huang, & Lane, 2001). Generally, it is very likely that high level self-esteem serves as a positive resilience which enables adolescents to make effective adaptation corresponding to different situations, such as a different language environment or a new learning atmosphere (Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

Another feature of adolescent self-esteem is the high evaluation of success and recognition. High self-esteem is positively connected with aims, expectations and thereby determining behaviors and approaches the adolescents will adapt to make achievement and build up experience (Bachman, O’Malley, Freedman-Doan, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2011). Their eagerness to prove their maturity, to get social, emotional, and academic recognition and to subconsciously achieve the well acknowledged standard of success, however, makes them flexible and vulnerable to various possibilities. Therefore, adults’ guidance and peers’ positively functioning have great impact on their development (Chen & Farruggia, 2002).

The importance of learning about adolescent self-esteem is that students’ feelings of positive esteem will enhance how much they believe they are capable to deal successfully with the academic world's demands (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Those students who like
themselves, and who take pride in performing academically well within their peer group can better appreciate their capacities in the academic context and are likely to perform better in the academic setting (Di Giunta, Alessandri, Gerbino, Kanacri, Zuffiano, & Caprara, 2013). Hence, how to build supportive peer groups, particularly how to help adolescents have a beneficial social circle is critical to all educators.

In conclusion, educators, or more specifically, teachers at school, should be aware of their students' personality antecedents to better attune their efforts to improve their students' beliefs about how much they are capable to successfully pursue challenging academic and personal goals in the context of learning collaboratively with their peers (Bidjerano & Dai, 2007).

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review, I study research connected to motivation and its two main categories. I also review studies about how motivation has influence on students’ academic achievement. In addition, I specially examine research papers illustrating main challenges ELL students face and how these challenges have impacts on their learning motivation. I then review how peer influence functions in school setting. This review emphasizes the importance of having a supportive peer influence to promote adolescents’ development. By studying some critical factors, I also examine some of the key characteristics that make adolescent peer support crucial to their development. In addition, it raises questions about how teachers can make use of the peer influence to better facilitate students’ learning. By examining the demanding characteristics of adolescent self-esteem, I hope I could find out a practical and effective way to help adolescents
whose first languages are not English to better participate in peer activities so that they can both
develop their English proficiency as well as leaning motivation. By doing the research, I learn
more about the significance of constructing a positive interpersonal relationship with adolescents
and their peers, thus further support their growth.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

In this chapter I present the research methodology, explain the rationale for using various methodological approaches to conduct my research and explore answers to my questions. First, I identify my research approach and procedure. After that I describe the instruments that I used to collect data. Then I make up the sampling criteria, given the fact that this research was conducted by interviewing three participants. I list some information that I took into consideration when I selected participants. Another subcategory of this chapter is to illustrate the process of how I analyzed the data based on some relevant ethical concerns. Finally, I address some of the methodological limitation of this study and apart from this, I also identified the strengths of it.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

Typically, quantitative methodologies test theory deductively from existing knowledge, through developing hypothesized relationships and proposed outcomes for study, while differently, qualitative researchers are guided by certain ideas, perspectives or hunches regarding the subject to be investigated (Carr, 1994; Cormack, 1991). Therefore, as Carr (1994) states that neither quantitative nor qualitative is superior, I choose to use a qualitative method.

I employ a qualitative research methodology to gain insight into the strategies teachers are using to help build up a supportive peer group to facilitate adolescents’ growth. The rationale for using this methodology is that it is best suited to address a problem in which I do not know the variables and need to explore (Creswell, 2002). Given the fact that qualitative research
involves data collection procedures which lead primarily to open-ended, non-numerical data, and this data is then analyzed primarily by non-statistical methods, two very important distinctions of qualitative categories explain the reason why they are suited for my research purpose (Dornyei, 2007). As Dornyei (2007) argues, qualitative research is first not numerical but verbal, amounting to short textual labels and secondly, it is usually “not determined a priori but is left open and flexible as long as possible to be able to account for the subtle nuances of meaning uncovered during the process of investigation” (p. 26). Considering that I had three participants interviewed, qualitative research methodology better applies.

I view support as the central phenomenon in my study, since it is the key concept and process studied in this research (Creswell, 2002). Besides, considering the nature of my target phenomenon (i.e., support), I decided to follow the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1998) who explained that “qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional methods” (p. 11).

One concern is that I am left with the issue of the generalizability of qualitative research. However, compared with quantitative researchers’ following a “meaning in the general” strategy, qualitative researchers concentrate on an in-depth understanding of the “meaning in the articular” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 27). Therefore, given the research purpose I have and questions I design, a qualitative research study is an ideal approach for me, because it provides me with an opportunity to learn from a small but experienced group of teachers about their precious
strategies and what’s more, their teaching philosophies.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

As qualitative researchers often argue for the superiority of their approach on the grounds that it respects the complexity of the social world, researchers and participants make reflections on courses of action in the process of engaging in them, and may adjust (or completely transform) their behavior in light of these reflections (Hammersley, 2008). Reflections, or more specifically, primary data comes from artifacts, historical documents, observations or directly from people through interview (Anderson & Michael Jr, 1998).

Basically, all interviews are used to get to know the interviewee better, yet the purpose of that knowing varies based on the research questions and the disciplinary perspective of the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Because I am most interested in teachers’ strategies on building up supportive peer groups among adolescent students, interviews with a sample of teachers who have experience in teaching from grade 6 to 12 would provide me with the most relevant and valuable information. Asking open-ended questions create space for participants to best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspective of me or past research findings (Creswell, 2002). In addition, one obvious advantage of interviews is that they allow participants to describe their detailed personal information and at the same time, I can have a better control over the types of information obtained because I can select specific questions to elicit this information (Creswell, 2002).

“Collecting the data can be one of the most enjoyable aspects of doing research”
It is ideal to use semi-structured and face-to-face interview for interviewing participants who are not hesitate to talk, and who are articulate, because they can share ideas comfortably with me (Creswell, 2002). As Dornyei (2007) argues, there is a lot of things that may go wrong while doing research in the field, especially within the field of education. However, doing semi-structured interviewing provides for more flexibility with which participants are able to express specific information related to the particular events and phenomena, and it also allows the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new idea on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.101). By doing semi-structured interview, I can not only accommodate the changes but also capitalize on them and produce exciting results.

Unlike everyday interviews, the interview used for research purposes is a highly-disciplined endeavor (Anderson & Michael Jr, 1998). It demonstrates value placed on individual subject and allows for in-depth analysis and pursuit of details geared to each respondent (Anderson & Michael Jr, 1998). By conducting individual face-to-face interviews with participants, I organized my protocol (see Appendix B) into 4 sections. I started with communicating the participants’ background information. This was followed by questions about their working experience with adolescents as host teachers. The third section is about how they believe teachers may have influence on international adolescent students’ growth and relevant strategies. The interview finally ended up with asking questions regarding challenges and next steps for teachers.
Examples of questions include:

• How to identify the international adolescent students’ learning motivation?

• What challenge and limitation you have noticed when teacher try to facilitate peer support to promote international students’ learning motivation?

• What strategies you have ever tried to help build up a positive peer groups to support students’ growth? Can you share some successful ones and ineffective ones?

3.3 Participants

In this section, I outline the sampling criteria that I used to select my participants, and discuss the various ways I went about finding suitable participants. I also have included a section in which I briefly introduce each of my participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

My teacher participants met the following criteria:

1. Teachers have more than five years’ experience teaching students at the age of adolescence.

2. Teachers have been working as a host teacher of adolescents.

3. Teachers have students from other countries in their classes.

4. One teacher may have his/her working experience in another country.

5. At least two participants work in the Greater Toronto Area in public schools.

6. There are both male and female participants.

Since there is little rigor in justifying sample size when doing a qualitative research,
qualitative researchers should examine their participants based on their history and culture (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenot, 2013). Therefore, in order to collect sufficient information, the participants that I interviewed have experienced teaching adolescent students and acting as host teachers as well. Alternatively, since early adolescence generally begins at around age 11, participants are not necessarily working in high schools but may be teaching in elementary schools at Grade 6 or 7. Therefore, I am interested in learning from participants who have experience in teaching adolescent students from different countries, in order to find out whether there are approaches that apply to the highly diverse students in Canada, in specific, in Greater Toronto area. Their teaching experiences may not be limited only within Canada but they have at least five years’ working experience as host teachers. This also explains the reason why I interviewed teachers who are working in public schools, for students in public schools are sharing diverse families, languages and beliefs. Lastly, I worked with both male and female participants varying in age and teaching specialty, so that I can learn from more possible perspectives despite of this small sample.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures/Recruitment

The process used to locate and recruit participants in a qualitative research study is crucial for controlling potential bias and for efficiently reaching a representative sample (Arcury & Quandt, 1999). Given the consideration that the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under study so as to maximize what we can learn, this goal can be best achieved by means of some sort of 'purposeful' or
'purposive' sampling (Dornyei, 2007). Preparing semi-structured interviews allows the voice of the participant to be heard within the research context, as well as allows me to pick up on social cues such as voice, innovation, and even body language (Affleck, Glass & Macdonald, 2012). Therefore, following the three broad approaches to selecting a sample for a qualitative study, that is, convenience sample, judgment sample and theoretical sample, I recruited my participants accordingly (Marshall, 1996).

As for convenience sample, though in terms of time, effort or money it is seeming the easiest, still when I get to my most accessible subjects, I need to be cautious and more thoughtful, because sometimes this approach to selection of a sample requires justifying (Marshall, 1996). I mostly followed the judgment sampling process, because it is about selectively selecting the most productive sample to answer the research questions I design (Marshall, 1996). Since I am interested in particular teachers who have sufficient experience working with international adolescents as host teachers, judgment sampling, also known as purposeful sampling, applies the most to me.

As conclusion, I combined both the convenience sampling and judgment sampling to recruit my participants. Since I used to be a high school teacher in China, I found one participant there to enrich the variety of the information I obtain. Meanwhile, because of the limitation of my knowledge about Canada, I thoughtfully selected participants only with the Greater Toronto area. To acquire these participants, I asked colleagues and professors for leads on individuals who may fit my criteria. Then I contacted individuals who knew teachers meeting my sampling
criteria. I also provided my information rather than ask for the information of potential participants to ensure individuals were volunteering to participate rather than feeling pressure or obligation.

3.3.3 Participant bios

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect his/her anonymity.

Leo

Leo was my first participant. At the time of the research Leo was a 10th grade teacher working with a mixed population of international and native students in his classroom. He had had a background in multicultural education and an experience of teaching English language learners overseas before he became a classroom teacher in Toronto. He had been teaching for more than fifteen years. Additionally, he possessed 8 years’ working experience as a host teacher in high school. Leo’s first-hand experience in supporting a diverse student population, including language minority students as well as exceptional students, provided insights into the specific practices pertinent to my research area.

Chris

Chris was my second participant. Chris possessed an additional qualification of supporting ELL. He had been teaching for twenty-eight years, working as an ESL resource teacher who supported language minority students in integrated classrooms as host teacher, and was working as a 11th grade math teacher by the time of the interview. Chris’ professional qualification and rich teaching experiences with ELLs provided in-depth knowledge on my
3.4 Data Analysis

Each one-on-one interview may last between 30-60 minutes with audio recording through the whole process. To analyze the data, I did it with caution because it may lead to the question of how this engagement should be handled on a personal level and how it should be reflected upon (Masaryk & Sokolova). Dornyei (2007) argues that qualitative research outcome is often ultimately the product the researcher’s subjective interpretation of the data, thus various “alternative interpretations are possible for each dataset” (p. 38). Therefore, analyzing qualitative data has to be a systematic process that organizes the data into manageable units, combines and synthesizes ideas, develops constructs, themes, patterns or theories and illuminates the important discoveries of the research (Dorney, 2007). In other words, I considered it as a monumental task that begins as soon as data are received.

Qualitative data analysis is a continuous activity which constantly evolve, and it follows pattern where a research findings and experience are wound together, no matter written or communicated (Dorney, 2007). This pattern will be given codes which are sorted into categories and later interpreted into major themes, a process which DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) presents as template approach. During my analysis to the data, I followed this process. I transcript the interviews and code all the data, carefully selecting information that is relevant to my study. Finally, I extracted valuable ideas and discuss the significant finding obtained.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures
Given the fact that the joint construction of qualitative data between researchers and interviewees has particular implications for the ownership, archiving of qualitative data raises a distinct set of concerns about confidentiality, researcher and participants’ anonymity and participants’ consent (Parry & Mauthner, 2004). My study to some extent has connection with adolescents, which highlights the importance of keeping anonymity of participants as well as adolescent students they may talk about. Protecting the identity and ensuring the anonymity of research participants, researchers themselves included, might be relatively unproblematic in quantitative datasets, while it can raise particular problems in the context of archived qualitative data precisely, due to the personal, detailed and in-depth nature of this data (Parry & Mauthner, 2004). Therefore, the awareness and utilization of appropriate ethical procedures is crucial to maximally avoid certain issues’ appearance.

Qualitative research requires subtler, more sustained and humanistic consideration of ethical issue (Iphofen, 2011). With guidance, I should be capable of offering a rationale for my topic and methods that show respect for the rights and dignity of those I am studying (Iphofen, 2011). I followed Connolly’s instructions (2003) that first I provided a thorough description of the interview process so that potential participants have the information they need to make an informed and voluntary research. Honoring and maintaining potential participants’ anonymity, confidentiality and privacy, I also respected their right to withdraw from the interview at any time (Connolly, 2003).

In conclusion, because of ethical concerns as well as time constraints for my study, I only
used publicly accessible information that has already been posted somewhere to get contact with potential participants and conduct my interviews in accordance with all the ethical aspects mentioned above.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Qualitative research is particularly significant because of its exploratory nature (Dornyei, 2007). It is an effective way of exploring new and uncharted areas. Qualitative methods are useful for making sense of highly complex situations, such as in the field of education, because the participant-sensitivity of qualitative research is extremely helpful in deciding what aspects of the data require special attention by offering priority guidelines that are validated by the researchers themselves (Dornyei, 2007).

Other advantages of qualitative research methods include answering “why” and “how” questions, broadening our understanding, longitudinal examination of dynamic phenomena and flexibility when things go wrong (Dornyei, 2007). As mentioned previously in this chapter, qualitative research methods not only enable researchers to adjust to the changes but also allow them to capitalize on them and produce exciting products.

However, there are still some weaknesses of qualitative research. First, due to the sample size and its generalizability, although the common qualitative practice of examining real experience may be useful and helpful in providing insight into a phenomenon, the specific conditions or insights might not apply broadly to others (Dornyei, 2007). Besides, because qualitative researchers have no actual means of assessing which of their discoveries are of more
general significance, it might either build too narrow theories or too complex ones (Dornyei, 2007). Another problem is that qualitative research study is usually time consuming and labor-intensive, which to some extent explains the relatively small sample sizes in qualitative inquires (Dornyei, 2007).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology and the rationale behind that methodology. I specifically address some major benefits researchers can obtain through doing qualitative research. I then outlined in what ways semi-structured interviews were useful to collect data. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews allowed me to gain deeper understanding about my research problem: how to build peer support to promote international adolescent students’ learning motivation. I then listed the sampling criteria that were followed by rationale for those criteria and described the basic information of participants. I used convenience sampling with the aim of finding teachers from different backgrounds to afford an understanding of the research topic from different perspectives. I explained the ethical issues surrounding this study, including worthiness of the study, consent, member-checks, right to withdraw, and data storage. Finally, I discussed the methodological limitations and highlighted some strengths in my study. Next, in Chapter 4, I will report on the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings based on the data I collected from the two interviews made with two Canadian high school teachers. While analyzing the data, I searched for answers to my research question: What strategies do teachers use to facilitate peer support and thus promote international students’ learning? With this knowledge, I hope to provide teachers with more insightful information about how to match peers, how to conduct group work, and how to address international students’ needs and thus better promote their learning. In the discussion, draw connections between participants’ perspectives, experiences and relevant research studies I learned in the Chapter 2 the literature review. My findings are categorized into the following five main themes:

1. Participants recognized certain academic and behavioral phenomena as indicators of students’ learning motivation.

2. Participants identified that different relationships between international adolescent students and their peers have different impacts on their learning.

3. Participants have several strategies to learn more about their students in order to provide more meaningful collaboration in the classroom.

4. Participants identified resources within and outside the school setting that can improve students personal and academic well-being.

5. Participants indicated that reluctant students and concerned parents can challenge their
work supporting adolescent international students.

These themes also have subheadings which further demonstrate how they work out. For each theme, I will first briefly describe its content, then report the participants’ perceptions and experiences, and finally study the significance of each theme in accordance with the existing research studies. At the end of this chapter, I summarize my findings and make introductions for next steps.

4.1 Participants Recognized Certain Academic and Behavioral Phenomena as Indicators of Students’ Learning Motivation.

Both participants highlighted the importance of being aware of how students’ learning motivation changed. They shared some knowledge about how to identify students’ learning motivation, which included students’ body languages in class, their academic performances, and some other behaviors. They suggested that teachers make the most of these indicators to better promote international students’ learning motivation.

4.1.1 Participants identified that certain body language could be indicators of students’ learning motivation.

Leo and Chris explained that there were various signals teachers could utilize to detect students’ learning motivation. They stressed that when teachers were aware of students’ non-verbal behaviors, such as how they were making eye contact with teachers or peers, how their sitting gestures appeared during classes, or how their energy level changed in class or during recess, teachers understood their students better and therefore were more likely to support
their learning and social or emotional well-beings.

Leo noticed in many cases that when their international students lost interest in learning or were experiencing great struggle, they would avoid making any eye contact with teachers or peers. Even when sometimes they had to do so, they made brief contact reluctantly and would looked away immediately. Leo listened to his students and learned from them that when they were struggling with their study, they were afraid to look into their teachers’ eyes. Leo described,

The reason why they don’t look at you is that they are afraid to see disappointment, questioning, or even frustration in your eyes. When they have trouble with learning or with adjusting to a new environment, they are really sensitive. Otherwise, they will be active to look at you and wish to be noticed and thus receiving more help from you.

Another non-verbal signal Leo highlighted include different sitting gesture. He illustrated that when students were not learning, they sat in a way that they pretended to be learning. It was more like a self-protection gesture. They would lower their head and keep quiet. They might pretend to be writing on their notebook, which turned out to be just doodling. They might pretend to be listening when someone was talking. However, their eyes didn’t have any focus. They wouldn’t nod or shake their heads indicating their agreement or disagreement. They were just sitting there, doing nothing.

Chris emphasized that as a teacher, it was extremely necessary to be aware of how students’ energy levels changed during class and in recess. In many cases, he noticed when students appeared bored or exhausted, it was not because they stayed up late the night before. It
was very likely that they were spending every single minute waiting for the recess, or in other words, waiting for the time they didn’t have to study or stay together with the teacher or their peers. During the recess, they were more energetic and they talked and played with their friends, more specifically, friends who spoke their first language.

What both participants recognized was what Rowntree (2015) explained in his book: to assess students’ learning, teachers have to be aware of certain distinct phenomena, among which students’ body languages are essential.

Rowntree (2015) explained in his book that many students would manifest different behaviors when they were learning. To assess students’ learning motivation, to some extent, was to identify their certain behaviors such as how attentive they were when they listened to the instructions, how engaged when they participated in group work, and how willingly they would make eye-contact with others.

As both participants emphasized, it was very helpful when they had this knowledge about students’ behaviors, because those behaviors provided them with more evidence about their learning performance.

4.1.2 Participants identified students’ academic performance as important indicators of their learning motivation.

Both Leo and Chris highlighted the importance of students’ academic performance as great indicator of their learning motivation. They explained that academic performance referred to students’ participation in various learning activities, the quality of their assignments, and the
scores they got in tests. Other than merely focusing on students’ scores, Leo and Chris addressed that it was how students participated in different kinds of learning activities, especially how they contributed in group work with their peers, that provided teachers with more authentic information on how they were learning and how willing they were to learn within the class setting.

Chris explained that when students were willing to cooperate with their peers, they considered themselves as members of the class. He shared that, usually, students from other countries tended to consider themselves as outsiders. They hardly had the sense of belonging. Chris mentioned that many international students didn’t care about others and they assumed they were not cared about by others either. Due to their limited English proficiency, they lacked confidence expressing their opinions; even though sometimes they had very wonderful ideas, they didn’t know how to share them with others. They worried that other students might laugh at their broken English or accents; they worried that they might not be understood. Or, they might even assume they would just be ignored by others in the class.

Therefore, both Leo and Chris stated that when they noticed those students were learning collaboratively with others, they could tell they must feel comfortable within either the small group they worked within, or the whole class. Chris recalled,

Only when you believe what you say will be valued will you continue expressing your opinion. It is quite common that when international students first come to a new class, they spend lots of time observing, finding their “position” in the class. When they believe they are
welcomed by others and treated friendly, they will become more open and relaxed. Everyone wants their voice to be heard. International students just have stronger desire about that.

Leo also highlighted the importance of how international students were working with their peers. He suggested that one evidence of their willingness to learn was their attention and contribution in group work. Leo further described that they took initiative to exchange ideas with others; they positively shared responsibility within their group, which meant they considered themselves as part of it and they valued the outcome of their group work. Leo acknowledged that students’ academic performance could be various according to the subjects they were learning and the tasks they were working on. However, the quality of their working process was a factor by which they could know how motivated the students were in their learning.

Research has described motivation as ‘the willingness to attend and learn material in a development program’ (Cole, Feild, & Harris, 2004, p. 67), and the level of motivation influences students’ focus and level of effort expended on a given learning activity (Cole, Feild, & Harris, 2004). With regards to both participants’ discoveries, they witnessed how students acted differently when they worked collaboratively with their peers at various levels. They both proved that when the international students were working well with their peers, when they were willing to contribute in their group work, they had higher level of learning motivation, which in return would greatly improve their working quality with their peers.

4.1.3 Participants recognized many behavioral indicators to know about students’ learning motivation.
Apart from aspects mentioned above, both participants considered there were other behavioral expressions teachers could take advantage of. For example, Chris claimed that even though sometimes students seemed to be listening and working on their task, they didn’t. Usually, they asked questions without thinking about it. They copied homework from others. What’s worse, sometimes, their getting high marks in test wasn’t because they worked hard on it but they cheated. Chris explained,

You know they cheated, though they were not caught. They might get high marks for their assignments, but they took work from somebody else. When you questioned them, they either refused to say anything, or used their influent English as an excuse to get rid of me.

Leo demonstrated understanding towards some other behaviors, such as how students helped clean up the classroom, how they greeted others in the morning, or how they played during the recess. He recognized that when students were willing to join others in various activities, they were into their class. Otherwise, they would be indifferent about everything. They wouldn’t care whether their classroom was tidy or not; they wouldn’t care whether others considered them polite or rude; they wouldn’t bother showing others the sports they were good at.

Both Chris and Leo confirmed that students’ contribution to the class reflected the degree of their sense of belonging.

As research has demonstrated, motivation is a set of beliefs that can drive and maintain certain behaviors and how students interact with teachers and peers, and how students care about
the class play a central role in supporting young adolescents’ learning motivation (Wentzel, 2012; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007). Compared with what Leo and Chris noticed, they believed when students demonstrated their care about the class and people around them, they were more likely to consider them as part of it and to participate more in different learning activities in the class.

4.2 Participants Identified that Different Relationships Between International Adolescent Students and Their Peers Have Different Impacts on Their Learning.

Both participants highlighted the significance of peers’ influence on international students’ learning. They pointed out when international students were paired with supportive mentor peers, they were more likely to be engaged in their learning, while when they worked with some “unfavorable” peers, their learning motivation was very likely to be distressed. In addition, they questioned grouping international students with other international students. They reported that when international students only worked with students from the same origin country, they tended to use their first language, and this was hard for teachers to assess their learning effect and classroom management issues were very likely to happen under such circumstances.

4.2.1 Supportive mentor peers greatly support international adolescent students’ learning as well as their social wellbeing.

Both participants stressed that supportive peers had positive effects on international students’ learning as well as social-emotional wellbeing in a way that helped them gain the sense of belonging. They expressed that when international students felt they were welcomed by their group members and helped appropriately, they were more likely to participate in the activity.
For example, Leo highlighted when peers demonstrated patience, kindness and understanding when they were helping each other, international students felt more comfortable. Leo explained that due to their lack of English proficiency, they would experience uncertainty and self-doubt that other native students would not necessarily understand. Therefore, when their peers truly spent time listening to them and showed respect to what they said, for them, it was a significant encouragement. In addition, Leo highly recommended peer support be conducted exclusively. He emphasized,

Good peers helped others with respect. They didn’t show off their ability or skills. They had to understand they were a team and they had to work collaboratively. They helped others because they cared about everyone in their group, recognizing each other’s contribution and understanding their struggles. They didn’t do so because of sympathy but rather empathy.

Chris mentioned a similar concern. He alleged that what international students needed the most was sincere acknowledgement rather than taking on everything for them. When provided with enough scaffolding, many of them could take leadership on certain tasks. When their peers assisted them instead of taking over them, and when their peers helped them speak English instead of speaking over them, they did better job. Chris addressed the importance of their voice being heard within the small group and the whole class, and supportive peers would promote this.

In general, both participants recognized the importance of having supportive peers in facilitating international students’ learning. Their attentive listening, patient helping with their
English expression, subtle aid on their accomplishing the task created a safe and inclusive environment for international students, which promoted their positive learning.

Hamm and Faircloth (2005) found that peer support in learning, such as clarifying teachers’ directions and sharing information, promote students’ motivation and engagement. What both participants noticed was coherent with the research that when helped by their native peers, international students were more likely to accomplish their assignments and therefore made more progress in their study.

4.2.2 Negative mentor peers have passive influence on international adolescent students’ learning and other development.

Both Leo and Chris articulated that when international students were paired with “improper” peers, such as someone who was bossy or impatient, they were very likely to be discouraged and thus their learning motivation would be greatly defeated.

Leo noted that when some students didn’t have the patience to listen to some international students’ influent English, or felt bored explaining the task to their international peers, they took charge of everything within their group. They didn’t work collaboratively. In fact, they took charge of their peers as well. They would distribute the task according to their own advantages. Therefore, there was little communication or discussion within the group. International students wouldn’t get the opportunity to practice their English or actively participate in the group learning.

Chris described situations where international students could not have any voice in their
groups. When they were paired with some “unfavorable” peers, they might be urged to express their opinion, when they couldn’t do so, their peers didn’t spare them any tolerance but blamed and then ignored them. Chris reiterated the negative effects that the sense of isolation would have on those international students. He shared,

International students tended to feel lonely and isolated because of many reasons. They might live with their family, but in most of the cases, they lived in homestay, therefore, they didn’t have anyone to talk outside school. However, when they were working with someone who would not listen to them or even deprived their right to express themselves, they felt much more exhausted and defeated than other students. They would doubt themselves greatly and thus gave it up on their study.

It was noticeable that both participants conveyed that this “unfavorable” peer relationship didn’t necessarily mean those peers were rude or impatient. Considering the characteristics of their age, they might have not developed the skills to accommodate their peers’ learning status. They were too young to understand what others were going through. They might understand English was a primary issue for students from other countries, but what they didn’t know was how different their educational background and prior knowledge were, or how differently they grew up.

As research has demonstrated, when adolescents don’t perceive peers as supportive, they often will not develop a strong sense of school belonging and may be at risk for losing their learning motivation (Wentzel et al., 2010). As Leo and Chris shared, international students
needed friendship to obtain the sense of belonging to their learning community. When they didn’t have their native peers support, they subconsciously reinforce their belief that they were foreigners and they didn’t belong in Canada. They didn’t have the need to learn and the motivation to prove their value and capacity.

4.2.3 Working only with other international students can be problematic to many international students’ academic and emotional well-being.

Both participants strongly argued that teachers could not let internationals students find their own peers. They believed that when international students worked only with those who could speak their first language potentially caused problems such as classroom management issues or impossibility to assess their learning.

Leo suggested that international students take advantage of every opportunity to practice their English as well as make new friends. However, Leo questioned hanging out only with other international students wouldn’t provide them with such opportunity. He explained that international students were very likely to speak their first language, which could be problematic in many ways. First, obviously, if they speak their first language they aren’t practicing English. Secondly, teachers who don’t speak their first language wouldn’t understand what they were talking about and thus would be unable to have the first-hand information about how they were learning and the problems they had while learning. He stressed,

They must let me in, otherwise I won’t be able to help them. I need to know what they are talking about, what they are struggling with, or whether they are learning or not. If they don’t
talk in English, I am unable to help them, because I won’t know whether they are chatting or
discussing the topic. I know it is hard, but if they will stay in Canada, it is for their own
long-term benefit and for the neutral benefit of the class. When everyone speaks English, no
one is the outsider.

Chris mentioned more about the negative effect this might have on their social skills
development. For one thing, he figured out that when they were talking in their first languages,
others wouldn’t be able to join them, which hindered the possibility that they made new friends.
He was concerned that when international students lacked opportunity to communicate with
other students, they were losing their access to their new living and learning situation. They
would be unlikely to make adjustment to their new surrounding, which for them was a crucial
skill to develop if they wanted to be more adaptive and successful in a new country.

Zhai (2002) stated that international students usually felt very connected with their fellow
international students and very isolated from native students, which prevented them from
openness to seeking counseling to address cultural and academic adjustment problems. Related
to what both participants observed, when international students formed their own small
community where they communicated only in their first language, it would be impossible for the
native Canadian students to join, which would cause even bigger barrier between them.

4.3 Participants have Several Strategies to Learn More about Their Students to Provide
More Meaningful Collaboration in the Classroom.

Both participants shared some strategies that teachers could use to facilitate international
students’ learning. These strategies included finding students with the similar cultural backgrounds, distributing teachers’ attention and time in accordance with students’ needs, and specially providing opportunities for international students. They also addressed some insightful knowledge about how to take advantage of both inside and outside class moment to better understand and then support international students’ learning.

4.3.1 Participants identified many classroom strategies in supporting peer group work that can have positive effects on international students’ learning.

Both participants had very practical strategies in building up an ideal learning environment where international students’ learning would be greatly encouraged. These strategies included designating certain peers for them to work with, preparing international students in advance so that they could act as leaders with their groups, and spending more time with the groups where international students were working.

Leo shared his experience matching international students with certain peers so that they could work collaboratively together. He highly recommended that within a small group of four, one international student be paired with at most one student who spoke the same first language. When there was no such student available in class, he suggested finding someone whose family came from the same country. He greatly valued the connection an international student could make with other students based on their similar language or cultural background. He conveyed, Nobody wants to be the only “stranger” within the group. International students long to feel connected with others. They want to be understood and then accepted. Working with someone
who speak their first language help them express themselves better. Even though when this is impossible, working together with someone whose family is from the same area is another option. With certain person aside, they would feel they have company and thus feel safe and comfortable.

Chris highlighted the importance of teachers’ extra attention and assistance to international students when they were working with others as a group. He appreciated those students’ unique and valuable knowledge in their original countries. Therefore, on certain tasks, such as in geography or art classes, he would prepare the international students in advance so that they could be able to take the leadership within their group. He might help students practice their English, polish their skills in getting everyone engaged on the task, or even spend time assisting them to do some rehearsals. Chris also emphasized that when they were working within their groups, teachers should spend relatively more time with groups where there were international students. He shared,

You can’t expect your students to do your job. They are learning and they need to focus on their task not something else. If you hope everyone could make contribution to the group, you facilitate them to do so. You are not “spying” or “supervising”, you are just there to make sure they understand what they are doing and give hand whenever they need it. Sometimes you need to help distribute responsibilities within the group, or sometimes you simply help with their expression in English.

Research has addressed, “Teacher support (autonomy support, structure, and involvement)
may have implications for academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school belonging (Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015. p. 12)." As in both participants’ cases, international students’ learning performance and academic achievements were greatly improved when they worked collaboratively within their groups with teachers’ targeted support.

4.3.2 Participants recognized meaningful opportunities inside and outside the classroom to learn more about their students and thus better facilitate their learning in the classroom.

Both participants had experience working as a homeroom teacher, which they identified as great opportunity to know more about their students. They explained that spending more time with students inside and outside the classroom, compared to other subject teachers, provided them with more information about their students’ overall behaviors and social-emotional wellbeing.

Leo highlighted the significance of knowing how students, in this case international students, perform in classes that were not very “academic”. He explained that without less academic pressure or learning stress, many international students were more relaxed in classes such as Art, Music or Physical Education. He shared that many international students had backgrounds in painting or playing one or even more musical instruments in their home country, and he noticed when they could demonstrate their talent or strength without using language, they appeared much more confident. He recalled,

I just happened to pass by their music class. I was attracted by the beautiful flute solo. I peeped in to the classroom and was surprised to see it was Alicia, the shyest student in my
class who just came to Canada at the beginning of that term. The most fabulous thing was the confidence and happiness I saw in her eyes. She was completely intoxicated with the enjoyment of playing the flute.

Leo further explained at that moment he realized how precious it was to know more about his students. In addition, he realized he could take advantage of what he knew about his students in other classes to better facilitate their learning in more challenging courses, especially in pairing them with other native students. He explained that he would put students with similar “taste” in music in one group, or students who were all interested in painting in one group. He claimed that working with such peers, international students were more relaxed and likely to contribute more within their group.

Chris considered recess time as a valuable chance to know more about his students. He recognized that students, especially boys, were more likely to play sports together and thus formed their team simultaneously. He mentioned that boys were more willing to demonstrate their skillfulness in certain sports. He further explained that for some students, recess was the opportunity for them to feel powerful and confident. He would spend time watching them play and then figure out whom they played together and got along well with. He would make the most of that knowledge to set up groups for them in his class and he claimed it worked well. Therefore, Chris suggested teachers know about their students not only according to how they learned in class but how they played outside class.

Many research studies have illustrated that teacher involvement, such as providing
students with social and emotional support, is usually associated with students’ needs for relatedness, care, and connection to others and is significant to supporting young adolescents’ motivation and engagement (Juvonen, 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). What Leo and Chris highlighted was just coherent with those research studies in the way that when international students felt understood, and their strengths were recognized by their teachers, they had more faith in their teachers’ teaching strategies and would be more willing to follow their teachers’ instructions.

4.4 Participants Identified Resources Within and Outside the School Setting that can Improve Students’ Personal and Academic Well-Being.

Both participants stressed the importance of using various resources within the school setting, which consisted of staff or students in other classrooms who spoke another language besides English and technology. They also addressed the necessity of making connections with the community where the international students were living, such as their custodians, homestays, or their neighbours.

4.4.1 Participants identified many resources within the school setting as beneficial factors that will help international adolescent students navigate the classroom learning.

Leo and Chris recounted the importance of taking advantage of various school resources, such as staff who spoke language other than English, students in other classes that spoke different languages, or technology. They both highlighted the importance of finding someone who could speak a different language, because it helped communication as well as building up
connections among international students, other students, and teachers.

Leo addressed that sometimes when there was no available student in his class who could speak the language an international student spoke, he would go to other classes to seek help. He explained that when he had someone interpret for him and the international students instead of translation app on the computer, he reached his students more easily. Besides students from other classes, Leo would also invite staff to his class to help him communicate with students. He noted,

I always believe interpersonal communication is the most important. You have to hear their tones, notice their change of speed and volume, and understand their feelings behind their words. You can’t do this without someone helping you. When you set up valid connection with them, you will earn their trust and thus give them more support and assistance in their learning.

Chris also highly valued people in school who spoke other languages. He advocated interpersonal communication with students, especially with international students. He considered them as precious asset to truly understand his students. He emphasized that students, especially international students must have someone that they could talk to. He shared,

They need a listener, someone can literally listen to them and understand them. It must be someone, not an app or something. When they have someone with them, helping them express their thinking, questions, concerns, or simply help them talk with other students and teachers, they feel they have real connection with others, which to some extent creates a soothing
atmosphere for them to release their uneasiness and loneliness.

Both participants also admitted the importance of using technology. However, they both agreed on using them to clarify instructions but not to communicate. They shared experiences using translation apps to translate long sentences, which turned out as “silly” or “nonsense”. Therefore, technology was only their second choice.

Researchers have inferred that social support from teachers and peers within the school setting (Wentzel, 1998), school climate (Brand et al., 2003), and relatedness with other teachers and peers (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993) facilitate students’ motivation, adjustment, and well-being (Anderman & Freeman, 2004). In related to both participants’ experience, when they took advantage of all kinds of resources to facilitate international students’ learning, international students manifested more interest and engagement in their learning community.

4.4.2 Participants indicated that reaching out to others within the community can improve students’ sense of belonging, which has positive effects on their learning.

Both participants claimed that when teachers reached out to people outside school who had connections with the international students, their help could be more targeted. Such people included students’ parents or custodians, people in their homestay, or even neighbours.

Leo stated, “social support is one of the best buffers for stress.” He explained that social support referred to the caring of friends, family members, and other people. He acknowledged that some international students only lived with one parent, or even without any family member. They might live with their custodians or just the homestay, which prevented them from sharing
their experiences, feelings, and learning with someone who truly cared about them. Leo noticed when he reached out to those people and to some extent persuaded them to care more about the students, his students appeared more positive in class. Leo shared,

"Sometimes it’s not easy to do so, but at least I tried. I remembered once I noticed one of my students was the neighbour of a new international student who lived in a homestay, I persuaded him to come to school and go back home with him once or twice a week. It turned out that they had a lot in common and became close friends really fast. The amazing part was that this student became a “bridge” that helped that international student build up connection with others."

Chris argued that homestay could do better and more than simply providing accommodation and meals for students. He would request that homestay chat with students occasionally. He acknowledged that this was not included in their responsibilities, therefore, it was not easy to conduct. However, Chris emphasized it was worthwhile because when those students felt they were cared about “at home”, they were more likely to be positive and willing to communicate with others.

Both participants questioned how the living condition would affect those internationals students’ academic performance and social-emotional welling. Therefore, they both highlighted the importance of finding social support for them. They indicated that many international students lived in “vacuum” outside school, which meant they had no one to talk with or share emotions with. Under such circumstances, custodians, homestays, or neighbours were significant
resources for both the students and teachers. Jun and Shin (2015) have explained that a lack of positive experiences with family members may lead to various problems. Compared to what both participants did to help building connections outside school between international students and their living companies, their effort aimed at reducing these potential problems and thus positively influencing their learning experience in and outside school.

4.5 Participants Indicated that Reluctant Students and Concerned Parents Can Be Challenges to Their Work Supporting International Adolescent Students.

Both participants acknowledged that they had encountered many challenges in their work. These challenges might come from international students who didn’t want to come out of their comfort zone, or from native students who didn’t want to work with the international students who couldn’t communicate with others fluently in English. Challenges also included some native students’ and some native students’ parents’ concerns that working with the international students might lead to their having more load of work or a lower grade.

4.5.1 Participants noticed that in many cases, international students were unwilling to be paired with others by the teacher.

Both participants expressed concerns that usually it was the international students who didn’t want to work with other native students. They explained reasons for this might be various, but more often it was that they worried about their drawing the group back, being blamed or laughed at by others due to their broken English, or their unwillingness to come out of their comfort zone.
Leo identified many international students were sensitive and thus had stronger self-defence. He shared,

They (international students) just care too much about others’ comments. They tend to overreact to others’ words, or sometimes even a (facial) expression. When they (international students) see people talking, they assume people are talking behind them. When they hear people giggling, they believe they are laughing at them. Because they don’t have feasible method to communicate with others, they are very likely to doubt how others would regard them.

Leo further explained that because some international students came to Canada without their parents, they were so lonely that they longed for company. However, working with native students sometimes added to their anxiety because they got frustrated easily when they tried to make themselves understood but failed. Leo mentioned that the lingering sense of failure would keep drawing them back from further attempt or effort.

Chris claimed that some international students were unwilling to come out of their comfort zone. He noticed that some international students just slacked off their studies. After he talked with some of them, he understood that they were sent to Canada by their parents even though they did not want to go. They didn’t know what to expect in Canada, nor did they know how to make adjustment to the new living and learning situations. Therefore, they wouldn’t take initiative to adapt to their new environment. Instead, they were “hiding” in their small social circle, which was made of people who spoke their first language or people who presented
outstanding patience and kindness to them. Chris described,

They (international students) just need someone to push them because they are in a dilemma. On the one hand, they are quite aware of the fact that they must be brave and build up connection with others. However, on the other hand, they were so afraid of being rejected that they would rather stay to themselves.

Research has revealed that international students usually had no time or initiatives to make new friends in the new country due to heavy demands of academic work and the language limitation (Chen, 1996). The reason why both participants would push international students out of their comfort zone is to help them make contacts to other people, get used to working together with their native peers, and thus making some new friends in Canada.

4.5.2 Participants pointed out that sometimes native students were reluctant to work with people who were from other countries.

Both participants noticed that sometimes native students seemed unwilling to work with students who were from other countries, more specifically, students who didn’t speak English very fluently. They concluded there were reasons such as difficult communication, lack of cooperative skills, limited patience, or difficult personalities.

Leo identified that some native students got frustrated when they couldn’t make themselves understood by their international peers. Leo explained that many native students didn’t speak any language but English, therefore, when English didn’t work, they felt helpless and upset, and thus lost their patience in further attempting to communicate. In fact, Leo had
encountered one student who came to him and asked how he could work with Amy (an international student in the class) when she couldn’t understand English. That student asked,

She just doesn’t get it! No matter how we explained to her, she wouldn’t understand! Why did you put her in our group? Will we lose our mark because of her? Could we have someone help us interpret for her?

Leo emphasized that though only very few students would be straightforward like the one he mentioned, some native students hesitated when they had to work in a group with someone who hadn’t mastered English yet. He shared his students’ “interesting” experiences ineffectively using translation application to help with communication. He questioned the authenticity and validity of those apps and wished they could provide more authentic translation.

Chris demonstrated similar awareness. He added that under the circumstance that native students were learning to work collaboratively themselves, they sometimes felt powerless when they didn’t have effective communicative skills or accessible resources to understand those who didn’t speak English well. He explained that for some students, it was very likely that when they tried several times to get understanding but failed, they lost their temper and patience and gave up. He stated that he wouldn’t blame those students for being impatient. He emphasised what those native students needed was understanding, support and manageable strategies; otherwise, those students could present a real challenge in the class.

As research has acknowledged, with the purpose of collaborative learning, teachers should in advance evince the value of caring teammates and encouraging group work; otherwise,
students are very likely to consider they are learning in a competitive environment rather than collaborative one, and thus reluctant to help others (Kong, Kwok, & Fang, 2012). As in both participants’ cases, they used various strategies to set up classroom atmosphere as caring and inclusive, therefore, both international students and native students could benefit from this collaborative work. Since the sense competition was greatly diminished, students were more likely to encourage and help each other.

4.5.3 One participant indicated that parents’ concerns and expectations can be challenges to their work.

Chris recognized that sometimes native students’ parents could add more challenge to his work. He explained that some parents didn’t understand or appreciate the collaborative learning among students and had worries or concerns about their children’s learning, especially when there were international students involved. He shared that one of his students’ parent had said,

I don’t think it is fair for my son to spend time explaining everything to her [one international student in Chris’ class]. If they are going to have a same mark as a group, how could you make sure my son won’t be drawn back by her? It seems that my son would take more work for nothing. I really want him to work with someone he could learn something from.

Chris concluded that there were two main concerns from parents; one was equity and the other was the academic outcome. He further explained that though quite a few parents would worry like the one he mentioned above, he did encounter some similar incredulity, such as concerns about spending time helping students whose English was not good instead of working
on their own assignments, about getting a lower mark when someone in the group didn’t do as well as others, or about their child being overloaded with more work or responsibilities.

Chris acknowledged that, although he didn’t have many parents complaining about their children working with international students, it was still necessary for teachers to pair students and distribute work with more caution and consideration. Chris demonstrated sincere understanding of parents’ concern, therefore, he emphasized that teachers be critical about equity and equality. He claimed no matter how much he was willing to help international students, he must keep a balance. He would provide international students with more opportunities or scaffolding in their learning, but no matter what he did, it was premised on the basis of “equity and equality.” He stressed that only when all students believed they were learning in an inclusive, caring, and equal classroom could they truly benefit from helping others or being helped.

However, a lot of research studies have stated that most international adolescent students may face challenges such as such as interpersonal stress, low self-esteem, racial or ethnic discrimination, disappointment, resentment, anger, sadness, physical illness, and other symptoms of culture shock, most of which are associated with their personal reflections or their peers, there is little about how native students’ parents’ perspective can be challenging (Leong & Chou, 1996). As Chris emphasized, parents have powerful influence on their children. When they don’t approve the way their children are working with the international students, the effects of teachers’ efforts would be greatly reduced.

4.6 Conclusion
In summary, this study found that teachers are using their insightful knowledge about indicators of students’ learning motivation to support international students’ needs and better facilitate their learning. They highly valued student peer support and thereby utilized various strategies to help build up supportive peer groups in their classrooms. Strategies include pairing international students with someone who speaks their first language or shares similar cultural background, learning more about students’ interests and strengths and thus providing them with opportunities to take leadership within the small group, and taking advantage of outside class moments to know the students more.

Hopefully these findings can provide teachers with more knowledge associated with the existing literature about how to promote international students’ learning motivation with the help of their peers. Once teachers who have international students in class become aware of the strategies, they gain knowledge that they can hopefully use to promote learning and social-emotional wellbeing in their own classrooms, which consist of both native students and students from other countries.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications of my research study and provide my suggestion to teachers that are having or will have international students in their class.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 expands upon the discussion of findings as answers to the question, “how can teachers facilitate peer support to promote international adolescent students’ learning motivation?”

After reviewing the findings in the context of the literature, the implications of these findings for other teachers and myself are discussed, followed by recommendations for organizing peer groups including international students to have them feel engaged and therefore promote their learning motivation. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The findings of the present study echo those of the literature. Five main themes rose from the research:

1. Participants recognized certain academic and behavioral phenomena as indicators of students’ learning motivation.

2. Participants identified that different relationships between international adolescent students and their peers have different impacts on their learning.

3. Participants have several strategies to learn more about their students to provide more meaningful collaboration in the classroom.

4. Participants identified resources within and outside the school setting that can improve students personal and academic well-being.

5. Participants indicated that reluctant students and concerned parents can be challenges
to their work supporting adolescent international students.

Both participants highlighted the importance of the awareness of certain indicators of students’ learning motivation. They both explained how they benefited from the knowledge of students’ learning motivation and how they made the most of this knowledge. They explained when teachers truly understood the reason behind students’ certain behaviors, verbal or nonverbal, they learn more about their students’ needs and thus would be able to facilitate their learning. Chris also emphasized the significance of knowing students’ behaviors in unacademic situations, because he identified this kind of knowledge as useful for him to facilitate his classroom teaching, especially in organizing groups utilizing that knowledge.

Both participants agreed that international students should be paired with native students with more patient and considerate personalities. Leo explained how others students’ kindness and understanding positively influenced international students’ learning performance, because they could feel welcomed and accepted by their peers, and thus be more willing to participate. Chris and Leo also stressed that letting international students work with others without purposeful arrangement could be problematic. Chris explained when international students were “pushed” to express their ideas, they felt stressful and would be very likely to hold back and keep silent. In addition, Chris and Leo doubted the outcome of international students’ only working with international students. They expressed concerns about many potential problems such as classroom management due to teachers’ unfamiliar with international students’ first languages.

There are many strategies teachers can use to better facilitate students’ group work that
benefit not only international students but all students’ learning. In class, my participants would put international students intentionally with 2 to 3 students including at most one student either from a country other than Canada or someone’s family which was from another country. They explained in this way international students would not feel singled out and relax while working with others. Apart from these strategies used in classroom, both participants also highlighted the necessity of knowing how international students behaved outside classroom. They stressed that teachers could use certain knowledge to designate more ideal partners for those students in the classroom activities.

Along with these strategies, both participants highly valued many resources with the school setting. They figured that staff who could speak a language other than English, students in other classes who were from other countries or speak a language other than English, and aid of technology could all play essential roles in helping them facilitate internationals students’ learning. Furthermore, both participants helped international students build up their sense of belonging by making connection to people who they lived with, such as their custodians and their neighbors. They illustrated the importance of having access to their social relations as helping international students feel cared about and thus were more engaged in their classroom learning.

However, teachers could encounter many challenges while pairing international students with native students. Leo and Chris shared experience dealing with both international students and native students’ reluctance working within the groups set by the teachers. They noticed
reasons varying from loss of patience due to the influential communication to worries about the equity issues related to the distribution of the work and the shared score. Chris even went through situations when native students’ parents expressed similar concern. He acknowledged that native parents, due to lack of knowledge and understanding of international students’ strengths and the benefits of collaborative working, might worry about the equity in such group work.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research findings. I begin by discussing the broad implications of my research findings for the educational community (as a whole). Next, I discuss the implications of my findings for me both as a teacher and as a researcher.

5.2.1 Educational Community

The purposeful strategies used in facilitating international students’ learning in small groups successfully promote their learning motivation. According to Hamm and Faircloth (2005), students rely greatly on their peers in their learning. Given this, it is essential for teachers to understand the crucial role peers play especially when they are working with international students, because international students will count on their peers to clarify their teachers’ instructions and share information which they miss from the teachers due to their English unproficiency.

Both participants highlighted the incredible benefits and support international students obtained from peers who did not necessarily spoke the same language but had the similar family
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background. International students need certain company in their school life to feel understood. Participants indicated that meeting other with similar backgrounds, such as coming from the same country or similar immigration circumstance, provides students with the sense of belonging, which is significant to how they learn in class. Therefore, when having international students in class, teachers were advised to perceive certain students with background from other countries as helpful resources and asset to them both social-emotionally and academically.

The fact that both participants have encountered students’ reluctance working with certain students, native and international, and parents’ worry about their kids’ being hindered by international students reinforces the importance of equity. Both students and their parents, either native or international, deserve to be treated equally. Although it is understandable that teachers spare more effort helping international students, teachers need to consider all students’ individual needs. The strategies teachers use in class should benefit both native students and international students, because it is obviously unfair that native students take more responsibility within their group but get the same mark in the end. Therefore, with regard to giving marks on group work, teachers need to put more consideration into the work distribution, the evaluation of the outcome, and the final group mark.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

As an international student in Canada, I have always had a strong commitment to helping international students navigate though their learning. After conducting research on how to take advantage of peer support to promote international students’ learning motivation, I built up my
confidence that with sincere understanding of international students’ struggles, I have furthered my understanding of how to better facilitate their learning in the context of collaborative work with their peers.

After listening to the experiences of a small selection of teachers, it is evident that, apart from randomly designating partners to international students or letting them work with whomever they want, teachers’ understanding of their need of the sense of belonging and the knowledge of their individual strength plays an important role in effective teaching. In my own teaching, I will always look into students’ strengths and address their both social-emotional and academic needs. I will embed this knowledge to acquaint my teaching practice, especially when I have international students just coming from another country.

With this in mind, as a classroom teacher, I am committed to always considering my students’ individual needs and building on their strengths. This requires me to always remember the importance and necessity of knowing more about my students. Collecting authentic and objective information, as well as making conversations with students, listening to their voices, are beneficial both to their learning and my teaching practice. Students through adolescence have unique characteristics. Only by truly listening to them can teacher understand what is going on within their mind. With such authentic information about their students, teachers are more likely to come up with more practical methods to support their learning and social-emotional wellbeing.

What I have learned will not only impact my own classroom practice, but also impact my
research practice. Leo and Chris both spoke to the importance of making connection with their students’ social life outside the school setting. As international students, they are very likely to have only a little, social support outside school, or even none at all. As a teacher, it is important that I expand my work outside the classroom to students’ parents, custodians, homestays, and even their neighbours. To help them build up more connections with people around is crucial for their feeling engaged and accepted in their community.

5.3 Recommendations

One of the most significant aspects of being a teacher is the opportunity to have access to other people’s thoughts, experiences, and wisdom, which will greatly enrich my own life. In my experience, the best teachers are those who listen to their students, know about their students, help their students acquire knowledge, and help them form a positive view of their life. In addition, good teachers should always present ongoing commitment to creating learning environment which will benefit all students in class. With that being said, I feel that the findings presented in this study suggest the need for teachers’ truly understanding of their international students’ needs and how to address these needs in the context of working with their peers in small groups.

One suggestion I would give is that teachers should have knowledge about students’ learning motivation, more specifically, knowledge about the “indicators” of students’ learning motivation. Based on certain knowledge, teachers should also be sensitive to students’ external manifestation of their learning motivation. To accomplish this, teachers have to spend more time
with their students, observe their students inside and outside classroom, and gather authentic information about how they are learning.

The benefit of obtaining information about students outside classroom also factors in how teachers set up groups. Teachers should take advantage of their knowledge about the students outside classroom to assist their designating members within small groups. By saying that, I strongly recommend teachers spend some time outside the classroom, watching how their students play and with whom they play during the recess, as well as how they behave in other less academic classes. In this way, teachers can know with whom students get along well and what strengths students have but will not be noticed by teachers in class.

I also recommend that teachers use the whole school setting as useful resources, as well as the community where the students live. Staff who speak languages other than English, students in other classes from different countries, parents, custodians, homestays, and even neighbours can play important roles on helping international students build up their sense of belonging, which is crucial to their practice of learning. When teachers spare no effort on combining resources from different aspects, students are more likely to feel they are cared about by others, and thus are more willing to participate in their group learning.

Finally, teachers should not only focus on the international students and “ignore” native students in class. Since both native students and some native students’ parents expressed their concern about equity, teachers should clarify certain issues to both students and teachers that all strategies used in class aim to benefit all students. Moreover, teachers should keep equity in mind
when designating members into small groups, distributing work within small groups, and giving scores based on the group work. Internationals students do need more attention and assistance, however, a teacher’s role is to build up an inclusive, caring and equal learning environment where everyone is learning and making progress. Therefore, no matter what strategies teachers using, they should always aim at all students’ interests and wellbeing.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Research regarding utilising peer support within small groups to promote international students’ learning motivation is limited, especially on the impact that learning in an inclusive classroom with teachers’ and their peers’ support has on international students’ further education performance. Although many research studies found that peers in school have significant influences on adolescent students’ learning (Williams & Jacobs, 2004), and, with regard to academic outcome, that adolescent peers can promote academic attitudes and behaviors that contribute to school success (Lynch, Lerner, & Leventhal, 2013), only limited studies focus on how peers might influence international students specifically.

Through my study, I have been able to build upon existing research and delve deeper into issues related to my research—specifically, how international students’ prior learning experience would impact their learning in a different country. I feel that further research should be done to explore how different prior learning experience would influence international students’ navigation in the Canadian learning environment. In particular, I wish I could find out more research studies about how international students with different prior learning styles would adjust
and fit in the Canadian learning environment, especially how they would behave within small groups with their peers.

During both interviews, I had a strong impulse to be actually in the class to view how those international adolescent students were accepted, respected and supported within their groups. When Leo mentioned about the change he noticed happening on his students, I wished I could have been there to interview those students about their feelings and experiences. When hearing Chris and Leo described how they felt compassionate when their students struggled and how they felt relieved when they finally saw their engagement in class, I felt that to be in the class and be able to listen to those international students talking about their own stories would benefit my own study greatly. Therefore, I highly recommend there be research conducted about how international adolescent students perceive their native peers, their relationship with them, and how they reflect on their teachers’ support on building positive peer influences.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I provided a brief summary of my findings as outlined in Chapter 4. This research study has helped me to better understand the needs of international students and how to address these needs, as well as support both international and native students’ learning. Through my exploration of the research literature and my interview with Leo and Chris, I have become more aware of the challenges that I will be very likely to encounter doing this work.

One surprising finding is how some native students and their parents are concerned about issues such as equity or fairness. This reminds me of my role as a teacher in creating an inclusive,
This research study originates from my personal experience as an international student in Canada and my previous working experience as a high school teacher. I have witnessed many of my students’ struggles when they were sent to another country in high school despite their unwillingness, purposelessness and English unproficiency. They shared lots of their struggles in a foreign country, especially the difficulty they experienced when they had to work with peers. I had great compassion for them but it was beyond by knowledge and ability to provide help then.

After I came to Canada, I experienced exactly what my students had gone through, which provided me with the very first hand information about their feelings and challenges, as well as great passion and commitment to contributing my own effort to helping them. Through this research, I learned from the literature and experienced teachers’ efficient strategies, which equipped me with theoretical knowledge, pedagogical instruction and practical approaches. I understand how adolescent students’ self-esteem can impact their academic performance and how their relationship with their peers can impact their educational experiences. Specifically, students from other countries face serious challenges in the education system, such as limited English proficiency, a lack of a sense of belonging, and a lack of acceptance and acknowledgement by their peers. These are challenges that can be addressed with the implementation of the strategies contributed by these experienced teachers.

This study, particularly the research process and the insight from my participants, has greatly inspired and encouraged me to go out and to do this important work as a teacher.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date:

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is __Shu Wang__ and I am a graduate 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 will focus on how teachers influence international adolescent students on building up a positive peer environment to support their learning motivation. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have more than five years’ experience working with adolescents and students from other countries. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 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 computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. 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,

Name: Shu Wang

Phone Number:

Email: wangshu.wang@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: ___ Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic_____

Contact Info:

Phone number:
E-mail: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

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 _____________ 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

Thank you for participating in my research study. The aim of this research is to learn what strategies a sample of teachers are using to facilitate building up positive peer environment to support international adolescents’ growth and their learning motivation. This interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes, and is comprised of approximately 20 questions. The interview protocol has been divided into 4 sections, beginning with some of your background information, followed by questions about your working experience with adolescent students and how you will comment on the features of adolescent self-esteem. Then I will ask you a series of questions focused on you facilitate building supportive peer groups among adolescents. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Background Information

1. How many years have you been working as a secondary or high school teacher in Canada and outside Canada?

2. What grades and subjects do you currently teach? Which have you previously taught?

3. Can you tell me about the school you work in?
4. You have identified as someone who has exhibited leadership in the area of supporting international adolescent students. Can you tell me more about what kinds of personal, educational, or professional experiences you have had that have developed your interest in this topic?

5. What experiences have helped to prepare you for this work?

Section B: Experience and Notice

1. In your experience, what range of barriers do international adolescents face in schools?

2. In your view, what are the specific phenomena that indicate a student is losing his/her learning motivation?

3. In your experience, what kind of friends those international adolescents usually hang out with? Does it really make a difference to their schooling when they hang out with different students, such as students who speak the same language, or native Canadian students?

4. What are the benefits and limitations of letting students find their peer groups on their own, especially those international adolescent students?

5. From your perspective, what are the benefits and limitations of grouping international adolescent students with students who speak the same first language or native Canadian students?

6. In your experience, do different ways of grouping international adolescent students have different impacts on their learning motivation, and thereby affecting their development of English proficiency and academic achievement?
Section C: Successful Strategies

1. What does peer grouping look like in your classroom?

2. How, if at all, do you designate peers to international students?

3. Can you describe for me some specific examples of the kinds of support you offer international students in an effort to have the sense of belonging to their peer groups?

4. How, if at all, do you differentiate your peer grouping for international students?

5. What factors do you take into account when designate peers to international students?

6. What instructional strategies do you consider to be most effective for supporting group work?

7. What indicators of the increase of learning motivation do you observe from your international students as a result of your approach to supporting their grouping with peers? Can you speak to any examples?

8. What, if any, outcomes do you observe from their English-speaking peers?

Section D: Challenges, Supports and Next Steps

1. What range of factors support you in better facilitate students’ peer grouping? (E.g. access to international adolescent students support person, collaborative school environment, school culture with high level of international students, communication with parents etc.)

2. What range of resources support you in better facilitate students’ peer grouping? (E.g. text resources, books, music, websites, e-resources, classroom space, educational assistance etc.)

3. What resources would help further support you?

4. What challenges do you encounter in this work and do you respond to these challenges while
supporting your international students?

5. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting his/her international students, especially in helping students get their peers’ support?