ABSTRACT

A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior Perspectives
of Post-Graduation Motivations and Preparation in Five Different Educational Settings

Jeffrey S. Smith, Ed.D.

Mentor: Jessica Meehan, Ed.D.

Education improvement has become a national imperative. Low graduation rates, standardized test failures, and overall success rates falling significantly behind in global competition have forced the dialogue towards alternatives to public education (Stewart, 2012). As the United States continues to trail other countries in educational success, it raises concerns about what environment is the most effective for student success in today's economic and cultural states.

In a response to this educational concern, today's students have seen the emergence of campus alternatives, and with these differing environments, research needs to provide clarity to the results produced from each environment, and if these results prepare all students for what comes after graduation. Equally important is the exploration of how each of these environments may help or hinder motivation for students and hear this information from the students directly. This collective case study gives high school students that voice.

This study begins with a criterion-based sample of one to three students attending each of five specific categories of learning institutions—a public school setting, a private school setting, a home-school setting, a charter school setting, and a final group from an innovative or alternative education setting. Through a series of interviews and observations of the various learning environments, the student stories compared common experiences, differences, and learning paths. This anthology of research information presented an understanding of each of their learning environments, motivational influences, and how these students believe their experiences prepared them for what comes next.

The power of the responses evidenced commanding themes throughout each distinct case and revealed compelling patterns common among all five cases. The result was a better explanation of experiences from the student's point of view, a clearer picture of motivations—both extrinsic and intrinsic—and strong patterns of concepts that can create influential change in any educational setting. The implications show the power of student's voices in the education process, setting the foundation for future studies that will incorporate the significant contribution made by the ones affected the most by current practices—the voice of the student.

A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior Perspectives
of Post-Graduation Motivations and Preparation in Five Different Educational Settings

by

Jeffrey S. Smith, B.A., M.Ed.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

_____

Brooke Blevins, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of

Doctor of Education

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

_____

Jessica Meehan, Ed.D., Chairperson

_____

Sandi Cooper, Ph.D.

_____

Nicholas R. Werse, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

December 2021

_____

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP: Advanced Placement

BU: Baylor University

CER: Center for Education Reform

CET: Cognitive Evaluation Theory

COVID: Corona Virus Disease

FAPE: Free and Appropriate Public Education

FICO: Fair Isaac Company

GPA: Grade Point Average

IRB: Instructional Review Board

LPP: Legitimate Peripheral Participation

NCEE: National Center on Education and the Economy

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics

NSSE: The National Commission of the High School Senior on Student Engagement

NVIVO: Inductive Decoding Software name—not an Acronym

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OIT: Organismic Integration Theory

PISA: Program for International Student Assessment

SDT: Self Determination Theory

SLT: Situated Learning Theory

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Honoring those who have supported me in this endeavor would take too many pages to write. I am enormously grateful for the words of encouragement that have come from those around me—colleagues, friends, business associates, professors, and more. I am honored to be able to call all of you, my friends. Thank you for continually supporting me throughout this journey. My former educator colleagues who provided support and encouragement are always with me and have been the impetus to continue growing and learning. Thank you for your work and efforts, the contributions you make to your districts and businesses and, most importantly, to my continued development as a human being. To the staff of excelsior professors and writing center experts at Baylor University, thank you for your continuous compassion, guidance, tutelage, and support throughout this process. Dr. Werse and Dr. Meehan, you two are amazing mentors who made this process an incredibly satisfying educational journey.

The most important people in this process starts with my mother, who has always encouraged me to obtain this degree, and who has provided continued support in so many ways throughout this arduous process. My children, Jaime, Kyle, Spencer, and Zoë, have watched me toil and struggle, celebrate and rejoice throughout this roller coaster of a ride. Thank you for believing that anything is possible. Lastly and most importantly, my loving wife Debbie. Without her constant encouragement, unwavering support, discerning grammatical eye, and immeasurable love, this would never have come to be. I am proud to share this degree with you. Thank you will never be enough. My love and appreciation for you and our partnership are infinite.

DEDICATION

To my father who always believed in me and pushed me to discover the best in everything I do. Although he was not able to live to see this day, his legacy lives on through all that I strive to be.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Introduction

Education improvement has become a national imperative. Low graduation rates, standardized test failures, and overall success rates falling significantly behind in global competition have forced the dialogue towards alternatives to public education (Stewart, 2012). As the United States continues to fall behind other countries in educational success, concerns arise about what environment is the most effective for student success in today's economic and cultural states. Ken Robinson (2017) eloquently sums up the concerns facing students today in the current U.S. standardized educational setting. He states:

> Our current educational systems are still based on an industrial paradigm of education—education is increasingly standardized and about conformity, and kids, who are living in the most stimulating age in history, fail to see the point of going to school, which is about 'finding the right answers to pass the tests' rather than about stimulating divergent thinking. (2017, p. 16)

The community response to divergent thinking is driving the increase in school choices, giving parents more control over their student learning environments (2017). Today's students have seen this increasing emergence of campus alternatives, and with these differing environments, research needs to provide clarity to each of their results produced, and if these results prepare students for what comes after graduation. Equally important is the exploration of how each of these environments may help or hinder students' motivations and the need to learn this information directly from the students. An abundance of information exists about the differences between these environments

and how they try to prepare students, but research largely lacks the student voices—those who experience the environments firsthand. These environmental differences define the contextual controls and external influences that ultimately shape learning outcomes for students. What is surprising is that the students themselves do not have a voice in the development of the educational plan or process. This omission of student voices has direct consequences for students, as motivations, learning experiences, engagement, and ultimately their overall preparation may not meet the student needs or maximize potentials. Learning environments shape outcomes, and each school strategy seeks to produce the best results for its students. Intention and practice do not always coincide. Student voices are necessary for ensuring that all qualities of the high school experience appropriately meet their perceived needs for post-graduation preparation.

The results of this study allowed the high school student the rare opportunity of shaping the face of education in their image. Each of the students involved in this study explained their high school experience and assessed the impact that this experience had on their motivations and preparations for what endeavors come next after high school. Their descriptions are the epitome of what they feel works, what does not, and how they would shape the educational experience. This study was unique in its design, as no other research enterprise has collected insights directly from students on this topic. This research study gave the student a voice and impacts educational research moving forward.

Statement of the Problem

Traditional brick and mortar schools struggle to find their identity as the learner has metamorphosed into something that challenges natural conventions. John Hood

(1993) states, "… America's monopolistic, bureaucratic, over-regulated system of public schools is woefully unprepared to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century" (p. 44). The traditional school environment expects to become a clear physical, psychological, and instructional reflection of the students attending. Yet, it is unclear how to best describe today's students.

The most common recurrent term that describes today's students is "digital native." According to John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2016):

> All…are 'Digital Natives.' They were all born after 1980, when social digital technologies, such as Usenet and bulletin board systems, came online. They all have access to networked digital technologies. And they all have the skills to use those technologies. (p. 7)

To meet the needs of digital natives, schools continuously search for a different design yet are not sure what form it should take. School transformation is "trying to tackle the future by doing what we did in the past and we are alienating millions of kids in the process, who simply can't see the point of going to school" (Robinson, 2017, p. 3). Student apathy becomes prevalent and as a result student performance suffers. School transformations create a problem as to how today's students are engaged, educated, excited, and prepared for what comes next after high school.

The transformation of schools creates an opportunity for alternatives to public education. For example, the number of home-schooled students has doubled from 1999 to 2016 (NCES, 2019). Charter school openings continue to increase as well, evidencing a 13% increase in enrollment annually (Texas Charter Schools Association, 2016). Currently, the State of Texas has already reached its maximum number of allowed charter schools by law and continues deliberating the opportunity to add even more in the coming years. Private schools have also grown as an alternative, increasing locations and

enrollment as states engage in the debate over school vouchers. Education choices are booming.

The Center for Education Reform (CER) implemented a mandate for change and submitted its recommendations in the early days of the Obama Administration. The CER (2009) asked for a five-point actionable plan for accomplishing change in education consisting of "federal accountability, transparency, charter schools, school choice, and improvements in teacher quality" (Allen et al., 2009, p. 17). According to the Foundation for Economic Education, reforming education is not enough, rather the need exists to replace the entire system (Hood, 1993). The evidence demands a re-design of the current educational system, but the best formula remains unclear. With change needed and no real road map to achieve proven results, research must look to include the students themselves and directly ask them the questions about what they have learned, what they have not, and what they see that they need to be successful post-high school graduation.

When investigating these environments, the research revealed a significant gap in collecting data straight from the students themselves. Multiple research studies exist on areas around the issue of the environment (e.g., Attwood, 2018; Morton et al., 2018; Lee, 1993; Eryilmaz, 2015). However, no study thus far directly asks the students about their individual experiences in each of the varied classroom environments or anything about their thoughts on their motivations or their perceived preparedness for post-graduation. The most common research method utilized surveys, but when asked directly about the effectiveness of these surveys, students overwhelmingly responded that "surveys are pointless because even if there is a problem you guys are going to do nothing about it"

(Bryner, 2007, p. 7). When student voices filter through surveys, they feel powerless in their ability to impact the learning process.

Students feel they do not have a voice that influences learning practices but believe they have the answers that could best change the process of how to meet students' needs (Bryner, 2007). By validating their point of view, real change can occur, as they become contributing collaborators to their learning process. When looking at the ability to learn and grow as an individual and a group, their interdependence epitomizes the importance of achievement and success.

A crucial element of constructivism is that learning, itself, is a social course of action, and interaction with others is when growth occurs (Kilbane & Milman, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). In short, learning is inherently an active process. Students are the ones impacted by the learning process, and the connection to their learning environment shapes outcomes. Research needs to look at these environments from the students' point of view to understand their ability to connect and maximize student potential.

In 2016, the United States ranked 40th in the world in comparison through the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), showing a continued pattern of decline from previous years (Heim, 2016). Furthermore, as the United States continues to outspend their counterparts in education, they do not get the same or even better results. "According to the Washington think tank, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), the average student in Singapore is 3.5 years ahead of her U.S. counterpart in math(s), 1.5 years ahead in reading and 2.5 in science" (Rushe, 2018, p. 7). This distance between American students and international students raises concerns on

how preparations impact student motivations and learning and create a need to explore options that close this "learning gap."

Children born between 2000 and 2020 represent 25.9% of the U.S. population, and their way of learning information vastly differs from previous generations (Goldenkoff, 2010). With attention spans shrinking and technology increasing, the traditional school design is no longer the only design. Charter schools, private schools, and other innovative opportunities have emerged in record numbers, which leads to the question, with different environments working towards a common goal, how does one gain an understanding of each unique environment and their abilities to support student learning, motivations, and preparedness? A collective case study that compares these groups as seen through the lens of the student provides answers to this question.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore five distinct educational settings—public, private, charter, home, and alternative schools—through the lens of the graduating high school student to learn how each unique environment plays a role in student motivation and preparation. This study revealed the perspectives of the graduating senior, giving them an active voice in assessing their learning experiences. This research focused on the five distinct learning environments to understand the answers to the following questions:

1. How do graduating seniors from five distinct educational environments describe and assess their learning experiences?
2. What are student perceptions of how these distinct learning environments encourage or inhibit individual motivations towards post-graduation aspirations?
3. What would graduating seniors change about their educational environments to meet their ideal learning experiences?

As a public school, private school, charter school, homeschooling, and specialized alternative school options have grown exponentially in recent years, too many choices create confusion and uncertainty about overall effectiveness. The need exists to extensively research what results each of these different educational options produce and explore if their expected outcomes prepare all students for what comes after graduation. Furthermore, students who experience these environments are the ones who need to directly tell their stories.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework utilized elements of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), specifically the sub-theories of Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) and Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET). The study found its social constructivist perspectives rooted in the works of Vygotsky, Lave, and Wenger, who paved the way for the sound practices from contemporary theorists Ryan and Deci (2018) that address all elements of motivation and "the social conditions that facilitate or hinder human flourishing" (p. 3). They distill their focus to the three components of autonomy, relatedness, and competency. Their theoretical framework directly applies to the nature of student motivations interconnected with their preparation in different learning environments and creates a foundation to "change ways of thinking" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 34) about what works best in an educational setting, as told by the students themselves. This research process engaged the students in the developmental process of these learning environments. Through this lens, the research explored student perceptions of their motivations and post-graduation preparation (see Figure 1.1).
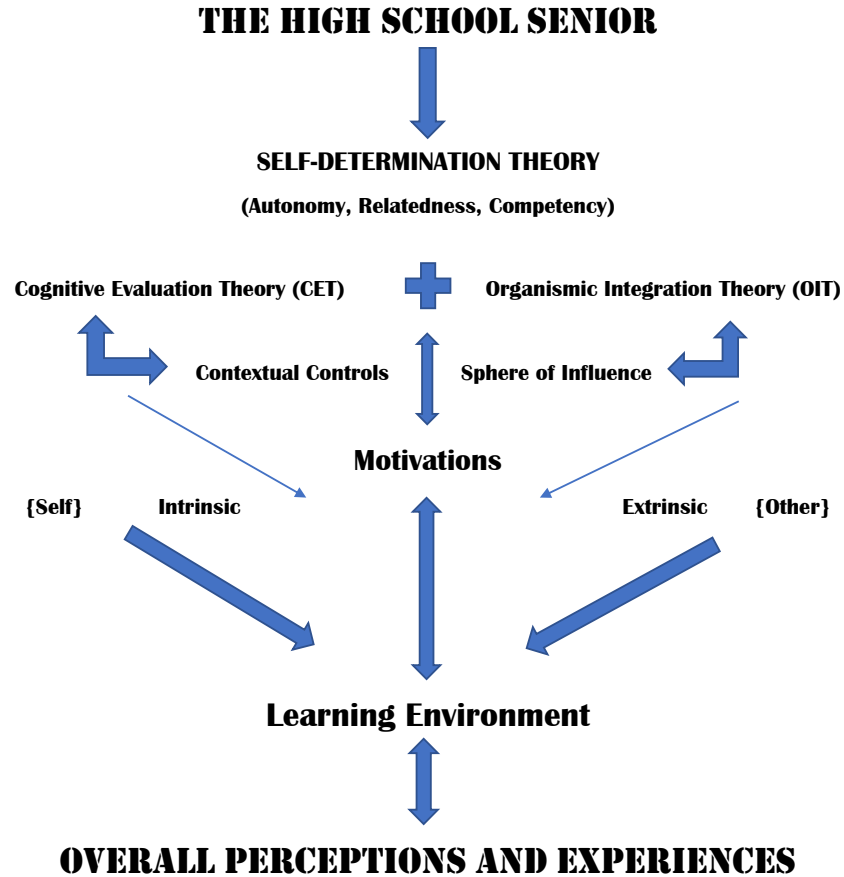
THE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

(Autonomy, Relatedness, Competency)

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)   Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)

Contextual Controls   Sphere of Influence

Motivations

{Self}   Intrinsic   Extrinsic   {Other}

Learning Environment

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior Perspectives of Post-Graduation Preparation in 5 Different Educational Settings

Figure 1.1. Diagram of Theoretical Framework adapted from Ryan and Deci's (2018) SDT, OIT, and CET Theories

Ryan and Deci (2000) and their Self-Determination Theory address the mechanics of how individuals learn. Their work explores the very nature of motivation—specifically the nature of positive developmental inclinations and the impact of environments on these tendencies. They discuss at length how their theory "critically inquires into factors, both intrinsic to individual development and within social contexts, that facilitate vitality, motivation, social integration and well-being" (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 3). The theory looks at both positive and negative impacts on social behavior, environmental influence,

and the choices individuals make as they meet their needs as defined through the innate psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Self-Determination Theory has six sub-theories that provide further context to motivational progressions, exploring "social and environmental factors that facilitate versus undermine…motivation" (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 70). For this collective case study, two of these sub-theories prove relevant. First, Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) looks directly at how external conditions can directly impact motivational outcomes. Second, Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) focuses on the extrinsic motivations that help or hinder individual internal motivational levels. Combined, these frameworks present as highly objective, direct, and effective. Owing to their thorough analyses, readers achieve a deeper understanding of the functions of motivation, along with the integration and regulation of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Understanding the influence of these concepts is crucial to this research of high school senior perspectives of their environments, their motivations, and their overall learning experiences.

Research Design

The research design was a qualitative collective case study. The design included five distinct cases that consist of one to three participants representing each case. The distinct cases are the different educational settings and the participants are high school seniors attending each of these different learning environments. Each of the schools participating in this study is within the defined regional area of Dallas and Fort Worth. Site selection ensured comparable demographics and regional proximity to ensure reliability with the comparison data.

Data collected for this study consisted of one observation and up to three semi-structured interviews with high school seniors at each of the designated case sites. Purposive sampling of interviewees took place providing equal gender representation and similar qualifications for study participants. The consistency of this design allowed for replication in other settings and sets the foundation for future studies. Finally, the study employed analytic induction to explore the cross-comparisons between each of the five cases, completing a five-step process using a constant comparative examination of the collective data, providing a generalized narrative of each case, an explanation of the patterns and themes that emerged, and a rich, thick description of student voices that answer the three research questions posed for the study.

Definition of Key Terms

Charter School Education: A charter school is an independently run school outside the public-school structure. Charter schools enjoy more flexibility in how they operate, yet accountability expectations are similar at the state level. Through an application with state education organizations, these schools establish a charter or contract that describes the innovative expectations of the school. "The charter contract describes things like the school's mission, instructional program, governance, personnel, finance, plans for student enrollment, and how all these are measured" (The United States Department of Education, 2019).

College- and Career-Ready Graduation Requirements: The minimum requirements as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education (2019) to graduate from high school. The expectation is to meet college and career-ready standards "that cover a wide

range of academic and technical knowledge and skills to ensure that students leave high school ready for college and careers" (2019).

Empowerment: Researchers have defined empowerment as both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). The basic definition of empowerment is the gradual implementation of newly acquired skills to work independently and confidently. There are direct connections to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators when experiencing empowerment.

Extrinsic motivation: Extrinsic motivation is the outside elements that influence activity and individual output. "Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than its instrumental value" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 17). Extrinsic motivation is the outward attempt to get one to engage or participate in any new activity.

Home-School Education: "To teach one's child at home instead of sending him or her to a designated school" (Forsyth, 2014, p.12).

Innovative/Alternative Education: Generally, an innovative school setting would be an academic setting that does not fit any of the previous four groups. On-line schools, STEM schools, Early College High Schools, and Gifted and Talented schools are all examples of what qualifies here. "Alternative Education is designed to meet the needs of at-risk students who cannot succeed in the traditional setting. Students see a variety of options that can lead to graduation and supported by services essential to success"

(NCES, 2019, p. 8). This study focuses on the non-traditional campus meeting the needs of students that meet the "at-risk" definition.

Intrinsic Motivation: Intrinsic motivation is the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. "When intrinsically motivated, a person moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures, or rewards" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.37). This type of motivation is the internal drive for engagement and participation.

Learning Environment: A learning environment is any physical, psychological, emotional, or atmospheric location where learning takes place. The glossary of educational reform states that a learning environment "encompasses the culture of a school or class—its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another—as well as how teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning" (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, p. 3).

Preparedness/Readiness: Cultural differences exist with this term. In general terms, "preparedness" is "readiness" for what comes next, at any phase in a learner's life. Preparedness, as viewed by the U. S. Department of Education (2019) is College and Career Readiness.

Private School Education: Private school is any school independently run and operated without the control of any governmental agency. "An education institution classified as private as it controls and managed a non-governmental organization (e.g., a Church, Trade Union, or Business Enterprise), or if its Governing Board consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency" (UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat, p.

49). The operational guidelines are independent of other schools by a board of directors and receive private funds.

Public School Education: Public schools are the most common schools offered and the most prevalent, often referred to as the right of all to attend (Free and Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE). "An educational institution is public if it is: (1) controlled and managed directly by a public education authority or agency; or (2) is controlled and managed either by a government agency directly or by a governing body, most of whose members are appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise" (2001 Data Collection on Education Systems: Definitions, Explanations, and Instructions, UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat, p. 49).

Self-Efficacy: One's individual capacity to bring about the desired result.

Student Success: This definition has different characterizations as described by each student ranging from the value in GPA, class rank, acceptance to colleges or military, to even the simple act of graduating from high school alone. Extrinsic and intrinsic value, as explained by the participants, evidences the various answers seen throughout the data collection process.

What comes next: As it currently stands, the generic definition as seen through an academic lens of each unique student is any career path as determined by these students that meet minimum requirements for graduation and leads to paths of full-time employment, vocational specialization, college, or university, or even time off.

Conclusion

Environment, motivation, and preparation interconnect and intersect inextricably. Exploring these elements from the student's point of view presents powerful evidence of

necessary change. When looking to create change in the educational system, Paulo Freire (1970) refers to education as "constantly remade in the praxis. To be, it must become" (Freire, 1970, p. 84). Therefore, to grow and become a better system, challenging convention is a necessity. This collective case study leads researchers down a path that develops a theoretical foundation for new ways to prepare today's students for what comes next after high school graduation. The evaluation of the five environments of this study, as told by the students who experience them, epitomizes these thoughts laid out by Freire.

Substantial information exists about the differences between these environments and how they try to cultivate learning differently, but research largely lacks the voices of those who experience the environments firsthand. This research study actively listened to one to three high school seniors in each of the five different learning environments, comparing, and contrasting their common experiences, differences, and learning paths, to seek an understanding of each of their unique learning environments, explore its impact on their motivations, and to learn how these students believe they are truly prepared for what comes next. Hearing firsthand from the student provides a better understanding of the effects these environments have on students, and what may be the environmental design for the future. Furthermore, seeing the students' journeys through different environments, exploring this study from the students' perspective, a voice emerged for those who previously had none. With a new perspective, researchers can then utilize this study in future research, setting the foundation for new grounded theories regarding educational environments.

Moving forward, the review of the literature explores several components crucial to the understanding and implementation of this research study. It begins with an understanding of the significant role learning environments play in shaping motivations and preparation. Next, it seeks to explain the importance of the theoretical framework to the exploration of the students' stories. Finally, the literature review takes an in-depth look at each of the unique learning environments, their strengths, and weaknesses, and how they impact their students. The research reflects a serious gap in the literature when it comes to the representation and inclusion of student voices in the development of educational practices. Understanding these environments, looking at the studies most relevant to student motivation and preparation, and identifying the gaps within the literature evidences the genuine need for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This study focused on graduating high school students. As a collective case study, it explored the shared student experiences from all the unique school environments. This study explored results both individually and collectively from student participants. The strength of the research came in the understanding and adaptation of the newly acquired information at all levels of analysis from each case, from each group of participants in each case, and each participant.

The student's voice is lacking in the educational process, and what studies exist on the matter limit their scope, focus on mechanics, and severely limit student involvement and expression. This serious oversight misses the perspective of the primary stakeholders in the educational system, and a thorough review of the literature shows the need for this collective case study. First, this review defines what is an intrinsic motivation for learning, extrinsic motivation for learning, and how these characteristics influence students. Second, the review shifts to how students and their motivations relate to their learning environments. Third, the review explores each of the learning environments that are the focus of this study—their strengths, weaknesses, and how they impact student motivation and preparation. The assessment then moves to the glaring omission in the literature—no studies that directly address the environmental impact on student preparation from the student's point of view. The evidence explored reveals a genuine need for this study.

The Foundations That Led to This Study

The review of the literature begins with what foundational principles led to the inextricable connection between learning, motivation, and learning environments. Origins connect back to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Further explorations led to discoveries of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) detailed by Jean Lave. Lave (1996) is a social constructivist credited with the development of the Situated Learning Theory (SLT). Her studies focused on the "re-conceiving" of learning, learners, and educational institutions in terms of social practice. She believes that "…learning, viewed as a socially situated activity, must be grounded in a social ontology that conceives of the person as an acting being, engaged in activity in the world" (Lave, 1996, p. 36). In short, one learns by doing. Her studies exemplified this process of blending old with new, experience with novice, and reaching higher levels of learning by acknowledging culture, community, and previous experience or knowledge.

Lave initiates her theories by spring-boarding off Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and applies it to real-world situations. Her ethnographical studies proved repeatedly the success of situational learning and its current relevance to teaching and learning practices. Its relevance here is in understanding the impact of the environment on student learning. These elements interconnect with the prior works of Vygotsky creating a foundation for collaboration between teaching and learning and stressing the importance of socialization (Wink & Putney, 2002). He views "learning and development as dynamic processes…interactive agents in communicative socially situated relationships" (p. 7). This dynamism is a crucial component to understanding students' relationships to their learning environments and reflects the beginning of understanding environments and their connection to student motivation for learning.

17

Motivation for Learning

Understanding motivation begins with exploring how students learn, why students learn, and how best to cultivate learning as it pertains to the student's environment. The mere function of learning has two specific motivational components termed intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the engine that runs learning, and extrinsic motivators are the outside factors that influence and shape learning. Intrinsic motivation is an internal drive to complete actions or tasks simply for the joy of doing them. This internal drive occurs as a "want to" rather than a "have to" experience. Completing specific learning or activities happens "because it's enjoyable and interesting, rather than because of an outside incentive or pressure to do it, such as a reward or deadline" (Healthline, 2019, p. 7). Conversely, extrinsic motivation is that external push to accomplish learning. Extrinsic motivation has that added element of a punishment or a reward, a type of outside influence that compels one to accomplish a task or meet a deadline. This concept of punishment and reward originated in B. F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning. His theories focused on the base elements of behavior and consequence, but he also believed "man himself may be controlled by his environment, but it is an environment which is almost wholly of his own making" (Skinner, 1971, p. 196). His efforts were not the end of the research, but the beginning that sparked exploration into the connections between behavior and the environment. Skinner's work on stimulus and response set the foundation, but the others who followed took the research from biological to psychological applications.

When looking at the focus of this study, how students learn, and what they perceive as preparation ties their experiences together with that of motivations and the learning environment. Influences from within and without have strong implications.

18

Expanding the concept of external influence, examples of primary actors are parents, teachers, coaches, and mentors. Each influencer generates defining external motivating factors for students rooted in their world views. The location also matters. Although an external indicator, elements like class size, engagement, visual stimulation, and focus can influence one's internal motivation.

Research has been extensive on intrinsic motivation, especially on how to promote this strategy as a drive to learn (e.g., Simsek & Barto, 2006; Bonarini et al., 2006; Huang & Weng, 2002; Kaplan & Oudeyer, 2003; Marshall et al., 2004; Merrick & Maher, 2009; Oudeyer et al., 2005, 2007; Schmidhuber, 1991; Thrun, 1995). Most studies on intrinsic motivation connected to the decades-old studies of Ryan and Deci (2000), who developed the Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

> SDT is an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68)

Their work explores the very nature of motivation—specifically the nature of positive developmental inclinations and the impact of environments on these tendencies.

Ryan and Deci (2000) identified within the learning construct three key components—the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy—that drive intrinsic motivation in individuals, the core causes for learning and motivation (Harter, 1978; White, 1963; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis & Franks, 1994; deCharms & Carpenter, 1968; Deci, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Ryan and Deci (2000) define motivation in the following way:

> To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas

someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated. (p. 54)

This existential view of motivation looks directly at learning functions and environmental influences. The continued psychological studies by Ryan and Deci (2000) commit to investigating extensively the biological and cognitive roots of motivation. Their research repeatedly focused on the types of motivation and how they produce results from all positions in the learning process. Leadership roles also tie directly to how outcomes through manipulation of motivation produce desired results. Teachers, parents, coaches, and others look for the balance of what will get the best output of individuals. All these stakeholders continue to search for the best approach to accomplish desired learning outcomes but continue to design and implement plans without directly consulting with the students they expect to achieve these positive results.

As previously stated, the concept of rewards and punishments are typical processes utilized to externally motivate students to learn. Skinner's work extensively explored how this process worked as his studies advanced to reinforcement and motivation. His Reinforcement Theory believed in "increasing the rate or probability of a behavior in the form of response by delivery either immediately or shortly after performing the behavior" (Isai Amutan, 2014, p. 682). For example, teachers utilize grade incentives, coaches set benchmark goals, and parents provide monetary rewards, all as examples of influences from these external sources. Choosing what is effective and what does not work in this realm is not an exact science, and all these influencers continue to explore new ways of getting desired results.

What is striking about the work of Ryan and Deci (2000) is they went far beyond the basics of Skinner and were successful in focusing deeper on the core aspects of what

compels individuals to learn. Their work clearly shows that internal drive ties to a genuine passion for the activity, and that external influences can also urge one to act. Their evidence reveals that the core of intrinsic motivation is authentic, self-prescribed, and created while extrinsic motivation is influenced, fabricated, and shaped from the outside.

Ryan and Deci (2018) explored the importance of motivation in the learning process. Their Self-Determination Theory (SDT) distills this impact on learning down to the three components of autonomy, relatedness, and competency, and these elements distill further through their sub-theory of Cognitive Evaluation Theory. CET is a subset of SDT and focuses on the impact that environment has on the way students learn (intrinsic motivation), how their learning is influenced (extrinsic motivation), and how these influences shape world views and plans of action moving forward (autonomy, relatedness, and competency). When applying this theoretical framework to high school seniors, it is evident that the environment plays a crucial role in the influences of overall student development. Ryan and Deci (2018) define a subset of the proposition of CET stating the following:

> Interpersonal contexts can be characterized in terms of the degree to which the motivational climate tends to be controlling, autonomy-supportive, or amotivating. Environments that are most facilitating of intrinsic motivation are those that support people's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (p. 160)

Above is a definition that applies directly to the approach of this collective case study and demonstrates the importance of understanding high school seniors' perspectives in five different educational settings to better understand their views on adequate or inadequate preparation for what comes post-graduation, especially as it pertains to these environmental influences on their motivations.

A secondary sub-theory of Self-Determination Theory known as Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) also shows relevance to this study when focusing on the stories told by high school seniors in each distinct learning environment. OIT specifically focuses on the influences that families, peers, and cultural institutions have on individuals. This premise of outside influence ties to the importance of the extrinsic components that help shape world views. Ryan and Deci (2018) define this component of OIT as "taking values, beliefs, or behavioral regulations from external sources and transforming them into one's own" (p. 182). This developmental process results in different degrees of internal motivational practices that become shaped by external circumstances. For example, students placed in an alternative campus have different external experiences from those who experience a public school. The differentiations become even more intriguing as choices continue to evolve. This collective case study looks at the commonalities and differences that emerge because of these different environmental influences.

Both sub-theories of Self-Determination Theory reflect how the environment plays a crucial role in student development, how external influences impact motivational practices, and how hearing the stories of the experiences of students in each of these different environments can help better understand how well or how poorly prepared graduating seniors are for what happens beyond their graduation from these distinct learning environments. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the key questions posed by this research study.

As stated previously, Ryan and Deci (2018) distill Self-Determination Theory down to the core concepts of autonomy, relatedness, and competency. Their research

reinforces that these three elements are what drives or inhibits human development. External and internal influences continue to affect the development of social, psychological, and biological growth and development. Intricate examination of the theory reveals several sub-theories that comprise the focus of these influential elements, which are relevant to the proper execution of this research study. SDT breaks down into six sub-theories (Ryan & Deci, 2018). The most relevant to this study are Cognitive Evaluation Theory and Organismic Integration Theory. Combined, their elements directly influence motivation for individuals, considers the significance and importance of the environment, and are central themes defining student perspectives of post-graduation preparation (See Figure 2.1).

The first subset, Cognitive Evaluation Theory, explores how environments have a direct impact on either enhancing or undermining intrinsic motivation for individuals (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 157). This theoretical outline ties directly to the importance of the environment on student development. The second sub-theory of Organismic Integration Theory focuses on the motivational transformations that occur from infancy to adulthood, and the impacts that extrinsic motivation has on self-regulation and individual acceptance of cultural and social norms. Organismic Integration Theory directly connects to the individual effects that learning environment constructs have on how students learn and what they choose to believe as their reality. Students who have no alternative or view their world as limited by their surroundings directly impact motivation for growth, change, and advancement. OIT directly connects to the stories of the students, especially their perceptions of how their environments have best prepared them for what comes after graduation.
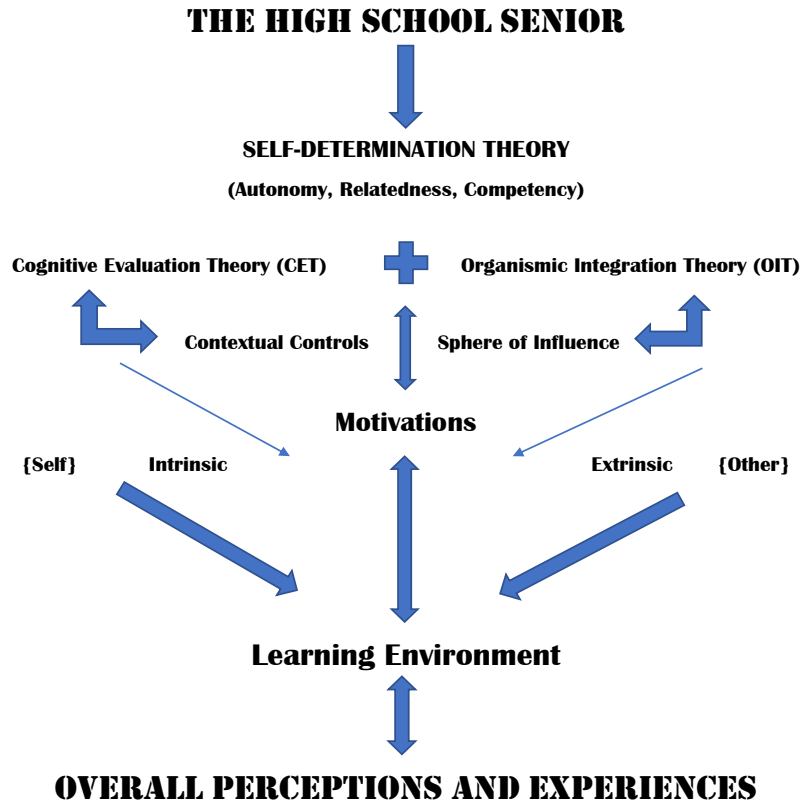
THE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

(Autonomy, Relatedness, Competency)

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)   **Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)**

Contextual Controls   **Sphere of Influence**

Motivations

{Self}   Intrinsic   **Extrinsic   {Other}**

Learning Environment

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior Perspectives of Post-Graduation Preparation in 5 Different Educational Settings

Figure 2.1. Diagram of theoretical framework adapted from Ryan and Deci's (2018) SDT, OIT, and CET Theories, revisited

When exploring student perceptions of preparation for post-graduation, each of these elements has a direct connection to the stories of high school seniors and their evaluation of their learning experiences. The five cases for this research study comprise an empowered community of students sharing their perceptions and motivations for learning and provide crucial information to the shaping of future educational environments.

This literature review demonstrates that extensive studies looking at quantitative measures exist, and they generally focus on the external regulations, or extrinsic motivations of rewards and punishments (Simsek & Barto, 2006; Bonarini et al., 2006;

24

Huang & Weng, 2002; Kaplan & Oudeyer, 2003; Marshall et al., 2004; Merrick &

Maher, 2009; Oudeyer et al., 2005, 2007; Schmidhuber, 1991; Thrun, 1995; Zingier,

2011). The limitations presented by previous studies show strong evidence that

environmental factors and their influence on individual motivational practices need

further study. The gaps reflect a need to hear directly from the students themselves, in

their own words, and their designated environments.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory specifically highlights the significance of this

correlation (Ryan & Deci, 2018) stating "the quality of the overarching interpersonal

climate both directly impacts motivation and the likely interpretation or functional

significance of specific events" (p. 160). In this collective case study, the research

questions looked directly at this phenomenon, obtaining first-hand stories from each of

the five different learning environments. Organismic Integration Theory takes this

exploration one step further as the observations of the environments, along with historical

perspectives of students telling their stories through semi-structured interviews, explore

the external influences that shape their high school experiences and determine their

perceived preparation for post-graduation experiences.

The sub-theory of Organismic Integration Theory may best explain how important

it is to assess the qualitative data collected. The "factors in social and interpersonal

contexts" are a crucial part of understanding student perspectives on post-graduation

preparation (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 180) and are direct influences on how the students'

experiences emerge. Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are the underlying

factors that shape the experiences of these students and are crucial to understanding what

describes the ideal learning environment. Ryan and Deci (2018) comment that "the

process of organismic integration inclines humans naturally to internalize extrinsic motivations that are endorsed by significant others" (p. 180). This convergence, as revealed through the cases and their stories, drives the patterns that emerge, both positive and negative, in understanding how these participants view their high school experiences and how that information can influence the shape of learning environments for students who follow.

When looking at the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of students, the research leaves out any direct conversation with the students themselves. The theories of Ryan and Deci (2018) show how these motivational processes work, but they overlook the voices of the students. Ryan and Deci (2000) delve into the inner workings of how students learn but lack in what drives them to learn. Their sub-theories explore the intricacies of learning and their motivations but once again the existing research does not ask the student learner directly. These foundational theories are important but need more research to better understand the connections between learning and the environment as told from the student's point of view.

Relationship between Student and Environment

Limited studies exist that explore the students' perceived relationship between learning and the environment, yet their results prove significant. The first reference to this correlation came from Moos in 1979, claiming that architectural design was an influencer on achievement and behavior. Other researchers of note also looked at architectural psychology—the impact of "security and shelter, pleasure, symbolic identification, task instrumentality, and social contact" (Stadler-Altmann, 2015, p. 549). Taking these elements into consideration when designing a learning environment proved

to create the most effective learning environment for both teachers and students. Moos and Stadler-Altman looked at the overall spatial design—the look and feel of the space. None of these studies, however, included student feedback to the process.

Hattie (2009) is also worth mentioning for his meta-analyses on the influences on achievement and the influence of the environment, looking at effect size for what has the most impact. His body of work focuses more on aiding teachers in achieving greater success in learning—extrinsic motivators tied to academic performance. He breaks down over 138 factors affecting learning. Hattie (2009) ranks the categories from strongest to weakest as they influence learning. Relevant to this study, the category "'teacher' has the strongest effect (0.49), and 'school' (0.23) the weakest" (Terhart, 2011, p. 426). This relationship reinforces the significance of extrinsic motivators as well as the impact of the environment on learning.

The idea that the school, although a positive effect size, reveals a lower influence on student learning, and extrinsic motivators become the strength and power where learning may exist. These studies have objectified the impact, and, unfortunately, focus on the extrinsic motivators, leaving intrinsic motivation as an outlier. Hattie (2009) does, however, reflect the strong connection to engagement through the environment and shows how these factors influence learning outcomes.

Hattie (2009), Schlechty (2005), Terhart (2011), and others have presented evidence addressing the environment and its connection to learning. While all show a strong connection between the two, the research still falls short in providing support from the student's point of view. The continuous trend throughout these studies is the external

choices that create the context for their research. The research continues to overlook intrinsic motivators and student perceptions.

Saeed and Zyngier (2012) took the work of Ryan and Deci (2000) one step further, exploring intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as it pertained to student engagement. Engagement shows a direct correlation to student motivations, focusing on the contextual influences of external factors. Saeed and Zyngier applied Schlechty's (2011) Student Engagement Continuum to understand authentic student engagement. Their research discovered correlations between pedagogical reciprocity and intrinsic motivation where the connections between the teachers and the learners had a direct influence on student engagement. Students who were extrinsically motivated evidenced a drive-by ritual engagement (Zyngier, 2011). The strength of this result shows an external view of student connectivity to learning but does not evaluate the student directly to validate the findings.

The framework of Schlechty (2011) looks at the clear definition of output by students in a learning environment. His definition of engagement is when the "…task, activity, or work the student is assigned or encouraged to undertake is associated with a result or outcome that has a clear meaning and relatively immediate value to the student" (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012, p. 253). This concept of motivation was at the root of their study, as they were looking at what accomplished sound academic outcomes (Stone et al., 2009). Their approach looked at the motivational authenticity and extrinsic preferences of students in an elementary classroom environment. They sought to validate those students who are engaged or actively involved in their learning. They believed that "students are engaged when they are involved in their work, persist despite challenges and obstacles,

and take visible delight in accomplishing their work" (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012, p. 254). In short, the students connect when the process is genuine to the learner.

Designed as a qualitative study, Saeed and Zyngier's research tied both interviews and continuous surveys to self-assess the motivational tendencies of elementary students (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). They wanted to understand students' perceptions of their motivation and its impact on their engagement. Their results identified students who were both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated, but those more intrinsically driven showed a propensity to learn more than their extrinsic counterparts. Intrinsically motivated students were more authentically engaged. Students exhibiting more extrinsic values tended to be more passive in their compliance and more inclined to ritual learning practices (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). The results again are looking at motivational factors in driving learning but fall short in providing a full picture of student perceptions of the learning activities observed.

The researchers did talk to students, but specifically through survey and Likert scale information rather than in-depth semi-structured interviews reflecting on their experiences. It appears observation played a key role in their discoveries, yet their exploration did not connect student experience to the specific environment. The clarification of the environment would be a strong next step with their research, clarifying the influences of teachers, family members, peers, and environmental design.

Only one person-centered study focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, specifically in high school students, took place in 2011 to understand its connection to academics. Following the theories of Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT was the theoretical premise for the study. The results were clear that the environment and its influence on the

high school student were significant, especially as it pertained to their academic motivation (Wormington et al., 2012). They explored the impact of teacher support and extracurricular activity involvement of students as a key factor in determining effective motivation as it pertained to academics and discovered that students who exhibited lower levels of intrinsic motivation were receiving higher levels of extrinsic support from teachers for their efforts (Wormington et al., 2012). This idea further proves a strong connection between motivations and learning environments.

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation connect inextricably to learning. The challenge continues to be cultivating the most out of individuals. Schlechty's (2001) continuum ties directly to students and learning, and it has investigated how to best cultivate learning from individuals. He does so by stressing the importance of understanding what psychological qualities exist in situational learning and attempts to point leadership towards a combined approach, balanced in the utilization of both extrinsic and intrinsic elements to maximize student learning (Schlechty, 2001).

Schlechty (2001) also has collected significant research on student engagement, stating that "the evidence suggests that learning that results from extrinsic inducement is…more likely to do harm than be beneficial" (p. 36). He believes that the motivation for students should not manipulate the learning from a position of control, rather a position of guidance. It, therefore, becomes incumbent to understand and nurture intrinsic motivators to maximize learning.

The validation of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is an essential core to the body of Schlechty's (2011) work. His research continues to center on the importance of engaging students in purposeful work—rooted in constructivist theory and crucial for

producing long-term impact with learning as students can see value in the work they do. Schlechty (2011) focuses on the element of engagement to reflect the best approach to learning design. Cognizant of the motivators for learning, his work continues to look to what may work best from a teacher's point of view. Understanding how students learn translates to the powerful guidance of the learning itself (Schlechty, 2011).

The challenge posed with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is the influences that the actual learning environment places on the learning process. The connection between student and school is unavoidable, as "school motivation cannot be understood apart from the social fabric in which it is embedded" (Weiner, 1990, p. 621). This interconnectivity between learner and environment becomes essential in understanding how students ultimately are prepared for what comes next.

Learning can take place anywhere, yet focused learning for educational purposes has always connected to specific locations. More specifically, a learning environment "encompasses the culture of a school or class—its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another—as well as how teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning…" (Bates, 2014, p. 1). Learning environments can be any of several designs, the most common being the five realms targeted by this research study—public school, private school, charter school, home school, or alternative school settings. Exploration of these environments' strengths, their weaknesses, and influences on motivations and student preparation exhibit their unique approach, but also their connections to students and learning.

The importance of learning institutions as differing environments for students is the way they focus their efforts on student engagement, which directly ties to the

intricacies of all forms of motivation. Engagement, while different than motivation, still contributes to the overall learning experiences, how the environmental design addresses student learning, and ultimately how their campus design influences motivation and overall preparation for the future. Multiple researchers have looked at ways to study student engagement with mixed results (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Sinclair et al., 1998; Osterman, 2000). These researchers looked at the environment and student achievement to determine how engaged students were in multiple settings.

Osterman (2000) highlights the significance of the environment on student engagement. In 1998, her synthesis of the literature in this regard highlights the importance of building a sense of community among peers. She goes on to explain the significance that context plays in the degree of student engagement. She believes "Contexts differ in the extent to which they address individual needs and people (including students) can be expected to function optimally depending on the extent to which these basic needs are satisfied" (Osterman, 2000, p. 3). The different learning environments inherently will produce different results.

Osterman's (1998, 2000) extensive research unveiled that the sense of community among students had a direct correlation to their learning. The concept of belonging proved that "if students who experience community have more favorable attitudes toward others, they also view themselves more positively with higher levels of self-efficacy, an important cognitive perception linked to school success" (Osterman, 1998, p. 14). When viewing varying school environments, it is important to take into consideration how the environment shapes the entire learning process.

The works of Vygotsky and Dewey (1978, 1938) have long since believed that the environment has an impact on how students learn and grow, and each of these different environments brings strengths and weaknesses to the learning process—the real question is whether anyone is better than the other, and if so, how can schools of the future replicate the best of all these environments into an all-encompassing one for the best overall student results. Context matters and the connection to each unique environment in this study defines the contextual parameters for understanding student perceptions of preparation and how these influences on motivation have affected their learning throughout their high school experience.

Public Education

The most prominent learning environment for the United States is that of public education. By definition:

> An education institution is classified as public if it is:
> (1) controlled and managed directly by a public education authority or agency; or
> (2) is controlled and managed either by a government agency directly or by a governing body (Council, Committee, etc.), most of whose members are appointed by a public authority or elected by a public franchise. (2001, UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat, p. 49)

Public education is available to all who wish to attend, and each school district works to provide a broad level of learning opportunities for its students. "Public education has always been about the development of each child as an individual to the fullest extent of their abilities for the ultimate benefit of society" (Corso, 2016, p. 7). The most prevalent of school options, public schools are the most common and most attended in the United States and the most regulated of the school options.

The design of public education may be similar nationwide, but it varies from state to state as to what specific curriculum and community programs each district focuses on

33

as they target localized values. The National Commission of the High School Senior Year on Student Engagement (NSSE) reported in 2002 how each institution "deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum creates other learning opportunities…that constitute success" (p. 2). Schools continuously work to develop their perceptions of what works best for their students.

Rothstein (2001) explored current strengths in public education. He discovered that public schools are meeting and exceeding the needs of their students by teaching the skills needed by employers, reducing dropout rates, increasing testing scores for minority students, increases in minority college attendance, and doing so with only small increases in annual funding (Rothstein, 2001). In 1993, Michael Kirst also looked at both the strengths and weaknesses of public education. His assessment saw strength in inclusiveness, post-secondary education success, local flexibility, content standards, and assessments, and socialization for a nation of immigrants (Kirst, 1993). An asset to public education is the concept of student inclusion in the learning process. The preparation was key for post-secondary schools, as American students statistically showed the most growth from freshman to senior years in colleges. As a nation of immigrants, public education has done well to level the playing field for all who attend. "The U.S. system of public education has been a crucial element in unifying a nation of immigrants, producing the *Unum* from the *Pluribus*" (Kirst, 1993, p. 2). Public education funnels the learning process to the least common denominator.

Kirst (1993) also saw struggles with students of poverty, teacher effectiveness, fragmentation, and gridlock. Links are evident to poor health, lower-quality schools in urban areas, and a general difference in priorities for lower-income families. Also, of

concern is the professional development of teachers. Kirst (1993) states, "the U.S. has no national strategy for staff development that provides depth and breadth for its 2.2 million teachers" (p. 2). The philosophy of *one and done* with no real follow-up or coaching lends itself to the perpetuation of bad habits in the classroom.

Research studies exploring public educational settings took place in 1981 to determine the presence of intrinsic motivation in elementary and secondary students (Gillet et al., 2011). These initial results indicated that intrinsic motivation declined in students from 3rd grade to 9th grade. Replication of their results occurred the following decade by Harter and Jackson (1991, 1993, p. 384), achieving similar results (Gillet et al., 2011). These studies found that it was inconclusive as to whether the intrinsic values decreased as extrinsic values increased when the schools influenced their performances. Gillet et al. followed up these studies with their own in 2011 using a quantitative research design. They looked at motivation through a Likert scale survey, as well as student's perceived autonomy support toward school activities. Their data reflected a confirmation of the lowering of intrinsic motivation and an increase in extrinsic motivation (Gillet et al., 2011). Their research found that the teacher's role was the one filling the extrinsic value. The discovery shows that public education "emphasizes to students that schoolwork is important for their future but often without conveying that it can also be enjoyable." (Gillet et al., 2011, p. 14). As the intrinsic motivation fell, extrinsic compensations occurred to ensure student success. These studies reinforce the continued connection between all types of motivations and the environment. They also reflect how the research has continued to exclude student voices in the development of educational practices.

Gillet et al. (2011) validate how important the environment connects to student learning and motivations but limits their study to a public education setting. Gillet et al. (2011) also looked directly at this specific environment and found a clear connection and how learning environments worked to influence student learning. However, their research faced limitations, exploring only the motivational constructs, and did not go to the lengths needed to understand student voice in effectiveness overall of the public education setting. Furthermore, their research stops short of assessing the effectiveness of learning environments. The research only looks at the connection, not the results. Studies that listen to the student's voice will fill this void in the literature.

Public education is the most prevalent learning environment available and is the one that continues to experience challenges of ensuring a free and appropriate public education for all students. Standardized testing, governmental regulation, and a never-ending pursuit to socialize the process to equitable standards overlook the importance of contextual influence nationally, regionally, and locally. Standardizing the process completely overlooks the celebration of individuality and the fostering of community to achieve maximum success. As only one of many options, it is important to understand the different contexts that are available for student learning and preparation. The next environment to review is private school settings.

Private Education

Private education has developed a staunch reputation. As defined:

> …an education institution is classified as private if it is controlled and managed by a non-governmental organization (a Church, Trade Union, or Business Enterprise), or if its Governing Board consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency. (UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat, p. 49)

As they are not bound by the rules of public education, the expectations for students differ dramatically from public education.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, enrollment in PK–12 private schools as of 2016 was 5,751,000, or 10% of all United States students, and overwhelmingly these schools are religious-run institutions. "More students were enrolled in Catholic schools than in other religious schools, 49 and 36 percent of total private enrollment, respectively" (Broughman & Colaciello, 2001, p. 14). Other options are vast, though, ranging from military academies to art schools to even special needs schools. The draw to a private institution is the autonomy in the curriculum, smaller class sizes, statistically stronger academic results compared to other institutions, and a selective approach to daily encounters (Lindenberger, 2019). Furthermore, it is statistically a stronger alternative to public education. According to Dronkers and Robert (2008), "pupils at private government-dependent schools (often religious schools) have higher cognitive outcomes than those in public schools, even after allowing for the social and cultural composition of these schools" (p. 543). The evidence shows that private schools present a viable alternative for the classroom environment and provide definite advantages and disadvantages to their students.

Academic rigor and specificity are the draws of a private school. The curriculum design statistically has been specialized to focus on a style for student achievement (Broughman & Colaciello, 2001; Biddle & Berliner, 2002). These institutions have more flexibility as they are not bound by public school guidelines, and they focus on what they believe best prepares their students for the future. Green et al. (2017) "found that private education has a positive effect on children's locus of control, and on their aspirations for

good jobs, while also initially selecting children with relatively high self-esteem" (p. 11). The more robust the student's confidence level, the stronger the learning result.

Biddle and Berliner (2002) conducted an extensive study on the effect of smaller class sizes and concluded that those in smaller class sizes significantly improved achievement scores and academic growth was larger for those in the smaller environments (p. 14). Smaller class sizes also develop close working relationships between peers and teachers; thus, starkly improving overall learning, especially for those seen as at-risk (Lee & Smith, 1993; Alt & Peter, 2002). Private schools pride themselves on the offering of smaller class sizes. The research reveals continuous gains for students the longer they learn in smaller class sizes (Broughman & Colaciello, 2002). Conversely, the disadvantages of private schools are just as extensive. The cost, entrance exams, religious affiliation restrictions, selection process, and even unqualified teachers allowed to teach in the classroom all create concerns for merely attending a private school.

In 2016, Jeffrey Mitchell reviewed the overall cost of private schools and their meteoric rises over the past 20 years. On average, costs have risen at a rate of over 2.74%, bringing current costs to attend a private school to nearly $15,000 per student per year. Unfortunately, private school teacher salaries have met with only a modest increase in comparison to the cost of attendance, which is a disadvantage for keeping quality teachers in the classroom.

One key component to private institutions is their ability to be selective in who attends and who they reject from their institutions, and there are serious implications to this process. "In 1999-2000, 77% of all private school students were white" (Alt & Peter, 2002, p. 14). Lower socio-economic students continue to be the minority in private

institutions, even though school choice has provided some financial assistance to alleviate this disparate representation on private campuses. This disparity among the student population is also a disadvantage as these campuses potentially hamper social growth and real-world cultural exposure for their students.

Private schools have both advantages and disadvantages to learning and achievement. In the review of the literature on private schools, however, no real evidence exists of studies that directly address the students' point of view. The external influencers here are dominant, as families, school traditions, and well-defined school structures drive the learning process. Further research that clarifies whether this choice is a better alternative to other school environment opportunities, as viewed by the student, needs to take place.

Private schools are an option that comes with a significant family expense. Vouchers have become a topic of conversation to alleviate the financial burden on families who choose the private school option, but another response to vouchers has been the emergence of the charter school as another viable alternative, with no cost attached to attendance.

Charter Education

The third case for this study is charter schools. By definition:

> A charter school is a public school that is independently run. It receives greater flexibility over operations in exchange for increased performance accountability. The school is established by a "charter," which is a performance contract describing key elements of the school. The charter contract describes things like the school's mission, instructional program, governance, personnel, finance, plans for student enrollment, and how all these are measured. (The United States Department of Education, 2019)

These schools can be identical in design to public schools or can be specified in their design, catering to a specific academic regimen. According to the National Association of Public Charter Schools (2018), current statistics of the number of students attending charter schools in the United States is approximately 3,200,000 spanning 43 of the 50 states, with 56% of them located in urban areas. Each state has its guidelines for opening a charter school, and most have seen their design and implementation as a response to communities not providing a high-quality educational experience through public school options.

Charter schools, as seen through a positive lens, observe that they provide greater flexibility for students and teachers. The foundation of charter school development has been innovation (Dunn, 1994). Other viewed benefits are its flexibility in design, decentralized decision-making processes, and an overall shift to performance accountability (Dunn, 1994). The philosophy has been to design a school alternative that more directly connects to the student and the family.

The results of enrollment in charter schools, however, met with conflicting results. Proponents of the schools see them as better preparing students for life beyond their walls, yet detractors see no real difference between public or charter school options (CREDO National Charter School Study, 2013; Furgeson et al., 2012; Gleason et al., 2010; Zimmer et al., 2012). A key study of middle school students attending charter schools published in April of 2019 explored this concept to determine if there were benefits to a charter school experience over a public-school experience. Their barometer was that of college enrollment and completion. Striking in their discovery was no real difference from their counterparts in a public school (Place & Gleason, 2019).

The research works to prove regional successes and failures for charter schools. Research reveals thousands of studies occurring extensively across the nation specifically addressing the benefits and detriments of charter schools, but only a few addresses the effectiveness of student engagement. Furthermore, there seems to be a disconnect in the research on what constitutes a successful charter school, as they overlook several contextual items influencing these studies. This idea is one of the reasons charter school research has provided such mixed results.

The issue may be in the way they phrase the research questions. "Some researchers have said that asking 'if charter schools work' is the wrong question; instead, the question should be 'under what conditions do charter schools work?'" (McDonald, 2011, p. 14). Because of the individualized structure of most charter schools, it is difficult to ascertain what truly defines success in these environments. This differentiation in structure presents a challenge when looking for the best environment for student achievement, and the approach of this study clarified the contextual underpinnings that may influence the research outcomes.

The question of "under what conditions do charter schools work" (McDonald, 2011, p. 14) is profound, as it once again reinforces the importance of the environment and its impact on learning. Students who attend charter schools experience external influences—those contextual elements overlooked—that have a direct impact on their learning in this learning environment. Furthermore, asking the students themselves also creates a clearer picture as to the preparation—or lack thereof—that a charter school can provide.

Charter schools are a no-cost option, yet recent statistics reveal that there is another option on the rise—home school. This option allows parents to determine the educational outcomes for their children and is the smallest class size option available. The home school option provides autonomy, but also comes with its challenges as well.

Home School Education

Perhaps the smallest of classroom environments is that of the home school. Plainly defined home school is "to teach one's child at home instead of sending him or her to a designated school" (Forsyth, 2014, p. 4). Homeschooling can range from the possibility of individual learning to small groups developed in neighborhoods and communities. This setting eliminates the idea of a traditional brick-and-mortar school setting which provides unique learning advantages and disadvantages.

The National Home Education Research Institute estimates there are over 2,300,000 students who identify as homeschooled as of 2016, and that number continues to grow (Ray, 2021). Price is not an issue, as the only costs associated are the tools used to teach with, as determined by each family. The consensus of why families choose to home school is the freedom it provides for the learning process. In a study from 1998, Angelis states:

> Parents believe homeschooling allows children the freedom to pursue their natural desires, and that living and learning are not two separate entities, but [it] involves everyone at all times; therefore, learning is not just contained in a time and place. (p. 8)

Therefore, homeschooling provides a unique student experience that transcends that of a normal classroom environment as it incorporates every experience in the learning process.

Detractors of homeschooling believe the largest disadvantage of homeschooling is that students are essentially isolated or insulated, lack socialization, and are not truly prepared for reality post-K–12 school (Glanzer, 2008). The other main concern is that students do not receive quality instruction from a non-certified teacher. Rob Reich (2002) lines out several key concerns with homeschooling and believes private schools should submit to governmental regulations, just like public schools.

> When it comes to homeschooling, the state, Reich claims, should ensure the development of self-sufficiency in homeschooling children not by outlawing homeschooling but by regulating it to ensure that the state's and child's interests are met. (Glanzer, 2008, p. 12)

This concern is to the ability of homeschooling to achieve the best academic results for their students. Reich (2002) believes that government regulations should, at the minimum, ensure homeschooling meets all national standards for receiving an education (p. 15).

Statistically, however, Reich's (2002) premise seems to be in direct conflict with overall results from home school achievement testing. In 1999, Rudner found that in a study of over 20,760 home school students, 25% were a grade level ahead of their peers in traditional school settings, and their achievement scores were exceptionally high in comparison, with median scores ranging between 70% and 80%. These statistical results seem to reinforce the benefits of smaller class sizes, as seen in other school environments, and the impact of the home school on engagement is also very high.

Several contextual factors again have a skew to the collection of data, as environment, availability, socioeconomic status, and more play a role in whether a home school is as effective of an environment in comparison to all other available classroom environments. This study focused on students who are homeschooled in the same

geographical area, as all these options must be equally available to validate the comparison of study groups.

Home school information reinforces the importance of the environment, as it has statistically revealed high scores for students, high college admission rates, and perceived preparation for what comes next. However, no study on home schools has taken the time to empower the students themselves and give them a voice in their learning process. The studies stick to the standards of empirical data—testing scores, college admissions, and parent assessment of their programs. Time spent with students, hearing their views firsthand, can achieve the fullest picture of home school preparation.

Students who find themselves not "fitting in" to one of the previously discussed categories generally end up on an alternative campus. Unique to their purpose, intentional in design, these schools can take on very specialized roles. Alternative campuses provide their own set of problems needing exploration to understand their effectiveness in student preparation.

Alternative Education

Alternative education settings are a vast area that needs clarification for this study. As a rule, an innovative school would be an academic setting that does not fit any of the previous four groups. On-line schools, STEM schools, Early College High Schools, and Gifted and Talented schools are all examples of what qualifies as an alternative, as well as campuses for those students removed from a regular educational setting for discipline purposes. The campus for this study offers both a disciplinary wing and an academic choice wing. Historically, alternative education campuses are for students identified as at-risk or students who are failing in the traditional setting.

44

"Students receive a variety of options that can lead to graduation and are supported by services essential to success" (NCES, 2019, p. 8). Predominantly, alternative campuses are associated with the student who does not do well in a standardized educational setting. This campus classification can range from both the academically challenging and the psychologically supporting style of school offerings. The variety of offerings here prove a challenge as there is no one standard-bearer. For this study, however, it was important to view students that do not fit the standard public education school either for discipline or other potentially identified "at-risk" behavior.

Additional researchers utilized Raywid's (1984) studies as they sought to create clear categories for alternative schools, refining her definition to three levels of alternative schools—those geared to change the student, those geared to change the school, and those geared to change the system (Quinn et al., 2006). The challenge for each of these categorical school approaches was the ability to effectively analyze true academic achievement and with what metric would measure these accomplishments. Each state has its own set of guidelines, and as a result, each state has its measurement of alternative campus success. One consistent element, however, is the importance of community and connectivity in the alternative campus design.

Students who do not do well in traditional school settings are the dominant force in alternative school designs. This non-traditional student provides contextual validity to the intentional design of their school environment. By the very nature of the schools, students who attend alternative campuses are there by necessity. Their motivation and engagement are different and require innovation as regular instructional approaches are

not effective. Students may have behavioral issues, academic or social gaps, or other learning impairments that a traditional school setting does not address.

The American Youth Policy Forum reviewed results from 38 states on their achievements on alternative schools and found that accountability measures were unique to each state, with eight including additional measures looking specifically at incremental growth (Kannam & Weiss, 2019). This diversity in statistical information is a crucial element in understanding individual student engagement, motivation, and thoughts about preparation post-graduation. The concept of looking at incremental growth reflects a more intentional approach, focused on tapping into the intrinsic motivators more specifically to attain better results.

One of the strongest elements in alternative school settings is their intentional approach to the design. Riddle and Kleaver (2015), in their work exploring one alternative campus, approached this intentional design concept through the lens of assemblages. They believe "the physical and social organization of schools form an important spatial component of the schooling assemblage" (p. 503). Their research delved into the innovative practices on one alternative campus that worked intentionally to build a culture that combined the best of their students and the teachers with civics and a critical pedagogy focusing on relationships at the core of their engagement practices. They state, "through a critical pedagogy of engagement it is possible for students and teachers to 'construct educational identities for themselves within/against the wider global educational policy flows'" (Riddle & Kleaver, 2015, p. 505). As a result, student achievement accomplished significant results for the students on this campus. Specificity with the design produced incremental growth that was measurable in achievement.

Nicholson and Putwain (2015) adopted a student-centered approach, one of the few studies that asked students directly about their school experiences on an alternative campus. Their phenomenological study interviewed 35 students about their engagement in school practices once moving from the mainstream, or traditional school, to an alternative school. Crucial from their results was the impact on four key areas that defined the context for student re-engagement—classroom experiences, relational developments, generic school, and personal factors (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). The strongest elements were the strong sense of belonging by the students, as well as strong relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, students felt a stronger sense of ownership in their learning practices. Missing from the study, however, was an understanding of their views on overall preparation. The focus was on the transition and re-engagement in learning after moving from a public-school setting. As it focused on the transition and school engagement, long-term implications are unclear.

The research does show that alternative campuses are cognizant of the need for a different environment for their attending students (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). The very nature of most alternative campuses is a student-centered approach. The question, however, is whether their academic growth is comparable to traditional settings. Incremental growth creates, again, the issue of contextual influences that are unique to each alternative campus setting. What is true for this campus may not be relevant to a campus in another state. Alternative education campuses need further research to help clarify their effectiveness for the attending students and how their intentional campus designs impact internal, external, and overall student preparation.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this literature review shows the differences between these environments and how they try to cultivate all elements of learning and motivation differently, but current research largely lacks the student voices of those who experience the environments firsthand. The current research only looked at small samples through Likert scale surveys at the beginning of a time frame and an end, looking at self-perceptions of where they stand as guided by the research questions. Nowhere is there a clear exploration of the environments and their influences on student motivation and preparation except as seen in an alternative setting, and that was a narrow view of student re-engagement. More importantly, no study thus far explores the environmental impact on motivations and preparation as seen through the students' eyes. Cross comparisons are also nonexistent in the literature, and nothing explores student perceptions from the five key environments posed for this study.

First, it was important to understand intrinsic motivation for student learning, followed by extrinsic motivation for student learning. The next step was to explore how were these components fostered throughout the high school experience. The research revealed a pattern of consistency in understanding how students learn, including what factors can create change in the learning process for students, but limits the understanding from the student point of view. Second, students and their motivations are related to their learning environments as evidenced repeatedly throughout the literature. Environment influences the way students learn, how they learn, and what potential outcomes for students may be. The research proves that where students learn matters. Third, the literature provided a better understanding of each of the learning environments that are the focus of this study. The research shared each environment's strengths, weaknesses,

and how they impact student learning, motivations, and their focus on preparation. Each learning environment is unique, and through the research, they all possess excellent qualities that target these concepts of motivation and student growth. The evidence reveals no real standout as a quality learning environment. Also evident from the literature, different is not necessarily better.

The glaring omission in the literature is the limited studies conducted thus far that directly address the environmental impact on student motivation and preparation, and no research has done so from the student's point of view. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the need for this collective case study exploring high school seniors' post-graduation motivation and preparation in the five different learning environments. The next chapter discusses how to achieve the best results for filling this void in the research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

High school students are in a position today unlike any other in history. The number of school choices, the rapid transformation of standardized testing, curricula expectations for graduation, and even the paths presented to students after graduation is significantly different than just a generation before. The environments of high schools differentiate vastly. Public school once was the predominant educational option, but now the trends evidence a rapid rise of other school alternatives. Parent evaluation of the different approaches can change the course of a student's educational pathway with only the narration provided by the institutions to set the tone for the potential learning that occurs. Students who experience these different environments are the ones who speak to any certainty of the quality of their learning experiences. Student stories explain the motivational influences of self and others and are the best source of information about their post-graduation preparation perceptions. The literature has been clear that, to this point, very few studies have taken the time to ask these graduating seniors about their experiences and how their distinct learning environments have shaped their world views and preparation for what comes after they leave the comfort of their assumed home of four years. This research design explored these student stories in each of five different high school learning environments, and it aimed to fill the gap on what the students think works, what they believe does not, and how their student voice can help educate all stakeholders about these key issues.

In revisiting the research questions, this research study focused on five distinct learning environments to understand the answers to the following questions:

1. How do graduating seniors, from five distinct educational environments, describe and assess their learning experiences?

2. What are student perceptions of how these distinct learning environments encourage or inhibit individual motivation for post-graduation aspirations?

3. What would graduating seniors change about their educational environments to meet their ideal learning experiences?

This study focused on high school seniors who can best explore the answers to these questions and provide insight into how these environments function at the student level. Through one to three semi-structured interviews with research participants at each of the five distinct learning environments, the students utilize a platform where peers, families, teachers, administrators, and community leaders hear their voices. Their contributions set the stage for future research that redefines high school learning environments from the student's point of view.

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

The role of the researcher in a qualitative design can influence, both positively and negatively, the research data and the outcome of a collective case study. The researcher's collected information may engender bias when the design and execution do not meet the needs of the overall study in a manner that is objective, structured, and easy to replicate in the various settings explored. As the sole researcher for this collective case study, it is imperative to understand where my foundations exist, their potential influences, and how my approach to this study culminates in a wealth of undiscovered information that may re-shape educational perspectives.

The initial understanding lies in my constructivist views. I concur with the definition provided by Creswell and Creswell (2017) that "individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences…leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views" (p. 8). I also believe that the participants are the ones who build the meaning and understanding of a phenomenon. My approach is no different. I do see a need for high school students to have an active voice in how they learn, what they learn, and when they learn it, but I am also cognizant that this opportunity does not naturally occur. My experiences have led me to this point in time where I can finally facilitate that vocal opportunity for students in a meaningful way.

Fifteen years in the classroom working directly with high school students as a theatre teacher provided me opportunities to empower students. I found innovative ways to facilitate their feelings and desires into actions and provided a solid foundation for how they could create social change. Social change is by definition "changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions" (Dunfey, 2019, p. 1). Instilling the abilities to create change in their communities and their social circles created solid foundations that all my students could apply immediately and continue in their paths through what came beyond graduation. Their powerful insights drove me to move into administration where I would have the opportunity to expand from 300 students to over 2500 students, giving them the same opportunities to create change. The first few years working in high school administration were amazing experiences, culminating in a powerful "revolution" of campus culture. This student-driven culture shift was proof that, when schools acknowledge that students have a voice for change, real change can occur. After eight years in administration trying to replicate and improve

upon this process, the voices of the district administration began to diminish the importance of encouraging student voice in the educational process. I could not do the work from within the system—I had to move beyond it to create any real opportunity for a bridge between students and administrative powers. That revelation propelled me towards this collective case study.

I have raised my four children in public schools but decided to home school my youngest child for sixth and seventh grade. This difficult decision changed her learning environment significantly and required adaptation in her learning strategies. Her eighth-grade year also brought about another change. I moved her to a private school setting, which once again changed her learning dynamics and the environment. This continuous change of schools and environments with my fourth child has been the result of personal concerns with the learning preparation provided in each of the respective settings. Regardless of the positive or negative evaluations I made, this process not only increased my awareness of learning alternatives, but also the importance of gaining a real understanding of what works best for the student. My three older children did not have these different choices. Instead, they immersed themselves in the public-school environment for their entire kindergarten through graduation experiences. Providing these choices for my youngest has enlightened my understandings of what impact the environment has on learning and listening to my daughter express what exactly she needs has helped influence the decisions of where her high school experience will ultimately be. These revelations are a direct influence on my seeking out a better understanding of what works best from the student's point of view.

The sites chosen for this study have both nostalgia and forward-thinking principles in the foreground. The participants at each of the locations are not familiar, but their sites are, either through being a former employee on that campus or as a connection to the other campuses through former students, friends, and colleagues who advanced to new educational locations and opportunities. The ideas espoused by the research questions are ones that all individuals involved with the facilitation of this study have an interest in the outcomes. My bias falls to the belief I have in the power of the student's voice which I would like to see unbridled. The results across the board present a fascination to me with no real expectation for a predicted outcome other than to hear the resilient voices and to truly understand their unique perspectives across the varied learning environmental experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study returns first to the components of the Self-Determination Theory, (SDT), as it provides the overall direction and focus for the study. The foundation of Self-Determination Theory is "an empirically based…theory of human behavior and personality development" (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 3). The sub-theories of Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) are the lenses utilized to view the stories of the high school seniors exploring their contextual controls that comprise their learning drive and their sphere of influence that directed their journey. These theoretical elements combine to directly influence motivation for individuals, consider the significance and importance of the environment, and are central themes defining students' perspectives of motivations and post-graduation

preparation (See Appendix A, Figure A.1). This theoretical lens shapes the answers to the questions about how these individuals' experiences prepared them for what comes next.

The research questions look to both the narrative of the high school students' experiences as well as how their unique experiences coincided with their intentions and ambitions. The first research question asks directly for an assessment of the environment and the shaped journey experienced in each of the distinct learning environments. Cognitive Evaluation Theory drives this question, as it looks to the contextual controls of the environment and how it shaped the students' experiences. Organismic Integration Theory assesses how external influences and worldview development drives student narratives. The second question focuses on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, providing a self-assessment of how those processes flourished or diminished throughout the students' high school journey. The final question gives the participants the power to define the ideal learning environment. Their perceptions and experiences provide valuable insight from the students' overlooked perspectives. An in-depth review of the data collected empowers the student's voice in the overall high school education experience, with insight that sheds new light on the strengths and inadequacies of learning environments and their influences on individual motivations and overall preparation.

The data collection process also followed the emerging themes as they unfolded in each of the distinct cases. Observations provided detailed descriptions of the external influences and dynamics of unique learning environments. These are the Organismic Integration Theory influences in the research. The responses within the semi-structured interviews reflect guided imagery of motivational experiences through participant tone

and real-world narratives of contributions and detractions these climates created for graduating seniors. CET drove the interviews, shaped the structure of the questions, and the follow-up stems. Altogether, the data paints a clear picture of the perceptions of graduating seniors on their environments, the influences involved, motivational impacts, observed quality of learning, and defined descriptions of potential changes that potentially create the ideal learning environment.

Research Design and Rationale

This study is a qualitative collective case study that focused on distinct learning environments and their graduating high school students. Yin (2014) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in-depth and within its real-world context" (p. 16). Creswell and Creswell (2017) go on to define a case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 485). Additionally, a research design utilizing a case study exemplifies this process if the environment's problem "relates to developing an in-depth understanding of a 'case' or bounded system" (p. 496) and if the purpose is to understand "an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 496). Each case defined in this research study is bound as graduating high school seniors from five different types of school environments, exploring their unique stories. This research process gained a better understanding of student perceptions through its purposeful design collecting detailed narratives from the students at each of the different types of educational settings combined with detailed observations describing each location in detail. This approach allowed for the student to share perceptions of their

learning experiences and explore their thoughts and ideas about what they believe is the ideal learning environment.

A qualitative collective case study is the most appropriate approach for this design because the thick, rich descriptions emerge from the stories in each of these unique learning environments. This quality narration best highlights the importance of their stories through the words of the students themselves. Furthermore, "Merriam conceives qualitative case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon," which exemplifies this research design (Yazan, 2015, p. 139). Merriam's constructivist views epitomize the importance of a case study, and the graduating senior perspectives are best shared through this specific qualitative approach. The utilization of a qualitative study is, by its very nature, providing a voice to its participants. Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that the focus of qualitative research is on "participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives" (p. 204). The axiological coding kept in data codebooks for each case reflects consistent application and incorporates replication of the embedded data for cross-comparison (Yin, 2014). "In analyzing multiple cases, replication can be achieved within the types or 'families' of cases, with predicted variation observed across groups" (Kohn, 1997, p. 6). This cross-case analysis is exactly what this study provided. Consistency in the application of the interview questions along with a structured observational approach adhered to these methods of analysis.

An alternative option considered for this study was a mixed-methods approach, specifically an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. This combinative design may be a good alternative because it would increase the sample size for the study. The

decision not to utilize this approach was because of time limitations and a distracted

focus from the narrative could unfold if any quantitative data became part of this initial

study. The current qualitative design is appropriate and sets a strong foundation for future

qualitative or mixed methods studies, especially exploratory sequential.

It became evident through the literature review that a large gap exists when

looking at student perspectives. While there is vast information about the differences

between different learning environments and their strengths and weaknesses from

performance parameters, it largely lacks firsthand accounts from students. This research

design looked at the environments and their designs from the student point of view to fill

this void and provide foundations for further research that validates and includes student

voices in the educational process.

Site Selection and Participant Sampling

Site selection for this collective case study focused on campuses located in the

Dallas and Fort Worth metroplex. The study looked to explore representation in a mid to

large-sized population area. This consistency of design allowed for replication in other

settings for future studies. The selection of both the public and alternative education

campuses came from a school district that encompasses 73 square miles and serves over

20,000 students in Tarrant County. The private school site was a K–12 campus that

currently serves over 300 students also located in Tarrant County. The charter school

selected was a K–12 campus, also located in Tarrant County, housing over 3000 students.

The final group of students came from home school students working in a co-op

including Tarrant County, Parker County, and Wise County, all within the surrounding

area of the Metroplex. Their numbers vary but total student participation is less than 100 students.

The researcher interviewed one to three high school seniors from each of the five identified learning environments for a minimum total of twelve participants. The procedures most appropriate for this research design fell into two major categories: maximum variation and stratified purposeful. Stratification is where "specific characteristics of individuals are represented in the sample and the sample reflects the true proportion in the population" (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018, p. 150). The intent was to interview high school seniors from different learning environments and to explore their stories, commonalities, and differences. The most logical procedure to achieve the best result initially pointed towards utilizing stratified purposeful sampling. To illustrate subgroups and facilitate comparisons, this type of study would glean the best information needed. However, the research intended to give a voice to the high school senior who may not always receive direct attention—the middle-of-the-road student. This concept meant a student who is not in the top 10% or a targeted focus on a special needs' population. By focusing on the average student population, the sampling reflects a criterion-based sampling. "Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2001, p. 238). This focus ensures a data-rich representation within each case and proves useful in collecting data that is information-rich, and each of these cases meets that standard.

This study comprised five different cases, and it required analytic induction to explore the cross-comparisons between each of the five cases. Analytic induction is "a way of building explanations in a qualitative analysis by constructing and testing a set of

causal links between events, actions, etc., in one case and the iterative extension of this to further cases" (Talbert, 2018, p. 18). The research design looked to person triangulation where "researchers collect data from more than one level of a person, that is, a set of individuals, groups, or collectives" (Talbert, 2018, p. 21). The groups, in this case, are the high school seniors at each of the distinct learning environments, and the data collection comes from one-on-one interviews with the identified student groups at each location. The interview process started by using at least one participant from each campus with the potential to expand to three to ensure saturation of the data. Each case determined the participants through a stratified purposeful sampling process that illustrated distinct characteristics from each case study "to facilitate a quality comparison of the data" (Bricki & Green, 2009, p. 10). The design was the same for each case ensuring replication and consistency throughout the study. The data collection utilized semi-structured interviews with additional question stems directly associated with the specified questions asked. The systematic process used for choosing the participants incorporated a direct collaboration with campus counselors to ensure that the selection process observed the following conditions and characteristics:

1. High school seniors only.

2. Student grade point average is between 3.0 and 4.0 on a 4.0 grading scale (maintaining a "B" average).

3. Student ranks are not in the top 10% or the bottom 10%.

4. Males and females stand equally represented.

5. Socio-economic status representation reflects the campus demographics.

6. Cocurricular and Extracurricular participation in at least one group or activity, and not an officer or captain.

The characteristics focused on the students who met these specifications at each designated learning environment. To keep the process objective, the selection of several qualifying students chosen by counselors started the selection process. To remove potential bias by counselors assisting the selection process, a random draw process from the identified pool of students chose the study participants. Once participant selection concluded, the researcher completed the requisite parental permission request forms as dictated by IRB policy (See Appendices C and D).

The collection of students from each learning environment comprised the cases reviewed. Each case consisted of one to three interviews and one observation, bounded by the time limit of the spring semester of their graduating year, before their campus' spring break, schedules, and COVID-19 protocols permitting. When possible, interviews took place on each of their respective campuses immersed in the direct environment that contributed to shaping their worldviews on motivation and post-graduation preparation. Due to COVID-19 protocols, this was not always possible, and in those instances Zoom interviews took place.

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell and Poth (2018) refer to six forms of data collection that create an in-depth picture of each distinct case. For this collective case study, direct observation of the learning environments combined with individual interviews comprised the data collection utilized. The initial process for data collection began with one observation that took place in each learning environment. The researcher completed these observations as an objective observer, following a strict protocol from a pre-determined list of categories and responses, exploring the initial feel and tone of the space, the design, visual

impressions, and overall environmental design. The next step was to conduct in-person interviews of one to three participants in the study at each site, utilizing a semi-structured interview process (See Appendix B). The researcher completed a minimum of eight interviews, maximized at twelve to ensure sufficient saturation of the data. As these were one-on-one interviews, they either took place on the specific campus designated by each case or remotely by Zoom and in a location comfortable to the participants. All interviews conducted for an individual case took place in the same location, ensuring consistency and comfort for participants in the process. Recording the interviews relied on permission from the participants and their parents or guardian and was a pre-requisite for their participation. The interviews used both video and audio recordings, creating redundancy for the accurate collection of the information. Each audio track became transcribed once the interview concluded. The researcher consistently took reflexive notes in real-time during the interviews to verify the effectiveness of the information obtained. If the information collected warranted additional interviews, the notes helped to make that determination. The process continued until the research achieved saturation.

The observation data collection consisted of researcher narration of first impressions, visual descriptions, tone, and personal experience within each of the distinct learning environments. Detailed descriptions completed the observation process. The observations conducted answered the same questions and narration, first recorded, then transcribed, maintaining consistency in initial reactions to each space (See Appendix A, Figure A.1). The collection of transcriptions, notes, pictures, and the observation protocol information provided clear descriptions for each distinct learning environment, setting the

picture for the narrations to follow from the students who attended each of these distinct learning environments.

The semi-structured interviews followed a consistent application at each location and with all participants and sought to answer the research questions posed for this study. The interviews initially conducted began with a minimum of nine questions including potential stems empowering elaboration by study participants (See Appendix B). Interviews took place at each of the designated locations, videotaped, and transcribed for analysis through the coding process. Continuous feedback allowed the participants to "play a major role in directing as well as acting in the case study research" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). This collaborative process improved the outcome of the data collected and its subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

This collective case study followed the expectations of a constant comparative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) and consisted of five major steps. The process first began with the descriptive narrative of the observation material. The process used a single completed observation that followed the designated protocol for the evidence collected. The researcher then transcribed the collected information into a narrative describing each environmental case. This information set the tone for the interview information that followed. The second step collected, collated, and cataloged all transcribed interviews, along with the notes and observations for their review and analysis. Reading through all the collated research material informed the researcher on generalizations that emerged, the tone of the information, and the credibility of the information gathered. Third, a review of the information through a coding process

utilizing NVivo along with researcher manual coding established the significant themes

that emerged from the interviews. The coding process looked for any patterns relevant to

environmental influences, motivational practices, and identified the strengths or

weaknesses of the learning experiences. The next step was winnowing the data. Each of

the emerging codes identified the subsequent themes for the research. These codes

revealed both expected and surprising results, unusual patterns, and items of conceptual

interest. Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) helped

define the categories and emergent themes. The final step began with the triangulation of

the data "by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent

justification for the themes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 200). Each case consisted of

four distinct perspectives from each case that converged to develop the common themes

focused on environmental experiences and motivational influences. These narratives

unfolded in a rich, thick descriptive narrative that utilized member checking to verify the

accuracy of the results. Each of these purposive steps reinforced the qualitative reliability

of the data analyzed for this study.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher committed himself to the safety and security of all participants

throughout the research process. Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that "first and

foremost, the researcher must respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the

informants" (p. 206). Therefore, this research design's priority was to protect all research

participants involved with this study. The researcher focused on confidentiality

respecting the privacy of the respondents throughout the data collection process. All

information and data collection remained on flash drives secured in a private office with

only the researcher's access. All transcriptions and documents remained in the same secure location. The researcher worked with twelve student participants throughout the study, along with several administrators, parents, counselors, and campus staff members. Confidentiality was the top priority in all interactions, adhering to IRB protocols for working with human subjects throughout the research process. The researcher obtained written permission from the participating school districts, chosen campuses, participants, and their parents or guardians at each of the participating sites and proceeded with the study as prescribed by the research parameters. The participants understood the entire process of the study, how all data collection devices operated, and the processing and handling of all data. The researcher provided copies of the research results to all participants once the results concluded. Transparency was at the core of all research practices and a priority for everyone involved in the study. District and administrative approval occurred through proper channels that allowed the interviews and observations at each of the five selected sites. The researcher took precautions not to disrupt the natural environments when on site. Finally, the entire study ensured and respected the privacy of all locations and participants as pseudonyms protected the identity of all students involved in the study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research design confined itself to interviewing and observing high school seniors in five distinct learning environments. The focus stayed on comparable demographics of one specified geographical area in the Dallas and Fort Worth Metroplex. The initial challenge evidenced in this study was that the schools chosen varied widely in their total student population. This was a direct result of parental choice on where the

students attend school, beyond the control of the students themselves. All students in the study, however, lived within a thirty-mile radius providing geographical equivalencies.

The design shared stories from up to three students in each of the varied learning environments. This limited number of participants helped tell the story that best exemplified the experiences on each of the different campuses. The cases that had fewer student participants were campuses that had fewer students, resulting in quicker saturation of data. The comparison-contrast data revealed common threads in development and where the participants believe they would best be prepared for post-graduation experiences. The number of participants was a limitation, as qualitative studies limit the numbers of participants to provide a rich, thick descriptive narrative of the phenomenon in each case. The research design was intentional in the student represented, reflecting commonalities across all five learning environments. It is replicable but not generalizable.

The study also was time-bound, completed during the spring semester of graduating seniors. COVID-19 created challenges when it came to campus access and full immersion in each of the learning environments. Even though all precautions were in place, campus observations revealed potential differences from previous years due to COVID-19, creating potential outlier information in the observational data.

Conclusion

School choice and their differentiated designs for post-graduation preparation warrant a critical view. Administrators, school board members, and governmental agencies work tirelessly to develop their structures for what they believe works best but implement their plans excluding the ones that matter most in the learning process. All

stakeholders expect students to adhere to the parameters that define their learning environments without ever having a voice in that process. This study provided that student's voice. This chapter explored the processes that achieve this task.

Ryan and Deci (2018) laid out a strong case for the importance motivation plays in how one learns, and through CET and OIT they clarify the impact environments, context, and worldviews have in shaping one's learning opportunities. The high school senior, through the lens of SDT and its sub-theories, explored how contextual controls and spheres of influence connected to all types of motivation and environments, leading to their overall perceptions of preparation for what comes post-graduation. Asking students directly about their experiences in these different learning environments provided insight into what works well for learning and motivation, what was limiting the potential learning and motivational opportunities for students, and what the best possible learning environment may be for students to gain the best post-graduation preparation. Chapter four provided the answers to the research questions as seen through the lens of the high school senior. It explored the answers to the research questions, assessed the findings, and provided insight into the emergent themes and patterns of information that exemplified the needs of the high school student.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

Introduction

The previous chapter on methodology laid out the path for discovery in this collective case study. The purpose and intent behind this exploration were to understand student perceptions of post-graduation preparations and motivations in five different environmental settings as presented by the students. A review of the literature revealed that the student voice lacks representation when looking to gaining a better understanding of the core principles of preparation and motivation. This study took the time to explore these issues from the students' point of view to gain a unique insight into the students' perspectives through their experiences in each of five distinct learning environments. Ryan and Deci (2018) established a quality framework for evaluation of the findings using OIT and CET, sub-theories of SDT. This lens, along with a thorough thematic analysis and cross-case analysis, led to an evaluation of findings that revealed two to three distinct themes in each individual case, and a surprisingly overwhelming common thread of two to three distinct patterns among all five learning environments. This chapter reveals these results as it pertains to the three key research questions driving the study:

1. How do graduating seniors, from five distinct educational environments, describe and assess their learning experiences?

2. What are student perceptions of how these distinct learning environments encourage or inhibit individual motivation for post-graduation aspirations?

3. What would graduating seniors change about their educational environments to meet their ideal learning experiences?

This collective case study results and implications chapter starts with observational data describing each of the five distinct environments painting a clear picture of the environmental parameters for each case. Second, the answers to the research questions case by case share the value of the student's voice in the educational process, defining experiences, influences, and assessments of each unique learning environment. The format unfolds following each research question, step by step through the individual cases revealing their significant findings. Third, in the interest of providing a voice for the high school student, the researcher shares sample responses from students articulating their views. Next, the analysis moves through a cross-case analysis defining the emergent patterns found throughout the data. Finally, the discussion of the significance of the findings both individually of each case and comparatively across the five cases reveals the importance of student's voice, assessment of their perceived post-graduation preparation, and the student perceptions of environmental impact on motivations both intrinsic and extrinsic.

Analysis

The analysis of the results followed Tesch's eight steps to the coding process to establish a baseline of the information and ascertain the emergent themes. The data collection process began with observations of the environments providing a visceral picture of each unique case. Second, interviews took place on each campus where possible, or Zoom interviews with the researcher interviewing participants that were in their selected environment. Following the steps of Creswell's qualitative inquiry and research design (2018), the researcher read, memoed, and classified emergent ideas into categories that led to an assessment of the interpretations distilling the information down

to the overwhelming themes within each of the cases explored. The first and third

research questions were answered through thematic analysis, with the second question

answered utilizing the theoretical framework as an analytical lens. The significant

findings unfolded independently for each case, and addressed the three research questions

(See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1.

Significant Thematic Findings

Cases	Question #1 (Thematic)	Question #2 (Theoretical)	Question #3 (Thematic)
Case #1—Public School	Lots of people—intimidating Works like a community Lots of clubs, classes, choices	Passions and opportunities don't match Priorities out of sync Left wanting more	Real-world experiences Hands-on/experiential learning Increased responsibility with age Smaller class sizes
Case #2—Private School	Family atmosphere More individualized attention Limited clubs, classes, choices Small classes/more attentive	Passions congruent with opportunity Opportunity limitations Looking for more	Real-world experiences Hands-on/experiential learning Tailor-made curriculum needs
Case #3—Charter School	Sense of Community Lots of class options	Passions congruent to opportunity Focused/linear Not aware of other options	More Growth opportunities Real-World Experiences
Case #4—Home School	Family/teacher collaboration Focused opportunity Limited clubs, classes, choices Indiviual attention/global curriculum	Passions explored/nurtured Limited in curriculum Wanted more experiences	Individualized plans Aptitude based placement Community collaborations
Case #5—Alternative School	Focused on success Small/Attentive All about graduating—credit based	Passions Secondary to graduation Survival first Not sure what else is out there	Smaller class sizes Personalized learning plans Celebration of successes

Each of these identified cases provided powerful responses that revealed the importance of utilizing student voices in the educational decision-making process. As proven through the literature review, this approach has been missing from the research landscape, and the student responses provided answers to the research questions that reinforce the importance of understanding student perceptions on preparation and motivations.

This research study began with observations of each of the learning environments following a strict protocol adhering to first impressions—sights and sounds and overall feel for each space—followed by reflections once leaving the space. The observation information was visceral and based on first impressions. The tone and feel of each environment proved different in the process but common in the goal of students achieving graduation. Worthy of note is the undercurrent of common practices as defined by the state's graduation plan. The differences existed in the paths presented for students, the areas of extrinsic influence, and the care of the individual students in each environment. The following is a case-by-case synopsis of the environmental observations.

Case Descriptions

This collective case study explored five distinct learning environments and began with the collection of observational information about each of the distinct learning environments. The observational data followed the defined observation protocol for the study (see Appendix B) and the researcher performed these defined observational protocols for consistency in experience and description. The observations showed the differences between the settings and how each one is unique in its approach and process.

This observational exploration set the stage for the information that followed through interviews with up to three graduating seniors from each case. These numbers broke down to three seniors on the public, private, and charter school campuses, two on the alternative school campus, and one participant from the home school campus. The differences in tone and design proved intentional, creating desired results as defined by each unique case setting.

Case #1: Public School

The high school selected was a 5A high school in Tarrant County with a total enrollment of 2300 students. The campus was large, with two academic wings at the front of the building, a long hallway that connected the academic areas with the cafeteria, gymnasiums, and art classes. The back end of the building was a fine arts center housing a choir room, two band halls, two black box theatres, and an auditorium with just under 900 seats. Double glass doors meet all visitors who first must sign in at the office area. Emblazoned on the walls are paintings of empowering words like excellence, pride, and unity. The school mascot was evident and the academic wings seemed to be bright with limited posters and information on the walls. Outside a few classrooms were work samples from students along with name tags for the teachers that also reflected what college they attended. All administration members were in a large office on one side of the front hallway, with counselors clustered on the other. Overall, the feeling of the campus was warm, busy, energetic. The lasting impressions had to be the continuous hum of conversation among students during a passing period that turned to silence as the next round of classes began. The school colors were vibrant and omnipresent, symbolizing a

strong commitment to school pride. Ultimately, the space felt vast, like a small bustling city within its walls.

Case #2: Private School

The private school was small, intimate, and unique in its layout. The building seemed to be an old daycare facility that was retrofitted to house the school. The front office was intimate with live animals in the lobby, tons of pictures of artwork, photos, and student work from all ages throughout the hallways. Additional information about projects, opportunities to get involved, and ways to connect with other students and staff were evident throughout the observation. The intimacy of the space was genuine, warm, and inviting. The lasting impressions tied to the campus dog that roamed freely from class to class. Everyone knew the dog and had an opportunity to spend time with this animal. There was a sense of genuine connection between students and faculty. The energy of engagement seemed to permeate every hallway. There was an overwhelming feeling of interconnectivity that permeated the school and continued once leaving the space.

Case #3: Charter School

The campus tone could only be described as determination. An open and lively campus, the school had positive quotes and inspirational messages throughout the hallways. The offices were small and not necessarily the direct focus when entering the building. The buzz of conversation was evident that seemed to continue from the hallways into the classrooms. The energy was palpable in the air throughout the visit. Most memorable was the feel of a sense of purpose that permeated the walls and their

inhabitants. The space itself was warm and inviting and exuded a sense of purpose for all who entered. Its design was thematically focused on student success.

Case #4: Home School

The observation protocol was unique for this case, as the home school model was part of the student's houses along with a small building that students met together for cooperative classes. In both instances, a personal visit was not possible, but the students followed the designed protocol as they described their learning spaces. They described dedicated spaces in their homes that were for working on school projects and how personalized they built their areas. They seemed to have their own office space for their school-related tasks. What was striking about this case was the amount of time spent in community spaces to broaden the learning experience. Not tied down to one area, public spaces became part of the overall environmental learning experience.

Case #5: Alternative School

The alternative campus had two wings that comprised the school. One side was a voluntary alternative to public school, while the other side housed students placed there from throughout the district for discipline reasons. This case study focused on the voluntary side of the alternative campus. First impressions were that the space was intimate, quiet, and inviting. The front desk was direct to the left upon entering, and the front lobby was decorated with pictures of teachers, their specialty, and some of the students in attendance. The student pictures were celebrations of success and stories of their accomplishments. The overall feel was incredibly positive and inviting. There was a double door entry that led to the academic classrooms. The quietness was indicative of

the tone and feel of the entire campus which was positive and calming for anyone who entered.

Observation Summary

The observations revealed how each case created a distinct learning environment for their students. Each environmental design proved to be intentional and geared towards a specific purpose for students in attendance. The observations validated the work of Osterman (2000) on context and the influence of environment on engagement and learning. Ryan and Deci's (2018) OIT also became evident through the observation process. The observations revealed the external influences that each site posted. The impression left was perceived intentionality to influence or encourage elements relevant to student success. The differences observed at each site directly correlated with the discussions and interviews that followed. Space itself shaped the answers that students provided, distinct from their external influencers. Even though the answers provided came from different experiential journeys, common themes still emerged from each site, reinforcing the importance of listening to the students as they identified elements missing in all educational settings in addition to key recommendations for improvements moving forward. The subsequent sections provide the answers to the research questions as provided by each case, followed by a cross-case thematic analysis of the findings.

Research Question #1—How do graduating seniors, from five distinct educational environments, describe and assess their learning experiences?

Question one began with the exploration and analysis of the descriptions and assessments of the learning experiences through the lens of the graduating senior. This process followed the guidelines established through the emergent thematic analyses. The

responses from each of the participants gave a compelling overview of their environments along with key emergent themes from each case (see Table 4.1, column 1). The themes reflected the individuality of each case and provided insight into student perceptions about strengths and weaknesses experienced distinct to each campus. The following narratives provide in-depth examples of the emergent themes discovered through this interviewing process.

Case #1: Public School

The interviews with seniors in this environment initially began with a certain layer of trepidation, as this was a new opportunity for these students. No one had asked them their opinion about their experiences before and, as a result, the interviews started slowly and built as the conversation continued. These were semi-structured interviews following the protocol established for the interview processes. The stems in the conversation led to the emergence of three overarching themes from the conversations regarding their assessment of their learning experiences at a public high school. Whereas the conversations discussed positives and negatives, the common themes that emerged referred directly to the environmental influences on their experiences. The first theme to emerge was how intimidating the experience was at first with over 2000 students on one campus. The participants consistently described the size of the campus and the difficulties of traversing the building and working their way through the crowds. Initial experiences revealed that starting high school in such a large environment was not only intimidating but impersonal.

Perhaps this thematic concept is best described by the students themselves:

I guess you could say that high school can be very intimidating. Especially with, like, walking around school with upperclassmen that just kind of, they don't give

you attention. Even the teachers can be very, like, not very personal upfront when you first start school. They are kind of like we got to get stuff done. They are not as personal until like the middle of the year so it could be kind of intimidating.

As the students progressed through their high school experiences, their evaluation of public high school defined how they migrated from this realm of generality to areas of interest. As their choices became refined, the second theme consistently revealed is the ability for public schools to provide a strong sense of community. What became clear is that within the school there were several microcosms at work. As interests developed, these smaller organized sub-communities became the focus for the students. Their friends emerged from common interests and activities, and the organized structure of the campus enabled students to explore more in-depth these well-defined pockets of learning and experience. The categories ranged from academic activities and organizations to extra-curricular activities involving sports or fine arts. These appeared as migratory experiences where the students were able to connect to the compartment of the community that appealed to their basic academic needs and intrinsic motivators.

The voices that emerged from the student participants painted a clear picture of community experiences on the public-school campus:

> One of our strengths as a campus is that we are very community organized. I have met a lot of my friends in all my classes and even ones that I didn't have in middle school was able to get friends that were from other schools. I made really good bonds with people in sports. These connections became my two best friends now.

> I feel like it has been good. I would like genuinely enjoy going to school because, like, even though no kid really likes to do work, but especially being involved in extra-curricular that kind of like made it go by a little easier.

> Everybody here has such a strong school spirit. It's just a thing where we hype each other up and we help each other, especially with like sports or like band. And then our gymnastics team are going back to the state champions and I feel like proud.

This sense of community shaped the learning experiences and revealed how, as a public high school student, it became essential to find the types of activities that appealed most through the tremendous number of opportunities on campus. These microcosms made the experience enjoyable, easier to handle, and a connection to a smaller group of like-minded individuals.

The final theme that emerged was the amount of opportunity on the public-school campus. All respondents spoke at length about the numerous clubs and activities that were available for student participation. The responses showed that both academic and extra-curricular opportunities were in abundance. The consensus was that when one found what was most appealing, a student could thrive through those experiences. The intrinsic motivators influenced the navigation of the large campus to help guide students to their passions and connect them to these micro-communities for learning experiences and preparations:

> There are lots of clubs that [students] can join, and our AP program is very strong so they would get a very good education. So, like, I am by the band hall because I am one of the band kids and this is where we go and hang out. It is amazing how much band has had an influence on my life.

> I found wrestling my junior year and my closest friends came out of this experience.

> My friends and I are involved in so many things and we just find the time to make our schedules work, even to the point where it's not overwhelming on top of our school work. It gives everybody a chance to be involved and get a good education. So, if anything, it just benefits us in the future.

The public-school case discovered the student's high school experiences through a progressive process from beginning to end, as each student reminisced on their full high school journey. This process started as first impressions and how they changed throughout the four-year high school experience. Their views started with what seemed to

be a first impression that was intimidating and overwhelming. The students identified opportunities that appealed to their intrinsic passions and aptitudes and found a way to connect with smaller communities within the larger campus. These connections built a sense of community within the vast expanse of a large campus and gave purpose to their four years tied to this campus. The consensus was that the experiences overall were positive ones, as they were able to autonomously nurture their path throughout high school.

Case #2: Private School

The private school interviews were a unique experience, as they took place on campus and with the principal quietly observing the interactions. Initially, it appeared this would influence the responses to the questions, but in fact, it had the opposite effect. These students felt empowered to share their voice expressing overall assessments of their high school experiences and showed no inhibitions in their responses to any of the questions raised. The conversations were extensive, honest, and compelling. For the first research question, these students' assessments of the private school experience began with an overwhelming response related to the environment and its intimacy. All responses began with a description of a family atmosphere that led to a more individualized approach to their learning experiences:

> A private school like this one is very unique in that I think it is a very close kind of almost like familial type of feeling with like your classmates and teachers were like, you really get to know people very well. That can have like pros and cons to it because I mean you kind of have to figure out your own boundaries, it's kind of finding your own sense of comfort with the people around you but overall, I really like that. I think you gain a better sense of community maybe than some other places.

It is very different here. It's a lot more tight-knit. I know everybody and everybody knows me. I think the teacher-student relationship here is also very unique in the fact that the teachers they love to hear, hear what we say.

The human element appeared to be very much a part of the fabric of the private school setting. The relationships were strong both with teachers and other students. The family atmosphere described repeatedly reflected this theme as the foundation for the private school learning environment.

The second theme to emerge was about the learning opportunities and how all students on this campus benefitted from small class sizes. This encouraged a strong sense of individualized instruction that helped nurture their learning throughout their high school careers. This theme presented both positives and negatives, as even though the smaller class size enhanced learning, the choices of classes were extremely limited and may not have provided the best of opportunities to expand learning to meet personal needs in particular fields. The school encountered limitations tied directly to the small staff on the campus with a limited range of class offerings in comparison to other schools. The classes offered provided quality in-depth learning opportunities, but additional studies became limited due to a lack of teachers or course offerings:

Obviously, we're a small private school and so we don't really have the resources that bigger private schools do especially like science and research-based private schools. But I will say like some of the more education-based opportunities are definitely limited. We are small, we don't have the funds, and we don't have the faculty, but our campus is unique.

I think that it definitely, on the pro side of things, you really do get to meet some unique people and take some classes that you won't get offered in other places. Although the other side of the coin is that you may also won't be able to find some classes that you could have at bigger schools because our staff is limited and the amount of courses they can offer just, in general, is limited. You miss out on some that might be more accessible at a bigger school.

80

The opportunities presented in this private school appeared to cater to the needs of the individual student but did not necessarily allow for an expansive exploration via class choice. The classes that students did take, however, were far more in-depth in comparison to other high school experiences, according to these students.

The small class size and intimacy made for a quality educational experience for these private school students. This continued response was consistent throughout all conversations, as all participants felt like they benefitted from the additional individualized attention afforded by the school's design. The close-knit experience appeared to meet or exceed student expectations for expanding their knowledge and skills in areas of importance and best prepared them for what comes next after graduation.

These emergent themes reflect how powerful the environment is on student perceptions about their preparation. The campus structured its programs with a more individualized instruction approach that promoted a culture of family and connectivity. The conversation also revealed a connection to their motivations, as the additional attention afforded by the smaller environment produced innovative extrinsic motivators that pushed these students to succeed.

Case #3: Charter School

The perceived drive experienced in observation paralleled the conversations with graduating seniors from this campus. The consistency in the message from the space permeated the interview process and resulted in an evaluation focused on community, class options, and student graduation. The answers derived from personal stories that led to their attendance at the charter school, a choice made by family and circumstance. There is evidence of consistency in messaging from the entire campus throughout all

responses to the posed research questions. Their assessment was positive, linear, and focused. Ambition and accomplishment drove these discussions.

The assessment of the high school experience on this charter school campus was positive, first focusing on the importance of the campus functioning as a community. Repeated comments about the entire staff consistently presenting positivity and continuity in encouragement throughout all classes and activities are what made this case compelling. The message was to stay focused and graduate. All students felt empowered to reach that goal as they felt strong support for them to achieve.

Collaboration among teachers and students evidenced this continued drive to achieve graduation. The students reflected the messaging in all their responses reinforcing the importance of environmental influence. The connection was evident as these students' identified teachers and their contributions to ensuring they stayed on track and motivated even during the toughest of times. The teachers and the students held each other accountable for their efforts, reflecting a strong sense of family on campus:

> This is the best school I have ever been to. Everyone here is so helpful. They really want you to graduate, that their main goal is to get you to graduate. Yeah, I mean you are going to have to put in the work, but they will help you if you help yourself.

> We make sure everyone is included here. We make sure that, you know, everyone has a friend, a group, someone they can go to. Everyone wants to make sure you are successful. And once you get here, you won't want to leave. Well, at least until you graduate.

The students' assessment of the campus focused on the importance of graduating and doing what was necessary to achieve that goal. Even when experiencing difficult challenges, there was the omnipresence of a system of support for all students on campus. The strength represented by the connection with campus staff proved a powerful tool for these students to achieve academic and personal success.

Case #4: Home School

For this study, a home school cooperative participated in the research. Their design was a hybrid, as they did allow for home school students to collaborate on certain classes and projects two days a week, while the remaining time was home study. The interviews presented a unique perspective on the high school experience, providing insight into the positives and challenges this type of educational setting creates. First and foremost, the sense of family and community emerged throughout all the interviews, along with opportunity and individualized attention. Conversely, challenges arose with limited class selections and no real clubs or activities to enrich the learning process. Both themes presented challenges where the students sought enrichment independently with the help of their parents. Overall, the experience was the best option that provided a rewarding high school experience for these participants:

> I would say there's a lot of opportunities at my school because you have opportunities to get closer with your teachers and to learn from them, and to have a more personal relationship with them. You have a lot more opportunities to grow in the areas you want to grow in. So yeah, you get to have a lot more personal relationships. It's like a family as everyone you work with cares for you on a much deeper level than you would experience in a regular high school.

> Since we are not governed, it's not super organized, but overall, it is pretty amazing. The time spent with my teachers, I had more time individually to work on projects and things, and that makes them go well in the end. The deeper learning has helped me learn a lot more than I would have in a different setting.

The significance uncovered in the home school setting was the power of relationships on the learning outcomes. Responses evidenced an enhanced experience because of the strong connections to the learning process. It appeared the learning process and experiences were more meaningful, having long-lasting effects in a positive way towards their preparation for what comes next after graduation. The positives outweighed the

negatives, and the unorthodox path to graduation appeared best suited to set up students for future success.

Case #5: Alternative School

The interviews for the alternative campus provided another powerful example of the influence of the environment. The observational data revealed a quiet and calming atmosphere singled out by all participants as an asset to their learning success. The responses focused on class size, individual attention, and a focus on graduation. All participants revealed a structured classroom approach, more focused on the credits rather than the actual learning. All were adamant about the importance of graduation from high school:

> They always keep it very quiet so I can focus. That is one of the main reasons I came here. Since there are less kids to deal with, it feels like the teachers care about me more. It's not a lot of people. Because of that, I think it is easier to do what you have to do in order to get the credits to graduate."

> Yeah, our environment here is very good, a good place to be. The teachers here are amazing. They talk to you, they say good morning to you every day no matter if they don't know your name, they'll say good morning to you. I'm getting ready to graduate and I'm just like I don't want to leave here. I love it here. It's a great school.

> This is literally the best school I have ever been to. They are so helpful. They basically guide you. They want you to graduate and they, their main goal is for you to graduate. They offer all types of tools for you to finish your credits and walk that stage to get your diploma.

The participants revealed that overall, they had an enriched high school experience by attending this alternative campus. They may not remember much of the information from the classes, but they know they received help to get through the information and achieve the end goal of graduation. Alternatively, their thoughts on preparation revealed little about impact. They know they achieved graduation, but not sure of how much information they retained:

84

It was like, the information was there and we learned it when we needed it to pass the test, but I don't really remember much about it now.

You work on what you can to get the grade and pass. I'm not sure how much I can tell you about the classes I took, only that I know I passed.

Fear still exists for what comes after graduation. Participants expressed concerns that although they are graduating, they may not be as prepared as they need to be for where they want to go next. They were able to move at their own pace, receive individual instruction, but the focus was more on getting through the information rather than absorbing the information. They all acknowledged they may struggle post-graduation, but still feel a sense of accomplishment to have come this far educationally.

Independently, each case generated a thorough assessment of their high school experiences. The answers revealed how each environment influenced and guided their students through these separate journeys. The paths were experientially different, but all had the same goal of achieving graduation for their students and showed the diversity of how to achieve that result. Further exploration in the interview process moved to the application of the theoretical framework of OIT and CET as it pertained to guidance and influence on motivation.

Research Question #2—What are student perceptions of how these distinct learning environments encourage or inhibit individual motivation for post-graduation aspirations?

Question two moves deeper into the individual motivations of students and how the distinct environments promoted their motivations. Utilizing the framework of Ryan and Deci's (2018) SDT, specifically the sub-theories of OIT and CET, the research detailed these results thematically for each of the cases explored (see Table 4.1, column 2). The results indicated powerful individual motivations and environmental influences

on student aspirations. The following narrative explores the emergent themes and their significance for each case.

Case #1: Public School

Student motivations originated through further discussion about individual passions and how the school helped or hindered this process. The conversation with these students reflected the vast array of opportunities that existed on campus, but it also revealed how the school's opportunities did not always coincide with their intrinsic drives. Furthermore, student perception revealed that campus priorities were out of sync with individual student needs. Finally, all students expressed that although some opportunities helped to ignite their passions, consistently they reached graduation wanting more learning experiences and opportunities that enhanced their post-secondary aspirations.

The students discussed at length the vast number of opportunities that existed on the campus. Each student had differing passions and showed how different paths can be for students in attendance. These opportunities reflected challenges for the students, as it became incumbent on them to determine the best path forward, and this created challenges for building clear choices moving forward. The disconnect became evident through the descriptions of opportunity and application. The vast opportunities, including the required class load, limited the ability to expand in desired areas. It became introductions to experiences rather than in-depth explorations. The students provided several examples of campus opportunities:

> I think there are unlimited opportunities because, like, among me and my friends, we are all involved in so many things like we find the time to make our schedules work. So, our school gives everybody a chance to be involved and get a good education and build like time management skills. I think it's more of a me thing

like they are putting opportunity for me and I'm just the one who has to like do it myself. It's kind of like my own thing.

I feel like we could do a lot more. Like the activities and clubs, I am in, it would just kind of like, I don't feel like I'm doing anything in it. It seems like I am doing because the school has said what I have to do. There could be more than just going to meetings. I feel like we could do more to make a difference.

I was passionate about sports, and, things got difficult when I had practice in the morning, and then straight from football I had wrestling, and right after wrestling I had baseball, so as it was, I never really had any downtime to myself. I got participation grades because the teachers knew what was going on and they didn't pound me with work.

The responses showed how opportunity as defined by the space dictated the experiences throughout high school. Students know no comparison, as this is the only school they attended. The opportunities provided opened doors of exploration and, as evidenced by student responses, the opportunities led to memorable experiences. Students migrated to the areas of interest as dictated by their intrinsic motivators, and the public-school environment provided an opportunity to explore these motivations. The limitations corresponded with the time limitations of schedules and class loads. The sphere of influence emerged in areas of interest, but students expressed a disconnect between academics and the activities that excited them the most:

I mean, I enjoy going to school, because like no kid really likes to do work, but like it wasn't ever a big deal to me like the learning wasn't too difficult or too easy, it was just school. Especially being involved in extracurriculars kind of made it go by a little easier. With all that is going on at school, it is just hard to stay motivated.

It is worthy to note that throughout the experiences discussed, all students shared the challenges of not having enough time available to further explore what excited them the most. The experiences followed the designed path of opportunity created by the school, with the students expressing positivity about those experiences throughout their time in

high school. Consistently, however, all graduating seniors found themselves wanting

more experiences within their desired fields:

> I think that if we could finish all of our required classes our Freshman and Sophomore year it would, like, give us more time to explore the things we like the most. Maybe even get an internship or something? That would be great.

> I like all of the opportunities we have but I feel like I could get more out of what I want if I had more time. It's like I am always doing something and it's hard to, like, focus on what I really want to do. So, my only goal right now is to be happy with what I am doing.

The stories told revealed a path dictated by the environment, shaped by the opportunities

designed by the campus and its overall purpose. The public-school experience is full of

opportunities and student motivation is crucial to student success. All students expressed

this desire to gain more experiences that went deeper, but all revealed their preparations

allowed exploration of the concepts and skills that appealed to them most, regardless of

path.

Case #2: Private School

The students in the private school setting expounded in-depth about motivations

and the impact their school had on their personal journeys. The conversations revealed a

strong sense of intrinsic motivations, a cornerstone of student development on this

campus as it evidenced a strong desire to individualize educational paths. The student

stories showed a strong connection between opportunities and passions, yet the chance to

explore in-depth hit limitations due to staffing. The teachers on staff provided strong

support to the desired paths but because of the small size of the school staffing did not

always have the expertise sought by the students. This limitation left students expressing

their desire to want more out of their high school experience.

The striking component that continuously presented itself was the passions elocuted by the students interviewed. Each one discovered a passion while beginning their high school experience and found individualized paths that worked to enhance those passions. This case was unique in this discovery, as classroom opportunities looked for ways to expand the knowledge base of these students. The limitation, however, appeared in each conversation about essentially reaching a cap in-class options, as not enough staff was available to meet the needs of every path. The students discussed the challenges of teachers who had expertise in certain areas were not necessarily available to teach advanced classes due to the need to teach other sections:

> I think that definitely on the pro side of things you get to take some classes that won't get offered other places like we do a lot of research-oriented classes here that are really interesting that maybe you won't find other places. The other side of the coin is that you may be also won't be able to find some classes that you could have at bigger schools because our staff is limited and the amount of courses that they offer in general is limited. And like the teacher you have isn't always like the subject or class they are teaching maybe isn't always their first subject choice, like so you kind of get a pro and a con.

> I think anyone can succeed here, you know, but you might not just always get exactly what you are wanting, just because class things can be limited in terms of who teaches them and what you are going to get out of it.

The motivations played a strong part in the development of individual curriculums and the alignment between the two became evident the deeper the discussions went. The students expressed repeatedly that their intrinsic motivations equated to success, and a lack of motivation would have the opposite effect. Ultimately, the experiences provided stimulation and extrinsic motivation to nurture desired paths, but the discussion still leaned towards providing more opportunities to explore further.

89

Case #3: Charter School

The charter school exploration revealed another unique approach. Students attending focused on accomplishment and preparation for the next steps. The conversations revealed a congruency to passions, but only as identified by the school experience. The classes and design took a linear approach, guiding students through a generalized path focused on graduation and future success. The conversations remained limited to these elements and the focus on graduation, and other options appeared irrelevant past academic success.

The initial comments about motivations focused directly on staying in school and graduating. The academic focus, studying, and staying motivated on that objective overwhelmed the conversation. The provided choice to attend this school connected directly to opportunity and the perceived difference from the public-school setting. External motivations have the strongest impact on these students in the charter school setting. The continuous press for academic excellence permeated all actions expressed by the students throughout all interviews:

> It's a really good school, like honestly, in my opinion, it's the best school I have ever been to. They are so helpful. They basically guide you. They want you to graduate. Their main goal is to get you to graduate.

> Our environment is a good place to be. You feel appreciated, and everyone works to give you that motivation to do well. Everyone is very uplifting; makes you make sure you want to like get your stuff done—very motivational.

> This is a great opportunity. If you aren't going to put forth the effort then you don't need to be here. But if you do have the opportunity to go here, it is a great opportunity. And once you get here, you don't want to leave. I am getting ready to graduate, and I am like, I don't want to leave here. I love it here.

The linear approach appeared to appeal to the population in attendance. The step-by-step approach to achieving continued to be the cornerstone of student motivations. The understanding of their motivations simplified down to the desire to graduate first. The

exploration of opportunities seemed to be through discussion of possibilities and career advice about individual passions. Class options, however, seemed to focus heavily on academics and personal growth rather than the nurturing of intrinsic passions beyond the walls of the school. Conversations reinforced this continued academic focus with discussions about aspirations. Class options exploring these career paths seemed limited in scope, providing generalized overviews for students:

> They constantly ask me like, you know, what are you going to do whenever you get out of here. And then most of the teachers here are so interesting, like you hear all kinds of stories of like different things that their families used to do, and like know at least one of their family members has done something that you want to do and it's like mind-blowing.

> The teachers are like, you know you can definitely do anything you put your mind to if you want to truly then do it, like put your mind to it, buckle down and you will get there. They definitely give you that motivation to step up to your goals and do your goals.

The experiences of the students from this case deviated from intrinsic motivations of personal passions to that of a growth mindset committed to academic success. The passion for what could be accomplished became secondary and could be attributed to a lack of support in other facets of their lives outside the school environment. These conversations evidenced a clear focus on self-worth and academic success setting them up for what they choose to pursue next.

Case #4: Home School

The discussion regarding motivations centered on personal experiences and a thorough exploration of the opportunities generated through this unique case. It became evident that motivations and passions received focus and created individualized opportunities designed to nurture these intrinsic drivers. The challenge emerged in the limited curriculum provided, which left students pleased with their opportunities but

91

wanting additional experiences beyond the limitations set. The environment proved again to be a guiding factor shaping student perceptions.

Students had the opportunity to discuss what mattered to them most, resulting in teachers and parents collaboratively generating personal options that best fit the needs of each student. The options, nonetheless, became limited in scope due to the limit of teachers available to nurture advanced levels, and, as a result, personnel limitations capped the guided opportunities before achieving quality saturation. Students did feel empowered, however, to independently pursue opportunities, digging deeper into their fields of passion. The environment proved a solid devotee, providing guidance and support for all student endeavors. The result was a positive assessment of student experiences and eagerness for further opportunities:

> I love being a leader and I love leading people. I really feel like them putting me in a leadership position at my school, where I get to lead my peers is really helping me to have opportunities to grow in that and learn what to do, what not to do, and really feel like they helped me grow in that area. I kind of just feel their passion for me.

> I would say there's a lot of opportunities with my school because you have opportunities to get closer with your teachers and the admin and to learn from them to have a more personal relationship with them. You also have a lot more opportunities to grow in areas you want to grow within. With these personal relationships, you get more and gain more responsibilities.

Student motivations in this case tied directly to their sphere of influence. The personal relationships and genuine connectivity with these educators revealed a positive mindset, one that felt nurtured and supported in all efforts. The genuine excitement exuding throughout the interviews reflected a strong center of preparation and an instilled passion to seek out more opportunities. A genuine bond between teachers and students reflected a key focus for this environment was personal passions and motivations.

Cognizant of these components, the class curriculum adjusted to meet the needs of the students in a manner consistent with OIT theoretical components, specifically the influence and dynamics of this unique learning environment. Classes were selected or placed based on aptitude, and opportunities to select more advanced classes became evident, intentionally working to meet the needs of each student. The extrinsic motivators worked in concert with student intrinsic motivations.

Case #5: Alternative School

The alternative campus provided unique perceptions, as the primary focus for these students was on the school process. Efforts to maintain a quiet and orderly campus to enhance concentration and comfort for the students became a priority. Students on this alternative campus looked at motivations as directly connected to graduating high school. The structure provided personal attention, but when looking at internal motivations, the students revealed that most of those elements received attention through conversation and examples provided by staff members. The actual opportunities fell to vocational classes or units of study providing foundational information only. Consistent throughout all conversations was this thankfulness for a quiet environment that nurtured their study habits, a clear focus on graduation, and ease or comfort in knowing that possibilities would be abundant past graduation:

> This school has made me learn a lot about myself, has made me want to do more. It's not just the teachers that want you to graduate, it's the students that go here too they want to see you succeed. And you knowing that they want you to succeed is the biggest thing.

> So, when I came here, it was a game-changer. It opened my mind a lot more. I was right, I want to come to school every day. I am ready to go, ready to learn, get things done. I am more motivated here than I would be on a regular school campus.

93

The overwhelming factor with motivation fell to extrinsic motivations. The students

received an accolade for incremental accomplishment, and the campus design proved

conducive to student accomplishment. Students admitted to not remembering information

covered in classes, but clearly remember when they achieved completion. This process

shaped motivations from the outside in, allowing students to gain confidence first before

learning to focus on intrinsic passions:

> You know, everyone here has a friend, everybody has a group, we all, and then
> whenever it comes to celebration, which is on Fridays or Mondays, everybody
> claps, makes sure you feel appreciated to get that motivation to keep getting those
> credits in.

> The biggest strength here is that if you are motivated, you can graduate really,
> really early, depending on how much work you put in. The downside is that you
> are rushing through these lessons and you don't really remember anything.

The interviews revealed a passion for possibility. The school environment instilled a

sense of self-worth that empowered the students to realize that the small

accomplishments within the school translate to personal accomplishments beyond the

school. The conversations between students and staff centered on these future

possibilities, even when the classes themselves did not. This continued relationship

through their journey on campus presented a unique perspective that personal motivations

and aspirations do not have to be about large future accomplishments, rather personal

motivations to succeed in the here and now. Together, the contextual controls and the

intent of this sphere of influence developed strong, confident mindsets for each of the

students in attendance:

> My biggest goal right now is wanting to graduate, but then I am thinking about
> joining the police academy. And then I have other job opportunities that I am
> looking at. Like becoming a state trooper. I hear all these cool stories and it's like,
> man, I want to do that.

> The teachers constantly ask me like, you know, what are you going to do
> whenever you get out of here, you know? And then some of these teachers here

94

are so interesting like you hear all kinds of stories like different things that their families used to do, or they used to do and like know at least one of their family members has done something that you want to do and they definitely give you that motivation to step up and do your goals.

This environment motivated students to see success in small palatable parcels. By piecing together small successes, the snowball effect created sets these students up for future successes beyond the school. The students expressed how strong this environment's external motivations stimulated individual intrinsic motivation.

Research Question #3—What would graduating seniors change about their educational environments to meet their ideal learning experiences?

Question three looked to student ideas of where changes should be made to improve overall high school experiences. This process looked at student voice and their identification of perceived necessary adjustments for each of the distinct learning environments to improve its approach to preparation and motivation. The subsequent narrative for each case explores the overwhelming themes evidenced through the continued interview process with high school seniors (See Table 4.1, Column 3).

Case #1: Public School

The interview questions prompted passionate participant responses. Through the coding and thematic processes, their impassioned conversations identified four common solutions to improving preparation and motivations on the public-school campus. All participants identified a need for more real-world experiences, a need for more hands-on or experiential learning, a desire for increased responsibilities with age, and finally a plea for smaller class sizes. Responses proved consistent throughout the interview process with all participants independently identifying the need to address these changes to improve what they see as necessary for post-graduation preparation.

95

The interviews generated an initial impression of surprise from participants, as no one had asked them their opinions before. Without hesitation, the consistent responses overwhelmingly expressed a need for more real-world experiences. All participants provided examples of how the curriculum did not provide opportunities to connect with what they perceive as applicable knowledge and skills, having to learn these aspects on their own. The participants tied real-world samples to the understanding a FICO score, filling out a rental application for an apartment, and understanding how to do one's taxes:

> There's just a lot of stuff that I don't know that I have to go to my parents about, and sometimes my parents aren't really there to like, explain things to me, and I know there are classes that would help but they don't fit into my schedule because I am trying to do other things. So, I wish they had like, something where we can at least learn a little bit more because I don't know, it's just all confusing and we kind of have to learn along the way as we grow up now.

The striking commentary came when students felt they would be more prepared if afforded the opportunity to increase their freedoms and responsibilities as they progressed from their first year through graduation. Some matters expressed were social, referring to needing a pass to walk the hallways or have an open campus for lunch, but the core concern was that as they reached the legal age to vote and enlist in the armed services they should be treated with more respect:

> I would say, and I know like, I've definitely thought a lot about this year a lot more like, how I wish was a little more prepared like seniors to like go out into the actual like real world, because I feel like a lot of teachers, especially our superiors don't treat us like we are adults because a lot of us are 18 now. I just like we should be treated like adults, or at least get a taste of it—just a little freedom.

> I understand like there are rules and regulations that we have to abide by. But I also think that like we are mature enough to understand those things and like, just be able to do our own thing. I understand that it's about safety, but sometimes it just seems silly.

Respect as an issue seemed to tie to maturity and age as the students progressed through their high school journey.

The final theme of importance was the discussion of smaller class sizes. All participants felt that they would have learned more or done better if their classes were just a little smaller. Even though the students felt that their teachers cared about them and their success, they thought the number of students in each class made it difficult for personalized attention to all students. It turned to a discussion about how to improve individualized instruction by making each of the classes what they believed would be more manageable for everyone.

Case #2: Private School

The in-depth conversations continued with the private school students, as they also felt strongly about elements that would benefit their environments. Noteworthy themes that emerged were wanting more real-world experiences, advanced hands-on learning opportunities, and most importantly a tailor-made curriculum to meet individual needs. The examples provided ranged from internships that start as early as junior year, mentorship programs with experts in relevant fields, and elaborate field trips to business venues of interest.

The conversation about real-world experiences and hands-on learning tied to what they perceived as a lack of common-sense courses that would provide adequate preparation for living independently and a lack of opportunities to apply what they learn. This stemmed from the issue of not having enough staff to cover these types of courses, but it also extended to other areas where they felt the school fell short in meeting their expectations for post-graduation preparation. Students sought opportunities to connect

their theoretical classwork to real-world situations, taking their classroom information and making it an applied learning process:

> I think you could do more hands-on learning just inherently and everything you do, whether it be, if you read Shakespeare, you are going to watch the play, right, I think something as simple as that. The curriculum could definitely be shifted where there are more hands-on opportunities within it, I don't think that necessarily like teaching and like PowerPoints and going through information is a bad thing. But I think it should be supplemented with other opportunities for kids to take the knowledge and not look at it conceptually, but practically.

> I think there should be a core tenant of a high school experience that is like actually preparing you for like the real world. It would be nice to have classes where you could actually get guidance from people who know a lot about these things directly.

The consensus revealed a desire for more of these applied learning opportunities.

The strongest theme to emerge was the need for a curriculum that was tailor-made for each student to meet their specific needs. Certain classes seemed superfluous, contradictory to their passions and directions, and therefore, time spent in these extra classes was in their eyes wasteful. If their realms of interest were specific to a field, then there was a desire to increase targeted class opportunities and remove the classes that were not helpful:

> I think you should be able to pick your tracks, obviously, you should be able to switch it as well because I think that you know you are in high school and you are a freshman and you go okay, I want to go down a STEM career. And so, you take a focus in these classes and you realize I hate this, then I think you should be able to switch, but I think it should function more how certain colleges do where you can kind of create your own end goal with graduation in mind.

> I am taking Calculus this year. I plan on being an art teacher for middle schoolers so yeah, like I am really going to need calculus. I just think that the curriculum is unbalanced and needs to focus more on my needs.

> I think dealing with the world, whether it be psychology, current events history, or just mathematics or statistics, I think that there's a lot of applications of everything in the world. I feel like really if we had a better understanding of these things would be more beneficial. China's gonna probably be the biggest economy soon, places in the world with these massive people in a large booming industry that we kind of just ignore, villainize, and push by the wayside. I think if we had

98

just a better understanding, it will help break down stereotypes, just discrimination, and more. We don't address these issues internally before we do so externally. So, I think globalized classes would be good.

These themes reflected a strong sense of confidence about where they felt the school could improve its methods of preparation for all students. They all spoke of a need for more advanced classes that tied directly to their field of interest. The students were cognizant of the limitations that the school had, but their responses focused on constructive critical elements. Each participant had a different academic track and a wide array of interests, but they were all united in how they felt the school should change to meet their needs professionally and academically.

Case #3: Charter School

The answers to the final interview questions from charter school participants focused on two areas. First, the hope was for more growth opportunities, and the answers explained how to get beyond discussing big plans and to do more of what they find of interest beyond academic success. Second, akin to the first, was a way to accomplish these growth opportunities. They felt the best way to achieve this is through more real-world experiences branching out beyond the classroom. Together these emergent themes provided insight into the mindset of the charter school student.

The discussion of growth opportunities and a need for real-world experiences stemmed from their explanation of coursework. The classes and curriculum followed a linear approach of information, gradually increasing in difficulty, but reflected a standardized approach to classes and applied learning. According to the students, this regimented process left little room to explore a wide array of classes and topics beyond the state standards. Students spent time learning about possibilities beyond graduation

through conversations with staff and other students. They expressed a desire to explore more but expressed content with the current school direction:

> Everybody here wants you to graduate and wants you to be successful. I have learned how to study, but I want to learn more about being a policeman. I think that would help me know if going on to the police academy is right for me.

> Some of the people here have told me stories about so many things that they have done in their lives. That's been cool. I know I could do anything I set my mind to, but maybe if I could have taken a few more classes that taught me more about this stuff and not just talked about it, maybe I could like know more about what I want to do. Right now, I just don't know. I am happy to just graduate.

This case presented a view of their learning environment that was not about forward-thinking opportunities beyond graduation, rather a focused view of achieving graduation. Its intentional focus on student survival made it an ideal environment for the students in attendance. The student suggestions for improvement were simple modifications that expanded the campus approach to an increased level of awareness that potentially expands the purpose of the school.

Case # 4: Home School

The home school discussions began with a personal reflection on individual experiences that led to the discovery of three common themes of change recommended for improving the overall high school experience. First, it was a common desire for individualized graduation plans, tailoring classes to fit the needs of each scholar. Second, recommendations for an aptitude-based placement process for class levels and matching learning styles. Third, the discovery of an approach that connected students to the community outside the school through innovative collaborations with existing businesses and organizations. These common themes represented targeted ways to create an ideal learning experience.

100

The first theme looked at the importance of individualized graduation plans. The thought was that the student, parents, and teachers work together to listen to what each student wants to accomplish and to gear all classes towards that goal. The idea was to streamline class offerings, collaborate on ideas and create a more mentor-based learning environment. Participants acknowledged this process to be a bit more time-consuming, but a valuable process to increase student investment in the learning process:

> I think getting my parents and my teachers working together with me to design a plan makes a big difference. They listen to what I want to accomplish and then help me to achieve it. I think it works best when they both get involved in our learning. I then would have more classes that were tailored for where I am at.

> You should have the opportunity to build a more personal relationship with your teachers. If you prove yourself, you get a lot more responsibilities and learn how to be a leader.

The second theme that emerged was the concept of aptitude-based placement in coursework. This case already has an initial aptitude placement test, but the students went further thinking it best to continue the aptitude testing to either move on to other classes quicker or to make sure to catch gaps when there is a deficiency identified. The students felt the testing process would save time and ease struggles for students who might end up misplaced in a course. Participants reinforced this idea with personal stories of struggling in classes where they did not have a proper foundation, and it hampered the learning experiences in those classes because efforts were to catch up rather than learning how to apply the new skills:

> I would say that testing, they need to do that with every subject, especially Latin, to see what class you should be placed into. Because I understand that you should have that assessment at where people are at and what you need to work on. But I feel like people should have more.

> For me personally, when I came to this school, I really wish they would have put me in an easier Latin class, I would have enjoyed learning it. Besides, I would have like, had a good foundation to build off of.

> I think having a test, and then also having, like, almost kind of an interview, like have a test and kind of get interviewed, you can have a person that would sit down and talk to me and then they can understand where I'd be at because like they could talk about it and see where your placement would be. It would be time-consuming, but, for me, that'd be best for me if I wanted tailored courses.

The final theme to emerge was the concept of creating community collaborations to enhance the learning experience. These students felt that bridging the learning from inside the school to the surrounding community would improve the long-term effects of the learning. This merging of components would also get community members invested in the learning process for high school students:

> It's like, if I want to go into business, who better to learn from than someone who runs their own business? It just makes sense that they are involved in some way.

> I am passionate about theology and Latin and feel a call to go into the ministry. It would be so cool to be able to spend time with people who are already doing this now. That personal connection would help me a lot.

The three themes that emerged for the home school environment showed a thoughtful method to improving elements for this case. The students engaged in thoughtful reflection on their own experiences and devised these suggestions for future exploration. The personal examples reinforced the strength of their intentional approach to these suggested improvements.

Case #5: Alternative School

Student participants in this case reiterated the importance and value of their learning environment. They believed this was the ideal place geared for their success. The focus was on attaining graduation, and the elements that showed significance were items that they benefitted from and believed others could do the same. The ideas of improvement arose through their acknowledgment of those items that had personal connections. The first theme to emerge was a need for small class sizes. The second was

102

the focus on personalized learning plans. The final element that found commonality was the celebration of success. These three suggestions for improvements consistently appeared in all conducted interviews.

Commonly discussed were small class sizes being a true benefit to academic success. The personal attention afforded each student by teachers increased individual value. The students believed they were important and in return wanted to perform well for their instructors. The smaller size also reduced stress and anxiety, as the smaller number of individuals made for a quieter learning environment:

> I would say that having smaller classes makes it easier to focus. It is more quiet and it is easier for the teachers to pay attention to certain kids at a time because there are fewer kids and then you can get the help that you need.

The second theme to appear was the significance of having personalized learning plans. Not all students learn the same way or at the same pace and creating an environment where students can design a schedule that meets their needs while still following school guidelines would best benefit high school students. The process would also focus on classes that provide importance to that individual. The perception was that some classes are unnecessary and yet are still requirements to graduate. A re-evaluation of what classes bear the most importance and then creating a personalized plan appeared to be the prevailing theme with all participants:

> I think that certain classes are more important than others and should be stuff you are going to be doing when you are older. I mean, I know you need to take math and English and science and stuff, but teachers and people at the school should take a little time to get to know how I work, how fast, or slow I work, or where I might want to spend more time on a class, you know? I think you should mix it up, but do it how it fits me.

The final recurring theme to emerge was the celebration of success. Every student, in this case, commented on the significant impact an external motivator celebrating incremental

success had on their learning and their desire to achieve more accolades. They repeatedly

commented that these types of memorable experiences make learning fun and a

worthwhile endeavor:

> One thing that they used to do on our campus was to have these weekly celebrations. We would go to the cafeteria; we would all sit on the tables and everything and it would be like Mardi Gras with everyone getting beads to celebrate our class credits or something. It individually celebrated everybody who finished something during the week. It was so memorable because it was like no other school does that. Maybe celebrating should be at all schools. It was always so memorable and made a difference. It was important. It is important.

These themes consistently arose from all participants and reflected the experiences the

students had in this learning environment. The smaller class size, the celebrations, and the

personalized learning plan were present in the daily activities of these students. The

emergence of these concepts was the result of the external influences created by the

purposeful design of the alternative campus.

Cross Case Thematic Analysis

Yin (2003) refers to five different ways of analysis; pattern matching, linking data

to propositions, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case

synthesis. This research study followed a collective case discovery process and utilized a

cross-case synthesis reviewing the pattern matching elements. This path was the most

logical approach to understanding the results. The synthesis process looked at the three

research questions independently and explored the common patterns discovered from

each of the five cases. After identifying these common patterns, the analysis culminated

into an overall assessment of the similarities and differences experienced throughout the

five distinct environments. The analysis refers to the strength of the literature review as it

reinforces the findings, along with an examination of the significance of the theoretical

framework as it pertained to the overall results of the study (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Cross-Case Synthesis of Emergent Patterns

Research Question	Patterns	Literature Connections
Question #1	1. Relationships 2. Opportunity 3. Community	Wormington, Corpus, and Anderson, Schlechty, Hattie, Decie and Ryan, Osterman, Vygotsky, Dewey
Question #2	1. Inconsistent 2. Limitations 3. Need for more	Deci & Ryan, Saeed and Zingier, Gillet & Vallerand, Osterman, Nicholson & Putwain, Schlechty
Question #3	1. Real-world Learning 2. Hands-on Skills 3. Personalized Education Plan	Deci & Ryan, Schlechty, Hattie, Osterman, Nicholson & Putwain, Lave, Wenger, Vygotsky, Dewey, Saeed & Zingier, Gillet & Vallerand

This cross-case synthesis identified three emergent patterns for each of the research

questions posed. These themes reflect connections between environments, learning

experiences, motivations, and preparations of the participating students.

Discussion

The results from the research presented strong patterns common to each of the

five learning environments. These common patterns warrant explanation and further

exploration. The following discussion breaks down the results for each of the research

questions, their emergent patterns and the significance of their findings.

Question #1: The Emergent Patterns

The first research question looked to the student's perspectives assessing their high school experiences. Each of the participants demonstrated attributes of their environment, their journeys distinct to the intentional design of each case. The correlation to the literature stayed true to the intentional design of each case, defining the environment and its influence on the learning practices. The results reinforce the findings of Wilmington et al., (2011) where the external influences directly corresponded to student output. This study takes the results one step further by allowing for the voices of the students to reflect the importance of the teacher and student relationship beyond just extra-curricular activities, as these connections and their influences were key components to success on all campuses. All students described positive encounters as defined by their environments. The themes that emerged from answering this first research question were diverse and reflected the pattern of intentionality unique to each environment, but clearly showed how each case achieved better success through campus relationships. All cases referred to administration, coaches, and teachers as being a crucial part of helping them achieve.

The results also validate the works of Osterman (1998). Referring to the literature review, it revealed that "if students who experience community have more favorable attitudes toward others, they also view themselves more positively with higher levels of self-efficacy, an important cognitive perception linked to school success" (Osterman, 1998, p. 14). This proved true throughout all the cases. The second pattern that emerged was the significance and importance of community. Equally shared throughout all the data collected, each unique case presented answers consistent with the importance of the community. The visceral descriptions of the space along with the connections made with

other students and staff members showed how in all cases microcosms developed strong bonds. These bonds resulted in a positive view of the campus as seen through the lens of these developed micro-communities.

The researcher discovered one final pattern that emerged from the results connected to opportunity. All students discussed the opportunities presented in each environment, and it became common through their assessment that opportunity was a foundational need. This commonality tied directly to their decision-making processes that comprised their high school journeys. This pattern emerged as something not covered through the literature review, a discovery that proves the necessity of this study. Connecting directly to the students and hearing their perspectives have revealed this new area that how opportunity is addressed in all learning environments is a pattern warranting further research and exploration.

The theoretical framework of SDT, specifically the use of CET and OIT provided a quality lens for this investigative process and especially revealed a direct correlation between environmental experiences and how it directly defined preparation. Each unique case followed its defined journey and became the context for the learning practices of its participants. Looking at the patterns that emerged for this first question, it is evident that one's sphere of influence (OIT) and contextual controls (CET) influence participant perceptions. All five cases are distinct in their intention and purpose, and the answers provided by participants that are products of that environment revealed an adherence to the guidelines created by each distinct learning environment. This study validates the inquiry originated from Deci and Ryan (2018) that looked at intrinsic to individual development and within social contexts, that facilitate vitality, motivation, social

107

integration, and well-being. The answers to this research question showed how social context matters and directly parallels environment and student perceptions. The diversity of the cases revealed the importance of these connections. Hearing the students' voices revealed both validation and criticism of each environment. Ultimately, their voice revealed the truth about student perceptions of post-graduation preparation.

Question #2: The Emergent Patterns

The second research question delved deeper into the motivations, and again three significant patterns arose from the results. First, the data revealed patterns of inconsistencies in the application of opportunity. It appeared that personal passions and motivations received discussion and basic orientations but in-depth exploration varied greatly between the cases. The pattern of inconsistency was that none of the cases adequately targeted personal motivations. Saeed and Zyngier (2012) looked at this correlation through their studies on environments and student engagement. Their exploration of the engagement continuum received validation from the results of this study. Throughout the data, the stories showed how opportunity did not equate to application. This inconsistency contributed to a decline in intrinsic motivation throughout the five cases.

Campus limitations emerged as a second pattern. Consistently participants commented on how their campus had limitations on what they could provide to feed their passions and they needed more. Across the board, the results evidenced an acknowledgment of individual motivations and what they needed from their environments to facilitate that inner drive, yet a cognizance of the environmental limitations to continue providing additional nourishment throughout their high school

journey. These restrictions showed how any learning environment, as evidenced in this study through five, struggled to connect on an intrinsic level.

The patterns led to the discovery of a common desire transcending all five cases. Each of the cases revealed that although some classes and possibilities emerged, all participants consistently felt they needed more opportunities. This acknowledgment of and need for more verifies the need for further engagement employed throughout learning environments. These concepts connect to the student engagement continuum as identified by Schlechty (2011) and Hattie's influence on achievement and influence through his value-added effect size assessments. Both authors accurately represent the need to engage at a high level all students. These concepts receive confirmation from the source of students. Student voice again proves valuable in shaping campus direction, regardless of setting.

Question #3: The Emergent Patterns

In reviewing the data, what was most significant was that no matter the journey, the needs of the students in all cases remained the same. The strongest evidence of this came in the final research question, looking to understand the types of changes the students would make to create the ideal learning environment. Consistent in all environments was a desire for real-world learning opportunities, a need for more hands-on applied skills, and a personalized education plan that connected with their intrinsic motivations.

These themes proved common vociferous answers throughout all five cases. It became striking that regardless of the journey or the environment, all student participants wanted the same thing and felt all environments needed to make these adjustments to

improve preparation and increase connectivity to individual intrinsic motivations. This surprising result proved the need to include student voices in the education development process. The literature review evidenced this gap in research, and the answers provided from all cases validated the premise of this research. Deci and Ryan (2017) provided the best lens for analysis, as the components of SDT revealed the importance of environmental influence, the impact of external motivators, and the need for further research on the subject. The environment does have an impact directly on the journey and limits itself to the paths defined by each of the five distinct cases in this study. However, the omission of student's voices proved to be a necessary component to reinforce the theoretical discoveries of all research listed in this study.

The common theme of real-world learning opportunities stemmed from a description from participants about a lack of preparation for what they face once they are out of the safety of their homes and the secure environment that defined their school experience. Throughout all five cases was a lack of educational classes or resources that filled this void. The student's voice shared a genuine concern that they would not have the necessary skills and would have to learn on their own. The literature review could not anticipate this outcome except for the reinforcement of the gap in the literature where student's voice is missing.

The need for more hands-on applied skills revealed a direct correlation to Vygotsky (1934), Lave and Wenger (2007). Vygotsky and Lave (2014) both explored the importance of apprenticeships and the value this process provides. Lave (2007) believes "Learning is…more basically a process of coming to *be,* of forging identities in activity in the world" (Lave, p. 132). In short, one learns by doing. Her studies exemplified this

process of blending old with new, experience with novice, and reaching higher levels of learning by acknowledging culture, community, and previous experience or knowledge. Lave (1997) initiates her theories springboarding off Lev Vygotsky's (1934) zone of proximal development and applies it to real-world situations. Her ethnographical studies have proven repeatedly the success of situational learning and its current relevancy to teaching and learning practices. The answers to question three proved the validity of Lave's approach, but warrant further exploration as it applies to educational settings.

The final pattern that emerged pertained to the desire for all participants regardless of the case to have a personalized educational plan. Throughout the data, all participants expressed the need for a class structure that catered to their passions. The responses followed diverse intrinsic motivators and consistently they felt class structures could have listened more to their individual needs. The literature again achieved validation, especially as it pertained to the theoretical framework examined by Deci and Ryan (2017). CET looks directly at how external conditions impact motivational outcomes, and as evidenced by student responses, all environments impacted motivational outcomes. This connection revealed between environment and motivation further proves the significance of this emergent pattern, proving the importance of nurturing intrinsic motivation, especially through the acknowledgment of the student's voice. As stated previously in the literature review, "interpersonal contexts can be characterized in terms of the degree to which the motivational climate tends to be controlling, autonomy-supportive, or amotivating" (Deci & Ryan, 2011, p. 160). When reviewing the data, it became evident that the motivational climate of all five cases has a

high degree of control, lacking the autonomy support necessary, resulting in the responses that looked for a more autonomy-supportive environment.

The research identified emergent themes from each of the five cases, and upon review, discovered common themes that transcended the environments. The research data provided answers to the three key research areas from the perspective of the high school senior. The exploration through the first question provided a distinct journey through each of the five cases. The assessment from the students shared insights into the experiences both positive and negative about their high school journey. Ryan and Deci (2018) correctly identified the power an environment has on shaping one's experiences. CET and OIT both reflected how one's sphere of influence shapes and guides perceptions. As evidenced in the responses from the students, compared to other options did not occur other than a mention as a comparison with a public-school option, the most common environment available. The observations reinforced the concept that distinct environments and their intentional process distill perceptions and skew them to fit the experience.

All too often, the learner is the passive participant in the learning process and receives information and nothing more. Learning models have sounded great in theory, but the practice has left them still leaving the learner as the minority. This research study places the learner in an active position and gives them a voice in the educational process. These results have significant implications for change.

Implications

The implications of this research are twofold. First, the research explored the voice of the student, gaining an understanding of their assessments on preparation and

motivations. This process allowed for students to speak with certainty to their experiences and share what works, what does not, and how to improve processes in the future. The literature review confirmed there was a gap in the literature and this study fills that void that existed previously. The research exposes where each of these environments could benefit from the inclusion of the student's voice. The implications from the results of this study fill the gap in the research and provide a quality resource for campuses and legislators to utilize when reviewing effective school designs.

Second, the research reveals a common missing component in learning experiences. District and campus administration would benefit by listening to the stories of the students in each of these distinct environments. The recommendations made by the students themselves revealed that diverse environments can all benefit from first-hand assessments. Their answers to the interview questions provided a road map for making common-sense adjustments to any educational environment. District and campus administrators can utilize the student data relevant to their learning environment to influence their district or campus improvement plans. Stakeholders across the board can take the foundation established by this study and expand it to future exploratory processes, creating an approach that expands the research to further validate the findings and allow for students to finally participate in the shaping of the education process.

The power of this research evidences the need for student inclusion in the developmental process of educational practices. Their voice shows that regardless of the environment, commonalities of need exist that need attention. Consistently, students expressed a need for a personalized approach to their education needs. It is evident through the literature and this research that regardless of environment student needs for

preparation and increased motivations require a collaborative approach that includes the student in the development of programs and opportunities. Administrative teams would do well to take the time and talk to students directly about what would best prepare them for what comes next. Developing a program and then asking the student if their program works is only looking for justification for what the adults created. The students made it clear that a personalized educational plan that caters to their motivations creates an increase in productivity that directly impacts their perceived preparedness for what comes after graduation. The students need to know that adults are listening to their needs, and are willing to work in a direction that best benefits the student.

Parents that know their children best should advocate for differentiated instructional programs that gear more towards real-world preparedness. Their voices can reinforce that of the students. Active listening becomes the cornerstone of this process, and with student inclusion, the landscape of education can shift to better meet student's needs and connect to their intrinsic motivations.

The recommendation is a complete paradigm shift from creating structures first and compelling students to fit. It is the opposite. Start with the student and build upwards a structure that best exemplifies that human component. The results will reflect strong student engagement, excitement about learning, and a change in student motivation moving in a positive direction as the celebration of individuality takes center stage.

Ken Robinson (2017) states that "we need to change the habitual ways of thinking of those within the education system and the habitats which they occupy" (p. 137). The key to this change is listening to the students. The environments explored by this study

reveal reliability on external motivators instead of a thoughtful approach to intrinsic connectivity with their students.

The opportunities are available and create communities within which present positive results but the best outcomes would benefit greatly from student input. Administrators, school boards, and even teachers can learn improvements for program development and implementation by utilizing these research questions to drive conversations within their respective communities. The addition of student voices in the process would not increase planning time nor would it create additional financial strains on any district. The ensuing information attained increases awareness of student need from students directly, helping to increase the personalization of the educational process.

Summary and Conclusion

This research explored the high school senior's perceptions of post-graduation preparation and motivations across five different learning environments. The research exposed a serious gap in the literature when it comes to the representation and inclusion of student voices in the development of educational practices. The research consisted of observations of each of the learning environments, along with interviews with high school seniors to gain new insight into the environmental idiosyncrasies that shaped their high school experiences. Furthermore, it looked to how these students viewed their process and what they think makes the best learning experience to best prepare students for what happens after they graduate. The three research questions first asked for an assessment of the environment, second its impact on motivations and preparation, and finally what changes would they recommend. The result of the data revealed even though

the environments were different, experiences were different, there were commonalities present in all five cases.

The power of the responses evidenced commanding themes throughout each distinct case and revealed compelling patterns common among all five cases. The result was a better explanation of experiences from the student's point of view, a clearer picture of motivations—both extrinsic and intrinsic—and strong patterns of concepts that can create influential change in any educational setting. The implications show the power of student's voices in the education process, setting the foundation for future studies that will incorporate the significant contribution made by the ones affected the most by current practices—the voice of the student.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore high school seniors' perspectives of

post-graduation motivations and preparation in five different educational settings. The

intent was to provide a voice to the students themselves in assessing what works, what

does not, and how they perceive the effects these environments have on student

preparations and motivations. The study explored five distinct educational settings—

public, private, charter, home, and alternative schools—through the lens of the graduating

high school student to learn how each unique environment plays a role in student

motivation and preparation. The data design promoted actively listening to high school

seniors in each of the five different learning environments comparing their common

experiences, differences, and learning paths. The researcher sought an understanding of

each of their unique learning surroundings, explored its perceived influence on their

motivations, and learned how these students believe they are truly prepared for what

comes next.

The research collectively explored five distinct learning environments to

understand the answers to the following questions:

1   How do graduating seniors from five distinct educational environments
    describe and assess their learning experiences?

2   What are student perceptions of how these distinct learning environments
    encourage or inhibit individual motivations towards post-graduation
    aspirations?

3   What would graduating seniors change about their educational environments to meet their ideal learning experiences?

The process of this study, utilizing these three questions, addressed the gap in the literature when it came to student voice in the educational process. The recommendations made by the students themselves revealed that regardless of diverse learning environments, all levels of educational stakeholders benefit from these first-hand student assessments. Their answers to the research questions provided a road map for making common-sense adjustments to any educational environment

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Through data analysis, the researcher identified emergent themes for each of the five cases, and upon review, discovered common patterns that transcended the environments. The research data provided answers to the three key research areas from the perspective of the high school senior. Observational data provided an in-depth understanding of each distinct learning environment, and this information was combined with a series of semi-structured interviews with high school seniors to complete the data picture for the study. The coding process looked for patterns relevant to environmental influences, motivational practices, and the strengths and weaknesses of the learning experiences. The analysis process worked "to aggregate data into a small number of themes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 192). Each of the emerging themes created the ensuing codes for the research. These codes revealed both expected and surprising results, unusual patterns, and items of conceptual interest. Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) helped define the categories and emergent themes. The final step began with the triangulation of the data "by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes" (Creswell &

Creswell, 2017, p. 200). Each case consisted of one to three distinct perspectives from each learning environment that converged to develop the common themes and patterns focused on environmental experiences and motivational influences. These narratives unfolded in a rich, thick descriptive account that utilized member checking to verify the accuracy of the results. Each of these purposive steps reinforced the qualitative reliability of the data analyzed for this study.

Yin (2003) refers to five different ways of analysis: pattern matching, linking data to propositions, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. This research study followed a collective case discovery process and utilized a cross-case synthesis reviewing the pattern matching elements. The synthesis looked at the three research questions independently and explored the common themes discovered from each of the five cases and then distilled the information further to the common patterns. After identifying these common patterns, the analysis culminated into an overall assessment of the similarities and differences experienced throughout the five distinct environments. The analysis identified the strengths and limitations of the literature review as it reinforced the findings of the gap in the literature. The study applied an examination of the significance of the theoretical framework as it pertained to the overall results of the study.

Summary of Key Findings

Ryan and Deci (2018) correctly identified the power an environment has on shaping one's experiences. CET and OIT both reflected how one's sphere of influence shapes and guides perceptions. The observations reinforced the concept that distinct environments and their external impressions distill perceptions and direct them towards a

common campus experience. The theoretical framework revealed the significance of one's sphere of influence along with contextual controls that defined overall perceptions and experiences of the high school senior. Furthermore, the emergent themes revealed overwhelming patterns connecting all five cases.

The thematic analysis exposed clear themes that emerged from each of the distinct environments that provided clarity of what worked, what did not, and what students thought needed to change. The answers to all the research questions led to the discovery of key patterns consistent through all environments (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Cross-Case Synthesis of Emergent Patterns, Revisited

Research Question	Patterns	Literature Connections
Question #1	4. Relationships 5. Opportunity 6. Community	Wormington, Corpus, and Anderson, Schlechty, Hattie, Decie and Ryan, Osterman, Vygotsky, Dewey
Question #2	4. Inconsistent 5. Limitations 6. Need for more	Deci & Ryan, Saeed and Zingier, Gillet & Vallerand, Osterman, Nicholson & Putwain, Schlechty
Question #3	4. Real-world Learning 5. Hands-on Skills 6. Personalized Education Plan	Deci & Ryan, Schlechty, Hattie, Osterman, Nicholson & Putwain, Lave, Wenger, Vygotsky, Dewey, Saeed & Zingier, Gillet & Vallerand

The literature review reinforced the findings but does so from the student's point of view. The strength of the research revealed the power of student's voices and the relevance they provide to the educational process. Regardless of the environment, key findings transcended the experiences. The most powerful result emerged from the answers to question three, as all environments appeared to need real-world learning

120

experiences, more hands-on learning opportunities, and most importantly, a personalized educational plan designed to meet individual needs.

Informed Recommendations

The significant results from this study pave the way for future exploration in understanding the educational experience from the student's point of view. This study is replicable and would benefit from a bigger study, including a larger sample size. The commonalities that emerged set the tone for this future research and present the opportunity for school districts, administrators, and policymakers to incorporate student voices into their decision-making processes. As evidenced by the extensive literature review and its subsequent relevance to the research outcomes, the inclusion of student's voices takes the literature to a deeper level, tapping into the importance of the individuals influenced by school environments. The research sought to give a voice to the student, and it succeeded in providing that outlet. The research information revealed how crucial a component of a student's voice is in the developmental process of learning environments. This research expands the boundaries of the work previously completed by Ryan and Deci (2018), Syeed and Zingier (2012), Lave and Wenger (2007, 2014), and more. The recommendations made by the students themselves revealed that regardless of environmental influences, all educational settings and programs profit from first-hand student assessments. Their personal accounts provided a road map for making common-sense adjustments to any educational environment as a component of campus improvement plans, strategy for class offerings, curriculum development, and more. The consensus from all students was a need for more hands-on learning opportunities, real-

world learning experiences, and a personalized educational plan that stimulated their intrinsic motivations.

Findings Distribution Proposal

The research revealed the power of listening to the student who receives direct impact by the design, development, and implementation of school environments. The individuals responsible for creating these environments—high school administrators, district-level administrators, school boards, and policy makers—are the target audience for this research. These individuals would benefit greatly from reviewing these results, listening to students, and incorporating their voices into future campus planning.

The research lines out key needs for all environments, regardless of experiences, and has universal application. As stated previously, the Center for Education Reform (CER) implemented a mandate for change and submitted its recommendations in the early days of the Obama Administration. The CER (2009) asked for a five-point actionable plan for accomplishing change in education consisting of "federal accountability, transparency, charter schools, school choice, and improvements in teacher quality" (Allen et al., 2009, p. 17). The evidence demands a re-design of the current educational system, but the best formula remains unclear. With the results of this study in hand, policymakers and administrators can make the necessary adjustments to their campus plans, their campus designs, and cite their inclusion of the student in shaping their campuses and campus programs.

The distribution of the findings works best through literature publications. The top three publication venues are *the Journal of Educational Administration, Education Administration Quarterly, and the Journal of Education Policy*. It is important to look for

122

additional publications beyond these listed that reach parents, teachers, and policymakers at state-level agencies like the Texas Education Agency. Region Service Centers throughout the state of Texas are excellent resource centers that this information would prove beneficial in its dissemination. The saturation of these mediums provides maximum impact on reaching the desks of those directly impacted by the significance of this research document.

Presentations of the material would prove beneficial, but the length of presentation, location of presentation, and materials needed will differ based upon the targeted audience. Crucial in any presentation is the explanation of the theoretical framework and how it came about through the extensive research of Ryan and Deci's (2018) Self-Determination Theory. The theoretical framework is the first document for reproduction (see Appendix A). The theoretical framework provides a clear explanation of the power of SDT, OIT, and CET. It further defines how the student perceptions form through the influences of their environments. The second document for distribution to presentation participants reveals the common patterns that emerged throughout all educational environments. Presenting the information connects regardless of the environment. The significance of the findings becomes crucial to the understanding of the importance student's voices have in assessing educational settings and programs. Participants in the presentation will receive copies of these items, along with an additional document sharing student voices as revealed through this research process. Hearing from the students is crucial. As the presentation grows over time, the inclusion of video representations sharing interviews with students providing their first-hand assessments will play to enhance the power of this research message. This information

provides maximum impact, revealing the significance of environmental influence and common needs for all students.

 Additional avenues exist for the dissemination of these results. The study provides a universal application to multiple avenues beyond the few presented here. Further exploration of relevant publications and academic conferences continues, and additional time committed to this exploration is ongoing. Advocacy for students and student voice transitions to the realm of public discourse. Continued conversations with relevant stakeholders drive the relevancy and necessity of connecting with these results and allowing students to provide input in the educational process.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Observation Protocol

LOCATION:_____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____

OBSERVER: _____

FIRST IMPRESSIONS—Describe the space:

What do you see?

What do you hear?

How does the space "feel"?

What distinguishing elements do you observe that stand out in the space?

REFLECTIONS—Once exiting the space, describe the memorable elements of the visit:

What did you see that stood out or stayed with you?

What did you hear that resonated?

How do you feel after exiting the space?

What distinguishing elements do you remember most?

Figure A.1. Observation protocol, learning environment site visits. (Smith, 2020)

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior Perspectives of Post-Graduation Preparation in 5 Different Educational Settings

Interview Questions

LOCATION: _____

DATE: _____   TIME: _____

PARTICIPANT: _____

INTERVIEWER: _____

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do graduating seniors, from five distinct educational environments, describe and assess their learning experiences?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about your high school. What is it like to be there for four years?
2. If a potential student was visiting your school, and they were asking your genuine opinion about attending and the opportunities available here, what would you tell them?
3. The governor of Texas has invited you to speak to the state's congress about your school. What would be your explanation and assessment of their strengths? Their weaknesses?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What are student perceptions of how these distinct learning environments encourage or inhibit individual motivation for post-graduation aspirations?

1. Walk me through your high school journey. Reflect on your most memorable moments.
2. Describe your passions and goals in life. What has your school done to effectively address these passions and goals? Where did they fall short?
3. What opportunities (learning or extra-curricular) at your school excited you the most? The least?

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What would graduating seniors change about their educational environments to meet their ideal learning experiences?

1. You have been hired as a consultant for your high school. What fixes and changes would you recommend?
2. Looking back on your experiences, what do you believe your school could do differently than it did for you?
3. What would have been the perfect high school for you?

APPENDIX C

Parent/Guardian Permission Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: ***A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior Perspectives of Post-Graduation Preparation in 5 Different Educational Settings***

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **Jeffrey Smith**

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your child is invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether or not to let your child participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

Important Information about this Research Study

Things you should know:
- The purpose of the study is to explore five distinct educational settings—public, private, charter, home, and alternative schools—through the lens of the graduating high school student to learn how each unique environment plays a role in student motivation and preparation.
- To participate, your child must be a high school senior, graduating in spring, 2021.
- If you choose to allow your child to participate, your child will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. This portion will take two hours of their time.
- Risks or discomforts from this research are not greater than everyday life experiences.
- There is no direct benefit to participating in this study.
- Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to allow your child to participate, and you can stop your child's participation at any time.

More detailed information may be described later in this form. Please take the time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child to take part in this research study.

Why is this study being done?

- The purpose of this study is to explore five distinct educational settings—public, private, charter, home, and alternative schools—through the lens of the graduating

high school student to learn how each unique environment plays a role in student motivation and preparation.

What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study, your child will be asked to participate in an interview on-site at your child's school. The interview will last no more than two hours and will be videotaped and recorded for transcription purposes. The interview will be conducted by the researcher with a second individual present to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data collected.

How long will my child be in this study and how many people will be in the study?

Participation in this study will last for six months. Active participation is only in the interview, but opportunities to check the reliability of the study will occur once the data has been processed. About twenty subjects will take part in this research study.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

We don't believe there are any risks from participating in this research.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

How Will You Protect my child's Information?

The risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your child's personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your child's information. The researcher plans to protect your child's confidentiality.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by limiting access to only the researcher and participant and maintaining all information stored on a flash drive in a secure location with only researcher access. We will make every effort to keep your child's records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your child's records.

The following people or groups may review your child's study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:
- Representatives of Baylor University and the BU Institutional Review Board

The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. If your child's individual results are discussed, your child's identity will be protected by using a code number or pseudonym rather than your child's name or other identifying information.

Will the information you collect about my child be used for future research studies?

Information collected from your child as part of this research may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify your child before the information is shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify your child from what is shared.

If your child becomes ill or injured as a result of participation in the study, you should seek medical treatment from your child's doctor or treatment center of choice. You should promptly tell the researcher about any illness or injury.

There are no plans for Baylor University to pay you or give you other compensation for your child's injury or illness. You do not give up any of your legal rights to seek compensation by signing this form.

Your Child's Participation in this Study is Voluntary

Allowing your child to take part in this study is your choice. You are free not to allow your child to take part or to withdraw your child at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you or your child are entitled. If you decide to withdraw your child from this study, the information that your child has already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected before your child's withdrawal.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:
Dr. Jessica Meehan
Phone:
Email: Jessica_meehan@baylor.edu

Or

Debbie Garrett-Smith
Phone:
Email:

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Baylor University Institutional Review Board
Office of the Vice Provost for Research
Phone: 254-710-3708
Email: irb@baylor.edu

Name of child (please print):

_____

SIGNATURE OF PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN FOR CHILD:

By signing this document, you are agreeing to your child's participation in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree for my child to take part in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian   Date

APPENDIX D

Assent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: A Collective Case Study Exploring High School Senior
Perspectives of Post-Graduation Motivations and Preparation in
Five Different Educational Settings

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **Jeffrey Smith**

What is a Research Study?

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies help us to
learn new things and test new ideas. People who work in research studies are called
researchers. During research studies, the researchers collect a lot of information so that
they can learn more about something.

What is this study about?

We are doing this study because we would like to learn more about student perspectives
on post-graduation motivations and preparation. We are asking you to join this study
because you are the ideal candidate to provide the insights we seek for this study. Your
voice is important and participation allows for your point of view to be heard.

What will I do if I am in this research study?

If you decide to be in this study, we will ask you to take part in interviews about your
high school experiences. We would like to make a/an audio/video recording of you
during this study. Audio/video recording is required for this study. If you do not want to
be recorded, you should not be in this study.
This study will take approximately two (2) hours and there will be 20 participants in this
study.

Can anything bad happen to me while I am in this study?

We don't believe there are any risks from participating in this research.

Will being in this research study help me?

This study won't help you, but we will learn more about student perspectives on the
effectiveness of high school campuses, including possible recommendations for future
changes influenced by your contributions.

132

What else should I know?

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say "yes" now and change your mind later. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate. All you have to do is tell us you want to stop.

We will limit the use of your information that we collect to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise to keep everything a secret, but we will work to keep your name and other information private. Your responses may be used for a future study by us or we may share your responses with other researchers.

If you tell us that someone is hurting you, the law says that we have to let other people know so they can help you. If you tell us, you might hurt yourself or someone else, then we will have to let people know.

Who do I talk to if I have questions?

You can ask any questions at any time. You can ask now or later. Just tell the researcher when you see them or ask your parent or another adult to contact:

Jeffrey Smith
Phone: █████████████████
Email: █████████████████

Statement of Assent

If you want to be in the study, write your name below.

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Angelis, K. L. (1998). *The evolving relationship between homeschoolers and their local public schools* (ED417483). ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED417483.pdf

Allen, J., Chavous, K. P., Engler, J. M., Whitmire, R., & Williams, J. (2009). Mandate for change: A bold agenda for incoming government. In S.C. Carter (Ed.), *The United States of America, The Center for Education Reform*.

Alt, M. N., & Peter, K. (2002). *Private schools a brief portrait.* National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Attwood, A. I. (2018). *Social aesthetics and the school environment: A case study of the chivalric ethos*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bates, A. W. (Tony). (2014). *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning*. BCcampus.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological bulletin*, *117*(3), 497–529.

Biddle, B. J., & Berliner, D. C. (2002). What research says about small classes and their effects. In pursuit of better schools: What research says. *Educational Leadership, 59*(5), 12–23.

Bonarini, A., Lazaric, A., Restelli, M., & Vitali, P. (2006). Self-development framework for reinforcement learning agents. In L. Smith (Ed.), *Proceedings of the fifth international conference on development and learning*.

Bricki, N., & Green, J. (2009). *A Guide to using qualitative research methodology.* [ebook] Médecins Sans Frontiers, 13–21. http://hdl.handle.net/10144/84230

Broughman, S. P., & Colaciello, L. A. (2001). *Private school universe: 1999–2000* (NCES 2001–330). U.S. Department of Education, NCES.

Bryner, J. (2007). *Most students are bored at school*. LiveScience.com. https://www.livescience.com/1308-students-bored-school.html

Center for Research on Educational Outcomes. (2013). Executive Summary. Stanford University. http://credo.stanford.edu./sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/ncss_2013_executive_summary.pdf

Corso, M. (2016). *School voice report 2016*. The Quaglia Institute for Student
    Aspirations; Teacher Voice and Aspirations International Center. Corwin Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and
    mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods
    research*. (3rd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing
    among five approaches*. Sage.

deCharms, R., & Carpenter, V. (1968). Chapter 4 Measuring motivation in culturally
    disadvantaged school children. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *37*(1).

Dunfey, T. S. (2019). *What is social change and why we should care? Social change is
    way human interactions and relationships transform cultural and social
    institutions over time, having a profound impact of society*. Southern New
    Hampshire University. https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/2017/11/what-
    is-social-change

Dunn, D. (1994, June). *Charter schools: Experiments in reform* (ED394198). Texas State
    Legislative Budget Board. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED394198.pdf

Eryilmaz, M. (2015). The effectiveness of blended learning environments. *Contemporary
    Issues in Education Research*, *8*(4). 251–256.

Finn, J., & Voelkl, K. (1993). School characteristics related to student engagement. *The
    Journal of Negro Education*, *62*(3), 249–268. https://doi.org/10.2307/2295464n

Forsyth, D. R. (2014). *Group dynamics* (6th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Seabury Press.

Furgeson, J., Gill, B., Haimson, J., Killewald, A., McCullough, M., Nichols-Barre, I., &
    Lake, R. (2012, January). *Charter-school management organizations: Diverse
    strategies and diverse student impacts*. Mathematica Policy Research.

Gillet, N., Vallerand, R. J., & Lafreniere, M. K. (2011). Intrinsic and extrinsic school
    motivation as a function of age: The mediating role of autonomy support. *Social
    Psychology of Education: An International Journal, 15*(1), 3–95. https://doi
    10.1007/s11218-011-9170-2

Glanzer, P. L. (2008, February 4). Rethinking the boundaries and burdens of parental
    authority over education: A response to Rob Reich's case study of
    homeschooling. *Educational Theory, 58*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-
    5446.2007.00272.x

Gleason, P., Clark, M., Tuttle, C. C., & Dwoyer, E. (2010). *The evaluation of charter school impacts: Final report.* (NCEE 2010-4029). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Goldenkoff, R. (2010). *2010 census: Operational changes made for 2010 position the*

U.S. Census Bureau to classify and identify group quarters: Testimony before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives (the United States of America, U.S. Department of Commerce) more accurately. (Testimony GAO-10-452T). U.S. Government Accountability Office. http://www.gao.gov/assessts/gao-10-452t.pdf

Great Schools Partnership. (2013). Learning environment definition. *The Glossary of Education Reform*. https://www.edglossary.org/learning-environment

Green, F., Henseke, G., & Vignoles, A. (2017, February). Private schooling and labour market outcomes. *British Educational Research Journal, 43*(1), 7–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3256

Harter, S. (1978). Effectance motivation reconsidered. *Human Development, 21,* 34–64.

Harter, S., & Jackson, B. K. (1993). Young adolescents' perceptions of the link between low self-worth and depressed affect. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *13*(4), 383–407. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431693013004003

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* Routledge.

Heim, J. (2016, December 6). *On the world stage, U.S. students fall behind*. Washington Post, Education. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/on-the-world-stage-us-students-fall-behind/2016/12/05/610e1e10-b740-11e6-a677-b608fbb3aaf6story.html

Hood, J. (1993). The Failure of American Public Education. *The Freeman*, *43*(2), 44–50.

Huang, X., & Weng, J. (2002). Novelty and reinforcement learning in the value system of developmental robots. In C. Prince, Y. Demiris, Y. Marom, H. Kozima, & C. Balkenius, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd international workshop on Epigenetic Robotics: Modeling cognitive development in robotic systems*, 47–55. Lund University Cognitive Studies 94.

Isai Amutan, K. (2014). A review of B. F. Skinner's 'Reinforcement theory of motivation. *International Journal of Research in Education Methodology, 5*(3), 680–688.

Kaplan, F., Oudeyer, P-Y. (2003). *Motivational principles for visual know-how development.* https://www.cogprints.org/3333/1/Kaplan.pdf

Kannam, J., & Weiss, M. (2019). Alternative education in ESSA state plans: a review of 38 states. *American Youth Policy Forum*.

Kilbane, C., & Milman, M. (2014). Teaching models; designing instruction for 21st century learners. (2014). *Reference & Research Book News*, *28*(5). Ringgold, Inc.

Kirst, M. W. (1993, April). Strengths and weaknesses of American education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *74*(8), 613–16, 618. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ461095.pdf

Kohn, L. T. (1997, June). *Methods in case study analysis: The center for studying health system change* [Technical Publication No. 2]. Based on Panel Discussion Conducted at a 1996 Meeting of the Association for Health Services Research.

Learning Theories. (2007, January 17). *Situated learning theory (Lave).* May 2019, from https://www.learning-theories.com/situated-learning-theory-lave.html

Learning Theories. (2014, July 16). *Communities of practice (Lave and Wenger).* May 2019, from https://www.learning-theories.com/communities-of-practice-lave-and-wenger.html

Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1993). Effects of school restructuring on the achievement and engagement of middle-grade students. *Sociology of Education, 66*(3), 164–187. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ482403.pdf

Lindenberger, H. (2019, October 28). Private school vs. public school: Facts, benefits & statistics. The age-old debate about where to send your child to school is still causing headaches. *Fatherly*. Education. https://www.fatherly.com/love-money/education/private-school-vs-public-school-facts-benefits-statistics/

Marshall, J., Blank, D., & Meeden, L. (2004). *An emergent framework for self-motivation in developmental robotics.* In Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Development and Learning (ICDL 2004), Salk Institute, San Diego.

McDonald, A. J. (2011). *An examination of innovation in Tennessee's charter schools* (ED535923). [Ph. D. Dissertation, The University of Memphis]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535923.pdf

Merrick, K., & Maher, M. L. (2009). Motivated learning from interesting events: Adaptive, multitask learning agents for complex environments. *Adaptive Behavior*, *17*(1), 7–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059712308100236

Moos, R. H. (1979). *Evaluating educational environments.* Jossey-Bass Publishers.

NSSE. (2002). *National survey of student engagement (NSSE), 2002 Results*. Benchmarks.doc - Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. https://www.evergreen.edu/sites/default/files/institutionalresearch/pdf/Surveys/nssn/nsse2002results.pdf

NCES. (2019). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2019*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/

Nicholson, L. J., & Putwain, D. W. (2015). Facilitating re-engagement in learning: A disengaged student perspective. *Psychology of Education Review*, *39*(2), 37–41. https://research.edgehill.ac.uk/en/publications/facilitating-re-engagement-in-learning-a-disengaged-student-persp-4

Osterman, K. F. (1998, April). Student community within the school context: A research synthesis. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

Osterman, K. F. (1998, April). Student community within the school context: A research synthesis. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

Osterman, K. F. (1998). *Student community within the school context: A research synthesis*. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED425519.pdf

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70*, 323–367. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00346543070003323Osterman, 1998, 2000

Oudeyer, P., & Kaplan, F. (2007). What is intrinsic motivation? A typology of computational approaches. *Frontiers in Neurorobotics*, *1*(6). https://doi.org/10.3389/neuro.12.006.2007

Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2016). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. Basic Books.

Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *23*(5), 569–79.

Place, K., & Gleason, P. (2019, April). *Do charter middle schools improve students' college outcomes? Evaluation brief. NCEE 2019-4005* (ED594043). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. ERIC. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594043.pdf

Quinn, M. M., Poirier, J. M., Faller, S. E., Gable, R. A., & Tonelson, S. W. (2006). An examination of school climate in effective alternative programs. *Preventing School Failure*, *51*(1), 11–17. https://doi.org/10.3200/PSFL.51.1.11-17

Rappaport, J. (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 9*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00896357

Ray, B. D. (2021). *Homeschooling: The research*. https://www.nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/

Raywid, M. A. (1984, February). *Family choice arrangements in public schools: A review of the literature (*ED253959). National Institute of Education, Educational Policy and Organization Program. ERIC. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED253959.pdf

Reich, R. (2002). The civic perils of homeschooling. *Educational Leadership*, *59*(7), 56–59.

Reis, H. T., & Franks, P. (1994). The role of intimacy and social support in health outcomes: Two processes or one? *Parental Relationships, 2*, 185–197.

Reis, H. T., Sheldon, K. M., Gable, S. L., Roscoe, J., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Daily wellbeing: The role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, *26*, 419–435.

Riddle, S., & Cleaver, D. (2015). Working within and against the grain of policy in an alternative school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 38*(4), 489–510. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1105790

Robinson, K. (2017). *Out of our minds: the power of being creative.* (3rd ed.) Capstone.

Rothstein, R. (2001, November 26). The myth of public-school failure. Public schools are actually performing remarkably well. What they need is not radical reform but support. *The American Prospect*. https://prospect.org/api/content/9c1b6f2a-1577-52c6-9ef4-2076b9d176de/

Rudner, L. M. (1999). *The scholastic achievement of home school students*. *ERIC/AE Digest* (ED435709). Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED435709.pdf

Rushe, D. (2018, September 7). *The US spends more on education than other countries. Why is it falling behind?* The Guardian, US News, Education. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/07/us-education-spending-finland-south-korea

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000, January). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68–78. https://doi:10.1037110003-066X.55.1.68

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2018). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. The Guilford Press.

Saeed, S., & Zyngier, D. (2012). How motivation influences student engagement: A qualitative case study (EJ1081372). *Journal of Education and Learning, 1*(2), 252–67. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v1n2p252. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081372.pdf

Schlechty, P. C. (2001). *Shaking up the schoolhouse: How to support and sustain educational innovation.* Jossey-Bass.

Schlechty, P. C. (2005). *Creating great schools: Six critical systems at the heart of educational innovation.* Jossey-Bass.

Schlechty, P. C. (2011). *Engaging students: The next level of working on the work.* Jossey-Bass.

Schmidhuber, J. (1991). Curious model-building control systems. *Proceeding International Joint Conference on Neural Networks, 2*, 1458–1463.

Şimşek, Ö., & Barto, A. (2006). An intrinsic reward mechanism for efficient exploration. *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Machine Learning, 2006*, 833–840. https://doi.org/10.1145/1143844.1143949

Sinclair, M. F., Christenson, S. L., Evelo, D. L., & Hurley, C. M. (1998). Dropout prevention for youth with disabilities: Efficacy of a sustained school engagement procedure. *Exceptional Children, 65*(1), 7–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440299806500101

Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity.* Hackett.

Stadler-Altmann, U. (2015). *Learning environment: The influence of school and classroom space on education*. In book: The Routledge International Handbook of Social Psychology of the Classroom. Routledge.

Stewart, V. (2012). *A world-class education: Learning from international models of excellence and innovation*. (ED529506). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED529506.pdf. ISBN-978-1-4166-1374-9

Stone, D. N., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Beyond talk: Creating autonomous motivation through self-determination theory. *Journal of General Management, 34*(3), 75–91. doi:10.1177/030630700903400305

Talbert, T. (2018). *Qualitative & quantitative data analysis course packet—Data analysis.* Baylor University School of Education. https://2bu.onlinegrad.baylor.edu/ap/courses/502/sections/cdc1252d-4e4f-41cd-857f-bdefed2ee46b/coursework/module/afaf9374-eeaf-457f-82d4-975f5a66306c/segment/17bee257-b970-4340-96f1-9a2f73375252

Terhart, E. (2011). Has John Hattie really found the holy grail of research on teaching?: An extended review of visible learning. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *43*(3), 425–438. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2011.576774

Thrun, S. (1995). Learning to play the game of chess. In G. Tesauro, & D. S. Touretzky (Eds.). *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems, 7*, The MIT Press.

United States of America, United States Government, U. S. Department of Education. (2019). *College- and Career-readiness*.

United States of America, United States Government, U. S. Department of Education. (2019). *The National Charter School Resource Center*. https://chaterschoolcenter.ed.gov

Vygotsky, L. S. (1934). Thought and Language (E. Hanfmann, & G. Vakar, Trans.). MIT Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.

Weiner, B. (1990). The history of motivation research in education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 616–622.

Wink, J., & Putney, L. G. (2002). *A vision of Vygotsky*. Allyn and Bacon.

Wormington, S. V., Henderlong Corpus, J., & Anderson, K. G. (2012, August). A person-centered investigation of academic motivation and its correlates in high school. *Learning and Individual Differences, 22*(4), 429–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2012.03.004

Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(2), 134–152. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss2/12

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and method* (5th ed.). Sage.

Zimmer, R., Gill, B., Booker, K., Lavertu, S., & Witte, J. (2012). Examining charter student achievement effects across seven states. *Economics of Education Review*, *31*(2), 213–224. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2011.05.005

Zimmerman, M. A., & Warschausky, S. (1998). Empowerment theory for rehabilitation research: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, *43*, 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1037/0090-5550.43.1.3

Zyngier, D. (2011). (Re)conceptualising risk: Left numb and unengaged and lost in a no-man's-land or what (seems to) work for at-risk students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *15*(2), 211–231. https://doi.10.1080.13603110902781427