SECONDARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TEACHERS' ABILITY
TO MOTIVATE THEM AS LEARNERS

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

SECONDARY STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TEACHERS’ ABILITY TO MOTIVATE THEM AS LEARNERS

By

Cecil Swetland

Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

A lack of interest in learning, underperformance on classroom assignments and standardized tests, and a failure to graduate describes many of today’s students. Teachers in classrooms across the country and around the world have long been concerned with a decrease in academic motivation that begins as students enter middle school and continues through their high school years. This examination of secondary students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them academically provides educators with insights regarding relational and instructional practice that can more fully engage and motivate students to learn. This phenomenological case study utilized interviews, surveys, and student journals to gather data, which was analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that the participants were largely motivated by intrinsic motivational factors surrounding their teachers’ relational and instructional practices. The findings also indicate some extrinsic motivational factors play a role in academically motivating and demotivating students. The students perceived that their level of academic motivation was connected to their teachers’ ability and willingness to interact with them on a personal basis. The participants were also motivated academically by teachers who
enhanced the students’ sense of confidence in their ability to be successful in their assignments, in their classrooms, and in life.
Chapter I: Statement of the Problem

Today’s classrooms are often filled with instructional technology that, in the not too distant past, would have seemed out of this world to many teachers. Fast and affordable computers, smart phones, electronic tablets, mp3 players, and interactive white boards are educational tools that are widely available in modern classrooms. Teachers have also been trained in updated approaches to professional development including disaggregating assessment data, Response-to-Intervention, differentiated instruction, and understanding how the function of the brain impacts learning. While all of these advances have occurred and improvements made, one significant problem still irritates and concerns many teachers; what can be done with an unmotivated student? This mystery confounds teachers who want to know what can be done to get students to pay attention and expend more effort to classroom tasks (Graham & Weiner, 2012).

Motivation

In a general sense, motivation is the examination of why organisms or individuals behave in a specific way (Graham & Weiner, 2012). In the classroom setting, motivation is considered one of the most important psychological concepts in education around the world (Mizuno, Tanaka, Fukuda, Imai-Matsumura, & Watanabe, 2011), in the United States (Gottfried, 1985), and in California (Crosnoe, 2001). Academic motivation has been defined as a “student’s desire (as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest) regarding academic subjects when the student’s competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence” (McGrew, 2007, p. 4.1.1). A student’s level of
academic motivation has a significant impact on his or her level of success in school and later in life (Daniels, 2010; Gottfried et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Teachers in classrooms around the world and across the country have long been concerned with a decrease in academic motivation that begins as students enter middle school and continues through their high school years (Gottfried, Marcoulides, Gottfried, & Oliver, 2009; Mizuno et al., 2011; Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2011). In broad terms, motivation has been classified into two forms, extrinsic and intrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Extrinsic motivation refers to the concept of doing something because it will lead to a separable outcome (Mizuno et al., 2011). This form of motivation is commonly used in schools and other activities involving children and teens because it can foster quick compliance with rules, standards, or other expectations (Brophy, 2004). Extrinsic motivation takes many forms including rewards, praise, and recognition (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In my personal experience as a school administrator, I observe that teachers appeal to extrinsic motivation beginning early in a child’s school experience. Considering my own elementary school experience, I remember being happy when my elementary school teachers would place a gold star or draw a smiley face on a paper I had completed. Two or three encouraging words, such as “Good Work,” on an assignment made me feel good about myself as a student and usually resulted in positive feedback from my parents. Grades, themselves, can be a form of extrinsic motivation that causes some students to strive for a standard that will either result in a reward or avoid a negative consequence.
**Intrinsic Motivation.** Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, describes performance or involvement in activities because of an inherent sense of pleasure in the activity (Gottfried, 1985). I can clearly remember an experience with intrinsic motivation from my elementary school years. I spent an entire family camping trip inside our camper reading the book *Where the Red Fern Grows*. My parents checked on me several times and were concerned that I was sick because this was not typical for me. I was motivated to read it because it was enjoyable. This was a personal experience with intrinsic motivation for reading. This is different from the common practice of using Accelerated Reader programs in elementary and middle schools to encourage students to read and pass comprehension quizzes in order to earn recognition or prizes.

**Decline in Academic Motivation**

Research involving students in California has documented that they experience significant declines in academic orientation and interest during their four years of high school enrollment and that this decline affects students regardless of their initial level of academic orientation. Beginning high school with a high level of interest and motivation did not prevent a significant decline in motivation for these students (Crosnoe, 2001). A detailed examination of secondary students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners may provide teachers with insights concerning their instructional practice and may suggest improvements that could more fully engage and motivate students to learn (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008). Teachers with an understanding of academic motivation may be better equipped to leverage any untapped capacity in these students.
Problem Statement

A lack of interest in learning, underperformance on classroom assignments and standardized tests, and a failure to graduate describe many students in today’s schools. The question of why some students are academically motivated while others persist in a state of educational malaise has been a topic educators have pondered for decades (Tollefson, 2000). Examination of students’ perceptions of teachers’ ability to motivate them is an important topic in terms of educational practice. While educators at the university level receive regular feedback from their students, teenagers are not typically given the opportunity to provide meaningful written feedback to their teachers. This lack of formal feedback from secondary students about teachers’ actions or attitudes in the classroom prevents a complete feedback loop that informed educators understand is critical for the ongoing growth and development of students and teachers.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore secondary students’ perceptions of teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners at a high school in southern California. Educational researchers have noted that over time there has been a decreased preference for academic challenge as well as a decreased curiosity and focus on individual mastery (Harter, 1981). In the same way, student engagement (Marks, 2000), motivation (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001), and commitment to education (Epstein & McFarland, 1976) have all declined. Studies also show that by high school many students have lost interest in school and find classes to be boring (Harter, 1996; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). This lack of interest is reflected in reduced attention and effort in
school as well as widespread cheating on homework and tests (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2002; Schab, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1996).

Gaining a clearer understanding of secondary students’ perception of what motivates and demotivates them could provide important information to help teachers provide engaging instruction that maintains student interest and enhances the opportunity for student learning. In order to discover secondary students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them, the following research questions will be examined:

1. What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

2. What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

3. What are secondary students’ perceptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes of teachers?

Gaining an understanding of student perceptions of their teachers has the potential to become life changing when it is understood that good instruction is motivating (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Students in classrooms that are highly motivating cheat less often (Anderman & Anderman, 2010), are more likely to seek help when they are struggling to grasp a concept (Anderman & Anderman, 2010), are more likely to feel competent and autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and are more likely to be engaged and learning (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). If teachers were to be asked if they would prefer a classroom filled with students who are interested in the subject at hand or who are slumped down in their seats and staring off into the distance, we all know how they would answer the question. If we asked students would they prefer to be in a boring and
monotonous classroom or in a classroom where the teacher and subject were interesting and even fun, we also know they would choose to be engaged and enjoying learning. This paradox is at the heart of the matter. If teachers want their students to be interested and motivated to learn and students want their teachers to be engaging and interesting, why are there so many bored students and frustrated teachers? As this research considers the topic of academic motivation from the student perspective, it is hoped that the insights developed will make teaching and learning more interesting, engaging, and motivating for students and teachers alike.

In order to complete an informed study, a review of the existing literature must be undertaken. The following chapter will provide a theoretical framework to examine student motivation and construct the methodology used to conduct the research.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

A review of the literature related to motivation and case study research has been completed to examine what is already known about secondary students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners. As a fuller understanding of what secondary students experience is gained, it is expected that teachers can be provided with insights concerning their instructional practice which may lead to increased effectiveness that will more fully engage and motivate students to learn (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008). A review of the literature in the areas of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and case study research will follow.

“Why” Questions

Perhaps the most frequently asked questions about human behavior are “why” questions. Why is Andrew reading that book? Why is Erin playing that game? People are very interested in the reasons for behavior. These questions about behavior are often focused on motivation and people want answers to “why” questions (Deci, 1975). Academic motivation has been defined as “a student’s desire (as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest) regarding academic subjects when the student’s competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence” (McGrew, 2007, p. 2). Motivation is one of the most important psychological concepts in education (Mizuno et al., 2011). A student’s motivation or their lack of motivation has a significant impact on their learning (Brophy, 2004).

Many motivational theories have been developed in order to provide a language, conceptual representation, or explanatory system that offers a framework for understanding a complex process which involves emotions, perceptions, and intellect
(Culligan, 2002). The most basic distinction between the theories of motivation are intrinsic motivation, doing something because it is enjoyable or inherently interesting, and extrinsic motivation, doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Teachers in classrooms around the world and across the nation have long been concerned with a decrease in academic motivation that begins as students enter middle school and continues through their high school years (Gottfried et al., 2009; Mizuno et al., 2011). Research involving students in California has documented that they experience significant declines in academic orientation and interest during their four years of high school enrollment and that this decline affects them regardless of their initial level of academic motivation (Crosnoe, 2001). Entering high school with a high level of interest and motivation did not prevent a significant decline in motivation for these students (Crosnoe, 2001).

This decline in motivation is critical in educational terms because intrinsic motivation is associated with pleasure gained from learning (Day, Berlyne, & Hunt, 1971; Gottfried, 1985), curiosity (Day et al., 1971; Gottfried, 1985), positive feelings of interest (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000), novel and challenging activities (Deci, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000), high levels of task engagement (Brophy, 2004), persistence and mastery orientation (Harter, 1981; Lepper & Greene, 1975).

There was a lively debate among researchers during the 1970’s and early 1980’s which included several different perspectives on the role intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays in human existence and the best way to understand and describe these
opposing ideas (Deci, 1975; Kohn, 1993). The debate re-erupted in 1996 when an article by Eisenberger and Cameron, published in the important journal American Psychologist, described the detrimental effects of rewards as a myth (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). Their meta-analysis of nearly 100 studies challenged the widespread acceptance that rewards reduce intrinsic task interest Eisenberger and Cameron (1996). This debate is ongoing while most researchers acknowledge the detrimental effect of rewards on intrinsic motivation Brophy (2004).

**Intrinsic Motivation**

As a construct in the realm of academic motivation, intrinsic motivation has a long-standing presence (Day et al., 1971; Gottfried et al., 2009). Intrinsic motivation can be defined as engaging in something because it is inherently enjoyable or interesting (Gottfried, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who are intrinsically motivated engage in a task because they want to learn and enjoy the task for its own sake (Anderman & Anderman, 2010). The significance of intrinsic motivation in education has grown as researchers have come to understand the impact that it has upon students (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation leads to high-quality learning and enhances creativity (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Gottfried, 1985; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic motivation appears to be highest in young children but declines, in most students, as they mature and advance thorough grade levels (Bryant, 2004; Gottfried, 1985; Gottfried et al., 2001). Ryan and Deci (2000) have theorized that the intrinsic motivation experienced in young children continues to exist but it is weakened, in most individuals, as children assume responsibility for tasks that may not be intrinsically
motivating. Much of the debate concerning intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has centered around whether or not extrinsically oriented actions and attitudes of parents and educators and others undermines intrinsic motivation to the detriment of children, students, and others (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Brophy, 2004; Gottfried, 1985; Kohn, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Self-Determination Theory.** Edward Deci and Richard Ryan developed an intrinsic motivation theory they have labeled Self-determination theory (Brophy, 2004). When people are motivated, they “undertake goal-oriented action” in order to accomplish something (Brophy, 2004, p. 9). Motivated action can be self-determined, meaning it is a free choice made by the person taking the action. Motivated action can also be undertaken because of some outside pressure or external force (Brophy, 2004). An archetype of self-determined behavior is intrinsically motivated and undertaken free of outside factors (Brophy, 2004, p. 10). Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) indicated that during the first two formative decades of an individual’s life, he or she spends approximately 15,000 hours in school. They described ideal schools as those that succeed in promoting a genuine enthusiasm for learning and for accomplishment. As they get older, students should gain a sense of volitional involvement in their educational experience (Deci et al., 1991). They explained the Self-determination theory of intrinsic motivation as follows:

Self-determination theory, when applied to the realm of education, is concerned primarily with promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes. These outcomes are manifestations of being intrinsically motivated and internalizing
values and regulatory processes. Research suggests that these processes result in high-quality learning and conceptual understanding as well as enhanced personal growth and adjustment. (p. 325)

As it applies to students, Self-determination theory supports the view that intrinsically motivated students develop stronger conceptual understanding and experience high-quality learning.

Deci et al. (1991) confirmed that many modern theories of motivation focus on goals or results or specific aspects of these performance measures that lead to desired outcomes (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Dweck, 1986; Eccles et al., 1983). These theories examined the human processes the lead individuals toward desired outcomes but they do not address the question of why some outcomes are desired over others (Deci et al., 1991). Self-determination theory addresses the issues of directed energy and desired outcomes in the context of three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (self-determination) (Brophy, 2004; Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci et al. (1991) explained the three basic psychological needs as follows:

- Competence involves understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes and being efficacious in performing the requisite actions; relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one’s social milieu; and autonomy refers to being self-initiating and self-regulating of one’s own actions. (p. 327)

Self-determination theory is important because it provides a construct for examining and understanding the competence, relatedness, and autonomy needs of the participants and
for determining if they experience enhanced academic motivation as a result of being with teachers who more effectively meet these needs.

**Extrinsic Motivation**

Behaviorism, in the form of two theories, was the dominant view in the field of empirical psychology from the 1940’s to the 1960’s (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The first form of Behaviorism, Learning theory, maintained that physiological drives motivate all behaviors (Hull, 1943). The second form of Behaviorism, Operant theory (Skinner, 1953), asserts that all behavior is motivated by rewards. In the classical Skinner model (Skinner, 1938), reinforcement is the key element of behavioral control (Morris, 2003; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). Collected over a period of 60 years, the research evidence supports the view that the rewarding of desired behaviors increases the likelihood that they will be repeated (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). Professionals who work with institutionalized clinical populations, animal researchers and trainers, and educators have utilized positive reinforcement systems and can verify their effectiveness (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). A behaviorist view of human motivation forms the foundation for the construct of extrinsic motivation (Kohn, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000) which can be defined as engaging in a behavior as a means to an end (Vallerand et al., 1992).

Although it is clear that intrinsic motivation is an important type of motivation, people conduct much of their day-to-day lives operating from motivation that is based on something other than an innate curiosity and desire to learn or perform certain tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
Expectancy-Value Theory. A great deal of what researchers understand about motivating, including implications for educators, can be understood within a construct of Expectancy x Value Model (Brophy, 2004; Pekrun, 1993; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). The Expectancy-Value Theory is an extrinsic motivational theory because it holds that motivation should be understood within the context of rewards that will be received after the successful completion of a task (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). The Expectancy-Value model of motivation is an attributional theory in which students develop personal beliefs about why things happen in their lives and in the lives of others in order to bring order to their lives (Tollefson, 2000). This model holds that the amount of effort people are willing to expend on a task is a function of (a) “their expectation they will be able to perform the task successfully and by so doing obtain the rewards associated with successful completion of the task” (Tollefson, 2000, p. 68) and (b) “the degree to which they value those rewards as well as the opportunity to engage in the processes involved in performing the task itself” (Brophy, 2004, p. 18). For the purposes of this definition, it is important to understand that value means to see worth in or appreciate, rather than ethical principles (Brophy, 2004). Eccles et al. (1983) developed the Expectancy-Value model as a construct to understand early adolescents’ and adolescents’ choices and performance within mathematics. They theorized that adolescents’ persistence, achievement performance, and choice of achievement tasks can be predicted by their expectations of success on those tasks and the subjective value that they attach to those tasks.
Chart 2.1 (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002) is an updated depiction of Expectancy-Value Theory from when it was originally published in 1983. The basic framework for understanding and explaining academic motivation within children and teenagers has not changed; the level of effort students expend on a task is a function of their expectation of success times the value they place on a given academic task (Brophy, 2004; Tollefson, 2000). This theory of motivation provides a construct for understanding and interpreting high school students’ differing levels of motivation for the same individual task or set of tasks within a classroom. It may also shed light on teachers’ ability to create intellectual momentum, my phrase to describe getting students excited about classroom learning of a topic or in an area that carries little or no innate interest for the student.

**Extrinsic Versus Intrinsic Motivation**

The literature regarding intrinsic motivation often indicates that utilizing extrinsic motivational practices, providing a reward or benefit for an action or result, undermines
intrinsic motivation (Bowman, 2011; Gottfried, 1985; Gottfried et al., 2001; Lepper & Greene, 1975). Other researchers have found that, although there may be a relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, academic intrinsic motivation declines naturally as students mature and progress through advancing grade levels (Brophy, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The following is a good example of quantitative research into intrinsic motivation.

This longitudinal study was conducted by Gottfried et al. (2009) concluded that task-extrinsic parenting practices undermine intrinsic motivation while task-intrinsic parenting practices enhance academic intrinsic motivation in math and science. The researchers began following 130 infants and their families in 1979. Each of the children who participated in the study was born after full term pregnancies, had normal birth rates, and had no visible abnormalities. Every six months the children were assessed at the university laboratory from 1 to 3.5 years. The assessments took place annually from age 5 to age 17. Each time they visited the lab, a battery of assessment measured their development across a number of domains. Each of the children was raised in middle-class families whose parents’ professions ranged from semi-skilled workers through professionals. Approximately 85% of the children participated in each assessment. The math and science scales of the Children’s Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI), among other assessments, were administered at ages 9, 10, 13, 16, and 17 years which spanned from mid-elementary through high school. The Parental Motivational Practices Survey was administered to parents periodically, beginning when the children turned 9, to measure the parents’ contribution of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational
practices to the children’s academic intrinsic motivation. A latent curve model analyses was performed on the repeated measurements on math and science motivation.

The results of the study indicated that parents’ motivational practices have an important influence on their children’s math and science academic intrinsic motivation. Parents’ task-intrinsic motivational practices (e.g. “I encourage my child to be persistent at school work.” “I encourage my child to enjoy school learning.”) were beneficial to children’s initial levels of motivational status, and the positive impact continued as they grew older and progressed through a normal decline in math and science motivation. Parents’ task-extrinsic motivational practices (e.g. “When my child does well in school, I usually reward him/her with money.” “When my child does not do well in school on a school task, I usually take away a privilege.”) had adverse impacts in comparison to task-intrinsic practices. The children of parents who had a higher use of task-intrinsic practices experienced less of a decline in math and science motivation through adolescence. The children of parents who used more task-extrinsic practices had lower motivation scores at the outset, and these practices did nothing to reduce the developmental decline in academic intrinsic motivation while the task-intrinsic practices reduced the decline (Gottfried et al., 2009)

This research could have implications for adults, other than parents, who work with children and teens, including teachers. It is possible that teachers could also enhance academic motivation by utilizing task-intrinsic practices in the classroom?

**Case Study Research**

Case study research is used extensively in the social sciences (Yin, 2003). A case study approach has been described as “Out of doors social science” (Campbell,
2003, p. x). It has the same goals as laboratory science, gaining and sharing knowledge, but it seeks to validate inferences outside of the lab (Campbell, 2003).

Phenomenological research focuses on human experience to gain comprehensive descriptions that can be analyzed in order to understand the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). As a phenomenological case study, the focus of this study is to investigate the lived experience of the students in order to gain a deep understanding of their experiences and perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). A phenomenological tradition is the most appropriate way to study students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them in order to understand the core essence of their human experiences regarding academic motivation. A clear understanding of the students’ everyday experiences at their school and in their classrooms will be a significant element in terms of the researchers’ ability to uncover students’ perceptions in a way that will produce rich and descriptive data.

Yin (2003) has indicated the importance of considering three conditions when determining which research strategy should be employed while conducting social science research. The first condition to consider is the research question. For the purposes of selecting an appropriate research strategy, the research question or questions being considered should be categorized into one of five types of questions: who, what, where, how, or why. The current study is considering how teachers impact the academic motivation of high school students.

The second condition to be considered is the extent of control that the researcher has over behavioral events being examined. In this study, the researcher has no control over the relationships and interactions that develop between high school students and
their teachers. The third condition to be considered is the time frame of the events being studied. Is the researcher looking at contemporary events or historical events? In the case of this dissertation, contemporary events involving high school students and their teachers are being examined.

In light of research strategy selection rubric (Figure 2.1) developed by Yin (2003), a highly regarded expert in the field of social science research (Campbell, 2003), a case study approach is the most fitting for the research questions being considered in this study. “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 1).

Figure 2.1: Relevant Situations for Different Research Strategies

Yin (2003, p. 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Form of Research Question</th>
<th>Requires Control of Behavioral Events?</th>
<th>Focuses on Contemporary Events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>How, why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, why?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, what/which, where, how much?</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archive analysis</td>
<td>Who, what/which, where, how much?</td>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical analysis</td>
<td>How, why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Existing Research is Typically Quantitative. At the beginning of this review, there was an initial assumption made that the existing research would be somewhat evenly divided between quantitative and qualitative approaches to the subject. It has become clear that quantitative research is a more typical approach to examining academic motivation. Researchers have developed a number of quantitative measurement scales and instruments to evaluate the level of academic motivation in children and adolescents. The Children’s Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (Gottfried, 1985), Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992), and the Self-Report Scale of Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Orientation (Harter, 1981) are three examples of measurement tools used in quantitative research of motivation. I will review the Self-Report scale to explain a common approach to measuring academic motivation and to illustrate why a qualitative approach will be beneficial.

Harter (1981) developed the Self-Report Scale of Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Orientation in the Classroom. The objective of developing the scale was to create an assessment that would answer the question: to what degree is a child’s motivation for classroom learning determined by his or her intrinsic interest in learning and mastery, curiosity, and preference for challenge, as opposed to an extrinsic motivation through which a child acts in order to get the approval of their teacher or their grades? The assessment examined five distinct aspects of classroom learning that were characterized along an intrinsic and an extrinsic pole: 1) “Learning motivated by curiosity versus learning in order to please the teacher,” 2) “Incentive to work for one’s own satisfaction versus working to please the teacher and get good grades,” 3) “Preference for challenging work versus preference for easy work,” 4) “Desire to work independently versus
dependence on the teacher for help.” 5) “Internal criteria for success or failure versus external criteria (e.g. grades, teacher feedback) to determine success or failure” (Harter, 1981, p. 301).

More than 3,000 students were studied in the development of the scales. Data was gathered from a total of six different samples. The students were located in Connecticut, New York, Colorado, and California and were enrolled in third through ninth grade. Their socioeconomic backgrounds ranged from lower-middle to upper-middle class, and there were approximately the same number of students from each grade level, evenly divided between girls and boys.

The findings of the study indicated that the scale provides reliable measurements and is sensitive to individual differences (e.g. children with developmental disabilities) in intrinsic and extrinsic orientation. Two independent cluster subscales came to light. The first cluster involved the preference for challenge versus the preference for easier work, curiosity/interest versus teacher approval, and independent master versus dependence on the teacher. The second cluster was independent judgment versus reliance on the teachers’ judgment and internal criteria for success or failure versus an external criteria (Harter, 1981). Students with high scores in the first cluster possess an intrinsic motivation for mastery while students with high scores in the second cluster tap cognitive-informational structures more readily. The results indicated that individuals can be intrinsic in one cluster and extrinsic in another. Third grade students were intrinsic in the first cluster, regarding mastery, and extrinsic in the second cluster, dependent upon information from the teacher. These results were the opposite for ninth grade students who were extrinsic in the first cluster, indicating they were doing
schoolwork in order to please their teachers and get good grades. They were highly intrinsic in the second cluster which indicates they had enough information to come to their own conclusions about their level of success (Harter, 1981). The researcher theorized that one possible interpretation of the data is that something about our school systems are gradually stifling the intrinsic motivation of students in terms of their interest in school along with their curiosity, interest in challenge, and independent mastery (Harter, 1981). Because the research indicates decreasing intrinsic academic motivation is common, it is possible that the intrinsic motivation that children have in the elementary years is naturally reduced as they mature, gain more knowledge, and grow in their ability to make independent decisions.

This research has the strength of examining a large number of students, 3000, in six different samples, from four different states in the East, West, and Rocky Mountain regions of the United States. This approach identified different clusters of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that changed as the students grew older. The large number of participants increase the reliability of the data and enhance the degree to which the results can be generalized to a wider population (Creswell, 2008). The weakness of this approach, in my view, is that it represents an excellent look at the surface of an important phenomenon without getting below the water line to see what is taking place. Harter (1981) identified where students were on the map but we have no idea how they got there.

Large quantitative studies and the diagnostic tools developed and utilized in the research form an important foundation to the existing understanding of academic motivation. However, in understanding something as personal and individual as
motivation, it is important to develop a perspective and understanding that plumbs the depths of students’ thought processes and the meaning they derive from learning. The data gained and analyzed through qualitative approaches to understanding the academic motivation of secondary students has informed this study. The research examined individual participants’ experiences in much greater detail and resulted in a deeper understanding of the impact teachers have upon the academic motivation of their students.

**Gap in the Literature**

There is a dearth of qualitative research related to high school students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners. A well-planned and executed qualitative research study will provide thick, rich data from which to draw conclusions (Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This study sought to fill this gap in the literature. The following chapter will provide a detailed description of the methodological approach to conducting the research.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore secondary students’ perceptions of teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners. This chapter will include a description of the research design, data collection, and data analysis. The role of the researcher and related ethical issues are also described.

This inquiry into student perceptions of academic motivation utilized a phenomenological, multiple case study, research design. A detailed examination of secondary students’ perspectives may provide teachers with insights concerning their instructional practice and may suggest improvements that could more fully engage and motivate students to learn (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008).

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this case study:

1. What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors that personally motivate them to engage in learning?
2. What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning?
3. What are secondary students’ perceptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes of teachers?

Participants

The participants in this study were students who attend a private high school in southern California. The students were enrolled in grades 9-12 and range in age from 14 to 18 years old.
Research Site

The research site for this study was a private high school located in southern California. The school was established in 1977 with two preschool classrooms and one kindergarten class. In subsequent years, a new grade level was added each year until the school encompassed students in PK through 8th grade. A high school was subsequently opened and the school includes 1,400 PK-12th grade students on three campuses. The school’s student population is 58% white, 16% Hispanic, 13% African American, 11% Asian, and 2% other. The high school site serves 340 students in grades 9-12. In a typical high school graduating class, 95% of the students attend college and the remaining 5% enter the military or the workforce.

The school offers services for students with special needs including developmental delays, reading interventions, Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and for students with a lower to moderate range of needs along the Autism Spectrum Disorder. The school provides academic advising to all students and college counseling services to students and their parents. The school coordinates with local public school districts for the assessment of potential learning disabilities and for the development of individualized education plans. Students with severe disabilities are referred to programs that can best meet their needs. The school is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Site Selection

The site selection has focused on the nature and composition of this high school and its students. It fits the purpose of the research because the school is typical of private high schools in southern California in that it is relatively small in student population,
comprised of students who are less diverse than the community in which it resides, and the academic performance of its students is higher in terms SAT scores, the percentage of graduates attending college, and the weighted average of academic scholarships received by the graduates.

Access to the site was gained through working with the principal and with the permission of the IRB Committee of the Board of Directors. The board members examined all aspects of the research including the survey and interview questions. This dissertation is action research because it took place within a school system where I am employed and where I have an interest to improve learning through this study (Glesne, 2011; Hendricks, 2009).

Data Sources and Collection

The data sources and data collection instruments are key elements of the research study (Creswell, 2008). Figure 3.1 explains the three data sources and the process of data collection.
Criterion sampling was utilized to select the participants. The participants were enrolled in grades 9-12, attended a private high school in southern California, and were willing to either complete a survey, participate in an interview, or keep a reflective journal (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

The review of the literature indicated that, while there has been some research regarding student’s views regarding academic motivation, it is predominantly quantitative research and lacks the depth and detail a qualitative approach has the potential to uncover. I was most interested in developing thick descriptions of student perceptions related to academic motivation so that the details, emotions, and textures could be clearly articulated. No process involving human perceptions can be understood or interpreted until it has been described in detail (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).
Data Collection Instruments

Three different data collection instruments were used to conduct the study. An interview protocol, survey, and participant journals were used to gather data from the participants.

Interview Protocol. An interview protocol has been defined as a document which is developed by a researcher that includes questions to be asked, instructions for the interview process, and space for the interview to record notes based on the responses of the interviewee (Creswell, 2008).

The interview protocol included a short description of the study, a statement of confidentiality, and instructions for the interview that included a reminder that the interview can be stopped at any point if the participant needed a break or became uncomfortable in any way. The protocol also included a statement that the participants’ involvement in the study would not impact their standing at the high school in any way. Each of the questions and possible prompt questions were grouped and listed beginning with a grand tour question, “Tell me about yourself,” to break the ice and establish a comfortable relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The protocol concluded with a statement of appreciation for their participation and an invitation to contact the interviewer with any additional thoughts about the questions that were discussed in the event that a participant remembers something important or has a new thought they would like to be included in their interview responses.

The point of the interviews was to gather rich textual data that would help answer the research questions and to frame a deep understanding of students’ perceptions on the topic. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed as a result of reviewing the
literature related to academic motivation among secondary students and two qualitative research classes that guided me in establishing a strong foundational understanding of educational research. The protocol was developed and refined throughout the process of conducting the review of the literature. Additional changes were made after defending the research proposal and in consultation with the dissertation committee.

Given that the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions secondary students have concerning their teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners, a series of personal interviews was an effective approach to gather the students’ views and come to a deeper understanding of their thought process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A series of semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions provided the participants with the opportunity to voice their experiences without the constraint of researcher perspectives or past research findings and allowed them to create their own options for responding (Creswell, 2008).

Survey. The participants who responded affirmatively to the research invitation received a brief survey (Appendix B) containing open-ended questions to which they provided anonymous responses utilizing Survey Monkey, an online survey system. The survey responses helped the researcher develop probing questions for the interviews and support the triangulation of research data in the study.

Participant journals. At the conclusion of the interviews, each participant was provided with a journal and was asked to record their experiences and reflections related to academic motivation for a period of two weeks following their interview.
Figure 3.1

<table>
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<th>Instrument</th>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Peer reviews of 2 coded transcripts to test coding scheme</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>B. Co-Researcher review of codes survey results</td>
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<td>Journals</td>
<td>A. Manual coding and re-coding utilizing thematic analysis</td>
<td>Journals to gather participant</td>
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<td>experiences and reflections re: their academic motivation</td>
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**Data Collection and Analysis**

The procedures utilized in sampling, collecting, and analyzing data was carefully planned and executed in order to facilitate the development of meaningful results from the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2008).

**Sampling process.** The School Board considered my request to perform research at the school. They were provided with documentation that the IRB Committee of California State University, Northridge had approved the research study. This was the first such request made of the school board and they authorized the study after believing that appropriate controls were in place to mitigate any risk to students and families at the school. I presented the board approval to the site principal and requested that they send the research invitation to the families with students enrolled at the high school. The parents and students who were interested in participating in the study were asked to read and sign the informed consent documents which had been previously approved by the California State University, Northridge IRB Committee and by the school’s Board of Directors.
**Data Collection**

Data collection is described as the process through which individuals are identified and selected for study, permission to conduct a study is secured, and information is gathered through the administration of instruments in the form of asking questions or observing behavior (Creswell, 2008). Interviews, surveys, and journals were utilized to gather data for this study (see Figure 3.1).

**Interviews.** A series of twenty-eight semi-structured interviews was conducted with students enrolled in grades 9-12. The interviews were formal in that they were scheduled in advance after the participants were selected as described earlier in Chapter Three. They were also formal because an interview protocol was developed and comprised of an introductory statement, a series of questions in a specific order, and a concluding statement. The interviews were semi-structured because probing questions were asked to in order to clarify responses and to get at the heart of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2011). These probing questions were important in order to identify new ways of understanding the topic from the participants’ experiences. The questions were open-ended in order to give the participants opportunities to give as thoughtful and detailed answers as possible. Semi-structured interviews are an excellent approach when a researcher will only have one opportunity to interview a participant (Bernard, 1988).

**Recording the interviews.** A digital recorder was used to capture the complete interview after obtaining the participants’ approval for making the recording. Based on prior experience with interviews, two different recording devices were used in order to minimize the possibility of losing valuable data because of the failure of a piece of
electronic equipment or operator error. The first interview was transcribed and the overall interview was assessed. The interview protocol and probing questions were evaluated and found to be effective in collecting the needed data for the study. The remaining interviews were transcribed in groups and an ongoing evaluation of the interview data was conducted. Additional probe questions were developed and utilized in subsequent interviews with the participants.

*Taking notes during the interview.* Printed copies of the interview protocol were printed, and space was left between the questions and on the right margin to make short notes about information that was not collected on the audio recorder such as facial expressions, body language, eye contact, level of comfort, and other items that described the participant in regards to his or her responses. The taking of notes did not interfere with the establishment and maintenance of a good rapport between the participants and researcher. The researcher closely monitored the development of rapport and dialogue during the interviews. Appropriate body language was utilized, including maintaining good eye contact, and note taking was temporarily stopped when it appeared to be inhibiting a participant’s ability to provide detailed and thoughtful responses to the questions they were being asked.

**Surveys.** Survey Monkey, an online survey program, was utilized to gather anonymous responses to the survey questions from 18 participants. The data was gathered and manually coded and re-coded to complete a thematic analysis of the survey results. The purposes of the survey were to gather data about the research questions, to provide for the triangulation of data, and to assist the researcher in the development of probing questions for the interviews.
**Journals.** At the end of the interviews, the participants were provided with journals and were asked to record their experiences and reflections regarding academic motivation in the following two weeks. Five of these anonymous journals were returned to the researcher at the school office in an envelope provided for this purpose. The data in these journals was manually coded and re-coded to complete a thematic analysis of the data following the same process utilized in analyzing the survey data.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process through which qualitative researchers make sense of data that has been collected. A plan for data analysis was developed that included manual coding and re-coding, peer review, securing the data, and reviewing the data coding to surface themes within the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Analyzing the data took place through organizing what the researcher saw, heard, and read in a way that allowed the researcher to make sense of what was experienced (Glesne, 2011).

**Preliminary Data Analysis.** Preliminary data analysis took place during data collection and involved focusing and shaping the study while the survey and interviews were being conducted. The survey results and interview transcripts were coded as they were received. The coded data was read multiple times before and during the coding process. This practice was suggested in the literature which indicated that a research study may be more relevant and profound if this reflection is simultaneous with data collection (Glesne, 2011). A field log was used to record reflections and document any thoughts as they occurred. The goal was to capture as many thoughts and insights on paper as possible while leaving the researcher’s mind free for new thoughts and perspectives to develop. During the process, rudimentary coding schemes were developed.
and analytic files were established in order to organize the information that was being gathered. In addition to recording observations in a field log, the data recorder was used to capture spoken thoughts and reflections during the process of developing the data codes and the coding scheme.

The interview recordings were transcribed professionally and de-identified by the co-investigator in order to protect the identities of the students and faculty members. The student and teacher names were removed or replaced from the interview transcripts and the survey results in order to eliminate any potential conflict students might feel about sharing negative information about their teachers. The researcher continued to utilize a journal to record thoughts, questions, and potential codes in preparation for the more detailed subsequent analysis of the data.

**Thematic Data Analysis.** Thematic data analysis involves techniques that allow a researcher to comb the data looking for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). The goal was to identify these patterns and develop a framework for sharing the essence of what the data revealed within the context of a specific research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). There was a deductive process of analyzing the data that stemmed from developing data codes based on the literature and the conceptual framework of the study. At the same time, analyzing the data was inductive because we understood the data through the lens of personal experience and the surveys, interviews, and journals of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Excel spreadsheets were used to store, retrieve, and code the interview transcripts using the preliminary codes that were developed. Additional codes were added throughout the process of analyzing the transcripts. After two of the transcripts were
coded, a colleague was asked to read the coded transcripts in order to test the coding scheme that was established. The colleague reviewed the transcripts and a discussion took place regarding codes that could have different meanings. This process helped to solidify the meaning of the codes and provide suggestions for additional codes. It also affirmed the researcher’s approach to coding the data. This peer review also helped to establish inter-rater reliability for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2008).

Each transcript was read several times in order to gain a thorough understanding of the participants’ responses to the questions and to code, re-code, and review the coding scheme multiple times. The purpose of the ongoing review was to establish the best possible understanding and codes for the data and to gather these data into themes that allowed for analysis, splitting the data apart, and synthesis, pulling the data together. This process was used to answer the research questions and discover how the findings related to the literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

The preliminary, early, and thematic data analyses are appropriate techniques for analysis within a phenomenological case study. In examining the lived experience for a small group of high school students, the goal was to gain a deep and meaningful understanding of how the interaction between students and teachers enhances or detracts from the students’ academic motivation. The detailed process of transcribing and reviewing the interviews multiple times allowed the researcher to gain a detailed understanding of the students’ perceptions related to their teachers.

**Ethical Issues**

The ethical issues surrounding this study are what Rossman and Rallis (2003) have referred to as relationships and expectations. For students, this may center on issues
of trust between themselves and the researcher. Students might be reluctant to be candid in responses because they are afraid of reprisals from teachers or administrators. In order to respond to these anticipated concerns, a carefully worded protocol was developed (see Appendix A) that clearly spelled out how the data was utilized and how confidentiality was maintained as well as indicate the length of time the data would be kept before it is destroyed. The researcher explained that the names of students were converted to pseudonyms to ensure their identity would not be known. The participants were allowed to disengage from the study at any time although all the participants completed the interview without feeling any need to end their participation in the study. The survey instrument, interview protocol, and journal assignment were approved by the California State University, Northridge Institutional Review Committee before any research was conducted with the participants.

**Role of the Researcher**

As a school administrator and a doctoral student in educational leadership, I have a very high level of interest in the impact of academic motivation on learning. The literature is clear that students experience a marked decrease in academic motivation as they progress through the K-12 school system. The result of this phenomenon is reduced attention, decreased effort, and boredom in school. It has been important to guard against any researcher bias that could have developed through a desire to advocate for a more academically engaging classroom environment. As a student in educational leadership, a deeper understanding of academic motivation among secondary students is desired with the hope that this understanding will provide important information that will allow
teachers to enhance the motivation of their students and increase the likelihood of student success in high school and beyond.

In nearly 17 years as a school administrator, it has been a wonderful experience to witness highly motivated students achieve great success in attending the university of their choice, graduating from these universities, and attending graduate school or beginning a career in their field of study. At the same time, it has been disappointing to observe students with high achievement test scores and solid potential, perform poorly in high school and limit their opportunities in the future. Because I believe hold the belief that academic motivation is an important aspect in student’s lives, it has been important to remain impartial and to check the conclusions that have been derived through this study with peers.

It is possible that some of the participants know who I am because of my role at the school. In order to minimize any researcher effects, a co-investigator conducted the survey, interviews, and collected the journals.

**Researcher Bias**

Researcher bias and effects have been mitigated in three ways. First, an independent researcher reviewed the data coding and discussed the coding utilized by the researcher. It was an opportunity to receive feedback and hear the perspective of a different researcher. Second, I worked with the dissertation chair and committee members to discuss any aspects related to bias and have remained open to their input on this important topic. Third, the researcher engaged in personal critical reflection throughout the research process in order to mitigate researcher bias (Glesne, 2011).
Dissertation Timeline

The dissertation proposal was approved in July 2012. The California State University, Northridge Institutional Review Board approved the study in January 2013 and granted two subsequent amendments in March and June of 2013. Data was collected in May and June of 2013. The dissertation defense hearing was conducted in November 2013.
Chapter IV: Results

In this examination of high school students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners, data was collected through 18 surveys, 28 interviews, and five student journals to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are high school students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

2. What are high school students’ perceptions of teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

3. What are high school students’ perceptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes of teachers?

Data Collection Instruments and Research Questions

The online survey and interviews addressed all three of the research questions. The journals provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their motivational experiences with their teachers during a two-week period of time. The participants recorded their thoughts with varying degrees of depth. Some of their thoughts related to the research questions while others did not.

Presentation of the Data

The data was organized and presented around the research questions, in order, one through three. Each of these sections was organized around the data collection instruments used starting with the survey data, then the interview data, and the journal data. Any names that appear in the data are pseudonyms. Before considering the students’ perceptions of their teachers, the survey participants were asked to describe their personal level of academic motivation. This information allows the researcher to understand the
students’ perceptions of their motivation separate from their teachers influence on their level of academic motivation.

Self-Reported Level of Academic Motivation

In order to understand the survey participants underlying level of academic motivation, they were asked to describe their level of motivation as a student. Seven of 18 (38.88%) survey respondents indicated they have a high level of academic motivation. Four of 18 (22.22%) respondents described a moderate level of motivation. One of 18 (5.55%) indicated they had low motivation as a student. An additional four of 18 (22.22%) of the respondents indicated their level of motivation changes depending upon varying factors and two of 18 (11.11%) of the students had other, less precise, responses to the question (see Figure 4.1).

The responses from participants who indicated they were highly motivated varied from “I’m usually very self-motivated,” to “I have a high level of motivation as a student,” to “It’s pretty high. The desire to accomplish my goals in life is fuel for that motivation, which already comes naturally to me.”

Figure 4.1 Survey Participants Self-Identified Level of Academic Motivation

- Highly motivated: 38.88%
- Moderately motivated: 22.22%
- Low motivation: 5.55%
- Motivation varies: 22.22%
- Unclear motivation: 11.11%
Students who indicated a moderate level of motivation responded they were “average,” or “6 out of 10.” Another participant indicated “out of 10, about a 6.5.” The one participant, who described his or her motivation as low, indicated “It’s low because there is rarely any motivation.”

Four of the students indicated that their level of academic motivation changed depending upon particular circumstances. One described his or her motivation as “High, lower towards the end of the year.” Another indicated “7 overall, really depends upon the class.” Still another participant wrote, “I think my level of motivation depends upon the teacher. I think I could be a lot more motivated as a student.” Two of the participants gave responses that were not precise. The first responded “Study hard” and the next wrote “I would describe my level of motivation as a student as always being positive and never letting any negativity influence me to do something I don’t want to do.”

**Research Question #1**

What are high school students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

**RQ #1-Survey Data.** Eighteen students responded to the open-ended survey questions. They were asked to “Describe the most motivating teacher you have had during your school years. What did they do that motivated you to learn?” Some responded with six or seven words while others wrote two or three sentences. Their answers may have contained a single action or described as many as four actions on the part of their most motivating teacher. The participants provided descriptions of 30 different actions among the 38 total descriptions of their teachers’ motivating behaviors.
Seventeen of the 38 (44.7%) responses described some type of relational practice on the part of the teacher. Another 17 of the 38 (44.7%) of the responses described a teachers’ instructional practice. Four of the 38 (10.5%) described a personal quality of their teacher that was highly motivating (see Figure 4.2). The participants’ responses concerning their teachers’ relational practice, instructional practice, and personal qualities will follow Figure 4.2.

![Figure 4.2 Survey Participants Descriptions of Teacher Motivational Practices](image)

**Relational Practice-Expressing Confidence.** According to the 18 survey participants, teachers who express confidence in their students are motivating. One student described the interaction with his or her teacher after the student gave a required speech:

> After giving a speech he pulled me aside and told me he believed I would be very successful in life. It meant a lot and I wanted to do really well in his class because I did not want to disappoint him.

Another participant shared that,

> I had a one-on-one conversation with the teacher to discuss my grade because I was not satisfied with it. She told me that she believes in me and that she knows I will be able to do it. Hearing that as a student ignites a fire for me to be motivated
to do my work and study. Just the fact that she cares that I get what she is
teaching helps.

*Relational Practice-Care and Personal Interest.* The perception that teachers who
care for their students and take a personal interest in them was identified as very
motivating by 7 survey participants. “Mrs. Hudson is the most motivating teacher to me.
Her love for God and her care for each individual student makes me want to make her
proud by showing her that her motivation towards me is greatly appreciated and needed.”
One student expressed that “They actually took the time to get to know the students and
knew what to do to motivate us.” Another indicated, “The most motivating teacher for
me was probably my fourth grade teacher. She (showed) special interest (in) all her
students and pushed us all to do better.” One student described his or her most
motivating teacher as someone who “…takes an interest in the students on a personal
level.”

*Relational Practice-Urging and Encouraging.* In addition to caring for students,
showing a personal interest in them, and expressing confidence in them, four of the
participants described other relational practices that motivate them in school. “Mrs.
Gallagher, she believes and pushes us to do more.” “Mrs. Diaz, she always encourages.”

*Instructional Practice-Passion.* Five participants also described their teachers’
instructional practices when discussing their most motivating teachers. Several of the
students described their most motivating teacher as being passionate about teaching or
passionate about the subject they teach. One participant noted, “She is also very
passionate about her work.” Another participant wrote, “The most motivating teacher I
have had was passionate about what they taught and was extremely knowledgeable in all
aspects of their subject.” One of the students described his or her teacher in this way, “She was really excited about what she did and put a lot of effort into her work.”

**Instructional Practice-Varied Methods.** In addition to being passionate, three participants described a number of other instructional practices as being motivating to them. Using a variety of instructional methods and providing different types of assignments was noted by a number of the participants when they described their most motivating teacher. One wrote, “He made the assignments different and tried to make them fun for everyone.” Another indicated that “Knowing that he cared about us doing well in school by trying to change up assignments helped motivate me.” Someone else expressed a similar thought, “This teacher thought of interesting and creative ways to teach the material to the students.

**Instructional Practice-Life Application.** In addition to varying assignments and instructional methods, two participants described other instructional factors such as applying academic subjects to real life. “This teacher constantly applied their subject to the students’ lives in an understandable way, which was motivating to me.”

**Instructional Practice-Step-by-Step Direction.** Taking the time to provide step-by-step instructions was important to two participants, “I think my most motivating teacher would be my math teacher because she helps me to understand stuff and walks me through steps and shows me how to do stuff.”

**Instructional Practice-Emphasis on Success.** Two participants noted their teachers’ focus on success. “She wanted everyone to succeed.” Another student shared, “She taught me every skill in her class even learning how to be successful.”
Instructional Practice—Overcoming Dislike of a Course. One participant noted that they were motivated by instructors who taught academic courses they did not like, “Miss Litton motivated me to learn the most awful subject ever, Physics. She just made it fun and interesting and didn’t let us be lazy.” Another participant indicated a teacher was motivating even though they were not ideal. “The teacher that motivated me to learn the most during my school years is my freshman (class subject) teacher. The fact that I didn’t learn by her methods of teaching and the challenge she continued to give motivated me to try harder to pass the class with the grade that I wanted.”

Instructional Practice—Providing Autonomy. Only one student indicated a preference for some autonomy. They said, “The (sic) allowed me to find the research myself and explain it to the class in a presentation. It made me want to learn more about the topic.”

Instructional Practice—Rewards. As well, only one other student indicated he or she was motivated by “Rewards for going above and beyond.”

Teacher Personal Qualities. In addition to relational practices and instructional practices, four participants described their most motivating teachers in terms of personal or character qualities. For example, one student said, “She lives a life of integrity and obedience; it’s really encouraging to see.” Another student described their teacher was “nice to me and helps me a lot.”

This summarizes the survey data related to the first research question. Next, the interview data pertaining to research question #1 will be provided and explained.
RQ #1-Interview Data

Twenty-eight students participated in semi-structured interviews and were asked to describe a time when a teacher motivated them to do their best work on an assignment or in a class. The data was coded and sorted to determine that 24 of the students (85.71%) described an intrinsic form of motivation, nine of the students (32.14%) described an extrinsic form of motivation, and five of the students (17.86%) described both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation when recounting a time when a teacher motivated them to do their best work (see Figure 4.3). By combining all the responses, we determine that

![Figure 4.3 Interview Participants Descriptions of Their Academic Motivation](image)

**Intrinsic Motivation-Self-Determination Theory.** The responses of the 24 participants who described an intrinsic form of motivation were coded from a Self-Determination Theory perspective in order to determine if they were motivated by a sense of autonomy, competence, or relatedness. The participants described their sense of autonomy, competence, or relatedness 36 different times (some of responses included more than one motivational factor). Four of the responses (14.29% of the participants)
described being motivated by a sense of autonomy, 11 of the responses (39.29% of the participants) described being motivated by a sense of competence, and 21 of the responses (75.00% of the participants) described being motivated by a sense of relatedness (see Figure 4.4).

![Figure 4.4 Interview Participants Intrinsic Motivational Factors](image)

**Intrinsic Motivation-Autonomy.** One of the students motivated by a sense of autonomy shared the following:

> Usually its research (class name) and usually you can kind of pick your topic or you have a topic, but you can go any direction as long as you have a few key things in it. So when you research what you want, you take what you’re interested in. And if you’re interested in something, you’re obviously going to want to know more about it.”

A second student described how a sense of autonomy motivated him when he said:

> I love writing, too. So in my (class name) class when we were given the opportunity to write on anything that came to our minds, the freedom to do
whatever we wanted, that’s when I was like I could go on for days about anything. When the freedom’s there – ‘cause I don’t really like scripted work. Like when a teacher goes on a website and finds like a pre-made, fill in the blank, I like something that involves critical thinking. That’s a big thing for me. So when the option is to do whatever you want, that’s when I really enjoy it.

_Intrinsic Motivation-Competence._ There are eleven students who indicate that gaining a sense of competence from their teachers is motivating. One participant said:

I think I would probably say (class name) because it was like, when she explains it and I know I get it and she calls me up to the board to do it, I’m like, this is so easy. It’s like motivation, like I got this, throw me another one; this is really easy to me. But the way she tells me like ‘You got this, this is easy, it’s not even that hard.

Another shared, “When you talk to her and tell her your concerns she just like, motivates you to do better. She tells you how good you are and like how you can do it, and how she believes in you and that really helped me.”

_Intrinsic Motivation-Relatedness._ The largest group of students (75% of the participants) indicated that a sense of relatedness with their teachers was academically motivating to them. They shared many examples of this experience, including a student who described the significance of her teachers as follows:

Taking the time to get to know their students and just to, not necessarily, it’s hard to get on a one-to-one level with every student but just to have that perspective and relationship, in the students’ view and stuff. As like a class and stuff, just
getting to know the students well and probably being like a really good influence on them too. I’ve noticed that teachers have a very powerful impact on students. While that participant described a teachers’ relational influence as “powerful,” a different student described how a teacher’s concern for his life outside the classroom is important to his academic motivation. Here is what he said:

Well I think it really helps to have a teacher that cares. One of my teachers just really cares about how I’m doing and then she follows up on my home life and what’s happening at home, what’s happening at school, what happening in my spiritual life, and it helps me to have a teacher that really cares.

A teacher showing interest in their students can be a significant form of motivation. A different participant has taken note of her teachers’ level of care and the teacher’s academic success as a source of motivation. This student said:

I think that how they’re so open, how they care and also we have some very accomplished teachers here. Like I know our teacher Dr. Jones, he’s been a visiting scholar, he graduated from Boston University, he has his PhD and so many other administration and faculty that have valued their education. So it shows us that this is something that should be taken – not taken lightly. And they do it to glorify God. And so I feel like with those two things in mind you can go anywhere, and they show us that.

Many other participants described how a good relationship with their teachers positively affects their level of academic motivation. In addition to intrinsic motivational factors, some of the participants described extrinsic factors that motivate them in their schoolwork.
Extrinsic Motivational Factors. The interview participants also described extrinsic motivational factors that influence their level of effort at school. Nine participants (32.14%) described some type of reward or punishment as being significant to their academic motivation. These nine participants described a total of 18 different factors that influence their level of effort on schoolwork. Sixteen of the 18 extrinsic responses (88.88%) were rewards or potential rewards and two of the eighteen extrinsic responses (11.11%) were negative consequences or potential negative consequences. Figure 4.5 provides a summary of the extrinsic motivational factors described by the participants:

![Figure 4.5 Extrinsic Motivational Factors](image)

Coding for Extrinsic Motivational Factors. Slightly less than one-third (32.14%) of the participants indicated that extrinsic factors were important to their academic motivation. The following responses were coded for extrinsic motivational factors. One participant shared three different extrinsic motivational factors that were common.
responses of the students, “I think what motivates me most is like my parents and my
sports, cause – and to get into college. I really want to get into a good college.”

*Future College Plans.* Another student indicated grades were important because
of her future plans, “I want to be a doctor. So I want to get into a good school so that
makes me more motivated to get good grades. That’s what mostly motivates me.”
Another student shared why good grades are important to him, “My teachers, they’re
always telling us to keep on track with our work because of colleges. And they influence
me most to do the work, even though I don’t like doing it.”

*Parental Approval.* Several students indicated that having their parents’ approval
is important to them. One student shared her thoughts:

My motivation is to make my parents happy and I am sort of a perfectionist…I do
take the responsibility of doing my homework and I think that’s important for any
career or job because you have a work job to do, and you have to do something
for it. So you’re learning to be conscientious about what you’re in charge of and
creating those habits and patterns now.

Another student shared that his motivation is, “Deals I’ve made with my
dad…Yea, a bargain that could get me something I could actually use, free time.”

*Grades.* Another participant spoke of grades and shared, “I like to get good
grades, I don’t really like to fail, though. So I’ll work hard at it. But that’s kind of my
motivation I guess.” Parents and grades are a common source of extrinsic motivation.
Another participant said, “Well, I would probably say I just – I want to call myself a
perfectionist. I like to get stuff done and I like to get a good grade. So my goal is to get a
good grade and I’ll do whatever I can to do that. Because at home, so my parents are happy with a good grade and I like a good grade. So it keeps my parents happy.”

In explaining the reasons these extrinsic factors are motivating, the participants shared that sometimes grades are important because they influence future educational opportunities or indicate they are important because poor grades prevent them from participating in school activities, such as sports. “I’m really motivated because, to do sports, my dad makes me have – I have to have nothing below a C. So I have to have really good grades to do the things I like to do.”

**Teacher Practice and Characteristics.** The interview data was also coded to consider the students’ perspectives on their teachers’ relational practice, instructional practice, and personal characteristics. When asked to share about a time or class in which the teacher motivated them to do their best work, 19 of the participants (67.86%) described a teachers’ relational practice, 16 of the participants (57.14%) described a teachers’ instructional practice, and 1 participant (3.57%) described a personal characteristic (see Figure 4.6).
Instructional Practice. The teachers’ relational practices have been previously described in detail, in terms of their impact on intrinsic motivation, so these comments will not be repeated. The interview participants have also described teachers’ instructional practices that motivated them academically. One student shared his experience of explaining their academic struggles to a teacher, who offered some practical assistance:

I wasn’t getting good grades on the tests. And I’ve talked to her about it like what can I do, is there something else, like different study habits or something? She told me she has study groups every Thursday so I’ve been going to them. And when you talk to her and tell her your concerns she just like motivates you to do better.

In addition to offering academic support and encouragement, the assignments teachers provide can also inspire a student’s learning. A different student described a motivating teacher practice as follows:
Well the teachers, well sometimes you know they can set like, have some fun stuff you can do. Like sometimes they’ll have a fun report and you’ll have fun doing it. Or maybe it’s an interesting report, something you’re interested in, and they make it interesting so you want to find out more about it.

As the student noted, selecting reports that capture student interest can motivate the students to learn more about the subject of the report.

*Teacher Personal Characteristics.* One interview participant shared the following about one of his teacher’s personal characteristics when describing the actions of a teacher who motivated them to work hard at school:

My 7th grade teacher motivated me a lot because, number one, he’s a Christian, he is a full believer. And to know that knows, like that everything he assigns will help, that really encouraged me to trust that he’s not going to lie to me or say anything that’s not exactly true. Just knowing that, it really motivated me to do the work that he gave me to do. And if I would forget I would feel really bad, but I knew that it’s OK, we all make mistakes. And the encouragement he gave was also a huge motivation as well.

These comments indicate that student perceptions of their teachers’ personal character qualities can also impact their level of academic motivation. Now we will consider what the participants shared in their journals, the third source of data utilized to answer the first research question.

*Journal Data*

At the conclusion of each of the 28 student interviews, the participants were provided with a journal and asked to “Use this journal to record any thoughts or feelings
you have regarding how your teachers affect your level of academic motivation during the next two weeks.” Five of the participants returned a journal after recording some of their thoughts or feelings.

The five journals contained a total of 12 entries that ranged from a very short paragraph to one and on and one-half pages in length. Four of the journal entries (33.33%) pertained to the first research question. Each of these entries addressed an area of intrinsic motivation. One of them described a relational practice and the other three described instructional practices.

One participant described a relational practice as follows: “A different teacher was actually really encouraging by just their words to us. They gave us a great pep-talk and I felt very encouraged by it.”

The students also wrote about their teachers’ instructional practices. One wrote, “When teachers explain either directly or indirectly what will be on the tests, students have a better chance of picking out what to study rather than studying blindly.” Another student was motivated by the opportunity to conduct independent research. He wrote the following:

In my history class, we just finished a unit on the 1920’s, where the students taught the different aspects of the 1920’s. This was motivating because it caused the students to research their topics on their own and present it to the class. The students were able to focus on one topic and learn about it in depth, rather than just learn general details about everything. This was motivating to me because I was really interested in my topic and I wanted to learn more about it. I also had time to focus on this one thing, rather than having to learn about everything all at
once. This project was also motivating because it was different than everyday notes taught by the teacher.

From the Self-Determination perspective, two of the journal entries expressed positive comments in terms of a better sense of competence and one expressed a thought related to autonomy. A fourth entry did not contain any thought related to Self-Determination Theory.

**RQ #1 Summary**

The data collected to answer research question #1 indicated that the students at the school are largely motivated by intrinsic factors and that their teachers’ relational practices were the most often described behaviors when the participants responded to the question. Now I will describe the data collected to answer the second research question.

**Research Question #2**

What are high school students’ perceptions of teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

**Survey Data-Research Question #2.** Eighteen students responded to the open-ended survey questions. They were asked “Describe teacher attitudes that get you motivated to learn.” Their answers varied in length and may have listed a single attitude or described several attitudes they have observed in their teachers that have motivated them to learn. The participants described 19 different teacher attitudes within 27 total responses to the question.

Twenty-five of the 27 (92.59%) descriptions of teacher attitudes were related to an intrinsic form of motivation. None (0.00%) of the descriptions of teacher attitudes
were related to extrinsic motivation and 2 of the 27 responses (7.41%) were not related to either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (see Figure 4.7).

Several of the responses that were coded as intrinsically motivating addressed a teacher’s level of enthusiasm while teaching or toward the subject that is being taught. One respondent wrote, “When a teacher is excited to teach and actually believes what they are teaching is important.” The two responses that were coded as neither intrinsic nor extrinsic were “Not boring or overly emotional” and “Straight forward, right to the point.”

The responses were also coded from the Self-Determination perspective. Twelve of 19 (63.16%) participants indicated teacher attitudes of relatedness are motivating. Two of 19 (10.53%) participants responded that a teacher attitude that enhanced a students’ sense of competence was motivating. One participant (5.26%) described a teacher attitude that fostered student autonomy was motivating. Four of the 19 (21.05%)
Responses did not describe a teacher attitude that fit within a Self-Determined perspective (see Table 4.8).

![Figure 4.8 Survey Participants Intrinsic Motivational Factors-RQ#2](image)

Responses that were coded for relatedness were consistent with those mentioned earlier. The students described teachers as “caring,” “friendly,” and “supportive.” The responses coded for competence were those in which the student indicated that a teachers’ positive belief in the students’ ability or a desire on the part of the teacher to know that students understand the material being taught. The response that was coded for autonomy indicated, “A teacher with an attitude to learn from the students is a motivating one for me. The attitude where knowledge is open for discussion…” Four of the responses did not fit within a Self-Determination perspective and could not be coded. “Not boring or overly emotional” and “Straight-forward to the point” are examples of these responses.

Ten of the 27 (37.04%) responses described some type of instructional practice on the part of the teacher. Nine of the 27 (33.33%) responses described a teachers’
relational practice. Eight of the 27 (29.63%) described a personal quality or qualities of their teachers that are highly motivating (see Figure 4.9).

![Figure 4.9 Survey Participants Descriptions of Motivational Teacher Attitudes-RQ#2](image_url)

**Instructional Practices.** One participant wrote, “The attitude where knowledge is open for discussion, possibly one that opens doors to information the teacher didn’t think of, innovative attitudes are motivating ones.” Another student shared, “Teachers who motivate me to learn are passionate about what they teach and are excited to be teaching.” Another shared a similar thought, “The teacher who really enjoys teaching the subject, they are passionate about what they do.” Another participant looks for something else, “Fun! Us kids like to have fun. Boring teachers are hard to follow.”

**Teacher Relational Practices.** Other participants described relational practices that are motivating to them. For example, one said, “What gets me motivated is knowing that teachers believe that you can do great and knowing that the teacher cares that you understand what he or she is teaching.” One student described a motivating teacher as
someone who has a “good attitude and will get to know the students.” A different participant wrote, “When they encourage and go along side of me.”

**Teacher Personal Characteristics.** Several students responded to the question about teacher attitudes that motivate them to learn by describing a personal characteristic or characteristics of their teachers. Some participants provided a list of characteristics. One wrote, “Enthusiasm, care, interest, nice, fun.” Another shared, “Excited, supportive, caring.” A third participant wrote, “Positive, friendly, willing to help you.”

**Interview Data-Research Question #2.** The twenty-eight interview participants were asked to describe what type of teacher attitudes get them motivated to learn and why? Their responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded from a Self-Determination Theory (intrinsic) perspective, a rewards-punishment (extrinsic) perspective, and through the lenses of teacher practices and characteristics.

Twenty-four of the students (85.71%) described an intrinsic form of motivation, two of the students (7.14%) described both an intrinsic and extrinsic form of motivation, and two of the students (7.14%) did not include any type of teacher attitude while describing teachers’ attitudes that are academically motivating to them (see Figure 4.10).
The responses of the 24 participants who described an intrinsic form of motivation were coded from a Self-Determination Theory perspective in order to determine if they were motivated by a sense of autonomy, competence, or relatedness. Autonomy refers to a students’ sense of independence to guide their own learning. Competence describes a students’ confidence in their ability to be successful in a given academic task. Relatedness is the degree to which a student feels connected with their teacher or teachers. Sixteen of the responses (57.14%) were coded for relatedness and the remaining data did not fit into either competence of autonomy domains.

**Intrinsic Motivation-Relatedness.** The participants who were motivated by a sense of relatedness with their teachers made statements such as the following:

Like personal ones (teachers) where they actually care about you. Like even Mr. Smith, him and I have a love-hate relationship, people say. Because he’s a teacher that I’m close with, he actually cares about the students also. So people that actually care about you. And all the teachers say “I’m here to care about
you” but I feel like a lot of teachers don’t actually do that. Yea, they’re just there to teach the whole class. Yea, I mean you can teach the whole class, but rather than, just get interactive with the students rather than just being there.

The level of care for students expressed by teachers was important to many of the participants. Another said, “If you don’t care about the individual, why would they care about your class? There’s no point.”

Teacher Practices and Characteristics. The interview data was also coded to consider the students’ perspectives on their teachers’ relational practice, instructional practice, and personal characteristics. When asked to describe teacher attitudes that motivate them to learn, 16 of the participants (57.14%) described a teachers’ relational practice, 16 of the participants (57.14%) described a teachers’ instructional practice, and 12 participants (42.86%) described a personal characteristic (see Figure 4.11).

![Figure 4.11 Descriptions of Teacher Motivational Practices-RQ#2](image-url)
Relational Practice. A teacher’s ability to interact and relate to students was an important factor in motivating students. In describing a motivational teacher, participants shared:

Ones (teachers) that are a little more interactive with the students. I love a lot of interaction. My (class name) teacher, she does a lot of interacting with the class and I feel the more you interact with the students the more we learn and stuff. And just making sure that we’re learning. And also I love asking questions.

Another participant described his motivating teachers as, “The teachers who are very open and, I don’t know, excited and fun and have had incredible experiences in their lives.”

Instructional Practice. Participants also indicated that the instructional practice of their teachers influence their academic motivation. One participant described her teacher as follows:

If they like make the notes fun. Like Mr. Farrell, he like, puts in jokes and makes it like easy to understand. He’ll kind of like make it so that we can relate a little bit. It’s easier when you have younger teachers that remember a little more what it’s like to be – how it’s easier to learn in different environments and stuff.

Teachers who possess a genuine sense of excitement about the subject they teach and share that enthusiasm with their students are motivating. One participant shared how this impacted her level of motivation:

That’s how Mrs. Johnson was. She would stay up late like researching about (subject). She cared about it so much and she loved it and she loved teaching us about it. She was always so excited in class. That made the students excited to
learn. That class was probably the best class I’ve ever had. Kids were interacting and it was like, everybody asked about (class name), that was my favorite class by far.

Utilizing creative instructional methods is motivating to some students, as one participant shared:

When a teacher wants to sing songs or do something that’s totally out of the ordinary, then I feel like that’s a huge motivation and encouragement. And something that inspires kids to do stuff. So in (class name) we have (networked) white boards and that helps us get interactive. And he also uses his guitar and sings songs with us so I think it involves the whole class and it’s really fun too.

Teacher Personal Characteristics - Enthusiasm. The participants described teachers’ personal characteristics when sharing about teacher attitudes that were personally motivating to them. The characteristic of enthusiasm is mentioned frequently. “I think their motivation for the subject. Their motivation, and I think the creativity of it.” Another participant shared, “Teachers also can motivate you because if they seem really excited about something then you tend also to get excited about it too.” Finally, a student said, “It’s really effective when they’re excited about what they’re going to teach. I love it when they’re so passionate about what they’re teaching.”

Journal Data – Research Question #2

The 28 interview participants were provided with a journal and were asked to use the journal to record any thoughts or feelings they had regarding how their teachers affect their level of academic motivation during the following two weeks. Five of the participants returned a journal after recording some of their thoughts or feelings.
The five journals contained a total of 12 entries that ranged from a very short paragraph to one and on and one-half pages in length. One of the journal entries (8.33%) pertained to the second research question and is the only one reported here. The other journals entries pertained to Research Questions #1 and #3. The entry described a relational practice, instructional practice, and a teacher characteristic that was intrinsically motivating to the participant. The first three lines of the journal entry have been covered with White-Out to de-identify the information. From the context it appears to be a list of teachers at the school. The entry continues as follows:

…all have something in common. Their love for God is evident and they are funny. Through teaching or talking to them personally, their love for God is evident. They are loving and they are not quick to judge. They also do not bring up past events when you did not do your best. They are easy to talk to and they care about their students’ academics and they care if you understand what they are teaching, instead of rushing through notes just to be done before the bell. Mostly their love for God and care for their students make me motivated and makes them role models to me.

At this point in the journal entry, two words have been covered with White-Out. Based on the context, it appears to be a single name. The journal entry continues:

…specifically is my favorite because when we have a discussion he tells why he believes what he believes instead of taking the easy way out and saying “I was born in a Christian family. The discussions we have with (name covered) makes me think, and I like that because it makes me a better Christian and act in a way the glorifies Christ. And I think that is an important quality to have as a Christian.
Another series of names has been covered and then the entry concludes,

…all are teachers who glorify God and it is evident in their teachings and personal conversations with students.

The student has been motivated by the relational practice, in the form of showing personal care and concern, the instructional practice of taking sufficient time to cover material rather than rushing through it, and by the teachers’ personal characteristic of being Godly role models.

**RQ #2 Summary**

The data collected to answer research question #2 indicated that the students at the school are largely motivated by intrinsic factors and that their teachers’ instructional practice, relational practice, and personal characteristics have a significant influence on their level of academic motivation. Now I will describe the data collected to answer the third research question.

**Research Question #3**

What are high school students’ perceptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes of teachers?

**Survey Data-Research Question #3.** Eighteen participants responded to an open-ended survey question that asked them to “Describe the least motivating teacher you have had during your school years. What did they do that made you less motivated to learn?” Some of the participants provided very brief responses while others wrote a paragraph. Many of the responses focused on one specific action or attitude while several explained up to five attitudes or actions that were demotivating. The eighteen participants provided a total of 26 unique descriptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes.
Sixteen of the 26 responses (61.54%) described a teacher attitude or action that was intrinsically demotivating and ten of the 26 responses (38.46%) described an attitude or action that was extrinsically demotivating.

Self-Determination Theory. Among the 16 intrinsically oriented actions or attitudes, eight of the 16 (50.00%) descriptions can be described within the Self-Determination category of relatedness. Seven of the 16 (43.75%) fall within the category of competence and one of 16 (6.25%) is within the category of autonomy (see Figure 4.12).

The interview responses related to the third research question that were coded as Self-Determined-Relational included comments such as, “It seems that she does not want to be a teacher and she just doesn’t care about her students’ academics or thoughts.” Two other participants said, “They hated me and singled me out, turning me into a joke for the whole class and the visiting 7th and 8th graders” and “Mr. Fischer is mean and seems to hate life.” Another shared, “Mrs. Press always puts everyone down and is rude.”
A portion of the data (43.75%) was coded for competence. These comments described teachers’ attitudes or actions that undercut a student’s sense of confidence in his ability to complete academic work. One example of this is, “When you ask her a question, she makes you feel stupid and she seems not to care to teach.” Two more examples are, “She encouraged us but her tone gave the impression that we couldn’t do it” and “The least motivating teacher I had would just tell us how bad we were doing. I never felt very encouraged in that class.”

One portion of data (6.25%) was coded for autonomy because the student did not have a sense that her teacher made any effort to stay current with new information. The belief that the teacher was not providing relevant information on a key topic was demotivating. “The least motivating teacher I’ve had during my schools years was my eighth grade (class name) teacher. He gave off the appearance that he knew all there is about computers and left no room in his head for new ideas. He kept repeating the same exercises and didn’t really advocate a desire to improve the program.”

As was noted earlier, ten survey responses indicated an extrinsic source of motivation. All ten of these responses reflected some form of negative consequence that demotivated the participants. For example, one student said, “My teacher told me we would not have very many assignments anymore because he did not like grading them.”

Some participants also indicated the amount of required work in a class could be demotivating. One participant shared, “My least motivating teacher was Mr. McCall. It felt like we always had something to do for homework and I don’t think he realized that we had other classes and that we also had lives.” Another participant wrote, “This
Teacher gave us a lot of busy work that was not beneficial to us as students, and only made our work load harder.”

*Teacher Practice and Personal Characteristics.* In addition to considering intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, the data was coded using instructional practice, relational practice and individual characteristics to categorize the data. Fourteen of the 26 (53.84%) responses addressed aspects of instructional practice. Ten of 26 (38.46%) responses included a relational practice on the part of the teacher. Two of the 26 (7.69%) responses described a personal characteristic of the teacher (see Figure 4.13).

**Figure 4.13 Survey Participants Descriptions of Teacher Motivational Practices-RQ#3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Characteristic</th>
<th>7.69%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational Practice</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Practice</td>
<td>53.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Instructional Practice.* The responses included student perceptions that teachers did not want to teach or grade papers, gave too much work, or gave assignments that were not helpful in the learning process. They referred to these assignments as “busy work.” One participant shared the following demotivating experience, “Asking questions to understand something was almost a waste of time because she wouldn’t bother to
answer them or she gave answers that made no sense. I don’t mean to bash on her but I really didn’t feel motivated to do anything in her class.”

Another participant indicated the class was not motivating “partly because (subject) has never interested me nor been easy for me. However, this teacher doesn’t necessarily teach in a way where ALL the students can understand the lesson.”

Students want to know what is expected of them and understand what they need to know about a subject. One student provided a clear description and wrote:

The least motivating teacher I have had did not teach their subject well…This teacher did not explain clearly what was expected of the students or what we needed to know. Considering this teacher taught an advanced class, we students were frustrated with the lack of preparation on the teacher’s part leading up to the exam. This made me less motivated because I was constantly frustrated with the teacher and the class.

Another participant shared, “Lecture, Notes, Test. When that’s all you ever do you want to die.”

Relational and Instructional Practice. There is one pertinent response that was coded for both relational and instructional practice. The student shared,

What was really discouraging was when I went to math tutoring after school and she was explaining a problem to me. I told her I did not understand what she was saying or what the book was saying. She told me I am going to have to find another tutor then. The way she said it was rude and disrespectful and I now hate going to that class and do not want to be in that class.
Teacher Personal Characteristics. Two of the 26 responses (7.69%) were coded for individual characteristics. The first response indicated the teacher was not open to new ideas. He “left no room in his head for new ideas.” The second indicated a lack of desire for instructional improvement, “He kept repeating the same exercises and didn’t really advocate a desire to improve the program.”

Interview Data – Research Question #3

The twenty-eight interview participants were asked to detail a time when a teacher had a negative effect on their level of academic motivation. The data was coded and sorted to determine that 23 of the students (82.14%) described an intrinsic form of motivation, eight of the students (28.57%) described an extrinsic form of motivation, and six of the students (21.43%) described both an intrinsic and an extrinsic form of motivation while sharing teachers’ negative effects on their academic motivation (see Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14 Interview Participants Descriptions of Their Academic Motivation - RQ#3

Intrinsic Motivation. The 23 responses that were coded for intrinsic motivation were examined coded within the Self-Determination Theory framework. Thirteen of the
28 (46.43%) responses were coded for competence. Thirteen of the 28 (46.43%) responses were coded for relatedness. Five of the 23 (21.73%) responses were coded for both competence and relatedness. Two of the 28 (7.14%) participants indicated they did not have an answer to the question. None of the responses was coded for autonomy (see Figure 4.15).

**Figure 4.15 Interview Participants Intrinsic Motivational Factors-RQ#3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Competence &amp; Relatedness</td>
<td>21.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>46.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>46.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intrinsic Motivation-Competence.** The attitudes and actions of a teacher can undermine a student’s sense of competence, an understanding that they are capable of successfully completing the work required for a course. One participant expressed this as follows:

I feel that sometimes they (teachers) can think too much that you’re not smart enough, and I don’t think that’s their intention but the way it comes across can make you think that you’re not smart enough and “You have to do well on this test” or “You have to do well on this assignment” and it’s kind of discouraging to think that teachers say that. And I don’t think they mean to say it in a way that will negatively affect you but I think just how other people perceive it is what
causes us to think “Oh, we’re not smart enough” or anything like that. Almost
giving you the impression that you’re not smart enough to do well on the test,
before the test is even given. Kind of their expectations.

From this participant’s perspective, teacher expectations impact his personal level of
academic motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation-Relatedness. In addition to sharing how their sense of
academic competence was impacted, the students described how their sense of
relatedness was affected. Up to this point, students have shared the positive aspects of
developing personal and caring relationships with their teachers. One participant
pointed-out that there can also be a down side to personal sharing between teachers and
students:

There are certain teachers that will pour their life stories into the class and like,
relating to the students and telling them stories, like one of the teachers likes to
tell us stories but there was one point where she really got into something that had
been happening lately. And it wasn’t gross or anything but it was just so personal
I felt that it was inappropriate especially considering I’m in a sophomore class
even though I’m a junior and I felt like her saying that in front of the sophomores
was really a bad idea and it made me feel uncomfortable because I felt like it was
possible they could gossip about it.

Sometimes, a single negative interaction between a student and teacher can undermine a
student’s motivation towards the class:

She was very mean. She was so mean to me. She made fun of me in front of the
whole class about my hair. That has nothing to do with the class. And she was
really rude about it. And I barely passed the class. She was so mean, I just didn’t want to do her work, I didn’t want to go to her class, and I didn’t want to look at her. So I dropped it, my (class name) this year, the beginning of the year, I was like “it’s not even worth it”.

Negative interactions, such as this one, leave a lasting impression.

*Extrinsic Demotivation.* In addition to the intrinsic motivational factors, eight participants shared extrinsic demotivation factors that were examined and coded. The extrinsic demotivation factors described by the participants undermined their motivation to complete the work required for their classes. These factors involved disciplining an entire class for the actions of a few students, negative teacher attitudes towards the entire class because some students were not performing well, falsely accusing a student of wrongdoing, pointing out academic errors in front of peers, and others (see Figure 4.16).

![Figure 4.16 Extrinsic Demotivating Factors](image)

*Demotivational Teacher Practices and Personal Characteristics.* The interview data for research question #3 was coded to examine teacher practices and personal
characteristics. Seventeen of 28 (60.71%) participants described some type of relational practice of their teachers that was demotivating. Thirteen of 28 (46.43%) participants described an instructional practice was that demotivating. Two of 28 (7.14%) participants shared a personal characteristic of their teacher that was academically demotivating to them (see Figure 4.17).

![Figure 4.17 Demotivational Teacher Practices and Characteristics](image)

**Demotivating Relational Practice.** Several examples of negative relational practice have already been shared in this chapter. A participant described their interaction with a teacher in this way, “She (the teacher) was like ‘Respect us,’ and yea I agree we definitely do need to respect our teachers but I think there also needs to be a level of respect for the students. So they (teachers) could respect them (students) also.”

**Demotivating Instructional Practice.** The students described a number of instructional practices that were academically demotivating. Forcing students, who lack confidence in their skills, to share in front of the class, not making the connection between an assignment and the significance of what is to be learned from the work, a monotonous daily instructional routine, not taking enough time to adequately explain a
new concept to be learned, and not meeting the needs of struggling students that cannot learn at the same pace as their peers.

**Journal Data – Research Question #3.** Seven of the journal entries (58.33%) pertained to the third research question (see Figure 4.18).

The participants shared several experiences that were demotivating. Their experiences involved intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as instructional practice, relational practice, and personal characteristics. Some of the entries have portions covered in order to de-identify the data. One student expressed her frustration at not being allowed to use her personal technology in class:

Some teachers don’t allow their students to utilize technology to complete a given task if they forgot a hard copy of the supplies. An example is a Bible vs. a Bible app. For some students it’s easier to understand material and gain analysis from it when using different methods to view it. A benefit to students is having several ways to turn-in assignments.
Another participant shared their concern that teachers were not sensitive to the academic workload placed on students:

Many teachers feel that we are only at school for their class. I even heard a comment made by a teacher that she didn’t care about our other classes, only hers. It would be better if they understood we have a ton of work in studying in every other class.

Finally, a student shared his perspective that one of his teachers was not in the best mood during class:

Another teacher is becoming sort of annoying. They believe whatever his/her opinion is should be everyone’s and if our opinion doesn’t match his/her we’re wrong. Also, this person goes through a lot of phases and they let it affect the way they teach or that their mood is superior to everyone else’s. If he/she is grumpy because they didn’t get enough sleep or if he/she is hungry it shouldn’t be taken out on us. IT’S THEIR fault they’re grumpy because that’s their mindset. The worse of the mood the harsher the grading and the happier, the easier it is. It’s very annoying and frustrating.

RQ #3 Summary

The data collected to answer research question #3 indicated that the students at the school are demotivated by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic demotivating factors most often cited were relational and pertaining to the student perceptions of competence for a given task. Although a number of different extrinsic
demotivating factors were described, there was not a clear theme within the extrinsic factors described by the participants.

Chapter Four has presented the data collected to answer the three research questions posed by the study. The analysis of the data will follow in Chapter Five.
Chapter V: Discussion

The final chapter will begin with a brief overview of the problem being examined, the purpose of the study, the research questions, methodology, and a summary of the major findings. The chapter will include a discussion of the interpretation and analysis of the results and describe how the results fit within the wider body of literature, Self-Determination Theory, and a behaviorist perspective. The limitations of the study and the generalizability of the findings to other school settings will be detailed. The implications for education practice will be explained and recommendations for future research will be provided in addition to concluding thoughts.

Summary of the Study

In many schools there is a significant problem with a lack of interest in learning, underperformance on classroom assignments and standardized tests, and a failure to graduate. The question of why some students are academically motivated while others persist in a state of educational malaise has been a topic educators have pondered for decades (Tollefson, 2000). Examination of students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them academically is an important topic in terms of educational practice.

Gaining a clearer understanding of secondary students’ perceptions of what motivates and demotivates them in the classroom could provide important information to help teachers provide engaging instruction that maintains student interest and enhances the opportunity for student learning. In order to discover secondary students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them, the following research questions were studied:

1. What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors that personally motivate them to engage in learning?
2. What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

3. What are secondary students’ perceptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes of teachers?

Methodology

In this examination of high school students’ perceptions of their teachers’ ability to motivate them as learners, data was collected through 18 surveys, 28 interviews, and five student journals. In the process of coding and recoding the data, patterns and themes emerged, and a framework for describing the themes was developed. The data was examined within the context of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and additional patterns surfaced that did not fit either of these conceptual frameworks. Alternative descriptions and explanations were developed through reanalyzing and recoding the data.

Summary of Findings

In answering the first research question about students’ perceptions of their teachers’ actions that motivate them to engage in learning the data indicated that the students at the school are largely motivated by intrinsic factors and that their teachers’ relational practices were the most often referenced when the participants responded to the question.

The second research question asked the participants to describe their teachers’ attitudes that motivate them to engage in learning. The data indicated that the students at the school are largely motivated by intrinsic factors and that their teachers’ instructional practice, relational practice, and personal characteristics have a significant influence on their level of academic motivation.
The third research question examined the participants’ experiences with any demotivating actions and attitudes of their teachers. The data indicated that the students at the school are demotivated by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic demotivating factors most often cited were relational and pertaining to the student perceptions of competence for a given task. Although a number of different extrinsic demotivating factors were described, there was not a clear theme within the extrinsic factors described by the participants.

**Research Question #1**

In synthesizing the data from all three sources it is clear that when the participants were asked to describe teacher behaviors that were academically motivating, they overwhelmingly described intrinsic forms of motivation. Specifically, 73.68% of survey respondents, 85.71% of interview participants, and 100% of those who returned journals described teacher behaviors in terms of intrinsic motivational factors. Conversely, 13.15% of survey respondents, 32.14% of interview participants, and 0.00% of those who returned journals described teacher behaviors that were extrinsically motivating to them. A total of 17.86% of interview participants described both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors and 13.15% of survey respondents described motivational factors that could not be categorized in terms of intrinsic or extrinsic influences because the descriptions lacked the detail to determine the exact nature of the motivation (see Figure 5.1)

**Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination Theory.** Intrinsic motivation from a Self-Determination Theory (SDT) perspective was a factor in all three data sources. The least often cited SDT motivational factor was autonomy, which was included in 14.29%
of the interview responses, 9.09% of the journal entries, and 2.63% of the survey responses (see Figure 5.1). Among those who described an autonomy-related motivation, the participants indicated that they were motivated by teachers who gave them some freedom in selecting the topic of required reports or different options in terms of how assignments would be completed.

The next most-often cited SDT motivational factor was competence, which describes teachers who foster student self-confidence in their ability to successfully complete a task, project, or class. A teacher’s ability to enhance a student’s sense of competence was noted by 34.21% of the survey respondents, 39.29% of the interview participants, and 45.45% of those who completed a journal. A teacher’s ability to inspire confidence in his or her students is clearly an important and significant SDT motivational factor for the participants.

The data is clear that a teacher who establishes and enhances a sense of relatedness with his or her students was, by far, the most significant SDT motivational factor noted by the students. A sense of personal connectedness, care, or concern was cited as significant by 31.57% of the survey respondents, 54.55% of those who completed a journal, and 75.00% of the interview participants (see Figure 5.1). Students are intrinsically motivated to engage in learning by teachers who take a personal interest in them, their lives, and their success in school and beyond.

**Extrinsic Motivation.** While extrinsic motivational factors were cited by some of the study participants, they were described much less frequently than intrinsic factors. Among the survey respondents 13.15% noted rewards were academically motivating, and none indicated a punishment was motivating. None of the participants who completed a
journal described a reward or punishment as a motivating factor. However, 28.57% of the interview participants described a reward, and 7.14% described a punishment or potential punishment as academically motivating to them. The rewards most often described were related to making parents happy, maintaining grades that allowed for participation on an athletic team, pleasing teachers, or better college opportunities in the future. The punishments described were related to poor grades, making parents unhappy, or fear of failing a class. The implication is that some students are motivated by extrinsic factors, both rewards and punishments, but extrinsic motivation played a much smaller role than intrinsic motivation in terms of inspiring the participants to work at school.

**Alternative Explanations.** Although most of the data collected in the study could be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, not all of it fit neatly into these categories. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), an intrinsic motivational framework, explains motivation in terms of an individuals’ sense of autonomy, competence, or relatedness. A significant amount of the data from this study can be explained from an SDT perspective. However, there was a portion of that data that could not be explained from an intrinsic or extrinsic framework. In wrestling with this fact, the data was re-coded several times in a search to understand and identify other themes and possible explanations. As a result, three themes were identified that can also be used to describe and understand teacher actions or characteristics that are academically motivating to students. Teacher instructional practices, teacher relational practices, and teacher personal characteristics also surfaced as being important motivational factors for the participants.
Teacher personal characteristics, such as being nice, fun, positive, or friendly were cited as motivational factors by 10.52% of survey respondents, 3.57% of interview participants, and in 9.09% of the journal responses.

The relational practice of teachers was described as motivating by 44.73% of survey respondents, 57.14% of interview participants, and in 54.55% of the journal responses. Although these descriptions may be related to the SDT characteristic of relatedness, they are distinct in that the participants were describing specific actions of their teachers that made the students feel more connected to their teachers and more motivated to work in class.

In this evaluation of the data, the instructional practice of teachers was cited as motivational somewhat more often that their relational practice. While the same percentage of survey participants cited instructional practice as cited relational practice, 67.86% of the interview participants cited instructional practice and 63.64% of the journal responses noted instructional practice as motivating (see Figure 5.1). The subsequent coding and analysis is less precise than considering intrinsic and extrinsic factors because a single student response could be understood to mean both instructional and relational practice. When this occurred, a response was included in each category. Although this approach is less exact, it does provide an understanding of specific teacher actions and attributes that motivate students.
Figure 5.1 Motivating Teacher Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th># Participants</th>
<th># Responses</th>
<th>Intrinsic</th>
<th>Extrinsic</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Relatedness</th>
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<td>Survey</td>
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<td>5.09%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
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</table>

Research Question #1 - Conclusions

The participants perceive that their teachers’ behaviors are directly linked to their personal level of motivation to engage in learning. The data in Figure 5.1 indicates that teacher practices (behaviors) account for nearly all of the academic motivation described by students. This motivation is largely intrinsic in nature and most often attributed to a teacher’s ability to establish a sense of connectedness with the students through demonstrating personal care and concern. From 34.21% - 45.45% of the participants indicated that teachers who are able to increase their students’ level of confidence to complete their work and be successful in a class and in life are also very motivating to students. In some cases, providing freedom in terms of assignments or topics studied is motivating to students. While it was less prevalent (from 0.00% to 35.71%, depending upon the data source), some participants described extrinsic motivational factors. In terms of what teachers do, these factors were largely centered on grades or the results of grades. For example, making parents happy or being able to participate in athletics is a motivator.
Teacher instructional practices, such as being excited to teach their subject, believing what they teach is important, utilizing engaging instructional methods, and taking time to understand students’ questions and answer them are highly motivating factors for students.

**Research Question #2**

When the participants were asked about teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning, more than 92% of the survey respondents, interview participants, and individuals who returned journals described intrinsic motivational factors. Conversely, only 7.14% of the interview participants and none of the survey respondents or those who submitted journals described extrinsic motivational factors (see Figure 5.2).

**Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination Theory.** As noted above, the participants described their teachers’ motivating attitudes in intrinsic terms. In terms of SDT motivational factors, 63.16% of survey respondents, 57.14% of interview participants, and the single journal response described teacher attitudes in terms of relatedness. Slightly more than 20% of the surveys and 40% of the interviews described a form of intrinsic motivation that did not fall within the scheme of SDT classification. This is a significant phenomenon and will be discussed later in this chapter (see Figure 5.2).

**Extrinsic Motivation.** While none of the survey participants or the individuals who submitted a journal response to research question #2 described their teachers’ motivational attitudes in terms of extrinsic factors, two of the interview participants indicated they wanted to make their teachers proud of them (see Figure 5.2)
**Alternative Explanations.** While nearly all of the participants described intrinsic motivational factors when describing their teachers’ attitudes that personally motivated them to engage in learning, a significant portion of the data could not be described in terms of Self-Determination Theory because their motivation was something other than a sense of autonomy, competence, or relatedness (see Figure 5.2). Student’s academic motivation is more complex than simply pulling the three levers of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While the data shows two of these factors are important to the participants, it is also clear that the personal characteristics of teachers are highly motivating to the students. Characteristics such as being respectful of students, friendly, creative, having enthusiasm or excitement, being positive, correcting students nicely, having a sense of humor, being welcoming, engaging, displaying a love for God, and possessing a sense of joy in student interaction. Teachers should understand that their attitudes are under scrutiny in the same way they may be keenly aware of their students’ attitudes. The significance of this is that it is not enough simply to be a subject-matter expect and classroom manager. A teacher who possesses these positive characteristics will be motivating to their students.
Figure 5.2 Motivating Teacher Attitudes

Research Question #2 - What are secondary students’ perceptions of teacher attitudes that personally motivate them to engage in learning?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th># Participants</th>
<th># Responses</th>
<th>Intrinsic</th>
<th>Extrinsic</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Intrinsic (Self-Determination Theory)</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Relatedness</td>
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<td>7.41%</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>57.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question #2-Conclusions

Students describe their teacher’s attitudes that motivate them to learn in terms of intrinsic motivation more than 92% of the time. The evidence shows that developing and maintaining a sense of relatedness between the teacher and student is a very strong motivational factor. Intrinsic motivation and Self-Determination Theory describe this aspect of students’ perceptions well but it does not account for another important student perception regarding teacher attitudes. Teachers’ personal characteristics play a significant role in motivating students in the classroom. It is important that a teacher projects warmth and welcome, creativity and excitement, and is positive and kind, even while correcting students. According to the participants, these teachers’ personal characteristics and the ability to relate to students on a personal level motivates students to engage in classroom learning to a greater degree than if these characteristics were not present.
**Research Question #3**

If teachers are able to enhance the academic motivation of their students, it is reasonable to expect they are also capable of decreasing their students’ level of academic motivation. This is the topic the last research question explored. What are secondary students’ perceptions of demotivating behaviors or attitudes of teachers?

**Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination Theory.** As with the first two research questions, the participants cited intrinsic motivational factors much more often than extrinsic motivational factors. The survey respondents cited intrinsic factors 61.53% of the time and extrinsic factors 38.46% of the time. The interview participants’ descriptions of teachers’ demotivating behaviors and attitudes included intrinsic factors 82.14% of the time and extrinsic factors 28.57% of the time. Each of the six journal entries related to the third research question described an intrinsically demotivating behavior or attitude (see Figure 5.3).

In terms of Self-Determination Theory, actions and attitudes that undermined a sense of relatedness were the most often cited by the participants, followed by attitudes or actions that negatively impacted the participant’s sense of competence. Only one survey respondent described a demotivating experience related to their sense of autonomy. None of the interview participants or students returning a journal described a similar experience (see Figure 5.3).

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Survey respondents described extrinsically demotivating factors 38.46% of the time while 28.57% of interview participants shared similar experiences related to extrinsic demotivation. None of the journal responses related to research question #3 described extrinsic factors (see Figure 5.3).
It is unsurprising to note that each of the 10 survey responses and 8 interview responses that related an extrinsically demotivating experience described the participant’s loss of motivation as a result of a punishment or negative consequence related to school work.

**Alternate Explanations.** Student perspectives related to demotivating behaviors and attitudes were nearly evenly split among the instructional practice and the relational practice of teachers. Only two survey respondents and two interview participants described a teacher’s personal characteristic that decreased their level of academic motivation (see Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3 Demotivating Teacher Behaviors and Attitudes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th># Participants</th>
<th>#Responses</th>
<th>Intrinsic</th>
<th>Extrinsic</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Intrinsic (Self-Determination Theory)</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #3 – Conclusions**

The study participants described the ways their teachers’ actions or attitudes have demotivated them academically. Students are demotivated when teachers express negative interpersonal attitudes or behave in a way that undercuts a healthy and caring relationship with their students. Examples of this shared by the participants were
discouraging responses to questions, a failure to express personal care or concern for students, and being rude, disrespectful, or mean. Underestimating students’ abilities or not providing a student with needed assistance were also experiences that decreased students’ levels of academic motivation. The participants indicated that they want to be challenged and that they enjoy academic work that causes them to learn more about the subject or topic. Students are demotivated when teachers are not prepared to teach or lack enthusiasm and interest in the topic they are teaching. Teachers can have a profound impact on their students’ level of academic motivation. In the case of this research question, the participants have described how, at times, the impact on their academic motivation has been negative.

**Limitations of the Study**

This phenomenological multi-case study focused on the perceptions of 18 survey respondents, 28 interview participants, and 5 students who returned journals. When the survey participants were asked to describe their own level of academic motivation, 38.80% described themselves as highly motivated, 22.22% indicated they were moderately motivated, and 5.55% said that had low academic motivation. Another 22.22% of those who took the survey indicated their motivation varied while 11.11% were not clear about their level of academic motivation. The themes that surfaced and were developed were supported by the data provided by these students but the findings may not generalizable to other schools because of the small number of participants and because the participants’ levels of motivation and their perceptions of their teachers may be different from students in other secondary schools. Because of these factors, the study cannot be generalized to other schools.
Recommendations for Future Research

The data gathered in this study was de-identified in order to protect the identities of the student participants and their teachers. Additional research should be performed that would allow for the analysis of data based upon the age, grade level, and gender of the participants. There could be meaningful differences between these subgroups of students, which might result in findings and recommendations tailored to students’ specific needs related to academic motivation.

There is a considerable amount of literature that describes in decline in students’ academic motivation that begins in middle school and continues through high school. Much of this research is quantitative. Additional qualitative study is needed to determine if this decline in academic motivation and children progress through school is as widespread as reported and, if so, we are the factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

Additional study is also needed to understand the factors that motivate and demotivate lower performing, mid-range performing, and high performing students. Considering these subgroups independently may also result in conclusions and recommendations that would be best suited for each group.

Conclusions

Intrinsic motivational factors connected to student-teacher relatedness, a teacher’s ability to improve students’ confidence in their ability to be successful in their academic work, and teachers who are effective in the classroom had the most significant positive impact on the participants’ level of academic motivation by a wide margin. Some students were motivated by extrinsic factors including maintaining good grades, pleasing
parents or teachers, or gaining current opportunities, such as playing sports, or future opportunities, such as the ability to attend the college or university of their choice.

Based on the results of this study, I have three recommendations for enhancing the academic motivation of secondary students. First, because students perceive that their level of academic motivation is connected to their teachers’ ability and willingness to interact with them on a personal basis, I recommend that teachers invest themselves in the lives of their students by becoming familiar with them and taking a personal interest in them and their academic successes. The students described teachers who were interested in their lives and noticed when a student was experiencing a difficult time or having success in or out of the classroom. A caring teacher takes the time to ask students how they are doing and dedicates some amount of classroom time and personal time for this purpose. The student-teacher relationship will be enhanced and the intrinsic academic motivation of students will be heightened in the process. The participants described motivating teachers as individuals who related well to students. This primarily took place when the teachers showed care and concern about students rather than engaging in overly personal interaction with students. There were negative examples of teachers who shared too much personal information about themselves and their lives, which was not viewed favorably by the participants who have communicated their interest in having respect and appreciation for their teachers. In other words, students are motivated by a caring and supportive teacher-student relationship rather than relationships that assimilate peer-to-peer qualities similar to those they have with friends.

Because students are motivated academically by teachers who enhance the students’ sense of confidence in their ability to be successful in their assignments, the
class, and in life, my second recommendation is that teachers use their unique position in the lives of students to encourage them through affirmation of their abilities and the quality of their academic work. Lower or moderate performing students may benefit from a teachers’ acknowledgment of high quality work on written assignments, assessments, or for making meaningful contributions to classroom discussions. It is important that the encouragement be genuine. This feedback can take the form of written notes or verbal feedback. The participants in this study have experienced important motivation and, in some cases, turning points in their lives, as a result of teachers’ positive feedback and encouragement.

Students are motivated academically by teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching their subject matter; effectively communicate the significance of the subject to students’ lives, and who are prepared and skillful in their instruction. While these findings are not surprising, the degree to which the participants indicated their importance was somewhat surprising. Because it is important that teachers be subject-matter experts and filled with enthusiasm for their subject, my third recommendation is that teachers spend time reading experts in their field, attending subject matter conferences, or avail themselves of the myriad of online resources to feed their sense of passion and knowledge in their subject area. While fueling their enthusiasm for the topic of their lesson plans, teachers will be simultaneously improving their knowledge and level of expertise which is another highly motivating factor for students. To be a highly motivating instructor, teachers need to display enthusiasm, be prepared to teach, and know their topic thoroughly.
The choice for teachers is clear. They can leave their students in a state of intellectual malaise, wasting time and resources in their classrooms, or they can take proactive steps to enhance the academic motivation of their students. They can make the effort to build and maintain constructive relationships with their students or they can let students disengage in the belief that their teacher has no personal interest in them or their success. Teachers can choose to expend the effort required to build their students’ sense of self-confidence in their ability to be successful in academic endeavors or they can simply watch as their students surrender academically because the students are convinced no matter how hard they try, they will not succeed. Finally, teachers can show-up at school and teach the prescribed curriculum or they can invest the effort required to teach students with excellence and enthusiasm. Teachers can choose to blame students for the students’ lack of academic motivation or they can accept the clear evidence of this research, teachers have a profound impact on their students’ level of academic motivation and teachers can build it or break it.
References


Culligan, J. J. (2002). *What are middle school students' reasons for choosing to engage or not to engage in their own learning?* PhD, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.


Appendix A: Research Invitation

Email from Principal

The following email message is being sent on behalf of Cecil Swetland

Dear DCHS Student,

I am writing you to let you know about a dissertation study that is being conducted at the school regarding academic motivation and student-faculty interaction. The study is being conducted as part of a doctoral program at California State University, Northridge and is part of the requirements to earn an Ed.D. degree.

In the study, I will be exploring possible connections between the interaction students have with their teachers and their level of academic motivation. As part of this research, we are conducting an online survey, confidential interviews, and requesting written feedback concerning student-teacher interaction. Responses used in this dissertation will be anonymous, thus your name will not appear in the study. The online surveys are brief and the interviews will be approximately 30 minutes in length and can be scheduled during the school day. The interviews will be audio recorded and the recordings destroyed after interview transcripts have been prepared. In order to conduct anonymous research, Rachel Byers will serve as a co-investigator to protect your identity.

If you would like to participate, please contact Rachel Byers at academicresearch2013@gmail.com. Your decision to participate or not participate is an individual decision and will not affect your standing at Desert Christian High School.

Thank you,

Cecil Swetland
Appendix B: Survey Questions

How would you describe your level of motivation as a student?

How much influence do you believe your teachers have on your level of motivation to study and learn? Why? (RQ1)

Describe the most motivating teacher you have had during your school years. What did they do that motivated you to learn? (SRQ1)

Describe teacher attitudes that get you motivated to learn? (RQ2)

Describe the least motivating teacher you have had during your school years. What did they do that made you less motivated to learn? (RQ3)

What else do you think is important to know about you and your academic motivation?
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Students’ Perceptions of Their Teachers’ Ability Enhance Academic Motivation

Time:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:

Description of Project: Understand students’ perceptions of their teachers’ influence on their academic motivation.

Tell me about yourself and your family?
How much do you enjoy academic work at school? Why?
Describe your level of motivation to do school work?
How would you describe your teachers’ influence on your level of academic motivation? Why?
(RQ #1) (Probing follow-up questions)

Tell me about a time when a teacher motivated you to do your best work on an assignment or in a class. (Sub-RQ #1) (Probing follow-up questions)
What type of teacher attitudes get you interested and motivated to learn? Why? (RQ #2) (Probing follow-up questions)

Tell me about a time a teacher had a negative effect on your level of academic motivation. (RQ #3) (Probing follow-up questions)
If teachers could understand one or two important ideas about their impact on your level of academic motivation, what would they be?
What else do you think is important to know about you and your academic motivation?

EXPLAIN JOURNAL: Request that each participant anonymously record their experiences and reflections regarding their personal academic motivation in the provided journal and return to in a sealed envelope to the school office. Please do not include your name, email address, or phone number anywhere in the journal.

CLOSING STATEMENT: “Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. If you have any thoughts about what we have discussed during this interview, please email me at academicresearch2013@gmail.com”
Appendix D: Sample Coded Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Ok. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your favorite activities, what you enjoy doing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes. I really like outdoor stuff. I love to hike and rock climb and I'm really into cross country because I like to be active and my favorite class is History and Bible and then I'm in the leadership class and I like to keep myself busy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Sounds like it. So you like to go up, and far. Laughs. That's awesome. As far as academics, how much do you enjoy your academic work?</td>
<td>Extrinsic GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>I really enjoy English and History, more of the artsy side as opposed to Math and Science, but I do try really really hard in my academics. It's like my high school goal to get a 4.0 or graduate with a cumulative 4.0 so I do try to work really hard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>So that goal is important to you then?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Yeah. Good. So you enjoy the English, the arts, more so than the science and math?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Yeah. Can you think of a reason maybe it just interests you more --?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Well I think of History. History is probably my all-time favorite, as like a magazine. It's like a gossip magazine because History is all about like, what leader is</td>
<td>Interest Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Rachel: really not doing so well, and wars and rumors and so I just find it a lot more interesting than formulas.

Rachel: Because it really happened?

Student: Yeah. And I think it's important to know our past to be able to aim for a better future.

Rachel: So can you describe maybe your level of motivation to do schoolwork?

Student: Well it's mainly a personal motivation, just like, if I know I can achieve an A in the class, then I expect nothing less of myself. I'm a very goal oriented person, kind of like how I do hiking, like I have a goal, and in cross country I have a time goal, so I kind of apply that to my schoolwork.

Rachel: So yeah. Something that you can see where you want to get to and that mark. That makes sense I could see where that like you said that carries across the board, whether it's like climbing or the 4.0 thing. You run after that. Could you maybe talk a little bit about how you would describe your teachers' influence on your level of academic motivation and how that comes into play?

Student: Yeah well in subjects that I struggle with such as (class name) it's really convenient and nice to have a (class name) teacher who's always in her room at lunchtime to help me with the homework I didn't get, or there's like free academic tutoring after school.
Rachel: school on Tuesdays and Thursdays which I usually always go to. So --

Student: So availability is a big part of it then?

Rachel: Pretty much, and that they're interested in how I'm doing and if they see where I'm slipping up or need improvement, they're more than willing to help and that's very convenient.

Student: So when they're interested in you and how you're doing, that's very important to you and it motivates you to do --

Rachel: To try my hardest.

Student: Because they've taken an interest in you?

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Student: OK. Could you maybe tell me about a time specifically when a teacher motivated you to do your best on an assignment or a project? And what that looked like?

Rachel: Yeah. Well (teacher name), she does the afterschool tutoring. And I was really discouraged because (class name) is just the worst subject ever, because it just doesn’t make any sense and no matter how hard I try I will get a B in the class, it's just really discouraging. And this whole semester I've been working really hard and I can't get an A on a test and that kills me inside because I feel like if I put forth a lot of effort I should be able to attain it but I can't. And so I was working and there was
this really hard chapter on statistics and probability and it just wasn't clicking. And I was like, well my goal is to get a C. And she was like, why is your goal to get a C? And I'm like, well I think that's all I can accomplish. And she's like, come on, aim for a B or an A. And I was like, OK. And in that sense, because she believed in me, I put forth more effort to strive for it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rachel</th>
<th>Do you think that she knew how you operated? As far as you being motivated by goals?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>I don't really think so. I think she was just being like a kind person. SDT-Rel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>She just wanted you to --</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>She's just like an honest to goodness sweet person who cares for my well being and was like, have some confidence in yourself. SDT-Rel, Compete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Can you talk about that and how teachers caring for your wellbeing and having confidence in you, how that affects your motivation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Well I mean, it just tells students that like, we're actually capable of it. Someone believing in you gives you that glimmer of hope that you can actually accomplish something. SDT-Compete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>So if a teacher comes across as portraying that they know that you can do this, it encourages you to do that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>It's going to make you have that extra spark or that extra</td>
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</table>
effort to go after it then?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Most definitely. Good. Can you tell me about -- and some of these may sound like similar questions but they're asked in a little bit different way -- what type of teacher attitudes get you interested and motivated to learn?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>I like it when teachers kind of switch it up. I mean I do well with notes and lectures and tests, but I know not every kid operates that way, some have to have projects. And I like change. I enjoy the challenge. So even if I don't learn very well by doing projects, I enjoy just -- it's always changing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Yeah so when teachers can make class interesting by not just doing the normal -- So variety is important to you? Keeping it fresh. Good. Could you maybe tell me about a time a teacher had a negative effect on your level of academic motivation or maybe something happened or some attitude was portrayed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Um, well this year is the first year I've not been in advanced (class type) class. And so the teacher, it's kind of hard, because there's half the class that wants to learn and get good grades, and the other half of the class that doesn't. And so sometimes it's very obvious they're disappointed in us because poor attitude</td>
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</table>
we're not trying. Though it's not the whole class, but it can be a majority of the class and I get thrown in there. So it's kind of -- if that makes sense.

So they're not -- they're very aware of what's going on in the --

Yeah of the apathy in the class and they just like don't care and don't want to be there. And that's portrayed in their attitude towards everyone.

So you're saying when the teacher picks up on the apathy in some of the students, maybe the teacher's motivational attitude is not there as much as it would have been had the whole class been on board and excited about what you were learning.

Yeah.
So teacher attitude affects that? That makes sense. So as a teacher if we could understand one or two important ideas about their impact on your level of academic motivation what would you sum those up to be?

Can you repeat that?
If you had to boil it down to one or two things you would tell a teacher that would impact your level of academic motivation what would that be?

I would just say, personal investment. I know, especially high school teachers, or at Desert Christian, they've got a

SDT-Rel, Care
hundred students come in, plus, a day. But like, just getting time to learn all the kids' names and like maybe see what they're really good at and what they're not good at and being able to get on a personal level. That helps me.

Rachel: Getting to know you personally as a student?
Student: Yeah.
Rachel: What does that convey to you?
Student: It just shows me that they care.
Rachel: That they care, more than --
Student: Just the surface --
Than the grade in the class, or another student. OK very good. Is there anything else you could think of that would be important to know about you or your academic motivation?
Student: I don’t think so.
Rachel: OK.

End interview 8:53