ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF UNDERSERVED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE

BY

NICOLE CHISLEY

DR. SERENA SALLOUM – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Serena Salloum for supporting me throughout this entire process. I am so thankful that she found time to support me academically and morally. Dr. Salloum has been patient and held me to high standards. It is because of her guidance that I have grown as a person, a mother, an educator, and a leader. I am definitely a better version of myself because she met me where I was and helped me grow. She challenged me and encouraged me to keep going.

Thank you to Dr. Marilynn Quick, Dr. Lori Boyland, and Dr. Gilbert Park for agreeing to sit on my committee and for helping me brainstorm and think outside of the box. Thank you for believing in me and my project. Thank you to Dr. Tim Hanson for being an awesome and supportive classmate and colleague. Thank you to Dr. Mike Gustin for being willing to talk about the work that we do every day in alternative education. Thank you to Dr. Scott Robison for being a wonderful sounding board, example, and mentor.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. I thank my son for his willingness to be patient with the time I have spent working late nights and understanding the importance of my work. I thank my brother, Michael Chisley for encouraging me to pursue and complete this accomplishment. I would like to thank all my friends and classmates for listening to me vent but reminding me to keep it moving.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the Chisley Family and other educators that realize that we must do things differently to understand that our students are individuals. My mother, father, and two brothers have always been in professions that served others. My mother served as a central office administrator, principal, and teacher and my father served as police sergeant. They taught my brothers and I that is was important to serve and help others. It is because of their example that I have served students, parents, teachers, and community members for over 25 years with all of my heart. This dissertation was inspired by my desire to help other educators and youth supports better understand how to serve the students whose voices sometimes go unheard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF UNDERSERVED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS……………………………………………………………….……I

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS…………………………………………………………………..V

DEDICATION……………………………………………………………………………..VI

TABLE OF CONTENTS………………………………………………………..……….VIII

LIST OF FIGURES………………………………………………………………………X

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION………………………………………………………2

Problem Statement……………………………………………………….....…….3

Purpose Statement…………………………………………………………..………4

Significance of the study…………………………………………………………4

Research Questions…………………………………………………..………….5

Definitions…………………………………………………………………………7

Summary…………………………………………………………………..……….8

CHAPTER TWO: REIVEIW OF THE LITERATURE………………….……….….…….11

Self-Determination Theory……………………………………………………….11

Overview of Alternative Schools…………………………………………………16

Historical Function and Creation of Alternative Schools…………………….................20

Historical Evolution of Alternative Schools……………………………..................24

Current Context of Alternative Schools……………………………………………..29

Indiana Alternative Schools…………………………………………………...........33

Curriculum and Instruction in Alternative Settings……………………………………35

Alternative School Appeal…………………………………..………………41

Addressing Student Learning Styles: Student Centered and Individualized Learning Experiences……………………………………………………….…………………43

.

Researched Based Practices in Alternative and Nontraditional Programs…………..…44

Best Practices with Teacher Behaviors, Teacher-Student Relationships, and Teacher Training……………………………………………………………………………49

Addressing Teacher Training and Teacher Effectiveness in the Alternative Setting...52

Leadership Practices in Alternative Settings……………………….……………..……..53

Barriers and Challenges School Districts Encounter Implementing Alternative Programs and Schools…………………………………………………………………..…56

Further Research Needed to Understand School Success……………………………57

Summary………………………………………………………………………...……58

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS………………………………………59

Self-Determination Theory……………………………………………………..59

Research Questions……………………………………………………………59

Research Design………………………………………………………………60

Context…………………………………………………………………………61

Description of the Sample……………………………………………………..65

Instrumentation……………………………………………………………...67

Data Collection……………………………………………………………...69

Analysis………………………………………………………………………..72

Positionality Statement………………………………………………………..76

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS…………………………………………………….…78

Purpose of Case of Study……………………………………………………78

Data Collection………………………………………………………………….78

Participant Background/Overview……………………………………………...80

Findings……………………………………………………………………………83

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION……………………………………………………..107

Key Findings and Discussion of Case Study Results……………………………..107

Research Question 1. Students explain why they chose to attend an alternative school……………………………………………………………………………..108

Research Question 2. Students describe their social and academic experiences at an alternative school……………...112

Research Question 3. Students explain how they create goals and define success Student Perspective on Complexities……………………………………………114

Case Study Implications……………………………………………………..…116

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research…………………….…125

Case Study Limitations……………………..…………………………………..…126

Closing Remarks…………………………………………………………………127

REFERENCES……………………………………………………………………...139

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL INTERACTION EVIDENCE CHECK LIST………………128

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL DOCUMENT EVIDENCE CHECK LIST……………….…130

APPENDIX C: STUDENT PARTICIPANT PROTOCOL……………………….…..132

APPENDIX D: STAFF PARTICIPANT PROTOCOL…………………………………135

APPENDIX E: PARENT PROTOCOL………………………………………………..137

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Self-Determination Theory……………………………………………..6

Figure 2.2. Motivation……………………………………………………..….14

Figure 3.1 Endor High School Schedule…………………………………..…64

Figure 3.2 Case Study Sample Participants that will be interviewed/observed…...…65

Figure 3.3 Case Study Data Collection……………………………………………70

Figure 3.4 Data Collection……………………………………………..…….73

Figure 4.1 Types of data collected………………………………………...…78

Figure 4.2 Participants interviewed and observed……………………………...…79

Figure 5.1 Self-Determination Theory……………………………………………118

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Although graduation rates are at an all-time high in the United States of America, thousands of high school students are still not successfully graduating from traditional American high schools. The graduation rates among underserved students, namely African Americans, Latinos, nonconventional students, and other minority groups, are still lower than national norms. These types of students will be referred to as underserved students throughout this dissertation. The US Department of Education reported that the 2016 graduation rate was 83.2%. However, the graduation rates among African Americans have not risen at the same rate as White students. For example, the average 2016 graduation rate in Indiana was 89.1%, but the graduation rate among African-Americans was 79.6%, which was below all other ethnic groups. The graduation rate for African Americans was also below the average percentage of students who received free and reduced lunch (86.4%) and Latino students (86.3%). Given this disparity, it is important to study the issues affecting 21st century African American and other urban students. Although the graduation rates of underserved students who received free or reduced lunches were not far below the national rates, there are strategies and opportunities that can be implemented to help underserved students overcome barriers (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016).

The gaps in graduation rates illustrate the need for traditional school districts to revisit the options they provide their students. As the country seeks to address the disparity in graduation rates amongst underserved and urban students, traditional school districts are now faced with competition from private and charter schools. For example, legislators and private organizations are attempting to address the low graduation rates and other issues by offering parents and students alternative educational options. Policies and laws now exist to influence parent and student decisions to attend schools other than the traditional public school district. Some of these other school options include charter schools, private schools, and religious schools.

Technological knowledge, teamwork skills, industrial knowledge, and intellectual knowledge are essential for the 21st century student. American business owners and corporate human resource departments are recognizing that not all students need to attend four-year colleges and universities. Shectuman, Levy, and Leichtentrit (2005) acknowledge that students' experiences impact their self-perceptions and the way they fit into the world. Therefore, it is important for school programs to offer students a multitude of experiences and a chance to develop a variety of skills. Many students need to obtain trade skills, computer skills, social skills, and effective writing skills.

Many large urban school districts across the country have created alternative schools and innovative programs designed to address the needs of the diverse student population they serve. Some of these alternative schools and programs have been very successful in helping urban students graduate from high school (Reese, 2013).

Statement of the problem

Graduation rates among African American, Latino, and other underrepresented groups are still below the national graduation averages. In the effort to continue the upward trend of high school graduates, it is important to study possible circumstances that may influence students who are not graduating from high school.

In the late 1990s, thousands of high school students were not successfully graduating from traditional American high schools. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that, in 2012, high school graduation rates were 80%. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that graduation rates were 86%, 69%, and 73% for White, Black, and Hispanic students, respectively. In February of 2015, the United States Department of Education reported that the graduation rates for high school students in America continued to rise.

Graduation from high school is required in order for students to take a significant place in the American work force. American post-secondary school experiences, trade school experiences, and trade skill jobs require the successful achievement of a high school diploma. 21st century students are facing very different challenges in the world today. As a result, the belief that the traditional school model meets the educational needs of every student walking their halls must be revisited. Therefore, it is important for school programs to offer students a multitude of experiences to develop a variety of skills. Students need to obtain trade skills, computer skills, social skills, and effective writing skills. Alternative schools could be a solution to this problem. However, there is very little research that seeks to understand the alternative school settings from the perspective of students.

Purpose of Case Study

The purpose of this case study is to illuminate how three underserved students describe their experiences in an alternative school. From the perspectives of three students, this case study elucidates the experiences of these students. Using qualitative methods, this case study investigates the extent to which the needs of these students were met.

Significance of this Case Study

This case study is important because it investigates practices used in a large urban public school district. The trends that emerge may be helpful to other large public school districts when they create alternative options designed to help nontraditional or alternative schools set goals, achieve realistic goals, and increase high school graduation rates. This case study may identify root causes that prevent some non-traditional students from achieving their academic goals in the traditional high school setting; identify characteristics that non-traditional schools and programs possess that lead to increased student achievement for non-traditional students; and uncover effective practices and strategies used by educators in non-traditional schools and programs.

Research Questions

The essential research question I seek to answer is: How do underserved students describe their experiences in an alternative school in a large urban Midwestern school district? More specifically, how do three underserved high school students attending an alternative school:

- Explain why they chose to attend the alternative school?
- Describe their social and academic experiences at the alternative school?
- Create goals and define success?

The questions seek to identify trends and themes that may help to understand underserved students' experiences in traditional and alternative schools.

Theoretical Framework

As applied to my study, Self-Determination Theory illuminates three student needs, including autonomy, competency, and relatedness, that Ryan and Deci (2006) suggested lead to student intrinsic motivation. Figure 1.1. depicts the interconnectedness between the three student needs and intrinsic motivation. As I interviewed students, teachers, and administrators in an alternative school, these needs emerged as influences that show a connection between student motivation and student success. I discovered effective practices used in a public alternative school located in a large urban Indiana school district. I also discovered whether these practices contributed to an increase in successful graduation rates for high school students attending it. A full explanation of Self-Determination Theory will be given in Chapter Two.

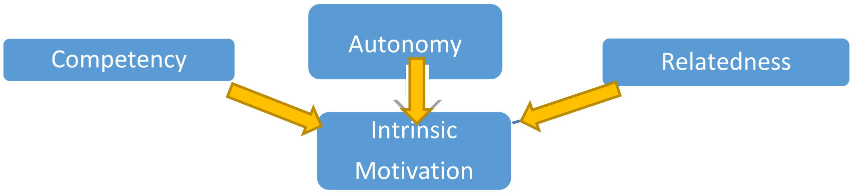


Figure 1.1. Self-Determination Theory Components

When students who need a nontraditional educational approach are referred to and included in a category called "at risk" or alternative, a negative perception of the students is sometimes created. For example, Watson (2001) explained that some American schools view at-risk students as different from conventional students and define alternative schools as being formed for a specific type of student they call "at-risk." Instead of alternative, schools can use words like non-traditional, non-conventional, underserved, high ability, or non-standardized. The needs of the underserved student who thinks outside of the box, thrives in a flexible learning environment, and does not fit into the industrialized approach that most traditional programs follow are often not addressed. To provide consistency and a concise definition that encompasses the diverse types of students found in schools, these types of students will be referred to as underserved students throughout this dissertation. However, when performing searches for resource literature, the word alternative is used as a key word to find educational research regarding the nontraditional public or nonpublic student.[1] The Encyclopedia of Children's Health defines alternative schools as an educational setting designed to accommodate educational, behavioral, and/or medical needs of children and adolescents that cannot be adequately addressed in a traditional school environment (Conley, 2002).

---

[1] When performing resource searches, I used the word alternative as a key word to find educational research regarding the nontraditional public or nonpublic student.

Definitions

For the purpose of clarity, the following terms will be defined.

Self-Determination Theory. The study of three basic needs of autonomy, competency, and relatedness that students need in order to perform effectively and to be successful. These three needs lead to intrinsic motivation in the student (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Autonomy

The essential need of students to have choices and to make choices based upon their life goals and educational decisions (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Competency

The essential need of students to believe that they have the ability to accomplish goals that they set for themselves (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Relatedness

The essential need of students to interact with others and experience connection to their learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Intrinsic motivation. Internal satisfaction experienced by students when they are allowed to make decisions for themselves regarding their education and life goals (Deci & Ryan, 2006).

Alternative School/Nontraditional School

Schools or programs designed to serve a special student population (Koetke, 1999).

Traditional School

Schools or programs designed to standardize learning and to serve a large student population. The curriculum is compartmentalized and all students are required to accomplish the same academic expectations and to achieve success in the same way as other students (Martin, 2000).

Nontraditional Student/Alternative School Student

A student attending a nontraditional school or alternative school due to past disciplinary actions or their being considered “at-risk” of failure in the traditional setting (Martin, 2000).

Traditional Student

A student attending a conventional school that is departmentalized (Martin, 2000).

Underserved Student

A nonconventional, African American, Latino, and other minority student groups who think outside of the box, thrives in a flexible learning environment, and does not fit into the industrialized approach that most traditional schools follow are often not addressed.

Summary

This dissertation sought to illuminate possible barriers faced by African American, Latino, and other underserved high school students, which prevented them from being successful in traditional schools. Furthermore, this study sought to understand why, despite an increase in overall graduation rates for American high school students, a large number of African American, Latino, and other underserved high school students were still not graduating from high school.

Chapter One of this dissertation outlined the problem, the purpose of this work, and the significance of this study. In addition, a summary of Self-Determination Theory was provided. Finally, important terms were defined that appear throughout this dissertation.

Chapter Two will review literature and previous research regarding the importance of addressing the needs of non-traditional students. Chapter Three will explain the qualitative research, performed through interviews, observations, and review of documents, proposed for this dissertation. Chapter four will analyze the data collected and reveal themes. Chapter five will make connections, explain limitations in the research, and reveal suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter, the need for alternative educational pathways to graduation is explained from the perspective of students. Literature and previous research are reviewed exploring practices that alternative schools and programs implement to provide students with the opportunities to meet their academic goals and graduate from high school.

Research Questions

The essential questions this case study seeks to answer are:

How do three underserved high school students attending an alternative school:

- Explain why they chose to attend the alternative school?
- Describe their social and academic experiences at the alternative school?
- Create goals and define success?

The literature reviewed illuminates why alternative schools are necessary and why alternative schools began. It also reviews how most large urban school districts make decisions to offer and to support alternative programming for underserved learners. The concepts shared in this literature review provide perspectives and perceptions surrounding the design of alternative schools and programs. The literature reviewed also reveals the complexities and barriers faced by school districts in creating learning experiences that address the needs of the underserved and nontraditional high school learner. Finally, the literature reviewed illustrates effective practices used when helping underserved urban students graduate from high school.

The research in this literature review is divided into nine sections: (a) Self-Determination Theory, (b) an overview of alternative schools and alternative schools in Indiana, (c) the historical evolution of alternative schools, (d) the current context of alternative schools, (e) curriculum and instruction, (f) alternative school appeal to students, (g) best practices in alternative education, (h) barriers districts encounter when implementing alternative programs, and (i) alternative school concerns and issues that need to be investigated further.

Self Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2006) sheds light on what motivates and influences people. By applying this theory, traditional school districts can better provide underserved students with educational opportunities and experiences by creating learning environments that motivate all students, consider the psychological needs of students, and give students the opportunity to act autonomously when making decisions. An atmosphere conducive for a positive and successful experience is required for students to feel connected to their educational environment.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000) developed Self-Determination Theory, a set of ideas that address the intrinsic behaviors of humans. They discovered motivation greatly influences successful outcomes of students when they achieve goals. For example, when students are motivated intrinsically they tend to have a positive self-esteem, are more productive, and are more invested in their work. The application of Self-Determination Theory to education provides positive implications for schools when trying to motivate students and increase learning. Deci and Ryan's theory emphasizes the basic needs people must have met to perform effectively. They identified three basic needs that students need in order to be highly motivated: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Figure 1.1 depicts the three needs essential to student motivation and student achievement as discussed by Self-Determination Theory. These three concepts—autonomy, competency, and relatedness—are needed for students to experience success. These three concepts foster the development of intrinsic motivation within students.

Autonomy

Self-Determination Theory defines autonomy as the need students have to make choices that reflect their goals and decisions. Students are encouraged to regulate themselves. Deci and Ryan (2006) explained that autonomy and independence are not the same; autonomy refers to self-governance derived from intrinsic motivation, whereas independence refers to the regulation of one's self because of pressure from outside influences. If a school is to provide a student's needs to be autonomous, that school should provide the student with the opportunity to control their educational path by making their own educational decisions based upon intrinsic motivation.

Competence

Self-Determination Theory defines competence as students setting a goal, understanding the goal, internalizing the goal, and believing that they possess the skills needed to achieve the goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students must feel the ability to achieve the goals that they set for themselves. Schools must foster experiences for students to practice the skills they need to accomplish tasks. For example, schools can help students experience competency by giving them opportunities to make choices about the topics they study. Allowing students to make academic content choices provides students with a level of comfort and confidence that increases their motivation. When students feel in control of their learning, they may experience increased motivation and increased interest, which may improve their mastery of content skills. Furthermore, an understanding of the value and importance of obtaining their education and graduating from high school will transfer into improved life circumstances.

Relatedness

Self-Determination Theory describes relatedness as giving students the educational environment in which they feel comfortable expressing themselves. Students need opportunities to interact with others. As schools create programs and educational experiences, they need to provide a nurturing environment that promotes the importance of their students. School districts need to show their commitment to the well-being, and intellectual and emotional growth of students. When a school fosters an educational environment that allows students to feel connected to the other students, school groups, or to the school culture, the school has managed to create in students a sense of belongingness to the school. The student feels respected and cared for by the teacher (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It is essential that students feel that teachers and administrators genuinely care for them. Schools must be a place that students relate to and feel that the adults believe in them.

Motivation

Relatedness, competency, and autonomy are three components needed to create motivation. The crux of Self-Determination Theory focuses upon those characteristics and needs that students must experience to be motivated towards the achievement of their goals. Deci and Ryan (2006) discussed extrinsic and intrinsic motivation sources by examining the impact that external rewards have on student behavior and how they undermine intrinsic motivation. Autonomy is a necessary condition that students must have to experience intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Deci and Ryan suggested that extrinsic rewards make it very unlikely that intrinsic motivation will be achieved.

Vallerand, Fortier, and Guay (1997) also discussed human behavior and identified self-motivation as a key factor to predicting human behavior. For example, they applied their research findings to further understanding of why students drop out of high school. They discovered that students who drop out often lack motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) defined the characteristics that drop out students tend to possess as amotivation, or the state of lacking an intention to act. Similar to Deci and Ryan, Vallerand, Fortier, and Guay (1997) mentioned that controlling student behavior, by telling them what to do and how to do it with little regard for the student's goals and choice, destroys self-determined motivation.

Deci and Ryan (2000) found that the more students were externally regulated, the less interest, value, and effort they showed towards the achievement of their goals. They found that the more autonomy (freedom to self-govern) students felt in making decisions and regulating themselves, the more intrinsically motivated they were towards achieving their goals. Students need to feel free to make their own decisions to experience autonomous intrinsic motivation, which is opposite of teachers and parents telling them what should motivate them. Parents and teachers may begin with providing external rewards to students, but they should gradually seek to give students more opportunity to develop intrinsic motivation by allowing them to find personal value in their experiences. Figure 2.2 depicts the continuum between amotivation and intrinsic motivation. The figure illustrates the progression from the state of lacking motivation, to being motivated by external rewards, to the state of internal motivation. The goal of parents and teachers is to guide students to the state of intrinsic motivation so that they find value in their experiences and achieve the goals that they set for themselves.

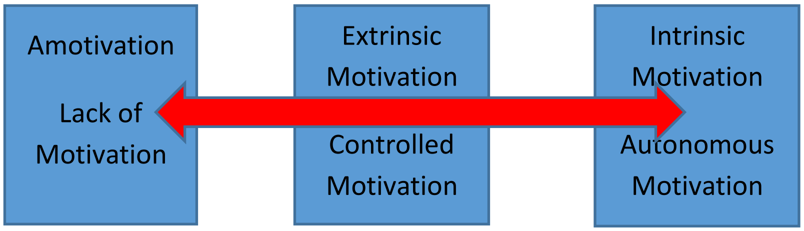


Figure 2.2 Continuum of types of motivation

Deci and Ryan (2006) explained that there is a difference between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. The researchers observed participants engaging in different activities to determine whether the behaviors that the participants exhibited were autonomously motivated or extrinsically motivated. What they found was that when participants were autonomously motivated, they were also more psychologically healthy in comparison to when participants were extrinsically motivated by external rewards or pressures. The participants who exhibited effective performance in activities were more persistent, displayed positive self-esteem, and were more productive because of their intrinsic motivation and their opportunities to be autonomous. The researchers found that autonomous motivation involved both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Participants identified with activities that they actively engaged in as well as those where they understood the importance of the activity. As a result, participants internalized the process. Participants were intrinsically motivated because they saw the relevance of the experiences as they related to the goals they had set for themselves. Their experiences were not imposed on them by others or by the promise of an external reward. The beliefs that participants had about themselves improved as they actively engaged in the activities. Deci and Ryan (2008) called this self-endorsement of their actions. In contrast, they discovered that "controlled motivation" caused people to perform based on external pressures. Motivation was encouraged by the existence of rewards and punishments. People were made to think and feel in specific ways based on the fear of shame or of not receiving approval. Controlled motivation resulted in lower achievement. These participants lacked purpose and did not demonstrate that they had gained anything from their experiences. Controlled motivation or independence does not encourage students to self-govern and does not provide students with opportunities to be autonomous. Autonomy promotes self-motivation because students set their own goals and paths to success.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has implications for the public school system. Traditional public school leaders and teachers need to focus on understanding what motivates students internally. By internalizing the process, students transfer their learning and decision making capabilities into other aspects of their education. Students need to be given experiences that facilitate autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students need to be guided towards making decisions and setting goals that give them internal feelings of success. Deci and Ryan (2000) stated that when the basic needs to feel autonomous, competent, and related are thwarted, people adopt extrinsic goals that lead to external indicators of worth. SDT also supports the need for effective alternative programs and schools to ensure that students are provided with meaningful experiences that fuel intrinsic satisfaction. Families must also be involved in helping students make decisions about their education and post-secondary future.

Overview of Alternative Schools

There is evidence of the existence of several alternative schools and programs that have been designed by school districts. School districts have created individualized educational environments for students who make poor behavioral decisions in the traditional environment by offering programs that are alternatives to expulsion (Hanover Research, 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2005). Several districts have created such environments; for example, Cincinnati Public Schools has a program called A2E program, Indianapolis Metropolitan School District of Warren Township has the Renaissance School, Oakland Unified School district has the Circle Up program, and Chicago Public Schools offers the Alternative SAFE schools program.

It is important to discuss research that shows other ways school districts are providing students with options within the traditional setting that cater to their individual learning needs by providing students with educational choice. Horn and Staker (2015) explained that school districts are investigating effective programming that customizes learning to help each individual student succeed. For example, Hanover Research (2014) found that effective alternative schools or programs addressed students as individuals. They discovered that the most successful practices used in alternative schools were not based upon any universal measures or rubric for alternative school design. They also illuminated the importance of assessing outcomes that are less frequently assessed, like student self-esteem, student connection to school, and the student demonstration of appropriate behavior.

Watson suggested that school districts consider the impact that separating or isolating these students has on positively reforming or changing their future decisions. For example, alternative to expulsion programs are usually not offered to students as a positive option, but they are offered to students as an option that allows the individuals to continue their education, as well as a way to receive social skills training (Hanover, 2014). These students often perform better when taught using differentiated educational strategies and methods. However, according to the 2009 National Alternative Education Association report, alternative schools are often not able to provide differentiation due to lack in staffing. In some cases, an alternative school environment offers more structure and is more rigid (NAEA, 2009). For example, in some alternative schools, students must walk in straight lines to and from class, they wear uniforms, the curriculum is the same for all students, and the schedule is the same every day. The expectations for students are to conform and to be compliant. These types of alternative schools do not seek to give students opportunities to be individuals or to be innovative; rather these alternative schools create an environment that reminds the student of their poor choice (Watson, 2011). While some students may thrive in a very structured environment, schools continue to investigate diverse school districts' designs and programs that allow for choice and differentiation of the academic experience (Duke & Griesdorn, 2010). The types of systems critiqued by Watson do not promote the creation of self-motivation, autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

All students need to be prepared for the future. Departmentalized educational experiences do not necessarily prepare students adequately for the real world. There is research that supports that departmentalizing the curriculum allows students to experience a differentiated academic experience because of the opportunity for choice (Ready, Lee, & Welner, 2004). However, students also need social skills and employability skills to be successful in the work world (Cardichon & Hammond, 2017). Wagner (2008) also discussed the importance of preparing students to be successful in the 21st Century. He explained that students need to be able to work with others, communicate their thoughts, and utilize technology effectively holistically and not in isolation. Students need experiences to use their skills in real world scenarios or in other subject areas. Integrated courses may be better suited to allow students to draw upon such skills.

In contrast to alternative schools, traditional high school programs have often been designed into separate departments based upon the curriculum. Many high school programs and alternative programs seek to recognize the differences among students, offer a variety of curricula, and use different instructional strategies to engage the students (Felder & Brent, 2005). Alternative schools often differ from traditional schools because of their small student body and small staff; therefore, many are not designed around curricular departments. When it comes to alternative schools, one size does not fit all (Wai, 2014). Wai suggests that alternative schools address the multiple needs and learning styles of the students that attend them.

According to Felder and Brent (2005) and Dumont (2017), schools acknowledge that providing students with options that cater to the individual student needs and learning styles is appealing to most students; and having this option to choose seems to lead to more success among students who typically fall through the cracks or even make poor choices in the learning environment. Horn and Staker (2015) suggested that by offering students opportunities to experience personalized learning experiences that are competency based, school districts will better prepare students to enter into the working world. Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory recognizes this opportunity to have choices as allowing students to feel autonomous. Students need to have opportunities to make decisions about their educational pathways.

Districts have to remain committed to providing all students and parents with educational options. As researchers like Johnathan Wai continue to point out, districts must embrace the fact that one type of school does not meet the needs of all of the district's students. Students should be encouraged to seek out educational opportunities that interest them (Mind Shift, 2014). School districts must realize that the nontraditional student does not only describe the rebellious student but also includes the nonconventional student who thinks outside of the box and does not thrive in a departmentalized and standardized academic environment. As Ashcroft (1999) pointed out, traditional school programs sometime reject the non-traditional student; and in turn, the non-traditional student rejects the traditional school programs because of the traditional school's inability to offer students choice and flexibility. Field and Hoffman (2004) created models designed to guide school districts in the development of instructional interventions that promote self-determination. They suggested that self-determination instructional programs help students learn how to participate in making educational decisions, understand the educational planning process, and support students in developing skills needed to communicate their needs.

Historical Function and Creation of Alternative Schools

Koetke (1999) described two types of alternative schools based on their being either inside or outside the system. Outside the system, alternative schools are private schools; and inside the system, alternative schools are public schools and serve special populations like students with specific learning interests or students with learning disabilities. School districts must strive to make sure that both traditional high schools and alternative high schools are departmentalized and offer differentiation regarding teaching methods used to deliver the curriculum to students. Students need flexibility with their school schedule and school choice. Martin (2000) emphasized three qualities that distinguish alternative education programs from traditional education programs: (a) philosophies and learning styles, (b) historical differences, and (c) addressing student differences and conflict. Traditional schools philosophically offer the same curriculum to all students. The curriculum is compartmentalized and separated. Watson (2011) made a similar argument, discussing ways in which traditional schools fail disadvantaged or “at-risk” students by treating them all the same. She explained that traditional schools attempt to standardize learning and ignore the individual differences that exist amongst students. She wrote that traditional schools force students to learn the required curriculum in a traditional period like quarters or semesters. By forcing students to learn this way, she suggested that the non-traditional students, who need more flexibility, develop learning deficiencies, along with low self-confidence, and end up failing. Martin (2000) added to the discussion by pointing out that teachers in traditional settings also use the same resources and instructional strategies to teach all students, which negatively affects the success of underserved students. These experiences make it hard for underserved students to fit in because their needs are not addressed. These experiences could also negatively influence the self-esteem of the underserved student.

Alternative schools often have a negative connotation. The students enrolled in alternative schools often need a variety of skills, such as behavioral skills, differentiated lessons, and modified assignments (Martin, 2000). A concern arises when the term *alternative* is also used to describe a student who simply learns in a nontraditional manner. Sometimes, the label adversely influences how the teacher prepares lessons for the students. Therefore using the term *alternative* to describe students, schools, and programs becomes problematic when seeking research-based practices that help school districts design programs or schools that cater to the needs of the underserved student. Vast ambiguity in the terms used to define or identify alternative or nontraditional students, schools, or programs has been addressed by researchers. Porowski, O'Conner, and Luo (2014) provided a detailed report on their research regarding how different states define alternative schools. They found that 43 states define alternative schools as programs or educational activities that fall outside of the traditional K-12 curriculum and serve students who are at risk of school failure. This makes identifying strategies, including effective practices, and designing schools and programs complex. Because of the different definitions of programs and students, collecting data to determine effective practices in alternative education is complicated.

Martin (2000), as well as Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009), agreed that most United States school districts' descriptions of alternative schools are ambiguous and biased due to being either very vague or very opinionated. As Porowski, O'Connor, and Luo (2014) found, the typical American school district seems to believe that alternative schools are for "at-risk" students only. Failure of education and educational opportunities are two experiences that youth may have that classify them as youth at risk of delinquency or school failure (Phillips, 2011). Phillips suggested that these experiences make it more likely that students will participate in risky behaviors. Traditional American school districts acknowledge that students need alternative educational options or choices to be successful. School districts are investigating effective ways to provide all students with options that address their psychological needs so that students are less likely to participate in at risk behaviors.

All Students are Alternative Students

The research of Dewey (1938), Deci and Ryan (2000), Phillips (2011), Watson (2011), and Paul (2019) uncovered that underserved students typically thrive in environments that give them flexibility and educational choices, as well as the opportunity to feel valued, to have a personal connection to the school, and to have a good rapport with the school staff. Autonomous, competent, and relatedness experiences provide psychological needs that are essential to student success.

There is a difference between an alternative student and a nontraditional student. It is hard for school districts to distinguish the difference between the two types of students. Alternative students are most frequently labeled as such because of a disciplinary violation that they have committed. They are placed in an alternative school consequently for their action. Alternative and nontraditional students are often defined as “at-risk” students.

The problem with referring to and including all students who need a nontraditional educational approach into a category called “at risk” or alternative student is the negative perception that is created. Some minority students who simply need options for obtaining their education are perceived to be problem students when they are not problems. The typical

American school views at-risk students as different from the conventional student; these school districts seem to believe that alternative schools are for “at-risk” students (Watson, 2011). They do not acknowledge that students need alternative educational options or choices to be successful.

Martin et al. (2000) suggested that there is a difference between alternative students and nontraditional students. They found that teachers in both nontraditional and traditional school settings use similar words when providing students instruction; yet based on their traditional or nontraditional setting, these words have different meanings. Schools need to use different words to define the types of students they serve. Instead of alternative schools, they can use words like underserved, non-traditional, non-conventional, or non-standardized. As previously defined, underserved students or nonconventional student who thinks outside of the box, thrives in a flexible learning environment, and does not fit into the industrialized approach that most traditional schools follow are often not addressed. However, when performing resource searches, the word alternative is used as a key word to find educational research regarding the nontraditional public or nonpublic student.[2]

Although there is a difference between nontraditional students and alternative students, it is important to recognize that these students do often have similar educational needs. For example, an alternative student who is placed in an alternative school because of discipline usually misbehaves because they do not feel that they fit in to their current educational environment. Often alternative students are bored, lack learning skills, or do not feel valued. Because of not feeling accepted in the educational environment by their teachers, administrators, and sometimes by other students, these students often form a bond with each other thereby giving them the sense of acceptance or relatedness that they need to feel valued and accepted.

---

[2] When performing resource searches, I used the word alternative a key word to find educational research regarding the nontraditional public or nonpublic student.

On the other hand, a non-traditional student who is not necessarily a discipline problem sometimes becomes a discipline problem as they seek to find their place in a traditional educational environment that is failing to meet their needs. Watson (2011) and Santos-Longhurst (2019) suggested that these students often seek ways to make themselves feel valued. The barriers that alternative students encounter are often the same barriers that non-traditional students face. Educators and school districts need to identify the educational needs of both the alternative and nontraditional students. School districts have to consider designing educational programs that attempt to provide an individualized experience for students based on their diverse needs. School districts must consider the strategies that they use to motivate students. Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that students need to feel competent and related to their school environment. School districts must provide these experiences. Research like Deci and Ryan's (2008) reveals that alternative schools need to foster an environment that is appealing to non-traditional students who are not successful in the traditional departmentalized school environment.

The Historical Evolution of Alternative Schools

To better understand the evolution of these alternative programs, this section of the literature review addresses the history of alternative schools in the United States. John Loflin (2007) shared that alternative schools were mainly created to address the needs of minority and low socio-economic groups.

Chronological Evolution of Alternative Schools

Historically, alternative schools began as a solution to further educate students who did not appear to thrive in a traditional environment. Traditional schools in the 1950s and 1960s catered to middle and upper-class Caucasian students and were indifferent to the needs of students from other backgrounds and races. Historians discussed the origins of alternative schools between the 1960s and 1970s (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Neumann, 1994; Raywid, 1981). Neumann (1994) specifically suggested that alternative schools began because traditional schools failed to meet the needs of poor and working class students.

Young (1990) and Barr and Parret (2001) provided the context and setting for the evolution of alternative schools as a response to the indifference to the needs and rights of all students. Educators founded alternative schools to ensure the civil liberties of the underserved or under-represented racially, at-risk of failing, or poor. Young (1990) explained that by the end of the late 1960's, alternative schools were split into two categories: outside of the public school system and those within the public school system. Similarly, Koetke (1999) described two types of alternative schools as either inside or outside the system. Outside the system, alternative schools are private schools; whereas inside the system, alternative schools are supported with public funds to serve special populations like students with specific learning interests or students with learning disabilities.

The next phase of the evolution of alternative schools was the development of schools by community groups or individuals who viewed the traditional school system as either unfair or stifling to student potential (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009). Lange and Sletten (2002) described the two types of schools created during the Free Schools movement, which occurred between the 1950s and early 1970s. Freedom Schools focused on freeing the oppressed minority student. Freedom Schools were created by groups of community members who opened store front schools or church schools with the intent of providing minority students with a quality educational experience (Grubard, 1972). Free Schools lifted students from the restrictions placed upon them in the traditional school setting through focusing on individual achievement and the individual's needs (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Free schools were the innovative way that educators and parents, who were dissatisfied with the traditional way of schooling, changed education for students by making the experience more individualized (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009). Free schools focused on giving students the openness to learn without imposing specific requirements. Students were given opportunities to investigate topics that interested them. A.S. Neill founded the most recognized Free School, Summerhill School, in 1921 (Lange & Sletten, 2002), which was recognized because of its success with delinquent students and nontraditional approaches to learning. Neill explained that his private boarding school was successful because it focused upon the student's ability to learn independently, free of teacher or adult dictation (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Between the 1970s and1980s, some alternative schools were very diverse and seemed to focus mainly upon meeting the needs of Latinos and African Americans. In the 1970s, the number of alternative schools increased tremendously. For example, Raywid wrote that alternative schools proliferated, from about 100 to over 1000 alternative schools during a 10 year period. In the 1980s, alternative schools were not as popular and there was a decline in the creation of new alternative schools and the maintenance of existing schools.

There are several suggestions for why there was a decline. Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) suggested that the focus of many Americans was centered on the Cold War and global competition. Lange and Sletten (2002) suggested that another reason for the decline in popularity in and numbers of alternative schools was because of the change in the way alternative schools were defined.

Alternative schools had been defined in a much more liberal way. For example, alternative schools were not defined by specific qualities but were defined more broadly, as simply being different from the traditional way of attending school. In the 1980s, alternative schools began to be defined more specifically. For example, alternative schools were identified as schools designed to address specific students who exhibited inappropriate behaviors and seemed to focus upon remediating students (Conley, 2002). In their book American Education: A History, Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner (2008) cited the 1983 A Nation At-Risk report which addressed the decline in student achievement. They argued that A Nation at Risk (1983) contributed to the decline in alternative school enrollment due to the negative stigma that alternative schools carried which led to alternative schools not as popular during that period of time. At the close of the 1980s, there was a push to return to the basics by focusing on the core subjects (Urban & Wagoner, 2008).

In the 1990s, school districts began to create their own version of alternative schools, called Open Schools. The school districts, in collaboration with teachers and parents, described these district alternative schools as learning environments in which students had autonomy and learned at their own pace. The teachers committed to taking a student-centered approach when providing instruction. Over the years in the 1990s, alternative schools took on different purposes for different groups, school districts, states, and communities. The definitions of alternative schools also differed widely between states, school districts, and communities. Lange and Slatten (2002) gave examples of the differences that began to evolve amongst alternative schools. For example, some alternative schools became “last chance” opportunities for students who had been expelled from the traditional school. Other alternative schools became “last chance” opportunities for students who were failing academically in the traditional school. Some districts created alternative schools for students who believed that the traditional school was failing to challenge them. With the refocus and diversity among alternative schools, the nation as well as individual states began to address policies and rules to govern alternative schools.

In the early 2000s, alternative schools were impacted by the change in national policy regarding federal and state regulations due to the No Child Left Behind Act, which required that all schools, including alternative schools, provide students with best and highly qualified teachers and staff members (Chalker, 2007). As a result, Chalker reported that alternative schools became more legitimate because they were held to the same standards as the traditional schools. Due to the increased number of alternative schools, alternative schools clearly advertised how they differed, which increased their appeal (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1999). The inclusion of alternative schools in NCLB and the recognition of alternative schools by the US Department of Education also required alternative schools to adopt specific structures, identify effective practices that work in alternative schools, clearly define their purpose, and make decisions based upon the data of their students.

Present Day Results of the Evolution of Alternative Schools

Since the mid-2000s, alternative schools continue to be popular and difficult to define. The focus of many present day alternative schools is on dropout prevention (Tyler & Loftstrom, 2009). Because alternative schools are now expected to meet state and national standards, some alternative schools find it challenging to define themselves, to state their specific purpose, to secure funding, and to establish the rigid guidelines and requirements. Alternative schools often must comply with these standards and requirements to receive federal or state funding (Raywid, 2009).

Raywid (2009) and Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) suggested that present day alternative schools stand on the same premise as their predecessors, which is that not one type of school, not one type of approach, nor one type of curriculum works for all students. It is interesting to note that during the mid-2000s, alternative schools were growing all over the country. The next section of this literature review discusses the current context of alternative schools.

Current Context of Alternative Schools

This section describes the current context for alternative schools. Topics of discussion include the characteristics of alternative schools; the context of alternative schools nationally, the types of students attending alternative schools, and the alternative education experiences. Minimal graduation requirements are held by school districts all over the country.

When considering the current and future graduation expectations required of students, school districts acknowledge that students need a variety of learning opportunities to propel them into their post-secondary pursuits, whether it be entering into post-secondary education programs or entering directly into the work force. As a result, school districts are designing alternative programs as well as schools within their school districts that provide students with a variety of learning opportunities by providing small, flexible school settings.

In 2008, the United States Department of Education reported that there were 10,300 public alternative schools and programs across the country. The current environmental characteristics that usually identify alternative schools include small class sizes, small staff, enhanced student/teacher rapport, college and career experiences based upon student interests and student decisions, an integrated curriculum, and a flexible school schedule and environment (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Alternative School Characteristics

For a school to be considered alternative, it should differ from a traditional school. Opponents to alternative schools point out that alternative schools often have the same mission statement as traditional schools (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009). In 2007, the United States Department of Education published four characteristics that alternative schools possess: (a) they address the needs of the underserved student not being met in the traditional school, (b) they provide a non-traditional education, (c) they are an adjunct to the traditional school, and (d) they are not defined as special education, vocational school, or traditional. Alternative schools serve students who are struggling in the traditional school setting. They offer the underserved student flexible schedules and a more integrated curriculum. Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) pointed out that alternative schools differ greatly from each other because they cater to the specific needs of the particular students they are serving. To this end, Raywid (1994) classified alternative schools as follows: (a) schools that use progressive ideas; (b) schools that serve students who have committed violent crimes or displayed disruptive behaviors; and (c) schools that teach students to problem solve.

On one hand, some alternative programs are considered an extension of the traditional school. They receive accreditation because they are linked directly to the traditional school. On the other hand, alternative schools are their own stand-alone entity and they have their own school identification number, the same as traditional schools. For example, alternative programs share the same school number as the traditional school (Mintz, 1994). However, alternative schools have their own school number and follow the same accreditation requirements that traditional schools meet to obtain accreditation. School districts can use these differences when making decisions to create alternative educational experiences to meet the diverse needs of students. For example, small class sizes provide opportunities for underserved students to receive more attention from teachers.

National Alternative Schools

The United States Department of Education also makes a distinction between alternative schools and alternative programs around the country. They provide links to the National Center for Education statistics, which illuminate the differences found among alternative schools and programs from state to state. The 2014 National Center for Education Evaluation report showed that most states defined alternative settings as either a program within a traditional school or as a separate school within a traditional school district. The report also pointed out that although the states described themselves as either a school or program, they described the type of student they served as at-risk with behavior problems. The 1998 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that there were 1,390 alternative schools in the United States and that those schools served approximately 280,000 high school students.

By 2001, the number of students enrolled in alternative schools had increased to 612,000 across the United States. The FRSS District Survey of Alternative Schools and programs reported that 39 percent of 2,000 schools districts contained at least one alternative school or program for at-risk students for students from grades 6-12. According to the 2000-01 National Center for Education Statistics, 66% of the urban public school districts in the United States have alternative schools or programs, 41% of the suburban public school districts in the United States have alternative schools or programs, and 35% of the rural public school districts in the United States have alternative schools or programs. These results were based on 1,515 school districts that kept data on the amount of poverty existing in their district as well data on the number of minorities enrolled in alternative programs. Disproportionality exists among the numbers of minority students enrolled in alternative schools or programs in these 1,515 school districts. For example, in 62% of school districts, more than 50% of the students enrolled in the alternative schools or programs were minorities. Forty-five percent of the school districts reported that more than 20% of the students enrolled were living in poverty.

Type of Student Attending Alternative Schools

The Indiana Department of Education lists five criteria that qualify Indiana students seeking attendance at alternative schools. The student criteria are: (a) at risk of dropping out of school, (b) failing academically in the traditional school setting, (c) a teen parent, or (d) the student has to be employed and earn an income (IDOE, 2002). Students who are not attending school or participating in the workforce are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school and potentially being involved in criminal activities. Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) suggested that it is important for school districts to identify these students as soon as possible and provide academic interventions. They also identified outside influences that alternative students encounter. These influences included abuse, neglect, poor reading skills, low income, and poor nutrition. School districts need to consider both the academic and social influences that impact the underserved student’s ability to successfully complete high school with a diploma.

Alternative Education Experiences

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017) identified the skills and qualities that employers and colleges expect potential employees to possess. Earning a high school diploma is the gateway to post-secondary opportunities. For example, students need to be employable by possessing the ability to work with others effectively, be proficient with their use of technology, demonstrate the ability to solve problems, and successfully earn a high school diploma. These needs provide the context for the goals alternative schools attempt to achieve. Horn and Staker (2015) suggested that by offering students an environment to experience personalized learning opportunities that are competency based, school districts prepare students to enter the working world more seamlessly.

Students need to have opportunities to make decisions about their educational pathways. Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory recognizes the opportunity to have choices as allowing students to feel autonomous. Alternative schools often differ from traditional schools because of their small size and small staff; and therefore, they are not designed around curricular departments. Because of their small size and small staff, the educational environment of alternative schools tends to offer students more individualized experiences, an integrated curriculum, and increased opportunities to develop a deeper rapport with the staff (Lange & Sletten, 2002). However, as some research suggests, these characteristics do not guarantee that a student will be successful academically.

Indiana Alternative Schools

The Indiana Department of Education (2007) makes a distinction between alternative programs and alternative schools. Currently there are several schools classified[3] as alternative in the state of Indiana. The Indiana Department of Education (2009) suggested that the ideal student to teacher ratio in alternative settings should be 15:1. Indiana alternative schools or programs are expected to have a small student base to foster opportunities for the staff to be caring and hold students to clearly communicated expectations. Indiana alternative schools are also expected to keep specific data on their students to ensure that the individual needs of students are being met. For example, alternative schools who apply to receive alternative education grant money from the state are expected to create "Individualized Service Plans" for each student attending as well as to report the graduation exit data for each student (IC 511 Rule 9). Alternative schools are expected to follow up with students for one year after they have successfully graduated from the alternative school.

---

[3] The Indiana Department of Education could not give me a definitive number of alternative schools for Indiana and an updated number of alt. schools in the country after at least 2016.

The state of Indiana requires that all high school graduates earn one of four types of diplomas, including the General Diploma; the Core 40 diploma; the Core 40 with Academic Honors; or the Core 40 with Technical Honors. Graduates are also required to successfully pass the ISTEP+ test by the end of their senior year of high school (Indiana Department of Education, 2016). The state of Indiana has recently revised the graduation requirements for all students. The new graduation requirements are now called graduation pathways. According to the Indiana State Board of Education (2017), high school graduates will now be required to complete three requirements: They must earn a high school diploma, complete a work-based, project-based, or service-based experience, and prove that they are postsecondary ready by passing a post-secondary institution or military entrance exam. These requirements will begin to be implemented beginning with the class of 2023. The state has given school districts permission to implement certain portions of the graduation pathway requirements beginning with 2018 summer high school graduates who were not able to graduate by earning a Core 40 diploma and passing the ISTEP+ standardized test. The number of students receiving diplomas from those alternative schools that do exist increased in the mid-2000s (Sue Foxx, IDOE, 2009).

Curriculum and Instruction in Alternative Settings

Twenty-first century alternative and traditional high school programs both seek to recognize the differences among students, offer a variety of curricula, and use diverse instructional strategies to engage students and prepare them for the future. However, in contrast to alternative schools, traditional high school programs have often been designed into separate departments based upon the curriculum. Aron (2006) discussed that alternative school research is fairly new. This research into alternative schools and what makes alternative schools and alternative school structures work for students at risk of failing is based upon the findings that alternative schools offer students a more integrated curriculum and problem-based learning experiences.

This section illuminates the different ways in which students can be provided with educational choice and a differentiated educational experience and focuses on how alternative schools and programs provide differentiation within the alternative learning environment. Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1995) discussed authentic pedagogy and the essential skills students need. For example, students must be capable of solving problems and given real world experiences to increase student performance. Wagner (2008) discussed the importance of preparing students to be successful and competitive in the 21st Century workforce. He explained that students need to be able to work with others, communicate their thoughts, and utilize technology effectively. He also suggested that students need a more integrated educational experience. For example, teachers should provide students with cross curriculum learning experiences by creating lesson plans that incorporate more than one academic content area. For example, teachers can give students word problems in mathematics requiring that they utilize English content. Wagner (2008), Ashcroft (1999), and Martin’s (2000) research further supported that when school districts design educational programs, they need to take into consideration the individualized needs of students and the importance of providing students with an integrated curriculum.

Students need more well-rounded and integrated learning experiences because soft skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills are needed to solve real world problems on the job and in their lives (Yoder, 2014). If students are only given departmentalized and isolated experiences, they are not being trained to pull upon multiple resources when solving problems or overcoming obstacles. Students need to make connections between the materials they learn from the different courses they take in school. Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1995) supported providing authentic learning experiences through classroom activities, such as real world application of mathematical and scientific content concepts. Colleges are recognizing their purpose to prepare students to work in the industrial world and therefore provide students with hands-on experiences, rather than focusing solely on textbooks and philosophy (Svetlik, 2007).

Research further supports that school districts should consider the individualized needs and the different learning styles students possess when they design educational programs. Giving students opportunities to explore their interests and to make connections between their educational experiences encourages creative thinking **(**Ashcroft, 1999; Martin, 2000; Wagner, 2008). This is fast becoming the focus of most schools but tends to be a consistent focus of alternative educational settings. Even colleges are recognizing the need to offer experiential learning to students.

Alternative schools and programs recognize and cater to the differences among students and the changing needs students have over time. The focus is on the student and giving them the skills they will need to make better decisions, not only in academic decisions but also in social decisions (Barnhardt, 2006). The focus is also on giving students a flexible learning environment along with several opportunities to make choices. There is an attempt to make learning more experiential. Tomlison and Allan (2000) illuminated the ideas of differentiating the content, differentiating the process, differentiating the product of learning, and differentiating the learning environment to effectively meet the needs of students in schools. Other researchers agreed that differentiation is important as well as the consideration of student learning styles. However, they mention that unfortunately these processes are often disjointed and detract from the effective use of differentiation. It is important for school districts to provide cohesiveness between instruction, curriculum, assessments, and teacher training to make learning consistent for students (Cohen & Ball, 1999). Alternative programs and alternative schools tend to focus on the needs of students by differentiating the process of learning, differentiating the content students learn, differentiating the way students are assessed, and differentiating the learning environment. As explained in the next sections, differentiation is not a collection of strategies but is a mindset that teachers adopt when planning instructional lessons (Tomlison, 2008).

Differentiating Academic Content

When applying this concept of differentiation to alternative schools, alternative schools and programs provide students with the same academic learning standards as required by the federal, state, or school district. However, teachers can differentiate the content they use to teach those learning standards to students. The content is differentiated, for example, by allowing students the opportunity to make choices with what they read, incorporating student interests into lesson plans, and focusing learning experiences toward post high school plans. At other times, the content is integrated by incorporating learning standards from multiple content areas. Cohen and Ball (1999) explained that the materials used by teachers serve as mediation between the content and what the students actually learn. They define materials as the text, questions asked, or tasks to be performed as being a part of the content. Tomlinson (2000) gave a few examples of how teachers can differentiate the content. For example, books on tape, flip books, and varied text are resources teachers can use to offer students variety in the ways they interact with the content they are learning.

Differentiating the Learning Process

Alternative schools and programs differentiate the learning process by providing different ways in which students engage with the content (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). Students are provided with learning expectations that cater to their learning styles and interests. Students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge, apply their knowledge, and use their knowledge to solve problems. For example, students interested in particular employment areas are provided with opportunities such as work shadowing experiences, team projects, individual presentations, research projects, and community service opportunities. Students are not expected to only read books and answer questions. This implies that teachers should be differentiating the alternative learning experiences that students are exposed to during classroom instruction.

All aspects of learning can be differentiated. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) have conducted extensive research regarding the importance of differentiating the learning experience. Their research does not specifically address alternative settings but references what all effective learning environments should provide. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) argued that differentiation provides students with multiple ways of engagement and expression. Differentiating the ways students interact with the curriculum also means that the individual learning styles of students should be considered.

Differentiating the Products of Evidence of Student Learning

Alternative schools and programs also differentiate the ways they assess students to align with the different ways they teach students. Tomlison and Allan (2000) referred to the product as the tangible pieces of evidence that demonstrate what students have learned, like having students present to a group, create a brochure, or take a written test. Differentiation of product in alternative schools could be expecting students to demonstrate and apply their learning by completing project-based assignments using a rubric that is aligned to how the project will be graded. Some of these projects are completed individually and at other times they are completed with a team. Whether they are to attend a post-secondary institution or to enter directly into the work force, students are expected to participate in job shadowing experiences that support their post high school plans.

Differentiating the Learning Environment

A review of the characteristics suggested for effective alternative schools supported the premise that alternatives are not departmentalized but focus on student needs and authentic educational experiences. Tomlison and Allan (2000) explained that the learning environment can be differentiated by arranging the furniture in ways that encourage collaboration and align with classroom routines and expectations. Research suggests that the characteristics of alternative schools lean towards some of the key strategies mentioned by Tomlison and Allan (2000). Differentiation in alternative schools may include implementing flexible school hours, using round tables instead of desks, and incorporating technology to create flipped classrooms.

Addressing Student Differences and Student Conflicts

Failure of education and educational opportunities are two experiences that youth may have that classify them as youth at risk of delinquency or school failure (Phillips, 2011). Phillips suggested that these experiences make it more likely that students will participate in risky behaviors. They did not acknowledge that all students need alternative educational options or choices to be successful. But school districts are recognizing that all students need individualized learning experiences (Masters, 2015).

Alternative Schools and Programs Provide Educational Choice for Students

Although there is a difference between how all students learn, regardless of their label, it is important to recognize that these students often have similar educational needs (Masters, 2015). The barriers that alternative students encounter are often the same barriers that non-traditional students face (Masters, 2015). Districts have to remain committed to providing all students and parents with educational options. As researchers like Johnathan Wai continue to point out, districts must embrace the fact that one type of school does not meet the needs of all of the district's students. Students should be encouraged to seek out educational opportunities that interest them (Mind Shift, 2014). School districts realize that all students can be considered alternative due to their individual needs. This is evidenced by the increasing number of services that schools are providing to students that include providing instruction, providing opportunities to practice soft skills, and making social services available to students and families (Horn & Staker, 2015).

Deci and Ryan (2000), Lange and Sletten (2002), and Masters (2015) suggested that school districts must consider the strategies that they use to motivate students. Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that students need to feel competent and related to their school environment. School districts must provide these experiences. Research like Deci and Ryan's (2008) reveals that alternative schools need to foster an environment that is appealing to non-traditional students who are not successful in the traditional departmentalized school environment.

Martin (2000) emphasized three qualities that distinguish alternative education programs from traditional education programs (a) philosophies and learning styles, (b) historical differences, and (c) addressing student differences. Additional important characteristics of alternative schools include how they define themselves and the students served. Edwards (2013) and Raywid (1999) also included student choice as an important characteristic found in alternative schools. Chad D'Entremont explained that some alternative students are seeking a more creative educational experience or a smaller environment which provides them more support (Learning Lab, 2015). He recognized the need to differentiate the learning experience for students. This suggests that these experiences make it more likely that students will be successful and more confident.

Alternative School Appeal

To begin to address the needs of the underserved student, districts need to consider the characteristics of successful alternative schools or programs as well as identify what successful alternative schools and programs offer that appeals to the educational needs of their students and brings she students into the alternative school doors.

What attracts students to nontraditional programs? Martin (2000) discussed specific alternative programs and identified factors that appeal to the nontraditional student. She emphasized that nonconventional programs address a student's individuality, provide constant communication, involve parents, set clear expectations, and give students choices. Students and parents want to be involved in decisions that impact them. This makes both students and their parents feel valued and respected. Reimer (2003), Cash (2003), and McLaughlin (2019) also suggested that students and parents find alternative programs appealing because they offer individualized instruction, small classes, flexible scheduling, and differentiated instructional methods to engage and motivate students. From two focus groups, Phillips (2011) found four themes that emerged as student needs for successful learning to occur: positive relationships, social learning, learning that is connected to the real world, and student autonomy tied to achieving goals. The characteristics suggested by Phillips et al. (2001) align with Deci and Ryan's (2006) Self-Determination Theory. Students must be motivated toward success by having their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy met.

Family Influences on Students

Parents make decisions for their children based on their own personal past educational experiences, from which develop the perceptions they have about educators. Students and their family find schools appealing when they feel good about the interactions they have with staff at the school and know that their individual needs and interests will be addressed. Parents and students are drawn to schools that send the message that all students can and will be successful because the staff will be flexible and committed to every student. Students are able to see where they fit in to the culture and believe that they will be successful. Families must be able to see the differences between their current unsuccessful educational experience and their potential for success in their new educational experience. Parents have had concerns of schools and the traditional structures that were created as far back as the 20th century. For example, David Tyack (1974) shed light on just how deep the feelings of distrust of traditional schools goes for parents and students. In his research, he explained their fear and distrust of public schools and of public school teachers. Tyack discussed the need for creating alternative systems within urban school districts to improve the educational experience of nontraditional high school students. Self-Determination Theory stresses the need for students to feel competent in their educational environment.

The experiences that the Chicago students described in their interviews with Tyack seemed to support Deci and Ryan’s findings by providing an example of why students need to feel competent. The feeling of self-worth fosters their belief in themselves, which is needed to stay intrinsically motivated. Phillips (2001) discussed how student experiences, values, and conduct serve as sources of influence on the learning experiences and interactions with the broader world. She emphasized that learning does not happen in isolation. The people that students encounter and interact with have either a positive or a negative influence on them. Students need to have access to resources and a value system.

Addressing Student Learning Styles: Student-Centered and Individualized Learning Experiences

Graves (2011) and Martin (2000) emphasized that alternative schools, as they call them, do not operate on the premise that one model fits all students; they adhere to the belief that alternative schools should seek to give students educational experiences that are meaningful, fun, and uplifting. When these opportunities and experiences are not given to underserved students, these students can develop negative attitudes toward education in addition to a low self-esteem because they do not feel empowered and their experiences are not relevant to their home life. School districts and other educational organizations are striving to give more students access to a quality education. This is leading to their investigation of effectivepractices in educational methods and instructional strategies. For example, schools are providing students with blended learning opportunities, which allow students to have choice and to use technology creatively. Blended classrooms allow for more flexibility in staffing and are appealing to students (Horn & Staker, 2015).

Nontraditional high school programs recognize these needs and provide students with diverse, hands on, flexible, and meaningful learning experiences, involving the students in the process. Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the need for the students to feel related to their learning environment. Martin (2000) and Graves (2011) findings align with Deci and Ryan's observations; school districts should offer students opportunities to become comfortable with setting goals for themselves as well as to create individualized pathways to achieve those goals. There are specific practices that alternative schools implement that provide a setting for students to be successful.

Research Based Practices in Alternative and Nontraditional Programs

The next section will discuss research-based practices used by alternative schools and programs. Topics such as recommended practices, engaging the family, effective practices used by teachers to develop rapport with students, types of professional learning provided to teachers and alternative education school leaders in the alternative setting.

Alternative School Suggested Recommendations for Success

There is abundant research to help guide districts in creating alternative options for high school students. An important practice is to accommodate a variety of student interests, supporting both white and blue collar work (Wagner, 2008). Students need to be given educational experiences that cultivate and enable them to use 21st Century skills, which involve communicating, exploring careers, and using technology. Research suggests that alternative schools should provide a variety of learning opportunities for students that cater to student needs and prepare them to be successful in the real world.

Dewey (1938), Reimer and Cash (2003), Reese (2013), and Schargel and Smink (2004) provided insights that school districts might consider when developing nontraditional school settings. Dewey (1938) suggested that schools needed to rethink the meaning of the educational activities and the purpose of educational standards. He argued that schools should focus on educating the whole child and that teachers should provide educational experiences that allow students to demonstrate their different talents and interests. Schargel and Smink (2004) reviewed the best practices that nine successful model alternative schools used. By observing different alternative schools and interviewing the staff at these various alternative schools, they identified eight best practices: (a) student to teacher ratio of one teacher to 10 students; (b) total school enrollment of no more than 250 students; (c) a clear school mission and discipline code; (d) an effective, caring school staff, with exposure to relevant professional training; (e) a school staff that maintains high expectations for student achievement; (f) learning opportunities and programs that cater to student interests, expectations, and student learning styles; (g) a flexible school schedule and opportunities to be involved in their community; and (h) a staff committed to each student's ability to be successful.

Along with these effective practices used by alternative schools and identified by Schargel and Smink (2004), the National Dropout prevention report (2003), sited by Reimer and Cash (2003) offered ten suggestions for the evaluation of alternative schools that districts can use to gage the success of alternative programs offered in their school districts. The ten strategies can be grouped into six categories that address the different aspects of the school culture and learning environment. These six categories are: administrative structures and policies; curriculum and instructions; faculty and staff; facilities and school climate; student support services; and program funding. Grouping the ten strategies organizes the strategies into the suggested areas that school districts and school leaders should focus on to address the needs of students.

Schools tend to create systems that call for students to fit in to a very departmentalized and structured learning regimen. This departmentalized approach is often used to help schools, especially large schools, govern students. Creating a structured experience makes lesson planning, master scheduling, and student supervision effective. Despite this, Gatto (2011), Tyack (1974), and Watson (2011) suggested that these conditions create barriers for a large portion of the students in the traditional school setting, such as limiting opportunities to make choices and inhibiting the creation of an inclusive learning environment. Recognizing the differences among students, successful alternative programs involve the parents and acknowledge the unique differences that their students possess (Yazzie-Mintz, 2006). These factors influence the educational decisions parents and students make regarding the school they attend.

School districts can create opportunities for all students to be successful by embracing the differences among students and by encouraging student and parental involvement in educational programs (National Education Association, 2008). Research has suggested that students benefit from feeling valued. A suggested effective practice and recommendation for an alternative program or school to successfully meet the needs of students is to give students the opportunity to choose the program that best fits their educational and social need (Wai, 2014). Enabling students to feel a part of the school environment fosters relationships and inspires them to strive towards success, especially for the underserved student (Moore, 2013). Watson (2011) described Sennett and Cobb's (1972) explanation of the cycle of distrust and disappointment that nonconventional students often experience in traditional schools. They defined key factors in the cycle of disappointment that make students feel inadequate and not valued. These factors included lower expectations, poor student performance, and traditional classroom practices.

Teachers must be trained and prepared to provide differentiated instruction and authentic learning experiences for all students, as well as being trauma informed regarding challenges students may face outside of school (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017).

Martin (2000), Neumann (1994), and Watson (2011) agreed that the main strategies and best practices for a successful alternative school that benefit its students are: small class sizes; a flexible environment; parent involvement; student choice; and differentiated instruction. Alternative schools can be systematic in the support they provide students. Research suggests that alternative programs and schools should not lower their expectations and should offer rigorous instruction and rigorous curriculum. Providing students with opportunities and involving their family in the alternative school experience helps the students experience a sense of belonging, safety, and support (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017).

Family Engagement

In a variety of ways, successful alternative schools and programs communicate frequently and clearly with parents and guardians regarding their students. Barkhurst and Wolf (1979) discussed the results of their study of American alternative schools in the northeast sector of the country. They found that successful alternative schools used a variety of communication strategies with their students' parents and guardians. They identified four strategies that were used: open classroom visitations; making literature about the program available to others; providing workshops; and writing articles for the educational community. The results of their study were similar to Martin's (2000) and Watson's (2011) findings regarding the need to involve and communicate effectively with alternative school families. Communication with parents and students helps schools and alternative programs involve parents in their child's education.

Watson (2011) suggested that schools need to shift away from the industrial age based approach and move toward a more learner-centered approach. She studied the culture of learning that students' experience. She recognized the differences that exist among students. To embrace the differences that also exist in student backgrounds, districts must personalize the educational environment and ensure opportunities to engage parents in their child's education. Moore (2013) wrote that school districts create a partnership with families when the school district empowers parents and guardians by giving them opportunities to practice supportive parenting. Consistent with Self-Determination Theory, Mageau et al. (2015) described the difference between supportive and controlling parenting styles and suggested that supportive parenting results in autonomous and motivated students. Families who adopt supportive parenting skills give their children opportunities to practice autonomy and develop intrinsic motivation. The main distinction between these parenting practices is the emphasis on the process versus the outcome. For example, when parents focused solely on the outcome of grades, students were less likely to exhibit autonomous behavior. Instead, when parents focused on the learning process rather than grades, students were more autonomous.

If alternative schools are striving to give students opportunities to be autonomous, competent, and related to the school and others, alternative schools need to provide resources to parents to help them understand the expectations that their students must achieve to be successful. Sharing this information enables parents to set goals that support their children's needs, and in turn, will increase students' ability to be successful.

Grolnick and Pomerantz (2009) studied the parenting control concept. They divided parenting skills into two domains: parenting controls, which provide discipline and restrictions to children; and parenting structures, which provide guidelines and boundaries for children. They suggested that parenting behaviors that allow children to be more autonomous lead to child competence. Grolnick et al. explained a link between parenting skills and academic, social, and psychological development. This aligns with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory that suggests that students have a strong need to have ownership of their behaviors and decisions to develop intrinsic motivation by making their own decisions and having ownership of their behavior.

Effective Practices with Teacher Behaviors, Teacher-Student Relationships, and Teacher Training

Successful teachers in alternative schools do not lower their expectations. In many cases, they hold students to higher standards (Moore, 2013). Alternative school teachers need to be prepared with creative strategies that they can use to address the different obstacles that their nonconventional students often are struggling to overcome. These teachers need to have opportunities to build relationships with students.

Ashcroft (1999) and Martin (2000) agreed that alternative school teachers should be trained specifically for the population that they serve. In the effort to provide students with the best learning environment, McHugh, Horner, Colditz, and Wallace (2013) studied teenager's perceptions of alternative teacher characteristics.

Although there are qualities that all teachers should possess, students in this study had previously experienced teachers in traditional schools who did not possess qualities that made the students feel competent, related, or autonomous. Students reported that effective alternative teachers possessed some common characteristics: student centered, provided differentiated instructional strategies, made students feel a since of belonging in the classroom, possessed high expectations of students, and helped students set and meet individual academic goals. Because the alternative school setting is often the last chance opportunity for some students to be successful in school, alternative schools must offer something different from the traditional school setting. A few states have recognized the importance of preparing teachers to be effective teachers in alternative or nontraditional school settings. Lehr et al. (2009) mentioned states that acknowledged the different set of skills and challenges that teachers in nontraditional schools face and which offered these teachers more pay.

The California education code has different requirements for alternative school teachers in comparison to traditional teachers. The California education code requires that alternative school teachers prove that they possess the proper licensing and special fitness. Ashcroft explained that the term "special fitness" is undefined, but teachers working in alternative setting face challenging circumstances. Therefore, alternative teachers need to be fit or become fit to endure those circumstances they encounter in an alternative setting. The California state code recognizes the difference between the traditional school setting and the alternative school setting and defines the alternative school setting as "special."

Ashcroft (1999), Devlin, Dutton and Singer (1998), and Tyack (1974) all mentioned that teachers' perception of students and their families have an influence on the nontraditional student's success in school. Tyack (1974) revealed that teachers often viewed the barriers and challenges that students faced as personal problems and not public problems. This meant that teachers viewed the problems their students possessed as being caused by their home lives and not the responsibility of the teacher or something the teacher could help students overcome. There are negative perceptions teachers sometimes have regarding the problems alternative or underserved students face (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Teachers often develop a deficit-thinking paradigm and blame students for their failures (Valencia, 2010). For example, some teachers fail to consider the external factors that might be related to academic failure. Moore (2013) and Valencia (2010) found that teachers viewed poverty, minority status, and dysfunctions in the family as the root causes that made it unlikely that students could be successful. These teachers were detached from students and tended not to provide a nurturing environment for students. Teachers failed to see the public issues that exist and identified the issues as personal problems students face. This type of thinking resulted in blaming students for their failure because of their low economic status.

In contrast, Arsonson and Laughter (2015) emphasized that all good teachers, whether traditional or alternative, are culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teachers consider the differences that their students bring to the classroom and how those differences influence what and how they learn. These teachers see their students as individuals and build bridges academically and emotionally for students so that they can experience success academically. This practice aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that students have the need to feel competent in their learning environment. Arsonson and Laughter (2015) found alternative teachers needed to ensure that students feel competent academically and culturally. Alternative teachers do this by giving students opportunities to set goals that they can achieve and opportunities to understand themselves and others culturally.

Watson (2011) emphasized the importance of student-teacher relationships and the need for a collaborative and relaxed learning environment. Teacher behaviors and teacher expectations influence a student’s educational success as well as shape the way students view themselves. Watson identified risk factors that affected student achievement, including: (a) learner attitudes and motivation toward education; (b) low teacher’s expectations; and (c) the widespread anti-school culture and peer-group attitudes toward schools as significant obstacles to education. These factors align with the three needs of competency, autonomy, and relatedness that Deci and Ryan (2006) identified as essential needs that foster intrinsic motivation and lead to student success.

Addressing Teacher Training and Teacher Effectiveness in Alternative Settings

Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009) addressed strategies that some school districts and states are implementing to address teacher training and teacher effectiveness. For example, teachers must hold professional teaching licenses, provide proof of their ability to influence positive behaviors in disruptive students, demonstrate proof of their ability to educate troubled or disruptive youth, and possess mentoring skills. Some states also require that alternative school teacher applicants possess a specific set of skills needed to address the academic and social needs of nonconventional students before they are considered for alternative school teacher interviews. Lehr et al. (2009) recognized the importance of choosing teachers who are effective with students who face barriers such as behavior problems, learning deficits, poor attendance, or who are disinterested in the curriculum. Again, the student who thrives in a more hands-on or innovative learning environment is left out of their research and definition of alternative school and student.

Teachers in nontraditional settings must have a genuine rapport with their students and have high expectations of them. They must have content knowledge and a variety of instructional strategies that they can use to engage all students. “Differentiated instruction also focuses on the principle that there is diversity within any group of learners and that teachers should adjust student learning experiences accordingly” (Watson, 2011, p. 1501). The teacher must be able to see beyond the barriers or opinions that their students bring to the table. If teachers in nontraditional settings fail to do this, student self-esteem and academic success suffer.

Leadership Practices in Alternative Settings

Creation of a family-like school environment starts with the alternative school's administrator and teachers. "You often hear the words 'community' and 'sense of family' in reference to successful alternative schools" (McGee, 2001, p. 591). School leaders are responsible for establishing the culture of buildings and using data to make decisions (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Alternative school leaders are no different; and because there are so many different types of needs that alternative students bring with them, alternative school administrators must enlist the help of others and surround themselves with adults who have an understanding of the alternative student. Because alternative schools often do not receive the same level of funding and staffing, alternative schools leaders must reach out to the community surrounding them (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003). Leaders need a staff that understands the varied and unique needs of alternative/nontraditional students as they work at creating a comfortable and family-like school environment for students. Alternative school administrators must be creative. Researchers have identified several characteristics successful alternative school leaders possess as well as things they do to ensure the success of their school.

Barkhurst and Wolf (1979) and McGee (2001) discussed the importance of leadership in alternative schools and programs. They recognized that successful alternative school leaders are creative, hire well-trained teachers, secure funding, communicate with families, and foster community partnerships. Because of the many challenges nontraditional or underserved students face, alternative school administrators and their schools undergo frequent change in the effort to ensure that they are addressing the needs of their students. In order to deal with these changes effectively, alternative education administrators must be knowledgeable of effective nonconventional strategies that other nontraditional schools use such as creative funding, business partnerships that help provide educational experiences and student internships, and alternative school teacher training. They must have an accurate pulse on the needs of both the students and staff. As Barkhurst and Wolf (1979) pointed out, the changes typically affect curriculum, governance, scheduling procedures, admittance process, and facility expansion plans. When these changes are necessary, the alternative education administrator typically initiates these changes and must be able to think outside the box, foster staff and student buy in, and receive support from their district as well as the parents and community.

Reimer and Cash (2003) illuminated characteristics that successful alternative school leaders possess. Successful alternative school leaders are able to articulate the vision of their school to stakeholders, staff, and the families that attend their school. They navigate through obstacles and politics by communicating to others that the needs of their school are just as important, if not more important, than the needs of traditional schools. Successful alternative school leaders secure the resources they need to allow their teachers to provide quality instruction and a variety of learning experiences. Alternative school leaders provide professional learning opportunities and direction for their teachers that lead to increased student achievement. Barkhurst and Wolf (1979) and McGee (2001) expressed a concern regarding the isolation that alternative school administrators fall into because their circumstances are so different from the traditional school setting. Alternative school administrators often communicate with only each other (Barkhurst & Wolf, 1979). Pannell, Glaze, Haynes, Skelton, and Davis (2015) suggested that school administrators should partner with community businesses and other schools to create an atmosphere for sharing and supporting each other. Isolation may stifle their creativity and their ability to stay up to date with new trends in education and new skills their students need to be successful in today's society.

Barkhurst and Wolf (1979) and McGee (2001) found that school leaders often become isolated in professional communities, where interactions with persons like themselves unintentionally limit the knowledge, learning, and experiences they could obtain to help them develop better and more effective alternative or nontraditional schools and programs. McGee (2001) also discussed the importance of encouraging alternative school administrators to communicate with others outside of the alternative school community. McGee emphasized that by communicating with others there will also be a positive change in the public's negative perception of alternative schools. He suggested that alternative school administrators should communicate with the public. Like Barkhurst and Wolf (1979), McGee (2001) suggested possible strategies that effective alternative school administrators use to communicate a positive message to the public and to keep the public informed. Two of these strategies were to have an open door visitation policy for the public and to maintain frequent communication with their students and their families. Inviting the public in to observe the positive things occurring in the school helps to redefine any negative perceptions of alternative schools and alternative students. Maintaining frequent communication with the public keeps them informed and allows the families in the school to be involved. McGee (2001) argued that school districts need to get community and school board support for the creation of more educational opportunities for nontraditional students. He suggested that school districts demonstrate to the community that nontraditional schools and programs are successful with a diverse body of students. Alternative schools and programs should not serve one specific type of student who is viewed as incorrigible.

Working with the community can positively impact public perception around alternative schools and programs. Involving community members in alternative programs and alternative schools can help schools and school districts provide diverse opportunities for students that cater to their needs.

Alternative school administrators are very important to the success of alternative schools and programs (McGee, 2001). They play many roles and juggle many tasks. They are administrators, teachers, parents, publicists, and politicians. In addition to the variety of roles alternative school administrators hold, McGee (2001) pointed out several major barriers alternative school administrators and students face. These barriers influence the effective implementation of alternative education programming. These barriers also affect student achievement and self-esteem.

Barriers and Challenges School Districts Encounter Implementing Alternative Programs and Schools

It is important to address the many challenges and barriers nontraditional programs experience when they are implemented, as well as the negative experiences the nontraditional learners must overcome before they experience success in alternative schools. Blazar, Litke, and Barmore (2016) addressed test-based evaluations versus value-added evaluations to rank alternative schools and teachers within school districts and states. They raised questions about the potential unfairness of evaluating alternative teachers the same way as evaluating teachers in traditional schools, specifically the use of test-based evaluations instead of value-added evaluations. Blazar et al. (2016) described the biased practices some districts use when assigning teachers to alternative schools as well as when supplying alternative teachers with resources.

Reimer and Cash (2003) explained that in addition to state and federal accountability formulas, funding is also a barrier faced by alternative schools.

Alternative schools encounter a variety of barriers. For example, state and local policies, such as inadequate staffing and funding, inadequate alternative school teacher training, poor teacher attitudes towards students, and an industrialized approach to school, all present barriers to the success of alternative programs. Reese (2013) concluded that American policies will continue to be significant barriers to nontraditional schools as long as they continue to emphasize and judge school success and teacher effectiveness by standardized test results. Instead of judging the school and its teachers, alternative schools should be evaluated on their ability to be student-centered, to motivate students, and to build capacity within their students to be successful citizens or college-ready immediately after high school.

Further Research Needed To Understand Alternative School Success

Though much is known about alternative and nontraditional students and their needs, there is still more that researchers need to investigate. Most of the research in this review focuses on the views of teachers and administrators. There seems to be an abundance of literature describing alternative schools from the perspective of adults, school districts, parents, and politicians. However, there is very little literature exposing the student perspective or the student experiences in alternative schools. The student perspective can add to the field of alternative education research. Further investigation should be done regarding student perspectives and experiences. Exploring these student perceptions will provide insight into how students explain their needs. Chapter three illuminates the perceptions that three underserved Indiana High School students share regarding their experiences in an alternative school. Researched-based effective practices will be elucidated through interactions with these students as well as through observation of the educational environment in their alternative school.

Summary

Graduation from high school is required in order for students to take a significant place in society. Students need to graduate from high school to progress in their adult lives. Students need high school diplomas to get jobs, join the military, and to attend post-secondary educational institutions. Graduation rates have been increasing over the years; however, there are still students who are not graduating from high school successfully. This literature review has shed light on potential root causes preventing some students from graduating from high school. The research discussed in this literature review suggests that students struggle and have unsuccessful experiences because they lack self-esteem and self-motivation. Families are often not included in their child's educational experience, which fosters negative feelings and creates communication barriers between the school and families. The absence of nurturing school relationships with adults causes some students to lack the feeling of relatedness to their school environment.

This literature review illustrated a need for alternative educational programs to assist nontraditional learners to successfully graduate from high school. We still need to know and understand the essential needs of nontraditional learners as well as what school districts should provide to fulfill these needs and motivate students to complete high school successfully. This case study helps school districts create alternative schools and programs that are centered on student needs, are committed to the inclusion of families, are designed to ensure student achievement, are able to clear obstacles in the pathway, and lead to successful completion of high school.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

In this chapter, I describe the methods I used to respond to my research questions. The essential research question this study sought to answer was “How do three underserved high school students seeking describe their experiences in an alternative school setting in an urban school district?” Using contextual observations, participant interviews, document reviews, and based on an analysis of a comparison between three student participants and their experiences, a case study was conducted. Through data collection and analysis, I hoped to understand how the practices of the alternative program influenced student achievement of high school diplomas. Therefore, qualitative methods were well suited to respond to my research questions.

Self-Determination Theory

As described in Chapter Two, Self-Determination Theory undergirds this study. This theory provides insight into specific teacher practices schools implement to meet the needs of students. It also illuminates the psychological and emotional needs necessary for students to experience success. Self-Determination Theory suggests that autonomy, relatedness, and competency are needs that students must have filled to increase the likelihood of self-motivation. Deci and Ryan (2006) described *autonomy* as the regulation of self, *relatedness* as connection to environment and others, and *competency* as control of one’s experiences. In this study, I postulate that a positive teacher-student relationship contributes to student engagement and potential graduation. These three needs provided the framework for which data were collected and analyzed for this case study.

Research Questions

In order to understand the experiences of underserved learners in alternative schools, my case study focused on three students who attend one urban non-traditional high school located in a large urban Indiana school district. The non-traditional school has a large minority population and receives monetary and curricular support from their school district; this school is located in a separate facility from the traditional high school program. Through observations, interviews, and document review, I learned about the thoughts and feelings students and their families have regarding their schooling experiences. I sought to understand how these feelings affected their high school experiences and choices. Through analysis of interviews, observations, and review of documents, I explored the practices used by the non-traditional high school teachers and administrators. I posed the following research questions:

- How do three underserved high school students attending an alternative school:
    - a) Describe their social and academic experiences at the alternative school.
    - b) Create goals and define success.
    - c) Explain why they chose to attend the alternative school.

Research Design

As Patton (2002) stated, qualitative inquiry leans toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic. Participants were observed in context of the non-traditional program they attended; therefore, a case study design was used to investigate the practices used by a large school district to address the needs of the underserved learner. As Robert Yin (2016) explained, observations should take place in the natural setting. Observing students and staff in their natural setting provided a visual confirmation of feelings and beliefs shared by participants during interviews. During interviews, student participants were encouraged to share their own personal school experiences to obtain an understanding of the feelings they have toward public schools and the reasons they did not believe the traditional school was meeting their individual needs. The important characteristics discovered by the review of school documents, lesson plans, and handbooks were used to explore whether the specific needs identified by Deci and Ryan's (2006)

Self-Determination Theory were met within the [4]Endor High School structures and systems. I triangulated the data collected from observations, participant interviews, and institutional document analysis.

Context

Three participants were observed in the context of the nontraditional school to illuminate the experiences that shaped their views of traditional schools. This naturalistic approach to collecting data provides an atmosphere for obtaining genuine responses from participants. Inductive strategies provided direction for data collection and data analysis.

Endor High School

Empire School District serves 12,500 students and is the largest school district in a Midwestern state. Empire School district has five traditional high schools, one Career Academy, one alternative to expulsion school, and one alternative school of choice. Each of the five traditional high schools has enrollments ranging from 1000-2300 students.

Endor High School was the school studied for this case study because it is the only alternative offered to students in the Empire School district. The district offers this opportunity to students who are seeking a different way to obtain their high school diploma and is the only option offered by Empire School district to students who are contemplating dropping out of school. Endor High School is an alternative school of choice available to students in the Empire School district and receives students from the traditional high schools located in the Empire School district. Endor High School reports that they graduate an average of 89.4% of the Empire School district students each year who had planned to drop out of school. They did not offer quantifiable data to support this claim.

---

[4] Pseudonym will be used throughout.

The [5]Empire School District began Endor High School, a nontraditional high school, to meet the diverse needs of the district's students. Endor High School has an enrollment over 300 students. The school serves students in grades 7 through 12. The purpose of the school is to prevent students from dropping out. Empire school district supports Endor High School with teachers, administration, support staff, as well as school materials and textbooks. It has been recognized as the first program in the United States to offer the "School to work to life transition program which incorporates character education, service learning, work readiness, and career development.

Student Selection at Endor High School

Students are not assigned to Endor High School but choose to seek enrollment if they are not earning credits quickly enough to graduate from high school on time, are disinterested in the larger traditional high school, or if they are seeking a more flexible school schedule.

Students choose to attend Endor High School based upon their need to recover credits at a fast pace and/or due to life circumstances requiring a flexible daily schedule. They make arrangements to meet with their traditional high school counselor to discuss graduation choices. To seek attendance at Endor High School, eleventh or twelfth grade students meet with their traditional high school counselor. If it is decided that Endor High School is the best option for the student, the traditional guidance counselor completes a referral form and submits it to Endor High School.

After Endor High School receives the referral, the student is scheduled for an interview with the school principal. During the interview, students express what they are seeking to achieve by attending Endor High School. The school principal makes a decision based on the student’s ISTEP+ and district assessment test scores, answers to the interview questions, and the number of credits the student needs to earn in order to graduate with their senior graduation cohort. Students who do qualify are referred back to their traditional high school with the recommendation that the traditional high school provide remedial opportunities for the students to assist them to improve assessment scores and obtain more credits.

---

[5] Pseudonym for the school district that will be used throughout.

Staffing and Schedule

The average student-teacher ratio is 15:1. The staff consists of four teachers, one principal, one administrative assistant, and one secretary. All 40 teachers hold Indiana teaching certifications in high school content areas (Mathematics, English, Social Studies, and Science). Each teacher is also able to teach multi-disciplinary courses, which do not require a specific content area type license. This is important because Endor High School students will still need to earn elective courses. By teachers being able to teach the multi-disciplinary courses, Endor High School students can receive their elective courses. The state of Indiana does not require a content specific teaching license to instruct the multi-disciplinary courses. Examples of multi-disciplinary courses include Community Service, Peer Tutoring, and Basic Skills. The principal holds an Indiana administrators license. The administrative assistant and secretary are considered classified employees and are essential to the functioning of the school because of their small size. There is not a high school guidance counselor available to students at Endor High School.

Though Endor’s school hours are 8:30am to 4:00pm (see Figure 3.1), students do not all attend during the same hours. There are several class sessions and two tutoring sessions available to students.

Figure 3.1 Endor High School Schedule

Class Sessions	Class Session Times	Session days of the week
Session One	8:00am-11:15am	Monday through Friday
Lunch Session	11:15am-11:45am	Monday through Friday
Session Two	11:45am-3:00pm	Monday through Friday
Session Three	8:00am-3:00pm	Monday through Friday
Session Four	3:00pm-3:45pm	Monday through Friday
Tutor Sessions	Tutor Session Times	Session days of the week
Tutor Session One	7:30am-8:00am	Monday through Friday
Tutor Session Two	3:00pm-3:30pm	Monday through Friday
Teacher time	3:30pm-4:00pm	Monday through Friday

Student hours are determined based on the courses students need to complete for graduation and when the courses are offered. Teachers do not have a traditional teaching schedule. For example, when necessary, teachers may have to provide instruction for at least two different courses of the same content in one class period. For example, an English teacher may have students needing English 10 semester one and English 11 semester two in the same class period.

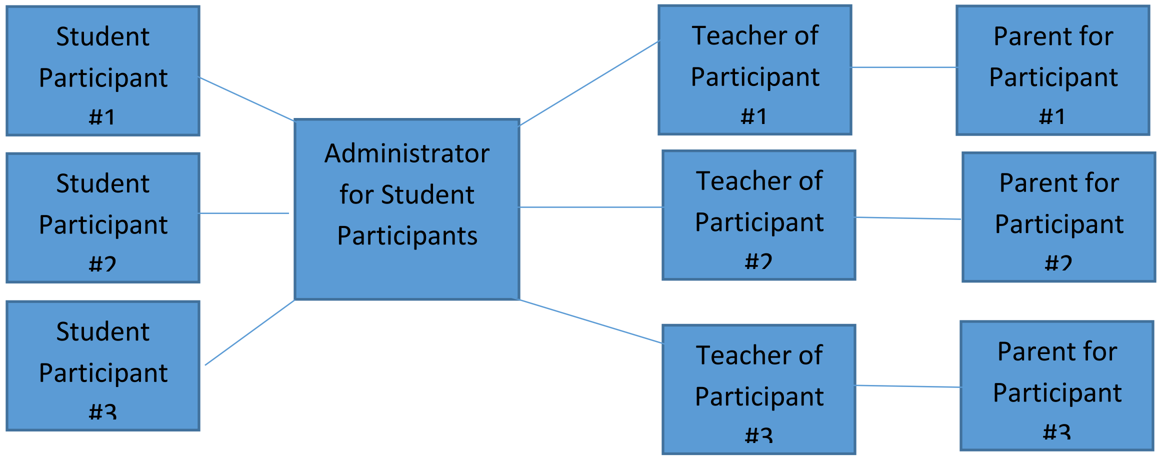
Endor High School students are not offered the opportunity to participate in traditional school sports. Students at Endor High School do not have extracurricular activities and do not participate in extracurricular activities at the traditional high school they previously attended.

Facilities and Transportation

To provide a visual context of the location of the physical setting, conditions, and location of Endor High School, a description of the facility will be provided. Students either receive transportation to Endor High School provided by the school district, or students provide their own transportation. The school is a separate facility. There are 13 classrooms, one computer lab, one study room, one small conference room, one room used as a lounge for students and teachers, an office for the director, and an office shared by the administrative assistant and the secretary. Because there is a formal cafeteria and a cafeteria for staff to have their lunch in the facility, students and staff can bring their lunch.

Figure 3.2 Case Study Sample Participants that will be interviewed and/or observed

Sample


Student Participant #1
Student Participant #2
Student Participant #3
Administrator for Student Participants
Teacher of Participant #1
Teacher of Participant #2
Teacher of Participant #3
Parent for Participant #1
Parent for Participant #2
Parent for Participant #3

Students

Three students attending Endor High School were selected for this case study. Only students from the traditional high school in Empire School district were eligible for selection. The selected students shared similar reasons for consulting their traditional high school counselor and choosing to attend the alternative high school. For example, the selected students were at risk of dropping out of high school because of their not earning at least 14 credits their freshmen and sophomore years of high school, or they had poor attendance in the traditional high school setting for a variety of reasons.

Each student selected had different experiences while attending Endor High School. The experiences were ranked based upon the number of high school credits students earned and their post-graduation plans. The first student has earned 40 credits, a core 40 diploma, and has post-graduation plans. The second student has earned 40 credits, a general or core 40 diploma, but is undecided regarding post-graduation plans. The third student three has not earned 40 credits, has no diploma, and lacks a post-graduation plan. The experiences of three underserved students were explored to explain how an urban school district is meeting their needs and the factors that encouraged them to attend the alternative school (relatedness), to seek completion of high school (competence), and to develop post-high school graduation plans (autonomy).

Teachers

One teacher was selected for each of the three student participants by using the students' schedule of daily classes. I cannot assume that one teacher can represent all three students because each of the students may not be earning credits in all subject matters. For example, a student may have entered Endor High School as a senior student and may have already earned all English, Science, and Social Studies credits and only needs to obtain their mathematics credits. The selected teacher had daily interactions with the student and monthly interactions with the student participant's parents. The selected teachers were full time teachers employed by the Empire School district to work specifically at Endor High School. The selected teachers interacted with the student participants' parents or guardians.

Administrator

There is only one administrator at Endor High School. The administrator was interviewed and observed interacting with each of the three student participants. The administrator was a full time administrator employed by the Empire School district to work specifically at Endor High School. The administrator was also observed interacting with Endor High School teachers for each of three student participants. In addition, the administrator was observed interacting with each student participant's parents or guardians.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

One parent or one guardian of each of the three-sample student participants was selected who had consistent interaction with the teachers and administrators at Endor High School. Involving the parent and/or guardian helped to illuminate perceptions they had regarding their child's experiences at Endor High School.

Instrumentation

In preparation to perform the collection of data for this case study, I created semi-scripted interview protocols for students, parents, teachers and administrators that are broken into three categories based upon the three psychological needs identified by the Self-Determination Theory (See Appendix #). The three categories include those that describe: 1) how Endor High School meets the need of students to feel competent, related to the educational environment, and autonomous; 2) which Endor High School autonomous experiences have influenced the three-student participants' successful completion of high school; and 3) which Endor High School experiences have allowed the three participants to control the final outcome of their attendance and experiences at Endor High School.

Interviews

Interviewing three students with a range of earned credits and post-graduation plans elucidates the autonomy student participants had in deciding to attend Endor High School as well provided insight into their experience at Endor. I asked questions to understand the students' journeys to and through Endor High School. The questions varied for each of the student participants to capture their individual experiences.

Parent interview questions sought to obtain an understanding of why the student participants are attending Endor High School. I wanted to understand the parent's perception of Endor High School. I also wanted to illuminate any supports the parent provided at home that influenced their child's experience at Endor High School.

Interviews of student participant's teachers and administrators helped me understand the practices and supports provided by school staff that afforded student participants with opportunities to make autonomous decisions regarding the courses they take to receive a core 40 diploma. Teachers were interviewed and asked questions regarding intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that exist in their school environment and how these influences affect the successes that the particular student participant experienced.

Observations

Each of the three student participants was observed in class, interacting with teachers and administrators as well as with other students. I wanted to discover whether the three main needs for success and motivation identified by Self-Determination Theory were present and influential in the student participant's educational experience at Endor High School. I created an observation rubric to identify self-determination characteristics which were observed in the culture and climate. For example, I observed student interactions with teachers and other students in the classroom to discover the quality of relatedness students have with each other. I also observed the students, teachers, and administrators in their natural non-traditional setting to gather data regarding their interactions and learning environment.

Artifacts

The review and analysis of school documents helped me understand school policies and practices that enabled or constrained Endor High School students to earn credits, to graduate from high school, and to pursue a post-graduation plan. Analysis of program handbooks, lesson plans, student goals, student work, and student commitments completed the triangulation of the data collected. The review of teacher lesson plans uncovered teaching strategies used by teachers to create a student centered environment that possibly provided opportunities for students to exercise autonomy. Reviewing school guidelines and enrollment procedures described the structures that exist that give students the opportunity to have control over their educational experiences (competency). The Endor High School's handbook and professional learning plans were additional examples of artifacts reviewed.

Along with the artifact review checklist, a checklist of documents used by the non-traditional school to communicate their expectations, curriculum, policies, procedures, and student goals was created.

Data Collection

I received formal permission from the superintendent of the Empire School District and the principal of Endor High School. Upon receiving permission from the Ball State University Institutional Review Board, I selected three student participants at Endor High School. I asked four students and they all agreed to participate. Because, I had four willing student participants I went with the first three who said yes to participating.

To capture the educational experiences of these three student participants, open-ended questions were asked that prompted the participants to share their school experiences. Robert Yin (2016) calls this method of interaction between the researcher and participant narrative inquiry. I recorded the interviews and provided specific interview questions that allowed the participants and those who interacted with them to tell their educational stories.

Figure 3.3 Case Study Data Collection

Interviews

- Teachers
- Students
- Administrators
- Parents

Observations

- 2 hour observation of each student
- Interactions with teachers
- Interactions with other students
- Interactions with administrators

Artifacts

- Lesson plans
- Textbooks
- School handbook
- Student work
- Student assessments

Interviews

Data were collected through interviews of the students, teachers, and the alternative school administrator to discern the opportunities students are given to feel related and to be connected positively to the school environment. *Narrative inquiry* is the focus on the participant's reality (Yin, 2016). Participants described their personal experiences. As Patton (2002) explained, the naturalistic inquiry approach allows for qualitative data collection of real-world situations as they unfold naturally and are not manipulated, leaving the research open to whatever emerges. The stories of the students and parents offered the educational world insight into some of the reasons students do or do not graduate from traditional high schools. Students also shared the emotional and educational needs that are being met at Endor High School which allow them to experience success.

A student who is excelling at Endor High School was interviewed using the student protocol. One parent of student participant one was interviewed using the parent protocol. All interviews were recorded in a conference room located in Endor High School. Interviewing parents about their experiences with traditional public high schools triggered their positive or negative memories and provided an opportunity for them to compare their experiences with those of their child, thus exposing any connections between their experiences and the experiences that their children are having. Finally, teachers and administrators were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data that explained why their non-traditional program successfully addressed the needs of the non-traditional learner. The interviews for each student lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Observations

After interviewing each participant, a two-hour observation of the student was performed. Participants were observed interacting with teachers, students, and administration. *Systematic observations* of students and teachers interacting revealed the opportunities students have to feel autonomous and in control of their education. An observation check list located in the appendix had been created, which identified teacher-centered practices, student-centered practices, and subject-centered practices (Yin, 2016) that were tallied during my observation. Using *nonreactive measures* to observe characteristics that are already present prevented me from influencing or altering the interactions between participants. Robert Yin identified this approach by the researcher’s ability to not instigate or interfere with the natural social environment of the participant. This means that the researcher derives meaning from the existing features of a social environment that result from the participant’s natural interactions in the environment (Yin, 2011). Student participants were observed participating in class discussions and administrator-student planning, completing written class assignments, and engaging in class discussions, social interactions with other students, and informal interactions with staff. Examples of observable interactions included those regarding routines, program schedule, instructional strategies, and student behaviors.

Collection of Documents

Robert Yin wrote that collecting data is the accumulation of objects (Yin, 2016). To complete the triangulation of data collected for this case study, the review of institutional documents served to elucidate the specific practices implemented by the school to motivate and empower students. Data collection was not limited to interviews and observations. The collection of tangible artifacts completed the triangulation of the data collected during this case study. Endor High School documents and artifacts were collected from a variety of sources. Examples of documents that were collected included lesson plans, student handbooks, sample written class assignments, sample class assessments, and planning documents. Marketing brochures, student motivational programs, website descriptions, and parent involvement opportunities were also analyzed to reveal the amount of parent engagement Endor High School extends to parents and the needs the school promises to meet for students. Deductive approaches guided my determination of what additional data I needed to collect to discover the extent to which the documents provided evidence of the characteristics of the Self-Determination Theory, specifically student autonomy, student competency, and student relatedness.

Analysis

Using Self-Determination Theory and an inductive qualitative research approach, opportunities for student participant one were investigated to identify the reasons the student had chosen to attend Endor High School to achieve graduation and to exercise his/her freedom of choice that Endor High school provides. I looked for evidence of the student's ability to be autonomous, related to the other students and staff, and the motivating factors that made the outcome of graduating from high school intrinsically important to the student.

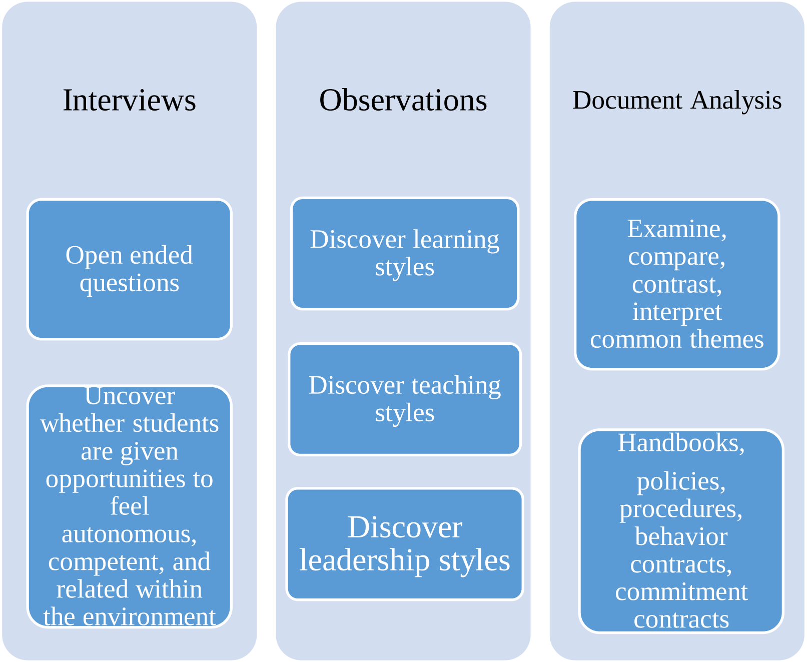

Interviews
Open ended questions
Uncover whether students are given opportunities to feel autonomous, competent, and related within the environment
Observations
Discover learning styles
Discover teaching styles
Discover leadership styles
Document Analysis
Examine, compare, contrast, interpret common themes
Handbooks, policies, procedures, behavior contracts, commitment contracts

Figure 3.4 Data collection

Inductive and deductive analytic methods (Yin, 2016) were used to analyze (1) the ethnographic field notes, which documented the observations, (2) the interviews, and (3) the Endor High School documents. Then, my data were organized to allow emerging trends to be identified. Deductive approaches allowed characteristics of the Self-Determination Theory to emerge and to be confirmed. Inductive approaches let the data lead to the emergence of additional concepts. Deductive approaches allowed the researcher who collected the data to determine the relevance of what was collected (Yin, 2016).

An investigation of several elements of the Endor High School was conducted to identify themes across the school connect to the Self-Determination Theory. These themes, such as how teachers used collaboration time and how administrators monitored teachers during collaboration time, illuminated the practices used by Endor High School. I triangulated the findings with different sources of evidence, including observations, interviews, and school artifacts.

Observations

The observations of students, teachers, and administrator interactions provided opportunities to discover student learning styles, teaching styles, and leadership styles that were being used at Endor High school. By observing these styles, a comparison and a contrast grid was created, which identified differences and similarities between Empire School district's conventional high schools and Endor High School, the alternative high school. For example, teaching strategies, student engagement, and student graduates were coded and placed in the grid so that themes could easily be discovered and identified.

Document Analysis

Because the focus of this case study was to identify what it is that successful nontraditional schools or programs do to address the needs of the nontraditional learner, the review of program practices was helpful in obtaining an informed perspective regarding the school, in identifying the themes that evolved, and in triangulating the data collected during interviews and observations. Qualitative modes of data analysis provide ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes. Specifically, I used the techniques of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or confirming phenomena, approaches recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994).

By reviewing the Endor High School handbook, procedures, policies, grade scale, class schedules, and expectations for students I was able to identify specific practices implemented at Endor High School that assisted students in earning credits towards attaining their high school diploma. Additional documents that I reviewed included behavior contracts, commitment contracts, and student goal sheets. Review of these documents informed my research by showing opportunities parents are given to provide input into these documents. Lesson plans provided evidence of instructional strategies teachers used in the non-traditional program that addressed the different needs possessed by their non-traditional students. Finally, I reviewed the school budget to see how the district supports the program financially regarding teacher allocation, materials, supply purchases, textbook rental, and lunch fees.

Interviews

The process of conducting qualitative interviews by asking open-ended questions improves the likelihood that student participant answers will be authentic. Interpretation of the results and analysis of the answers given by participants allowed me to understand the perceptions and experiences of the student participants that influenced their decision to attend Endor High School. After compiling and organizing the answers to the interview protocol questions, the answers were disassembled to better identify whether students' three basic needs identified by the Self-Determination Theory were met while attending Endor High School.

Triangulation of Data

The triangulation of data collected from interviews, observations, and documents served to illuminate how Endor High School motivates the students to achieve by supplying their emotional and psychological needs as identified by Self-Determination Theory. Student and parent interviews revealed how much control students and parents perceived that they had in the non-traditional environment. The interviews also provided insight into how connected the parents and students felt to the non-traditional school. Observations and review of documents provided examples of how the school motivated students intrinsically and gave the students choices regarding curriculum and instruction.

After collecting field notes and documents, Miles and Huberman offered guidance on effective organization and analysis of the data collected. They recommended using contact summary sheets and document summary forms, coding interviews, coding observations, making reflective remarks, and drawing conclusions by triangulating the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result of the triangulation of the data, stronger conclusions and evidenced based conclusions can be drawn from the various sources of data collection.

Positionality Statement

Because I am not an administrator at the traditional high school in this school district which will be called Football High School, all students who attend Endor High School, the alternative high school, will be eligible for selection providing opportunities for students to share the student's perspective freely.

As an African American female educator and a former alternative school principal, I will be able to connect with the staff, parents, and students that I will interview. I am currently an administrator in an alternative school and this will give me the ability to put the interviewees at ease as they share their experiences. Being raised as a middle class African American female and being 48 years old will allow me to understand the differences some of the interviewees share in their descriptions of their experiences both in the traditional and alternative settings. Alternative schools were not prevalent during the time that I attended school and alternative schools that did exist were for students who were teen parents, drug dealers, or expelled from school for rule violations only. Because of my experiences as an alternative school administrator and my personal traditional education experiences, it will be necessary for me to remain objective and be mindful of any biases I may have regarding the educational experiences shared by participants.

Conclusion

Chapter Three provided a description of the case study research plan. The qualitative methods, context, participant sample, data collection, and instrumentation were described. Chapter four provides the results of this analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter Four will discuss the analysis the data collected. After collecting my data at the Endor High School and organizing the data from the interview transcripts, I organized Chapter Four based upon emergent themes. The chapter will explain the three emergent themes that were illuminated through interviews and observations. Finally, the major findings will be discussed and presented through the lens of the three students who participated in this case study.

Purpose of the Case Study

The purpose of this case study was to illuminate how three underserved students describe their experiences in an alternative school. From the perspectives of three students, this case study elucidated the perspectives of these students. Using qualitative methods, this case study investigated the extent to which the needs of these students were met from the perspective of three students.

Data Collection

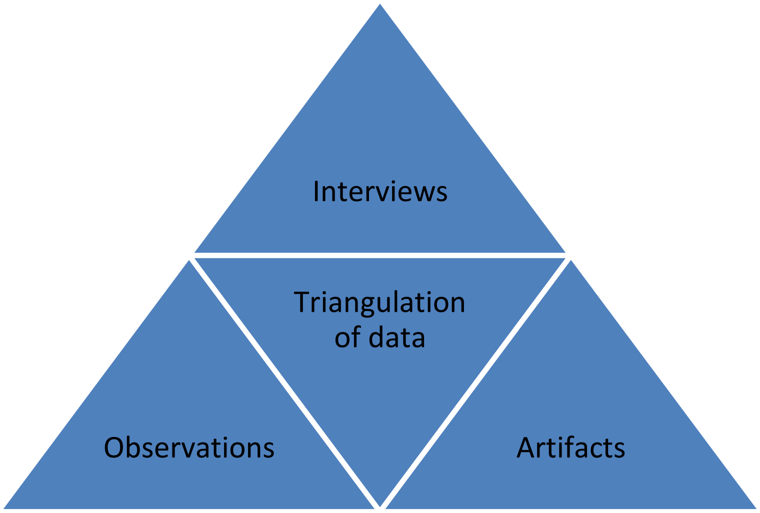


Figure 4.1 Types of data collected

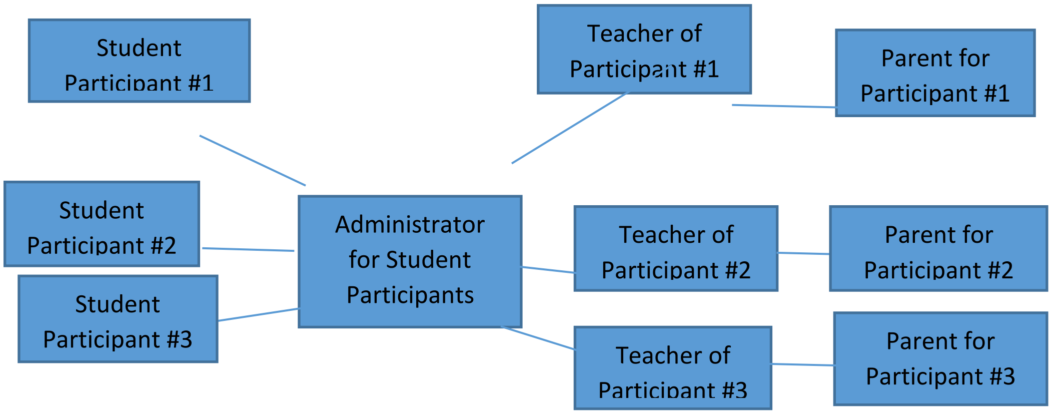
When triangulating the data, the analysis of the documents and observations aligned well with the organization of the data by themes. Interviews were conducted to gain each student's perspective from three current students attending the Endor vAlternative School. A different teacher who interacted with one of the three students in class and had a positive rapport with the student was also interviewed to provide insight into the student's experience at the school. The school principal was also interviewed to gain an additional adult perspective different from the teachers.

Observations were performed of the three students and the three teachers interacting in the classroom setting. Each student was also observed interacting with administrators and other students. These observations helped support experiences described by the three students.

Artifacts were analyzed. These artifacts included lesson plans, anchor charts, encouragement posters, handbooks, orientation meeting documents, and posted progress charts. The artifacts helped further illuminate the emerging themes from the case study. The anchor charts provided information supporting previous lessons taught, classroom routines, or classroom expectations.

From interviews, observations, and artifacts, three themes emerged from the data analyzed. I describe the themes in the following section. Data addressing each of the themes are provided from the perspective of the student. Data from school staff who interact with the three students focused upon in this case study provide further insight into the perspectives of the students. In addition to interviews and observations, the artifacts analyzed provided supporting evidence of perspectives shared by both students and adult staff.

Figure 4.2 Visual depicting student participants and how they are connected to other participants.


Student Participant #1
Teacher of Participant #1
Parent for Participant #1
Student Participant #2
Administrator for Student Participants
Teacher of Participant #2
Parent for Participant #2
Student Participant #3
Teacher of Participant #3
Parent for Participant #3

Participant Background/Overview

For this case study, I interacted with three student participants and three different teachers; for each case, I interviewed the student's current teacher. Each participant was referred to using a pseudonym. In the next section, information on each of the participants is shared to provide insight into their backgrounds.

Participant One, who was called Gary for the purposes of this case study, was an eighteen year old male senior student. Gary has five siblings and his parents are divorced. Gary is currently living in a group home. He explained that he wanted to live with his mother but due to poor decisions that he had made along with an anger problem, he was put out of the family home by his mother. Gary explained that the courts had placed him in the group home. He shared that his time in the group home allowed him to reflect on his current life and where he wants to go. Gary also shared that being at the alternative school had helped him grow up. He stated that his teachers cared about him and helped him plan for his future. Gary revealed that the most influential teacher was his science teacher, Mrs. Rock.

During an interview, Mrs. Rock explained that she had received her teaching degree in 1976, but she did not teach for several years. Before she began working at the Endor alternative school she had worked as a consultant for the state welfare department and as a teen leader at the YMCA. Mrs. Rock shared that it was through her working experiences at the YMCA that she had learned about the Endor alternative school. She said that the students from the Endor alternative school used the YMCA for physical education class; she had enjoyed her interactions with Endor students and wanted to be more involved with the students in the program. She explained that when she sought the opportunity to work at the school, she actually had to apply to become a teaching assistant to get into the school because that was the only position available. She later became a science teacher when a position became available.

Participant Two, Candy, was an eighteen year old female senior student. Candy came to Endor alternative high school from a different school district, where she had been in trouble. When she transferred to the Empire school district, the Empire school district placed her in Endor alternative high school. After completing her sophomore year, she was allowed to begin her junior year at the traditional high school. She was an athlete but after the season ended, her grades dipped, and she was not earning her credits. Another student she was working with outside of school suggested that she go back to the alternative school. Candy saw that the student coworker was accelerating through her credits and was going to graduate. Candy said that this inspired her to reach out to her guidance counselor and to have a conversation with her mother to seek admittance into the alternative school again. Candy shared that once everything was settled, she was happy to be back at Endor alternative school where she was thriving and had a graduation plan. She shared that her most helpful teacher was Mr. Middle, her social studies teacher.

Mr. Middle explained that he was in his 14th year of teaching at the Endor alternative school. Before going into teaching, he had been a restaurant business owner. As a business owner of a fast food store, he had opportunities to interact with Endor alternative high school students. Mr. Middle said that it was these interactions that made him consider education. He said for a while he operated his business and went to school. Mr. Middle said he saw the different struggles the students had and he hired a few of them to work at his restaurant. Mr. Middle believed he had a great impact helping students make plans for their future as their teacher. Candy is one student who had faced many challenges mainly based upon the decisions she had made. Mr. Middle has been able to see Candy mature and definitely make better decisions. He too has learned from his students and reports that “he is a better teacher and a better human” because of his work with Endor students. He has not worked at any other alternative school and has no desire to do so.

Participant Three, Porsha, was 19 years old and had a four year old daughter. She currently lives on her own with her daughter. Porsha worked and was completing her last few credits. She explained that pregnancy had been difficult and was the reason she had almost dropped out of school. She had contracted a bacterial infection while in the hospital and ended up having a minor surgery. This complication had increased the length of time she was out of school. She explained that she had hit a low and felt hopeless. She shared that her time at Endor alternative education school had truly renewed her hope. Porcha named Principal Zelle and her English teacher, Mrs. Sand, as most instrumental in keeping her encouraged and telling her that they believed in her ability to be successful.

Mrs. Sand has been teaching for over 20 years. She described her educational journey as one that had been very unique. Looking back over her journey, Mrs. Sand said she never would have thought that she would become a teacher in a majority minority alternative school. Mrs. Sand had begun teaching in a very wealthy school district that had little racial diversity. She explained that she really had not felt comfortable in that setting because she had not felt that she was making a difference in the lives of the students. She felt more as though she was just existing. She searched for more challenging experiences and found a good fit at a juvenile detention center. She said that she really enjoyed her experience but due to a change in leadership it became an unsafe teaching experience. When she was applying for jobs, Mrs. Sand said that she specifically applied for alternative or non-traditional schools. When she saw the posting for the Endor alternative high school, she was excited and applied for the position. She has been teaching at the Endor alternative high school for over 10 years. She described her experience as one of close comradery and fulfillment. Mrs. Sand believes that she has a calling to work with underserved populations. For example, she explained that she clicked right away with Porsha because Porsha was a young mother with a daughter who was close in age to her own daughter. She remembered Porsha being very self-conscious about the fact that she had a four year old daughter. Mrs. Sand looked at it as a way to bond with Porsha and by talking about baby stories she was able to get Porsha to break down her walls.

The main trend that bound these three students with the three teachers was the strong teacher student relationship. As I discuss the three main themes that emerged during this case study, my specific observations highlight the importance of these teacher student relationships. Every observation focused upon the student perspective.

Findings

In this section, I describe the data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts. The data were organized by theme. After describing the three themes and data collected, I draw conclusions separately for each theme. The three themes included: (a) teacher student relationships, (b) student experiences, and (c) complexities of resources.

Theme One: Teacher Student Relationships

Relationships and social experiences emerged as a major theme as I talked to students, teachers, and administrators. Through the collection of data, I observed students experiencing success because of the connections the teachers had with the students. Both teachers and students discussed how their interactions positively shaped the self-esteem of the students.

My observation of students and teachers in the natural setting of the classroom further illuminated the importance that strong teacher student rapport has on the school culture and the classroom environment. I observed each student interacting with a teacher and other students in the classroom. I observed specific factors which included student engagement, student time on task, equity and access to learning, positive classroom environment, student-teacher interactions, student-teacher communication, and student-student interactions. For example, my discussions with teachers regarding their lesson plans and choices of instructional strategies provided examples of how learning was customized for each student. Because the same state standards were taught in the alternative school, the teachers strive for equity by providing personalized instruction to each student and by holding each student to the same academic expectations as those of students taught in the traditional setting. The existence of lesson plans that contained specific student names and my observations of student-student and teacher-student interactions further exemplified the focused effort that teachers took to provide students with quality instruction and to develop a positive rapport with students.

To ensure that I captured the perspectives of the specific students selected for this case study, I selected teachers who the students currently had as instructors. I then observed the student during the class they had with the teacher on two different days. Figure 4.2 provides a visual representation of the pairing of the students and teachers. I also observed the same two students interacting with the school principal.

All observations confirmed that students were comfortable interacting with their teachers and others students in the classroom. For example, I observed these three students raising their hands to answer questions, approaching their teacher to ask questions, and staying on task; some students needed prompting from the teacher, and some stayed on task with little to no prompting from the teacher.

I observed teachers using instructional strategies during the specific lessons I watched. I documented whether the teacher was lecturing or whether students were working with others or working on assignments individually. These strategies were also confirmed in the lesson plans that I reviewed.

To get a more informed student perspective, I interviewed three specific students who participated in this case study as well as at least one teacher that each of the specific students had for classroom instruction. When possible, I also interviewed an administrator that each specific student interacted with frequently.

The interviews of students and teachers illuminated the thoughts, feelings, and depth of student-teacher relationships. Interviews were performed with the intent of gaining insight into the school from the students' perspectives. Interviewing teachers associated with the three students provided additional data regarding the perspective students shared about the positive beliefs and perceptions expressed about their teachers.

Students revealed that they felt more comfortable at the alternative school. They shared reasons like acting more like a family, receiving more individual attention and more help, and getting greater encouragement from teachers. Students also revealed that their teachers believed in them. During our interview, Gary stated, “Um, so, here I feel like I've built closer connections instead of more connections. Well, stronger connections instead of more connections." And Candy stated, "Teachers are respectful to the students and care about the students."

Teachers shared that in many cases students seemed to have doubted themselves before coming to the alternative school. The three teachers all expressed the strategies they used to encourage students to try hard and to find academic success. For example, teachers made adjustments to lessons by working one on one with students, had high expectations for students, provided each student with positive encouragement, and gave students immediate feedback on assignments.

Based upon the review of written school artifacts, classroom observations, and interviews, the importance of the student-teacher rapport was evident. Mrs. Rock, Mr. Middle, and Mrs. Sand purposely fostered opportunities for students to ask questions, take risks outside of their comfort zone, and to work at their own pace while providing immediate assistance and feedback to students.

During my discussions with teachers, teachers shared their lesson plans with me. The lesson plans revealed that teachers planned specifically for each of the courses they teach. Lessons also included planning for the computer-based courses. I observed that two of the three teachers listed specific student names in their lesson plan books. Upon reading the details next to the specific student names, it appeared that teachers were planning specifically for the strengths and challenges of each of the students written in their lesson plan books.

I collected and reviewed artifacts from the school. The handbook contained general information about the school such as hours of operation, staff names, contact information, disciplinary expectations, and consequences for non-compliance. The school handbook did not reveal any specific evidence supporting the importance of the strength of the teacher-student relationships.

Analysis of the lesson plan books supported the finding that teachers value their relationships with students and strategically planned to meet each student's individual needs. These specifics in lesson plans also provided evidence that teachers personalized the academic experiences for students. This finding also confirmed that teachers knew their students beyond just knowing their name.

Mrs. Rock, a science teacher, used a variety of teaching methods. The first day I observed her, she allowed students to work on their computer course work individually and she supported them by walking around answering their questions about the material in the computer course. Before the end of the class period, she met with each student individually and did a mini student-teacher conference to check on the student's progress. Gary explained the practices that Mrs. Rock specifically used to help students be successful in her science class. Gary stated:

> One thing that the teachers do is, like, my teacher Mrs. Rock. She has, um, she has these little point charts up, well, class charts. It tells you what class or what subject you're in. Now, she's the science teacher- so, she puts, um, she has categories. So, like, the biology, chemistry, um- Yeah, earth space and science, those classes. And then she'll put your name in which ever class you're, and for every test that you do, she'll put a sticker up there. She also has a, um, minute monster chart because we had to have - a lot of time- ... we had to have at least 10 minutes, um, worth of study time before we can take our tests. (Gary, personal communication, April 3, 2019)

The students were working quietly and remained on task throughout the entire fifty minute class period. The second day I observed Mrs. Rock, she was working with the entire class on specific science concepts. She then followed up with an activity that followed the “I do, We do, and You do” instructional strategy. Students were given a task focused on probability. Mrs. Rock performed the experiment with dice for the students. She then had the students throw the dice with a partner and then throw the dice by themselves. She had each student write an explanation regarding the probability task involving the dice throwing results. Gary commented on instruction:

> They don't just, "Well, we're going to teach you this. We're going to teach you that," and then leave us alone. No, they, "Hey, you need any help? Aye, um, got any notes you need? I've been working on my notes. I've been taking the test that you guys are taking. I can show you guys what needs to be done- what, um, which, which questions are the tricky ones." Like Ms. Gladwell. She's my, uh, Algebra II teacher. She'll take the test before we take it, study it- and then tell us which ones are going to be tricky. She doesn't tell us the answers, but she tells us which ones are going to be tricky, and what we should do, and be careful of. So, with that being said, high school, um, doesn't really ... they don't really, uh ... they don't really push us towards anything. They don't ... It's do this, do this, do this, do this. Do it when I tell you to do it, or they're not saying it directly. (Gary, personal communication, April 3, 2019)

Gary was focused during the class period. He came into class and sat down in his seat immediately and began working on his computer course. He asked Mrs. Rock a few questions regarding the material but did not talk much to the teacher or other students during the class. Upon first observing this, I had thought that the teacher and student did not have a good rapport. However, when the bell rang to go to the next class, Gary went to the teacher’s desk and asked her how her day was going and shared a story about an incident that happened at his job the night before. Mrs. Rock listened and commented on the incident and the two laughed together. Gary then told Mrs. Rock he would talk to her in the morning during family night. Although the school referred to this event as “family night,” the events were actually held during the school day right after breakfast. The staff explained that they created “family nights” because they wanted to give students a feel of how family nights work in natural families. The teachers explained that the name was actually coined by the students. The students preferred to call them family night. When I interviewed Gary, he felt that the teachers in the school really cared about him and the other students. During the interview, Gary shared:

> So, being here, I feel, like, they really do ... They, they really do care for us. And with it being a small school, all the teachers know everyone. They really do care for a lot of people. They try ... They connect with them themselves- to help better our experiences here. (Gary, personal communication, April 3, 2019)

Mr. Middle, a social studies teacher, used the lecture method for the two days that I observed his classroom. This teacher had discussions about the content with students. Students were comfortable interrupting the lecture to ask questions, and the interruptions were appropriate and related to the topic of the lecture. Mr. Middle appeared to be comfortable with the interruptions and used them as teachable moments.

My observation of Mr. Middle did not afford me the opportunity to observe one on one interactions between the students and teacher. I was able to observe that Mr. Middle had clear classroom routines and expectations of the students. For example, behavior expectations were posted and academic procedures were posted and reviewed at the beginning of the class. Before the lecture began, Mr. Middle reminded students that they were to take notes, keep their heads up, ask questions, and complete an exit ticket before leaving the class for that day. This was reviewed both days that I observed.

During the observation, Candy was engaged during the entire class on both days that I observed the class. Candy asked questions frequently. She openly engaged in conversations with Mr. Middle. At one point of a lecture during US history class, where the topic for two days was on slavery and triangular trade, Candy asked the teacher how this content was going to impact his life moving forward. Mr. Middle explained the concept of cause and effect to Candy. She told the teacher that she understood how decisions people made in the past were still impacting her life today and even thanked Mr. Middle for breaking the topic down. This observation of dialogue between the teacher and student illuminated the level of comfort and confidence students were willing to display.

Mrs. Sand, an English teacher, used whole group discussion and individual work time on task during the two days that I observed her classroom. On day one, students were discussing the essay writing process. She gave students a hamburger graphic organizer and explained the three parts of a complete essay. She then had the students all write one paragraph with seven sentences using the hamburger graphic organizer image. Mrs. Sand walked around helping students. She then had students exchange essays and critique the essays using a rubric that appeared to have been used on other assignments in the course throughout the semester. The students then returned the essays with written comments. Mrs. Sand commented on her instructional strategies:

> Much smaller class size setting, so I can get to know them and I can relate my content to them. I don't think I could do that with 34 kids. I'm not gonna hit all of them. I can hit

> all of them, I can connect with all of them. And I don't know, I feel like in the traditional setting I would be seen as crazy. (Mrs. Sand, personal communication, April 4, 2019)

On day two, she allowed students to choose a topic to write about during the class. The topics were not focused around any specific content or topic. I observed students working together and answering questions for each other regarding the organization of their essay, the wording they chose to use in the essay, and their use of the hamburger graphic organizer image. Mrs. Sand walked around observing and monitoring students. Mrs. Sand said, "Honestly, if you have a connection and you have time to sit down with a kid one on one, right next to them, they will succeed. They're gonna grow."

On day one of my observation of Mrs. Sand's classroom, Porsha was following along with the class regarding the writing process. She made some jokes throughout the teacher's explanation of the writing process and the use of the graphic organizer. Porsha appeared to be teasing Mrs. Sand and Mrs. Sand appeared to be comfortable with the teasing based upon the laughter between her and the other students. Although the student was making jokes, the behavior did not take away from the lesson.

The second day of my observation, Porsha was helping other students with the graphic organizer and told her peers that she completed her essay the night before. Porsha explained to one student in the class that the teacher had been emailing back and forth with her the evening before, providing feedback on her essay. After making the corrections suggested by her teacher, Porsha shared with her classmate that she could help them now with their essays because Mrs. Sand had explained things to her clearly. When I interviewed Porsha, she expressed that the teachers in the school respond differently to students when they are having a problem in comparison to the way teachers in the traditional school seemed to respond to difficult students.

Porsha expressed that she felt that this difference in teacher response to difficult students was a reason the alternative environment seemed more comfortable and the teachers seemed more caring. Porsha said during the interview:

> Interactions are better between students and staff at [Endor]. The teachers are not so quick to over react to things here like they do at Empire High School. Like if someone gets mad, they try to figure out why the kids is made and not just call for an administrator right away. (Porsha, personal communication, April 4, 2019)

This statement showed that student three was feeling a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of success. These feelings captured by student three's comments provide evidence of competency. Competency is one of three components of the Self-Determination Theory component of competency.

Theme Two: Social and Affective Experiences

During the interviews, Candy, Gary, and Porsha shared their thoughts about how their social, emotional, and motivational experiences emerged. They also described how their experiences had influenced them while attending Endor Alternative High School.

The observations and interviews provided opportunities to discuss and observe topics covered in the school handbook, classroom progress charts, classroom assignments, classroom posters, and lesson plans. Each of these provided examples of the specific strategies utilized or activities planned for students as well as the different ways teachers attempted to motivate students.

Anchor charts, classroom progress charts, and M.A.S. bucks[6] provided data supporting the intentional efforts teachers used to motivate students and celebrate student success. M.A.S.

---

[6] M.A.S. is the pseudonym representing the motivation award system being used in the Endor Alternative School.

bucks are a part of the all school P.B.I.S. plan (Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies). I observed classroom teachers interacting with students and using the different artifacts I reviewed. When I spoke with Mrs. Sand, she explained that using the M.A.S. bucks was a good motivator for students. She said that once one student earned M.A.S. bucks for participating in class, other students saw this and strived to also earn bucks by participating in class. Porsha explained in her own words the way M.A.S. bucks worked to motivate students. Porsha said, “You got a [MAS buck], and then the next day, another kid will volunteer. And eventually almost everybody starts volunteering, even if it's just for a little bit. They'll say, "Can I just read this paragraph?"

The science teacher, Mrs. Rock, presented curriculum and interacted with students in multiple ways. I observed Mrs. Rock and Gary over two days. I specifically observed Mrs. Rock working individually with a male student who was preparing for an upcoming Integrated-Chemistry Physics test. There was also a teaching assistant in the classroom who was working with an individual student on a computer assignment one day, and the next day the teaching assistant was helping three students complete a science lab experiment utilizing water, food coloring, and magnets. Gary was working independently on a paper assignment the first day and worked with the teaching assistant and the other students on a lab experiment the second day.

During both days, I observed student learning experiences from different methodologies used by the teacher intentionally. For example, I observed one on one instruction, use of the teaching assistant with small groups, hands-on experiences, and use of technology. Students were allowed to move around the room freely and appeared to be comfortable. I watched students execute the lesson directions for assignments, working well with other students, and performing routines which were posted in the classroom.

Mrs. Rock had a star progress chart posted in the classroom. The progress chart served as a visual motivator for students by indicating how many assignments students had successfully completed. The chart also informed students of how many assignments they had left to complete before they could earn the credit and a passing grade in the class. I observed Gary check the progress chart on the first day. On the second day of my observation, Gary reminded Mrs. Rock that he had completed an assignment and a star should be added to the progress chart next to his name.

I observed social, academic, and motivational experiences for Candy while in Mr. Middle's social studies classroom. The teacher provided instruction to students using lecture and class discussion. I did not observe any unique instructional strategies employed that would have provided the individualized academic experiences that the school promotes. However, one benefit of the classroom discussion was the small class size which allowed students to ask questions and receive immediate responses from Mr. Middle. He encouraged students to participate by providing positive affirmations when they asked questions and when students answered questions. Mr. Middle had motivational quotes posted around the classroom on the whiteboards, above the whiteboards, and on the classroom walls. He began the class each day spending about five minute's reflecting with the students on one of the posted motivational quotes. He read the quote, explained the quote, and then asked the students to explain what the quote meant to them. Porsha explained the motivational quotes were important to her by stating "Keep the motivational quotes. Those got me through on hard days."

The social experiences I observed in the Social Studies class evolved from the interactions that occurred during class discussions. I observed students responding to comments made by Mr. Middle and other students. Everyone in the class gave their undivided attention to the speaker. My observation also illuminated the comfort and courage students displayed by openly participating in the discussion. Candy was very engaged in the class discussion. She asked questions and contributed to the discussion by commenting on points made by other students participating in the class discussion. Students appeared to be comfortable in the classroom. I made this observation based upon their positive reaction to Mr. Middle when they answered a question incorrectly. The students kept participating in the lesson by encouraging one another, such as Candy saying “that’s ok man” to a classmate who tried and got an incorrect answer. This observation provided insight into the social experiences that students had in the social studies class.

I observed Porsha and Mrs. Sand, her English teacher, in the classroom on two different days. The teacher provided the students with academic learning experiences by utilizing class discussion, partner work, and whole group guided practice activities, as well as individual work time. During my first day of the classroom observation, I saw students writing paragraphs independently during individual work time. Before students worked independently, however, the teacher guided the entire class through the use of a graphic organizer which was designed to help them organize their essays.

On my second day of observations, students were working with partners by editing the essays written by their partner. Students were encouraged to sit in area of the classroom that made them feel most comfortable. Many students chose to sit on the floor with their partner. Mrs. Sand walked around the room on both days checking on student progress and answering questions. I watched students participate in class discussions and provide specific comments and conversation around edits that provided insight into the amount of comfort students felt with their peers. The observation provided evidence of the social experiences Mrs. Sand fostered in her classroom. Students gave and received criticism regarding their essays without becoming offended and appeared to respect the opinions and comments of their peer partners. It is significant to mention that the teacher chose their partners.

I observed the ways that Mrs. Sand motivated students both days of my observations. She motivated students with positive feedback and did not use generic comments. The feedback she provided as she walked around the classroom was individualized and was about specific tasks. The students responded to her feedback by either smiling, saying thank you, or asking her to look at different portions of their essay. Mrs. Sand encouraged students to give positive feedback and constructive criticism to their peers. She walked around commenting on the conversations she overheard students having with their partners. Every time she overheard a partner team using the proper grammatical terms while discussing their essays, she gave the students M.A.S. bucks. Students can take the M.A.S. Bucks to the school store and purchase things like school supplies, candy, or items for their smart phones.

During interviews, the students discussed how they related to the school environment socially. For example, clubs, extra-curricular activities, and sports are all things that students found important. The perspectives shared by students about their alternative schooling experience were confirmed by comments made by the three teachers interviewed. The Renaissance School provides an opportunity for the students to interact socially through their “Family Night Events.” Although the events are called “Family Night” they occur during the school day.

Students explained the differences between their alternative school experiences and their previous traditional academic experiences by giving examples of their frustrations with large class sizes, a greater frequency of distractions, and a lack of teacher-student rapport in the traditional school setting. During their time in traditional school, it seemed to be a recurring theme that students all seemed to have had a person or incident which led them to either doubt their ability to be successful in school or to feel like an outcast and not accepted. This negative experience for the students sent them in a wrong direction. They did not have an environment that nurtured and motivated them. Therefore, they did not try in class. Students explained how the teachers and their learning environment in the alternative school motivated them to try and to believe in themselves and their ability to be successful.

> Well the teachers tell you that they expect you to do your work so that you can have choices when you graduate. Also, the teachers motivate you by either telling you that they believe in you or celebrating with you when you finish a credit. They also listen to you when you are struggling with assignments. (Porsha, personal communication, April 5, 2019)

Endor students explained that they would like to receive more support and motivation from the school. For example, they wanted to have opportunities to receive tutoring or job skill training. They expressed wanting more time and opportunity to prepare for life after high school. In the interviews, teachers agreed with the need to better prepare students for life after high school.

Throughout my time talking with the students at Endor Alternative high school, the relationships and student experiences appeared to have great influence upon the student perspective regarding their experiences in their alternative school. The conversations with students and teachers illuminated the importance of feeling connected to the school, having a positive rapport with teachers, feeling genuine motivation, and having opportunities to be successful.

During interviews with Gary, Candy, and Porsha, I asked them how they defined success or how they knew when they had achieved success. Success was defined differently by each of them. Gary said he would know that he was successful when he had graduated from high school and had completed all of his court requirements. Gary stated that his ultimate goal was to be on his own and able to take care of himself and make good decisions. Candy reported that she knew that she would be successful when she graduated from high school and was attending school at Ivy Tech. Candy said that she still needed to work on her applications and that Mrs. Zelle was trying to get her to consider other schools. Porsha said that she knew she would be successful once she received her high school diploma and her C.N.A. certification. Porsha stated that her goal was to be able to take care of her daughter without needing government assistance. She expressed the desire to be an example and a positive role model for her daughter.

Theme Three: Complexities of Resources

Challenges were another theme that emerged from the time I spent observing the alternative school and interacting with students. However, one took it personally when asked about challenges. He explained that the work challenges meant that there was something wrong with him. He expressed that the word complexities was a more appropriate depiction of the obstacles that students often face. As a result, I named this section Complexities of Resources. I will use complexities through this section as a result of this student's perspective and explanation. Although there appeared to be many positive experiences and opportunities tailored to enhance the educational experiences for students based upon their unique needs, interviews with staff and students also unveiled some specific complexities that existed. Conversations revealed a few complexities and obstacles experienced by both teachers and students. The complexities and obstacles also seemed to stem from different catalyst. This was an unexpected discovery. For example, before interviewing students and staff, I had suspected that the obstacles for students would be very similar and would center on what the traditional setting did not offer. However, students described their personal circumstances as a major obstacle that prevented them from being able to experience the traditional school setting the same way other students experienced the traditional setting. Gary told me that "Empire High School eventually got tired of me getting in trouble." Gary stated, "The school told my mother that I was habitually truant and they were going turn her over to CPS or turn me into Juvenile." Gary shared that he was scared and was thinking about just dropping out of school.

Students explained that the alternative school setting made it a priority to be flexible to help them find ways to graduate from high school. Candy stated:

> My mom ended up calling my school counselor at [Empire High School] and asked if Football High School had any programs for pregnant teens or teen mothers. She told my mom no but Endor might be a good idea. She explained that I could work at a quicker pace and have a more flexible school day. My mom asked her "why they had never told us about this before." So, the [Football High School] administrators ended up meeting with me and my mom. "They told us that I was on the verge of being expelled." I told them I wanted to try going to [Endor High School] because I had heard that I could have a flexible day and move through my credits quicker and easier." The [Football High School] assistant principal said that he thought that it would be good for me. So, he talked to [Mrs. Bee] and [Mrs. Bee] said I could come to [Endor High School] if I was serious about trying to graduate. I had to call her to tell her why I wanted to come to [Endor High School]. I told her that "I had a child and I understood that I needed an education so I could get a job and take care of her. I told [Mrs. Bee] that I would take

> school serious and be respectful." So, I started at [Endor] and the rest is history. (She giggles) (Candy, personal communication, April 4, 2019)

The staff also explained that the unique student lifestyles and circumstances of the students often caused them to respond inappropriately in the traditional setting but they believed that this was not the students' fault. The staff believed that school should be more accommodating to student needs. The students believed that Endor Alternative High School was accommodating to them but believed that the school needed more money. The staff also described the biggest obstacles as being financial but additionally mentioned the need for more professional training. Mr. Middle shared that the students he worked with often demonstrated that they needed a variety of experiences to practice interacting with people outside of their social circle. Mr. Middle said, "And they live in this little tiny bubble, I mean ... So many of them don't even know past the east side of Indy. I'd like to do more, but you know, field trips cost money." Mrs. Sand shared that although the students were grateful of the technology they were allowed to use, the teachers saw it as unfair that the Endor Alternative school often received the leftover resources. Mrs. Sand shared during her interview that the alternative school needed resources and money. Mrs. Sand said, "Like we need more technology… "Yes. [But we feel, we] even the teacher feel, here, we get the leftovers [resources]. You know? Buy a laptop."

During interviews, students discussed how their personal lives presented unique circumstances that often became obstacles for them in the traditional environment. Students described the flexible schedule they had at the [Endor High School] and the self-paced curriculum as ways they could overcome some of their lifestyle obstacles. Students explained that a flexible schedule and individualized pacing were very important to them.

Teachers described obstacles and complexities regarding professional learning and staff support from the district. Teachers believed that they need to be provided with opportunities to collaborate with other alternative schools and programs so that they can better serve their students. Teachers agreed that having to meet the district directives on some initiatives is okay, but many of the curriculum and instructional directives do not fit with their school structure or classroom make up. Mrs. Sand explained that over the years administrators had tried to make the staff implement the same activities, lessons, and professional development as the traditional schools. Mrs. Sand acknowledged that eventually they got an administrator who understood alternative education and that the traditional methods did not work for alternative schools and students. Mrs. Sand stated:

> Calendar. Uh, when I first started here it was like that, then there was about half ... There was about four years where we had an administrator who tried to get us to follow what the high school was doing, um, which is fine and I get why. But, then the problem is we have nine week rotations, so a kid would come in and I'd be starting a nine week rotation and he's already read it. We realized that didn't work, and honestly, a lot of these kids aren't going to respond to Shakespeare. (Mrs. Sand, personal communication, April 3, 2019)

The teachers and the principal explained that the district was beginning to understand that the [Endor High School] has different needs and was becoming more flexible. In addition, teachers expressed wanting to have more professional learning designed around the alternative school environment and curriculum. Teachers shared that currently they receive the most support from each other as well as their principal. Mrs. Rock shared that “when somebody is struggling the staff lifts each other up.” She stated:

> We are so ... What I love about this staff, is we're so flexible, you know. If there's an emergency, if I were to get a call and say, "Hey, your kid's sick." All I'd have to do is send out an email, and everybody else picks up my kids. You know. (Personal communication, April 5, 2019)

During the teacher focus group discussion, Mrs. Light further expressed the importance of the alternative staff supporting one another. She also expressed that this was often also the reason that alternative educators felt isolated. Mrs. Light's thoughts were captured specifically in one of her comments. She stated:

> We don't have to worry about a sub, you're gonna go here, you're gonna go- and th- and the kids are used to it. So they know, if they go to the door and they see a sign, "Oh, I'm going to so and so this, this period. (Personal communication, April 5, 2019)

Mrs. Light also shared that the staff knows one another so well that they can read the body language or moods of each other. Having this type of rapport helps them further support each other and prevents them from becoming distracted. They are able to ensure that they are present for the students and their needs. Mrs. Light told the group "And we can, we can tell when somebody's down. And, what I love about here, everybody has their partner. Like, yes, we're this big family, but- Everybody also has that one person's back."

During teacher interviews and the teacher focus group, the staff expounded upon their need to depend on each other. The teachers appeared to believe that the district should be providing them with effective practice and research based professional learning opportunities. However, because they were not currently receiving these opportunities, the teachers believed that they primarily depended on each other professionally and emotionally. For example, one of the teachers mentioned that having the feeling of being isolated often got her down. As a result, her colleagues would recognize this and all rally together to support that teacher. The lack of researched based professional learning was reported by teachers as an obstacle and the cause for low morale; but it also seemed to bring out a positive aspect as well, which was the closeness of the staff, emotional support of the others, and professional support they provided to each other. This thought was captured concisely by Mrs. Night when she said, “You have to be close, 'cause you can't survive without it.”

The teachers shared that they would like to use data to make informed decisions about the social and academic needs of their students, but currently they had no evidence-based practices that allowed them to do this. They kept their own anecdotal data. Teachers shared during the focus group that having evidenced-based practices would help them address the needs of their students more effectively. For example, the teachers described the need to make student experiences more realistic and provide them with an outlook on life that is more realistically based on the specific circumstances each student faces. Teachers said that they wanted to do this without making the students feel judged and while keeping the students’ minds open to potential opportunities that they may not be ready to have now but may be prepared for down the road. The teachers expressed that they wanted to have an effective way to address these students. Mrs. Sand stated:

> I feel like, uh, post-graduation plans I think we're struggling. That's- that's somewhere we really need t- and we all know that. We've- we've discussed that on ... We've been so focused on them getting across the stage- but then they get across the stage and they're lost. (Personal communication, April 5, 2019)

Mrs. Sand also shared that she believed the Endor Alternative High School and the Empire School district needed to realize that students need multiple pathways to not only receive their diplomas but also to have exposure to multiple post-high school options. Mrs. Sand said we need to “be realistic and realize that a four year college is not for everybody, and that's okay, and it's- it's acceptable and even encouraged.”

The principal, Mrs. Zelle, shared that she agreed with many of the obstacles that the students and teachers expressed with regards to the need for more financing. She also shared that she agreed with the teachers with regards to having professional development that was specific to the work that they do at the alternative school with students. Mrs. Zelle said that, from her perspective, financing and technology were the two major obstacles that the school faced.

Mrs. Zelle talked a lot about the times the alternative school is used for the wrong reasons. She said that often the Empire traditional high school will have an angry African American mother that they are having trouble appeasing. The traditional high school will call Mrs. Zelle and ask her to come over to the traditional high school and join the meeting as if she were an interpreter for angry African American women. Mrs. Zelle explained that the traditional high school sent the message that they were unable to appease angry African American mothers or they felt as though they could not understand why the mother was upset. Mrs. Zelle stated:

> Sometimes, I feel first off that the traditional school calls me in when they are dealing with an angry black woman because they figured that because I was a black woman I could calm the angry black female parent down and that is ridiculous. (Personal communication, April 4, 2019)

Mrs. Zelle shared some insightful perspectives that exist between Endor alternative high school and the traditional Empire High School. For example, she shared that often the traditional high school referred students to the Endor alternative high school when they just wanted to remove the student because the student was difficult. She believed that the traditional school gave up on the student and shipped the student to her staff as a means to get rid of the student. For example, she mentioned a situation that arose during a meeting she was having with a parent of a potential new student, an administrator at the traditional high school, and herself. During the meeting it was revealed that the Empire traditional high school had a student who was experiencing attendance problems. The traditional high school put the student on a traditional high school attendance contract. Violation of the contract meant that the student would be automatically referred to Endor alternative high school. Mrs. Zelle explained that this was a common challenge that she faces as the principal. Endor alternative high school is not a dumping ground. She explained that she tried very hard to uphold standards for student eligibility so that she could maintain the supportive learning environment that they provide to students. However, the traditional high school often attempts to ship students to the alternative high school when they are tired of dealing with students. Mrs. Zelle shared that she frequently tells the Empire traditional high school administrators things like:

> I need more information on this student than what you have shared with me. This move seems more like an adult move not a student move. It sounds like y'all are just tired of dealing with this student and seeing them in your office. (Personal communication, April 4, 2019)

This practice by Empire traditional high school throws the numbers of the alternative school out of proportion and makes their student to teacher ratio off and out of compliance with the Indiana Department of Education teacher student ratio guidelines for alternative schools. Mrs. Zelle explained this as the “why” she has to push back often times when the traditional school refers students to Endor alternative high school. Mrs. Zelle wants to ensure that the alternative school was used as a resource and a pathway of helping students.

Interviews and focus group conversation illuminated that the major obstacles were finances, technology, and the need for professional development that is specific to alternative schools. Major complexities appeared to be the perceptions of others and the misuse of the referral process by the traditional Empire High School. In addition, it was surprising that the principal felt that her race and the purpose of the alternative school were often misused by the traditional high school.

In the next section, I narrate student and staff interviews and observations and indicate where self-determination components were revealed. Interviews and observations revealed components of the Self-Determination Theory that appeared in the Endor alternative high school setting. In the next chapter, the results of this case study, limitations, and future recommendations are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

The purpose of this case study was to illuminate how three underserved students describe their experiences in an alternative school. From the perspectives of three students, this case study elucidated the perspectives of these students. Using qualitative methods, this case study investigated the extent to which the needs of these students were met from the perspective of three students. In this chapter, I will discuss case study findings, implications, limitations, and further research.

Discussion

The data collection, interviews, and observations revealed three major themes. These three themes that emerged were: (a) teacher-student relationships, (b) student experiences, and (c) complexities that arise in alternative school settings. In this chapter, I discuss the case study results, limitations that surfaced during my research, implications the results have on alternative school settings and practices, and finally, recommendations for future research.

This chapter discusses the findings on the following case study research questions. How do underserved high school students attending an alternative school:

1. Explain why they chose to attend the alternative school?
2. Describe their social and academic experiences at an alternative school?
3. Create goals and define success?

These research questions revealed three themes that will help inform the alternative education community in meeting the needs of underserved students by obtaining understanding from the students’ perspectives.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the case study. I share and explain the findings of the case study. After a discussion of the findings, limitations that arose during data collection are shared. I provide transparency regarding factors that influenced or limited the data I collected and the data collections methods I used during this case study; this includes any bias I had as the primary researcher. As I draw towards the conclusion, I explain how this study illuminates Self-Determination Theory by comparing the results of the case study with the major components of the Self-Determination Theory. The last section of chapter five will contain recommendations for further research.

Key Findings and Discussion of Case Study Results

To address the research questions, I performed observations and interviews with the intention of gathering data from the student perspective. The three students, Gary, Candy, and Porsha, all reported that the relationships they had with the Endor staff were positive social and emotional experiences that were pivotal in their success at Endor Alternative High School. All three students shared that while attending Endor Alternative High School, these relationships and experiences helped motivate them and define their individual success plan. These relationships also helped them to feel better about themselves and have a more positive outlook on their future. Both the three students and the three teachers talked about the challenges and obstacles that they faced in a non-traditional high school setting.

These three thematic findings lined up well with the research questions that this case study sought to answer. All three of these themes appear to be important to the three students who participated in this case study. The following sections address the research questions this case study sought to answer.

Research Question 1: Students explained why they chose to attend Endor Alternative High School

Student explanations regarding why they chose to attend Endor Alternative High School revealed three main reasons. These reasons included: (a) the relationships they developed with the staff, (b) individualized attention they received, and (c) the positive, encouraging environment. Each student had experienced different circumstances that led to their decision to attend Endor Alternative High School. For example, Gary had been removed from his mother's home because of bad decisions he made that lead to legal problems. At the time of data collection, Gary was residing in a group home. Gary chose to attend Endor Alternative High School so that he could stay focused and graduate quicker from high school and be released from court control. Candy was not fitting in at the larger traditional high school setting; she was making decisions based upon peer pressure, and she was not earning credits. Empire School district was the second school district she attended. Candy self-selected to attend Endor High School so that she could earn credits quickly and receive individualized attention from her teachers. Porsha had a small child and felt she had been judged by the teachers in the traditional setting. She needed a flexible school schedule and more encouragement; she did not feel that she was getting these needs met in the traditional Empire High School.

Teacher-Student Relationship

Phillips (2011) found that students need positive relationships and social learning to thrive. I observed this concept. During their interviews, Gary, Candy, and Porsha all described decisions they had made as a result of their relationships with teachers. Student-teacher relationships seemed to be essential to each student's school experience. The relationships were developed by the nurturing social experiences teachers designed for students. The students explained the personal comfort they felt with their teachers. The students shared that their teachers were not only concerned with their earning their credits to graduate but also were concerned with their health and their futures. This finding aligns with the research of Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) who found that a characteristic of alternative schools is that they cater to the special needs of the particular students they are serving. The experiences that Gary, Candy, and Porsha described serve as examples of what the research says about the need for students to have positive relationships and encouragement from their learning environment. Gary, Candy, and Porsha all chose to attend Endor High School because of the relationships they developed with the staff and the encouragement they received from the staff. Porsha specifically describe the relationship she had with Mrs. Sand. Porsha described in detail that Mrs. Sand gave her advice on raising her daughter and encouraged her to be successful for the sake of her daughter. Porsha felt that Mrs. Sand believed in her and her ability to be successful in school and in life.

Students explained during their interviews that they appreciated the Endor Alternative School teachers because they worked very hard to make sure that they were successful. Students shared that the teachers recognized the differences between them all and accepted them all where they were in their life academically, socially, and emotionally. This finding aligns with Felder and Bret (2005) who discussed the importance of recognizing that all students are different; and therefore, teachers who use those differences to create learning experiences foster an environment that is engaging to all students. One school size does not fit all students. There is no one perfect school model that meets the needs of every student (Wai, 2018). For example, Candy explained that Mr. Middle used history to help her understand herself in some ways. She shared that Mr. Middle explained how factors and decisions that were made in the past led to historical conflicts or created current day circumstances. Candy said that Mr. Middle had conversations with her that helped her understand that her decisions also influenced her current situation or could impact her future opportunities. Candy expressed that this was one reason that explained why she actually listened and participated in Mr. Middle's class.

Individualized Attention

The teachers all shared that they enjoyed working in the alternative school and would not want to work in the traditional setting at this point because they would lose the opportunity to develop a close rapport with students. The Indiana Department of Education (2009) points out that the purpose of Indiana alternative schools is to provide a small student base to foster opportunities for the staff to show students that they care about them and believe in their ability to accomplish their academic goals and post-secondary plans. This information that teachers shared during their interviews aligned with the expectations of the Indiana Department of Education. Teachers also shared that they believed that they would not be able to help students as much as they are now because in the traditional setting the class sizes are larger and take away from their ability to individualize experiences for their students.

Positive Environment

The academic experiences that I observed gave students the opportunity to participate in their education and seemed to be purposely designed to provide hands-on interactions, academic conversations, and inquiry-based instructional strategies.

These findings can be explained considering the students' perspective when they compared the Empire school district's traditional learning environment to Endor Alternative High School's learning environment. Students explained that they did not have a close rapport with the teachers in their traditional learning experiences because of the large class sizes and lack of opportunities to be known personally by their teachers. All three students stated that they also felt lacking in knowledge and did not feel that they belonged. As a result, they would not ask their traditional teachers for help and fell further behind in their course work. As students explained, these factors fostered the foundation for them to make bad decisions, skip school, or feel inferior. Interviews and observations revealed that in the alternative school setting students participated in class and talked openly with teachers.

I observed the comfort that students appeared to have as the result of the smaller class sizes and the intentional focus of the teachers to develop relationships with the students in Endor Alternative High School. For example, I witnessed students freely moving about the classroom following the classroom routines and procedures, collaborating with other students, interacting with the teacher respectfully, and asking the teacher questions until they appeared to have enough information to move forward with their assignments.

Throughout the student interviews, the power of relationships and a positive environment was illuminated and seemed to be one of the characteristics of Endor Alternative High School that the students described as reasons they felt successful and cared about while attending the school.

Research Question 2: Students described their social and academic experiences at Endor Alternative High School

The next research question focused on how students explained their social and academic experiences at Endor Alternative High School. Students described positive social and academic experiences at Endor Alternative High School and how they differed from the experiences they had when they attended the traditional Empire High School. Students described their social and emotional experiences.

Social and Academic Experiences

Gary, Candy, and Porsha described specific experiences, but Porsha and Candy elaborated the most on the differences they perceived between the traditional Empire High School and the Alternative High School. Candy explained that athletics kept her engaged in school but when she transferred to the Empire traditional high school, they treated her as though she was a troubled student based upon the experiences she had in the previous traditional high school in a different district. Therefore, she was not allowed to participate in sports that year. The following year she explained that she was able to participate in sports, but she was not as motivated and was not doing well in her classes, which impacted her opportunity to participate in athletics. Porsha explained that because she was a teenage mother she felt judged or looked down upon by the teachers in the traditional high school.

Candy shared that Endor Alternative High School gave her the feeling that she needed of having a fresh start. Porsha described that the Endor Alternative High School teachers accepted her for who she was and seemed to want to prepare her for life as a teen mother instead of judging her for being a teen mother.

Teachers intentionally created lessons that gave the students numerous opportunities to participate. Lessons were hands-on, discussion-based, and tailored to student needs. The teachers made sure to know the skill set of each student by assessing the student’s skills once they began attending their class. Teachers then made time throughout the week to work with students one on one. Phillips (2011) found that all students need real world learning experiences that are connected to student autonomy tied to achieving goals. Research suggests that alternative schools provide students with social experiences that all students need to feel connected to the school and provide educational experiences that are meaningful, fun, and uplifting (Hanover Research, 2014; Graves, 2011; Martin, 2000). For example, Endor

Alternative High School provided experiences that were centered on the social and emotional needs of students. The morning “family meetings” that students described were important to them. Students described the family meetings as times to get to know their teachers and other students. Gary expressed that because he was not currently living at home with his mother and siblings, the family meetings gave him ideas on things he could do with his mother and siblings once he got released from the group home.

Research Question 3: Students explained how they create goals and define success

Gary, Candy, and Porsha shared that their experiences and relationships with staff at the alternative school helped them create post-secondary goals for themselves, and they shared what success would look like for them when they completed high school.

Each student, Gary, Candy, and Porsha, shared a different description of what their personal vision of success looked like. Gary shared that success for him would be living on his own and making better decisions. Candy shared that success for her would be graduating from high school and going to college. Porsha shared that success for her would be obtaining her diploma and a nursing assistant certification so that she could care for her daughter. These students see graduation from high school as a gateway to every road that they may want to pursue regarding future work and post-secondary school.

Motivational Experiences

Motivation emerged as a key characteristic that moved students to believe in themselves and create goals. Candy explained that this was something that Endor High School should always do for its students. Candy explained that the inspirational quotes in Mr. Middle’s classroom made her stop and think. Candy shared that sometimes she would have conversations with Mr. Middle about the quotes if she did not fully understand them. As a result of their conversations, Candy said that over time she began to apply a couple of the quotes to her own life and that she began to believe in her goal of graduating from high school and actually attending a four year college.

Motivation was a factor that each student elaborated on during their interview. Candy explained that the Mr. Middle's motivation quotes inspired her daily. Porsha described the willingness of Mrs. Sand to share real world advice with her and the belief that she had in Porsha's skills as a constant motivation. It was during conversations with teachers that students defined what success meant to them. Teachers, however, expressed frustration because they wanted to help students see beyond the present moment or even just next year. Student goals seemed to include the graduation from school and the obtaining of independence. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's (2000) research and identification of the Self-Determination Theory found that motivation greatly influences successful outcomes of students when they achieve goals.

The findings imply that the emotional and social needs of the students were being met with the small class sizes, teacher commitment to the students, the since of belonging that each student experienced. Teachers motivated students by using a variety of methods such as motivational posters, conversations, and experiences. This motivation appeared to inspire students and allowed students to see themselves as capable of success. The reality that students had not experienced success in their classes in the traditional environment may explain the fact that students defined success as graduation from high school as their ultimate goal.

Students discussed how they overcome complexities they face in Endor Alternative High School as underserved students

An unintended topic emerged during interviews with students and teachers. Both teachers and students described complexities they experienced in their alternative setting. The student perspectives can have an influence upon state and federal policy regarding alternative options for students.

As I talked to students, most of their experiences were positive. However, students shared that they faced challenges and obstacles at Endor Alternative High School. Students and staff described these challenges as factors that provided complexities in their experiences. Both students and teachers shared particular challenges they had faced at Endor Alternative High School. Students shared the different circumstances they faced that led to their attending Endor Alternative High School. As students shared their circumstances and experiences, these circumstances and experiences appeared to have impacted the goals they made for themselves and defined how they viewed what success looked like for them as an individual.

Teachers and students revealed that they believed lack of money kept them from having the opportunity to have more field trips or more experiences that were not related to the traditional school curriculum. Students shared that they would like to have more speakers that come to school to talk about different careers and trade school opportunities. Teachers explained that they would like to take students on field trips that would enhance student experiences; for example, they might visit college campuses, attend live performances of a play, or go shopping at a mall. The teachers explained that these extended out of school experiences would let students feel valued, get them out of their comfort zone, and practice being independent.

Case Study Implications

After analysis of the data collected for this case study, inferences can be made based on the observation of the three students. This section will address implications that can be considered when addressing the needs of underserved students. These implications can be applied to policy and practices regarding alternative education

There are specific implications that can be explored as they relate to the three main themes that emerged from this case study. I will share implications for practice in this section regarding the three themes: teacher-student relationships; student experiences; and complexity of resources. I will also include specific implications for school leaders. These examples may help administrators create an atmosphere within alternative schools and programs which cultivate the three themes which emerged from this particular case study.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Administrators may want to consider how they can help staff and students develop positive relationships. Administrators positively support the development of positive relationships with students by designing opportunities within the school master schedule. This nonacademic course time may foster opportunities for teachers to cultivate positive relationships with students. For example, if given 20 minutes a day, students and teachers could engage in character building and problem solving conversations or neuroscience researched based activities that would allow teachers and students to get to know one another. Desautels (2015) gives specific suggestions for teachers can connect with students. These suggestions can help educators create character building activities and address the social emotional needs of students. For example, Desautel recommends creating opportunities to let students know that teachers believe in them and support them in achieving their dreams and goals. She also explains that students like talking about themselves and teachers should engage in conversations with students creating opportunities for them to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas. Desautels also describes how community service activities are ways to develop a sense of social responsibility and compassion for others when students are giving the opportunity to help others. Administrators could also engage with students during this nonacademic time. This would model expectations for teachers as well as send the message to staff and students regarding the importance of the use of the time.

Student Experiences

Administrators may want to take into account that teaches in this study suggested that they needed more professional development that was centered on alternative education. Desimone (2009) suggests that professional development not be a one-time several hour session. She explains that new trends in professional development research implies that professional development be on going. Desimone says that effective professional development should contain five conceptual components to improve teacher practice and student learning: professional development should be content focused, active learning, coherent with curriculum, sustain duration, and collective participation.

Teachers could also benefit from having time to collaborate with one another to share ideas and to create student experiences. Cachia, Romina, Punie, and Yves (2012) describe the importance of teacher collaboration by allowing teachers to enhance the quality of their teaching and to increase their capacity. For example, students shared that they would like to have speakers, field trips, and job shadowing opportunities. Teachers could collaborate with one another and design student experiences that provide what students expressed that they need. Collaboration with other alternative school educators was another theme implication that teachers expressed regarding complexities of resources. Teachers shared that they would like to have time to support one another and time to communicate and learn from alternative school educators. As the educational leader, administrators should consider creating professional development opportunities and workshops for the educators who work in alternative settings.

Complexity of Resources

Implications regrading policy should also be addressed. Policy makers may want to create state level opportunities to meet with school districts and educators regarding the supports as they create alternative schools and programs within their school districts. O’Day (2002) suggests that in order to bring about change education and to create educational policies educators need to be included in the process and given opportunities to interact with others regarding new information and practices. She suggests that simply giving educators information and data regarding creation of new policies does not bring about change. Policy makers may want to consider providing opportunities on the state level to alternative school educators to collaborate. For example, an alternative education community should be created for alternative school administrators and staff. This forum may influence the way states decide to hold alternative schools accountable. The staff interviewed for this case study expressed that a complexity that they faced was the accountability model used to judge their effectiveness. The staff shared that the unique circumstances that they face and their students face often create obstacles. Having an alternative education community could allow for state policy makers to hear these concerns and work together with alternative educators to create policies that address the more effectively.

Policy

Large traditional high school settings may not be able to connect with high risk students and those students may fall between the cracks and become lost, hopeless, and unsuccessful. School administrators and policy makers may want to look into finding ways to make larger traditional school settings more personable. It may be helpful for educators and policy makers to consider Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) as they make decisions about better ways to serve students. Implications also suggest that it may be helpful to create small alternative school settings within larger school districts and provide ways to be supportive of alternative schools within their traditional school districts. Though this study focused on student experiences, emergent findings suggested that larger school districts may want to provide opportunities for staff learning and sharing.

Practice

Teachers described the need to collaborate with other alternative school educators. Teachers explained that they felt isolated because when they worked with teachers in the traditional setting the curriculum pacing was so different. Additionally, the teaching methods that work best for the alternative setting needed to be differentiated more frequently than what the traditional setting teachers seemed to use. For example, Mrs. Sand stated that when she worked with English teachers in the Empire’s traditional high school, those teachers tended to use more lecture-style teaching methods due to their large class sizes. She also mentioned that the traditional English teachers had to categorize student needs more often due to the large class sizes. Mrs. Sand also explained that the traditional English teachers had to drive their lessons based on ISTEP+ and/or student grades per the district expectations. Mrs. Sand understood the instructional decisions the traditional English teachers were making but shared that once students were sent to Endor Alternative High School, she never ever received any of the student data; so even if she wanted to base instruction on data like ISTEP+, she could not because she was not supplied with this data. Mrs. Sand, Mr. Middle, and Mrs. Rock all explained a similar challenge that their instructional practices could not be data driven.   As a result, they did not receive data. They had to gather their own data on students.

Not having opportunities to collaborate with other alternative school educators, lack of funding, and the need for data are unique findings uncovered by the data collected for this case study. These findings illuminate the difficulty Endor Alternative High School educators experience causing them to feel isolated. It also explains the close knit collegial relationships they have with one another. The staff expressed feelings of being left out or not as valued as the teachers at Empire's traditional high school.

Creating smaller learning environments customized to student's individual needs, helping students relate to the learning environment, encouraging educators to develop a positive rapport with students, and providing professional learning to educators in alternative setting may be factors that policy makers consider as they seek to improve the learning for all students in the state or country.

Self-Determination Theory

In the following section, I will compare the results of this case study with the Self-Determination Theory. I will explain the similarities and differences that can be made between the research and the Self-Determination Theory.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2006) sheds light on what motivates and influences people. By applying this theory, traditional school districts may better provide underserved students with educational opportunities and experiences by creating learning environments that motivate all students, consider the psychological needs of students, and give students the opportunity to act autonomously when making decisions. An atmosphere conducive for a positive and successful experience appears to be important for students to feel connected to their educational environment. Deci and Ryan's theory emphasizes the basic needs people must have met to perform effectively. They identified three basic needs that students need in order to be highly motivated: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

The results of this case study revealed the presence of these three key components of self-determination, including the presence of intrinsic motivation among students.

Figure 5.1. Depicts the interconnectedness between autonomy, relatedness, competency, and intrinsic motivation.

Theoretical Framework

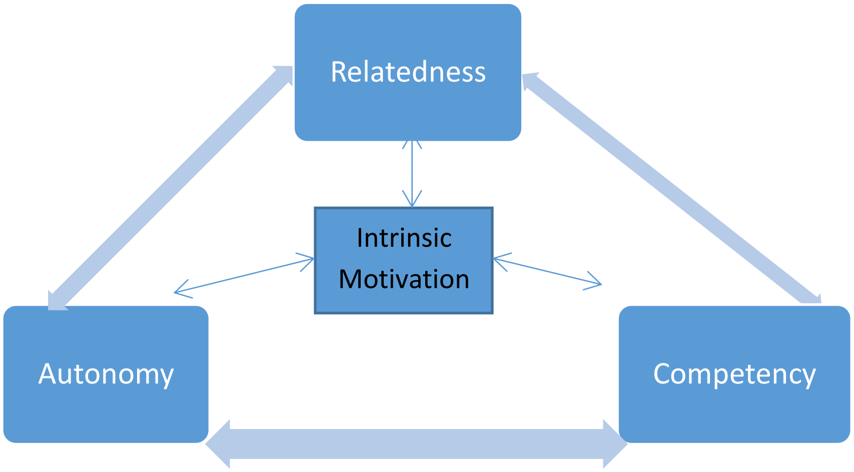


Figure 5.1. Self-Determination Theory components and how they relate to each other.

As I interviewed students and staff in the Endor Alternative High School, I discovered that these three student needs emerged to support the belief that there is a connection between student motivation and student success. Building genuine relationships between teachers and students evolved as an effective practice by Endor Alternative High School staff.

Relatedness

Relationships are comparable to the "relatedness" component of Self-Determination Theory. Relatedness is providing students with a learning environment in which they are comfortable expressing themselves and interacting with others. In addition to relationships, the research revealed that positive experiences and motivation helped students build self-confidence and contributed to an increased likelihood that students would make good decisions and self-regulate. Students explained that having a positive relationship with their teachers and other staff made them feel more comfortable. Feeling comfortable at school made students want to come to school. Because students wanted to be at school, students seemed to exhibit positive behavior and a cooperative demeanor. For example, Gary shared that he built closer relationships with his teachers at Endor Alternative High School. He especially felt that the "family nights" helped him feel connected to the students and staff. Furthermore, he believed that it was an example for him on how to communicate with his biological family.

Autonomy

The social, emotional, and motivational experiences described by students are comparable to the "autonomy" component of Self-Determination Theory. Autonomy is giving students the freedom to make choices that reflect their goals and decisions. Students demonstrated their ability to be autonomous through the social, emotional, and motivational experiences that I observed. For example, students participating during classroom observations demonstrated students' opportunities to practice self-governance and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2006). For example, students were allowed to choose their learning activities in some classes in the science class with Mrs. Rock. Interviews with students illuminated the strong belief from students in themselves and the strong convictions they expressed about the goals they had set along with guidance from their teachers. Gary, Porsha, and Candy all described their specific goals to graduate from high school and obtain their independence by either pursuing a post-secondary educational experience or by entering directly into the work force.

Competence

None of the three students expressed doubt that they would be able to successfully achieve their set goals. Each student defined success similarly but success would manifest itself differently for each of the three students based upon their life circumstances. For example, Porsha set goals related to being financially stable enough to care for her daughter. She explained that her relationship and conversations with Mrs. Sand created a since of self-confidence because Mrs. Sand believed in her and helped her uncover careers that she would be good at doing and would provide wages and benefits for her to care for her daughter. Experiences like these provide examples "competency" of Self-Determination Theory. Competence is helping students believe in themselves and their ability to achieve the goals they set for themselves.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, similar to Deci and Ryan (2000), Vallerand, Fortier, and Guay (1997) mentioned that controlling student behavior, by telling them what to do and how to do it with little regard for the student's goals and choice, destroys self-determined motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) found that the more students were externally regulated, the less interest, value, and effort they showed towards the achievement of their goals. They found that the more autonomy (freedom to self-govern) students felt in making decisions and regulating themselves, the more intrinsically motivated they were to achieve their goals.

My observation of students in classrooms, interacting with teachers and other students, illuminated the experiences the Endor Alternative High School provided students so that they felt free to make their own decisions.

Intrinsic Motivation

Experiences like flexible school scheduling, discussions with teachers regarding their future plans, intentional individualized motivation from teachers, and the comfort to express themselves are characteristics similar to characteristics achieved by "intrinsic motivation" suggested by Self-Determination Theory. Intrinsic motivation is achieved by allowing students to self-govern themselves and giving them the freedom to make their own decisions. Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that intrinsic motivation does not depend upon external rewards (autonomous motivation). Students were allowed to feel free to make their own decisions. As Deci and Ryan suggested, students need to experience autonomous intrinsic motivation and not be told what their goals should be based upon the perspective of the adults. The research seems to support Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory. An implication for practice is that students benefit from opportunities to be autonomous, develop competence, and build relationships with teachers and peers in a learning environment that fosters intrinsic motivation.

Conclusions

After interviewing and observing the three students for this case study, a few factors appeared to influence the students' likelihood of graduating from high school and developing future plans. These factors included: (a) lack of connection between students-teachers, (b) lack of confidence, (c) no adult guidance to set realistic goals that serve the student's best interest, and (d) the absence of a process that involves students in decision making opportunities. The overarching themes that emerged in this case study from the perspective of these three students were: (a) the influence of student-teacher relationships, (b) the importance of providing students with a variety of educational and social experiences, and (c) the impact that student motivation has on the ability of students to set goals and feel successful.

School districts similar to Empire School District may help students if they create academic options for students and provide training for teachers that help teachers address the social-emotional needs of students. Large urban school districts should provide financial support, specific professional development for staff in alternative settings, and ample opportunities for the staff to collaborate with other alternative school educators.

Recommendations for Further Research

Sampling more than one alternative school would have helped to illuminate the importance of student competency, relatedness, and autonomy and how alternative high schools are providing these. For example, sampling more students in three alternative schools would allow for more connections to the Self-Determination Theory. Collecting more data may reveal additional practices being used in alternative settings which may help large mid-western school districts make educational decisions regarding alternative education programing for students, training for staff working in alternative school settings, and funding for alternative programming. This data may also help enlighten practices used in traditional educational settings that may help underserved students before they fall through the cracks of the traditional way of educating students.

Case Study Limitations

As the primary researcher, I believe that a qualitative method for gathering data regarding the student perspective of their experience in an alternative high school setting was the most effective approach. However, all studies have limitations. For example, this case study only focused on three students in one alternative education school within one large mid-western urban school district. There are many alternative schools in Indiana and around the United States. These alternative schools and programs may not all operate in the same manner. It may be helpful to uncover other reasons students decide to attend alternative schools as well as to obtain more student perspectives regarding their experiences in alternative schools. Students in different cities or states may describe their alternative education experiences differently, which may bring forth other factors for school districts, educators, and policy makers to consider when addressing the needs of students, particularly the underserved student.

Closing Remarks

Better serving students is what has driven my career for the last 26 years, throughout which time I have developed a passion for alternative education. I have held teaching and administrative positions in both traditional and alternative education settings. My work with students in the traditional settings pushed me to find and discover more creative ways to serve students, especially the underserved high school student. Closing the achievement gap between students and ensuring that all students have equity and access to education is my goal.

It is my hope that this case study will help educators provide students with creative, personalized, and optional ways to receive their education.

Appendix A

SCHOOL INTERACTION EVIDENCE CHECK LIST

Using Susan M. Brookhart's framework, I have created a rubric that will be used to review school documents. For example, Student Handbook, Staff Handbook, and communication home to parents. (Chapter 7, Brookhart, p.77,80)

Category	**Adequate** Enough information provided to inform the parent, student, or reader	**Inadequate** Not enough information provided to inform the parent, student, or reader	**Not Applicable**	**Notes**
Classroom Observation				
Individual Work Time is provided to students				
Students participate in class activities				
Students work collaboratively with others during the class session.				
The teacher in providing students with the opportunity to learn and practice skills maximizes the instructional time.				
Classroom Environment is positive and inviting to all students.				
There is evidence that students understand the learning objectives.				

The teacher checks for understanding during the lesson.				
Communication				
There is evidence of clear communication of the content from the teacher to the student.				
Communication between students/ teachers is centered around goal setting and/or learning objectives				

Appendix B

SCHOOL DOCUMENT EVIDENCE CHECK LIST

Using Susan M. Brookhart's framework, I have created a rubric that will be used to review school documents. For example, Student Handbook, Staff Handbook, and communication home to parents. (Chapter 7, Brookhart, p. 77, 80)

Category	Adequate Enough information provided to inform the parent, student, or reader	Inadequate Not enough information provided to inform the parent, student, or reader	Not Applicable	Notes
Clear content Information in the document is easy to understand.				
Informative Content Descriptions are provide clarity to the reader.				
Content is resourceful Information provided is concise and helpful to the reader.				
Content is organized The information is arranged in a logical manner				
Learning objectives are clearly written Objectives describe what students will				

be able to do or demonstrate.				

Appendix C

Student Participant Protocol

Student Background

Good Morning,

My name is Nicole Chisley and I am a doctoral student at Ball State University. I want to learn about how your school district is providing alternative pathways for students to graduate from high school. I appreciate your participation in helping me understand the different experiences and choices you have been offered. I would also like your permission to record your interview so that I do not miss any of the experiences you share with me today. Before we begin, I would like to give you time to read and sign this consent form.

I would like to make you as comfortable as possible answering the questions today. Everything you share with me today will only be confidential and only I will hear and know your responses.

Student Experiences

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
    a. Listen for: family, favorite courses, interests outside of school.
2. Tell me about your experiences in the school you attended before coming to Endor High School.
    a. Describe a day in your life as a student in the traditional school you attended.
    b. Tell me about your social experiences at the Rival HS before coming to Endor High School.
    c. Tell me about your social experiences at Endor High School.
    d. Explain your academic experiences at Rival HS.
    e. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings regarding the support you received at Rival HS.
    f. (If not answered in #2) Why did you decide to leave Rival HS?
3. Tell me about your experiences at Endor High School.
    a. Describe a day in your life as a student at Endor High School.
    b. Tell me about your social experiences at Endor High School.
    c. Explain your academic experiences at Endor High School.
    d. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings regarding the support you receive here at Endor High School.
    e. Tell me about the decisions you have made while attending Endor High School that have influenced what you plan to do after graduating.
    f. Please describe how related or connected you feel in the Endor High School learning environment.
4. How will you know that you have been successful here at Endor High School?
5. What are your post-graduation plans?

6. Tell me about decisions you have made while attending Endor High School that have helped you develop you post-graduation goals.Tell me about the process that you experienced when you decided your academic and post-graduation goals.
   - Were you given the opportunity to be the only voice in making your decisions?
   - How important was it or was it not for you to be the sole decision maker when deciding upon your goals.
7. Describe how related or connected you feel in the Endor High School learning environment and the other Endor High School students.
   - Describe the differences between your learning experience at Endor High School been and your learning experiences at Rival HS.
     - Listen for academic and social differences
   - Explain specific things that the teachers and staff at Endor High School do to make your school experience different from your experiences at Rival HS.

Student Experiences: Competency, Relatedness, Autonomy

8. Do you feel connected to the school teachers, and students? Tell me about experiences you have had that have made you feel connected to the school, teachers, and others.
   - What activities do you participate in before and after school?
   - Are these activities that are connected to Endor High School or an outside agency like the YMCA?
   - Tell me about the extra-curricular activities you participate in at Endor High School.
   - How do you feel about not being able to participate in extra-curricular activities here at Endor High School?
9. Explain drawbacks you experience at Endor High School.
10. Tell me about your classes.
    - What kind of activities do you teachers have you do during class?
    - Tell me the ways your teachers presented the material that you had to learn.
11. Tell me about the teachers and the principal here at Endor High School.
    - Do the staff meet your specific needs when it comes to making decisions or learning?
12. What is the Endor High School process for selecting courses and setting post-graduation goals?
    - How much involvement do students have in the process?

13. Now that you have attended Endor High School, tell me about specific skills you have acquired.
    - How has Endor High School prepared you to make decisions regarding your future and future education options?
14. Tell me about how Endor High School staff motivates you to learn and to your best.
    - What incentives does the school offer Endor High School students?

- Explain the impact that rewards have on students striving towards accomplishing their goals. (i.e. attendance, completing assignments, and graduating)

16. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience at Endor High School or Rival High School?

Appendix D

Staff Participant Protocol

Good Morning,

My name is Nicole Chisley and I am a doctoral student at Ball State University. I am performing a case study on how your school district is providing alternative pathways for students to graduate from high school. I appreciate your participation in helping me understand the different experiences and choices you have been offered. I would also like your permission to record your interview so that I do not miss any of the experiences you share with me today. Before we begin, I would like to give you time to read and sign this consent form.

I would like to make you as comfortable as possible answering the questions today. Everything you share with me today will only be confidential and only I will hear and know your responses.

Staff Experiences with students

1. Tell me about your background as an educator.
    - How did you become an educator here a Endor High School?
    - What appealed to you about Endor High School?
2. Tell me about your experiences here at Endor High School as an educator.
3. How do students find out about Endor High School.
    - Tell me how students become a student at Endor High School.
    - What would you say the leading reason most students have for choosing to attend Endor High School.
4. Explain the different types of supports that are available to students.
5. Describe the different types of interactions you have with students at Endor High School.
    - How would you explain those interactions?
6. Tell me about a day in your life as a staff member here at Endor High School.
7. Describe the skill set of an incoming Endor High School student.
    - How would you describe the learning styles of your students?
8. Tell me how you know a student has been successful here at Endor High School.
    - Tell me how you would describe the level of success for participant one, two, and three.
9. Explain the students at Endor High School have to interact socially with others.
    - How do the staff at Endor High School provide opportunities for students to feel connected to the school, teachers, and other students?
10. Tell me about the steps or the process the staff uses to help students create post-graduate goals.
11. How would you describe the interactions with Participant One is having here at Endor High School?
    (Ask the same question regarding Participant Two and Participant Three)

Staff Experiences as professionals

12. How would you describe your teaching style?
    Administrator: How would you describe your administrative style?
13. Describe the different types of supports that are available to the staff at YLS.
    - Tell me about professional learning and teacher collaboration.
    - Explain the typical PL session.
    - Administrator: What types of professional learning activities do you provide teachers?
14. Tell me about the school climate here at Endor High School.
15. Tell me about the communication with parents.
16. Describe the process you use to create lessons for your students.
    - What types of strategies do you use?
    - What types of things do you use to help you plan lessons (data, content, etc?)
    - Tell about the different strategies you use to address the skill gaps that students have in your class.
17. How do you know that a student has been successful when they leave Endor High School?
18. How rigorous would you describe the education opportunities students receive at Endor High School?

Appendix E

Parent Protocol

Good Morning,

My name is Nicole Chisley and I am a doctoral student at Ball State University. I am performing a case study on how your school district is providing alternative pathways for students to graduate from high school. I appreciate your participation in helping me understand the different experiences and choices you have been offered. I would also like your permission to record your interview so that I do not miss any of the experiences you share with me today. Before we begin, I would like to give you time to read and sign this consent form.

I would like to make you as comfortable as possible answering the questions today. Everything you share with me today will only be confidential and only I will hear and know your responses.

Parent's Experiences from their perspective

1. Tell me a little about the educational and social experiences you had as a high school student that have influenced your parenting.

Child's Experiences from the parent's perspective

2. How would you describe the educational experiences your child has had at Rival High School?
3. In what ways have your child's experiences at Endor HS been different than those they had at Rival High School?
   Probe: How do you perceive the similarities and differences between your experiences and the experiences your child has had in the traditional high school?
4. Tell me about your child's strengths.
5. How did you find out about Endor High School?
6. Why did you decide to allow your child to attend Endor High School?
7. What choices do you and your child have at Endor High School?
   Probe: How did you know that this was the best option for your child?
8. What are the things that you like and dislike about Endor High School?

Parent's Interaction with the Endor High School Staff and Administration

9. Tell me about the interaction and communication you have with school staff and administration.
10. Tell me about the opportunities you have to have input in the educational choices your child needs to making post-graduation plans.(Self Determination-Competency)
11. Tell me how many opportunities you receive to help set goals with your child and the school staff.(Self Determination-Autonomy)

If you could give the administration or school district suggestions on how to provide alternative graduation pathways to students, what would you tell them?

References

Alvarez, S. (2015). *Is alternative education a good idea for your kid?* Retrieved from http://stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org

Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(1), 163-206.

Ashcroft, R. (1999). Training and professional identity for educators in alternative education Settings. *The Clearing House, 73*(2), 82-85.

Assor, A., & Tal, K. (2012). When parents' affection depends on child's achievement: Parental conditional positive regard, self-aggrandizement, shame, and coping in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 35,* 249-260. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.10.004

Barkhurst, M., & Wolf, W.C., Jr. (1979). Public alternative school proliferation. *The Clearing House, 52,* 343-347.

Berry, B. (2001). No shortcuts to preparing good teachers. *Educational Leadership, 58*(8), 32-36.

Blazar, D., Litke, E., & Barmore, J. (2016). What does it mean to be ranked a "high" or "low" value-added teacher? Observing differences in instructional quality across districts. *American Educational Research Journal, 53,* 324-259. Retrieved from http://aerj.aera.net

Bommarito, D., & Matsuda, P. K. (2015). *Sage Encyclopedia on intercultural: Constructivism competence.* Boston: Sage Publications.

Boyer, R., & Harten, C. (1985). Administrators' receptivity to nontraditional goals. *The Journal of Higher Education, 56,* 206-219.

Cachia, Romina & Punie, Yves. (2012). Teacher Collaboration in the Context of Networked Learning. Current eTwinning Practices and Future Perspectives. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net.

Conger, R. (2009). Comentary on Grolnick and Pomerantz, Issues and challenges in studying parental control: Toward a new conceptualization. *Child Development Perspectives, 3,* 173-175.

Conley, B. E. (2002). *Alternative schools: A reference handbook.* Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Conrath, J. (2001). Changing the odds for young people: Next steps for alternative education, *The Phi Delta Kappan, 82,* 585-587.

Creswell, J. (2014). Qualitative methods (4th ed.), *Research Design*, p.183-193. Los Angeles.

Sage Publications, Inc.

Dakin, W. S. (1914). A plan for training teachers while in service. *The Elementary School Journal*, *15*, 106-109.

D'Amico, L., & Stein, M. (2002). Inquiry at the crossroads of policy and learning: A study of a district-wide literacy initiative. *Teachers College Record*, *104,* 1313-1344.

Deal, T. E., & Nolan, R. R. (1978). *Alternative schools: Ideologies, realities, guidelines*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, *55*, 66-78.

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macro theory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology*, *49*, 182-185.

Deci, E., Koestner, R., and Ryan, R. (1999). A meta-analysis review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *125,* 627-668.

De La Rosa, D. (1998). Why alternative education works. *The High School Journal*, 81, 268-272.

Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. Educational Researcher,38(3),181–199.

Desautels, L. (2015, May18). 3 Things students desire to hear from teachers. *Edutopia.* Retrieved from www.edutopia.org.

Devlin, A., Dutton, S., & Singer, J. (1998). Racial identity of children in integrated, predominantly white and black schools. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *138*(1), 41-53.

Doll, J., Eslami, Z., and Walters, L. (2013). Understanding why students drop out of high school, according to their own reports: Are they pushed or pulled, or do they fall out? A Comparative Analysis of Seven Nationally Representative Studies. *Sage Open*, 1-15. doi:10.1177/2158244013503834

Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (2007). Self-determination in secondary transition assessment. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 32*, 181-190.

Flynn, P., Mesibov, D., Vermette, P., & Smith, R. (2013). *Applying standards-based constructivism: Secondary.* Florence, GB: Routledge.

Foley, R., & Pang, L. (2006). Alternative education programs: Program and student characteristics. *The High School Journal*, *89*(3), 10-21.

Gagne, M., & Deci, E. (2005). Self-Determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26,* 331-362.

Gatto, J. (2011). A polemic against schooling. *Education Revolution, 23*(1), 1-10.

Germain, R., Carten, R., & Meland, J. (1975). Roseville faces disaffection with alternative high schools. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 56*, 637-638.

Graves, I. (2011, March 9). Bringing democracy to education. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from

p.1-4.

Gregory, T. (2001). Fear of success? Ten ways alternative schools pull their punches. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 82*, 577-581.

Grolnick, W. S. (2015). Mothers' motivation for involvement in their childeren's schooling: Mechanisms and outcomes. *Motivation Emotion, 39*, 63-73. doi:10.1007/s11031-014-9423-4

Guskey, T. (2015). Mastery learning. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2*, 752-759.

Hellstorm, W. (1978). Reaching nontraditional students. *Modern Language Association*, p.22-27.

Helmore, G. A. (2014). *A summary of the general theories of Piaget: The Piagetian concept of intelligence and its development.* London, GB: Pergamon.

Jang, H., Reeve, J., and Halusic, M. (2016). A new autonomy-supportive way of teaching that increases conceptual learning: Teaching in students' preferred ways. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 84*, 686-701.

Jones, O. (August, 1922). Professional training for teachers of city schools. *The Journal of Education, 96*(4), 100.

Kim, J., & Taylor, K. (2008). Rethinking alternative education to break the cycle of educational inequality and inequity. *The Journal of Educational Research, 101*, 207-219.

Krei, M., & Shoulders, T. (2015). Rural high school teachers' self-efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. *American Secondary Education, 44*(1), 50-61.

Koppich, J. (1997). Considering **nontraditional** alternatives: Charters, private contracts, and vouchers. *The Future of Children, 7*(3), 96-111

Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wycoff, J. (2002). Teacher sorting and the plight of urban schools: A descriptive analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(1), 37-62.

Lee, R., Eckrich, L., Lackey, C., & Showalter, B. (2010). Pre-Service teacher pathways to urban teaching: A partnership model for nurturing community-based urban teacher preparation. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *37*(3), 101-122.

Mageau, G., Bureau, J., Ranger, F., Allen, M., & Soenens, B. (2016). The role of parental achievement goals in predicting autonomy-supportive and controlling parenting. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *25*, 1702-1711. doi:10.1007/s10826-015-0341-1

Marklund, S. (1968). Training teachers for the schools of today. *International Review of Education*, *14*, 432-445.

Martin, R. (2000). *Paths of learning: An introduction to educational alternatives*. Retrieved from http://www. radical.org/manyworlds/Pol.html

McGee, J. (2001). Reflections of an alternative school administrator. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *82*, 588-591.

McHugh, R., Horner, C., Colditz, J., and Wallace, T. (2013). Bridges and barriers: Adolescent perceptions of student-teacher relationships. *Urban Education*, *48*(1), 9-43.

McLaughlin, J. (2019). The appeal of Alternative Education. Retrieved from http://www.educationnext.org

Miles, M. B., and Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.,) p.10-12. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mintz, J. (2015.). Education revolution-alternative education resource. Retrieved from http://ww.educationrevolution.org/store

Mulcahy, D. G. (2013). *Transforming schools: Alternative perspectives on school reform*. Charlotte, NC : Information Age Publishing. (p. 67-86)

Neumann, R. (1994). A report from the 23rd international conference on alternative education. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *75*, 547-549.

O'Day, J. (September, *2002*) Complexity, Accountability, and School Improvement. *Harvard Educational Review*: (72)3; 293-329.

Patton, M. (2002). Strategic themes in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. p.37-73. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Parrett, W. (1981). Conventional vs. alternative schools: How different are the teachers? *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *62*, 603. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20386038

Paul, J. (2019). Education choice 2019 and beyond. *ExcelinEd*. Retrieved from http://www.excelined.org

Phillips, R. (2011). Toward authentic student-centered practices: Voices of alternative school students. *Education and Urban Society, 45*, 668-699.

Pomerantz, E., & Grolnick, W. (2009). Toward a clear inclusive conceptualization of parental control: Reply to the commentaries. *Child Development Perspectives, 3*, 176-177.

Plunkett, W. (1975). An alternative approach to career education. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 56,* 628-629.

Provenzo, E. F., Renaud, J., & Provenzo, A. B. (2009). *Encyclopedia of the social and cultural foundations of education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (p. 25-60)

Punch, M. (1974). Problems of research and evaluation in alternative education. *Compensatory* Education, *9*, 101-118.

Reich, K. (2007). Interactive constructivism in education. *Education and Culture, 23*(1) 7-26.

Reimer, M., & Cash, T. (2003). *Alternative schools: Best practices for development and evaluation*. Retrieved from http://www.dropoutprevention.org

Reese, W. (2013). In search of American progressives and teachers. *History of Education, 42,* 320-334. doi:10.1080/0046760X.2013.795616

Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 20,* 54-67.

Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2006). Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality, 74*, 1557-1586.

Sabatino, D., & Fuller, C. (1996). Who attends alternative high schools? *The High School Journal, 79*, 293-297.

Seppala, E. (2016). *Secrets of a happier life.* New York, NY: Time Books. (p.12-21)

Schectman, L., & Leichtentritt, J. (2005). Impact of life skills training on teachers' perceived environment and self-efficacy. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *98,* 144-154.

Schargel, F., & Smink, J. (2004). *Helping students graduate: A strategic approach to dropout prevention.* Larchmont, N.Y: Eye on Education.

Scrofano, D. (1998). *A history of curriculum change in the American high school 1890's-1950's*.

(Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://pubic.callutheran.edu

Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1993). *The hidden injuries of class.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Sentell, W. (2017, October 23). *Report: Louisiana too quick to toss troubled, especially black students; Alternative schools not helping*. Retrieved from https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/education/article_df2af9e0-b5ae-11e7-a466-b7e30395b078.html

Democracy and education 1916, by John Dewey. (2008). *Schools: Studies in Education, 5*(1/2), 87-95. doi:10.1086/591813

Tobin, T., & Sprague, J. (1999). Alternative education programs for at-risk youth: Issues, best practices, and recommendations. *Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior*, *42*(4), 3-20.

Tyack, D. (1974). *The one best system*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (p. 177-199).

Vallerand, R., Fortier, M., and Guay, F. (1997). Self-determination and persistence in a real-life setting: Toward a motivational model of high school dropout. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *72*, 1161-1176.

Wai, J. (2014). *One size does not fit all: The need for variety in learning*. Retrieved from: https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/author/mindshift/

Wagner, T. (2008). *The global achievement gap*: *Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need and what we can do about it?* New York: Basic Books.

Watson, S. (2011). Somebody's gotta fight for them: A disadvantaged and marginalized alternative school's learner-centered culture of learning. *Urban Education*, *46*, 1496-1525.

Yoder, N. (2014). Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that support social-emotional learning. American Institutes for Research. [Google Scholar]

Yip, T. (2018). Ethnic/racial identity: A double-edged sword? Association with discrimination and psychological outcomes. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 27(3), 170-175.

Yin, R. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York: The Guilford Press.