

Student Choice: The Effects on Motivation and Student Academic Achievement

by

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Bachelor of Education, University of Alberta, 2007

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This project is a student survey based on choice in the classroom (course work, assignments, and projects) as well as during a block of student selected time (FLEX) and how these choice opportunities impact student academic motivation. This survey was constructed based on the literature available in the area of student choice, motivation, autonomy and interest. The survey can be adjusted to fit many learning environments and is designed to provide administrators and school leaders feedback on the choices offered to students in their school as well as how students feel the choices they are offered affect their motivation and learning.

Key words: student choice, student motivation, student autonomy, student interest, self-determination theory, FLEX, survey design

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Entering a Changing Profession

When I started my teaching career 8 years ago the transition from a teacher-led classroom to a student-centered classroom was becoming a large focus in my school district. In that first year of my career I attended many professional development sessions on inquiry, engaging group work and how to foster student-centered learning. During this time, I was very fortunate to be part of a school that was very collaborative, although I know this isn't the case for many first year teachers. Working with my colleagues gave me first hand insight to what is possible when many come together to work towards a common goal and I wanted my students to feel the same success.

As a first year teacher I had enveloped myself into my newly budding career and was eager to learn everything I could to create a better learning environment for my students, in turn improving my own teaching skills and style. Little did I know that through these professional development sessions and collaboratively working with colleagues my own pedagogy was being shaped.

A Mix of Two Worlds

Over the years my teaching assignments have been a mix of grades 7-9 English Language Arts and Mathematics courses. To many this seems like a very strange combination but these subjects are actually my major and minor for my Bachelor of Education degree. Over the years these two subjects have provided me a mental break from each other but they have also helped me show students that you can use strategies from one class to help in another. Reading and decoding skills taught in language arts can be very helpful when working through word problems in math; and using different strategies to solve the same problem in math can show students that

there are different methods to construct a story or an essay. While still fostering a collaborative student-centered learning environment the need for more differentiation in the classroom became apparent because of the focus on inclusive education.

Inclusive Classroom Settings

Inclusion of students with all abilities has been another focus during my career. My district has moved away from exclusive district programs that focus on cognitive ability and moved towards inclusive classroom settings. This looks different at every school but could include students with mild to severe cognitive delays, students with various learning disabilities, and students with physical disabilities. This movement made the transition to student-centered learning even more apparent because there was very little chance that teacher-led instruction would meet the needs of all students in my classroom. This would have been a very difficult reality for teachers who were still stuck in a traditional teacher-led instruction method because what may have worked in the past may no longer be effective.

Many professional development sessions on differentiated instruction emerged and offering choice was being offered as a way of differentiating instruction. Choice became something that was given to students with learning disabilities or cognitive delays as a way for them to engage with the material that was being explored in the classroom. The success of offering choice as a means of differentiation was undeniable, students reported being engaged because they were able to choose options that aroused their own interests. The next question to emerge was: why not offer choice to all students?

Choice in the Classroom

With differentiated instruction and what is best for student learning in mind, choice has become a staple in my classroom. My language arts students often have choice around what

essay topic they would like to write on or through which medium they can complete a project with. My math students are given many strategies with how to solve a problem and then are able to choose which one or two they would like to use when working on longer or more complex problems. I have found students seem more engaged when they have choice because they have been given some of the control over their learning and because they chose a certain topic or method feel invested in the cause.

As well, it is much more engaging to read a few essays on a few different topics than many essays on the same topic. I am more engaged as a reader and always surprised with the connections that my students can make. Each bring their own personal experiences to their writing and I don't feel they would be as engaging if all students were focused to write on the same topic. I also feel that providing students with choice allows them to showcase what they are good at. Recently my students were given the freedom to express the requirements of a project using any medium they chose. The results of this were outstanding and ranged from the standard paper, scissors and glue to the creation of videogames showcasing a characters journey throughout a novel. I would have never dreamed to create a project where student make a video game because I wouldn't know where to begin but by giving students the freedom to choose they were able to teach me something new and demonstrate their learning in a meaningful way.

Walking a Fine Line

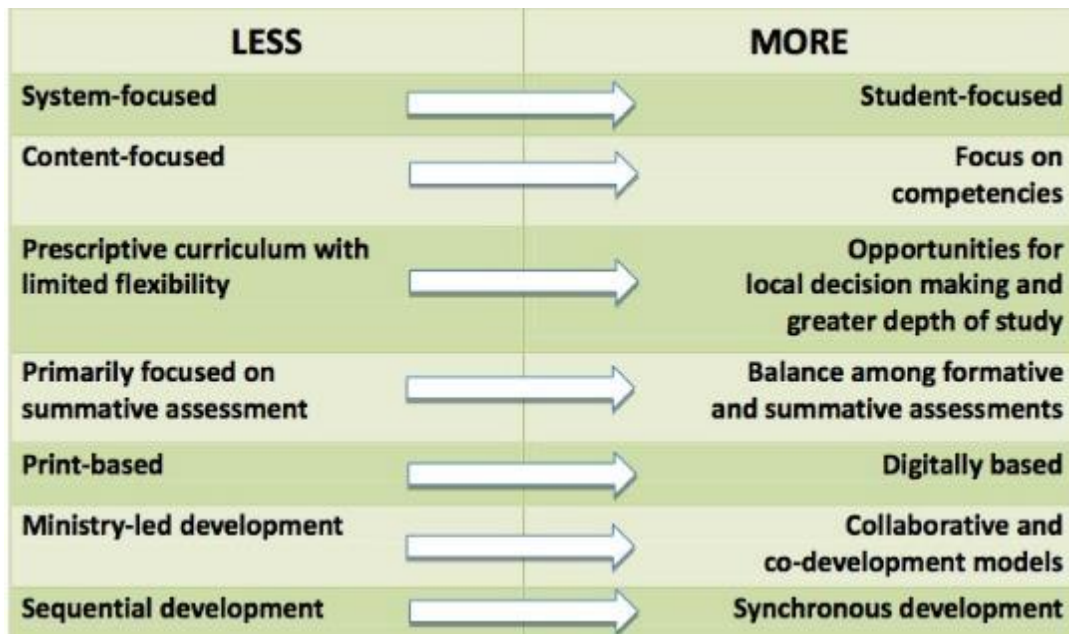
Although providing students with choice can tap into creativity that was previously unknown, it is not always possible. There are components of the curriculum that students need to learn in one particular way or with one particular format. For example when I teach the business letter or essay writing there are certain component that students need to produce and the

overall output of these pieces of writing looks similar from one student to the next, yet, as mentioned above, choice can be offered in the topic that they write on.

Balancing when to provide choice and when not to provide choice can be like walking on a tight rope. On one hand I want to provide student with choice so they have some autonomy over their learning and can access their background information to help them produce their best quality of work. At the same time I want to prepare students with skills for life and sometimes in life there is no choice and they will still need to put their best foot forward. Finding a balance between the two can be difficult but will also depend on the subject area, grade level and type of students that make up each individual class. Garnett (2008) states education “is about shared responsibility, mutual respect and clear rules of engagement with professional sharing processes and power with the young people in their charge” (p. 37). I have found that by developing a trusting relationship with students I am able to explain to them the reasons why choice has or has not been given and because of the rational explanation students trust that the best decision for their learning has been made. Building a relationship that fosters the shared responsibility that Garnett (2008) mentions may become more common in Alberta classrooms with the introduction of curriculum redesign.

Alberta Curriculum Redesign

In 2010, Alberta Education began a movement to redesign the current Alberta curriculum so that an educated Albertan in 2030 would be an engaged thinker and ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit (Alberta Education, 2010a). Work began on how these goals were going to be accomplished and the result was that shifts in the current curriculum needed to occur, as seen in Figure 1. These shifts would take what happens in the classroom from a more teacher centered-learning environment where the teacher is at the front providing the students with



(Alberta Education, 2010c)

Figure 1. Alberta Education Curriculum Redesign shifts

information, usually with the assistance of a textbook that students have in front of them, to a system where student-centered learning is the focus and where students are learning the curriculum alongside with competencies that will benefit them in life. Also, the textbooks that students so routinely carry with them from class to class would move towards a more digital form. Another change to classroom learning involves the chance to become flexible with the curriculum. This has occurred with the introduction of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (Alberta Education, 2013) in Alberta high schools and some junior high schools. At my school we have decided to refer to this as FLEX; this is the term that will be used throughout the rest of this project. FLEX blocks allow students to choose where they want to be for a pre-determined amount of time. In the past, the rigidity of the curriculum would not have allowed this possibility for students. Along with the changes in the classroom comes changes to assessment practices. Assessment will continue to be a blend of formative and summative

assessments throughout the year but a large change is coming in terms of Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs). This shift will bring about the move towards the Student Learner Assessments (SLAs) which will provide teachers information about where a student is at academically at the beginning of the year and provide ways the teacher can support student learning throughout the year rather than test what a student knows at the end of the year as the PATs have done. This is in its beginning stages at the moment with pilot tests occurring at the grade 3 level.

Embedded in many of these shifts is opportunity for choice to become a staple in classrooms around the province and ways for teachers with more traditional classroom styles to introduce choice in a more manageable way. As more of these shifts become the norm in Alberta classrooms, I feel that choice will also be found in more ways than it is currently being used. Once again going back to walking the fine line, it is important that choice be used in a way that motivates students rather than just be present to show that curriculum redesign is happening in the classroom.

Statement of the Problem

It is easy for teachers to give students choice in many areas of their learning but if students are not motivated when they are given choice then there is no real reason behind the teacher providing choice in the first place. It has been shown that choice does affect motivation (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Katz & Assor, 2007; Patall et al., 2008) but the findings have yet to pin point the specific ways in which choice in an educational setting has a fully positive effect on student motivation. Hopefully, the information found in this project can help educators as they move through curriculum redesign and the implementation of the redesign shifts finds ways to motivate students while creating an autonomous environment where choice is prevalent.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to look at different ways that choice can be offered to students in an educational setting and when students find choice motivating and when they do not. This will be looked at within a classroom setting as well as when students have the choice to choose which classes they would like to attend. This project will directly address the following question: What is the relationship between student academic choice of grade 9 students and levels of academic motivation?

Summary

A shift in the ways students learn in Alberta is upon us and will continue to impact teaching and curriculum for many years to come. As education moves into a new direction student choice is going to become a predominate fixture in Alberta classrooms. While it fits into many of the curriculum redesign shifts, it is important to find the best ways to use choice so that student motivation is at its peak. Understanding the research that has already been done in this area is key to moving forward to completing this project and positively affecting how choice is used in Alberta classrooms.

The following chapter will provide a review of the literature on student choice and how it affects student motivation. It will also review literature on students choosing how to spend some of their school day and what effect that has on their motivation. Chapter 3 is a detailed look at the project created to measure student motivation when given choice in the classroom and during FLEX. Finally, Chapter 4 will provide a reflection on this whole capstone project.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

A move to student-centered learning, which Alberta Education (2010b) defines as the recognition of all students unique interests and learning styles which increases their involvement in decisions to increase their ability to achieve their potential, is apparent in classrooms around the world. This is especially evident in Alberta Education's curriculum redesign document which requires a shift teaching strategies by educators, including embedding student choice into multiple aspects of education. Kohn (1993) states "[e]very day ought to include at least one block of time in which children can decide individually what to do" (p. 13). Through curriculum redesign the idea behind this statement is becoming a reality, taking shape in many different ways in K-12 classrooms around the province.

This chapter will focus specifically on the different research findings around student choice (inconclusive and positive) and how each impacts student motivation. The summary will offer insight to the gaps in this research and how this has led to my research question which will be furthered explored in Chapter 3.

Changing Classroom Dynamics

Classrooms today look very different from the classrooms of the past in both the physical layout and in the ways learning happens. Historically, education was rooted mostly in behaviourism where the teacher was the center of learning. Students would be seated in rows and work from a textbook. The teacher would teach a concept and students would complete an assignment, all to be repeated the next day. Since the late 20th century a shift towards constructivism has emerged. Today, it is not uncommon to find students sitting in groups, working collaboratively and accessing information through personal devices, such as smart

phones, tablets, etc. Students have access to more information than ever before and with the use of personal devices this information is constantly at their fingertips. This can provide great curriculum enhancement opportunities for teachers (i.e., team-teaching and cross curricular projects) but can also create problems when trying to hold student attention. According to the Associated Press the average attention span has dropped from 12 minutes (in 1998) to 5 minutes in (2008) and is even less when watching a video or browsing a webpage (Gaille, 2013). If today's youth are having trouble staying focused for 5 minutes then how are educators expected to hold their attention for a whole class period of 45-65 minutes, all while trying to motivate and engage students?

Education in Alberta is currently undergoing a large change: curriculum is being redesigned, the way curriculum is being delivered is shifting and the way students interact with curriculum is transforming. Two of the principles behind this shift are inclusive, equitable access where “[e]very learner should have fair and reasonable access to educational opportunities regardless of ability, economic circumstance, location, or cultural background” (Alberta Education, 2010a, p. 8) and a responsive, flexible approach meaning students “should have meaningful learning opportunities appropriate to each learner’s developmental stage, including learning that is experiential, multi-disciplinary, community-based, and self-paced” (p. 8). In other words, learning experiences that are created need to be authentic and relevant to each and every student. With these changes comes the need for teachers to re-examine their own pedagogy and to discover ways to keep students engaged and motivated with curriculum.

In addition to the changes in curriculum delivery, classrooms are comprised of students who have a wide spectrum of learning needs: mental health issues, severe cognitive delays, advanced cognitive skills and students at different levels of English language acquisition; it is not

unheard of to have the whole spectrum in one room. Diverse class profiles can make covering curriculum and motivating all students challenging; yet Alberta Education references Politao and Paquin (2000) who indicate when “providing choice and variety, wherever possible, teachers create the most productive learning climate for the most number of students” (Alberta Education, 2010b, p. 9). Though providing choice and variety allows teachers to differentiate learning for a large number of students, it does not ensure student motivation.

As the academic demands on students become greater (both in school and at home) “figuring out what motivates and engages students is essential” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 29). Self-determination theory has been foundational in the research surrounding motivation. In order “[t]o be self-determining means to engage in an activity with a full sense of wanting, choosing and personal endorsement” (Deci, 1992, p. 44). Self-determination theorists studied intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and found that people, in general, are intrinsically motivated when driven by personal reward or enjoyment and are extrinsically motivated when driven by external rewards such as monetary funds (Deci, 1992). As mentioned earlier, the attention spans of youth have significantly decreased from the youth of 10 years ago. This, on top of the difficulty behind fostering motivation, could make the job of classroom teachers even harder; the ideas behind self-determination theory could be a strategy to help educators work through this challenge. Deci and Ryan (1991) suggest competence, autonomy and relatedness are three inherent psychological needs related to fostering intrinsic motivation. Focusing on the components of self-determination is imperative when finding ways to motivate students because when deprived of self-determination students are likely deprived of motivation (Kohn, 1993).

The vision of Alberta Education (2010a) is “to inspire and enable students to achieve success and fulfillment as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit” (p.

7). This is not going to happen by teachers lecturing to them in the classroom; students need to become actively involved with the material they are learning to become motivated to work with the content. The properties of self-determination theory could help Alberta educators achieve this vision by engaging students, fostering autonomy and creating authentic learning. Educators could increase intrinsic motivation in students which could help them become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens. Studies have shown significant correlations between intrinsic motivation and achievement as well as positive academic performance (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008); these studies are rooted in self-determination theory and could be used as tools to help educators motivate the youth in today's classrooms.

The following sections will provide a detailed look at how choice has impacted motivation with specific studies that have examined the effects in a classroom setting.

Effects of Choice in the Classroom

As expected, "self-determination theorists have suggested that choices that allow one's actions to reflect personal values, goals or interests will have the greatest impact on motivation, performance and learning" (Patall et al., 2008, p. 273), yet research on the benefits of student choice vary. Patall et al. (2008) also quotes Lewin (1952) who "showed that choice has a powerful motivating effect, demonstrating that people would be more likely to engage in an activity if they believed they [have] chosen it" (p. 270), which leads to the conclusion that choice has a positive effect. Yet, the authors also state "[t]he context in which choice is administered may also affect the outcome of choice studies" (p. 274). While reading the literature it became apparent that there are choice studies that concluded positive results on motivation but there are also studies that resulted in inconclusive findings. Some of these findings are examined closer below followed by studies resulting in positive outcomes.

Inconclusive Effects. This section looks at the research resulting in inconclusive effects of student choice in the classroom as well as a discussion as to possible reasons for the inconclusive findings.

Through a meta-analysis study, Von Mizener and William's (2009) looked at 29 separate experiments surrounding student choice in the classroom. These experiments looked at students in primary grades all the way to post-secondary students who ranged in age from 3 years old to over eighteen years old. Their findings did not find overly positive results of student choice in the classroom. Choice was preferred to no choice, yet they found that students performed as well or better under no-choice conditions compared to choice conditions on written essays. These authors did indicate that their study included very few students with special learning needs or behavioral problems and that their results could have been impacted because of this reason. Another possible reason for their less than positive results is that the elements of self-determination theory were not present in the options given to students. The students did not feel intrinsically motivated but may have been extrinsically motivated (wanting to get a good grade) so they performed as well on the non-choice options.

Patall, Cooper and Wynn (2010) found similar results when researching how choice effects student homework practices. They found that the "choices of homework assignments seemed to have little effect on the amount of effort students put into doing the homework, the amount of pressure or tension they felt while doing the homework, or their value for the homework" (p. 910). Students seemed to enjoy the choice behind which homework piece they completed, yet they were not overly motivated while completing the homework nor did they feel more confident while completing it.

These findings align with the research conducted by Katz and Assor (2007) who proposed that the lack of positive effects in research regarding choice could have to do with Ullmann-Margalit and Morgenbesser's (1997) differentiation between 'picking' and 'choosing.' Picking "does not necessarily allow expression of the individual's desires or preferences," whereas choosing "involves opportunity for meaningful realization of the individual's desires or preferences" (p. 432). Similarly, Patall, et al. (2008) draw upon Reeve, Nix and Hamm, (2003) who suggested that "manipulations that offer choice between specified task options (i.e., "Do you want to read an essay on plants or animals?") may be less effective than more meaningful choices relating to the actions an individual takes to engage in and complete a task, including choices regarding method, pace or goals" (p. 273). For example, the choice to read two essays on different topic would be viewed as picking rather than choosing. The students involved in Patall, et al.'s (2010) study would have been picking a homework selection rather than choosing. Had they been given a situation where they had been choosing they may have felt more connected to, and therefore more motivated to complete the task. Kohn (1993) states to "deprive [students] of self-determination [means] you have likely deprived them of motivation" (p. 11). The elements of self-determination are not at-play when students are picking, therefore it is not surprising that students were not motivated.

In a study conducted by Myrow (1979), one group of students were allowed to choose their area of study from six options and another group was assigned a topic randomly. He found the "relative freedom to choose the topic of study did not affect retention of the instruction material" (p. 206) rather, that the "choice of topic did have strong effects on students' attitudes towards instruction" (p. 206). Retention, leading to comprehension and application, of the material is a key goal of educators, yet sometimes no matter what the teacher does, not all

students are going to retain the material. A step towards retaining material could be finding ways to positively impact students' attitudes. If students have a positive attitude about what they are learning chances are they will retain the information. Kohn (1993) states "students always have a choice about whether they will learn" (p. 11), focusing on what fosters a positive attitude could lead students to make positive choices about their learning. Whether the teacher provides choice or randomly assigns a topic he/she may not be able to "compel [students] to learn effectively or to care about what they are doing" (Kohn, 1993, p.11). Looking at the ways choice positively impact student learning may be the key to engaging learning experiences and motivating students to care about what they are learning.

Patall, et al. (2008) conclude that there is an optimum number of choices that are going to lead to positive results; "too many choices may lead an individual to feel overwhelmed, and too few choices may not allow the perception of choice to be realized" (p. 273). Iyengar and Lepper (2000) completed 3 studies in which the participants were given a limited choice (6 choices) or an extensive choice (over twenty choices) and they found, in each of their studies, participants experienced more positive experiences when given limited choices rather than extensive choice because they did not feel overwhelmed by the information presented. The authors concluded that these findings could be because the participants experienced "choice overload", as Patall, et al., (2008) indicated, as the participants were worried about making the wrong choice and therefore became unmotivated. Another reason provided was it would take substantial time and effort to make an informed choice therefore leading to participants becoming unmotivated (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). Further to this, Katz and Assor (2007) concluded "[i]n order for choice to have a positive effect on motivation, the options should differ markedly in terms of their importance to the participants, so that the chooser finds at least one of them to be more

relevant, interesting or important” (p. 433). It is possible that the participants in the studies did not find the choices relevant or interesting, therefore they reported that choice did not positively affect their motivation.

Many studies surrounding choice have resulted in inconclusive findings. Some of the reasons for this include participants feeling overwhelmed with the number of the choices given or not being given enough choice to be able to feel connected to any of the options provided. Making personal connections to the choices offered in a classroom appeared very important in the studies that yielded positive results, particularly student interest and autonomy; these studies will be explored in the next section.

Positive Effects. I have spoken to the inconclusive results in the research on choice and how that could apply to a classroom setting, now I will move to the positive findings in the area of choice and how they could relate to classroom practice.

The pressure on teachers to get through curriculum can be very intense possibility causing educators to push students through material; this can often over-shadow teachers providing choices on assignments. The curriculum for each subject can also be quite prescriptive, therefore it is “not always possible to give students choices about *what* they learn, but students can make decisions about *how* they learn” (emphasis in original) (Aldridge, 2007, p. 333). When students are given different strategies to decode material they can choose the one that works best for them, therefore choosing how they learn the curriculum. The educator in Morgan and Wagner’s (2013) study offered students choice around the books they selected to read and how they spent their time reading these books. The teacher was not able to give the students choice about whether they would read or not but by giving choice to how they spent their time completing the requirements lead to “increased student engagement, a deeper sense of

identity, a developed sense of agency, and higher state test scores” (p. 660). Patall, et al., (2010) indicate, “that choice reduces anxiety, and reduced anxiety [also] improves test performance” (p. 705). Flowerday and Schraw (2000) interviewed 36 teachers, using phenomenological methods, and asked them what, when, where, and to whom they offer choice. They found that age was a big contributor in what type of choice teachers offered to their students; “[y]ounger students were given choices about what to do, whereas older students were given more choices about how to do it” (p. 637). Kohn (1993) echoes these findings by indicating that participation can “range from choosing where in an assigned text to start reading to deciding what course to take” (p. 13) but he also cautioned teachers against using only age to determine what choices are given to students because “[w]hile it is obvious that a sixteen year old can make different decisions than a six year old we can’t just assume that students are too young to be able to make decisions” (p. 14). Patall, et al., (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 studies that examined the effect of choice on motivation in variety of settings throughout a variety of age groups. Their results “suggest that choice can have a positive overall effect on intrinsic motivation” (p. 294). As found with student autonomy, choices that are provided on a regular basis and increase over a long period time lead to long term effects and subsequent learning (Patall, et al., 2008; Schraw, Flowerday & Reisetter, 1998).

Interest is also key to fostering motivation in students. If students are not interested in a topic then it is going to be very difficult for teachers to foster intrinsic motivation in students; interest is innate to human beings. Deci (1992) points out that young children spend a large amount of time on activities that interest them which cultivates learning about the world in the process. He goes further to say “[t]he concept of interest has often been associated with intrinsically motivated behaviors because people seem to adopt these behaviors out of interest”

(p. 45). Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) observed “reluctant learners in an alternative high school to learn what factors they saw as contributing to their successes and failures” (p. 34). One of the main themes that ran throughout was that students needed to be “interested in and see the value of the tasks in which they [were] asked to engage” (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005, p. 45). This idea is verified by Katz and Assor (2007) who found “choice of a topic was beneficial because it was relevant to participants’ interests” (p. 432). When a topic taps into a student’s interest they feel connected to the task. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) further this by stating “[e]ffective student-centered approaches use adolescents’ personal experiences as hooks to help them connect with the curriculum” (p. 31). Creating meaning from text and curriculum helps students develop a deeper understanding, the same way that making personal connections with a story can help the reader understand what the characters in the story are experiencing. Dewey (1913), as quoted by Schraw, Flowerday and Lehman (2001), “believed that interest must be present in the classroom to satisfy students’ intellectual and personal needs...[which] could be fostered by providing students with a variety of materials and educational opportunities that promoted challenge and autonomy” (p. 213). As previously stated, classrooms today are dynamic places; by offering students choice and focusing on their interest, the teacher is likely to motivate more students than if all students complete the same task or pick from a couple tasks.

Teaching students how to take responsibility for their actions is something that most teachers want for their students but “if we want children to *take* responsibility for their own behavior, we must first *give* them responsibility” (emphasis in original) (Kohn, 1993, p.11). Giving students responsibility or control over portions of their learning can be difficult because it requires teachers to hand over some of the control – this is imperative to creating a classroom that promotes student autonomy.

Autonomy, like interest, is necessary when developing motivation in students because when an environment is perceived as controlling, self-determination and intrinsic motivation are diminished (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989). Similarly, “[c]hildren in the classrooms of control-oriented teachers showed less intrinsic motivation, perceived themselves as less competent, and felt less good about themselves than students of autonomy-supportive teachers” (Deci, 1992, p. 58). Giving up some of the control to foster student autonomy is a component of the *Alberta High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project* (2013). FLEX is defined as,

“time set aside for students to make decisions about what they will learn, with whom they learn and where they will find support to learn. Rather than the school directing students to engage in activities, flex time hands control over to students to make decisions that support their learning needs and interests” (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 4).

This initiative was started with the removal of the stipulation that each credit earned in Alberta High Schools must be attached to twenty-five hours of instructional time (Carnegie Model) which would allow high schools to provide students with the ability to attend FLEX blocks. Through this process, “teachers have indicated that they are empowering their students to be creative and innovative in their learning” (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 5). Young (2005) states that “[s]tudents’ increased involvement in their own learning process is thought to better prepare them for rapidly changing technologies and business paradigms by developing their ability to learn how to learn in preparation for careers that demand lifelong learning skills” (p. 25). The FLEX initiative develops the abilities that Young (2005) writes about and that are stated in the new vision of Alberta Education’s Curriculum Redesign, as mentioned earlier. This idea is supported by Zuckerman et al. (1978) as quoted by Patall, et al., (2008), who “found that allowing participants to make choices about how to apportion their time, as well as choose

among several versions of a task, enhanced intrinsic motivation” (p. 273). This is echoed by Kohn (1993) who stated “[e]very day ought to include at least one block of time in which children can decide individually what to do” (p. 13). Schools participating in the FLEX initiative are potentially providing this to their students; how this could benefit students in a junior high will be explored in Chapter 3. Patall, et al., (2010) found “student perceptions of receiving autonomy support from their teacher predicted intrinsic motivation” (p. 912). Teachers can continue to affect motivation levels over the long term by providing greater levels of student autonomy (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Student autonomy, no matter how small the amount, is beneficial to student motivation.

It Takes a Village

“Choice increased feelings of self-determination by satisfying the need for autonomy. In turn, increased self-determination leads to increased intrinsic motivation, interest, and engagement” (Schraw, et al., 2001, p. 215). Each component (choice, interest, and autonomy) can work independently to increase motivation but when they work together, deeper engagement is created. Creating one assignment that interests all students is nearly impossible but “[a]llowing students to determine the content (with the guideline that it be appropriate for school) also means students are likely to pick topics they can work with successfully and that relate to their lives” (Gardiner, 2014, p. 68). Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) observed a particular student become interested when allowed to read books of his choice because they gave him good ideas for his artwork; “instead of reading because he had to, he read because of the relevance for his personal goals” (p. 45). Choice allowed this student to engage an interest to his own life; therefore he placed value in the choice.

Cushman (2014) proposed the formula for motivation is “Value x Expectation = Motivation. As the multiplication sign indicates, both value and expectancy on the part of the learner are necessary to motivation; if either of these factors is zero, then motivation will also be zero” (p. 40). If teachers are able to give students a sense of value and create an expectation of success through choice, students should be motivated. Further to this, providing choice to students may be the most concrete way for teachers to show students that they have autonomy in the classroom which leads to motivation (Patall, et al., 2008; Patall, et al., 2010). Flowerday and Schraw (2000) reported teachers claimed that choice enhanced motivation by increasing interest through providing opportunities for students to select areas they are already interested in as well as created a possibility for students to generate interests they did not know they had. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) state “[c]lassrooms that capitalize on the power of self-determination can substantially increase achievement and motivation” (p. 32). Schraw, et al., (2001) take this further by saying “increased self-determination leads to increased intrinsic motivation, interest and engagement” (p. 215). The three components create a cyclical effect and become dependent on each other to provide the highest level of motivation such as “when choice is separated from other aspects of autonomy support and self-realization (e.g., interest, values, volition, and goals), the act of choosing is not the major motivating property of choice” (Katz & Assor, 2007, p. 432). Just like it takes a village to raise a child, motivation can reach a higher level when choice, interest and autonomy are in play simultaneously.

Summary

Self-determination theory plays a foundational role in the research on student motivation. While research has shown that individual student interest, autonomy and choice can affect motivation, together they have the greatest impact (Patall et al., 2010; Schraw et al., 2001;

Toshlis & Nakkula, 2012). The most controversial area around the effects on motivation was with student choice.

The research that has been done (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011; Morgan & Wagner, 2013; Schraw et al., 1998) has specifically looked at ways in which choice was offered within a specific class or subject area but does not go into detail when students have choice about what subjects they spend their time in. Von Mizener and Williams (2009) state “educators do not permit students to determine the curriculum or the school calendar” yet the Alberta FLEX initiative opens up the possibility for students to choose where they spend their time, therefore giving them an opportunity to focus in on a portion of the curriculum and calendar for a portion of their week. The research for this initiative is specifically targeting students at the high school level but does not give suggestions about what this could look like in a junior high setting. This gap is where I am going to conduct my research; looking at how FLEX opportunities in a junior high setting motivate students while they are participating in FLEX but also how it motivates them once back in the subject area that their FLEX focused on. For example, if a student chooses to take a FLEX session on using transitions effectively in writing, would they feel motivated while completing a writing assignment in their Language Arts class?

With this in mind, Chapter 3 will explore the relationship between student academic choice of grade 9 students and levels of academic motivation. I will specifically be examining the effects of motivation when choice is offered within a regular classroom setting and when it is offered to students through a modified FLEX model adapted for a junior high school. My hypothesis are as follows:

1. Students will be intrinsically motivated when they are given choice during specific assignments.
2. Students will be intrinsically motivated when given choice of FLEX sessions.
3. Students will report higher levels of motivation in relation to a specific subject after choosing to attend a FLEX session in that subject

Chapter 3 – The Project

The Journey Thus Far

Alberta Education is in the process of implementing a curriculum redesign that focuses on a more student centered learning environment. One of the strategies to achieving this is offering students choice in their day-to-day classes and in how they can demonstrate their learning (Alberta Education, 2014). When exploring the literature surrounding student choice two apparent sides appeared – the positive and the inconclusive. The positive findings focused around Deci's (1992) self-determination theory and student interest playing a key role in maintaining motivation (Patall, et al., 2008; Katz & Assor, 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The other side to the literature presented the idea that student choice is a balancing act between too few choices which leaves students feeling like they are really picking rather than making a choice (Ullmann-Margalit & Morgenbesser, 1997) and too many choices that leave students confused and overwhelmed (Patall, et al., 2008).

The literature that was explored in Chapter 2 presented positive findings and inconclusive findings, but there was also a significant amount of literature on how students can play a role in the classes they attend during their school day (Aldridge, 2007; Kohn, 1993; Patall, et al., 2008). This literature was specific to the FLEX initiative currently emerging in Alberta and specifically at my school. The main themes of student interest, choice, motivation, and autonomy over their school day are the foundation for the survey created and discussed in this chapter.

This chapter will explore the development of a survey designed for grade 9 student responders. The survey will specifically address how students feel about choice in their subject areas, in association with FLEX blocks and how they feel choice effect their academic motivation. The steps taken to develop the survey are discussed in detail along with the reasons

behind why decisions were made. If I were to use this to gather data within my school, I would move towards a pilot study and then use those results to adjust questions before a large number of students completed the survey to ensure questions are asking what they were designed to address.

Background Motivation for this Project

The way someone learns varies from person to person and can be dependent on the learning environment; the same can be said for how individuals are motivated. Sometimes it is easy for educators to see what motivated students look like and other times it seems impossible to get students motivated. As a language arts teacher, motivating students who view themselves as struggling readers or writers can be difficult. I have had students who have expressed that they feel they are unable to get ideas out of their brains and onto paper numerous times and trying to engage these students can be difficult. It took me a while to realize that students become more motivated when they are able to connect to what they are writing about rather than just writing on a random topic. Visualizing what student engagement looks like depends on the type of students in the class and the type of learners they are. One student may look motivated and engaged within a project when really their mind is anywhere but on the task at hand. Another student may look off task but actually tackling the assignment in an abstract way. The survey designed in this project is intended to provide real time information to teachers on what motivates their students.

As Alberta curriculum shifts towards a more student-centered approach (Alberta Education, 2010b) it is very important for teachers to take into account what motivates their students. The literature strongly suggested that student choice plays an important role in student motivation but cautions that too few options really isn't providing choice (Ullmann-Margalit &

Morgenbesser's, 1997) where as too many choices can be overwhelming and can lead to students becoming unmotivated (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). It seems like educators need to walk a very fine line when providing choices in order to engage student motivation, but where exactly is that line. Is three options too few? How many is too many? It are these questions that lead me towards developing a student survey surrounding choice and student motivation. The results of the survey would provide teachers with a better understanding where the line is for their particular group of students, therefore understanding how student choice can best be used, in a particular classroom, to motivate student learning.

The Survey

The Background to Survey Design

O'leary (2014) defines surveying as "the process of collecting data through a questionnaire that asked a range of individuals the same questions related to their characteristics, attributes, how they live or their opinions" (p. 202). There are limitations and benefits of using a survey; they will be outlined in this section. O'leary (2014) indicates that surveys are one of the most common ways to collect primary data but that they are difficult to create and "notoriously difficult to get right" (p. 201). In fact, Field (2015) says the first rule of survey design is to not design your own survey. Unfortunately, due to the research area developing my own survey is the route that needs to be taken; as with every type of research there are benefits and disadvantages to survey and survey analysis.

Limitations of Surveys. It is not uncommon for people to cringe when they hear the word "survey." Many people dislike participating in surveys and often avoid them at all costs; this could be because many of the surveys out there are poorly designed yet the results that these bad surveys generate are reported as truth and possibly used in decision making (O'leary, 2014).

Ross (2006) states that another disadvantage is a lack of control over who does and does not respond. It could be very frustrating if few very responses come in and the survey is used for decision making purposes. On the other hand, the response rate could be high, yet the questions on the survey could be very narrow, therefore still negatively impacting potential decision making (Ross, 2006). Caution needs to be taken when developing the survey that the questions are not too narrow and that respondents have ample opportunity to complete the survey. Ross (2006) cautions “[b]ecause decisions about policy and practice are made from survey results, consideration must be given to the representativeness of both the survey content in relation to the topic addressed and the sample in relation to the population” (p. 984). O’leary (2014) provides a list of challenges that need to be kept in mind when developing surveys:

- capturing the quantifiable data you require;
- gathering in-depth data;
- getting a representative sample to respond;
- getting anyone at all to respond;
- needing proficiency in statistical analysis;
- only getting answers to the questions you have thought to ask
- going back to your respondents if more data is required.

(O’leary, 2014, p. 204)

Benefits of Surveys. Although survey design can be tedious work, there are lots of advantages to using them in research; “[n]ot only do you get to ask what you want, when you want, you also get to ask it how you want – you get to choose the wording, the order, the prompts the probes” (O’leary, 2014, p. 201). O’leary takes this a step further by explaining when creating your own survey ‘[y]ou have data expressly generated for your own research

purposes, and this will surely give you insights not available if you had used a pre-existing data set” (p. 202). Since student choice in the classroom is a growing trend, and with FLEX being in its beginning years in Alberta, depending on a survey that encompasses student choice in these capacities is highly unlikely. Therefore, in order to get the information specific to student choice and motivation the creation of a new survey is necessary. Both O’leary (2014) and Ross (2006) stress an advantage of surveys is that a large population can be reached. Getting students to complete surveys in school can be relatively easy since there are many options during the day as to when students can complete the survey, especially if it does not take a large amount of time.

O’leary (2014) also offers a list of advantages of surveys:

- reach a large number of respondents;
- represent an even larger population;
- allow for comparisons;
- generate standardized, quantifiable, empirical data;
- generate qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions;
- be confidential and even anonymous.

(O’leary, 2014, p. 204).

Both the advantages and disadvantages need to be kept in mind when developing and administering a survey. Earlier, O’leary’s (2014) list of challenges to survey design were presented. I feel that the survey designed in this project will successfully overcome the challenges identified. For example, completing this survey with students at my site will ensure that I have not only individuals to respond to my survey but also a representative sample; it also allows me to revisit my respondents if needed. I also feel that because this survey was tailor-made for a specific purpose capturing the data required would be successful. While this

addresses the majority of the challenges O’leary (2014) presented, it is still important to remain aware “[w]hen using or designing surveys, the researcher or administrator must be cognizant of issues that can affect the validity of inferences made from results” (Ross, 2006, p. 985). It is through finding a balance between the advantages and disadvantages that the best results will occur and therefore the best decision can be made. It is important to remember “[i]f the information is important enough to gather in the first place, then it logically follows that it is important that the information be accurate” (Ross, 2006, p. 985).

This Project. The survey created for this project will target a grade 9 student population and will ask questions regarding their motivation level towards an assignment, project or subject when given choice in a class and/or during FLEX, which was defined in chapter 2 as “time set aside for students to make decisions about what they will learn, with whom they learn and where they will find support to learn. Rather than the school directing students to engage in activities, flex time hands control over to students to make decisions that support their learning needs and interests” (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 4). Surveys conducted in an educational setting “provide school personnel and educational researchers an avenue through which a large number of people can be accessed for feedback or information” (Ross, 2006, p. 984). The information gained from this survey will help administrators, school leaders and classroom teachers gain insight on how student choice can influence student motivation and when student motivation is the highest.

The Process

O’leary (2014) lays out clear steps that need to be taken when planning and developing a survey. The following are the steps that I worked through when developing my survey and the rationale behind each.

Survey planning. I chose a cross-sectional survey which is defined as a survey “that uses a sample or cross-section of respondents [with the goal of representing a] target population and generalize findings back to that population” (O’leary, 2014, p. 203). I chose this type because this way I would be able to sample a selection of grade 9 students rather than having all grade 9 students complete this survey. I feel it would be important to choose a sample that included students from a range of academic abilities so that the results were representative of the diverse class profiles found in our schools and so the results reflect a diverse profile of students when used in decision making situations.

The survey designed for this project is an explanatory survey which O’leary (2014) defines as “figure[ing] out why things might be the way they are; in other words, determine cause and effect” (p. 203). The purpose here is to determine how choice effects academic motivation, or in other words how choice (the cause) impacts motivation (the effect).

This survey falls into the category of a trend survey which “asks the same cross-section (similar groups of respondents) the same questions at two or more points in time [to see] if classifications of individuals change over time” (O’leary, 2014, p. 203). I feel this survey will need to be completed with a few groups of respondents over the next few years, which O’leary (2014) indicates as possible within a trend survey, as Alberta educators figure out how curriculum redesign works. As schools change and improve student-centered learning approaches and what FLEX looks like this survey could provide information on if these changes are effecting student choice and motivation for the better or worse. The hope would be that as schools experiment with student choice those involved will figure out what works best to increase student motivation, in turn, increasing student learning.

The format of this survey will be “self-administered” (O’leary, 2014, p. 204). In such a survey, students will complete it in a classroom setting, on paper and anonymously. I feel this is the best way to start with because it is easy to administer and monitor. I feel that paper and pencil is the way to go over a digital or online survey because this survey is not very long. It would probably take students the same amount of time to complete the survey as to get the computers, log-in, and log-into the website. I feel keeping this survey as simple as possible will keep students engaged while completing it rather than making it complicated and running the risk of students not taking the questions seriously.

Developing the questionnaire. O’leary (2014) sets out the following steps for developing survey questions: operationalize concepts, explore existing possibilities, draft questions, decide on response categories, review, rewrite questions, order questions, write instructions, layout, and write a cover letter/introductory statement. These are the steps that I followed when creating my survey.

1. Operationalize concepts – going from abstract concepts to variables that can be measured/assessed through the survey.

Fortunately, the concepts that my survey is addressing are fairly concrete for students. The idea of choice in the classroom is not something that students are unfamiliar with. The students who would take this survey would also fully understand what FLEX is and what it means to have choice through FLEX. It is for these reasons that I do not feel that the terms student choice and FLEX need to be defined at the beginning of the survey. If the survey ever expanded to a parent version I would then see a need to define these terms as parents may not be as familiar with them as their children.

2. Explore existing possibilities – search for existing surveys that can be changed or modified.

The survey that was created for this project has two parts, both needed to be reflective of current practices in my grade 9 classroom and keeping with the FLEX initiative from Alberta Education, therefore the survey needed to be created from scratch. Although I was not able to modify a survey that already existed, I feel that I was able to use the literature to help construct my survey questions. For example, Ullmann-Margalit and Morgenbesser's (1997) study examining the difference of picking and choosing and Iyengar and Lepper (2000) findings of too many choices can cause choice overload is examined through questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 which are shown in Figure 2.

3.	I prefer to pick between 2 options.
4.	I prefer to choose from 3-5 options.
5.	I prefer to choose from 6 or more options.
6.	I feel overwhelmed when I have choice.

Figure 2. Amount of choice

The questions shown in Figure 2 also have been structured in a way where students cannot agree with all of them. If a respondent agrees with question 3, then if they are answering the survey honestly, they should answer disagree to questions 4 and 5. Similarly, if a respondent answers agree to question 5 then they should answer disagree to question 6. Question 7, as seen in Figure 3, adopts the idea of empowerment and autonomy that was explored by Morgan and Wagner (2013).

7.	I feel empowered over my own learning when I have choice.
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Figure 3. Student Empowerment/Autonomy

Figure 4 displays question 10 and 11 that are directly tied to studies completed on how choice effects motivation (Patall, et. al., 2008; Schraw, Flowerday & Reisetter, 1998).

10.	I am more motivated to complete homework when I am given choice.
11.	I am more motivated to complete a performance task when I am given choice.

Figure 4. Motivation and choice

Finally, question 13, illustrated in Figure 5, specifically targets the research on the role that interest plays in student choice (Deci, 1992; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2008; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Katz & Assor, 2007).

13.	I am more interested in an assignment when given choice.
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Figure 5. Interest

The second part of the survey is specific to the FLEX initiative. Since this is such a new idea in Alberta, again, the questions needed to be created from scratch. Using my experience with FLEX so far I feel I was able to write questions that students would be comfortable with and would be able to answer with confidence. I collaborated with other teachers at my site to zone in on the key elements that FLEX is meant to address so that I had a focus area when it came time to write the questions. The questions relating to FLEX can be seen in Figure 6 below. These questions tie into Aldridge's (2007) research on how students are able to make decisions about how they learn as well as research on allowing students to make decisions about certain

portions of their day (Kohn, 1993; Patall, et. al, 2008). These questions also address how choice affects interest and motivation from the research mentioned above.

14.	I enjoy being able to choose my own FLEX sessions.
15.	My interest in a particular subject has increased because of a FLEX session I attended.
16.	My motivation to do well in my courses has increased because of FLEX.
17.	I developed an interest I didn't know I had because of FLEX.
18.	I do not like having to choose FLEX sessions.
19.	I have chosen FLEX sessions that will help my understanding of a core subject (ie: Math help).
20.	FLEX has helped me get motivated towards something I wasn't motivated about.
21.	Doing well in my classes or FLEX sessions makes me feel good.
22.	Doing well in my classes or FLEX sessions increases my motivation.

Figure 6. FLEX

3. Draft questions – draft new questions as clearly as possible.

After deciding to construct a survey, I found myself thinking about what kind of questions I wanted to ask at the most random times – in between classes, while conversing with students, driving home. I ended up scribbling a question on a sticky note here or there and before I knew it I had quite the list of questions. When drafting questions for this I took the advice that I give my students when they are drafting a narrative or an essay – get all possible ideas down on paper; more material to work with is always better than not enough. For example, originally I was going to include a question on choice during exams (whether students preferred multiple choice or written response), but through discussions with colleagues I decided to remove this

idea because responses mostly likely would be based on if students felt they were good multiple choice test takers or good writers which did not fit in with choice and motivation. I also had questions specific to subject areas but decided to reduce them to generally include performance tasks and homework because I did not want a student's particular feelings towards a certain subject area to affect the way in which he or she answered the question. Through this process I did call on colleagues to read my draft questions quite a few times to check for redundancies. I left the fine tuning and refining to the review stage.

4. Decide on response categories – consider the effect of response categories on responses themselves and how various response categories translate to data and statistical treatment.

The majority of surveys that junior high students complete have interval response scales; this was a major contributing factor as to why I chose to have interval response scales, also known as “Likert scales” (O’leary, 2014, p. 214). Since students are familiar with this type of scale I think they would be comfortable completing this survey. O’leary (2014) cautions about the number of points used when deciding on the Likert scale. I decided to use a 3-point system (agree, neutral, disagree,) so that students did not get overwhelmed in the degree to which they agree or disagree; this can be seen in Figure 7.

Student Choice and Motivation Survey				
Please read each question carefully and place an X in the box that applies.				
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	I value choice in my classes and assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I receive choice often in my classes and assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 7. 3-point system

Dillman (2007) also indicates that vague or problematic anchor labels for the response categories can be the cause of confusion for respondents. I feel that keeping with the 3 response categories will also help to avoid confusion for the responder. O’leary (2014) also cautions about using an even number of responses that will force the responder to take sides and the chances of respondents ‘getting on a roll’ when completing the survey. Using a 3-point scale avoids respondents being forced to take sides but, at the same time, I am also a bit worried that students may just choose the neutral response so they do not need to make a conclusive decision. Since the survey is relatively short and there are a small number of responses, I do not think that the majority of students would just circle the same answer for each question to get the survey completed quicker. Both of these concerns would be an area of focus during a potential pilot study.

5. Review – re-read the questions looking for anything ambiguous, leading, confronting, offensive, etc.

When I re-read all the questions I wrote I found that quite a few of them asked similar ideas. I ended up combining a few, re-phrasing a few and not using a few. For example, question 1 that can be seen in Figure 6, originally read “I like choice in my class assignments.” I changed the word “like” to the word “value” because there are many things that students like to do and I felt that the word “like” would elicit an agree answer for more general reasons than the word “value”. When reviewing I did not find anything that was necessarily offensive or misleading. Some of my original questions were a bit ambiguous; I think this happened because I knew what I was asking so in the moment I just assumed that the survey responder would also just understand what I was asking. When compiling all my questions I took the time to figure out, in

my opinion, what the best wording was and if I was a student taking this survey what would I think the question was asking.

6. Rewrite questions – have a few peers review questions and then re-write any parts necessary.

Once I was finished revising my questions I sent them to three colleagues, one at my current school who would understand the terms used because we are at the same location and two at different schools within the same school district to see if the language would translate across sites. The feedback I got was very useful. For example, my original questions were in proper question form and the final survey is in statement form. The statement shown below in Figure 8 was originally “Do you value choice in classes and assignments?” I feel that the statement is easier for students to make a connection to, therefore allowing them to answer as completely as possible.

1. I value choice in my classes and assignments.
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Figure 8. Statement instead of question

A few questions that I thought were clear needed to be slightly re-phrased. As well, there were a few minor editing changes. I think that receiving feedback from peers has been one of the most useful steps in this process because it helped to create questions that were clear when read by many different people with different experiences and background knowledge. Since colleagues at different sites were able to read through this and provide suggestions for minor changes, it reinforces the possibility that this survey could be completed by students around the district rather than just students at my site.

7. Order questions – put questions in a logical order for respondents.

Since I have background in writing exams and have worked with Alberta Education on PAT question development, I feel that I naturally put the questions in the survey in a logical order by keeping them chunked together in categories. This aligns with what O’leary (2014) suggests about easing respondents into the survey. For this reason I started with questions that are more general in nature, which can be seen in Figure 9, and then move to specific questions that target a specific idea (for example choice specific to FLEX).

1.	I value choice in my classes and assignments.
2.	I receive choice often in my classes and assignments.

Figure 9. General opening statements

I decided to end the survey with questions that are more over-arching in order to have students think about their overall feelings towards student choice and academic motivation, this can be seen in Figure 10.

23.	Overall, I feel motivated when I get to choose components of my learning.
24.	Overall, I feel motivated when I get to choose how to express my learning during a performance task.
25.	Overall, I feel motivated when choosing which FLEX sessions I attend.

Figure 10. Closing statements

8. Write instructions – make them as clear as possible.

Since the survey is quite short in length I felt it was important to keep the instructions short and simple as well. This is shown in Figure 11.

Student Choice and Motivation Survey

Please read each question carefully and place an X in the box that applies.

Figure 11. Instructions

By junior high, students are familiar with completing surveys so I feel that they have the background information needed to complete this survey with minimal instruction. I would rather they spend their time thinking about the questions rather than reading through lengthy instructions.

9. Layout – construct a clear, logical and aesthetically pleasing layout.

Similar to above, I decided that a simple layout would work best for this survey. The survey itself is not very complicated so I think a simple layout works best. I think that it is aesthetically appealing because it is so simple and easy to read. As shown below in Figure 12, respondents clearly have 3 answer choices which are clearly aligned with the question. The questions are also clearly numbered as shown in Figure 10.

		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	I value choice in my classes and assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I receive choice often in my classes and assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I prefer to pick between 2 options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I prefer to choose from 3-5 options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I prefer to choose from 6 or more options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I feel overwhelmed when I have choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I feel empowered over my own learning when I have choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I prefer to have choice on large performance tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I prefer to have choice in daily homework selections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I am more motivated to complete homework when I am given choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 12. Layout

10. Write a cover letter/introductory statement – explain who you are, your objectives, and what will happen with the results.

At this time I have included a general cover letter with my survey in Appendix A, see Figure 13 below.

<p>Date</p> <p>Dear _____:</p> <p>Attached is a survey that has been designed to be completed by grade 9 students who are given choice within their classroom assignments/projects and through flexible learning blocks. This survey is easily adaptable to other grades in your current school setting. It could also be used to address specific areas of student choice for which you wish to receive feedback.</p>
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Figure 13. Cover letter

This cover letter would introduce the survey to others looking to use it in a similar setting to my own. If there came a time to share it with the parent community or district as a whole I would then revise the cover letter and introductory statement so that those completing the survey would have all the background information required to efficiently respond.

Future Steps

I am curious to see what a pilot study of this survey would show and I hope to get to that point with some of my students in the near future. My hope after a pilot study, and revision based on that study, is to have all grade 9 students complete this survey to help future planning at my school. Depending on how that progressed I could see slight adjustments being made so that this could be given to a sample of our whole junior high. I would also be open to sharing this with other schools who feel this could help with their future planning. This could easily be achieved by sharing it on the district portal or through email. I think that this survey would be

easily tailored to fit many different junior high settings and possibly even high school settings. I think this document would provide real-time information to administration and lead teachers which is beneficial in our real-time, fast-paced work environment.

Chapter 4 – Reflection

Impacts on my Professional Practice

I have organized the review of my M. Ed degree into three pieces: the theory, the practical and the project. Each course completed for this degree fits into one of these three categories and together they have created a very engaging and insightful two years. Although tiring at times, I feel the past two years has reinforced my own pedagogy that best practices need to be rooted in research but have changed my professional thinking because now I feel I can read and understand the research more fully, am able to explain it to others and incorporate it into my own practice.

The Theory. I would have to say that the theory explored in this course has changed my professional thinking the most. EDCI 532 Emerging Trends and Topics in Curriculum Studies (July 2013) provided a strong theoretical base for this program. EDCI 532 gave me the background knowledge to curriculum that I did not have from my undergrad degree. Exploring the different curricular ideologies helped me see how curriculum has transformed over time. Having this information has changed the way that I look at what curriculum is and what it is addressing and helps me understand where curriculum redesign is heading. Often administrators focus their school year on a certain book or guiding question, before this course I always wondered where they got their ideas but since this course I have recognised some of the authors and ideas that the book or guiding question that we have explored as a staff. Having the background knowledge gained from this course has allowed me to interact deeper with the text and ideas that are being brought forth at staff meetings and within discussions with my colleagues. EDCI 591 Research in Elementary and Secondary Schools (July 2013) and EDCI 580 Qualitative Research Methods (July 2014) provided very useful information on the research side. Research theory was

something brand new to me so the topics covered in these courses provided an excellent foundation to understanding the research papers that I read for my capstone project. Both courses helped me to understand the methods discussed in research study papers and helped me make sense of all the academic language. I feel that this has reinforced my belief that best practices need to be grounded in research but it has affected my professional thinking because now I actually feel that I have the language to ask questions and reflection on the research and findings.

The Practical. I feel that many of our courses fit into the practical side of this degree; specifically EDCI 532 Emerging Trends and Topics in Curriculum Studies (July 2013) because a large portion of this class was looking at the new curriculum shifts in Alberta. Learning firsthand about these shifts, as they were unfolding or about to unfold, helped to reinforced what I was doing in the classroom. I also feel that this course gave me an advantage in my school because I was already aware of the specifics from Alberta Education whereas other teachers has only heard bits and pieces of the plan. This provided me the opportunity to help explain to my staff what the plan entailed and share examples from my classroom; this alone presented a leadership role for me within my school. EDCI 591 Leadership and Change (Fall 2013) helped me shape my own leadership style which helped me when working in a leadership position within my school. I actually found that I was able to have deeper professional conversations with my administration and that this course helped me understand their position on different issues. The material covered in this course helped open my eyes to administrative and managerial side of a school and provided a different perspective. Finally, EDCI 591 Technology as a Pedagogical Tool (July 2014) helped reaffirm the types of technology that I use in my classroom. Keeping up with technological advancements can be overwhelming and I have always been a firm believer that

the teacher does not need to be a technology expert because the students in the classroom already know what is new and they either know how to use it or have the skills to figure it out. Learning about all the different tools that can be used in the classroom reconfirmed this for me. There is no way that I can keep up with everything that is changing but if I give the students some autonomy over their work they can use the technology they are comfortable with and keep me informed with the latest and greatest tools. Reflecting back I think this was a moment that inspired the idea for my capstone project; providing students autonomy and choice was a theme at the center of this course.

Another component of the practical side has been the dialogue with my cohort peers. Being able to engage in professional dialogue has reinforced what I am doing in the classroom and with my students. The cohort style of this degree was a big selling feature because I knew that I would not be going through this degree on my own; strength in numbers was very appealing and, I feel, is one of the contributing factors to my successful completion of this course. Teaching can often be a very isolating career, even with the shifts in curriculum that are currently happening, teachers need to have people surrounding them that are going to buy into what is changing otherwise the feeling that educators are alone in their classroom will continue. If there is no buy in by others you could find yourself amongst a lot of people but still feel very alone. This cohort has surrounded me with like-minded people who are embracing the change happening in Alberta. Being able to talk about and share what is happening in my classroom has truly reinforced that project based learning and student inquiry are strong ways to engage students and create authentic learning opportunities. These are areas that I will continue to focus on in my classroom and try to help others in my school achieve the same feelings of success.

The Project. I feel my capstone project brought the theoretical and practical components of this program together. When formulating my literature review I felt that I was able to accurately read the research because of the theoretical courses taken during this program. I then felt that I was able to apply the practical information into my project component. I feel that my project is an accumulation of what I have learned in this program, what has been reaffirmed from my classroom practice and discussions I have had with colleagues and cohort peers. Overall, I feel that my capstone project is something that can be used within my own school and potentially other schools as well. I see each course, assignment, and conversation as an individual puzzle piece that alone may seem abstract or out of place but when placed together have created a project that I feel is solid and that I am quite proud of.

This program was very well rounded and was made up of a great balance of theory and practice. The capstone project allowed me to merge the two together and create a project that will be useful in my own career and has the potential to be shared with others. The program not only allowed me to create a useful resource that will help with future planning; it shifted my own teaching and how I will integrate research findings to tweak best practices within my own classroom.

Application of Learning

Beginning this program felt like a natural next step for me but I was unsure how it was going to impact my teaching career. After the first summer of this program I found myself going back to school in September with a new outlook on teaching. I was excited to talk with my colleagues, many which have completed their own masters programs, about the courses that I completed over the summer. I also found that my administration was offering me more leadership roles within the school. I feel that the knowledge gained from this program will open

more leadership doors for me within my school and potentially within my school district.

Over the past two years I have found myself leading the language arts department. This will become a larger role in the 2015-2016 school year as our language arts department is losing some staff members. My administration has already told me that I will be leading a few new staff members. I am hopeful that the new people to the department are open to collaboration and streaming lining what happens at each grade level. I feel that the knowledge I gained about Alberta's curriculum shifts and leadership styles during this program will serve me well when leading the language arts department. I am excited to share my knowledge and passion for language arts with fellow colleagues and looking forward to collaboration opportunities.

FLEX coordinator is another leadership role that I have taken on since starting this program. FLEX at my school is in its first year and is something that we will be continuing next year. Again I feel that the knowledge I gained during this program has helped me to create a smooth transition of flex into our school. I found that my experience with FLEX played a large role in the choice of my capstone topic but at the same time when researching for my literature review I found many articles supporting the ideas behind FLEX and was able to share that back with my administration and staff. I have found that the concepts covered in our leadership class gave me strategies to work with colleagues at different stages of understanding in relation to what FLEX is and why we are introducing it to our school. I also found that the theory learnt in the leadership course provided me with a rational of why some teachers were resistant which helped me be patient with them, I don't think I would have had as much patience without the background knowledge gained from this program. I will be continuing as FLEX coordinator in the 2015-2016 school year.

I have had other leadership opportunities arise in the past two years and I feel that these

opportunities presented themselves because I was working through a M. Ed program. At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year my principal assigned me as a leader for one of our professional learning community (PLC) groups. This required me to coordinate my group to present on a chapter of a professional development book that was chosen at the beginning of the year as well as plan and execute a school wide celebration together. I was also a successful candidate for an acting assistant principal position for a portion of the 2014-2015 school year. During the interview for this position I found myself referencing material and information from this program and I feel that the support I used as well as the fact that I was in a M. Ed program was part of the reason I was selected for the position.

Reflecting has been a large part of this degree and I feel that being asked to reflect throughout it has made me a more reflective teacher; I feel this will also help me to become a more reflective leader. As educators, we are asked to start reflecting right at the beginning of our practicum experiences but as with teaching and classroom management reflection takes time to develop. When I was first asked to reflect as part of this program I wasn't sure what I was to reflect on; the information was all new to me and besides feeling overloading with information I had no other reflective thoughts. As with reflective teaching, reflecting through this program became easier. Looking back and thinking about what you would do differently if you had the opportunity again or what the steps would be to move forward has been, although tiring at times, a very beneficial component of this M. Ed program. I feel this is an area that I will continue to grow and look to when reflecting on the leadership roles that emerge within my career.

Moving forward I feel that this program will continue to open new leadership roles with my school. I am lucky to work for a principal that recognizes the importance of teacher leaders on staff and building capacity within the building. Although I am not sure if administration is a

place I would like to move into having my M. Ed degree will open that door as well as other possible doors within my school district or within Alberta Education.

Key Recommendations Moving Forward

Providing students choice within the context of homework selection, an assignment or a project is something that most teachers have some experience in. The area that is newly developing is having students choose how they spent portions of their school day and having teachers give up some control to allow students to have more autonomy over their learning.

Moving forward my 3 recommendations for future study in this area are:

1. The long terms effects of student motivation when students have the choice to choose where a portion of their school day becomes the norm. Some long term effects to consider are: do students grades steadily improve? Do students gain important life skills? Do students gain important employability skills? Or do students become unmotivated to choose how a portion of their school day and become complacent and want others to make decisions for them?
2. What impacts does long term student autonomy in K-12 schooling have on motivation in post-secondary education classrooms? I wonder if student autonomy will become more predominate in post-secondary classrooms or if students are going to have a difficult transition to post-secondary education because so much of it does not leave room for choice.
3. How to motivate the student who is not motivated by receiving choice or the student who refuses to make a choice regarding his/her learning. My project did not look very deep into how to motivate a student who shows no signs of motivation no matter what is tried in the classroom. A next step here could be to look at what happens when a teacher

wants to offer choice but what to do when some students are resistance or overwhelmed when choice is offered.

There is still a large area to research in terms of student choice and how that can impact student motivation. I am looking forward to keeping current with the research in this areas and watching what other schools board, districts and countries do in the coming years regarding student choice and student motivation. Continuing to develop ways to motivate our students is at the core of education and will set them up for bright and successful futures.

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Appendix A

Sample Cover Letter

Date

Dear _____:

Attached is a survey that has been designed to be completed by grade 9 students who are given choice within their classroom assignments/projects and through flexible learning blocks. This survey is easily adaptable to other grades in your current school setting. It could also be used to address specific areas of student choice for which you wish to receive feedback.

The survey is designed to take students approximately ten minutes to complete as well as provide quick feedback for educational leaders. Within the survey respondents will see the term “FLEX”; this is used to describe blocks of time where students choose where they will spend certain blocks of time during their school day. This term can easily be changed to reflect the specific term used at your site.

If you have any questions regarding the survey or need assistance making changes so that it fits your needs please do not hesitate to contact me at (insert email address and other contact info).

Sincerely,

Student Choice and Motivation Survey

Please read each question carefully and place an X in the box that applies.

		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	I value choice in my classes and assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I receive choice often in my classes and assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I prefer to pick between 2 options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I prefer to choose from 3-5 options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I prefer to choose from 6 or more options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I feel overwhelmed when I have choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I feel empowered over my own learning when I have choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I prefer to have choice on large performance tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I prefer to have choice in daily homework selections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I am more motivated to complete homework when I am given choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	I am more motivated to complete a performance task when I am given choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	I feel I produce a higher quality of work when I am given choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	I am more interested in an assignment when given choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	I enjoy being able to choose my own FLEX sessions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	My interest in a particular subject has increased because of a FLEX session I attended.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.	My motivation to do well in my courses has increased because of FLEX.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	I developed an interest I didn't know I had because of FLEX.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18.	I do not like having to choose FLEX sessions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	I have chosen FLEX sessions that will help my understanding of a core subject (ie: Math help).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20.	FLEX has helped me get motivated towards something I wasn't motivated about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21.	Doing well in my classes or FLEX sessions makes me feel good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22.	Doing well in my classes or FLEX sessions increases my motivation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23.	Overall, I feel motivated when I get to choose components of my learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24.	Overall, I feel motivated when I get to choose how to express my learning during a performance task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25.	Overall, I feel motivated when choosing which FLEX sessions I attend.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>