

Fall 12-19-2016

Motivating Students to Read: A Case Study

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Motivating Students to Read: A Case Study

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Fall 2016

A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development
of
The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the
requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Abstract

This paper explores various literacy techniques that can be used to motivate and engage students to read. The literacy techniques examined were student choice, student interest, rereading with a purpose, and book discussions. A case study was conducted to determine whether or not these techniques increased reading engagement and motivation. The case study revealed that these literacy techniques did indeed promote reading motivation, particularly when the subject was given a choice in what they would be reading.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Imagine walking into a quiet classroom with students scattered around the room, deeply engaged as they are reading books. Every student has their nose in a book, one student is giggling quietly at a comical part of the story, and others are using their finger to follow along as they read. Two girls in the corner of the room are sharing their favorite parts of the text with one another. Some students are writing in a journal, documenting their thoughts and questions about the text. Other students are recording unknown words that they will be able to look up in the dictionary later. Three boys are sitting at the center table reading about snakes, stopping after each page to share their opinion on the snakes illustrated on the pages of the book, and whether or not before they have ever seen them. While some say this is not possible, this type of classroom environment is achievable! The key to having students be engaged in what they are reading is providing them with the option to choose what they would like to read. Allowing students to choose what they want to read not only improves their intrinsic motivation, but ultimately improves their reading skills as well. Motivation plays a huge role in reading comprehension; students perform better and demonstrate motivation when they read books that interest them; and have content which is engaging, that they can make meaningful connections to (Guthrie, 2007)

Topic and Research Problem

The research questions I will address are:

1. How can teachers increase motivation and engagement in struggling readers?
2. What are the benefits of student reading engagement?

My research study seeks to discover a variety of literacy strategies that teachers can use to increase motivation and engagement in struggling readers. The literacy strategies that I have explored are student book choice, implementation of student interest and culturally relevant texts, book discussions, and rereading for a purpose. The research also reveals the benefits that come from student reading engagement. I explored how motivation promotes reading comprehension. My research study consists of literacy strategies are possible for teachers to implement and still meet state mandates, as well as information obtained during my case study, which determined that significant improvements were observed in student motivation and engagement when one of these literacy strategies is incorporated in literacy instruction. My research consists of evidence provided from other research articles as well as my case study on a student that performs better academically when given a choice on what to read.

During the case study, I observed the student's thinking and engagement when implementing each of the literacy strategies. I also observed the student without implementing a strategy, to assess how he reacted to assigned texts. I interviewed the student to find out his attitude and thinking toward reading and whether or not the literacy strategies I used would increase his motivation to read.

Purpose

It seems teachers nationwide, in the facilitation of literacy instruction, face the challenge of trying to promote and support the literacy learning of non-motivated and disengaged literacy learners in the classroom. Teachers all over the country are facing a common problem. One of the reasons indicated regarding the drop in student motivation is because some students begin to feel self-conscious as they begin comparing their

reading performance with that of other students. Another reason motivational levels drop is that the instruction does not align with student interest (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Motivation is often what makes the distinction between learning that is everlasting and learning that is momentary (Oldfather, 1993). When students are unmotivated to read, their level of learning tends to be surface level; whereas students who are motivated learn at a deeper level (Gambrell, 1996, p.15).

When students are motivated to read they are reading more than those who are not. Not only are motivated readers better readers, but they are also better at comprehending what they read (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). When students are motivated to read they perform better academically and use advanced comprehension skills (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

When students are motivated to read they perform better academically. Students that score the highest on standardized tests enjoy reading (Guthrie et al., 2007). Students' intrinsic motivation for reading drops drastically when teachers are solely focused on test preparation and isolated skills (Kohn, 2010). When test preparation takes over a classroom, students begin to resent reading and look for excuses to get out of their seats during that time (Miller, 2015). Students in the middle elementary grades that perform poorly on reading and related activities are at a higher risk to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011).

The significance of this research study is to further examine student motivation and provide validity to using various motivational strategies specifically related to reading. I want teachers to be able to use this paper as a valuable resource in helping

motivate their students to read and become academically successful on a cross curricular level.

Rationale

My rationale for conducting this study is because reading engagement is important to students' literacy learning and comprehension across subject content areas. When students are engaged in reading they learn more, demonstrate sustained reading ability, make meaningful connections and improve upon their reading abilities, such as reading comprehension and fluency. Students are not born disliking reading. Students' resistance to reading comes when reading for enjoyment decreases due to a student's disinterest in reading certain required texts, limited choice in selecting texts and at times students' limited understanding or connections to the relevance of the text. There needs to be time where students can make choices about what to read in order for them to excel and become lifetime readers (Virgil, 1994).

Most of the research conducted on motivating students to read has focused solely on student choice, or the implementation of technology into the literacy classrooms. The research conducted on student choice does not strictly relate to literacy; rather, it involves other choice possibilities in the classroom. Although, including technology during literacy instruction can be beneficial, it is not always possible. I want to be able to provide teachers and educators with literacy strategies to incorporate into the literacy classroom instruction that increase student motivation and engagement, whether the technology is available or not. If this research were not conducted, teachers without a variety of technological assistance in the classroom would have to rely on dated studies or conduct their own research. Furthermore, students will continue to exhibit disinterest

and limited motivation and engagement when reading which may possibly affect future literacy learning experience and their ability to experience increased academic success.

This topic is important to me because I have seen firsthand how, as students advance from the primary to the intermediate grades; they lose interest in reading for a number of reasons. Students are told what to read rather than being able to make a selection. In addition to this, students do not find the texts they read culturally relevant. They are given reading assignments without a purpose or a chance to discuss what they have read.

I am currently working in the Rochester City School District, and I work with students who are both motivated and unmotivated in reading and all subject areas. I see students daily who refuse to open a book. For some, this lack of motivation could be connected with their level of ability to read. However, with others this lack of motivation is because the students do not understand the purpose and importance of their reading and are unable to make personal connections with the text. I have discovered literacy techniques that I can use with students who are struggling and resistant readers in order to reignite the motivation and engagement that they once had because it will assist them with their reading comprehension fluency. Not only will the motivated readers improve their literacy skills, but their self-efficacy will increase as well.

Summary

Working as a librarian, in the Rochester City School District, has given me the opportunity to witness students' reading motivation levels first hand. Most students in the upper-elementary grades have lost their motivation to read. While some students may be unmotivated because of their ability to read, others are unmotivated because they are

uninterested in what they are reading. Students need to be interested in the texts they are reading in order to make meaningful connections between the text and their personal lives. Studies indicate when students can relate to what they are reading and have choice in selection of text, their engagement and motivation for reading increase. Literacy strategies to consider implementing into the curriculum include purposeful rereading, text selection, texts of student's interest and cultural relevance, and social interactions surrounding the book. When employed correctly, these literacy strategies may increase student motivation to read. Students who are motivated to read will ultimately perform better academically and have a positive self-image.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction:

While research studies conducted examined literacy strategies that motivate students to read, more research in the area of student motivation must be continued, to discover which strategies are most effective. Many students, when they first enter school, are excited and eager to learn. However, as years progress, some elementary students begin to feel the internal and external pressures to academically compete and perform. Consequently, their motivation level decreases drastically, particularly during literacy activities. When students are unmotivated to read, their level of learning remains surface-level, whereas students that are motivated learn at a deeper level (Gambrell, 1996). Students who are motivated and engaged in what they are reading progress through the curriculum easier than those who are disengaged. When students are motivated to read, they perform better academically and use advanced comprehension skills (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). There is a positive correlation between reading motivation and reading comprehension among intermediate students (Guthrie, 2007).

The lack of reading motivation among children is a problem that teachers and educators are facing all over the country. One of the reasons indicated for the drop in student motivation is because some students start to become self-conscious as they begin comparing their performance with other students. Another reason motivational levels drop is that the instruction does not align with student interest (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Motivation is often what makes the distinction between learning that is everlasting and learning that is momentary (Oldfather, 1993). Children need to be reading at an appropriate level in order to be successful. By the time students reach fourth grade, two

thirds of the children in the United States are reading below proficiency (NAEP; 2007). Teachers should be teaching literacy strategies, while teaching content areas. Not only will this assist with reading proficiency, but with content knowledge as well (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Most students who do not learn how to use literacy strategies in different content areas often struggle and fall behind their peers. These students are unable to form connections with what they are reading.

There are three different components of reading motivation: reading self-efficacy, perceived difficulty, and reading orientation. Reading self-efficacy is what a student believes about his or her own reading skills. The perceived difficulty relates to how difficult the student thinks the reading is. Reading orientation consists of how much enjoyment and involvement the student has with reading. Teachers and students usually have similar views on reading difficulty and reading efficacy; however, there is a large divide between teacher and student awareness when it comes to reading orientation (Coddington & Guthrie, 2009).

Students in the middle elementary grades who perform poorly on reading and related activities are at a higher risk to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). It is crucial for teachers and educators find a way to reach these students before it is too late. Teachers should worry less about test preparation and isolated skills and instead focus on motivating their students intrinsically. In order to help disinterested and disengaged students, teachers should consider planning, designing, and facilitating literacy instruction inclusive of student choice and interest. My literature review will further discuss how factors and literacy approaches such as student choice, student interest, book

discussions, rereading text for a different perspective, and the use of culturally relevant text influence students' motivation and engagement.

Student Choice

One of the simplest and most important approaches to increasing a student's literacy motivation is to provide him or her with the opportunity to choose his or her own book. Students are more motivated when allowed to choose which books they would like to read (Miller, 2015). Many teachers are afraid to incorporate choice into the classroom because they feel that there is not enough time in the day or the text selected may be inappropriate with regard to students' level of ability to read the book selected. Teachers have become so concerned about standardized testing that they spend the majority of their days teaching to the test and implementing only the required texts into their curriculum. Students' intrinsic motivation drops drastically when teachers solely focus on test preparation and isolated skills (Kohn, 2010).

Several researchers support student choice and believe that choice promotes reading engagement. For example, a study conducted at southern elementary school in the United States, concluded that students are motivated when they are able to choose their own book. The study consisted of 15 fourth graders from six different classrooms. The researchers randomly selected 15 student participants out of the 91 fourth graders in the school. Three students each fell into each of the five categories being examined within the research study. The categories were motivated above grade level, motivated on grade level, motivated below grade level, unmotivated on grade level, and unmotivated below grade level. Each of the students answered 14 questions asked about narrative and expository reading. When asked to discuss a narrative text, 84% of the students

mentioned a book they had self-selected whereas; only 16% chose a text their teacher had selected. Students were excited about reading expository texts when they were gaining knowledge, personally interested in the topic, or given a choice in what to read. When asked to recall an expository text they had read 76% of the students shared a book they had chosen, 14% chose a book the teacher had assigned, and 10% could not share anything (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

All readers, struggling or not, should be given the opportunity to choose a book that interests them. When students are able to read a book that they think is interesting they are able to develop a deeper understanding of the text. Choice also gives students a feeling of empowerment and aids in building their self-efficacy, while boosting their self-confidence (Johnson & Giorgis, 2003). In order to make students life-long readers, it is critical that they are given time for choice reading at some point throughout the day (Virgil, 1994).

Many teachers worry about how they will assess their students if everyone is reading a different book of their choice. One way to do this is to create a generic book choice reading reflection worksheet. This is something that the students should complete each month. It will require them not only to summarize the book, but also to answer questions about how the book relates to their personal life and how it has helped them grow as a reader (Powell, 2011).

Student Interest & Culturally Relevant Text

Student interest and culturally relevant texts are a significant aspect of literacy motivation. The majority of texts utilized in classrooms currently aligns with the state standards, but at times are of little interest to the students in the class. When texts are not

interesting or culturally relevant to children, they become disengaged. They are unable to relate to the narratives, and are therefore unable to make deep connections with the text. Furthermore, when a student cannot make connections, they struggle to comprehend the text. Reading engagement occurs when a student becomes interested in the topic they are reading and are able to form a connection with that topic (Schussler, 2009). This connection allows the student to see the relevance the topic has on his or her own life. When students are able to make connections between school-based texts with what is relevant to them outside of school, they are able to see the purpose behind the literature (Jocson, 2009).

Student interest is a factor to consider, when creating literacy lesson plans. Teachers need to discover their students' interests and incorporate them into their curriculum. Students will become more motivated when assigned a book that they would typically choose on their own (Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011). In order to allow time for student's interest, teachers must create a curriculum that develops in stages and changes based on what the students are interested in. Teachers should build their curriculum around student interest books rather than following pre-determined content (Powell, 2011).

There are options teachers can employ to give their students access to books that interest them. One option is to give students a daily scheduled time to visit the school library. The teacher should give the librarian a couple of topics the students are interested in each week to ensure that the books will be easily accessible to the students. Teachers should also have a diverse classroom library with books categorized by various topics of interest, making them easy to find. Another option is for teachers to provide a weekly bag

of books to go home with the students. These bags should include books that the student is interested in, so that they can read with a family member (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

Non-Traditional Texts

Teachers should be incorporating nontraditional texts as a bridge to traditional text. This will aid in the building of meaningful connections and improving motivation. A variety of texts should be incorporated into the curriculum in order to increase literacy achievement. For example, poems, as of late, are infrequently used in literacy curricula, despite the positive effects poetry has on students' literacy learning. When working with poems, students receive the opportunity to practice word families. Reciting poems assists students in building fluency. Another nontraditional text that should be included into the literacy curriculum is song lyrics. Song lyrics are a great way to support students with reading comprehension. The melody in songs not only helps memorability, but adds context as well. One of the main foundational goals of reading is to be able to recognize sight words without need to decode. When lyrics are displayed during the playing of a song, it allows students to hear what they see; eventually they are able to add the words to their sight vocabularies. Readers Theatre scripts should also be incorporated into literacy instruction. This allows students to express themselves with the appropriate volume and intonation (Raskinski, Rupley & Paige, 2015).

Book Discussions & Rereading

Providing students time and the opportunity to discuss the books they are reading promotes critical thinking, motivation and student engagement. Social interaction among literacy activities increases student motivation (Gambrell, 1996). The reason a book

discussion can motivate students is because it gives them the opportunity to share and think about what they have read. They are able to give their perspective and hear the perspective of their peers. This allows the students to compare their thoughts with their peers and teachers. They are able to see the book through a different lens and truly delve into the significance of the text. It gives students the opportunity to tear the text apart and make meaning out of it.

Rereading can be an extremely powerful motivational strategy when applied properly. Rereading can assist students in thinking on a deeper level and allow them to interpret the reading in several different ways. Rereading also gives the reader a sense of familiarity and gives them the opportunity to develop new insights about the characters and themes of the text. In addition, it allows the student additional interaction with the text by developing questions about certain themes, conflicts, and observations they have about the text. This allows the students to form a relationship with the text and makes them want to go back and reread to understand the perspectives of others. However, rereading assigned without purpose will not engage students. It is not an activity that to be assigned simply as a time-filler (Moley, Bandre & George, 2011).

Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Motivation

When searching for strategies to motivate students in literacy it is important that the strategies motivate students intrinsically rather than extrinsically. Intrinsic motivation is when somebody chooses to do something because he finds it will be of benefit; whereas, extrinsic motivation is when somebody does something in order to receive some sort of tangible reward (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) have found that implementing extrinsic rewards were only temporarily helpful in motivating

their students to read. When students are motivated extrinsically, they focus solely on the reward they will receive, and only worry about reading the words of the book. They do not look for meaning in what they are reading because they do not care to form a connection with the book.

Peter, an eighth grader at a parochial school, is an excellent example of a student who was motivated extrinsically to read. When interviewed about what he was reading, Peter told the interviewer he was reading *The Color Purple* because it counted as three books, and he needed to read 10 books within ten weeks. Peter explained to the interviewer that he was not interested in the book, but chose it because it was worth three books. Peter did not engage in a book discussion after reading the book, nor did he receive any feedback from his teacher about the comprehension worksheet he completed. When asking Peter questions about what the book entailed, he was unable to recall any information (Moley, Bandre & George, 2011).

Intrinsic motivation occurs when children are able to have authentic conversations and make connections with the books they are reading. Students are also motivated intrinsically when they are able to choose a book they are interested in or one that relates to their cultural identity (Moley, Bandre & George).

Summary

In order to ensure the literacy success of students, teachers need to implement reading techniques that will intrinsically motivate students to read. These strategies include giving students the opportunity to choose their own reading material, providing books related to student interest and their cultural identity, and allowing time for book discussions and rereading. These literary techniques will not only motivate students to

read, but also increase self-efficacy, foster and promote a positive self-image of the student as a reader and increase the student's effectiveness as a reader and his/her ability to implement literacy strategies across subject content areas.

The findings of some research studies suggest a correlation between student motivational levels and own self-concept. Therefore, when a student has a positive self-image of himself or herself as a reader, they are going to perform to the best of their ability during literacy related activities. This also means that when a student has a negative self-image of themselves as a reader, they will disengage when involved in reading and related activities (Shaaban ,2006).

Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

Introduction

My qualitative research study examining reading motivation provides educators with a blue print of how they can motivate their students to read, particularly at the intermediate level. I have also documented the benefits that go hand in hand with reading engagement. This chapter will consist of my research questions, participant, and the data collection methods I used. I also explained how I analyzed the data collected and discuss the limitations this study had.

Research Questions

1. How can teachers increase motivation and engagement in struggling readers?
2. What are the benefits of student reading engagement?

Participants and Context

I conducted my case study in the participant's home. The home is located in a suburb west of Rochester. My study focused on the literacy learning of one participant, who for the purpose of my student I referred to as Alex, who is a ten-year-old Caucasian male. Alex likes to play hockey and soccer. He is the goalie on his hockey team and is currently playing up an age group. He was recruited last year by the coach of the under twelve team who had heard through word of mouth how talented he is. Alex enjoys reading when he is able to choose what he wants to read. Some topics that Alex enjoys reading about are sports, animals, and anything scary. Alex has one older sister, Jessica, with whom he has a close relationship. Although, they do not have as much in common with each other as they used to, they still find time to spend with one another. Alex cares deeply about animals and wants to be a veterinarian or a marine biologist when he grows

up. Alex has two dogs, one lizard, and several fish that he currently looks after. Alex comes from a middle class family and has little financial worry.

Positionality as the Researcher

As the researcher, I have had a great deal of experience working with children and teaching literacy. I understand the importance of creating a learning environment, which immerses children in multiple forms of literacy to maximize on the literacy learning potential and success.

I completed my bachelor's degree at Oswego State University in 2011, earning my initial New York State teaching certification in Childhood Education 1-6. Both of my student teaching experiences were in suburban locations. Since completing my degree, I have been working in the Rochester City School District. I started in the district as a substitute and am now currently working as a teaching on assignment in the library. In between subbing and working as a librarian I spent one year teaching fourth grade and another year teaching third grade. Literacy is a discipline that has followed me throughout my schooling and my career. I feel that it is the most important discipline, threaded through every other discipline. I am currently working on two master's degrees, one in Literacy Education B-12 at SUNY Brockport, and the other in Library Media Science at the University of Buffalo. I will graduate with my literacy degree in December 2016 and my Library degree in May 2018. I firmly believe that strong literacy skills are the key to academic success and that reading motivation plays a pivotal role in achieving such skills.

Procedures

I conducted eight literacy sessions with Alex over a two-month period. Each session lasted anywhere between thirty and forty-five minutes. The purpose of these sessions was to observe his reading motivation level and to discover what motivates him to read. During the first meeting, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Alex, asking self-created questions that pertained to reading motivation and engagement. I added additional questions based on his responses. During the sessions following the interview, I implemented various motivational reading strategies with the student to examine his thinking, determine his level of motivation, and to discover what factors contributed to his motivation and engagement and why. During the second meeting, Alex had to read sections from two different books then provide an oral and written summary of what he had read. The books I selected were outside of his interest level. Alex had no prior knowledge regarding the selected texts, nor was he given any description or purpose before participating in the reading session. One of the books was fiction and the other was nonfiction. The reason for this was to eliminate any discrepancies that may have occurred had he only read fiction or nonfiction. The third meeting was similar to the second except for the fact that both books selected aligned with Alex's interests. During the fourth meeting, the child had to read and discuss the first chapter from two different books. Both of these books were fiction, one aligned with Alex's interest and the other did not. I discussed both of the books with Alex prior to reading in order to gauge his interest and provide him with some prior knowledge before reading. During the fifth meeting, I present Alex was presented with six different books, three fiction and three nonfiction. None of these books interested Alex, but he was allowed to choose the two

books he wanted to read. After reading a section from each book, Alex had to complete a comprehension worksheet related to what he had read. The sixth meeting was similar to the fifth meeting except for that this time all six of the books presented were of interest to Alex. Before the seventh meeting, Alex was able to choose one book that he had read during a previous session to reread for a purpose. During session seven, I instructed Alex to reread, and then had to report his findings after the rereading; thus giving him a purpose for reading the text -. During the final meeting, I interviewed Alex again. I asked him the same questions that I had asked during the first session and added additional questions as needed. This post interview allowed me to see if Alex's perception of reading and motivation had changed over the past two months.

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

I implemented several data collection techniques in order to explore whether or not choice, rereading, discussions, assigned readings, and reading for purpose influenced Alex's reading motivation level. I took anecdotal notes while observing the child during our meetings to document how Alex responded to various literacy techniques. I also conducted two semi-structured interviews, which were typed, and recorded using a cell phone device.

Anecdotal Notes. During every meeting with the child, I recorded my observations using anecdotal notes, both typed and written. Taking anecdotal notes allowed me to record his body language, which would go undocumented otherwise if using a recording device. This allowed me to document the participant's behavior and keep track of what works for the student and what does not in terms of literacy engagement and why.

Cell Phone Recordings. During the interview, book discussions, and book retellings I used my cell to record the verbal interactions between Alex and I during the sessions. This allowed me to document everything that I was unable to record in the anecdotal notes. This also allowed me to be able to analyze the recordings at a different time.

Semi-Structured Interview

During our first and last meeting, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Alex, asking him questions that pertained to reading motivation and engagement. I added further questions based on his responses. These interviews allowed me to develop an understanding of Alex's thinking regarding his self-perceptions of his abilities as a reader, his reading interests, and the importance of reading and understanding what he read. It also gave me an idea of what books would be appropriate to use in conducting my study with Alex.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

I prevented research bias from creeping into my research study by only recording what I have observed. My observations and notes are all objective. If another researcher were to conduct a similar study with Alex, their findings would be comparable with mine. I have triangulated my data by incorporating an interview, observations, and supportive claims from other researchers and my participants own words into my paper.

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study. Since it is a case study, I was only able to observe and document the motivation level of one student. Literacy techniques that work for this student may not work with every student. I also only met with the child on eight

different occasions over a couple months, which may not be long enough to document long-term growth.

In addition, there are some limitations in my choice of data collection methods. Since I took anecdotal notes, I may not have documented every single behavior I observed. These notes may unknowingly be biased, due to my knowledge from the student interview.

Chapter IV: Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings from the eight literacy sessions I conducted with Alex, a Caucasian sixth grade male student. The findings illustrate how Alex's reading motivation and comprehension levels fluctuated, depending on what he was reading, and the type of introduction provided during the presentation of the reading material.

Pre-Sessions Interview

I met with Alex and asked him twelve questions pertaining to his attitude and behaviors regarding reading. The information I collected from the interview provided me with insight as to how Alex felt about reading and what may or may not motivate him to read. In addition, his responses assisted me in choosing reading materials for our other reading sessions. Below is an excerpt of the interview recorded via cell phone.

Samantha: Do you enjoy reading?

Alex: Yes.

Samantha: What do you like about reading?

Alex: I don't know. I just like reading books.

Samantha: What type of books do you enjoy to read?

Alex: Umm...*Goosebumps*.

Samantha: Do you like any others?

Alex: I'm trying to think...I Survived.

Samantha: Do you prefer to read in or outside of school? Does it matter?

Alex: In.

Samantha: Why?

Alex: I don't know, because...it is cold there and it isn't too hot.

Samantha: Are there any books you don't like to read? Which ones?

Alex: YES! I don't like *Harry Potter* or baby books like *The Cat in the Hat*.

Samantha: What makes reading exciting for you?

Alex: I get to read my books.

Samantha: What makes reading boring?

Alex: After you just sit there for a while and have to read over and over.

Samantha: Does your teacher make you read things over again?

Alex: Sometimes, last year I had to reread *Holes* a lot.

Samantha: Did your teacher give you a purpose or a reason to reread?

Alex: No, just told me to reread it.

Samantha: What does your teacher do to make reading and learning fun?

Alex: Umm... they don't.

Samantha: Do you think you're a good reader?

Alex: Yes.

Samantha: What does a good reader look like?

Alex: Eyes in the book, they flip the pages, and they are writing notes.

Samantha: Do you prefer to read books in print or eBooks? Why?

Alex: In print because I don't like reading books on the computer, it is too much.

Samantha: Does your motivation increase when you are reading a book of choice rather than something assigned to you by the teacher?

Alex: Yes, because I get to read a book I like. My bum teachers don't pick good books.

Samantha: Are there any specific kinds of books you'd like to read with me?

Alex: Umm...action, horror, and *Percy Jackson*.

I did not get as much information from the interview as I had hoped, but it was enough for me to move forward with conducting my research. I decided to eliminate eBooks from my sessions since time was limited and Alex told me he preferred print. The interview also gave me an idea of what types of books to incorporate into the literacy activities of the sessions. In addition, I was able to determine from Alex's responses during the interview that Alex would be motivated to read if given text that he found interesting. The types of books he like to read suggests he likes to use his imagination, envision the settings and characters, possibly infer what may happen, and place himself within the stories.

No Interest, No Choice, Low Reading Motivation

During my second session with Alex I decided to see how much of a role choice and interest played in his reading motivation. I wanted to put Alex in a situation that was similar to what typically happened at his school. I selected one nonfiction book and one fiction book that were outside of Alex's interests. I selected books that were grade level appropriate and at Alex's reading level. I wanted to make sure that I did not give him a book that would be too easy or too difficult.

I did not give Alex a purpose for reading; I just told him that he would be reading the first two chapters from each book with the expectation of him giving a verbal recollection of what happened, and write a summary on what he read. When Alex first saw the books that I had chosen for him to read his face dropped immediately. I could tell he was not impressed and had no desire whatsoever to read the books on the table.

The first book Alex had to read was *George W. Bush The 43rd President* by Carmen Bredson. Before Alex even touched the book, he told me that he did not like George W. Bush. I pleaded with him to attempt reading the book, and so he did. I observed Alex while he read silently, and noticed that he was flipping through the pages rather quickly. It appeared as though he was quickly skimming the pages without actually reading them. Something of interest caught Alex's eye on the third page because he read that page slowly and I noticed his eyes skimming each word as he read. Alex appeared to be interested in this page because it was about George W. Bush playing baseball and he is a big sports fan. Alex closely read the next few pages, but soon became bored with the book and started to quickly flip through the rest of the pages.

Once Alex closed the book I asked him to tell me what had happened. Alex appeared irritated that he had to discuss the book, but reluctantly grabbed the book, opened it and began his retelling. Even with the assistance of the book, Alex struggled to retell the story. The parts of the story that he did retell were word for word as was written in the book. It appeared that Alex had very little recollection of what he had just read. When I asked Alex to write a summary, he complied. His summary contained accurate information, but like his oral retelling, his written summation included sentences word for word from the book.

Alex had little to no motivation to read this book. His lack of interest and motivation was most likely what led him to perform so poorly during the retelling and summarizing, in that he could not recall anything without looking through the book. Alex's lack of motivation to read and do follow-up activities was physically evident as he would click his pen and tap the table.

The second book selected for Alex to read was *Dark Day in the Deep Sea* by Mary Pop Osborne. This book is from the Magic Tree House Series. As he did with the first book, Alex skimmed the first couple of pages, turning them within a matter of seconds. By the third page, Alex seemed to have read something that appealed to him because he stopped reading to look at the book cover. After looking over the cover of the book Alex went back to reading and appeared actually read each page this time. He was no longer clicking his pen and his eyes were skimming over the words as he read them. It seemed that his reading motivation increased slightly after he came to the third page and checked out the cover. Whether his motivation to read changed or not he was unable to comprehend what he had read. Alex struggled to tell me what happened in the chapter and was only able to tell me that there was a magical pony ride and that the kids in the book needed to go into a submarine to hide out from a shark. Alex's minimal retelling of the story was inaccurate and included a piece of information that never occurred in the chapter. When I asked Alex to write a summary he wrote about a half a page quickly without bothering to use the book. His written summary was inaccurate and included several sentences about events that never happened in the chapter. I assumed that Alex was making most of the information up based on what he had seen from the front cover.

Overall, when I did not give Alex a choice in the text he read or present him with a book selection within his interest, his reading motivation was extremely low. His lack of reading motivation and engagement negatively affected his ability to comprehend the text.

Books of Interest Increase Reading Motivation and Comprehension

The third session I had with Alex was very similar to the format of the second session. However, this time I choose two books that I knew would be of interest to him. I wanted to see if there would be a change in his reading motivation level when given a book within his interest. I was also interested to see how it would affect his reading comprehension.

The first book I had Alex read was from R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series. For the sake of time, I only had Alex read the first chapter. I thought Alex would be interested in this book because he told me he wanted to read horror stories. At first, Alex was not in the mood to be doing any work and told me he did not like *Goosebumps*. I started to think that I might not see a change in his reading motivation at all. I asked him to try it and thankfully, he gave in. He was spinning in his chair as he read the first few pages, but did appear to be reading each page thoroughly. By the time Alex was on the fourth page, he had stopped spinning in his chair and was even sliding his fingers beneath some of the sentences. It appeared as though Alex was truly enjoying the book. He was even changing his facial expression throughout his reading. After Alex finished the chapter, he turned and asked me if he could keep the book! I could tell that Alex was excited and that his reading motivation had definitely increased compared to the previous session, but now I had to determine his level of comprehension.

Alex needed to use the book to tell me what had happened in the story. However, unlike our previous meeting, Alex was able to give an accurate, detailed retelling and was even able to give me characters names when prompted. Alex was also paraphrasing the information and not simply reading sentences out of the book.

Alex really impressed me when he wrote his summary. Not only was it accurate, but he was also able to do it without using the book. He wrote the summary quickly and seemed focused the entire time, without letting anything distract him.

The second book I chose for Alex to read was *Face to Face with Cheetahs* by Chris Johns and Elizabeth Carney. I chose this book because Alex is an animal lover and enjoys doing pretty much anything that involves animals. Before I even asked Alex to read the book, his face lit up and he appeared to be extremely excited. He also informed me that the tiger was his favorite animal, and that he would like to be able to read a book about them as well. Alex did not spin in his chair at all while reading the first chapter in the book and appeared to be reading every word. His eyes were skimming each word and he spent a decent amount of time looking at each page. Once he finished the chapter, he asked if he could look at all of the pictures in the book before telling me what had happened. It was extremely evident that Alex liked the book and enjoyed reading it. He was highly motivated not only to read the book, but also to participate in the retelling. Alex was able to give me a descriptive retelling of the chapter without even using the book! He told me all of the important facts he had read in his own words. Alex wrote this summary just as quickly as he did with the Goosebumps book. He used the book to write his summary, but paraphrased his writing.

This session is clear evidence that Alex's reading motivation level will increase when given books that appeal to his interest. His reading motivation appears to correlate with his reading comprehension. When Alex is motivated to read the book, he tends to comprehend better as well.

Book Discussions Promote Reading Motivation

During the fourth session, I decided to discover whether book discussions would affect Alex's reading motivation. I selected a book from a series that Alex had mentioned he liked during the interview. The plan was to discuss the book and provide Alex with some background knowledge prior to reading. We would also discuss the story after chapter one and two without using the book.

I chose a book out of the *I Survived* series. Alex was to read the first two chapters from *I Survived the Attacks of September 11, 2001* by Lauren Tarshis. I wanted to give Alex a purpose for reading, and wanted to discuss the book before, during, and after to observe how his reading motivation level and comprehension were influenced. I also set a purpose for reading and told Alex that after each chapter he was going to need to tell me the main points of the reading and provide supporting details. Below is the warm up/introductory discussion included as a part of the book reading session.

Samantha: Do you know what happened on September 11, 2001?

Alex: (Looking at the cover) A bomb because it looks like something is blowing up, oh, it's the twin towers. The plane crashes into two buildings on a suicide mission.

Samantha: Yes you're right, it was a terrorist attack that caused thousands of deaths. Do you think this has affected your life today?

Alex: Not me, but it affects our country because we celebrate it.

Samantha: This book is going to be about 9/11. I want you to pay close attention to your reading and pick out the main point of the reading with supporting details from the chapter.

The purpose of this short discussion was to provide Alex with some knowledge on the topic he would be reading. I also hoped to get him excited about what he was going to read.

Alex seemed focused while he was reading. He was skimming his eyes over every word and was taking his time reading the pages. After both the first and second chapters, I asked Alex to tell me the main point of the chapter and provide supporting evidence. Alex was able to do this without any problems. Alex had high reading motivation and comprehension because we discussed the book before, during, and after reading.

Book Choice Impacts Reading Motivation

During our fifth session, I decided to discover the impact choice had on Alex's reading motivation level. I wanted to learn whether students would be motivated to read books out of their interest, if given a choice in what they would be reading. I placed six different books in front of Alex, none of which were of his interests. Three of these books were fiction and three were nonfiction. I told Alex that he would need to read the first chapter in two of the books and then answer some comprehension questions without using the book for help. Both of the books Alex selected were nonfiction.

I told Alex that after he finished reading the books that he was going to answer some comprehension questions and that he had better read carefully. The comprehension

worksheet consisted of one multiple-choice question, two short answer questions, and an open-ended question, which allowed room him to write down anything he had learned.

The first book Alex chose to read was *Venus* by Seymour Simon. Alex appeared to be especially motivated and grateful that he was able to have a say in what books he would be reading. Alex stopped in the middle of the reading to ask me what carbon monoxide was and if it came from trees. I informed him that oxygen came from trees and that carbon monoxide was an odorless gas. He then proceeded to ask me why there was carbon monoxide on Venus, when there was not any on Mars. I told him that I was not sure, but that it was something we could look up together another time. This was the first time that Alex ever asked me any questions while he was reading. This indicated that his reading motivation level was high and that he actually cared about what he was reading. Alex had no problem filling out the comprehension worksheet and answered all of the questions correctly. I would like to note that he did not provide many details in his short answer responses.

The second book Alex chose to read was *Extreme Scientists* by Donna M. Jackson. Unfortunately, Alex appeared not to like this book at all, and his reading motivation level dropped dramatically. He was skimming pages rather than reading and turned the pages after just a few seconds. He was also clicking his pen and twirling his hair. Alex was not motivated to read this book. Even though given a choice of what to read, he was still limited to choosing from books that were outside of his interests. Alex's reading motivation probably would have remained high if he had been able to choose a book within his interest. The behaviors observed during my study indicate the positive affect that book choice has on reading motivation and engagement.

Although, it appeared as though Alex was not reading the book at all he did surprisingly well on the comprehension worksheet. The worksheet followed the same format as the other one. He needed to ask me what a meteorologist was, and once I provided him with a definition of the word, he was able to answer the questions. He struggled to tell me something he had learned and ended up jotting down something that made absolutely no sense.

Book Choice combined with Personal Interests

I observed that Alex's reading motivation level and reading comprehension were both at their highest when combining interest with choice. The format of my sixth session with Alex was almost identical to session five with one major change. This time the six books that I provided Alex to choose from were all within his interest. As soon as I placed the books down on the table, Alex became excited. He chose a book about wolves immediately, but struggled to pick a second book. He informed me that the reason he was having such a hard time was that all of the books were appealing to him. Eventually he chose two of the nonfiction books.

The first book Alex read was *The Tiger* by Stephanie Ledu-Frattini. I reminded Alex before reading that he would have to complete a comprehension sheet without using the book just as he had for the previous meeting. Alex focused again on the text, and took his time reading the book. After reading the required portion of the book, he asked if he could read on and look at the pictures. It was easy to see how motivated he was especially, when he asked me if he could keep reading. I told him that I wanted him to answer the questions first while they were fresh in his mind and that as soon as he answered the questions he would be able to finish the book.

Alex was able to answer three of the four questions correctly, only missing the multiple-choice question. He thought that tigers were from Africa rather than Asia; a misconception he held, before reading the book. During this session not only were his short answers correct, but they included several details.

The second book Alex read was *Face to Face with Wolves* by Jim and Judy Brandenburg. Alex was excited to read this book and informed me that wolves were one of his favorite animals because they reminded him of his pet Samoyeds. Alex focused while reading the book, with his eyes glued to the pages.

Alex answered all of the comprehension questions correctly, but circled two answers for the first question. He was supposed to choose the species of wolves that are most common in North America, but instead chose the two types of wolves found in North America. I do not think Alex read the question correctly, for if he had he probably would have only circled the correct answer.

Overall, this was the most enthusiastic I had ever seen Alex out of all of the reading sessions. He was motivated to read because he was interested in the topics and was able to choose the books for himself. Alex had no problem comprehending the storylines and information presented in these books because he was actively engaged in his reading experience, thus demonstrating his increased intrinsic motivation.

Motivation Increases when Rereading with a Purpose

I wanted to discover the effect on the reading motivation of Alex when instructed to reread a book, when given a purpose for the task. At the end of session six, I asked Alex to choose one book that he would like to reread. Alex told me he would like to reread *Face to Face with Wolves*. Before having Alex reread the story, I asked him to tell

me what he remembered from the first time he read it and what he already knew about wolves. Alex was able to remember about half of what he had read, but brought a lot of prior knowledge to the conversation. I told Alex that the purpose of him rereading this book was to understand it better. I gave him a stack of post-it notes and told him he was going to write down any words he did not understand while he was reading.

Alex did not appear to be upset that he had to reread the book. In fact, he spent more time rereading this book than he had when reading any of the other books for the first time. He appeared to be reading every word carefully in order to find words he did not know.

When Alex was finished reading, he wrote down two words - admiration and facial. I explained to Alex what admiration meant; then had him go back to the page he had found the word to see if it changed his understanding. With this particular word, the meaning of the story did not change. When I started to tell him what “facial” meant he stopped me, and told me what it meant. It turned out that it was not that he did not know what the word meant, but that he was pronouncing it wrong. When going back and rereading the word correctly, the meaning on the page did change and it made much more sense to Alex. Alex and I discussed what he had read after going over the vocabulary words and he was able to provide me with much more details than he had during the beginning of the session. The behaviors exhibited by Alex demonstrate the importance of providing a purpose for rereading to increase student motivation and engagement. Although, I feel that it is important for students to learn unfamiliar words, my main goal was to have Alex reread the story with a purpose in mind rather than simply being told to reread. Alex appeared to be motivated to read, and comprehended more from the story

than he had the first time around, demonstrating an positive increase in Alex's motivation level when he was given a purpose to reread.

Post Sessions Interview

During our final session together, I interviewed Alex again. I asked Alex the same questions from the first interview. The information I collected provided me with an understanding of how his opinions and thoughts toward reading had changed over the past two months. Below is an excerpt of the interview recorded via cell phone:

Samantha: What makes reading exciting for you?

Alex: Being able to pick my own book.

Samantha: What makes reading boring?

Alex: Not being able to read my own book.

While most of Alex's answers remained similar to his first answers, his opinion on what makes reading exciting and boring changed drastically. After working with me, Alex was able to realize the huge impact choice had on his reading motivation level. Alex can correctly identify what can motivate him to read.

Chapter Summary

Throughout the two-month time that I worked with Alex, I was able to watch his reading motivation levels fluctuate. Alex's reading motivation level changed due to a variety of circumstances. The major causes of change in Alex's reading motivation level were related to how the book was presented to him, why he was reading the book, the genre of the book, whether or not he was interested in the book or not, and whether or not he was able to have a say in what he was going to read.

Within my study, I constructed my sessions in such a way that to allow me to observe Alex's literacy learning and behaviors within the various reading experiences. Demonstrably, Alex's reading motivation was observed to increase when he was able to choose which book he would be reading. He also showed signs of high levels of reading motivation and engagement when reading a book of interest, participating in book discussions, and rereading books with a purpose in mind. When giving Alex a book that was not interesting to him, his reading motivation level dropped drastically. This also appeared to be the case when given preselected books without being able to have a say in what he would be reading.

Reading comprehension and reading motivation appeared to go hand in hand for Alex. When he was motivated to read he would perform well on the comprehension activities. The same holds true for when Alex was unmotivated to read. When Alex showed a lack of motivation, it reflected in the work he provided during the comprehension activities.

My research has been beneficial not only to Alex, but also to me. As a teacher I need to know what motivates students to read and what doesn't. I also need to make sure that my students comprehend what they are reading. In conducting my research with Alex, I was able to demonstrate the importance of utilizing student choice and interest to improve and increase student engagement and motivation. I have also learned that if my students are motivated to read, they are also more likely to be able to comprehend what they have read.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

My study investigated reading motivation and engagement. I discovered, through using certain literacy strategies with Alex, which ones worked and which ones were ineffective. Through triangulation of my data, my research strongly supported that providing Alex with book choice and books within his interest increased his reading motivation and engagement. My data also concluded that setting a purpose for rereading and providing Alex with book discussions increased his reading motivation and engagement. Finally, the results of my study suggests that providing Alex with books outside of his interests and not giving him a choice in what he is reading, negatively impacts his reading motivation and engagement.

When students are interested in what they are reading, their reading motivation and engagement increases. They are able to relate to the topic they are reading about by activating background knowledge and making connections with their real life (Guthrie, 2007). As their reading motivation increases so does their comprehension (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Another strategy to increase student's reading motivation is to provide them with a choice in what they are reading. Students feel more empowered and in control of their learning when given a choice. Even if the choice is limited, it still increases student's reading motivation. Furthermore, when forcing students to read a certain book without any say in the matter they become disengaged and unattached to their reading. This leads to a drop in their reading motivation as well as comprehension (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Students can also be motivated to read by allowing them to participate in book discussions. This can be helpful to the students because it gives them the opportunity to share their opinion and hear other opinions. They may start to understand the story from a different point of view and look forward to rereading the book with different opinions in mind.

Implications

Implications for Teachers

Although, many teachers feel that the Common Core leaves them with little time to allow student book choice, it is something to consider incorporating daily in order to motivate students to read. Teachers could even supply students with supplemental texts that align the Common Core curriculum as long as some level of choice is provided.

Although, letting a student choose any book that they are interested in would be ideal, it is not always possible. Even if teachers start giving students three books to choose from, it will increase their motivation and ultimately increase their reading comprehension as well. Teachers should also start including book conversations into their lesson plans. This would give students the opportunity to express their thoughts about the book and hear different opinions. It also gives the students an opportunity to make connections with what they are reading. Finally, teachers should give students a purpose when reading or rereading a book. Students often become engaged in reading and motivated to read, if they are reading with a specific purpose in mind because it gives them a reason to do the reading.

Implications for Students

This study provides several different implications for students regarding how to increase their reading motivation and engagement. For Alex's self-perception specifically, Alex, and students like him, provision of more choice in book selection, more books that center on student interest, engaging book conversations, and a set purpose when having to reread a book. First, when Alex is interested in the book he is reading, he is more motivated to read and his comprehension increases drastically. Alex would also benefit from being able to choose his own books. Alex would benefit the most from being able to choose any book he wants, but will still benefit from provision of any sort of choice, even if it is just between three books. When Alex is able to choose the book he is reading, he feels more in control of his learning and validated in his opinion (Johnson & Giorgis, 2003).

Furthermore, Alex would also benefit if he were able to discuss the book he is reading with his teacher or his peers. This allows Alex to make connections with what he is reading and make sense of it all. Finally, Alex would benefit if he were given a purpose when reading or when rereading. When Alex is given a purpose to reread, he pays closer attention to what he is reading. This also helps him to understand why he is reading the book. His comprehension definitely increases when he is able to discuss the book and given a purpose for his reading. Oftentimes, when he is told to read or reread something that he is uninterested in he will just skim through the book because he does not understand why he is reading it.

Recommendations for Future Research:

One suggestion for myself as a researcher would be to continue observing Alex throughout the school. This would allow me to better document his growth and reading motivation levels. I would also suggest conducting another case study with a new student and juxtaposing the findings to provide a more accurate conclusion. A suggestion for other researchers would be to focus on the same question, but study the student's motivation to write as well. I think that similar results may arise with writing as they did with reading. Other researchers may also want to focus on an entire class of students rather than on one individual student in order to collect more data.

Limitations

The biggest limitation of this study was the amount of time I had to complete my research. I only had two months to observe Alex's reading motivation levels and may have discovered different results if I had had an entire year. Another limitation would be that this was a case study conducted with only one participant and his behavior may differ from other students his age. This study also focused on a child from a suburban setting, therefore rural and urban settings were not explored. The final limitation of this study was that there were not member checks. Since I was the only researcher working with Alex, I am the only one who took field notes and analyzed the recordings. I did not have anyone else to check my work or compare notes with to check for accuracy.

Overall Significance of the Study

It was important that I observed Alex's reading motivation and engagement levels because it helped me to discover literacy strategies that positively and negatively impacted his behavior towards reading. I, Alex's teachers and other teachers who

facilitate instruction for students of this nature could use the information collected from this study. This information may also be transferrable when working with other students. I now know by engaging my students with a book discussion, providing them a purpose to reread, giving them books within their interest, or giving them a choice in their book selection that they may be more motivated to read.

Appendices

Interview Questions

1. Do you enjoy reading?
2. What do you like about reading?
3. What type of books do you like to read?
4. Do you prefer to read in or outside of school? Does it matter?
5. Are there any books you don't like to read?
6. What makes reading exciting for you?
7. What makes reading boring?
8. What does your teacher do to make reading and learning fun?
9. Do you think you are a good reader?
10. What does a good reader look like? What do they do?
11. Do you prefer to read books in print or e-books? Why?
12. Does your motivation increase when you are reading a book of choice rather than a book assigned to you by your teacher? Why do you think this might be?

Date	Observation

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