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How Choice Influences Student Engagement and Motivation: A Case Study

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How Choice Influences Student Engagement and Motivation: A Case Study

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December 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 Masters of Science in Education

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Abstract

This capstone explores how choice influences student motivation and engagement in literacy. With observations, student and parent interviews, literacy based activities, and a student self-reflection. The participant is studied based on his motivation and engagement when choice is provided and when it is not. The parent participant is studied based on her parental involvement and influence on the student participant. The purpose of this study is to gain insight on how to implement choice for this specific student in and outside of the classroom, and how that influences his motivation and engagement in literacy. The study also aims to get a closer look at the educational benefits of providing choice in literacy. Findings suggest that it is simple for this student to sustain motivation and engagement in literacy because he truly enjoys reading and learning new information. Recommendations for future research include exploring how choice influences other groups of students or unmotivated students.

Keywords: engagement, motivation, choice, literacy

Chapter I: Introduction

Sitting down at the kitchen table, I looked across at Jason; he is poised, calm and confident.

Natalie: “What types of books do you like to read?”

Jason: “I enjoy reading books about the military and police force. Those are two jobs I would like to hold out of college. I would like to be a Marine Corps Infantry Reservist and a Rochester Police Officer. I read these kinds of books so I can learn more about these professions.”

Problem Statement

Trends in literacy education focus on the importance of teaching strategies and pedagogy implemented in the classroom. The issue that I will be addressing in my qualitative case study is how choice influences a student’s motivation and engagement in literacy activities. This study will provide important insight into the correlation between choice and a student’s learning. Further investigation is needed in order to determine the benefits of providing students with choice, and how choice influences their literacy achievement, motivation, and engagement.

Significance of the Problem

Student motivation and engagement during reading are of concern to many literacy professionals, educators and parents. Many struggling readers in middle school are disengaged from reading. Some factors that play a role in this phenomenon are students’ physical and psychological development. In addition to low achievement, these students can have low motivation for reading. Reading instruction is often disconnected from content, making reading tedious (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Students will need to

acquire and show mastery of various literacy skills inclusive of reading, writing and communicating, at all grade levels. Students will need these critical literacy skills in order to be effective across subject content areas within formalized educational settings and ultimately within their job or career choice. Unfortunately, teachers are faced with struggling and non-engaged readers with different interests, abilities, sociocultural experiences, and funds of knowledge. Teachers should consider using every literacy tool available to them to create and foster a literacy-learning environment, which engages and motivates students. This environment should allow students to use their strengths, knowledge and interests to deepen and enhance their learning.

My research study is important because it will shed light on current literacy practices and inform teachers and educators of ways to keep students motivated and engaged using choice and differentiation. Ultimately, by integrating the use of choice in traditional literacy instruction, student motivation and engagement should increase for disengaged readers as well as their intrinsic motivation to read.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to understand how the use of choice, appropriateness of text, differentiation, genre, technology and topic of interest can influence an adolescent male student's motivation and engagement in varied literacy activities. As a teacher, I want to create a motivating and engaging learning environment for my future students. Through conducting my research study, it will inform my thinking as a teacher regarding motivating my future students during reading and writing, as well as what strategies work to keep students engaged in literacy activities. There is plenty of research that is relative to motivation and engagement of students. However, my study will inform my thinking

as a teacher as well as other teachers, educators and professionals when trying to understand why choice is effective for students and how it influences their motivation and engagement in literacy activities. According to Dweck (2002) “when students are engaged in school, they try harder. When they try harder, they achieve more.”

Research Questions

Within my qualitative case study, I sought to answer the following questions:

- How does choice influence a 9th grade adolescent male’s engagement and motivation in literacy activities?
- How is this adolescent male student capable of sustaining engagement and motivation during literacy activities?

Rationale

My study is important to the field of education because if students are not motivated or engaged in what is being taught or what they are reading, it will affect their reading and writing comprehension, critical thinking skills, and their overall awareness of literacy. Therefore, it is necessary to look at literacy learning and instruction through a different lens. When choice is provided in a student’s education, it aids in the enrichment of the literacy learning and literacy development of the student; making the literacy experience more meaningful and engaging. Furthermore, it empowers the student in their learning thus gives them ownership. Conducting this study is important to me because I believe in the theories behind motivation, engagement, and choice. I believe my study will contribute to my knowledge of teaching adolescent literacy learners. My study will also provide me with new teaching practices and techniques that may work for students who benefit from choice. I can use these techniques in my classroom when trying to motivate and keep students engaged.

Study Approach

I will take a qualitative, narrative based approach which examines theories behind motivation, engagement, and choice (Glasser 1996); the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1999) and the Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) will also be pertinent to this study. Choice Theory (Glasser, 1998) “teaches us that outside events never make us to do anything, what drives our behavior is internally developed by notions of what is most important and satisfying to us.” Another major concept that Choice Theory teaches is:

The notion that people always have some choice about how to behave, this does not mean that we have unlimited choice or that outside information is irrelevant as we choose how to behave. It means that we have more control than some people might believe and that we are responsible for the choices we make (Glasser, 1998).

During my study, the student participant will have opportunities to makes choices. The choices the participant makes will allow me to examine his ability to sustain motivation, engagement, and self-determination during his participation in diverse literacy activities.

The Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) demonstrates the relationship between social interactions and a positive literacy-learning environment, which supports students’ cognitive development. Students continually learn from others and connect their experiences to themselves and their own learning. The connection between student’s intrinsic ability to learn and the environment they are in is the basis of the Sociocultural

Perspective/Theory. The student participant will partake in various literacy activities that demonstrate this theory.

Definition of Terms

Keywords: Sociocultural Theory, Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Determination, Choice, Engagement

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Many children become excited and engaged in reading; however, some are reluctant, disinterested, struggle and are even resistant to the process of reading. Some children mask their negative attitudes towards reading by using other behaviors for example, acting out or refusal. Research studies indicate that a large percentage of boys who were avid readers in the elementary grades become disinterested in reading during their middle school years into high school. There are a number of factors, which may contribute to this shift. Some factors are the increasing complexity of content material and peer pressure. The primary reason seems to be that these students fail to see the connection between reading and “real” life. According to Walt Gardner (2013), “when teachers try to design lessons more in line with the needs and interests of their students, they often find themselves stymied by district policies that prevent them from doing so.” These efforts to shield students from the realities of life almost backfire, leaving students more disengaged than before.

Based on the research I have reviewed and analyzed, I plan to conduct a qualitative case study to understand how choice influences a 9th grade adolescent male’s motivation and engagement in literacy activities. Research studies examining literacy engagement have been conducted; however, an underlying question is constantly being asked. What makes a literacy task engaging? The integration of choice in literacy activities is an important factor to consider in sustaining student engagement in literacy instruction. Children growing up in the 21st century are being provided with many tools such as iPads, social media, and multiliteracies to support their learning. Through choice and creating an environment that fosters and promotes literacy learning, I will be able to

examine how these factors can influence an adolescent male student's reading engagement and motivation.

My research study is intended to provide additional insight that may not be adequately addressed by previous research studies. My literature review will go into further detail on how factors such as the sociocultural theory, intrinsic motivation, choice and student interest, engagement and self-determination influence the literacy learning, engagement and motivation of the student.

Sociocultural Theory

The body of current and previous research conducted regarding the factors that facilitate or prevent students' deep involvement in learning suggests that a student's behavior is a function of their personal characteristics and environment. Vygotsky and Piaget's work in the mid-20th century allowed for a new perspective on children's learning. The Sociocultural Theory/Perspective is the relationship between social interactions and a positive literacy-learning environment that supports children's cognitive development. They continually learn from others and connect their experiences to themselves. The connection between a child's intrinsic ability to learn and the environment they are in is the basis of this theory.

In a study conducted by Marchant et al. (2001), researchers explored the relationship of both parenting styles and parent involvement and school contexts on students' motivation. Researchers examined how students' perceptions of their motivations and academic self-competence mediate between these environmental contexts and academic achievement. The study involved two hundred thirty fifth- and sixth-grade students. The students responded to questionnaires using four scales that

assessed parenting style and parental involvement. Parenting style was measured using two dimensions: demandingness (authority) and responsiveness (warmth). Parent involvement was measured by parental values and parental involvement in school functions. The teacher control scale and the teacher responsiveness scale were administered to measure teaching style. School atmosphere was measured using the school responsiveness scale. Students also responded to three measures designed to measure achievement outcomes. Students' school achievement was represented by their grades from the most recent grading period. Students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as their academic self-competence was measured using the motivations scale and the academic competence scale.

The findings of the study confirmed the important role that relationships among parents, teachers and peers play on early adolescents' school achievement. When students perceived that parents valued the importance of effort and academic success, students had higher perceived academic competence and placed a high priority on their ability, effort, and grades. Results from the study also show that parent involvement in the home verses participation at school may differentially relate to student motivation. When parents are involved, students report more effort, concentration, and attention. Students are more inherently interested in learning, and they experience higher perceived competence.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to any behavior that is driven by internal rewards, such as related to the satisfaction at achievement of personal goals. For example, for those who value hard work during the completion of a task demonstrate their effort, their engagement in and completion of the task has intrinsic merit. Deci and Ryan (1987)

suggest intrinsic motivation stems from the human need to be self-determining and competent, i.e., to be autonomous rather than externally controlled. An intrinsically motivated behavior is that which appears to be spontaneously initiated by the person in pursuit of no other goal than the activity itself. According to Deci and Ryan, events that foster self-determination or competence will enhance or maintain intrinsic motivation, while events that weaken self-determination or competence will decrease intrinsic motivation.

Researchers Becker et al. (2010), conducted a study in which 740 students from the grade levels fourth through sixth were participants, the researchers examined the students' reading frequency as a mediator between intrinsic motivations to read i.e. reading for enjoyment versus reading literacy. The researchers measured reading literacy by the students' abilities to comprehend and decode text and their knowledge of vocabulary. The results indicated that intrinsic motivation to read in the fourth grade predicted reading literacy in the sixth grade and this relationship was mediated by reading frequency. The study found that extrinsic motivation negatively correlated to reading literacy. Motivating students intrinsically allows them to develop self-determination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and competence when completing reading and writing activities.

Self- Determination

When children are transitioning into adolescents, they become more aware of their identity. Students experience competence when challenged and given prompt feedback. Students experience autonomy when they feel supported to explore, are encouraged to take initiative, they consider it safe to take risks and develop and

implement solutions for their problems. Students experience relatedness when they perceive others listening and responding to them. When these three needs are met, students are more intrinsically motivated and actively engaged in their learning.

According to Deci and Ryan, the significance of the Self-Determination Theory:

distinguishes between two different types of motivation- autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. SDT looks at the concept of goals as well as motivations and considers them in a differentiated manner. Both autonomy and control are types of motivation; they move students to exert energy and perform tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1999).

Angela Falter Thomas (2015) describes the Self-Determination Theory as, “a theory that focuses primarily on internal motivation causes such as the need to gain knowledge or independence” (p.28). She believes in order to become self-determined and intrinsically motivated to pursue activities of interest, the individual needs to develop competence as they master certain tasks and develop skills. The individual must also make connections or feel some sort of relatedness because people require experiencing a sense of belonging. The choices the participant makes will allow me to examine his ability to sustain motivation and engagement during literacy activities. The study conducted by Angela Falter Thomas took place over a five-week period. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized in this study to gain a more holistic picture of the sixth grade students’ reading homework experience. Students’ motivation was assessed using the self-report measures and rating scales completed by teachers and parents. It was the responsibility of the students to complete their homework and report whether they did the assignment or not. After the five weeks, each student participated in

a one-on-one private interview in order to obtain feedback and extend knowledge about the students' thoughts and perceptions toward the homework assignments. This allowed the researcher to determine if the students were more motivated to read the assignment because of certain types of classroom follow up. The findings of this study suggested that the that students were most motivated to do the homework reading assignments when they were required to come to class with work associated with the assignment (i.e. guided notes). Students were also found to be grade-driven and completed their homework because their parents were required to inquire nightly about homework assignments, and students did not want to have negative repercussions. In order for students to be engaged and motivated, teachers need to make sure they are using appropriate reading assignments, for example, allowing choice and collaboration to engage and encourage students to actually read and complete their homework.

According to studies conducted by Deci and Ryan, schools throughout the country are using self-determination instruction as a way to better motivate students and meet the growing need to teach children and youth to fully accept responsibility for their lives. Through helping them to identify their needs and develop strategies to meet those needs they will become self-determined.

Choice

When teachers provide choices during literacy instruction, students are encouraged to make personal choices. Students can select from a variety of tasks that are appropriate for their learning needs and interests.

Research has shown that choice is a powerful motivator. Choice Theory (Glasser, 1998) “teaches us that outside events never make us to do anything, what drives our

behavior is internally developed by notions of what is most important and satisfying to us.” Glasser (1998) further suggests another concept that Choice Theory presents that:

The notion that we always have some choice about how to behave. This does not mean that we have unlimited choice or that outside information is irrelevant as we choose how to behave. It means that we have more control than some people might believe and that we are responsible for the choices we make (Glasser, 1998).

Choice affects motivation, and motivation, when combined with cognitive competence and social interaction, leads to engagement (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). According to Turner and Paris (1995), “when students can choose tasks and texts they are interested in, they expend more effort learning and understand the material” (p.644). When students are allowed to select tasks that have personal value, they are more likely to use learning strategies that they have been taught. The study conducted by Turner and Paris consisted of providing students with open tasks. These open tasks provided challenge, choice, and student control over learning, which gave them opportunities to collaborate with others and construct meaning through reading and writing. Turner and Paris created six contexts for motivation, choice, challenge, control, collaboration, constructive comprehension, and consequences. In order for students to be motivated, teachers need to provide the tools and the reasons to read and write which will ultimately allow students to discover many paths to literacy.

Students who were involved in this study were allowed to choose among activities and had options about how to organize and plan, which gave them the personal responsibility for their own literacy learning, promote self-efficacy and boost student

self-confidence. For example, when the students selected texts, they decided what their interests were and whether or not they were the appropriate level and how the text supported their reading process. In this study, students chose both the process and the product when participating in the literacy activities. The findings of this study suggested that allowing students to make choices encourages them to develop an interest in literacy. It also provides students an opportunity to plan and regulate their own learning. A major indicator of motivation was not the type of reading program that certain districts follow, but the actual daily tasks that teachers provided students in their classrooms. The most successful tasks that teachers provided were authentic and conveyed the value of literacy for communication and enjoyment. This allowed students to be actively involved in constructing meaning and thinking metacognitively.

Engagement

Why is engagement so important? Engagement is a vital component of classroom instruction because it is explicitly associated with reading achievement (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). According to Parsons et. al. (2015) engagement has most recently been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, consisting of affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. Each component emphasizes how engagement is dynamic and malleable. A study conducted by Parsons et. al. (2015) was based on a sixth grade classroom in a Title 1 elementary school. The study included six students and one teacher. The teacher selected student participants based on their representation of three performance levels: two low, two average, and two high-performing students. The teacher, the researcher used observations to document the assigned tasks and behavioral engagement. The study also included post interviews to document affective and cognitive

engagement. Then a rubric was used to rate the academic tasks classifying as closed, moderately open, and open and a rating scale was used to rate students behavior, affective and cognitive engagement. The findings of this study indicated students were most engaged when they were able to collaborate and receive appropriate support during the academic tasks. The teacher researcher holistically assessed each learner taking into consideration his/her needs, and created a successful collaboration when creating groups. The teacher also provided the participants with the appropriate strategies and supports when completing the literacy tasks. This ultimately provided the students with an array of strategies they are capable of using in future collaborative or independent projects.

Summary

In order to facilitate students in acquiring the essential literacy skills necessary for students to be successful in their literacy learning, teachers should work to engage and motivate them in any literacy activity. Despite the many challenges of keeping our students engaged and motivated, teachers should consider using a creative approach to integrating choice into their literacy practices when planning, constructing and facilitating literacy instruction. By paying close attention to the aforementioned factors and how they impact the student's literacy learning, development and achievement, teachers and parents can support students' engagement and motivation through individualized reading instruction and experiences, high interest reading material, modeling, and providing opportunities for choice and collaboration during literacy activities.

Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

Introduction

I conducted my qualitative study to understand how choice influences a 9th grade male student's motivation and engagement in literacy activities. This chapter of my research study will address the methods and procedures used to thoughtfully gather the necessary data to be analyzed to effectively answer my research questions. My research focused on the influence of engagement, motivation, and choice in reading and writing activities. I discussed the research questions, participants and data collection methods I plan to use. I also discussed the ways I plan to analyze the data and described the criteria of trustworthiness and certain limitations this study has.

Research Questions

Within my qualitative case study, I sought to answer the following questions:

- How does choice influence a 9th grade adolescent male's engagement and motivation in varied literacy activities?
- How is this adolescent male student capable of sustaining engagement and motivation during literacy activities?

Research Design

I used a qualitative research design in the form of a case study to be conducted over the duration of six weeks. Conducting a study of this nature will allow me to collect data and determine how choice influences a student's motivation and engagement in varied literacy activities. I administered a literacy questionnaire and conducted two surveys- one with child participant and one with the parent participant. The student completed a self-reflection based on his experience partaking in this study. I made observations, took anecdotal notes, and used a double entry journal to reflect on my findings. I also took audio recordings as needed in order to avoid bias in my notetaking.

When analyzing my data I used constant comparative analysis, triangulation of my data and an open coding system of the trends I found. I shared my findings in order to provide implications for future instruction. I believe the findings from this study will enable me as a teacher to differentiate literacy instruction for any student of any ability in order to best support him or her. I conducted a six-week study with an adolescent male student who was immersed in literacy activities revolving around choice and differentiation.

Participants and Context

My participant, who for the purpose of this study shall be referred to as Jason, is a 15-year-old Caucasian male student. I chose this student because I have watched him grow up into the young man he is today. Our families have been very close for the past 15 years, and I am very intrigued to see what motivates him and keeps him engaged in literacy activities. I also interviewed his 45-year-old mother who shall be referred to as Melissa, to understand her perspective of her son's engagement and motivation.

Jason lives at home with his mom and dad, his older brother and two younger sisters. Jason loves to play sports, listen to music and spend time with his family and friends. He is the starting quarterback on the high school JV football team. He loves to read for pure pleasure. He enjoys reading about events that have taken place in history, current events, and informational texts. Jason is mature for his age and He aspires to be in the U.S. Military or a Rochester Police Officer. His father and uncle who are both Rochester Police Officers influence Jason. The context will be in the participant's home located in Rochester, NY.

Procedures

My study consisted of six sessions of literacy experiences, one per each week for duration of six weeks. The sessions took place at Jason's home. During the various sessions with the participants, I took anecdotal notes, made observations, and audio-recordings. I used a double entry journal to take notes and make reflections. I had Jason participate in varied literacy activities. During debriefing, the Jason was able to reflect on the activity and or discussions that took place during the session. This also allowed me to observe and make notes about his behavior and actions. Debriefing will consisted of me asking the participant questions about the activity, and or allowing him time to discuss the purpose of the activity and how he felt about completing it.

The first session was the "getting to know you" session, which lasted about 30 minutes. I first administered a literacy questionnaire in order to collect pertinent information about Jason. Then I had a conversation with Jason and his mother about their literacy experiences. Within the second session, Jason read a book of his choice for 15 minutes and debriefed for 10 minutes. In the third session, I asked Jason some questions regarding technology. He also read aloud from a book of his choice and an article of my choice for 10 minutes each and debriefed for 10 minutes. For the fourth session, Jason read aloud a nonfiction text for 15 minutes and fiction text for 15 minutes; after he responded to structured prompts and debriefed for 10 minutes. When the fifth session occurred, Jason wrote about a personal experience that influenced him using google docs and debriefed for 10 minutes. In the final session, Jason took part in a semi-structured interview with me for 20-30 minutes and debriefed for 10 minutes. Jason was encouraged and showed willingness to participate in any conversations regarding the activities he

completed. Jason completed a self-reflection based on his experience participating in my qualitative case study. Melissa took part in a semi-structured interview and debriefed for 10 minutes.

Positionality as the Researcher

I am currently an AIS reading provider in a suburban public school district in Upstate New York. I graduated from Canisius College and have dual certifications in General Education (grades 1-6) and Students with Disabilities (grades 1-6). I also have my Middle School Extension (grades 7-9) in English. I am pursuing my Master's degree in Literacy and will be certified in Literacy (Birth – 12). In addition, I have worked extensively in diverse school settings as a substitute teacher throughout Upstate New York. Growing up, my parents and grandparents always read to my sister and me. At bedtime, I would always ask my mom to “tell me a story from your head.” She was always so creative. My parents also always supported me in my schoolwork. I remember working on my spelling words with my mom at the kitchen table every night. I feel blessed to have been able to have such positive experiences surrounding literacy growing up. These varied literacy experiences inspired a desire and enjoyment for reading and learning new things. Reading allows me to place myself in the setting, make connections, and be imaginative.

I found my passion for teaching literacy because of my experiences and encounters with students who are struggling readers. I enjoy teaching small groups and working closely with students because it allows me to analyze their reading behaviors and plan instruction based on specific student needs. While teaching students who are in need of academic support, I have witnessed how choice can greatly influence student

motivation and engagement in literacy activities and learning. These students are also highly motivated by technology, e-books, and audio/visual instruction. By providing them with choices during reading group for example, students choose what books they read or using technology to read a text, they are far more motivated and engaged.

Throughout my academic journey, as well as my teaching experience, I have developed insight and understanding regarding student motivation and engagement. Varied literacy activities and experiences can make a difference in a child's life and literacy growth, learning and development because they are being exposed to new information and other perspectives that can broaden their literacy learning and deepen their understanding. Literacy experiences involving choice can help children become self-determined learners i.e. learners who use strategies and are motivated and engaged in their learning.

Data Collection Instruments

During the course of this study, I used several data collection methods as detailed in the following sections. I collected all data through observations, anecdotal notes, audio-recordings of conversations, literacy questionnaire, and through semi-structured interviews, and self-reflection. I created the literacy questionnaire and wrote the semi-structured interviews for Jason and Melissa. The interviews were conducted scheduled meeting times were over the course of fall 2016 at the Jason's home. All data was collected on my password protected computer, password protected smartphone, and through a double entry journal. These methods aided in providing insight into Jason's literacy achievement, motivation, and engagement during the literacy activities he was

involved. After the data collection process, I analyzed the data through triangulation and constant comparative analysis.

Literacy Questionnaire- Student

I administered the questionnaire during the first session. I handed the student a paper copy of the questionnaire. I allowed ample time to complete the questionnaire. When finished I collected it back from him. We then discussed his answers. This gave me the background knowledge I needed when preparing the literacy activities.

Semi-Structured Interview- Student

I conducted the semi-structured interview with the student participant by asking the student questions and giving the student ample time to respond. I audio recorded the interview. This interview took place during the seventh session. The interview provided insight into my student participants' literacy knowledge.

Semi- Structured Interview- Parent

I conducted the semi-structure interview with the parent participant by asking the parent questions and giving the parent ample time to respond. I audio recorded the interview. This interview took place during the eighth session. The interview provided insight into my parent participants' knowledge of what her son's strengths and weaknesses are as well as his motivation and engagement in literacy. It also provided a great source of my students' parental involvement and achievement in literacy.

Self-Reflection- Student

I created a self-reflection for the student participant to complete after the seven sessions were completed. This allowed the student to reflect on his experience. The student participant was encouraged to participate in any conversations regarding the

activities he completed. He also was able to reflect about how his choices influenced his literacy learning during the time of the study.

Constant Comparative Analysis and Triangulation of Collected Data

I used constant comparative analysis and triangulation to analyze my data in order to develop a grounded theory. Through open and selective coding, I was able to compare my data and identify a phenomenon. I used triangulation by collecting multiple sources of data and investigated in order to produce understanding.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

In my study, there are certain practices I needed to follow to ensure the validity, reliability and credibility of my research. I objectively reported my findings/results and behaviors demonstrated by the participants. During the process, I examined previous research and related my findings to specific research as well. Additionally, I ensured validity, reliability and credibility through the triangulation of my data. I used the literacy questionnaire, student and parent interviews, student self-reflection, and a double entry journal to report on the interactions objectively without integrating my own thoughts or feelings.

Limitations

The data collection methods I chose include some limitations. My qualitative study is not generalizable. The parent participant semi-structured interview may contain bias due to the student participant being her son. The anecdotal notes may inherently have some bias as well when taking into consideration different perspectives presented in responding to the literacy activities and interview instruments regarding student motivation and engagement in literacy. I compared the results of the interviews with my

observations and interactions because the data collected was dependent on the truthfulness of the participants. The limitations noted were taken into consideration when reviewing this study.

Chapter IV: Findings and Analysis of Data

Introduction

As indicated in my previous chapter, my study was conducted over a period of six weeks, with a session being conducted each week to examine student engagement and motivation in literacy. During this chapter, I will discuss the methods employed in analyzing my data and the themes observed during the examination of my data upon the completion of conducting my research. I used in my qualitative case study were constant comparative analysis and triangulation of my data. I used a coding process while reviewing all of my data based on the factors discussed in my literature review. I assigned each factor a number and planned each data collection session based on the five related factors Sociocultural Theory-1 Intrinsic Motivation-2 Self-determination-3 Choice-4 Engagement-5. I used this process to help answer my research questions; how does choice influence a 9th grade adolescent male's engagement and motivation in literacy activities and how is this adolescent male student capable of sustaining engagement and motivation during literacy activities? My research involved constant comparative analysis and triangulation of my data because I collected data using a student literacy questionnaire, student and parent interviews, student self-reflection survey and observational notes. This allowed for more accuracy in responding to my research questions.

I categorized my findings by themes that I noticed while analyzing my data from the Student Literacy Questionnaire, Student Semi-Structured Interview, Parent Semi-Structured Interview, Student Self-Reflection as well as the many observational notes and Jason's participation in the various literacy sessions over a six-week period. I found each

theme by coding all methods of data collection. The purpose of my study was to analyze how choice influences Jason's motivation and engagement in literacy activities. I wished to explore this because I wanted to see if his intrinsic motivation, self-determination, and choices influence his ability to sustain motivation and engagement in literacy activities. There are themes within my findings that I discovered by questioning, surveying, and observing the Jason and Melissa. I recognized that Jason is self-aware of his reading skills, Jason has a positive attitude and willingness to learn, Jason's sociocultural experiences influence his engagement and motivation in literacy and Jason is goal oriented. This information is significant in that this student is truly motivated to read and enjoys reading for pure pleasure.

Jason Demonstrates Awareness of his Reading Skills and Strategies

In session one, I conducted the Student Literacy Questionnaire with Jason. I was able to create questions to ask him based on the factors I discussed in my literature review. This allowed me to develop an understanding of him as a reader, writer, and learner. I asked Jason 10 questions relating to his choices, motivation, and engagement in literacy. One of the first questions I asked him was, "What do you think you do well as a reader?" Jason responded with "I am able to visualize what I am reading very well." Jason's responses indicate that while he reads he is able to paint a picture in his head about what he is reading. This reading strategy allows Jason to connect to what he is reading and in turn builds his comprehension skills. This question connects to the factor of Self-Determination because Jason knows how to use the visualization strategy and he benefits from using it to gain knowledge. Another question that I asked Jason was, "How do you help yourself remember the details of what you read?" Jason responded with "I

visualize what I am reading in order to remember the details of what I am reading.”

Again, this showed me how he relies on this strategy to aide him in comprehension.

Prior to conducting my study, I knew Jason loved to read. I asked him the question, “What motivates you to read?” he responded with, “The ability to grow my knowledge and become smarter is what motivates me to read.” Jason also said, “Reading makes me happy because I can learn new information.” This question and response correlates to the factors of Self-Determination and Engagement. It demonstrates Jason’s engagement and love for reading, because he knows that one of benefits of reading is to obtain new information in order to gain knowledge. Another question that I asked during the literacy questionnaire that correlates with the factors of Engagement and Intrinsic Motivation was, “As your reading, what are some strategies you use when you don’t understand a word or passage?” Jason responded with “When I don’t understand a word or passage, I reread the words before it and try to use common sense in order to understand and comprehend what I read.” This indicates that Jason could stay engaged while reading because he attempts to problem solve unknown words or passages. This also demonstrates Jason’s intrinsic motivation. When he does figure out the word or passage, he experiences intrinsic satisfaction.

In session two, Jason read from a book his choice. Jason chose *On Combat* by Lt. Dave Grossman. Jason read aloud for 15 minutes. During this time, I was able to make observations and anecdotal notes based on the reading behaviors I noticed. Jason re-read and self-corrected using the three-cueing systems- meaning, syntax, and visual. Jason’s fluency is strong however; he tends to read too fast, which causes him to make errors. Jason also has a strong vocabulary.

After he read aloud, I asked Jason some questions during debriefing. The first question I asked him was “What do you want to improve on while reading out loud?” Jason responded with “I think I read too slowly.” I explained to him that he was reading a little too fast, which caused him to lose his spot and become disoriented while reading. During debriefing, I praised him and told him how great he did. Jason said, “I liked reading out loud. I felt like I understood what I was reading better than when I read in my head or whisper read. I also was able to visualize what I read better.” I believe the debriefing allowed Jason to reflect. I asked Jason if this book challenged him or rewarded him.” Jason said, “This book is a challenge for me, and each time I finish a chapter I feel rewarded and enlightened by what I read.” During this debriefing session, the opportunity provided for him to discuss and debrief his thinking regarding the literacy experience positively influenced his intrinsic motivation.

The next question I asked was, “What made you choose this book?” Jason responded with “My dad recommended it.” This response immediately showed me how Jason’s context influences his choices. Jason’s father is a Rochester Police Lieutenant. The book *On Combat*, by Lt. Dave Grossman, is about what happens to the human body under the stress of a deadly battle. It discusses the impact on the nervous system, heart, breathing, visual and auditory perception, and memory. It also discusses new research findings as to what measures warriors can take to prevent such debilitations so they can stay in the fight, survive, and win. Jason said, “This book has influenced me to stop playing violent video games.” He also shared that the detailed quotes and military examples grabbed his attention and peaked his interest to keep reading. Jason’s

engagement was evident while reading this book aloud, and it suggests that his choice influenced his motivation and engagement.

Jason Demonstrates a Positive Attitude and Outlook on Learning

Jason is a student-athlete and has a very busy schedule. Throughout my conduction of the study, Jason was always willing to go beyond expectation. Even though there were times where it was difficult to meet with Jason, he still tried his best to make time to participate in this study and put forth his best effort. Jason enjoys reading about current events, history, the military and police force.

During session three, Jason was to choose a book to read aloud for 10 minutes and read an article of my choice aloud for 10 minutes. Jason chose the book *Decisions Points* by George W. Bush. *Decision Points* is a memoir of America's 43rd president G.W.B. This book shares the conventions of a political autobiography, and George W. Bush shares his candid journey through the defining decisions of his life. I chose an article titled *Study Shows Graduation Gap for Black Male College Athletes* by the Associated Press. I chose this article because I knew that it related to his life in some way. He plays sports and plans to attend college. I also thought he might be interested in the topic. I wanted to make sure he would enjoy reading the article and learn something beneficial about realities in society.

After reading both his choice and mine, I asked Jason a few questions during the debriefing. First, I asked Jason why he chose the book *Decision Points*. He said that his English teacher had suggested it to him. He also said that he has always wanted to read something by G.W.B. I then asked if he enjoyed reading his choice versus mine, and he said, "I liked reading the article you chose better because I learned new information about

the graduation rates for black males versus white males. I also liked reading about an article that relates to my life. I plan to attend college and play football.” His response validated my decision in selecting the article. I knew it would peak his interest and in turn might positively influence his engagement in reading and comprehending the article.

Jason has strong relationships with his teachers and classmates. Besides his love for reading, Jason enjoys math and science. During session four, I asked Jason some questions regarding his technology use in and outside of school. He shared that his school has a textbook-based curriculum and the only time he uses technology is when he reviews for tests or has to type assignments. Jason prefers to read from a book or print. He said, “I have a tough time reading on anything other than paper. It is tough for me to see, focus and visualize what I am reading if it is on some form of technology.” Technology tends to distract Jason especially when he is on a computer or cellphone. He said, “It is hard to focus because of distractions, like pop-up ads.” Even though it is not Jason’s preferred method of reading, he believes technology does have benefits as an educational tool. Jason’s insightful perspective of technology demonstrates his ability to choose what works best for him when it comes to his own learning.

Also within session four, Jason was asked to read a fiction and non-fiction passage. These passages were selected based on Jason’s interests. The title of the fiction passage is “The Football Team” and the title of the non-fiction passage is “The Gulls of Salt Lake.” These passages are located on the website of the Center for Urban Education, DePaul University, 2008. The goal of this session was to observe Jason’s reading behaviors, comprehension skills, engagement, and motivation while reading fiction and nonfiction passages.

While reading the first passage (non-fiction) Jason did not read the title “The Football Team.” He moved quickly through the passage and did not self-correct the miniscule errors he made. After reading, I asked Jason some basic questions based on the reading and his opinions, which are indicated below in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 “The Football Team”

Questions: “The Football Team”	Jason’s responses
1. Why do schools have football teams?	“Schools have football teams for the competition. In addition, to show kids how to be a team player, work hard, and build character.”
2. How should you as a quarterback feel?	“The quarterback should feel proud. The weight is all on his shoulders. He is the person that holds the team together. He is the leader. He cannot get cocky or lose his character.”
3. What does a teammate look like to you?	“Students who are on a team should be trustworthy, responsible, know all the plays, and stay disciplined. They should keep up on their schoolwork and carry themselves higher in class and on the field. If you have good character in school it will transfer onto the field.”
4. What does it mean to be on a team?	“A team is a family. For some kids this might be more of a family than they have at home. It makes them feel special and that they are doing something good.”

Based on Jason’s responses to the questions, it is evident that Jason takes pride in his ability to play football and all his successes. He is a positive person and a team player. He is someone who is willing to learn in and outside of the classroom and he wants to help his teammates achieve their goals.

While reading the second passage (fiction) Jason did not read the title “The Gulls of Salt Lake.” Jason made self-corrections using his meaning cue. He also made frequent

repetitions and insertions; these did not affect his comprehension. After reading the passage, I asked Jason some questions relating to character traits and the main idea of the passage, which are indicated below in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 “The Gulls of Salt Lake”

Questions: “The Gulls of Salt Lake”	Jason’s responses
1. Name one character. What is one trait you infer that character has? Explain why you think that.	“James. He is hard working and has perseverance. I think this because he faced many challenges while trying to find good land to plant crop.”
2. What is this characters motive?	“James inspired his fellow pioneers and showed them the way.”
3. What is the main idea of this passage?	“You have to put up a strong fight to reach your goal. Put in everything you have. If you do not then it is a failed mission. You will not accomplish anything.”

Jason’s responses to the questions demonstrate his understanding that in order to reach your goals you need to put forth effort. Jason was able to relate to both of these passages. However, he shared that he struggles with questions involving the main idea. When asked question #3 he had to look back into the text a few times before he could respond. When Jason has to answer these types of questions he said, “I over think it and don’t say what I’m actually thinking.” Jason’s behaviors and responses during this session suggest he prefers to read nonfiction texts better than fiction.

Jason’s Sociocultural Experiences Influence his Engagement and Motivation in Literacy

Jason’s sociocultural experiences and context influences his daily life as well as his literacy choices. Like previously stated, Jason’s father is a Rochester Police Lieutenant. His uncle also works within law enforcement. He is a police officer with the

rank of sergeant within the Rochester Police Department. In session five, I asked Jason to write about something, someone, or an experience, which influenced his life, which is illustrated below in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Writing

Writing Prompt: Write about something, someone, or an experience that influenced your life. Explain.

One major event that has influenced my life is the day my uncle was shot. My Uncle [REDACTED] is a Rochester Police Sergeant. On June 27, 2013, my uncle was securing the area around North Goodman Street in order to arrest one [REDACTED], who was wanted for a double murder, which occurred days earlier. My uncle was standing in front of a house while calling out on the radio to get more officers where he was when a man came running down the driveway. My uncle drew his .45 caliber handgun and told him to stop as the man drew his gun. The man fired repeatedly at my uncle and hit him twice. As my uncle fell to the ground, [REDACTED] ran up over top of him and attempted to execute him. My uncle made tactical roll movements and [REDACTED] firearm jammed. As [REDACTED] turned to run, my uncle shot him. [REDACTED] had already been hit at least once and my uncle hit him three more times. [REDACTED] continued running and dropped his .40 caliber firearm to the ground. He jumped a fence and stumbled upon three uniformed officers. [REDACTED] acted as if he still had his firearm and the officers shot him numerous more times but [REDACTED] lived. My uncle was put inside of another officer's Police Interceptor and was transported to Rochester General Hospital where a US Military Combat Medic and Doctor reconstructed his arms where he was shot. I was at the hospital and was able to speak to him before he entered surgery. This was very difficult for me and my entire family to see my uncle like that. He was very upbeat and positive when I spoke to him and said to me, "Hey that's the job isn't it?" and that is one thing I will never forget. Though he was nearly killed, he told me that's part of what he does. I also never forget my dad coming up to me and saying that he wished he was with my uncle when the shooting occurred. My dad is also a police officer. At the time, he was a Sergeant though he is now a Lieutenant. My dad was driving past the street as the shooting was about to happen. As he passed by he heard gunfire. Soon after Officer [REDACTED] said in the radio, "Shots fired, Officer down" and my dad responded saying, "Where is [REDACTED]? Where is [REDACTED]?" as he knew it must have been my uncle. That struck me as well. My uncle could be guarding the gates of heaven right now but instead, he stayed alive and now I can see and talk to him every day. I can call him and say hi. I can go to work with him. And he can see his family every single day. And to think that that could all be gone at the hands of some lowlife scumbag is very upsetting. My life has been greatly affected all because of that event.

Through this activity, Jason was able to write and reflect on a serious and traumatic event in his life. In reading and analyzing Jason's writing, he demonstrates a strong connection

with his family members. His thinking expressed within his writing illustrates his understanding and awareness of his father and uncles duties and responsibilities as police force members. He also knows the language they use and is aware of how serious and life threatening the experiences in their jobs can be.

Jason chooses to read books that relate to his interests. His interests are influenced by his sociocultural experiences and environment. In session six, I conducted a parent semi-structure interview with Melissa. I was able to ask Melissa questions relating to her involvement in Jason’s literacy experiences. Through conducting this interview, I was able to observe and analyze Melissa’s views of how her son’s sociocultural environment influences his motivation and engagement in literacy.

I asked Melissa eight questions, some of the questions were “How often do you see your son reading, writing, doing homework? How can you tell when your son is motivated and engaged? How do you think you influence your son? What values and beliefs have you taught him about your life and literacy? What do you think are your child’s literacy strengths and weaknesses?” I chose to discuss these certain questions and Melissa’s responses which are listed below in Figure 4.4 clearly demonstrate the impact she has had on her son and the choices he has made and will make regarding life and literacy.

Figure 4.4 Parent Semi-Structured Interview

2. How often do you see your son reading, writing, doing homework?	“Every day, he is constantly reading books, articles, or the newspaper.”
6. How can you tell when your son is motivated and engaged?	“When I can’t get him to put the book down. He is becomes immersed in the book and will bring it everywhere he goes, like the doctors or dentist office.”
7. How do you think you influence your son? What values and beliefs have you	“I influence him through my own actions. You learn what you see, he sees his parents

taught him about life?	engaged in something then he becomes encouraged. If I do something daily, he sees my actions and can mimic that in his own way. Some of the values that we have taught him include family first, take care of one another, make good choices, do right by others, help others, be a good citizen in the community, say please and thank you, and stand up for your friends. If you have good behavior the good grades will come, they go hand in hand. He is a positive kid, intellectual, interacts well with adults, and is mature for his age. Whenever he sees any military or law enforcement he will walk up to them and say thank you for your service.”
8. What do you think are your child’s literacy strengths and weaknesses?	“Jason reads because he is interested. He likes learning new things. He has an unbelievable memory and can recall a lot of what he reads. I want him to venture out and read about new subjects or genres.”

Melissa’s responses signify Jason’s choices, motivation, and engagement in literacy. She encourages Jason and provides a positive environment for him to be successful in.

Jason Demonstrates Reflective Thinking and is Goal Oriented

Most teenagers do not know what they want to be out of high school. Jason has two major aspirations. Jason’s two goals in life are to become a United States Marine and a Rochester Police Officer. As previously noted, Jason is mature for his age. Jason said, “My goals drive me to do what I do every day.” He is motivated to work hard in school, participate in his community, and treat others with respect. During session six, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Jason I asked him eight questions. Some of the questions I asked were, “Do you think reading is important why or why not? What are your goals? What did you learn about yourself as a reader?” These questions and

responses are indicated below in Figure 4.5, which relate to the factors discussed in my literature review for example, Intrinsic Motivation, Self Determination and Engagement.

Figure 4.5 Student Semi-Structured Interview

3. Do you think reading is important why or why not?	“Yes it is important. When I read I obtain new knowledge that I am interested in. I am not stuck in video games or my cellphone; you do not gain anything out of that. I like to read because I feel that I am learning something new.”
4. What are your goals?	“To become a United States Marine and a Rochester Police Officer. I want to help my country and people.”
8. What did you learn about yourself as reader?	“I learned that I understand what I am reading better when I am reading out loud. I thought I was a slow reader but when I heard myself, I realized not so much. I enjoyed talking about what I read after. Sometimes it can be tough for me to understand something without discussing or retelling after.”

Jason’s responses demonstrate his ability to reflect. The interview revealed Jason’s opinions about reading and his determination to reach his goals. During this final session, I asked Jason to complete a self-reflection, which is indicated below in Figure 4.6. This allowed him to reflect on this experience and help him understand what he learned about himself as a reader and writer.

Figure 4.6 Student Self Reflection

How did you like participating in the study?	1	2	3	4	<u>5</u>
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Would you participate in another study like this if given the opportunity? If no, why?	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Yes</u> No</p> <p>I think it was very beneficial to read and reflect on what I was reading which is why I would participate in a similar study again.</p>
What did you take away from this experience?	I took away the ability to comprehend what I was reading much better. I also was able to help an old friend.
What do you wonder about yourself after this experience?	I wonder why I am engaged more on readings when I read them out loud.
What did you learn about your motivation and engagement when completing choice literacy tasks?	I learned that I am more motivated to read books that I have selected versus books that were selected for me. I also learned that it is easier for me to read out loud because I obtain more information

Through completion of session six, Jason was able to value his choices and the reasons for which they motivate him. It is evident that Jason is more motivated and engaged to read books that he chooses.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Implications

Summary

Jason's choices, engagement and motivation in literacy reflect several findings, which allowed me to develop implications for future literacy based learning. In looking back at my research questions, "how does choice influence a 9th grade adolescent male's engagement and motivation in varied literacy activities and how is this adolescent male student capable of sustaining engagement and motivation during literacy activities?" The findings of my study demonstrate that Jason's choices positively influence his motivation and engagement in literacy. In addition, Jason, through his persistent and enthusiastic participation in the various activities illustrated his ability to sustain engagement and motivation in literacy activities because he truly enjoys reading. Furthermore, the findings of my study indicated that Jason is self-aware of his reading fluency and visualization skills. He also knows that when he chooses books to read he is more engaged in reading them versus when the text is chosen for him. Additionally, Jason has a positive attitude and is willing to learn. Jason is always reading something in order to gain knowledge. Jason is goal orientated and is driven to succeed and will do what it takes to meet his goals. Jason's sociocultural experiences influence his engagement and motivation in literacy. Jason's family highly supports and influences him daily.

Conclusions

Through analyzing my data and findings, the results demonstrate a student's self-awareness and choices could improve their motivation and engagement in literacy. When students are interested in the topic that they are working with, they are more likely to be engaged and invested in the content (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Humenick, 2006). When a

student is able to choose what they want to read their motivation to read it increases, along with their engagement due to their interest in the topic. A student's positive attitude can lead him or her to success. If a student is not willing to try or maintain a positive attitude, their success is affected. Helping students to identify their needs and develop strategies to meet those needs, they will become self-determined. A student who is goal oriented is self-determined. Students can maintain their goals and self-determination through competence, autonomy, and relatedness. A student who has a strong family support system and positive sociocultural experiences can influence his or her choices regarding literacy learning and achievement. When a student perceives that their parents value the importance of effort and academic success, they have a higher level of competence, ability, and effort.

Implications for Teachers

There are many strategies and concepts that teachers can rely on to maintain student engagement, motivation, and interest. Jason is clearly more motivated and engaged in tasks that focus on his choices. His classroom teachers should consider incorporating choice into the planning and facilitation literacy instruction and activities. Student choice can lead to higher engagement (Bang-Jensen, 2010).

Implications for Student

Jason benefited from reflecting on what he read by having a conversation after reading. He also responded well to positive feedback. His parents, and or peers can aid in his comprehension by providing opportunities for discussion. Jason also can benefit from broadening his love for reading. For example, reading about new subjects or different genres. This will allow Jason to develop holistic literacy experiences and possibly step

out of his comfort zone. Jason can continue to read, write, and reflect in order to keep reaching for his goals.

Recommendations

I would like to continue my observations of Jason (upon agreement of his mother), as he continues the rest of high school and beyond. By doing so, I can further observe and record any changes in his choices, motivation or engagement revolving around literacy. It is my thinking that more research should be conducted to further answer the questions put forth in my research study. More research should be conducted regarding the incorporation of choice in designing and facilitating literacy instruction and its influence on student engagement and motivation. Further research should be done with a larger sample size and for a longer period to investigate students their choices, motivation and engagement involving literacy activities. This would be significant because researchers could analyze more than one student's choices, engagement, and motivation then ultimately compare and contrast their findings.

Overall significance of the study

My study is significant because it focused on the uniqueness of one individual and how his choices influence his engagement and motivation in literacy based activities. It also includes his mother's perceptions and involvement. This information can be used to work with him in the future, and it can possibly be transferred to work with other students. My research and findings can provide stakeholders in the world of education with further evidence supporting the implementation of choice and its influence on engagement and motivation in literacy learning.

Limitations

This research study experienced limitations including member checks and transferability. Regarding member checks, I was the only researcher collecting data and recording field notes. I did not work with other people to check accuracy of my data or data analysis and reporting. Regarding transferability, I focused on one individual student and his mother over a six-week period, the results and findings that I collected are not transferable to a larger population. The data collection methods I chose also include some limitations. The parent interview included bias. Jason is a family friend; therefore, these results may not be reliable and or valid.

Appendix A

Student Literacy Questionnaire

1. Why do you read? How often do you read?
2. What do you think you do well as a reader?
3. How does reading make you feel?
4. As you read, what are some strategies you use when you don't understand a word or passage?
5. How do you help yourself remember the details of the readings?
6. What are some of your favorite books? What types of books don't you like to read?
7. What does a good reader look like?
8. What do good readers do?
9. What motivates you to read?
10. What do you think it means to stay engaged in reading and writing?

Appendix B

The Football Team- Article
Center for Urban Education 2007

A team is a group of people with a common goal. A school's football team has two goals. One goal is to win. That is what the team wants to do. The other goal is to build character. Character is what a person values, how a person relates to others. That is why schools have football teams. They want to help students build good values. There are many character traits that a football player can develop. One is leadership. The quarterback of the team is a leader. The quarterback makes choices—which play to do, who will get the ball. The quarterback has a big job. The quarterback has to inspire the players to work together. If they are losing, the quarterback has to work even harder, to give the players hope they still can win. There is another leader, too. The leader of the defensive group. When the defensive group is playing, that means the team may lose points. So the leader has to keep the team members working together to stop that. Each team member builds character. They learn to cooperate. They learn to make good decisions. They work hard. They practice every day. They learn to follow the rules. If a team member does not follow the rules, the entire team suffers. Each team member has a position. Each position is part of winning. No one player has the ability to win the game for the team. Only if the team works together does a team win. People often say, "There is no I in TEAM." Whether the team wins or loses, at the end of the game they congratulate the other team. That is called sportsmanship. While they fight to win during the game, it is just a game. They cannot be angry with the other team. If they are, they'll hear from their coach. The coach makes sure the team reaches the school's goal. The coach cares about the whole team. The coach gives each player advice. When the team wins, everyone celebrates. And the coach is glad. But after the season is over, the coach is still happy. The coach gets to see the players as they go to school every day. The character they have built is part of their success in school, too. Some coaches say that if you go into a classroom at their school you'll be able to tell the players. It is not that they are bigger than the other students. It is the ones who are helping other students work. Teamwork is part of their lives.

Appendix C

The Gulls of Salt Lake-Article
Center for Urban Education 2007

At last, they were safe. A brave little company of pioneers from the Atlantic coast crossed the Mississippi River. They finally succeeded in climbing to the top of the great Rockies and down again into a valley in the very midst of the mountains. It was a valley of brown, bare, desert soil, in a climate where almost no rain falls. But the snow on the mountain-tops sent down little streams of pure water; the winds were gentle. Like a blue jewel at the foot of the western hills was a marvelous lake of salt water, an inland sea. Some wanted to keep going, but most said, this is where we should live, the journey is accomplished. So the pioneers settled there and built themselves huts and cabins so they could survive the first winter. They were used to challenges. It had taken them many months to make the terrible trip. Many had died of illness on the way; then many died of hardship during the winter. The supplies they had brought in their wagons were so nearly gone that, by spring, they were living partly on roots, dug from the ground. All their lives now depended on the crops they could raise in the valley. They made the barren land fertile bringing mud from the river to the dry land, and creating irrigation channels. They planted corn and grain and vegetables, and everyone collaborated. Then it was an anxious time as they watched for the plants to grow, with hopes, and prayers, and careful eyes.

In good time the brown earth was covered with a carpet of tender, green, growing things. No farmer's garden could have looked better than the great garden of the desert valley. And from day to day the little plants grew and flourished till they were all well above the ground, they had succeeded. James, who was the head of the group, said, "We finally will have all the food we need. We have achieved our goal." Then a terrible thing happened. One day, the men who were watering the crops saw a great number of crickets swarming over the ground at the edge of the gardens nearest the mountains. They were hopping from the barren places into the young, green crops, and as they settled down they ate the tiny shoots and leaves to the ground. More came, and more, and ever more, and as they came they spread out till they covered a big corner of the grain field. Yet still more and more, till it was like an army of black, hopping, crawling crickets, streaming down the side of the mountain. James said, "Watch out, they're going to eat our food. We will be ruined." Everyone tried to kill the crickets by beating them down, but the numbers were so great that it was like beating at the sea. Suddenly, from far off in the air toward the great salt lake, there was the sound of flapping wings. It grew louder. It looked like a white cloud rising from the lake, a flock of sea gulls flying toward them. Hundreds of gulls rose and circled and came on. "The gulls! The gulls!" James cried. "They will rescue us. It is a miracle." The gulls flew overhead, with a shrill chorus of whimpering cries, and then, in a marvelous white cloud of outspread wings and hovering breasts, they settled down over the field. "Look, look," James said. "See! They are eating the crickets! They are saving our crop. We are restored." It was true. The gulls ate the crickets, and when at last they finished, they had stripped the fields of that pest. The pioneers had moved to the right place after all. It had taken a lot of work, great determination, and courage. They had met and overcome obstacles, solved problems, and would survive. Without the gulls, what might have happened is not certain, but the future was secure, the pioneers were confident.

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Student Interview

1. What types of technology do you use? How, for personal or school purposes, or both?
2. What types of materials do you read, and for what purpose?
3. Do you think reading is important why or why not?
4. What are your goals?
5. Talk to me about reading experiences in your family.
6. How do you know when you're engaged in reading?
7. What did you enjoy about participating in this experience and why? What didn't you enjoy and why?
8. What did you learn about yourself as a reader?

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Parent Interview

1. What role do you believe you play in your son's education?
2. How often do you see your son reading, writing, doing homework?
3. What types of discussions do you have with your son involving literacy?
4. What type of reading do you do and why?
5. Do you meet with your sons' teacher? If so what does he or she say?
6. How can you tell when your son is motivated and engaged?
7. How do you think you influence your son? What values and beliefs have you taught him about life?
8. What do you think are your child's literacy strengths and weaknesses?

Appendix F

Student Participant Self- Reflection

<p>How did you like participating in the study? 1=lowest 5= highest</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>
<p>Would you participate in another study like this if given the opportunity? If no, why?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>
<p>What did you take away from this experience?</p>	
<p>What do you wonder about yourself after this experience?</p>	
<p>What did you learn about your motivation and engagement when completing choice literacy tasks?</p>	

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