Effective Literacy Based Software Programs in a 5th Grade Environment

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Effective Literacy Based Software Programs in a 5th Grade Environment

By
Randall Yu
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A thesis or project submitted to the
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Table of Contents

Chapter One:
Introduction..................................................................................................................1
Background...................................................................................................................1
Research Questions....................................................................................................2
Rationale....................................................................................................................3
Definitions...................................................................................................................5
Study Approach.........................................................................................................5
Organization of Thesis...............................................................................................7
Summary of Chapter 1...............................................................................................7
Chapter Two: Review of Literature............................................................................9
Introduction................................................................................................................9
Motivating Reluctant Writers....................................................................................10
Motivating Reluctant Readers..................................................................................14
Using Technology in the Classroom.........................................................................16
Using Technology to Motivate Reluctant Literacy Students......................................21
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures.................................................................28
Introduction..............................................................................................................28
Context......................................................................................................................28
Participants...............................................................................................................32
Data Collection Methods.........................................................................................33
Procedures...............................................................................................................35
Data Analysis............................................................................................................38
Summary....................................................................................................................39
List of Illustrations

Figure 4.1: Class Discussion of a Common Reading #1 .................................................. 44
Figure 4.2: Class Discussion of a Common Reading #2 .................................................. 45
Figure 4.3: Student Folder on Edmodo.com ..................................................................... 47
Figure 4.4: Edmodo.com Teacher Created Comprehension Quiz ..................................... 48
Figure 4.5: Short Answer Question Comprehension Quiz ............................................... 49
Figure 4.6: Student Feedback Page after Taking a Quiz .................................................. 50
Figure 4.7: Incorrect Answer on Scootpad.com ............................................................. 51
Figure 4.8: Student Progress Report on Scootpad.com .................................................. 53
Figure 4.9: Student Navigation Screen on Scootpad.com .............................................. 54
Figure 4.10 Reading Assignment on Scootpad.com ....................................................... 55
Figure 4.11 Student’s Photostory Book Review ............................................................. 57
Figure 4.12 Picture Used in a Book Review of “Hoot” #1 ............................................... 58
Figure 4.13 Picture Used in a Book Review of “Hoot” #2 ............................................... 59
Figure 4.14 Book Review Rating ..................................................................................... 60
Figure 4.15 Student Discussion on Edmodo.com Wall .................................................... 66
Figure 4.16 Student Posts to Another Class .................................................................. 67
Figure 4.17 Example of Students Making Reactions on Edmodo.com #1 ...................... 69
Figure 4.18 Example of Students Making Reactions on Edmodo.com #2 ...................... 70
Figure 4.19 Scootpad.com Student Leaderboard ........................................................... 71
Figure 4.20 Scootpad.com Student Piggy Bank ............................................................. 72
Figure 4.21 Scootpad.com Student Awards ................................................................... 73
Figure 4.22 Student Comprehension Scores on Edmodo.com ....................................... 75
Figure 4.23 Student Skills Scores on Scootpad.com ..................................................... 76
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Weekly Procedure.........................................................................................36
Table 4.1: Literacy Survey Results (Pre-Study)..........................................................63
Table 4.2: Literacy Survey Results (Post-Study)..........................................................64
Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Students today are growing up in a technologically advanced society which offers many different modes of interacting with literacy. With the development of new online software devices, there are many opportunities for students to grow and learn about literacy in interesting ways. Many elementary students are driven by technology and gaming. They are familiar with computers and many of these students spend time playing computer games while at home. These students are used to the constant stimulation of these computer games and are motivated by them. Students are also used to interacting socially through the internet social media websites while at home. Websites such as Facebook.com and Myspace.com capture the attention of students as young as 9 or 10. Teachers are competing with these computer games for the attention of their own students. What many teachers fail to see is that they need to take advantage of our students’ engagement with computer software. While traditional methods such as guided reading, read-alouds, and practice sheets may still be important, they are not as appealing to many students when compared with computer based programs. If these software programs and social media websites are what the students want, why do not teachers offer them in an educational setting? Teachers need to incorporate the use of literacy software programs into their classrooms in order to increase motivation in student literacy learning. In turn, students should be more engaged in their own learning and will learn valuable computer skills that will carry over into their adult life.
As a fifth grade teacher I understand how important motivation is in literacy learning for the classroom. There are many students in my classroom that believe reading and writing is boring. I can see that they are not engaged in traditional instructional practices. Many teachers may say that there is “no hope” for students with this attitude. Personally I disagree with anyone who says this, and I believe it is just a matter of relating literacy instruction with something that they are interested and familiar with. Every student deserves to have the opportunity to learn and literacy based software programs will help accomplish this goal. I am eager to begin implementing interactive literacy software programs in my classroom with the goal of increase student motivation in reading and writing.

**Research Questions**

The main question of this study is, what types of literacy based software programs are available to educators who teach in a 5th grade classroom and how they are effective. I investigated this question by looking at research based websites that have been tried and tested. I looked specifically for software programs that I believed could be engaging for students on a social and educational level. The second question in this study is how literacy based online software programs increase the motivation or engagement of fifth grade student literacy learning in the classroom. Student motivation and engagement will directly lead to a student’s love of reading and writing. This love is imperative for in order for students to transfer their literacy knowledge into their adult lives. The final question to be answered in this study is
how literacy based software programs increase the achievement of fifth grade students during literacy instruction. Overall this is the goal of all teachers in schools today. Now that standards are being increased, teachers are looking for programs that are not only engaging for students, but also effective in reading and writing instruction.

**Rationale**

The rationale for this study is to observe how literacy based online software programs can positively impact literacy instruction in a fifth grade classroom. It is extremely important to realize that the purpose of this study is not to replace effective literacy instruction methods, but rather supplement it. Students must have the opportunity to still interact with text through guided reading, literature circles, and whole group instruction. These software programs should be used in a way to provide a different mode of interacting and connecting with literature. Also the programs used in this study will allow students to socially communicate with each other about common texts.

Personally I have strong feelings about offering effective and up to date literacy instruction in the classroom. When I was an elementary student, I did not enjoy engaging in literacy practices such as reading and writing. I was discouraged and often did not participate in activities. I knew I was capable of reading and writing effectively, but was not motivated to do so. At the time this severely impacted my achievement levels as an elementary student. I was pulled into intervention programs
that I should have not been in. It was not until middle school when my parents got our first family computer. I was a fixture at that computer and this is when my life as a literacy student changed forever. I enjoyed reading articles and short stories on the Internet. For the first time I was truly reading for enjoyment on my own. With the development of online chat room, instant messenger, and e-mail, my writing began to improve. Again, for the first time I was writing for pleasure on my own. A year later I was eventually pulled from any literacy intervention programs in school, and I am currently a fifth grade classroom teacher with a concentration in English and working on my literacy graduate degree. Clearly Internet based software programs changed my life as a student as well as an adult.

Although the literacy software activities in this study will be much more structured than my experience as a child, students will have similar opportunities to read, write, and communicate just as I did. With the development of web 2.0 software programs teacher have their choice of hundreds of programs. With the development of these programs, the federal legislation in the United States have mandated that technology be integrated into the school curriculum because of its effectiveness on today’s youth (Davies, 2011). According to an observational study conducted by Davis and Linton in 2008 pre-service teachers valued technology in literacy instruction more than in-service teachers. This shows that young teachers are more liable to integrate these programs into their literacy instruction. The quagmire is that many students are missing out on these valuable software program opportunities. As a teacher myself, this is why I believe this study is extremely important. Every student
deserves to have the opportunity to receive the most effective and engaging literacy instruction possible.

**Definitions**

The following terms will be used throughout the duration of this study.

- **Web 2.0** – This is a social web that contains many online tools, software programs, and platforms where students or teachers can interact with literature and share their own thoughts.
- **Edmodo.com** – This is a classroom friendly computer software that offers blogging to allow for students to share information with each other over the internet (Rethlefsen, Piorun, & Prince, 2009).
- **Scootpad** – This is an ELA and Math common core based software program that allows students to practice specific skills.
- **Photostory 3** – This is a Microsoft program that allows students to upload pictures and record their voice to create a digital story on the computer.

**Study Approach**

This study was an inquiry based qualitative case study; the duration of this study was over a six week period. I was the teacher-observer in this study and observed students in both informal and formal settings in my own fifth grade classroom. In this study I used many domains which included; observational field
notes from classroom interactions, interviews, surveys, student work samples, teacher instruction materials, and learning materials with contextual data.

To analyze the data I used multiple analytical codes such as motivation, achievement, and quality of work. When concentrating on motivation I looked for an increase in engagement with text and peers during literacy classroom activities. I also observed students as they work on different types of literacy assignments in class. I kept multiple field notes on student’s level of engagement and motivation when interacting with software programs verses working on traditional literacy assignments. When looking at achievement I analyzed different work samples within the classroom and compared them based on the activity.

To increase validity and reliability of my data analysis I employed a triangulation method by applying analytical codes across domains of data that I used in this study. I used many different domains in order to analyze my students’ engagement in class activities from a variety of perspectives. These perspectives include interviews with the students, formal observation notes, surveys, contextual background information, and work samples. In regard to the interviews I prepared several questions that focused on student interest and student understanding of literacy online program features. I made sure to note my information using an observation field note template (see Appendix A). As the classroom teacher, the majority of the contextual information came from my own knowledge of the students in the class and demographic information released on the school’s web site.
Organization of Thesis

This study is divided into five total chapters. In chapter One, I explained the background of the study along with the rationale or significance of the study. Here I give a little background on my experiences with teaching and literacy. Chapter Two contains the literature review for this study. This literature review focuses on the best practices to teach reading and writing in an elementary classroom. It also focuses on the research behind implementing literacy software programs in the elementary classroom and its effectiveness. Chapter Three contains the methods and procedures of how this study was carried out in the classroom. This chapter will contain details about my studies in my own classroom. It will also include detailed lesson plans which explain the goals of each literacy activity used in this study. Chapter Four contains the answers to my research questions stated in chapter one. These answers will be supported by qualitative data from my research in the classroom along with facts from chapter two. This section will take into account all of the observational field notes, surveys, interviews, and student work samples. Finally, chapter Five contains the overall implications of the study. This chapter explains what can be done in the elementary classroom in order for the implementation of effective literacy based software programs to be successful.

Summary

This chapter is about focusing on why technology needs to be a critical part of the elementary classroom, particularly in literacy instruction. Literacy based software
programs have been seen in more and more classrooms, but some teachers still refuse to use them despite federal guidelines. Web 2.0 tools have made it easier for educators to implement software programs into their curriculum, but many are apprehensive about trying new things. I will conduct a six week inquiry based qualitative study focused on the effectiveness of literacy based software programs in my own fifth grade classroom. Over the six weeks I will use a variety of data collecting methods to determine the students’ motivation, engagement, and overall achievement in literacy activities. They will engage in activities using the programs: Edmodo.com, Scootpad.com, and Microsoft Photostory 3. I will also observe my students during traditional literacy activities such as guided reading, literature circles, and whole group instruction.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

As teachers, we often deal with students who are frustrated with their reading and writing. They tell us that they hate writing and that they are unable to develop ideas to begin writing. They also say that they do not enjoy to read and do not understand what they are reading. These students stare at blank pieces of paper and books in frustration. Many teachers struggle to support and motivate these students during classroom literacy instruction.

Motivation is arguably the most critical ingredient for learning to read and write. It is especially crucial for reluctant or unconfident literacy students. For this reason, it is essential that teachers create situations to promote and support student motivation to engage in literacy activities. The integration of technology in literacy instruction is an authentic and motivating way to engage students in classroom literacy activities, while also teaching them the necessary 21st century skills that they will need in their futures in the workplace. The purpose of this literature review is to support teachers in their understanding of motivating reluctant readers and writers, and the benefits of using technology in the classroom. The article will allow teachers to develop innovative and effective literacy based instruction that motivates and engages reluctant readers and writers through the use of technology and literacy based software programs.
Motivating Reluctant Writers

Of great concern to many teachers are the inability of reluctant writers to write well and their lack of desire to engage themselves in classroom writing activities. Reluctant writers are defined as students who appear withdrawn from classroom writing instruction and who have difficulty coordinating knowledge or words on a page (Slayton & Hruby, 2008). Reluctant writers can make up a large group in any classroom and can often be heard making comments such as, “I don’t know what to write” or “I can’t write,” in addition to focusing their attention on tasks other than writing. Students may be reluctant towards writing because it is difficult for them and they often lack self-confidence in their writing abilities. However, some students may be reluctant because the classroom writing activities are uninteresting or irrelevant to them, causing them to become disengaged. As teachers, it is our goal to help students develop a love for writing and develop a tool for lifelong expression and meaningful communication.

Many students become reluctant writers with poor writing attitudes due to a lack of self-confidence in their writing abilities. According to Street (2005), a lack of self-confidence can negatively affect a student’s choice, effort, and persistence while engaging in classroom literacy activities. Low self-confidence can derive from teachers who provide negative feedback during writing instruction. Studies show that in teachers’ responses to student writing, the ratio of criticism to praise is about 9:1 (Street, 2005). In order to encourage students to write with greater interest and skill,
it is suggested that teachers provide supportive and positive feedback in individual conferences during writer’s workshop. Feedback during these writing conferences should focus on what was good in each story or piece of writing. By offering positive feedback, teachers are providing writers with hints to what is working and they will be more likely to focus on the good aspects of their writing rather than the negatives (Mazer & Potter, 2011). Positive feedback will also improve student interest, skill, and confidence in their writing.

Many teachers find it challenging to create activities that appeal to students and provide opportunities for their students to get excited about writing. Writing activities during classroom writing instruction often entail following specific writing templates or prompts. However, according to Slayton and Hruby (2008), student excitement tends to diminish when teachers force students to work within the confines of curriculum obligations. Research suggests that writing instruction is most effective when it includes a balance of direct teaching of the writing process and opportunities for students to practice these skills during open writing time (Slayton & Hruby, 2008). This approach to writing instruction allows students the opportunity to have confidence in what they write and to take risks in their writing.

Classroom writing activities should be student-centered, where students take a more active role in their development as writers. Instead of providing students with writing activities based on the curriculum, students should be offered the chance to explore topics of their choice. Students may choose to write about topics that interest
them, about their life experiences, or they may write to share information about topics they know a lot about. When reluctant writers have a choice in the topics they write about, they are much more motivated to engage in classroom writing activities and by giving students more authority over their learning, students can overcome their negative attitudes toward writing (Street, 2005). Teachers need to discover and capitalize on each student’s individual motivation for writing in order to encourage their students to engage in writing activities and become passionate writers.

Writing for authentic purposes in authentic contexts can be vital to quality writing instruction and student motivation. Students are much more likely to participate in an activity if they are excited about it and to be fully and successfully engaged in writing, what students write about must be relevant to them (Gambrell et al., 2007). Writers need to have authentic audiences and reasons to celebrate their writing. Inquiry-based writing activities give students authentic reasons to write and promote real-world writing. When students chose an inquiry topic to begin actively researching, they become empowered to write with confidence and develop a strong desire to teach others what they know (Johnson & Chiki, 2009).

Writers also need to understand that writing is functional and an important part of their everyday lives. Write-talks, brief motivational talks designed to engage students in writing, can be used to show how real people write in authentic contexts for real purposes. By inviting adults that the students admire- parents, older siblings, coaches- and asking them to bring in an example of their writing and sharing it with the
students, students will discover the various genres and authentic purposes for everyday writing, whether it’s through writing emails or writing a speech (Wilson, 2008). Implementing authentic writing activities into classroom writing instruction can have a vast impact on reluctant writers and their success as motivated and skilled writers.

Reluctant writers can benefit greatly from watching their teachers model good writing behavior. Research shows that the effectiveness of writing instruction is often improved when teachers write with their students (Street, 2005). Doing so will allow students to see that their teacher struggles with writing just as they do and can help develop trust and comfort in student-teacher interactions during classroom writing time. Teachers need to take advantage of numerous opportunities during the day to write in front of children and model their own thinking as they write (Johnson & Chiki, 2009). This should include teacher modeling of planning tools, such as graphic organizers. When reluctant writers learn how to use such planning tools, they will be less overwhelmed and more able to effectively draft their own writing (Slayton & Hruby, 2009). Watching their teacher model writing behaviors will provide reluctant writers the support and guidance they need in order to carry out each writing skill independently.

Learning to write is a social process and reluctant writers are more motivated to write when they are given opportunities to connect with their peers. Sharing their books or other writing samples with their peers motivates students to write and it
helps them see the possibilities for their own writing (Johnson & Chiki, 2009). Online social networking programs allow students to engage and discuss their own writing. Slayton and Hruby (2009) also suggest teaching students to be peer editors, where students can meet with a peer to get or provide help with writing. Collaborating with peers will allow reluctant writers to begin to identify with other writers and feel as though they are a part of a writing community (Street, 2005). When reluctant writers have identified themselves as writers, their motivation and desire to write will increase.

Teachers can reclaim their reluctant writers when they create a classroom community of writers where students can explore choice and take control of their own writing. When students discover the authentic and enjoyable purposes for writing, they will become motivated, willing, and skillful writers.

Motivating Reluctant Readers

In many cases students are reluctant to read because they feel self-conscious of their reading ability. They feel that they are unable to read and this directly affects their motivation and drive to read. Reluctant readers find reading as a chore and find very little enjoyment from texts. An interview by Zadora (2002), shows that the number one reason reluctant readers don’t like to read is because, “it’s boring.” This same interview showed that students who do like reading find reading, “a calming and relaxing experience.” Teacher must try to implement teaching techniques that move reading from a stressful chore to a relaxing and enjoyable activity.
One of the number one motivators for student reading habits includes making connections with their own personal interests (Halls, 2011). Teachers can help reluctant readers effectively make these connections by offering them choices in their own reading. It is too often that students just choose books for the sake of having to have a book. If students are educated about making proper book choices, they will enjoy and actually read the books that they select. There are many techniques teachers can use to educate students about selecting proper books. Boushey (2006), suggest using a technique called, “picking good fit books.” This technique uses the acronym, “IPICK” to help students remember the five steps of selecting a good fit book. These steps instruct students to think about their purpose for reading, interest, comprehension, and knowing the words before selecting a book.

Reluctant readers also feel self-conscious about their own comprehension while reading (Boushey, 2006). Allowing reluctant readers to socially interact while they read can help increase their understanding. The use of literature circles, reading groups, and guided reading groups all support students in making connections and comprehending their reading. Reluctant readers enjoy listening to the thoughts of others, and tend to want to engage in conversation whenever possible. Allowing reluctant readers to work with stronger readers can provide authentic instruction with effective reading strategies (Boushey, 2006). The more students talk about their understanding with each other, the more they will develop their own reading comprehension skills.
Unfortunately, most reluctant readers don’t believe that reading can be a form of entertainment. They need to see that reading can be an enjoyable activity. Modeling effective reading strategies can help students reinforce their thoughts in their own reading. “Cool role models mean so much to students in their lives” (Halls, 2011, p. 16). Teachers need to realize that they are often seen as positive role models in the lives of their students. It is important that reluctant readers hear exciting reading in the classroom. Reading aloud to students has become a topic of concern in the elementary classroom. Many believe that read-alouds are ineffective because students are not engaged during this time. Boushey (2006), states when teachers read with passion and excitement it can motivate reluctant readers to read themselves. Also, instead of focusing on decoding words, reluctant readers can focus on essential comprehension strategies while listening to a story aloud.

Reluctant readers can be inspired when teachers create a classroom community of readers. When all students are able to discuss their understanding of readings, reluctant readers can see and learn from other’s thinking process. When students discover reading can be enjoyable, they will become motivated in their own reading. This motivation can then be projected on a variety of educational reading activities. This will ultimately prepare our students for their futures in the workplace.

Using Technology in the Classroom

Many changes in education and the learning process have emerged throughout the 21st century. Possibly one of the most influential changes is the need for what is
referred to as 21st century skills. According to Larson and Miller (2011), 21st century skills are the skills that increasingly demand creativity, perseverance, and problem solving combined with performing well as part of a team. These 21st century skills directly impact teaching and learning because they include the skills, knowledge, and expertise that students will need for their futures in today’s workforce. The 21st century skills emphasize on what students can do with knowledge and how to apply what they learn in authentic contexts. They involve strong communication and collaboration skills, expertise in technology, innovative and creative thinking skills, and the ability to solve problems (Larson & Miller, 2011). Teachers are encouraged to integrate these skills across the curriculum in order to prepare students for the society in which they will work and live.

The technologies of literacy are rapidly changing and many researchers have begun to shift their focus towards what is referred to as new literacies. Researchers in the literacy community have been working to develop a clear understanding of what these new literacies are and how they develop. New literacies are defined as the new skills, strategies, and dispositions that are required to successfully identify important questions, locate information, engage in critical evaluation, synthesize information, and communicate on the Internet (Castek, Bevans-Meagelson, & Goldstone, 2006). New literacies build upon the foundational literacies traditionally taught in schools to prepare students for the effective use of books, paper, and pencils. However, the new literacies go beyond these foundational literacies to include new reading, writing, viewing, and communication skills required by the new technologies that continue to
appear in our lives (Leu et al., 2004). Teachers must discover the importance of new literacies in order to meet our students’ literacy needs, now and in the future.

In order for students to develop and acquire the new literacies required in today’s digital world, we must provide them with opportunities to use the Internet during classroom instruction. In the 21st century, being able to read, think critically, and communicate with the Internet has become just as important as being able to read a book or write a letter (Leu et al., 2004). According to Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, and Goldstone (2006), some scholars believe that the Internet is this generation’s defining technology for literacy and learning. A growing dependency on the Internet in the workforce and for functional purposes makes it essential that all students acquire the new literacies that are needed in the world of work and their daily lives. In classrooms today, teachers are discovering the exciting opportunities that are available on the Internet to enhance literacy instruction and prepare students for the new literacies that will increasingly define their futures (Leu et al., 2004). Through the Internet, today’s students have opportunities to explore and engage in authentic tasks that reach far beyond their classroom walls (Larson & Miller, 2011). It is becoming increasingly clear that the new literacies of the Internet and other technologies are required to ensure that students are prepared for their futures.

Technology and access to the Internet within the classroom not only provide students with important opportunities to develop new literacy skills, they also enhance student motivation and their excitement towards learning. As educators, it is
our goal to engage students in experiences that will inspire a lifelong love of learning (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). One way of achieving this is by knowing and acknowledging the kinds of things students are doing and being outside school in order to make effective pedagogical connections to them in class (Henry, Coiro, & Castek, 2005). According to a 2005 survey, roughly 73 percent of young people ages 12 through 17 in the United States use the Internet regularly to gather information, exchange ideas, and share opinions (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Such online activities include emails, social networking pages, blogs, computer games, and streaming videos. Teachers can use this information to guide their instruction and integrate technology into classroom instruction. Since students need authentic learning experiences, teachers have a responsibility to provide students with a wide range of literacy experiences that demonstrate the way we read and write in our daily lives (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Fun, engaging, and meaningful online experiences in the classroom help shape positive attitudes, motivation, and a strong desire to learn to use technology well.

Simply having Internet technologies in our classrooms will not prepare children adequately for the new literacies they require (Leu, 2000). Teachers need to discover the advantages of using technology in the classroom and know how to integrate technology into the curriculum effectively. Many teachers, however, do not feel well prepared to use technology in their classrooms and have not yet begun the fundamental shift in focus necessary to ensure our children’s success in the world. According to a 2003 survey, at least 50 percent of veteran teachers, and only 42
percent of new teachers, feel well prepared to use computers instructionally (Labbo et al., 2003). It is suggested that teachers carefully select and participate in professional computer-related staff development opportunities and share ideas with one another, in order to receive the support they need to integrate technology into classroom instruction (Labbo et. all, 2003).

Teachers play an important role in helping students develop the skills they will need for participation in the workplaces of the 21st century. It is up to teachers to provide students with technological and Internet learning experiences so that all students are given the tools to succeed in careers that will define their futures (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Due to the growing number of Internet-connected computers available in the United States, our classrooms are the best places for students to receive equal access to computers and acquire new literacy skills (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Students learn these new skills through observation, learning, and exposure. Instruction is maximized when technology use in the classroom supports or adds value to the curriculum and instructional objectives (Labbo et al., 2003). It is especially important for teachers to scaffold technology use of reliable and unreliable sources to ensure that students evaluate information on the Internet critically.

In a world increasingly defined by intense global competition, it is essential that we move toward more effective learning practices with new technologies that support innovation, critical thinking, curiosity, and imagination. In order for students
to acquire 21st century skills such as new literacies, teachers must effectively integrate technology into classroom instruction with a focus on critical thinking, authentic engagement, and quality instruction. By doing so, we are preparing our students for their futures and their career paths of tomorrow.

**Using Technology to Motivate Reluctant Literacy Students**

The process of reading writing is in the midst of change due to the understanding that our students need to develop the 21st century skills necessary to have successful futures in the workplace. The use of technology in classroom literacy instruction is an effective way to motivate reluctant readers and writers, while also encouraging the development of the important skills, strategies, and dispositions needed to be successful. According to Henry et al. (2004), teaching in ways that foster young children’s enthusiasm for, and engagement with writing enhances the likelihood that they will write successfully and become lifelong writers. By integrating technology into classroom literacy instruction, students will become more motivated and engaged in the writing process and they will also discover voice, confidence, and structure in their writing (Sylvestre & Greenidge, 2009).

In order for writing instruction to be relevant, writers need authentic learning experiences that coincide with the activities they engage in their everyday lives. Today, students in the contemporary classrooms are the first generation enveloped by sophisticated computers, video games, digital music players, cell phones, and other tools of the digital age (Sylvestre & Greenidge, 2009). Since the lives of our students are inextricably linked to popular culture and interactive multimedia, technology can
be a powerful tool for connecting students’ school life with their out of school worlds (Kingsley, 2007). Teachers should recognize that linking writing instruction to youth culture, such as technology, is a compelling way to capture and hold students’ attention, make learning relevant, and help students develop a sense of ownership of their learning (Kingsley, 2007).

Writers are also more motivated to engage in writing activities when they have authentic audiences. Most writing in the classroom, however, includes only the writer and the teacher. When students write for a larger audience, they are much more motivated to write and tend to do their best work (Sylveste & Greenidge, 2009). By integrating technology into student writing activities, students have the opportunity to share their writing with a large audience on the Internet. Knowing that a piece of writing will extend upon the writer and the teacher can motivate reluctant writers to polish, clarify confusing parts, entertain, inform, or for some, even complete a writing assignment (Sylveste & Greenidge, 2009).

One way we can help reluctant literacy students become more motivated is by inviting them to become authors on the web. Student publishing websites allow students to publish their own writing at a classroom home page or other Internet sites and are available to a wide audience of peers, families, and readers around the world. They also allow students to read works by other students. Student publishing websites are described as one of the most powerful and easiest ways to increase student engagement in reading and writing (Leu et al., 2004). They also prompt writers to put
thought and effort into their writing assignments, encouraging revision and editing (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Student publishing websites appear to be an effective strategy in encouraging reluctant writers to engage in classroom writing activities. Research in K-6 classrooms indicates that teachers report an increase in student motivation to write when they know their writing will be published on the Internet (Gambrell, Mandel-Morrow, & Pressley, 2007). In addition, publishing student work online encourages the writing process and provides a way for students to receive comments and feedback from readers other than the teacher (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006).

Another innovative way for students to become online authors, while also learning 21st century communication skills, is through digital storytelling. Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) define a digital story as a multimedia text consisting of still images complemented by a narrated soundtrack to tell a story or present a documentary and sometimes video clips are embedded in between images. To create a digital story, students begin by writing, and once the narrative is constructed, illustrations, voice recordings, and digital photos are added (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). According to Ohler (2006), digital storytelling can be very beneficial for education, but warns teachers that they should focus on the development of the story first and the digital medium later. He recommends that teachers use storyboards as a way to help students plan the events of a story. Digital storytelling can have a positive impact on reluctant writers. They act as a motivator for students, causing them to remain engaged throughout the project (Sylvester &
Greenidge, 2009). They also enhance students’ critical thinking, expository writing, and media literacy (Ohler, 2006). In addition, digital storytelling teaches students the writing process while instilling a sense of pride in their accomplishments (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006).

Reluctant readers and writers will also be more motivated to write when they use technology that allows them to communicate and share their ideas with others. Classroom blogs, or weblogs, are being introduced into classrooms as an educational communication tool. Poling (2005) defines blogs as personal online journals that allow outside users to comment on an individual’s postings. Discussion posts on blogs can be exchanged class to class or student to student and encourage students to post book reviews, comment on what they are reading, exchange ideas on their favorite books, or discuss and other questions or comments related to school (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Blogging as a classroom application allows for enhanced comprehension and communication among students as well as the ability to build understanding across the curriculum (Poling, 2005). Students are motivated by the use of technology in writing and by the audience they will have while writing online. In fact, reluctant writers and shy students become more interactive and develop online personalities when they exchange messages through digital communication systems (Gambrell, Mandel-Morrow, & Pressley, 2007). In addition, teaching students how to communicate online exposes them to the language constructs and etiquette common to the web that are essential for success in today’s collaborative workplaces (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006).
Collaborative Internet projects have highly motivating possibilities and are especially promising when it comes to encouraging reluctant literacy students. According to Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, and Goldstone (2006), Internet projects are partnerships between students or classes in different locations formed to solve a common problem or explore a common topic. An example of a collaborative Internet project would be two classes in different states exchanging ideas about a novel that both classes are reading. Collaborative Internet projects allow students to internalize vocabulary, develop approaches to problem solving, and encounter action schemes. Collaborative computer activities also allow students to simultaneously construct both conventional and digital literacy knowledge (Gambrell, Mandel-Morrow, & Pressley, 2007). Finally, participating in Internet projects help students acquire the collaborative problem-solving, information, and communication skills they will use when they enter the world of work (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006).

When integrating technology into classroom literacy instruction, teachers may not always have the software resources available to them and therefore, they need to be creative with the resources they do have available. In order to teach how technologies can be newly applied to writing instruction, we need to use a process that Donald Leu and his colleagues call “envisionment.” Envisionment is the ability to use a given technology for a purpose other than its intended purpose (Yancey, 2004). For example, in order to motivate reluctant writers, a teacher might invite students to use presentation software, such as PowerPoint, to engage in a writing project. Presentation software includes color, choice of font style and size, animation,
and special effects, all of which will appeal to reluctant writers. According to Yancey (2004), students found that they prefer this way of writing and their writing improved as a result. By being creative with their available resources, teachers will discover technology programs that function well as composing tools for young writers.

There are several other resources available to teachers and students that will motivate reluctant writers to engage in classroom writing activities. Graphic organizers, for example, are visual representations of information that show relationships and contain key vocabulary. They make excellent planning tools for writing (Gambrell, Mandel-Morrow, & Pressley, 2007). Inspiration and Kidspiration software programs allow students to construct their own graphic organizers online using visual learning principals (“Kidspiration,” 2011). A website referred to as Xtranormal can also be used to motivate student writing within the classroom. Xtranormal is a text-to-movie website that allows teachers and students to make short films with their own scripts (Picardo, 2009). The website is an exciting way for students to engage in writing and allows them to see characters play out their scripts when they are finished. In addition, electronic word walls (E-word walls) can be used to provide writers with a display of vocabulary words to reinforce spelling and writing strategies. Electronic word walls are interactive 21st century models of the original word walls and they allow students to use technology to view, read, and write words and sentences that contextualize new vocabulary (Narkon, 2011). Teachers are encouraged to further their knowledge and understanding of resources that are available to them so that they can motivate and engage reluctant writers.
There are a variety of ways that teachers can motivate students through the use of technology. When technology is integrated into classroom literacy instruction, activities should be relevant to the children’s lives, provide authentic audiences, provide social communication and interaction, and teach students skills that will prepare them for their futures. By exploring and understanding the technological resources that are available for writing instruction, teachers will be able to create engaging and innovative writing activities that meet the interests and needs of all learners.
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

Introduction

This case study is focused on the way a student’s motivation and achievement changes when engaged in online literacy software programs. I examined how student work differs from traditional literacy instructional methods versus methods that include literacy based software programs. Through this study I focused on the many different aspects of student literacy learning and made observations of how they transform between different types of activities. I also examined how students use these software programs during their academic and own personal time. This chapter will break down and discuss the overall context of the study. This chapter will include the district, school, and classroom the study will being taking place. This chapter also provided an overview of the participants in this study and their role. Following this section I will discuss my role as the teacher/researcher in the classroom and overview how this model worked. This chapter will also include information about data collection methods and my specific procedures during the case study. Finally, I will describe my data analysis methods that will be used throughout this case study.

Context

This study took place in a suburban school district in the Western New York area. This school district is just outside of a local city and contains students from three small surrounding towns. The total district population is 30,000 and the total student enrollment contains 4,160 students. This school district has been declining in their enrollment over the past four years. In 2007 their enrollment was at 4,184. 33%
of students in this school district qualify for either a free or reduced lunch. This percentage has steadily risen every year in the past five years. The students that make up the student population in this district are predominately white. Only 11% of students are not considered white or Caucasian. This district has an urban suburban program which busses in students from the city of Rochester to be enrolled in the district. The overall district population is predominately made up of the blue collar class. Typically students come from a household where both parents work full time jobs. The town contains a community center and a private elementary school that students and families can choose to take advantage of.

This school district contains five different buildings. These buildings include: a K to 1st grade building, 2nd to 3rd grade building, 4th to 5th grade building, middle school, and high school. This study took place in the 4th to 5th grade building. In past years this school was on the New York State list of a school that needed improvement. This is the first year in the past three that this school was taken off this list and is now considered a school is good standing. This building houses a total of 22 classroom teachers. It has one principal and does not have a working vice principal. It contains a computer lab and library that are available throughout the week for teachers and students. This school also has four netbook or laptop carts that can be signed out for daily use in the classrooms. Each room contains a SmartBoard and four to five desktop computers. In this school the teacher teaches the all of the core curriculum subjects in one room. Students are required to go to their special classes forty five minutes a day. These classes include art, music, library, and
physical education. Students also have the opportunity of joining band, chorus, or orchestra. In addition there are a variety of clubs and activities that students can engage in throughout the week.

This study more specifically took place in two locations in this school, my classroom and the computer lab. The classroom is made up of twenty-six students, thirteen being female and thirteen being male. The students are seated into groups of five to six. Each student has their own desk to keep their materials in throughout the school year. They also have their own locker in the hall and mail box in the classroom. Although the students spend the majority of their time in the classroom for instruction, they will switch to another classroom for their social studies instruction. The front of the room contains a large carpet where large group discussions and read aloud activities take place. In the back of the room there is a large table where students can conference with teachers about literacy activities. The classroom also contains a library of books that students may select from during the day. This classroom contains five students who have a 504 modification plan. A 504 modification plan is a federally funded program that allows students to receive assistance based on specific needs. Of the twenty-six students in the class, seven of the students receive additional instruction in reading and writing. Four of these students receive tier two AIS (academic intervention services) instruction daily. This program requires students to be pulled out of the room and to work on specific literacy skills with the school’s reading specialist. This intervention program takes place for forty five minutes every day. Three other students receive tier three
intervention services through the Read180 program. This program requires students to be pulled out of the room for 90 minutes to engage in extra literacy practices.

The ELA curriculum is made up of several different aspects and programs. As a school in New York State this school is required to follow the new state Common Core Standards Learning Standards. The majority of the whole group lessons were developed by New York State. Many lessons were also developed by other teachers in the school district. This classroom will stress reading non-fiction pieces of literature as much as fiction. This is again another requirement of the New York State Common Core Learning Standards. Instruction practices such as read alouds, whole group instruction, guided reading, literature circles, and writing workshop are all common literacy instructional practices that are used in this classroom.

This study focused on three different types of online software programs. These programs have been designed to align with the New York State Common Core English Standards. They will allow students to express their understanding of literacy terms. The first program that this study will use is called Microsoft Photostory 3. This program allows students to record their voice on the computer and upload videos. This allows students to publish their writing in a unique way. Students created their own book reviews based on a book that they had previously read. They then created a photostory of their book review to share with the rest of the class and potentially the rest of the school. The second software program that used in this study is called edmodo.com. This program allows students to post comments to each other, under the
supervision of the classroom teacher. Students in this study connected and wrote messages to students from their own and another class. In these messages they discussed common reading assignments and critiqued each other’s thoughts and opinions. Finally, students will be using scootpad.com in this study. This program is ELA and Math Common Core certified program. This program allows students to practice common core math problems and specific ELA skills.

Participants

I, Randall Yu will act as the teacher/observer in this study. I am a graduate of SUNY Buffalo State with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. I hold a childhood education certification in the grades of 1-6. I am currently a graduate student at SUNY Brockport working on my Master’s degree in elementary literacy. Along with this, I am also working towards my students with disabilities certification. I am a fifth grade teacher and will use my own classroom to collect all of the data used in this case study. I am eager to see how literacy based software programs effect my student’s motivation and engagement in literacy activities.

In order to collect sufficient data I observed three students out of the twenty-six in the class. In order to avoid a Hawthorne Effect in this case study, each student received a consent letter. This eliminated the chance of students reacting differently in activities because they know they a part of a study or not. The selection of these three students was purely based on the reliability that these students would be in class. It was not be based on student grades or current motivation in literacy activities.
This study is focused on how student motivation and achievement changes and not the overall motivation or achievement. Students were chosen if they did not have the tendency of being absent from class. Also students that were pulled out from class for clubs or music lessons were not chosen in this study. It is important to realize that students in this study are not meant to generalize motivation and achievement of the rest of the class or district. The data collected was only used to examine how these three students individually reacted to the literacy based software programs.

In order to protect the students used in this study, there were several precautions put into place. First, all student names were black out on all students work samples. In addition, the students in this study are only referred to as focal students. No actual personal names were used in this study. All observations and field notes will contain the student’s pseudonyms as well. Furthermore, each student brought home a permission letter for their parents to sign before participating in this study. This letter outlined the main points of the study along with the activities their students would engage in. A similar permission letter was sent to the school’s principle so that he was aware of the classroom study. All permission slips and letters of content can be seen in appendices D-F.

Data Collection Methods

This study contained many different ways in which data was collected. To analyze the data I used multiple analytical codes such as motivation, achievement, and quality of work. As for motivation I was looking for an increase in engagement
with text and peers during literacy classroom activities. This was all done in order to triangulate data to increase reliability and validity. This study was based on four different domains of data. I used interviews, student motivation surveys, observational field notes, and students work during this study. Interviews were used to get an idea of how students feel about literacy instruction in the classroom. The questions in this survey focused on what the students have done in the past with literacy and technology. The questions also asked students what they knew about computer software programs. Student motivation surveys were given throughout the study to measure overall student motivation. These surveys were handed out at two points during the study. First they received a survey before starting any of the new literacy based software activities. This gave me a general baseline of how familiar and motivated they were when engaging in literacy activities. Then the students were given another survey at the conclusion of the study. This data showed how student’s perspectives in literacy activities changed due to the use of literacy based software programs in the classroom. The bulk of the data was collected using observational field notes. These field notes were taken as I actually observe the students working with the software programs. I mainly observed student concentration when working in literacy based activities. I then compared student concentration and student work in traditional literacy instructional activities verses traditional activities employed in this study. All surveys, interviews, and field note observations relate directly to one of the three research questions asked in this study.
Procedure

This study took place over a period of six weeks in the classroom. The first step in this study was to collect benchmark information about the three focal students. I first collected student work and analyzed it by looking for completion and overall understanding. Once this was completed, the focal students were given their first literacy motivation survey. After the surveys had been completed, student interviews were conducted during guided reading in order to learn about students’ previous understanding of literacy based software programs. Once the data was analyzed, I had enough information to create a benchmark of student motivation and achievement in literacy based activities.

The next step in this study was to introduce my students to Edmodo.com, Microsoft Photostory 3, and Scootpad.com. I explicitly modeled how to use these three different software programs and went over the rules and procedures. At this time the students learned about eventually linking with a 6th grade classroom in another school district in the Buffalo area. We then discussed the benefits of engaging in conversation with another class and listed what we hoped to learn as a class. Below is a detailed weekly schedule of how this study was conducted.
### Table 3.1 – Weekly Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Procedure List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>- Students will be given the student consent letter and will be informed about the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Student consent slips get signed by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Parent permission letters will be sent out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will be given literacy motivation survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I will collect student work samples to observe and create a benchmark for the three focal students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>- Once all permission slips are handed back I will begin to model Edmodo.com and how it works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will learn how to log on and how to send and receive messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This week students will be given a writing assignment to complete and will send it to me using Edmodo.com.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will be introduced to Scootpad.com and given a tour of the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will receive their Scootpad.com log in and complete their first assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>- Students will be given a writing assignment that they will send to 6th grade students for the first time.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will continue to use Scootpad.com to engage in literacy practice activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>- Students will continue to connect and respond to 6th grade students from Buffalo using Edmodo.com.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I will show examples of book reviews published on Microsoft Photostory 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I will model how to publish using Microsoft Photostory 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will receive guidelines and expectations on making book reviews on Photostory 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Students will choose a book they want to use for their book reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Procedure List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Week 5 | - Students will continue to connect with 6th grade students from Buffalo. They will discuss common reading assignments and videos using Edmodo.com.  
- Students will choose a book that they have read and begin making a book review about that book.  
- Students will continue to work on Scootpad.com. |
| Week 6 | - Students will reflect on their experience with their 6th grade partners on e-pals.  
- Students will finish and present their book reviews that will be uploaded to the class website.  
- Students will take final motivation survey.  
- Teacher will collect student work samples to compare with traditional instructional work samples.  
- Students will present their book reviews to the rest of the class.  
- Students will reflect on the book review process using Microsoft Photostory 3. |

Students took part in using these literacy based software programs about forty five minutes a day during this six week study. Interviews were all conducted during guided reading periods. I also made sure to keep a running log of each observational note that I made. Observations were made while I am giving instructions, while students were working, and after they completed their literacy tasks. Making observations in these different settings allowed me to collect as much data as possible that may show a change in student motivation and/or achievement.
**Data Analysis**

There are four main types of data that I collected during this study. I collected data by using motivational surveys, interviews, observational field notes, and student work. Each of these pieces of data helped me gain a complete picture of how these students’ motivation and achievement in literacy learning activities may have changed due to the types of literacy based software programs they engaged in. With these four domains of data I was able to employ a method of triangulation which helped increase the reliability and validity of this study.

In order to analyze the three focal students in this study I used two forms of analytical codes. The first analytical code I analyzed was motivation. I used the student motivational surveys, interviews, and my observational field notes to draw my overall conclusion. In the surveys, I focused on some kind of change from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. The focal students received the same survey each time, but were told to answer the questions purely based on how they feel at the moment they fill it out. I also looked back at my observational field notes to draw conclusions on the students’ behavior as they were taking part in these activities. I made sure to take note of if the students were on-task or tended to be distracted while working with these software programs. The interview questions provided data about the focal student’s motivation during literacy instruction activities. These questions allowed me to see what the students consciously know about their own literacy motivation. The second type of analytical code I used was
student achievement. To analyze this data I looked at student work samples to draw conclusions about students’ overall achievement. By gathering work samples from traditional literacy lessons and comparing them to the work samples in this study, I was able to determine if there was a change in quality.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methods and procedures of this action based research study. I conducted this study in my own classroom in a suburban school setting. Students in my class had access to a computer in a variety of different ways. All students in my class participated in the activities, but the only data from the select three focal students were analyzed in this study. These students were chosen based on their reliability to be in class and not based on their current motivation or achievement level in literacy based activities. There are four main types of data that I collected during this study. I collected data through the use of motivational surveys, interviews, observation field notes, and student work samples. In order to analyze the three focal students, I used two forms of analytical code, motivation and achievement. Data was meticulously triangulated and analyzed by comparing the students’ benchmark status to their status after completing the literacy based software activities used in this study.
Chapter Four: Interpretation of Data

Introduction

Student engagement and motivation have always been something that elementary school teachers have been looking to increase in students within the classroom. Today’s advances in technology offer a tremendous amount of opportunity for any teacher who is interested in completing this task. There are a variety of literacy based software programs that allow teachers to get students excited about reading and writing again.

Students that are growing up in this era are going to be expected to have extensive experience with computer software programs. Students will grow up and use computers in their daily lives and professional careers. Despite knowing all of this, integrating literacy based software programs has still been a challenge for teachers all across the country. Many hesitate when trying newer programs with the fear of failure. Many school districts just simply do not have the resources or budget to purchase expensive literacy based software programs. My goal in this study is to show educators that literacy based software programs can easily be integrated in a classroom to boost student motivation and achievement in literacy activities with minimal to no cost. I performed a six week long study that focused on using literacy based software programs during ELA large group instructional times, independent reading times, and small group literature circle times. My objective was to compare
how three focal students in my 5th grade classroom react to these instructional periods with and without literacy based software programs.

The three 5th grade students in this study were chosen based on their attendance record in class. Students who were most likely to not miss class due to absences, being tardy, and extracurricular activities were chosen. This was to ensure that students in this study experienced the same types of instruction and had the ability to interact with the literacy based software programs. All names in this study have been blacked out for the purpose of ethical confidentiality. When mentioned in the study, these three students will only be referred to as focal students.

In this research study, I examined how literacy based software programs could affect a students’ motivation and achievement in class. During this period, I collected many different forms of data in order to properly triangulate my results. This data included two surveys of the focal students, one taking place at the beginning of the study and one taking place after, an interview of the focal students, observational notes, student comprehension scores, and student writing samples. This study focused on three main questions. The first question examined the different types of literacy based software programs that are available to educators who teach in a fifth grade classroom and how they can be effective. The second question focused on how literacy based software programs increase the motivation or engagement of fifth grade students. The third and final question analyzed how literacy based online
software programs increase the achievement of fifth grade students during literacy instruction?

*Research Question 1: What types of literacy based software programs are available to educators who teach in a 5th grade classroom and how are they effective?*

Through internet research and discussions with several fifth grade teachers I found that there were several literacy based software programs available for teachers to use in their classrooms. All of the programs that are mentioned in this study are completely free of cost to any teachers or school districts that may use them. Many of these programs provided various reading, writing, and social activities that the students could engage in. Some programs that were found offered incentives or rewards for completing literacy based tasks. Other programs allow students to easily share and publish their work for other classmates to see. This study focused on three different software programs.

**Edmodo.com**

The first program that was used in this study was Edmodo.com. Edmodo.com is an internet software program that can be implemented into any 3-12 grade classroom. Edmodo.com engages students because it has the appeal of social networking websites such as Facebook.com or Myspace.com. What sets Edmodo.com apart from these web sites is that it is completely driven towards learning and education. Furthermore, all communication between students can be safely monitored by the classroom teacher. Edmodo.com enables students to engage in literacy based
activities and assignments online. Students are able to save their work in
Edmodo.com and work on it while at home. It also allows students to share their
writing, thoughts, and opinions with each other. The goal of Edmodo.com is to offer
students a different way to be relevant in their education. One of the biggest
motivating factors for students is to write to authentic audiences. This software
program allows students to instantly write to a variety of different audiences.
Edmodo.com is a technological avenue that students can use to collaborate and
discuss tasks with each other. Students are able to practice different types of writing
and reading activities through the use of Edmodo.com.

Edmodo.com offers many literacy based components that are available to
students and teachers. Students are able to communicate with each other along with
the teacher though the use of a classroom wall. Similar to other social networking
websites, students can post their thoughts and then comment on each other’s posts on
a class wall. This allows students to see everyone’s thoughts in one place without
spending too much time in the classroom. The only people that can see the wall of the
classroom include students, teachers, and parents who are invited. Look at figures 4.1
and 4.2 to see examples of students posting and sharing their thoughts on a common
reading assignment.
Figure 4.1 – Class Discussion of a Common Reading #1

I think the author did this, "The Race Against Death" for many reasons. To begin with, the author said people were dying of diphtheria. Another reason is they had to race to the medicine as fast as they could because people were dying in Nome. I would not like to live in the 1820s for many reasons. The first reason is we wouldn’t have what we have today. For example, books, iPads, Playstations, and cars. Another reason is we wouldn’t have treatments to sickness so it would be more likely you would die.

Feb 11, 2013

I would not like to live in the 1820s for a couple reasons. To begin with, there would be no technology. I also would not like to live in the 1820s because there would be no much machinery. Furthermore, I would not like to live in the 1820s because there was not any television.

Feb 11, 2013

There are many reasons why I think the author bled the story "The race against death". To begin with, it’s about dogs racing to get medicine for sick children & adults. Furthermore the dogs have to race to Nome for all the people before they die. I wouldn’t want to live in the 1820s because they don’t have any kinds of good technology & if you got sick, the medicines weren’t as good as the ones today.

Feb 11, 2013

There are a few reasons the author gave this story title. The author gave this story title because mushers had to race to save people’s life. It is also a good title because there was a disease in Nome, Alaska. I wouldn’t want to live in Alaska 1820-1825 because I don’t want to get diphtheria. I also wouldn’t want to live in Alaska 1820-1825 because there are no snowmobiles.

Feb 11, 2013

Kyle S. - I agree because there is not really any more diphtheria.

Feb 11, 2013
Both of these discussions show students responding to a prompt about an independent reading activity. The students in figure 4.1 read a story titled, “A Race Against Death.” This was a non-fiction story about a disease that breaks out in a small town of Alaska. They were then asked to post their thoughts on why they think the author decided to title this story the way they did. The students in figure 4.2 the
students read a story titled, “Hunting a Killer.” This was also a non-fiction story about a park ranger that must hunt down a grizzly bear because it had attacked a human. Students were then asked to post their thoughts on if they thought the main character should have killed the grizzly bear. Notice how student are able to comment on other student’s thoughts. In figure 4.2, one student said, “I agree, she had babies, they have no mother now.” This comment shows that this student read her peer’s post and confirmed what she said. On the same post another student said, “I think it’s sad that they have no mother.” This student was able to read the post and made an emotional connection with it. These comments show that students are able to connect with each other through the use of a class blog on the Edmodo.com wall. After all the students make their final posts, the teacher can choose two or three posts to read aloud to the whole class. This creates a very effective and student centered face-to-face discussion in the class.

Edmodo.com is completely secure because teachers can easily monitor who is viewing the posts. Another feature is that available is the use of the calendar. Teachers are able to put a calendar on the webpage and assign assignments to students. Students always have access to this calendar and can see exactly when assignments are due. They can also make notes and add assignments to their own calendar. These assignments can be created right on Edmodo, or the assignments can be uploaded in PDF or word document form. Figure 4.3 shows an example of a student’s ELA folder. This particular folder contains stories in PDF form that the students can access in class and at home. Teachers can also customize and create
quizzes, surveys, and polls to meet Common Core Standards and relate to their school’s specific curriculum. When these assignments are completed, students can make their submissions online. Depending on the format, the assignment may be automatically graded and organized for the teacher to view. Educational and interesting links can be posted on the classroom wall or blog for everyone to see. Edmodo.com allows students to access their work through a variety of different venues. They can download the application on their I-pad, I-phone, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. This alone creates a tremendous amount of motivation for students to engage in different types of writing and reading activities. Figure 4.3 shows a list of stories that students in this study have in their folders. Students are able to go back into these stories at any time as long as they have access to Edmodo.com.

**Figure 4.3 – Student Folder on Edmodo.com**
After reading the stories, the teacher is able to engage students in different activities on Edmodo.com. Students can engage in whole class discussions which were shown in figures 4.1 and 4.2. Teachers can also create and assign comprehension quizzes that the students can take to show their understanding of the reading. These quizzes can be posted on the Edmodo.com wall and are instantly graded when students finish them. Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 all show examples of comprehension quizzes made by an elementary school teacher.

Figure 4.4 – Edmodo.com Teacher Created Comprehension Quiz
Teachers can choose to add multiple choice questions, short answer questions, or a combination of both in their quizzes. The program will automatically grade any multiple choice questions for the teacher. When the teacher goes into grade the short answer questions, he or she will have an opportunity to make comments on how the students did. These comments could include suggestions for next time or praise for doing a good job. When creating the quiz the teacher can make short answer questions worth multiple points depending on the question. The short answer question
in figure 4.5 was worth 2 points because there are two questions that needed to be addressed in the answer.

**Figure 4.6 – Student Feedback Page after Taking a Quiz**

Edmodo.com can also connect parents with what the students are doing in the classroom. If the teacher chooses to, he or she can distribute a parent code. This code enables parents to log in and see some of the discussions that are happening right in the classroom. In addition to this, parents are able to directly view their student’s grades on the website. A large component of the Common Core Standards is connecting students in school and at home. Edmodo.com is a great way to do this in a new and innovative way.
Scootpad.com

The second literacy based software program that I found as an effective tool to use in the classroom was Scootpad.com. Scootpad.com is a website for teachers looking to offer students a fun, interactive way of completing Common Core objectives. It is easy to navigate and user friendly for teachers, parents, and students. This program allows for positive interaction between the school and home environments. Scootpad.com gives students the opportunity to master math and reading skills by giving instant feedback. Students can choose to engage in different types of literacy based activities while at home or in school. Figure 4.7 shows what happens when a student incorrectly answers a question. On the right side of the screen, the system prompts the student that he or she got the question wrong, and allows them to try again for a second time.

Figure 4.7 – Incorrect Answer on Scootpad.com

![Incorrect Answer on Scootpad.com](image-url)
When students log-into Scootpad.com, the software loads quickly and is visually appealing. All of the links easily lead students around the website. In the teacher account educators can create classes in which they can invite students. The website provides students with their own username and password where they can log in, set their own educational path, and get started on the website. Scootpad.com is beneficial because it is a great opportunity to differentiate instruction for all students. All students learn at different paces based on their own strength and needs. This allows different learners to work at their own speed.

Teachers can add homework assignments with different start and end dates. They can set different tasks pertaining to math, reading, and spelling. Scootpad.com offers teachers and students the ability to track student progress. Teachers can look at results from one individual student by clicking “Results” or can track the progress of the entire class by selecting “Progress by Concept” or “Progress by Unit”. After viewing results, teachers have the option for adding improvement practice for students. Students are also able to review incorrect answers and continue practicing at their own rate. Teachers can also view how students are doing within particular Common Core Standards.
Figure 4.8 shows that this student is meeting the majority of the Common Core Language Standards. The teacher is able to see that this student got 57 of the 64 questions correct that dealt with language standard 5.2. Since this is something that this student is strong in, the teacher will be able to develop future lesson plans based on this data. This figure also shows that this student is struggling with some reading foundational skills. The teacher will then be able to direct instruction in the classroom to meet this particular need. As students complete more tasks, more standards will begin to appear on his or her report. This screen can also be used as evidence to show what types of common core activities students are practicing in the classroom.
Scootpad.com has many benefits that make it an effective literacy based software program for elementary classrooms. To begin with, it is free and there are no advertisements that pop up. Also students can sign in from at school or at home. In addition this website gives immediate feedback which helps learners to grow. It is a safe environment where students take more risks in their learning as they strive to master the content. It is beneficial because the website focuses on skills such as spelling, reading, writing, and grammar. Figure 4.9 shows an example of a student’s home page when he or she logs into Scootpad.com. They have a variety of activities that they can engage in on a daily basis. This program allows students to practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DUE DATE</th>
<th>ASSIGNED</th>
<th>DONE</th>
<th>MORE TO GO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Practice Concepts (from the Learning Path)</td>
<td>Self-Paced</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA/Reading</td>
<td>Practice Concepts (from the Learning Path)</td>
<td>Self-Paced</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No assignments due</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No assignments due</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No assignments due</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.9 – Student Navigation Screen on Scootpad.com
foundational skills that can be transferred into their own reading in the classroom and at home. This software program also allows students to be social through a chat wall. It is just as important for students to be nice and respectful to peers through media as it is in person. For the younger student there is an option to have words, sentences, and stories read to you. This makes it easier for students to listen and follow along.

Figure 4.10 – Reading Assignment on Scootpad.com

Figure 4.10 is an example of a reading assignment that asks a student to define a word by using context clues in the reading. This program is highly effective because
it actually uses excerpts from novels and stories in its assignments. This particular paragraph has a lot of punctuation using dashes, commas, and semi-colons. This is effective because the previous questions in the series focused on these types of punctuations. Although students may not realize it, they are now given the opportunity to see the punctuation used in an actual paragraph after answering isolated questions. The student must first read the entire paragraph before answering the question. Then they are forced to go back into the reading to define the word. Teachers can monitor the student’s effort by looking at the timer in the top right hand corner. In the student report section, teachers can look and see their student’s average time spent on a reading assignment. This statistic will make it apparent if the students is actually reading and going back, or just guessing at the correct answer.

**Microsoft Photostory 3**

The third literacy based software program that I found as an effective tool in the classroom was Microsoft Photostory 3. This is a free program that allows students to create visual stories to share with a variety of audiences. This program allows students to download digital photos and integrate them into their story. It also gives students an opportunity to record their own voice as their digital pictures are passing by on the screen. I used this program in this study as a way for students to create book reviews about novels and stories that they’ve read. After reading a novel or short story, students wrote detailed book reviews describing the characters, setting, and plot of their story. Students also gave their own thoughts on the story and
recommend the story to different groups of people. Many students also chose to rate their books out of 5 starts as seen in figure 4.14. In order for students to begin creating their photostory, they had to write it out in their reading journals. The book review then must have been approved by the teacher in the classroom. Students had to go back into the reading to make sure they had specific details about the story in order to get approved by the teacher. Figure 4.11 shows an example of a book review created by a group of students who read “Hoot” by Carl Hiaasen. These students read and discussed this book together during literature circle reading time. They had the opportunity to work together to create a photostory book review or book trailer.

**Figure 4.11 – Student’s Photostory Book Review**

This program is extremely student friendly and allows students to be creative with their own writing. Their first task after writing their book review is to take
photos or find photos that portray what was going on in their stories. Figures 4.12 and 4.13 are examples of pictures that students used in a book review of “Hoot.” This activity forces students to visualize what happened in their story. They must create a picture in their head before selecting pictures to add into their story. This software allows students to add effects to their narration, transition between photos, pan and zoom in on photos, and add background music. In the process of recording their narrations, students have the option to listen to their own voice. If they are dissatisfied with the way they have read something aloud, they are able to delete it and try again. This promotes great fluency practice and immediate feedback in student’s own reading.

Figure 4.12 – Picture Used in a Book Review of “Hoot”
Microsoft Photostory 3 is an effective program because it allows students to write to a variety of authentic audiences. In this case students knew that their book reviews would be played in front of the rest of the class. Book reviews that were exceptionally well-done were played in front of the entire school during morning video announcements. All student created photostories are uploaded to the class website where parents, friends, and classmates can view them from home. This creates a tremendous amount of motivation around reading novels and writing about them. Students look forward to creating their own photostory that critiques books that they love to read in class and at home. Students also enjoy playing their photostories to other students in order to persuade them to read the book that they just read.
Figure 4.14 – Book Review Rating
Research Question 2: how do literacy based software programs increase the motivation or engagement of fifth grade students?

Students that are self-motivated are more likely to learn and retain information when learning in school (Larson & Miller, 2011). It is important for teachers to tap into their students’ motivation. Many students are not motivated by grades. Especially in elementary schools, most districts do not use numerical grades. In the school that this study was conducted, students are graded based on a 1-4 scale. When asked in an interview, students gave their thoughts about grades.

**Instructor**: What do you think about grades in 5th grade?

**Focal Student A**: I think grades are important to teachers, but I don’t really care what grade I get, as long as I did my best.

**Focal Student B**: I try to get good grades because my parents give me money when I get a 4 on my report card.

**Focal Student C**: I don’t really look at my grades, and my parents don’t really care at all.

If these students do not really care about their grades, what is going to motivate them to do well when engaging in literacy practice? Student C claimed that his parents don’t care about his grades. If students see no value in the grade, teachers cannot use that as a way to motivate students in 5th grade.
I found that there was a tremendous effect on student motivation when using literacy based software programs in the classroom. The focal students in this study have all grown up using computer based technologies and were all excited to use it in the classroom. My observations of the three focal students show that they were actually engaged in literacy based activities at a higher percentage while on the computer, when compared to traditional literacy instruction. After several observations over six weeks, students were on task 85-95% of the time while on the computers. When these same three students were observed during traditional guided reading activities, they were only on task 70-75% of the time. During these non-computer based activities, students actually spent more time sharpening their pencils, getting drinks, and going to the bathroom. Students who were engaged in literacy based software programs did not partake in these types of activities nearly as much. In an observation of one of the focal students, the student got up out of his seat 4 times during a 40 minute whole group ELA lesson. The next day, the same student did not get out of his seat once when working on an assignment using Edmodo.com. These subtle observations and statistics show that these three students were more engaged and motivated to work when using literacy based software programs.

The focal students in this study were given two literacy motivation surveys. They were first given the survey before engaging in any types of literacy based software activities, and then given the same survey after engaging in these activities for six weeks. Chart 4.15 and 4.16 shows the result of both surveys. This survey consisted of 8 simple questions and the students were able to answer based on how
much they liked the activity in the question. They had four choices to answer which included, “Love it, like it, ho hum, and don’t like it.” The chart below focuses on 5 of the 8 questions that focus on the focal student’s motivation towards using literacy based software programs. The full survey can be found in appendix B.

Table 4.1 – Literacy Survey Results (Pre-Study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Love It!</th>
<th>Like it.</th>
<th>Ho Hum…</th>
<th>Don’t Like it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like reading at school</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like writing at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like reading on the computer</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like writing on the computer</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like using social networking sites on the computer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 shows that two of the three focal students stated that they do not like reading at school. When both of these same students were asked if they enjoyed reading on the computer, they both improved their answers to “like it” or “ho hum.” This shows that students have had some experience with reading on the computer and
they enjoy it more than traditional reading of books and articles in the classroom.

When these students were asked about writing at school, one student said they loved it. When this same student was asked about writing on the computer, their response actually got worse. This initially surprised me because I assumed that most students would have preferred to do their writing on the computer. I thought that the most interesting pieces of data taken from this survey were the responses for the question about using social networking websites. All three students either loved or liked using social networking websites in their own lives. This means students are already familiar with these types of sites, and enjoy using them in their free time.

**Table 4.2 – Literacy Survey Results (Post-Study)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Love It!</th>
<th>Like it</th>
<th>Ho Hum…</th>
<th>Don’t Like it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like reading at school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like writing at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like reading on the computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like writing on the computer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like using social networking sites on the computer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in the survey after the study was conducted showed that these three students were much more motivated once they became familiar with some of the literacy software programs in class. When asked the same five questions, almost all
students improved their answers to like it or love it. When asked about reading in school, all three students said that they liked reading in school. This means that two students, who originally said they hated reading in school, improved their answer in just over six weeks. The results were very similar with the question about writing in school. Students who originally answered “ho hum,” changed their answer to “like it.” This shows that the use of literacy based software programs in the classroom actually changed the perception on how these students felt about reading and writing in the classroom as a whole. At the end of the study, all three students reported loving using computers to write. This piece of data shows that students have used computers in the past to engage in writing activities. Many of them did not like it for whatever reason. After using programs such as Edmodo.com and Photostory 3 to share their writing, these students grew to love using the computer as a means to write.

I found that there are many reasons students tend to be more engaged when working with literacy based software programs over traditional literacy instruction. To begin with, Edmodo.com offers many features that motivate students in their literacy learning. Student writing is often motivated by the types of audiences that they are allowed to write to. Edmodo.com allows students to write to a variety of audiences that are authentic and real to them. In this class, the focal students were able to write to their own classmates, teachers, and students from other classes. This motivated these students because they were excited to know that other people were going to have the chance to read and respond to their writing. Many times they received immediate feedback from their peers on their writing. When students
realized that their writing was actually meaningful, they did not mind engaging in instructional types of writing on the computer. Even more importantly, students knew that they had to put forth their best effort because other students would be reading and critiquing their writing. Figure 4.15 shows students interacting with each other through the use of the Edmodo.com wall.

**Figure 4.15 – Student Discussion on Edmodo.com Wall**

In this conversation, students are discussing what the author, Lauren Tarshis, might say if she were to give a speech to elementary students about playing contact sports. These two students gave their opinions about what this author may say. They support their thoughts with details from the story because they want other students in the class to agree with their thoughts. The second post had four other students...
respond. All four of the students acknowledged that they agreed with this student’s thought, and some added their own thoughts. This assignment would not be as effective if these students did not know that their peers would be reading their writing. They are motivated by the fact that someone else besides the teacher is going to critique what they have to say. I have found that most students will care more about their own peer’s comments than any comments made by their own teacher in the classroom.

Figure 4.16 – Student Posts to Another Class
Figure 4.16 shows two posts of students introducing themselves to another class for the first time. Students were given guidelines on what type of information that had to include in their post, but they were able to add anything else they wanted. The student who wrote the second post included some pictures of galaxies in outer space because that was something that he had learned about earlier in the year that he wanted to share. This same student also shared that he liked posting pictures on Edmodo.com and enjoyed discovering new ways to learn with technology. The student in the first post stated that her favorite part about using Edmodo.com was the fact that she felt like she could post almost anything. These two posts show how motivating technology can be for students in the classroom. It took almost a week for the other class to respond to these posts, and every day the students who participated in the study asked if they could check their posts. Students were excited and anxious to see how their peers would respond to their introduction statements. These students wanted to hear back from them so that they could read all about other students in a different school district. When the other class finally responded, the students could not wait to log-in and communicate back to them in this format.

Figures 4.15 and 4.16 both showed how students can be motivated by simply writing to a different audience. These two figures showed how a teacher can design different types of assignments using the Edmodo.com posting wall. Figure 4.15 showed students making comments about a shared non-fiction reading, and figure
4.16 showed students writing informally about themselves. It didn’t seem to matter if this audience composed of peers that they knew or even peers that they have never met before. It also did not seem to matter if they were able to talk about themselves or a shared educational reading. As long as these students knew that someone besides the teacher was going to read their writing, this was enough motivation for them to get excited and try their best.

Edmodo.com also offers other features that engage students in literacy based activities. Underneath each post, students are able to give their reactions to how the post made them feel. Some reactions include phrases such as: awesome job, rock star, outstanding, and admirable. Students enjoy commenting and making a reaction to each other’s posts. Many of the reactions that students used actually matched the comments that they made on each other’s posts. Figures 4.19 and 4.20 show examples of students leaving reactions on each other’s posts and comments.

**Figure 4.17 – Example of Students Making Reactions on Edmodo.com #1**
Scootpad.com offers a variety of motivating features that engage students in literacy based activities. Scootpad.com has a feature that allows students to look at a daily leaderboard. This leaderboard shows the top 10 students in the class based on how many problems the student got correct over the past 7 days. Students can compare their scores to their own class or other classes. This motivates students to compete and stay at the top of the leaderboard. The focal students in this study reported going home and doing several practices just so they were able to stay on the leaderboard. Figure 4.21 shows an example of a leaderboard on Scootpad.com.
Another motivating feature of Scootpad.com is the feature that allows students to earn coins as they complete practice assignments. These coins are earned by correctly answering questions and completing practices. If students answer the question correctly on the first attempt they will earn more coins. Students can always go to their “piggy bank” to view how many coins they have saved up. Students can look and see exactly how many coins they have earned on each practice as well as their overall total. Figure 4.22 shows one of the focal student’s piggy bank.
With these coins, students are able to buy rewards. These rewards can be customized by the teacher. In this study, there were three rewards that helped motivate students to earn coins by engaging in literacy activities. The first reward that students could buy was a raffle ticket. During the week, students earn raffle tickets by answering questions or helping each other in the classroom. At the end of the week, all the raffle tickets get put into a basket and three names are chosen. These three students are able to pick one toy or object from the prize box. Students can earn one raffle ticket on Scootpad.com by collecting a total of 500 coins. The second prize that students could buy was a homework pass. This gave the students an opportunity to not have to do homework for one night. This award cost students a total of 1,000 coins. Finally, the last reward that students could buy on Scootpad.com was an automatic prize from the prize box. This allows students to automatically choose a toy or object out of the prize box on a Friday. This award cost 5,000 coins. These prizes
motivated students to engage in activities while in school and at home. Students also enjoyed comparing how many coins they had with each other. The student in figure 4.23 is able to redeem his coins to buy a raffle ticket if he chooses to.

Figure 4.21 – Scootpad.com Student Awards
Research Question 3: How do literacy based online software programs increase the achievement of fifth grade students during literacy instruction?

I found that literacy based software programs increase student’s achievement in literacy instruction in several ways. The first way is that students become much more interested in what they are learning. Naturally if students are more interested, they are going to learn more. In my observations I noticed that students were much more engaged in their literacy assignments when using programs such as Scootpad.com, Edmodo.com, and Microsoft Photostory 3. Students enjoyed discussing their readings with each other using the Edmodo.com wall and that actually lead to great verbal class discussions. When compared to previous classroom discussions I noticed that I did not have to probe for answers as much as I had in the past. Students tended to take more of a leadership role during whole class discussions after posting their thoughts and ideas on Edmodo.com. Instead of dreading the start of ELA time in class, the focal students reported that they really enjoyed it in their interviews. They also reported that they felt like they understood the readings more because they were able to talk with each other about their thoughts.

As a whole student’s comprehension scores began to increase as they engaged in these activities. Students were able to keep track of their own scores using both Edmodo.com and Scootpad.com. This allowed them to monitor their own progress and motivated them to do better on future tests. Figures 4.24 and 4.25 show one of the
focal student’s comprehension scores on Edmodo.com and practice skills scores on Scootpad.com.

**Figure 4.22 – Student Comprehension Scores on Edmodo.com**

This shows that this student first got 7 out of 11 questions correct on the first comprehension quiz during this study. This translates to about a 64% overall score. On the next two quizzes, this student got 8 out of 10 questions corrects, which
translates to an 80% score. On the final quiz of the study, this student got 14 out of 14 questions correct, which translates to a 100% score. This shows the positive trend that literacy based software programs may have had on this student.

Figure 4.23 – Student Skills Score on Scootpad.com

This information shows that literacy based software program may have had a positive impact on this student’s achievement in literacy instruction. His comprehension and skills scores both increased during this six week study. These results combined with heightened classroom discussion awareness show that literacy based software programs can increase student achievement in literacy learning.
Summary

This study found that there are many effective literacy based software programs that are available and effective for students in a 5th grade classroom. I described three programs that were used during this study. Edmodo.com is a program that acts as a social networking site for students in an educational setting. Students can have class discussions by positing their thoughts and teachers can create a variety of activities such as comprehension quizzes. Scootpad.com allows students to engage in Common Core literacy practice activities. Students get instant feedback and can keep track of their learning. Microsoft Photostory 3 allows students to bring their writing to life by creating a photostory. Students can read their writing into the computer and add pictures and animations to tell their stories. This study also found that the use of literacy based software programs can help increase the motivation and achievement of students in a 5th grade classroom. All three of these programs had features that motivated students to engage in literacy activities. Students were motivated by tracking their grades, earning coins, and writing to a variety of audiences. This chapter showed that student discussions were more student centered and engaging because of some of these software programs. In addition, comprehension and literacy skill grades of a focal student steadily increased during this study. Incorporating programs similar to the ones mentioned in this study can be beneficial for learners in any 5th grade classroom.
Chapter Five: Summaries, Conclusion, and Implications

Conclusions

This study looked at how literacy based software programs can be effective in a 5th grade elementary classroom. It broke down the features of three effective literacy based software programs that are free of cost and easy to use for classroom teachers. Over a period of six weeks, students were introduced to these programs and engaged in various literacy instructional activities. Three focal students were observed as they performed the literacy instructional activities in class. The intentions of this study are not to generalize all 5th grade elementary students, but to examine how these three focal students reacted to the literacy activities. These students took part in two literacy surveys and an interview. Their actions while working with the literacy programs were tracked by the use of observational notes. Through the analysis of the data, it was found that these three literacy based software programs were an effective way of increasing student motivation and achievement.

As a teacher, these findings will have many effects on the way I will approach literacy instruction in the future. Writing for authentic purposes in authentic contexts can be vital to quality writing instruction and student motivation. Students are much more likely to participate in an activity if they are excited about it and to be fully and successfully engaged in writing, what students write about must be relevant to them (Gambrell et al., 2007). With this in mind, I must consider what is authentic and meaningful to the students in my classes. What may seem authentic and meaningful to me, may not seem the same to the students in my class. This is why the use of
Edmodo.com was so effective in this study. Students are used to using social networking sites such as Facebook.com, Twitter, and Myspace.com. Edmodo.com is set-up in a similar fashion as these other websites, and this really allowed student to become comfortable and familiar with it. This also drove a tremendous amount of motivation because they are not allowed to use social networking website in schools. Edmodo.com gave these students a place where they could write for multiple and authentic audiences. Students knew their writing was going to be read, and this made it meaningful to them. This caused students to really think about word choice, grammar, and content as they wrote. Students often care more about what their peers think of their writing than what adults do.

Since the lives of our students are inextricably linked to popular culture and interactive multimedia, technology can be a powerful tool for connecting students’ school life with their out of school worlds (Kingsley, 2007). Teachers should recognize that linking writing instruction to youth culture, such as technology, is a compelling way to capture and hold students’ attention, make learning relevant, and help students develop a sense of ownership of their learning (Kingsley, 2007). This study allowed students to take ownership over their own learning through the use of Scootpad.com and Edmodo.com. Scootpad.com allowed students to self-pace themselves in their own learning. They got to choose what type of literacy skills they wanted to work on at their own pace. Students were motivated to move at a faster pace in order to earn coins. These coins enable students to buy rewards such as raffle tickets, homework passes, and prizes out of the prize box. Students always have the
opportunity to look back at their scores and track their learning. Teachers can also
look by at their scores and customize classroom instruction based on student strength
and needs. Edmodo.com allows teachers to deliver reading passages to students in a
different format. Students can access these passages in school, at home, on a laptop,
or even on an I-Pad. Microsoft Photostory 3 allows students to express their writing
in a creative and engaging way. Students are motivated to write so that they can
eventually transfer their stories to this program.

**Implications for Future Researchers**

Based on my findings, it would be interesting to see what other effective
literacy based programs are available to elementary teachers. There are thousands of
programs that are available, but I wonder which ones are truly effective. As the new
Common Core standards become adopted by more and more states, it would be
interesting to see if these types of programs change to meet these standards.
Scootpad.com did a tremendous job of aligning its skills practice to the Common
Core Standards. This program even broke down each question asked in the practices
into a specific standard.

Another area that could be investigated for future researches would be how
technology affects students that speak English as a second language. All students that
participated in my study were English speaking students. I did not have the
opportunity to see what kind of adjustments teachers may need to do to accommodate
English learners. I wonder if there are effective programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of these students.

Finally, I would find it interesting to see what types of programs would be most effective for emergent literacy learners. This study focused on the development of 5th grade students. At this grade level the focus is on enhancing comprehension and understanding of readings. Many teachers still use traditional teaching technique to teach emergent students how to read. Studies have shown that the best instruction includes the use of phonics instruction combined with meaning and comprehension based instruction. I wonder what types of programs provide this type of instruction to emergent readers.

**Implications for Educators**

In the 21st century, being able to read, think critically, and communicate with the Internet has become just as important as being able to read a book or write a letter (Leu et al., 2004). Every year students come into our classrooms with different skill sets and different needs. Students that are currently coming through our schools have a tremendous amount of experience with using computers and various software programs. Instead of fighting this interest, teachers need to do their best to welcome it into their classroom. By utilizing programs such as Edmodo.com, Scootpad.com, and Microsoft Photostory 3 in the classroom, teachers can change the way many students view reading and writing. Many students prefer to use computers to express their writing needs. This should be embraced by teachers because these students will be
using computers for their entire lives. Learning to write is a social process and reluctant writers are more motivated to write when they are given opportunities to connect with their peers. Sharing their books or other writing samples with their peers motivates students to write and it helps them see the possibilities for their own writing (Johnson & Chiki, 2009). With this in mind, teachers can use programs such as Edmodo.com to create a community of writers in the classroom. Allowing students the opportunity to share and publish their writing with each other, will develop life-long writers and readers. Most importantly it is important that educators become life-long learners themselves. Every year technology will be changing and it is important that teachers stay on top of the most current trends. No one knows what kind of instructional programs will be available in the years to come. The only thing that is certain is that it won’t be the same as today.

Finally it is important to understand that simply having Internet technologies in our classrooms will not prepare children adequately for the new literacies they require (Leu, 2000). Many teachers who see the importance of technology in the classroom, but are reluctant to use it, will just leave the piece of technology in the room unused. This is as bad as not bringing it into your curriculum at all. Teachers must take the time to go through professional development programs and learn how to engage students using these new technologies. This also means schools must make an effort to provide teachers with this type of opportunity. Teachers and schools who do not have professional development around new technologies will not be using the best instructional methods to help instruct their students. Teachers and administrators
must always be growing their knowledge of the most current technological programs and services to offer to their students.
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Appendices

Appendix A – Blank Observational Note Sheet

Date:  
Student Name (pseudonym):  
Observer:  
Time start:  Time Stop:  
Subject:  
Grade Level:  
Location:  
Class Layout:  
Group Configurations:  
Instruction materials:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
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<td>Phase III</td>
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Appendix B – Blank Motivation Survey

LITERACY SURVEY

1.) I like reading at school?

| Love it! | Like it. | Ho Hum... | Don't like it! |

2.) I like reading at home?

| Love it! | Like it. | Ho Hum... | Don't like it! |

3.) I like writing at school?

| Love it! | Like it. | Ho Hum... | Don't like it! |

4.) I like writing at home?

| Love it! | Like it. | Ho Hum... | Don't like it! |
5.) I like writing on the computer?

Love it!  |  Like it.  |  Ho Hum...  |  Don't like it!

6.) I like reading on the computer?

Love it!  |  Like it.  |  Ho Hum...  |  Don't like it!

7.) I like using social networking sites on the computer?

Love it!  |  Like it.  |  Ho Hum...  |  Don't like it!

8.) I like playing reading and writing games on the computer?

Love it!  |  Like it.  |  Ho Hum...  |  Don't like it!
Interview Questions

1. Do you like to read in your free time?
2. What kind of things do you read?
3. Do you like to write in your free time?
4. Would you rather read or write on the computer? Why?
5. Do you enjoy discussing books with friends or other people?
6. What kind of things do you do on the computer in school?
7. What kind of things do you do on the computer at home?
8. How do you feel about grades in school?
Appendix D – Parent Consent Letter

January 15, 2012

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As many of you know I am currently working on my Master’s degree in the department of Education and Human Development at the College at Brockport. I am conducting a study regarding literacy based software programs in the elementary classroom. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of these programs on student motivation and achievement in literacy learning activities. I will be looking for an increase in engagement with text and peers during such literacy activities.

As part of my study, I will be asking students to complete the following:

• **Reading and writing Attitude Survey** - a survey on their feelings about reading and writing. This survey will be given three, at the beginning, middle, and end of the study.
• **Literacy instructional lessons using software programs** – Students will be introduced to literacy based software programs such as: Scootpad.com, Microsoft Photostory 3, and Edmodo.com. They will use these software programs to enhance their learning of reading and writing.
• **Observational Field Notes** – observational notes will be recorded regarding your child’s demonstrated book-related play during the duration of the six-week long study.
• **Informal Interviews** – interviews will be given in a conversational environment.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, work samples may be collected from your child. Participation in this study will not impact your child’s grade negatively or positively. Also students that participate may miss some instructional time in the classroom. All time missed will be made up. Observational notes will be used in this study to examine how your child’s motivation or achievement may be effected during this study. Student names will NOT be released during this study. All names will be blacked out and pseudonyms will be used in the report.

The enclosed Guardian Consent form includes information about your child’s rights as a project participant, including how I will protect his/her privacy. Please read the form carefully. If you are willing to allow your child’s participation, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statement.
Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Randall Yu
Graduate Student, the College at Brockport
5th Grade Teacher
Randall.yu@bcs1.org

Dr. Dong-shin Shin
Thesis Advisor, the College at Brockport
Teacher dshin@brockport.edu

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR SOFTWARE LITERACY STUDY BY STUDENT

The purpose of this study is to determine how literacy based software programs affect students’ motivation and achievement in literacy learning activities.

The person conducting this research is Randall Yu, your student’s 5th grade teacher and graduate student in the Education Department of the College at Brockport. If you agree to have your child participate in this research study, your child will be observed during literacy instruction. He/she may also participate in informal interviews and take a literacy interest survey.

Not all students will be selected to participate in this study. Out of the 26 students in class, three will be selected. Students will be chosen on the basis that they do not have the tendency of being absent from class. This is to ensure that students will be able to participate in all activities over the six week study period.

In order for your child to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in the project. Any instructional time missed in the classroom, will be made up. If you would like for your child to participate in the project, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided at the end. You may change your mind at any time and your child may leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.
I understand that:

a. My child’s participation is voluntary and he/she has the right to refuse to answer any questions.

b. My child’s confidentiality is protected. His/her name will not be recorded in observational notes. There will be no way to connect my child to the observation. If any publication results from this research, he/she would not be identified by name. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants nor the school can be identified.

c. Other than time in the classroom, there will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.

d. My child’s participation involves participating in regularly scheduled reading instruction and classroom activities in his/her 5th grade classroom. Students will partake in a conversational interview, surveys, and interactive online literacy based activities.

e. Surveys, interview answers, as well as observational notes recorded will be used for data analysis only. Only the primary researcher and thesis advisor, who guides data analysis, will have access to this information. The data will be used for the completion of a master’s thesis by the primary researcher, Randall Yu.

f. Data from the observations will be kept in a private and secure location by the primary researcher, Randall Yu. I will be the only person with access to these documents and all documents will be shredded at the conclusion of the study.

g. Thesis findings might be shared in educational conferences presentations and publications.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. I understand that participation in this study will have no impact on my student’s grades or class standing. All my questions about my child’s participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.
If you have any further questions, you may contact:

Primary Researcher:
Randall Yu
Graduate Student, the College at Brockport
5th Grade Teacher
randall.yu@bcs1.org
(585) 944-0952

Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Dong-shin Shin
Department of Education
Thesis Advisor, the College at Brockport
dshin@brockport.edu
(585) 395-5007

Signature of Parent________________________ Date:_______________

Child’s Name______________________________
Appendix E – Student Consent Form

STATEMENT OF ASSENT TO STUDENTS IN MR. YU’S 5TH GRADE CLASS

Over the next six weeks, I will be conducting a research activity of the different literacy (reading and writing) activities that we do in our class. So far this year we have engaged in many different reading and writing activities. During this study you will be introduced to new literacy based software programs. I aim to see how you interact and use these software programs at school.

If you decide to be a part of my research, I will be asking questions about how you use books and computers. I may also ask you if I can have a copy of your work or take notes on a conversation we have about reading and writing. I will make sure that no one finds out your name except for me and my thesis advisor, who is my teacher. Your work and thoughts will be kept confidential.

Your parent or guardian has given permission for you to take part in this study, but it is up to you to decide if you would like to be in my study. If you would like to take part in my study, but change your mind later on, you can let me know. It is okay to change your mind at any time. Choosing to participate or not participating in my research study will not change your grade or class standing.

Please sign and date below if you are interested in becoming a part of my study.

Thank you very much,

Mr. Yu

Name:________________________________________

Date:________________________________________
Appendix F – Principal Proposal Letter

Dear Mr. Sean Bruno,

As a part of my graduate study at SUNY Brockport, I will be conducting research on literacy based software programs and their affects on student literacy learning and writing a thesis. I will be specifically using Scootpad.com, Microsoft Photostory 3, and e-Pals in this study. I will be examining how students’ motivation and achievement change as they interact with these literacy based programs.

My study would take place during my normal ELA and computer lab times. Student work samples would be collected and observational notes would be recorded during this study. I plan on starting this study in January through mid February. A literacy interest survey would be administered to three focal students during the first week, third week, and final week of the six-week study.

I will be taking a teacher researcher role in this research study. My role as a researcher will not disrupt instruction during my observation and data collection. In my study, I will not disclose the name or location of the school, professionals, or students. Enclosed is a copy of parental and student consent I intend to use. Parents and students who do not give consent will not be included in the study.

In order to comply with SUNY Brockport Institutional Review Board, I must submit a letter from you, on your school’s letterhead, stating your approval of this study. I must also submit informed consent forms from the students and their parents/guardians.

If you have any questions regarding my study please let me know at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Randall Yu

Primary Researcher:  
Randall Yu  
Graduate Student, SUNY Brockport  
5th Grade Teacher  
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