

Winter 2-7-2014

Students Speak Out About Choices Made in the Classroom

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Students Speak Out About Choices Made in the Classroom

By:

Wendy Federico

January, 2014

A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of the
State University of New York College at Brockport
In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A young girl walks in the front door of her home at the end of the school day throwing her backpack on the couch. As the young girl is walking through the house she yells “Mom!” with considerable irritation in her voice. Her mom is walking out of the laundry room with a basket of clothes.

“Please stop yelling! What is wrong?”

“We have to do another KBR on a book that I do not want to read. Why don’t teachers ever let us choose the books? I would so much rather read about things I like and not about dirty boys called greasers. It is just so unfair Mom!”

Mom tries explaining there are reasons why teachers choose the books they do for their students and the books teachers are choosing usually hold some sort of meaning. Mom cannot help but agree with her daughter. Mom wonders why is it difficult for teachers to allow students some say in what students read.

Problem Statement

Students need motivation in learning and in life. Teachers are constantly finding new ways for motivating students in the classroom. Sometimes teachers are finding ways to successfully motivate students and teachers begin implementing them in their schools for a little bit, and other times teachers have difficulty following through with an implementation. The motivation chosen may not fit the curriculum or administration may not be accepting of the motivational tool chosen for a particular lesson. Researchers have written books helping teachers and educators to find ways for motivating students. Researchers state that students should have the opportunity to have a say in the choices students make in their learning (Brozo, 2010; Goudvis, 2007; Harvey, 2007). Motivation may develop from the individual choices

students are able to make in their learning (Sweet, Ng. & Guthrie, 1998). Teachers are constantly looking for ways to improve student motivation in learning and allowing students choices is an approach teachers may implement in the classroom to promote effectiveness in learning.

Teachers may claim they give students choices in the books students read and teachers may have given many different options in the ways students can present information in a report or project. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) state “choice makes a difference for both teachers and kids” (p. 61). The extent of the choices that exist was the question of this study. Students like having some control in their lives and when given opportunities in positive environmental surroundings students may thrive. Owocki and Goodman (2002) found students need opportunities to be heard and to apply their interests and ideas to their literacy development.

While teachers say that they give students the opportunity to make choices in their learning, to what extent are students really making choices? Are teachers working with the students in the choices made in their reading, writing, and presenting of reports or projects? How much of the students’ individual choices are being utilized in everyday reading and writing development? My research on the students’ perspectives of their learning discusses how very little partnership occurred between one teacher and her students as well as how that teacher had allowed the students limited opportunities to be involved in the choices made for literacy growth.

Significance of the Problem

Students have different learning styles and lesson plans created by the teachers need to be considered showcasing students’ best abilities. While some students may do well on book reports, others may need to present learning in a song or poem. Students who may lack in drawing or building abilities for a science project may excel in report writing. Learning needs and learning styles are unique and evident in every student and we need to tailor our teaching

methods to reach all of our students. Allowing students the opportunity for involvement with choices about their learning has been in discussion for years now (Applegate (2010), Brozo (2010), Brozo & Flint (2007), Brozo, Shiel & Topping (2007), Bruning & Horn (2002), Fletcher (2006), Fountas and Pinnell (2009), Fulmer & Frijters (2011), Giordano (2011), Guthrie & Cox (2001), Harvey & Goudvis (2007), Jenkins (2009), Lyons (2003), Moley, Bandre & George (2011), Morgan & Fuchs (2007), Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen (2005), Owocki & Goodman (2002), Pachtman & Wilson (2006), Routman (2004), Ryan (2005), Ryan and Cooper (2004), Sagan (2010),), Serafini (2010), Sweet, Ng. & Guthrie (1998), Tompkins (2004), Vartuli & Rojs (2008), and Vopat (2009) but the discussion of observing student involvement in choices actually taking place is another matter. Choice is important because it allows teachers opportunities to illustrate to students that we care about them, their individuality, and the decisions students make. Benjamin Franklin once stated “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn” (Benjamin Franklin quotes, n.p.). Involving students in their academic choices can assist in building responsibility, but also motivating students to the point that is leading students to a greater work ethic (Brozo, 2010). Student involvement in their learning is a key motivator. Brozo states “giving students control over what students read and reading-related tasks is also essential in keeping students motivated. Control not only increases engagement in literacy and learning but also allows students to reflect on their own competence” (p.18). Many students want to have control of their lives and show their families, teachers, and friends how hard they can work, what they can do, and what they have learned.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how students perceived their reading and writing choices through their involvement in academics. The research questions I asked were, to

what extent is one teacher allowing students individual choice in reading and writing tasks, and what are students voicing about choice and individual effort?

As a teacher I saw the importance of involving students in choice and how it motivated students to want to learn. Through their motivation students wanted to continue with the learning process which led many students to greater effort in their work. More effort in a plethora of student work can lead more students to be more proficient in their reading and writing development. Through my research, I found a clearer connection to student growth in reading and writing when students were involved in the choices made to reading materials and the ways students could present reports or projects.

Study Approach

I took a qualitative approach in my research. Taking observation notes in the classroom, conducting student interviews, and administering student surveys gave me the opportunity to link together students' feelings in regards to their individual involvement with choices made in their reading and writing development. Students' voices were compared to information that researchers have reported on choices in the classroom.

Rationale

People often make choices in life that may not always be the choice they would naturally make but people have their reasons for making those choices. I now know how students felt about making choices in their reading and writing development. I want to help teachers and educators see from a student's perspective what students feel would motivate them more. I have heard students say over and over that they do not like reading certain texts, writing about specific topics, or even creating silly projects because the topics are not aligning with their interests. By not allowing students individual choice, we may be hindering their learning because students are not motivated to read, write, or present about something that the teacher finds relevant to read,

write, and present. Teachers have reasons for limiting choices in the classroom. I believe in the importance of listening to the students and seeing if giving students individual choices in their reading, writing, and presenting tasks will create more effort and motivation in their literacy development.

Definitions

KBR: Kick Back and Read (term referred to me by students and teacher in local school district)

Choice: is essentially self-determination or volitional engagement (Brozo, 2010).

Motivation: self-generated and happens within the child; it is not done to the child (Lyons, 2003).

Summary

Choice through collaboration with a teacher is essential to get students motivated and involved in their learning. Research on how teachers and educators feel about choice through collaboration was easily found but research from a student's perspective was very difficult to locate. My goal was to confer with students to see if choice is allowed in their academic environments, to what extent it is allowed, and how choice motivates students to want to succeed in their reading and writing development. I believe that allowing students to make collaborative choices in their daily academics will not only promote responsibility but also may motivate students to be proud of their accomplishments.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A richness of research supports students being allowed opportunities to make choices in their reading and writing development (Brozo, 2010; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Tompkins, 2004). Research shows that when students are encouraged to make choices, motivation and effort increase (Brozo, 2010; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Lyons, 2003; Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Tompkins, 2004). Research also shows that teachers who are allowing students the opportunity to make these choices are also aiding in developing student strengths and responsibility (Brozo, 2010; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Tompkins, 2004). Within all of the research on choices, researchers do not identify how much control students have in making choices.

My investigation reports to what extent one teacher is allowing students to make choices and how students feel about the choices students are authorized to make. Through this literature review, I will consider the positivity of students making choices in their learning and how the literature review identifies with the study that is being conducted. Current research and findings assert that choice is essential for student growth in reading and writing (Brozo, 2010; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Lyons, 2003; Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Tompkins, 2004).

Through the literature review section of my thesis, I outline what factors researchers find to be important to increase student success with choices sparking student motivation. Motivation in student learning leads to engagement and enables students to have an active role in their learning. Taking a deeper look into various areas of expertise of choices implemented in the classroom may provide a gateway to understanding the reasoning behind my study.

Increase Student Success with Choices

Applegate & Applegate (2010), Brozo (2010), Bruning & Horn (2002), Guthrie & Cox (2001), Jenkins (2009), Routman (2004), Serafini (2010), and Tompkins (2004) discuss opportunities and benefits of student choice in the classroom. Students should be given choices in order to be successful in their literacy development. The importance of not giving students total control, but enough to feel students have some influence on individual learning is relevant. Routman discusses how students can be given choices in their writing within structure (Routman, 2005). A choice within structure allows students to choose their own topics as long as students know enough about the topics to actually compose engaging writing pieces. The teacher gives students a variety of choices, but the choices are within a “pre-determined, engaging topic, (one that students have had a hand in choosing)” (Routman, p. 177). By allowing students choices the teacher is giving students some control in their writing. Allowing students some control in their writing may be leading students to possible higher quality work because the students may find the work to be important. Choice within structure can also be applied to students’ reading and matching it to their interests and reading levels and abilities. Students can choose what they have an interest in, but students’ interests needs to be matched according to the level of difficulty students are able to read and comprehend.

Teachers want to create successful students and lifelong learners. Applegate & Applegate (2010) conducted a study of 443 students (202 males and 241 females) that analyzed the role of student interest and how it may or may not have correlated to the responses to questions and level of comprehension, kinds of ideas developed, and how the ideas were applied to new situations. Applegate & Applegate concluded students needed lessons which provided engagement and challenge in order to produce thoughtful responses to what students were

reading and to create students who find reading important in their everyday lives (Applegate & Applegate). Providing students with a quality learning experience helps in preparing students for higher achievement in life. Serafini & Tierney (2010) suggest four key relationships in a quality learning experience: authenticity (school-based learning and “real-life” learning), continuity (experienced now and how affects future experiences), engagement (a learner and the experience), and functionality (experiences provided and purpose in real world). A quality learning experience may foster successful lifelong learning.

Implementing all four relationships into a student’s reading and writing development increases a student’s chance of success in school and in the real world. When looking at students who are given opportunities in making choices in what they are reading and students who are reading required material, students who are given choices in what they read may have an increased chance of being successful readers (Brozo, 2010). Teachers are consistently assisting students in becoming lifelong readers and writers in and out of the school setting. Teachers can instill guidelines to help students make successful reading and writing choices (Tompkins, 2004).

Jenkins (2009) tutored a young man named Derek. During the time spent with Derek, Jenkins developed five recommendations to help struggling readers like Derek become successful readers. The five recommendations Jenkins established collaborating with Derek included teamwork helping his dream work, building on his past successes, connecting book reading to his world, allowing him to help select books, topics, and activities, and providing him with a variety of texts on a single topic. These recommendations may help guide teachers in their instruction not only with struggling readers, but with all of their students. Teachers are more effective in creating student success when listening to what their students have to say (Jenkins). Offering students choices helped in motivating and engaging students in their reading

and writing activities. Bruning & Horn (2002) state from Meece and Miller that “environments that provide students the opportunity for input and choice, promote student interaction, and provide challenging tasks particularly impact the goal orientations of lower ability students in positive ways” (Bruning & Horn, p. 29). The way the teacher sets up the classroom is very important to a student’s success in the classroom.

Guthrie & Cox (2001) went into a fifth grade classroom that consisted of 28 students from diverse cultural backgrounds and measured long term reading engagement. Guthrie & Cox identified the learning goals and knowledge for the first unit and then created a hands-on activity that motivated all the students through real-world interactions. Furthermore, students were provided with many resources which included a variety of interesting texts such as trade books and informational texts based on various reading levels. Collaborative and autonomy support was provided along with strategic instruction during the reading process. Guthrie & Cox determined that teachers can create a continual environment by providing seven various settings. Included in those settings you may find the importance of giving students some choices in subtopics and texts, and teaching students intellectual strategies that enable students to be successful in their reading.

Researchers have discussed opportunities and benefits of student choice in the classroom within guidelines. Providing students with enough guided control in the choice-making process enables students to feel responsible and influential in their own learning.

Choice Sparks Student Motivation Which Leads to Engagement

Applegate & Applegate (2010), Brozo & Flint (2007), Brozo, Shiel & Topping (2007), Fletcher (2006), Fountas and Pinnell (2009), Fulmer & Frijters (2011), Jenkins (2009), Lyons (2003), Moley, Bandre & George (2011), Morgan & Fuchs (2007), Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen

(2005), Owocki & Goodman (2002), Ryan (2005), Sweet, Ng. & Guthrie (1998), Tompkins (2004), and Vartuli & Rojs (2008) offer research supporting student motivation and how motivation creates more engagement in reading and writing activities. Fountas & Pinnell (2009) discuss how engagement and motivation receive little importance when there is discussion of raising achievement. Students reading below grade level are most likely the least motivated to read and the lack of motivation to read continues to increase as students age. (Fountas & Pinnell). Students can be motivated in so many ways, but the goal of the teacher is to help spark what motivates the students.

Students motivated in learning may become actively engaged in their learning. Fulmer & Frijters (2011) conducted a survey which showed students who were interested in the topic of choice while reading were motivated to put forth more effort in their reading. Nippold, Duthie & Larsen (2005) took 50 boys and 50 girls from the sixth grade and 50 boys and 50 girls from the ninth grade who were enrolled in public schools. Nippold, Duthie & Larsen had students answer a survey with questions based on what students did in their free time. The students had chosen from a list of possibilities directed at students in middle and high school and students could write in other activities on the survey. Additionally, the survey included a question on what type of reading materials students enjoyed for pleasure and how long students read outside the classroom. Nippold, Duthie & Larsen concluded reading and writing were of importance to students in this age group but other things like sports, video games, and music were a higher priority for pleasure activities (Nippold, Duthie & Larsen). Students reported they like to read a wide variety of materials but did not like to read for more than an hour or two a day outside of school. This study shows teachers what many students prefer to do outside of the academic classroom. Teachers can utilize students' interests and weave interests into the curriculum to

motivate students to read and write more. Ralph Fletcher (2006) states that “choice is negotiated between students and teacher” (p. 54). Allowing students’ input is not giving students total control nor is it taking control away from the teacher. Teachers can create student interest lists with student input of choices for reading and writing materials as well as activities. Allowing students’ input may help students feel involved and in control of student learning which may lead to motivation.

Josephine Ryan (2005) interviewed students in a secondary school about the text practices that were used within the school. The students revealed that their “passions for text were different from the traditional texts studied at school” (p. 38). Students reported they like reading books but students like reading other materials such as varied magazines, newspapers, comic books, web sites, and other entertainment materials. Students discussed when they do read from these other forms of texts students use their personal interests such as drawing or writing and apply it to what students learn from these sources of information. Students did not find reading to be a task but an enjoyment and a connection to their lives. Allowing these types of opportunities can get students more actively involved in their learning and opening the door to further successes in their literacy development.

Morgan & Fuchs (2007) examined 15 studies which reviewed the relationship between a child’s reading skills and reading motivation. The results pointed to reading skills and motivation correlating. The students who read well are motivated to read which enhances their motivation to read more. Students who are poor readers lack the motivation to read and in return the poor readers read less (Morgan & Fuchs). The rate of not wanting to read or not knowing what students are reading in the later years of students’ lives will be dramatically higher if teachers currently have difficulty capturing their attention (Applegate & Applegate, 2010). Moley, Bandre

& George (2011) talked with two different students about the text students were reading for class. In both cases, the text being read was out of obligation and not for enjoyment. Moley, Bandre & George found that choice increases motivation and motivation can lead to active engagement. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to connect books to their lives and openly discuss the text with their classmates and teachers in creative and thought provoking ways (Moley, Bandre & George). The goal of teachers was creating opportunities to help all students become motivated and engaged in reading. Teachers should find ways to get the attention of their students so students want to read and know how to respond to what students read.

Motivation is based on emotion and related to six factors which includes self-efficacy, successful processing, engaging texts, appropriate text level, shared understanding through talk, and social motivation (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). There are two different ways motivation comes from a student: intrinsic motivation, when students have the desire from inside of them, and extrinsic motivation, when there is an incentive from an external source to motivate them (Lyons, 2003). Allowing students to choose what they read, what they write, how they report and present projects would be the external motivator, sparking the desire to want to make those choices to read, write, and present in their own way. Students are intrinsically motivated through engagement and want to read and write more which helps increase their success (Tompkins, 2004).

Derek, a student (Jenkins, 2009), suggested making reading connections to his world and teachers should take advantage of student diversity and their ranges of experiences and interests when selecting books and literacy activities. Teachers may help guide students in making the right choices. Brozo & Flynt (2008) express the importance of student-teacher collaboration.

Students built a bond with a teacher that included trust and this led to an increase in motivation among students in their reading, writing, and other areas of academic and personal growth. When students have the motivation from within to learn, students lead activities and make connections to the real world, like challenges, ask questions, go above and beyond in their learning and thought processes (Vartuli & Rohs, 2008).

Motivating students is something that needs to come from within. To make that happen we, as teachers, need to give students opportunities to bring that desire out. Sweet, Ng, & Guthrie (1998) conducted a study that examined teachers' perceptions of student intrinsic motivation for reading and achievement. Part of the conclusion showed that lower-achieving students need to be motivated by topics that interest students and allow students to make choices. Giving students choices allows the students to have some control but within limits from the teacher. Teachers can enhance long-term literacy motivation by incorporating student choices into their reading and writing instruction (Sweet, Ng & Guthrie). Students can also develop responsibility in their learning when given motivational choices. Owocki & Goodman (2002) say that students who can take responsibility for their learning and make connections to their own experiences by applying it to their personal lives through their individual choices, will create motivated individual learners. Students who become motivated with learning will create a more active role in their learning. Brozo, Shiel & Topping (2007) explain that, as adolescents lose interest in reading, it is the goal of the teacher to intervene and get students interested again. Implementing different ongoing means of interventions and strategies will create effective results for engagement. Teachers need to discover the best intervention and strategy for each individual learner.

Applegate & Applegate (2010), Brozo & Flint (2007), Brozo, Shiel & Topping (2007), Fletcher (2006), Fountas and Pinnell (2009), Fulmer & Frijters (2011), Jenkins (2009), Lyons (2003), Moley, Bandre & George (2011), Morgan & Fuchs (2007), Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen (2005), Owocki & Goodman (2002), Ryan (2005), Sweet, Ng. & Guthrie (1998), Tompkins (2004), and Vartuli & Rojs (2008) have linked student choice to student motivation in completed studies. Allowing students opportunities in the choice making process and displaying students' interests in reading and writing development may create additional student effort.

Enabling Students with an Active Role in Their Learning

Brozo (2010), Fountas & Pinnell (2009), Giordano (2011), Harvey & Goudvis (2007), Jenkins (2009), Pachtman & Wilson (2006), Ryan and Cooper (2004), Sagan (2010), Tompkins (2004), and Vopat (2009) support active student learning which includes allowing student choices in everyday reading and writing development. Teachers do not have to give total control of choice to students, only to allow students opportunities to make choices in their reading and writing activities. Pachtman & Wilson (2006) found a way to give students an active role in their reading and set personal goals. Pachtman & Wilson observed and surveyed 22 students (13 female and 9 male) and recapped what students thought about their reading practices. Students were challenged to read as much as they could and then rate their books on student individual preferences. Students would record how many books they read and then explain why students chose the book. Students would vote on the best books and authors for the year. Additionally, students completed a survey that consisted of 18 open-ended questions to be rated based on a scale of 1-4 with 4 being the most important and 1 being not important. The final question, #19 asked students to give and explain 3 factors that were most beneficial to students as readers. Pachtman & Wilson showed through the results of the study that students thought about a lot of

things in regards to their reading and if teachers would listen to students, teachers would see students have a lot to contribute to their learning. Students who are given the opportunity to voice and use their interests and preferences in reading will want to do more independent reading (Pachtman & Wilson). Fountas & Pinnell (2009) say that a classroom in which all members of the group want to read and believe they can foster a positive emotional climate and a collaborative spirit results in intrinsic motivations and leads to greater amounts of reading. Teachers can guide students on how to choose books, what to look for when selecting books, and make sure the books are a good fit for them (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). In addition to allowing students choice in their learning, students are developing responsibility and control in student academic lifestyles (Tompkins, 2004). Boys are often the audience that teachers have difficulty in persuading to read because of their lack of interest in the material. Permit boys to choose their topics and texts and “control the kinds of responses and extensions, such as assignments and activities, associated with those materials” (Brozo, 2010, p.19). Choosing topics and texts applied to all students regardless of gender. One student who received work showcasing individuality permitted the student to learn about self and the kind of person the student was dreaming of becoming (Ryan & Cooper, 2004). Students want teachers to allow students the opportunity to select books and activities to “develop ownership of their literacy learning needed for success and strengthen the level of trust between student and teacher” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 161) Teachers who allow students the chance to be actively involved in their learning can strengthen the student-teacher relationship.

James Vopat (2009) wrote a book called *Writing Circles: Kids Revolutionize Workshop* that gives teachers another great tool with ideas that help to involve students in their writing choices and help to motivate students to learn. Vopat states that “in writing circles, small groups

of kids write on an agreed topic, share and discuss their drafts, receive positive responses, choose a new writing idea, and end with a brief reflection” (p. 3). Using writing circles helps build confidence in students as writers through differentiated instruction and allows students choice and control in their writing.

Lara Sagan (2010) believes students need to feel individual responsibilities in their learning in order to be more engaged in school. Sagan interviewed 134 middle school students in grades 6-8 (71 males and 63 females) in an eastern New York school district. She used their input on environmental and instructional changes in school to conclude the importance of students' having an active voice in their academic learning development. In Sagan's analysis "15.7 percent wanted additional choice of what they learned and in their assignments" (p. 220). Although the percentage is not high it shows that some students want to be more involved. The study's representation of giving students an active role in what students do and a voice in decision- making situations helps educators and administrators discover another strategic way to help students increase motivation and responsibility for their future personal and academic successes. Giordano (2011), a primary grade teacher, implemented a new approach to reading for her students called CLICKS. CLICKS was an active learning tool that helped students choose the best suitable books for their reading development. Giordano introduced and modeled each letter to her students until students had enough practice to try it on their own. Each of the letters in CLICKS represents a step in choosing student books. According to Giordano the letter C stands for connections to anyone or anything, L was for length of page or book, I was interest in topic, C was to count five unknown words, K represents knowledge about topic, author, illustrator, and S was for sense and understanding. Implementation of the CLICKS approach in Giordano's

classroom permitted her students active roles in choosing books that interested them and fit their reading development.

Sagan (2010) reports that teachers are constantly making decisions about students and their educational needs and activities without ever consulting students and finding out how students think and feel about what is happening in their schools. Sagan also concludes teachers should be giving students opportunities to be involved in the decisions made for their schools. Student choice opened the door for these opportunities. Students are taking ownership of their learning and developing responsibility in the decisions they make. Students have the support of their educators, peers, and families to guide them in making the right choices, but students should have some individual control in their literacy development. Students that are given opportunities such as choice will become motivated learners who want to be more active in their learning, and when that happens, students gain more personal and academic success. Researchers have agreed student choice is extremely important in student success.

My literature review discussed researched findings of effective ways teachers may implement and have implemented choices in the classroom. Enabling students with an active role in their learning allows students opportunities to feel responsible and influential in student learning which may foster increased motivation and successful life-long learners. Guidelines can be set by the teacher permitting students' input and allowing students limited control in choices made in reading and writing activities. Increasing motivation within students may begin with teachers listening to students and knowing students' interest. Teachers may take students' interests and weave into the curriculum finding ways to connect students' lives to their reading and writing activities. The literature review provided me with an understanding of how student choices can be effectively implemented into the classroom. Now I want to know to what extent

teachers are allowing students to make those choices in the classroom and how students view the choices which are allowed.

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent one teacher is allowing students individual choice in reading and writing tasks and what students are voicing about individual effort in student reading and writing tasks. I explain in this chapter how I conducted my research, the participants involved in the study, and what types of data I collected and analyzed.

Participants and Context of the Study

I currently do not have my own classroom but conducted my research in the classroom of a teacher in a school district where I currently substitute. The school district is located in western New York and consists of many pre-school or UPK programs, two public elementary schools, a public middle school, a public high school, a parochial elementary and a parochial high school. The students in this study attend a fourth grade public school classroom of a diverse background of academic and family backgrounds. Experiences and learning developments which also included students with disabilities and learning developments and needs are also represented in this study. The school district is considered an at-risk school district based on the number of students who receive free and reduced lunches. A fourth grade teacher who had been teaching more than twenty years was also included in the research.

Positionality as the Researcher

I have been substituting as a teacher for almost three years. I strongly believe that the most important traits a teacher can have is passion for teaching and knowing there is no perfect classroom. What I expect in my classroom community are students who want to learn and discover new things about themselves, their peers, and the world they live in. Students will all have unique abilities and talents that will be used creatively and effectively in the classroom, and as a teacher, I will allow students the chance to display their strengths and develop their

weaknesses into strengths. By displaying individualism, the students will learn about themselves and that being different is a wonderful thing. The role of the teacher is to create an environment in which students can learn on their own by guided reflection of their experiences. Giving students the opportunity to make individual choices gives students the chance to have control and take some responsibility in their learning. Students should be involved in democratic activities and in reflective thinking which can allow students to find ways to analyze the choices students make and seeing what can and cannot work from the results of the choices students make. The more a student can take what they learn and use it in their everyday lifestyles, the more successful students will become.

Data Collection

I recorded detailed notes during my six weeks of classroom observations and created a summary of what was observed. Surveys containing questions related to choice were randomly administered to five students in a fourth grade classroom. I audio-taped my interviews with the same five students who were randomly chosen for the surveys.

Student and teacher observations. Approximately 20-25 students and their classroom teacher were observed in their classroom as to how choices are made in their reading and writing tasks. I made anecdotal notes observing kinds of choices are made, how choices are made, strengths that are utilized, and the effort being displayed in student reading and writing tasks.

Students' surveys. I created a survey of questions about choices in which five students, randomly chosen, answered questions regarding whether students were allowed choices or not allowed choices in student reading and writing tasks. Students answered the survey anonymously to help provide feedback in regards to what extent individual choice was made in their learning and how it effects effort in their reading writing development.

Students' interviews. I discussed with five students the kinds of choices their teacher allowed them to make with what they read, wrote, and how they presented reports and projects.

The recorded observation notes from student and teacher observations, students' surveys, and students' interviews were tools in helping create a question-by-question analysis to determine from the students' perspective how choices were made in the classroom and how interests were or were not factored into those choices.

Data Analysis

Sharan Merriam (2009) defines qualitative researchers as being people who look at how people "interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and the meanings people attribute to their personal experiences" (p. 5). In this study, the qualitative data analysis showcases common themes among the similarities and differences in students' responses to students' surveys and interviews about questions related to students' choices. I used my observational notes to make connections to what the students said about making choices to actually seeing how those choices were made in the classroom. The survey questions were reviewed by me and I created a question- by- question analysis as well as included an overall summary of my findings. I used the results of the students' surveys to help me understand how much students felt they were allowed to participate in the choices that were made in their everyday reading and writing tasks. The audio-taped interviews with five students randomly chosen were analyzed to see if there were any common themes related to choice. The responses to the interviews helped provide feedback on how much students felt they were allowed to participate in the choices that were made in their everyday reading and writing tasks.

Through my careful analysis of the notes from observations, analysis of the surveys, and analysis of the interviews I connected my findings to current researchers' conclusions, and I

determined how my research may or may not relate with what researchers are saying. All my summaries and discoveries of common themes are thoroughly reported in my study.

Procedures

Over a period of six weeks I distributed surveys, I conducted interviews, and I made classroom observations of how a teacher allowed students to make choices in students' everyday reading and writing tasks.

Week One. I made introductions to the teacher and students in the classroom. I let the teacher and the students know that observations, surveys, and interviews would be done anonymously and with pseudonyms. I administered student surveys so I could get an idea of how students felt choices were being made in the classroom. I asked students to answer the questions honestly and anonymously. I took students' responses and observed ways students' responses were similar and different.

Week Two. I conducted my student interviews and made notes on the different themes I saw throughout their responses. I observed the classroom and saw how choices were made in the classroom. My goal was to see if the way students answered the survey and interview questions related to what actually happened in the classroom.

Weeks Three –Week Seven. I continued to observe the classroom to see how choices were made. My goal was to see if the way students answered the survey and interview questions related to what actually happened in the classroom.

Limitations

A limitation to the conducted study included self-reports. Self-reports in this study may be unreliable due to wording and clarity of questions which may have altered how students comprehended questions. How students comprehended the questions may have led to an

inaccuracy of student responses. Students' generated responses may have lacked personal thoughts and feelings to surveys and interviews and may have been based on what they felt were acceptable to Ms. Kat, me, or their classmates. Self-reports may be viewed as undependable in this study, but the student's point of view on choice was a significant portion to the study.

Summary

The examination of this study showed the extent a teacher was allowing students individual choices in reading and writing tasks, and what students were voicing about their individual efforts. I explained in this chapter how I conducted my research and collected data through observational notes, student surveys and student interviews. I discussed how I analyzed the data looking for common themes of student responses. The results of my findings are made clear with further discussion in the next chapter. Procedures of how I conducted my research throughout the weeks were outlined in this chapter along with limitations to the study.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter I will explain the data collected to help answer the question regarding to what extent students are allowed to make choices in their everyday reading and writing development. A summary describing the observation in the classroom begins the analysis and continues with graphs and charts along with commentaries that provide clarification. I will further discuss what the results exhibit about student choices observed in the classroom and what students report about individual choices made in the classroom. The students' voice may be considered an unreliable resource due to clarity and accuracy of questions and responses, but the students' voice was an important component in this study.

I took anecdotal notes during classroom observations to see how students were able to make choices in the classroom setting. The observations took place during reading and writing activities. I observed students reading when they entered the classroom, throughout the day during transitional periods, and especially during guided reading time blocks. Observations were also conducted during writing blocks that took place for approximately an hour in the afternoon three or four times a week. More time was allotted to reading than writing, and when observing writing, more instructional focus was on conventions and style than actual enjoyment. Five students were randomly chosen to complete a survey about their views on how choice is seen in their reading, writing, and projects and reports. After analyzing the students' responses, I noted that the students' responses varied. The interview consisted of questions related to choice and what opportunities the teacher provided the students and if or how effort would increase with more choices. The data collected in each of the areas provided the following information.

Results

The triangulation of data shows that 1) students expressed interests in literacy choices, 2) selected choices were allowed in the classroom but Ms. Kat (pseudonym) limited the choices and 3) students reported ways efforts would increase if collaboration were allowed in choice.

Students expressed in their surveys and interviews they would be more likely to increase effort in their reading and writing development if Ms. Kat would ask about and include student interests. Teachers who listen to students may see that students have a great deal to add to their learning (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006). Increased effort was not evident during observations in the classroom, only reported by students. Observations within the classroom, surveys of student responses, and interviews with students illustrated choices being provided by Ms. Kat but within guidelines. Ms. Kat provided guidelines in reading, writing, and in presenting and reporting projects.

Students' interests in literacy choices.

Reading. Students expressed they wanted to see more of their personal interests involved in reading selection. According to the five students surveyed in my study, four reported they would read additional materials such as entertainment magazines, graphic comic books, and funny comic books if students were given more choices in reading what students wanted to read. The one student who differed from the other students said he already read every chance he got, so there would not be much of an increase. Students identified they would complete supplementary reading inside and outside school if students could read more than chapter books. Students did not suggest what or how much added reading they would complete, only that further reading would be completed. Students reported they read some materials other than chapter books just not as often as they liked, because when students are in school Ms. Kat says students

must read chapter books. Students' interests woven into curriculum may motivate students to read more.

I observed that many of the students who would read throughout the day were the same students who did not take their reading logs and books home because the students had completed the required reading during the school day. Students who find reading to be enjoyable through motivation and their own interests may want to take their books home and keep reading to see what happens next because students who are given opportunities in voicing interests in reading may want to do more independent reading (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006). Through observations it was not evident students wanted to take their books home; therefore, it was not evident that students had found reading to be enjoyable. Students who had found reading enjoyable would have wanted to take books home regardless of whether or not they had completed the required reading.

Figure 1 illustrates that the five students' interests varied. Three of five students stated they enjoyed reading anything in the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series which included Dork Diaries. In addition, interests included another series, Junie B. Jones; classics, *Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; and fairytales, *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. One student stated he enjoyed reading classics, but he also liked reading the entire Diary of a Wimpy Kid series. Fulmer & Frijters (2011) identified in their survey that students interested in the reading topic of choice were motivated to contribute more effort in student reading. Students in this study may have read more if student interests were included in their required reading.

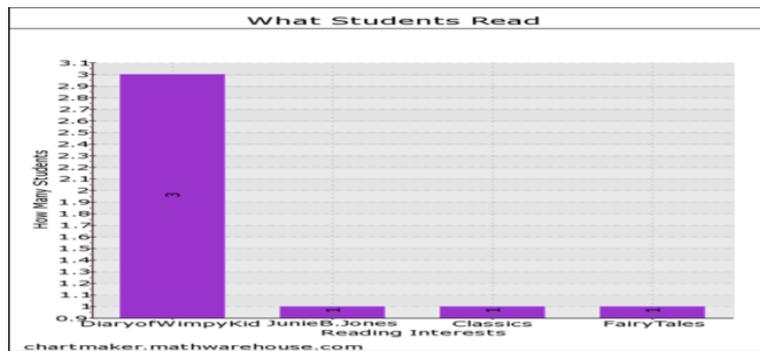


Figure 1. What students like to read. This figure illustrates the reading interests of students interviewed.

Projects and reports. Ideas were expressed across different learning styles when students were asked during the interview how they would like to present their projects or reports to the class and Ms. Kat. Students would like a wider range of opportunities to present projects and reports to the class. The students reported Ms. Kat does provide some choice in the classroom but choice is limited and students would like to see more individual ideas implemented into their literacy development. Figure 2 illustrates the different responses students gave regarding how students would like to present projects and reports to their classmates and Ms. Kat. Students expressed they like orally reporting but would have enjoyed presenting more if students could have presented differently such as in their Native American presentation. Students reported they had to choose from a teacher-provided list. Students stated when they reported on the Native Americans, the ideas on the list included a written report which could be presented alone or with a long house or diorama with materials students chose to use. Students would have liked to have dressed up, made foods, or acted out scenes that the Native Americans would have had during their time. Students would have also enjoyed the opportunity to have used technology like the Promethean board and ELMO, which is the technology students have in their classroom. Allowing different ways of presentations were not options for the students with the list that was provided by Ms. Kat.

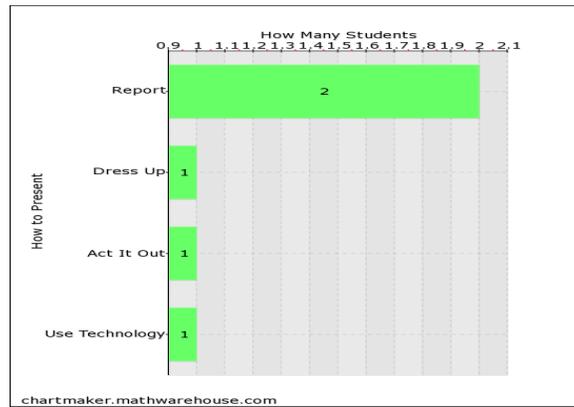


Figure 2. How would students like to present information? This figure illustrates ways students would like to present information.

Students indicated in their interviews that Ms. Kat does not probe the class regarding how students would like to complete a report or project. Students reported they want to be asked because students have ideas they would like to share and a few of the students said they have many fun and exciting ideas such as acting out student reports in a play and performing songs. Students are full of ideas, and the data collected in the interview about presenting projects and reports shows students have many creative ideas just waiting to be expressed.

Writing. Students would like opportunities to write about different topics and share ideas and interests with their friends. Figure 3 shows how students expressed interest in writing scary stories, mysteries, animals, fantasies and fairies. Students would also like to write about some of the topics they read or have read in their books. Students stated in their interviews they would enjoy opportunities for writing with their friends. No evidence provided showed students would actually write about these interests, use ideas from stories, or even write with friends; students were just self-reporting. James Vopat (2009) provides teachers with ideas to help involve students in their writing choices and help motivate students to learn. Vopat discusses writing circles and how students take interests agreed upon within the small groups, allowing opportunities for sharing, discussing, reflecting, and creating new ideas together to help build confidence in student writers and allow students control in writing activities. Student

opportunities to write about topics of interest and with friends may increase students' confidence and eagerness to write.

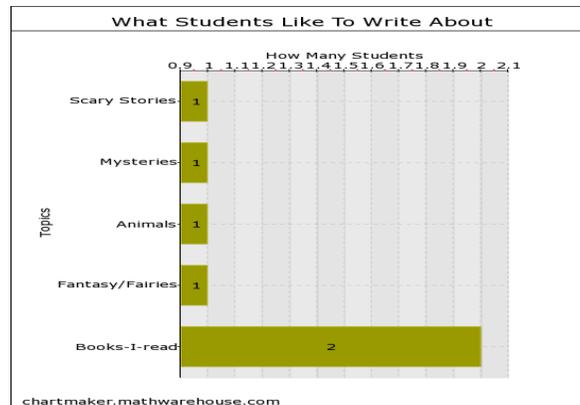


Figure 3. Topics students like to write about. This figure illustrates topics students would like to include in writing activities.

No consistent free writing was observed in the classroom, but a school-wide writing contest was taking place all month. The contest was the only opportunity for free writing evident in observations. The class who wrote the most letters to other students, teachers, and faculty in the school won a donut party. Students in this particular fourth grade class were not writing quality letters. Some students had one sentence or a picture and some were longer and detailed. The only guideline set by the school's Post Office workers stated that students were to write as many letters as students could and the most letters from each class won. The workers omitted additional requirements, specifically quality. Ms. Kat was dissatisfied with the quality and set additional requirements for her students. The students had to have at least three to five complete sentences. Ms. Kat still allowed students to choose their own topics and genres, but Ms. Kat believed students needed guidelines. The students were extrinsically motivated because they would be rewarded with a donut party. The contest showed students were motivated to write because the contest was a competition and the students would be rewarded if their class won. The students were writing, but lacked quality in their writing before guidelines were set.

Tompkins (2004) says that when students are intrinsically motivated they are engaged and motivated to write more. Students' quality in writing may have been greater if students had not been so worried about quantity of letters but the quality of their letters. The students' writing in this particular activity was not a proper combination of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation which are more successful when used together.

Selected choices were allowed in the classroom, but teacher limited the choices.

Reading. The number of students who made reading choices of when and where they were reading remained low and consisted of a few of the students in the class and the same five randomly chosen students who completed the surveys and whom I had interviewed. A few students from the entire class were seen reading every chance they could throughout the school day. These students were reading before announcements, during transitions between subject areas, after lunch, after tests, walking in the hallways, and at the end of the day during their few minutes of free time. Students were allowed to choose any book for reading given that the book was a chapter book. When students were reading for the recommended twenty minutes a day, students were writing summaries showing Ms. Kat what students comprehended during the required reading. Students who read during down times may have increased if students were allowed to read more than chapter books.

Silent Sustained Reading took place in a 15 minute block before lunch and then students were required to write a summary of what they read during that time. Students who had chosen not to read for homework were allowed to choose a chapter book and read during Silent Sustained Reading time. Only students who had not completed the previous night's required reading were obligated to read during Silent Sustained Reading. Students who completed

required reading were using the computers or completing other quiet seatwork such as drawing or other homework during this time.

Kid Biz, a computer based reading program, was the only other opportunity which allowed student choice outside their independent reading books. Students were able to choose specific areas they wanted to explore and complete on Kid Biz. Students had chosen from news, mail, writing (read this and then write about it), kid stuff, kids contribute, and resources. Students were told by Ms. Kat to choose NEWS first but there were different topics students could choose from. Students answered a range of questions that were multiple choices that related to main ideas, comprehension, details, vocabulary, etc. A key at the bottom of the page provided students an opportunity to go back to the article for help (text support). Students could keep guessing until they got the right answer but the program did not record the student's first answer for scoring purposes. A dictionary of words was provided to help students understand when words were used in context. Students could access the program at home with their login and password. Kid Biz was a reading program that students enjoyed and seemed to do very well exploring and completing. Kid Biz illustrated that when students enjoy a reading task, students may be motivated to read, take their time, and be productive.

Students reported in their interviews Ms. Kat did not ask the students what they wanted to read about because the students are allowed to read any books they want as long as the books are chapter books. This data represents how Ms. Kat allowed students choices but set limitations by specifically stating the students had to read chapter books. Students indicated they would like Ms. Kat to ask the students more about what they want to read and maybe expand outside of chapter books. Ryan (2005) found that students became more involved in reading activities when they went beyond reading traditional texts. In Ryan's study students read gaming magazines,

newspapers, articles about film and television, comic books, web sites, music, and many other non-traditional texts. Student motivation to read may increase if more non-traditional texts are allowed in the classroom.

Writing. Varied writing activities occurred in Ms. Kat's classroom with limited choices of how and what students were writing about. Students wrote summaries to their independent reading books, wrote essays based on writing prompts given by Ms. Kat, or used packets for writing prompts. The various writing prompts during my observation included comparison stories, writing responses with text support, choosing from multiple prompts in a packet, and writing a reaction to a concert or a story about a concert. All writing activities allowed some choices to be made within guidelines created by the classroom teacher.

Working on comparison of stories read about in class. Ms. Kat provided students a guideline of expectations but choices were allowed during the comparison writing activity. Ms. Kat had a word splash and students chose the words and the number of words students used in their comparison stories of Cinderella and Cendrillon. Ms. Kat modeled what she was looking for, but students were allowed to use as many details as they could and in their own words as long as the details were supported by both texts. The more text supported details students provided, the stronger the writing. There were students who had a hard time with an opening sentence and Ms. Kat gave students the choice to utilize her topic sentence if students could not think of one. Ms. Kat allowed the students a choice regarding how they wanted to write and she gave some limited control to the students in what they wrote. Gavin was struggling and was insistent on coming up with his own topic sentence. He said he liked to use his own words and not what other students and teachers used. Gavin showed he was a student who liked to be heard

through his own voice and not the voice of others and had chosen to keep thinking of his own words to use

Students wrote responses with text support of why or why not the school day should be longer. Ms. Kat gave students a choice to write about whether students felt the school day should or should not be longer. The only guideline Ms. Kat required in the writing piece was students had to provide text support from the article the students previously read. While completing the writing activity about why or why not the school day should be longer the students were using text support in their responses. Using text support was the sole guideline Ms. Kat set for the students to help students build on using information from the text in supporting their opinions.

During guided reading centers students were allowed to choose different ways they like to write. Ms. Kat provided students a packet of limited choices where students chose a writing topic and followed the guidelines outlined in each activity. The packet included topics and definitions which prompted students regarding what students could write or draw to express their writing during their guided reading centers. Students had journals, binders, notebooks they kept the writing in. This demonstrated how Ms. Kat allowed students varied approaches to how students wrote and students chose what they wanted to write about. The guidelines were set in each task but the students were still able to choose the way they presented the writing task. There was no evidence in my observations whether student writing increased or decreased as a result of the varied approaches to writing Ms. Kat provided.

The concert field trip activity allowed students to write about or create a story on what the conductor had students listen to or write a favorite moment from the performance. Ms. Kat limited the students' choices to three topics. Students wrote a story, memorable moment, or narrative about their concert field trip. The only guidelines set were the writing prompts

provided. Students chose the writing prompt they wanted and students were not limited regarding how much they had to write.

The observations with student writing activities showed that writing seemed more focused on writing conventions and skills than actual writing and writing for enjoyment. Activities like Daily Language Practice worksheets and spelling tests were administered to monitor student learning of skills. Students were learning about spelling, verbs, plural and singular nouns, comparisons, subjects, predicates, capitalization, punctuation, introduction, body, conclusions, and details in all student writing activities. There were activities where Ms. Kat asked the students their opinions on student writing pieces (that are left anonymous) and students could choose:

1. details missing
2. facts from article
3. using vocabulary from article to strengthen responses
4. organization
5. no details to support, little details, some details, or a lot of details to support responses

Providing students with choice as long as students know enough about the topic to actually write an engaging writing piece may help foster higher quality work from the student. Ms. Kat provided guidelines in student writing, but students did not participate in the decisions of the guidelines. Routman (2005) states choices in student writing are needed within structure. Choices are within a “pre-determined, engaging topic, (one that students have had a hand in choosing)” (p. 161).

Figure 4 shows how students responded when asked how often Ms. Kat requested their input about topics in writing activities. In addition, 100% of the students surveyed said they would prefer to have Ms. Kat ask what students would like to write about. She could then add it to the list or packets she provided. The students said she normally did not ask them. She had students choose from a list and packet she had previously created. Ms. Kat has allowed students choices in their writing but has limited students in creating lists and packets that students must choose to write from.

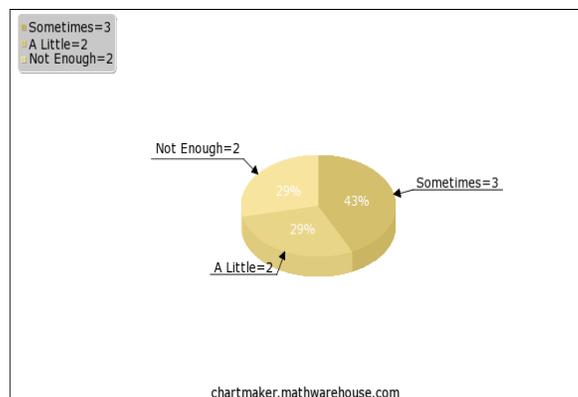


Figure 4. How often teacher asks students what they want to write about. This figure illustrates student responses ranging from sometimes to not enough.

Reading, writing, projects, and reports. Students were allowed limited choices in their reading activities, writing activities, project presentations, and student reports. Students selected from a list of pre-arranged topics which contained no student input. The pre-arranged topic list offers students choices, but choices made by the teacher without student input. Ms. Kat could have allowed student input with their writing activities and reading choices if she had given students specific details such as genres or themes students should be including in their writing or reading. Choice within structure can also be applied to students' reading and project-presenting by matching it to students' interests and reading levels and abilities. Figure 5 exhibits how often students confirmed that Ms. Kat allowed choices in reading, writing, and for the most part in

project- presenting. The students surveyed also indicated some agreement among themselves that students are allowed choices to some extent in what they can read, write, and present in their everyday reading and writing development.

Activity	Always	Some	Little	Not at All
Reading	4	1		
Writing	2	3		
Projects	3	1		1

Figure 5. Student choice. This figure illustrates how often choices are allowed in the classroom

Figure 6 displays that according to the same students Ms. Kat has not created lists of books to choose from (students can just choose) but students were not in total agreement about whether she created a list of writing topics. This question may have confused the student because Ms. Kat provided a packet that students could choose from, though the ideas were not in list form. The students also felt Ms. Kat gave students choices in how students presented information but those choices were from a list she created and then students had chosen from the list. Self-reports cannot be solely relied on by researchers because sometimes students may have confusion on the topic or question being asked. Norbert Schwartz (1999) discusses how the wording of the question can influence the respondents' understanding of what is being asked.

Activity	Always	Some	Little	Not at All
Reading				5
Writing		2	1	2
Projects	1		4	

Figure 6. Teacher Directed Lists. This figure illustrates how often teacher created lists for students to choose from on reading, writing, and projects.

Students reported ways efforts would increase if collaboration was allowed in choice.

Reading. Students reported they would like more student teacher collaboration, and in return, students would provide more effort in their individual reading tasks. Students need opportunities to be heard and to apply interests and ideas to student literacy development (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). During guided reading centers which lasted an hour and twenty minutes a day (four twenty minute groups), students did little of reading independently unless students were returning from an AIS Reading group or reading with Ms. Kat for their twenty minute block. I observed the students who participated in my survey and interviews were the ones who read during their independent time. The other students, who returned from AIS reading talked, drew, or completed nothing at all during their independent time and this was acceptable independent time for Ms. Kat. The reason students chose not to read is unclear from my observations. Students may have applied more effort to reading if students were allowed the option to express the different interests in books students like reading (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011).

Jordan, Ariel, and Gavin (pseudonyms) were three of the five students observed that I saw reading every chance they had during the day. When these students finished a lesson or waited for directions from Ms. Kat, these students would always be reading from chapter books they chose. The chapter books the students chose had two guidelines; as long as it was a chapter book and the book was appropriate based on the student's interest and reading level. Students who were interested and motivated read for enjoyment when given opportunities.

Pachtman & Wilson (2006) observed and surveyed 22 students (13 female and 9 male) and the students discussed their own thoughts about their reading practices. Students recorded how many books they read and explained why they chose the book. Students completed a survey of 18 open-ended questions rated based on a scale of 1-4 with 4 being the most important and 1

being not important. The final question, #19 asked students to give and explain 3 factors that were most beneficial to students as readers. Pachtman & Wilson concluded students think about many things in regards to their reading and if teachers were listening to students, teachers would see students have a lot to contribute to their learning. Students who are given the opportunity to voice and use their interests and preferences in reading will want to do more independent reading (Pachtman & Wilson).

Reading and writing. Students lacked effort in writing summaries for their required reading logs. Students who read during Silent Sustained Reading and at home were completing the summary writings in addition to the required readings. Students seemed as though they were rushing through the summary writing pieces just to get the writing done. I observed students writing one sentence summaries that said things like “I liked when Kenny....” but did not say why, like Ms. Kat had instructed the students to do. By not responding to what Ms. Kat was asking showed me the students were lacking the effort needed in their writing and may have needed more writing instruction. Figure 7 represents the student teacher collaboration occurring in the classroom. The students’ varied responses on the survey exhibit that collaboration with Ms. Kat is viewed unevenly especially with how information is presented. The students seem to be in more agreement that Ms. Kat did allow some collaboration in writing; however, their responses show there was less collaboration in reading. The students surveyed indicated their effort in reading, writing, and presenting would increase if given more choices.

Students expressed their personal thoughts and feelings in the surveys and interviews. Self-reporting in this study opens up the questions to possible different interpretations and may have caused confusion among the students. In addition, students could have been responding in a way students felt was acceptable to the teacher and researcher. Schwartz (1999) suggests

respondents to questionnaires “may want to edit their private judgment before they report it to the researcher due to reasons of social desirability and self-presentation” (p.97). The students’ voice was an important element of the study, and although self-reporting can be unreliable due to comprehension of questions and accuracy of responses, the students were heard.

Activity	Always	Some	Little	Not at All
Reading		2	2	1
Writing		4		1
Projects	1	1	2	1

Figure 7. Student-Teacher Collaboration. This figure illustrates how often student-teacher collaboration takes place in the classroom.

Enabling students to have an active role in their learning and allowing students to make choices in their literacy development will increase student success. Jenkins (2009) reports that when teachers take the time to listen to their students, teachers are opening up the door for future successes of their students. Teachers are providing opportunities for students to feel motivated to learn and become engaged in their reading and writing development when teachers provide students with choices. Allowing students choices increases motivation and effort which leads to success of the students.

Figure 8 displays students’ responses that their effort would increase either a lot or some, which expresses students know they can do better if students choose to do better. After analyzing the following responses from students with more individual choices made by the student, students report they would increase how much reading and writing they could produce along with putting forth more effort into their current and future reading and writing activities.

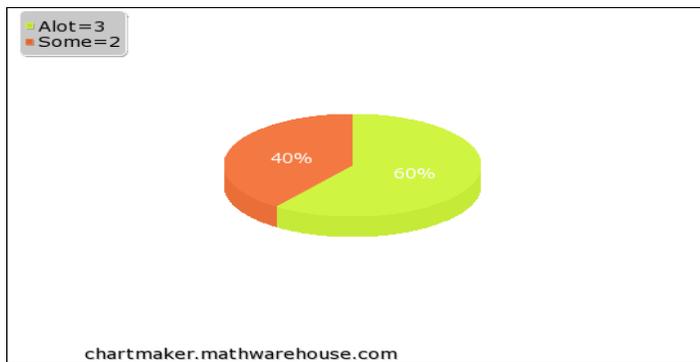


Figure 8. How Much Would Effort Increase If You Were Given More Choices In Reading, Writing, and Presenting?

This figure illustrates how much student effort would increase in reading when given more choices.

For the most part students expressed they like to write. Figure 9 displays that 80% reported in the interview students like to write and 20% do not like to write. The results of the interview also showed the one student who did not like to write said his hand gets sore from writing too much.

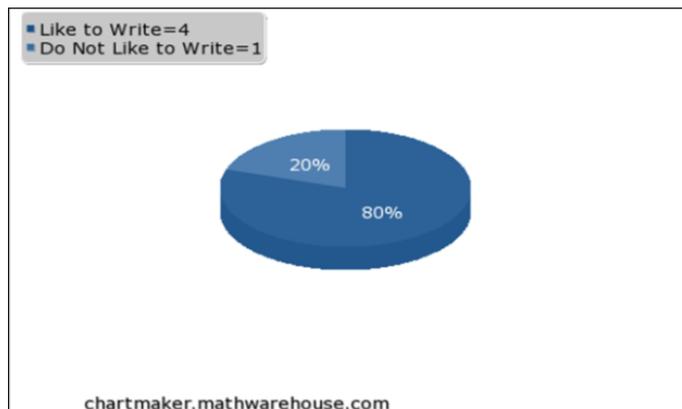


Figure 9. How many students like to write and not write. This figure illustrates student enjoyment of writing.

Students were asked how much additional effort they would put into their writing if students were allowed to write about topics which interested students. Figure 10 represents how students testified 80% would increase student effort and the student who makes up the 20% would not increase their effort, said he wouldn't because teachers ask for too much writing in school and he would not want to write more.

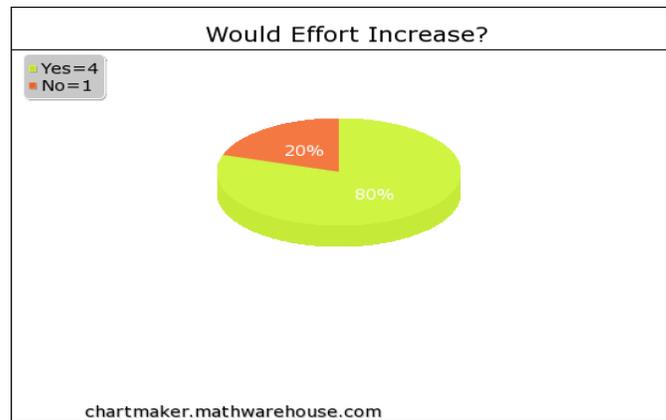


Figure 10. Would more effort be used in writing if allowed choice? This figure illustrates student responses to effort increasing in writing.

Interviews of students showed students were aware of ways they could improve student writing if allowed to choose what they were writing about. Figure 11 shows the areas of improvement in writing could be neater and include more information, more details and descriptive writing, and overall more excitement in their writing. Two students reported their writing would be neater and include more information if they were allowed to write about interested choices. One student within the five interviewed specified she would include more detailed and descriptive writing with more excitement. One of the students interviewed said her writing would include more detailed and descriptive writing which contained more excitement and her writing would be neater and include more information if she were allowed to write about interested choices. One student reported he would do nothing different in his writing because he did not like to write at all. The reported information from students showed that improvements could be made if teachers allowed students choice in what they write. There was no evidence during the study to confirm the students' reports of effort increasing in their writing.

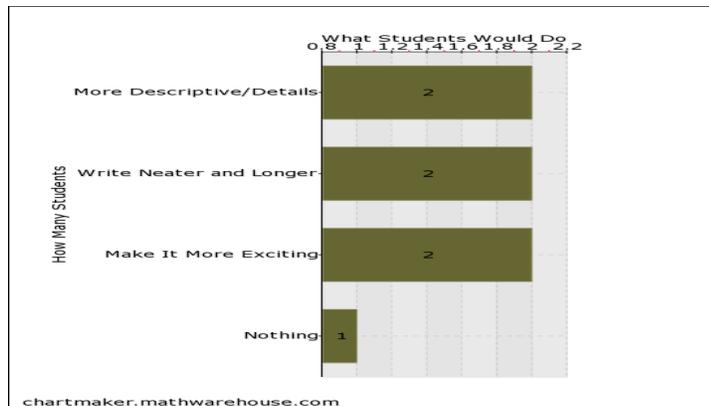


Figure 11. What would you do more of in your writing? This figure illustrates how students would improve writing if given more choices.

Conclusion

I explained through the data analysis to what extent students are allowed to make choices in their everyday reading and writing development. Through observations, surveys and interviews in the classroom I discussed what the results exhibited and how results correlated with student choices. The triangulation of data showed students expressed interests in literacy choices, selected choices were allowed in the classroom with limitations set by Ms. Kat, and students reported ways efforts could increase if collaboration were allowed in choice. In addition I also discussed how comprehension of questions may have hindered students' responses but the students' voice is the key to this study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how students perceived their reading and writing choices. Involving students in choice may motivate students to want to learn (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). If they are motivated, students may want to continue with the learning process which may lead students to greater effort in student work. Teachers who allow students to display interests in reading and writing development may help create academic success and life-long learners in students (Applegate & Applegate, 2010). The first research question I explored in my study was about the extent one teacher allowed students individual choice in reading and writing tasks. The second research question I explored was what are students voicing about choice and individual effort opportunities in the classroom? I clarified my research questions via observations, student surveys, and student interviews showcasing students' perceptions regarding reading and writing through students' academic choices.

In this chapter, I present four conclusions. The first conclusion I discuss is how student interests and student choices in the classroom are essential components leading to successful reading. Next, I discuss how students need student-teacher collaboration that enables students to be heard in literacy development. Then, I discuss how students need guidelines and structure in the classroom. Finally, I discuss students' needs for opportunities for reading and writing for a purpose. In this chapter I also present implications for student learning and for my teaching. The implications for student learning I discuss include students may develop stronger communication skills academically and personally, generate classroom connections with improved behaviors, and increase effort and motivation for higher quality work in literacy development skills and for life-long learning. The implications I mention for my teaching are, teachers learn about students'

interests and allow students' interests to be displayed regarding reading and writing development, teachers can assess motivation and effort through informal and formal assessments, teachers may also regularly explore student choices in the classroom and student-teacher collaboration through research, professional developments, and discussion with other teachers, and teachers may develop guidelines and limitations prior to literacy activities to guide their collaboration with students. The end of this chapter presents further recommendations such as further research of student-teacher collaboration implemented successfully in the classroom, researching effective guidelines and limitations to student choices needed in the classroom, not relying on self-reports in research and using more questions when using self-reports, and researchers should use a larger sample of data.

Conclusions

Student interests and student choices in the classroom are essential components leading to successful reading. Student interests and student choices are essential for student growth in literacy development. Ms. Kat could increase the number of students who take books home to read if she allowed students to read materials which interested the students. Nippold, Duthie & Larsen concluded in their study that students found sports, video games, and music a higher priority for pleasure activities than reading and writing although reading and writing were of importance to students (Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005). Intertwining student interests into curriculum by allowing students to read and write about interests such as sports and music helps bring students' lives into reading and writing activities which may create increased motivation. Josephine Ryan's students revealed they enjoyed reading other entertainment materials such as magazines, comic books, and web sites and using individual interests such as drawing or writing and applying it to what students learn from these sources of information (Ryan, 2005). Ms. Kat

could increase the number of students who read during non-instructional and group work activities if she allowed students choices outside of chapter books and allowed more non-traditional texts such as entertainment magazines and comic books in the classroom. The students observed, surveyed, and interviewed in my study openly stated they would increase effort if students were allowed opportunities for more individual reading and writing choices in the classroom. Researchers have continually reported the importance, implementation, and outcomes of student choice in classrooms (Applegate & Applegate (2010), Brozo (2010), Brozo & Flint (2007), Brozo, Shiel & Topping (2007), Bruning & Horn (2002), Fletcher (2006), Fountas and Pinnell (2009), Fulmer & Frijters (2011), Giordano (2011), Guthrie & Cox (2001), Harvey & Goudvis (2007), Jenkins (2009), Lyons (2003), Moley, Bandre & George (2011), Morgan & Fuchs (2007), Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen (2005), Owocki & Goodman (2002), Pachtman & Wilson (2006), Routman (2004), Ryan (2005), Ryan and Cooper (2004), Sagan (2010),), Serafini (2010), Sweet, Ng. & Guthrie (1998), Tompkins (2004), Vartuli & Rojs (2008), and Vopat (2009). When students are given the opportunity to make choices in what they read, those students will have an increased chance of being successful readers (Brozo, 2010). Brozo's statement can be expanded throughout all areas of literacy.

Students need student-teacher collaboration that enables students to be heard.

Enabling students to be heard makes students feel involved, responsible and influential in regard to their own learning, which may be highly effective in literacy development. In my research students stated how students want to be given a voice in the choice of books they read, topics they write about, and the way they conduct presentations and reports. Ms. Kat's classroom showed little evidence of students having a voice creating choices regarding student literacy development. Instead, the teacher provided teacher created lists and then students chose from

those lists. Students' voices would be heard if teachers took the time and listened to students and gave students more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers need to see what gets their students highly motivated by getting to know them and what interests them. Brozo & Flynt (2008) express the importance of student-teacher collaboration. When such collaboration occurs, students build a bond with teachers that include trust, and trust may lead to an increase in motivation among students in their reading, writing, and other areas of academic and personal growth (Brozo & Flynt). Jenkins (2009) concluded in his study that making reading connections to a student's world and teachers taking advantage of student diversity and a student's range of experiences and interests when selecting books and literacy activities may help teachers guide students to making right choices. Listening is a significant attribute in our personal and professional lives and listening to our students may be a considerable contribution to literacy development. When we take the time to actively listen to our students we can learn so much about who our students are, who they want to be, and what they value at that moment in their lives. Teachers who take time to know their students well can guide students on how to choose books and make sure the books are a good fit for them (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). In addition to allowing students choice in their learning, students are developing responsibility and control in student academic lifestyles (Tompkins, 2004). Teachers are more effective at creating student success when they listen to what their students have to say (Jenkins, 2009). Student success is the ultimate goal in teaching, and teachers can enable student success in social and literacy skills by listening to their students.

Students need guidelines/structure in the classroom. Students' interests and ideas can be voiced in the classroom successfully if the teacher provides proper guidelines in the choice-making process. Ms. Kat provided students with choices, but there was no evidence that students

had a voice in helping create the choices. Opportunities for choice can be quite beneficial to students if given guidelines on what makes a good choice versus a bad choice in choosing what topics to read and write about (Routman, 2005). Limited control enables students to be actively involved in student learning (Routman). Enough control is acceptable so students feel they have some responsibility and influence on their learning (Routman). A choice within structure allows students to choose what they would like to write about as long as they know enough about the topic to actually write an engaging writing piece (Routman). Choice within structure can also be applied to students' reading, writing and presentations of materials, and matched to their interests and abilities. They can choose what they have an interest in, but interests needs to be matched according to the level of difficulty they are able to read, write and comprehend. Applegate & Applegate (2010) concluded that students needed lessons that provided engagement and challenge in order to produce thoughtful responses to what students read and to create students who find reading important in their everyday lives. Within guidelines, teachers can provide multiple opportunities where students choose to display their interests in their learning through the choice of texts, writing topics and presentations, allowing for more engaging, productive and creative ideas to be reflected. Teachers may find students' success increases when teachers find a balance of knowing their students and the right time to allow choices made by students.

Students need opportunities for reading and writing for a purpose. Students need more opportunities to read and write for a purpose. Opportunities for students to do such activities such as DEAR time and providing writing with purpose activities may increase student motivation in literacy development. DEAR time is any given moment in the day students “drop everything and read” (Cooter, Mills-House, Marrin, Mathews, Campbell & Baker, 1999). During this time, students can choose any reading material of interest and read for enjoyment. Writing

activities which students do not have to focus on punctuation or grammar and can write more with a purpose may find student literacy activities more fun and less of a task in student learning. Monis & Rodriques (2012) suggest that teachers “use relevant and realistic tasks such as writing notes, recipes, e-mails, filling in forms and preparing signs for the class” (p. 5). Students are given opportunities to write topics of interest in different formats of writing. Students may choose from a multitude of writing activities such as writing a story or play, emailing a friend, creating a poster for student council, or simply jotting down notes of things they like to experience. Ms. Kat did not provide opportunities in her classroom for students to complete activities such as DEAR time and writing for purpose activities. Evidence is unclear at this time if the lack of opportunities was due to the fact that the classroom routine did not allow them to participate in such activities or if the teacher is not finding time or importance at this time with preparation for state assessments. Teachers who provide students with more opportunities such as DEAR time and writing for a purpose may show students that reading and writing can be fun and not just demanding tasks the teacher forces students to complete.

Implications for Student Learning

My findings and conclusions show students currently benefit from having opportunities in making choices in the classroom. In addition, students need to be heard and allowed opportunities for student input in the choice-making process. When teachers are listening to their students’ voice concerning interests and opinions, teachers are building on students’ character and students’ roles in the classroom. Students may develop stronger communication skills academically and personally, generate classroom connections with improved behaviors, and increase effort and motivation for higher quality work in literacy development skills and for life-long learning.

Stronger communication skills academically and personally may begin in the classroom. Students' voice enables more student involvement in student learning. Students who are involved in creating choices and decisions within guidelines begin to feel appreciated and important. Students are able to discuss what they are thinking and feeling openly and safely. Students may feel teachers value their opinions and thoughts through open communication with their teacher about any given situation in and out of the classroom. Those skills carry on into students' personal lives in the home, community, and in work. Communication among teachers and students helps build student confidence. Students may also feel like a part of a team in classroom decisions.

Student involvement may help generate a stronger classroom connection with improved behaviors which develops student-teacher relationships and student-student relationships. Student input may strengthen classroom behavioral management, creating a positive, safe working environment for students and teachers. Allowing students increased opportunities of responsibility in the classroom, listening to what students say about their literacy development, sharing ideas and opinions with teacher and students, helping each other in literacy activities, and developing respect for one another and the teacher creates a strong and positive classroom community.

Students may increase effort and motivation for higher quality work. Commitment to learning strengthens students' effort and increases motivation. Students may provide higher quality work and view relevance in literacy activities. The students in my study expressed many times how their effort would increase or improve if teachers would take the time to listen to students. Listening to students may make students feel important and drive them to apply more

effort in the work they complete. Teachers cannot determine if their effort will increase unless teachers listen first.

Teachers who begin by listening to their students may form stronger communication skills academically and personally, developing student –teacher relationships that foster a positive and safe working environment. Creating strong student-student relationships also builds on students’ social skills and opportunities to communicate effectively with people. Students who feel important and influential in the classroom may increase motivation in learning, developing higher quality work through increased effort.

Implications for My Teaching

As a result of this study I present four implications for future teaching. First, teachers learn about students’ interests and allow students’ interests to be enacted through reading and writing development. Second, teachers can assess motivation and effort through informal and formal assessments. Next, teachers may also regularly explore student choices in the classroom and student-teacher collaboration through research, professional developments, and discussion with other teachers. Finally, teachers may develop guidelines and limitations prior to literacy activities to guide their collaboration with students. Teachers need to know their students and what strategies work for students in the classroom. Teachers can modify instruction based on interests, assessments and personal exploration of effectiveness in literacy development.

Teachers learn about students’ interests and allow students’ interests to be displayed regarding reading and writing development. Getting to know the students is the first step for teachers in listening to their students and allowing students to showcase interests with literacy activities. Teachers could begin by creating getting to know you surveys and activities. The surveys and activities would focus on student personalities, learning styles, and

interests. The teacher would model first by creating a personal survey to share with the students and explaining to the students all answers are a reflection of who they are and there is no right or wrong answer. Teachers can also have individual, small group or whole group discussions allowing students opportunities to share interests with classmates and the teacher. Teachers can make observations on a daily basis of what students are sharing with one another about personal and academic experiences and possibly reflect those into literacy activities.

Teachers can assess motivation and effort through informal and formal assessments.

Once students have been allowed opportunities to collaborate with the teacher, the teacher can identify whether the students have shown improvements in literacy development. Teachers can begin by creating individual portfolios for the students which collects all literacy work to be reviewed at any given time during the school year. The portfolios can be revisited during student conferences and parent conferences. Teachers may discuss with students about student progress in a student-teacher conference. Teachers may also discuss with parents about student's progress in a parent-teacher conference and discuss in a teacher-student-parent conference what steps may be needed to keep moving successfully in the student's literacy development. A teacher-student-parent conference creates successful communication with the student and strengthens the home-school connection. Students may be highly motivated in literacy learning when given opportunities to be actively involved by discussing and sharing progress with teachers and parents through teacher-student-parent conferences.

Teachers regularly explore student choices in the classroom and student-teacher collaboration through research, professional developments, and discussion with other teachers. Professional developments, research, and communication with other teachers can strengthen a teacher's knowledge of the positive effects of a student's voice in literacy

development. Attending workshops that focus on benefits of student interests and student-teacher collaborations in the classroom increases teacher knowledge to effectively implement the student's voice in the classroom. Teachers can begin implementing their discoveries into the classroom and modify as needed for their students.

Teachers may develop guidelines and limitations prior to literacy activities to guide their collaboration with students. Teachers can create expectations when allowing student choices. Teacher's expectations may be developed for literacy activities and discussed with students providing limitations if needed. Teachers can create a general list ahead of time for each area of literacy and make changes as students' interests change. During the review of expectations, teachers may provide limitations when allowing students to add their own expectations in specific literacy activities. The teacher could explain she is taking input seriously but sometimes not all ideas can be used at that given moment. Allowing students to add their own expectations gives students responsibility and involvement in their learning creating motivation within the students to be successful (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). Teachers may decide to modify expectations with individual students or as a whole group. Teachers may be providing limitations on expectations but teachers are still allowing student input in student literacy development.

Recommendations for Future Research

In future research it would be beneficial for researchers to explore the literacy success of student-teacher collaborations and student choices in the classroom. Through more extensive research, fellow researchers and I may also gain a better understanding of the types of limitations and guidelines that should be permitted in the classroom fostering successful literacy learning and enabling more student responsibilities in student learning. Self-reporting provides many

limitations in conducting a study and it is important not to solely rely on self-reporting. When using self-reports, increasing the amount and details of questions may provide clearer results to be analyzed and reported in a successful study. I also believe surveying and interviewing a larger sample may have provided a stronger picture of the majority of students' voice in a classroom and not just a randomly select few.

Further research of student-teacher collaboration implemented successfully in the classroom. Hearing from the students' point of view how choices were made in the classroom was the focus of my study, but the implementation of student voice in the classroom in regards to interests and student-teacher collaboration was not observed. Many times I heard teachers say that students were allowed so many choices in the classroom, but I never really had the opportunity to see how those choices were obtained and if students' interests were allowed in the choice-making process. Students in my study stated that effort would increase if they were allowed to speak more with their teacher. If I could have spent more time in the classroom and actually seen students use their voices and shared interests with their teacher, I may have found evidence that when students say effort increases it actually does increase. I may have also been able to use previous and current student assessments to report the correlation of using student input and not using student input in literacy development.

Researching effective guidelines and limitations needed to regulate student choices in the classroom. Future research can focus on what types of limitations and guidelines work in the classroom. Teachers can create their own limitations and guidelines based on previous research and conduct their own classroom research on effective and non-effective limitations and guidelines of student choices in the classroom. Further research can report the success of student-

teacher guidelines and limitations and if student literacy success presents itself in the classroom when students are allowed limited control in the choice-making process.

Not relying on self-reports in research and using more questions when using self-reports. The limitations of self-reports consist of absence of clarity in questions and inaccurate results based on student responses. Students may lack comprehension of the questions causing them to answer differently or student honesty may not be reflected in responses because students are afraid to answer truthfully. Researchers may want to apply additional questions when self-reports are used in research. Additional questions may provide researchers with clearer results because they can look at the same concept in different ways. In addition, it is important in future research to use supplementary data such as informal and formal assessments to strengthen the research of student input in classroom choices.

Researchers should use a larger sample of data. Surveying and interviewing a small sample may have altered the results in my study. If researchers can conduct a classroom study on student input of choices in the classroom, answers may vary a little more or a lot more. Researchers could possibly find that some students may like it when the teacher provides choices and some students may say that not making choices relieves pressure from the students. By surveying and interviewing only a few students, I was unable to report on a majority of the students in the classroom. My small sample may have weakened my study and that is why I recommend using a larger sample.

Summary

The discussion of student interests, student-teacher collaboration, students needing guidelines and limitations, and student opportunities for reading and writing for a purpose supports my conclusions in this study. The implications for student learning that includes

students developing stronger communication skills academically and personally, generating classroom connections with improved behaviors, and increasing effort and motivation for higher quality work in literacy development skills and for life-long learning are all benefits students may develop as a result of my research. Implications for my teaching includes how teachers learn about students' interests and allow students' interests to be displayed regarding reading and writing development, teachers can assess motivation and effort through informal and formal assessments, teachers explore student choices in the classroom and student-teacher collaboration through research, professional developments, and discussion with other teachers, and teachers may develop guidelines and limitations prior to literacy activities to guide their collaboration with students. Further recommendations for research are based on my findings and my limitations. Further recommendations such as further research of student-teacher collaboration implemented successfully in the classroom, researching effective guidelines and limitations student choices need in the classroom, not relying on self-reports in research and using more questions when using self-reports, and researchers should use a larger sample of data may help current and future teachers find ways to implement student input into the classroom and curriculum to provide more student responsibility and involvement in literacy development.

When continuing the investigation of student input in classroom choices, future researchers and I would benefit by exploring student-teacher collaborations with student choices, limitations and guidelines of student input in the classroom, limitations of self-reports, and small samples of data in conducting a study. More extensive research into all areas may aid in developing a stronger study supporting the idea of student input in the classroom.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, students want opportunities to be heard and express their interests and ideas in literacy development. Choice through student-teacher collaboration is critical to get students motivated and involved in their learning. Allowing students to make collaborative choices in their literacy development and other academic areas may not only promote responsibility but motivate students to be proud of their accomplishments.

I hope my research opens the door for additional opportunities of student input in the classroom. I am hopeful that once future research explores student input in the classroom, teachers will discover the correlation of student input and student success.

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