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# Fostering Third Graders' Attributes of Independence During the Literacy Block: A Self-Study

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**Fostering Third Graders' Attributes of Independence During the Literacy Block:  
A Self-Study**

By Danielle Russell

July 2014

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The  
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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

It was the beginning of a new school year and I had been assigned a long-term substitute position teaching third grade. Although I was very excited for this opportunity, I was aware of the challenges that all teachers face during the first several weeks of school as they work to establish routines and get their classroom environment functioning in ways that will enable their students to be independent and successful. I knew that I would be stepping in during the midst of this crucial time. In order to have a smooth transition from teacher to teacher, I knew that I would need to ensure that I was carrying over the same routines, rules, and structure. To me, this seemed to be the most efficient way of keeping the students moving forward toward their independence and success.

Before I began my long-term substitute position, I had the opportunity to meet with the current third grade teacher, Mrs. Hill (all names are pseudonyms). “They are a good bunch,” she assured me, “but there is no way that they can work independently right now.” Mrs. Hill went on to tell me how she had noticed that her students seemed “to lack consistency and routines due to her frequent absences.” She explained that she had not started the word study routine, which consisted of a series of teacher created spelling lists, or administered preliminary assessments, such as spelling inventories and Development Reading Assessments. She also mentioned that she had determined that literacy centers were out of the question at this point in the year due to the students’ “lack of independence.” Mrs. Hill told me that her third grade students from the previous year were able to work independently at this point in the year and that the students this year were a “needy bunch.” From my own experiences, without independent literacy centers it could also be difficult to make time for guided reading, which explains why Mrs. Hill



informed me that she had not started guided reading yet either. I could see how overwhelmed she was and I couldn't blame her. As I looked around at the 23 students, all beckoning her for her attention, it seemed like it would be difficult to get much accomplished during the day.

The management system that Mrs. Hill had in place was one that was suggested by the principal. Mrs. Hill marked down a tally for each time a student was off task. To be considered off task, a student would be exhibiting a behavior that wasn't meeting the current expectation for a given assignment. If a student received a certain number of off tasks then he/she received a specific consequence, such as a phone call home or missing recess time.

Because of modifications outlined on two students' individual education plans (IEPs), special education support services were required to come into her room for forty minutes a day. However, Mrs. Hill informed me that the service providers just poked their heads in and left unless they thought that they could be of use. I could tell that this aggravated her by the way she spoke about the providers; the look on her face seemed to reveal that she would take any kind of help that she could get.

During the two transition days that Mrs. Hill and I both spent in the classroom, I was able to observe the students, the environment, and the instructional techniques that Mrs. Hill used. The students sat at rectangular tables with five students at each of the four tables. Three students sat at desks between the tables. It appeared that the students were placed so that their off-task behaviors and distractions were spread evenly throughout each table and each table contained students with a mix of abilities. Mrs. Hill informed me that she had placed the students at the desks because she recognized that they were

“often out of their seats;” having a desk provided a place for them to keep their belongings and called for fewer physical transitions.

The shelves under the window, typically used for storage of instructional materials in other classrooms, were filled with cubbies for the students’ belongings due to the fact that there was no storage for the students at their tables. Instructional materials filled the bookshelves that lined the walls. The door to an overflowing coat closet remained open. Math manipulatives were stored under the sink and children’s books filled an entire bookshelf, top to bottom. Student writing was displayed, student jobs were posted, and morning routines were written on the chalkboard. There was a SMART Board in the middle of the room and a small carpet lay in front of another set of chalkboards near Mrs. Hill’s desk. From what I had observed, the room was slightly cluttered, lacked storage, and didn’t seem suitable for a large group of active third grade students who need room to collaborate and move about the learning environment.

The 23 students had unique strengths, challenges, attitudes, and personalities. I watched as the students followed their morning routine, which was posted on the chalkboard for them to view as they unpacked and got ready for the day. Several students needed reminders from Mrs. Hill to hang up their jackets, turn in their homework, bring their book bags to their cubbies, or begin their morning work. As they worked at their seats, one student wrote down the lunch count for the day and other students completed their morning jobs. There was a hum in the classroom as Mrs. Hill got things ready around the room and the class worked while waiting for morning announcements. I walked around the room and observed what the students were working on and they

glanced up at me, flashing me smiles and asking me to look at all the work they had completed. After morning announcements, Mrs. Hill began math instruction.

When Mrs. Hill finished her short math lesson she directed the students to complete a series of problems independently. There seemed to be many students who were not sure of what to do or who were asking for Mrs. Hill's help before even reading the problem or applying their own strategy. I believe she gave clear directions and modeled a sample problem, but still hands began to shoot up around the room. Chatter from students started to fill the room and Mrs. Hill was going back and forth from student to student, repeating directions and redirecting students to their work. I now understood what Mrs. Hill meant when she said, "There is no way that they can work independently right now." It appeared to me that students were not making attempts on the task, they did not seem motivated to complete the assignment, I didn't see them trying to apply strategies on their own, and they appeared to be very reliant on teacher guidance.

As the day continued, I was able to observe similar happenings regarding this lack of independence during English Language Arts. Mrs. Hill told me that typically she has independent centers set up for reader's workshop, but right now she was just "working on helping the students build their stamina and work independently on a single task." To accomplish this, she had students independently reading for 30 minutes, then completing a worksheet about what they read, which took about 15 minutes. Within the first five minutes of this independent time, I observed students out of their seats and talking, or who had put their books down to do something else. She had mentioned to me that it was during this time that she would generally meet with her guided reading groups and give small group reading instruction. As we moved into the writing portion of the English

Language Arts period, I continued to see these same student behaviors. About half of the students would get started on their task while the other half showed what appeared to be lack of motivation, engagement, or independence.

### **Significance of the Problem**

According to text on the website EngageNY (<http://engageny.org>), one goal of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) is to “ensure that every student across New York State is on track for college and career readiness.” To ensure this, the CCLS provide a framework designed to alter instructional practices and curriculum within schools in an effort to increase student achievement, differentiation, complexity of materials, and independence. The CCLS (<http://engageny.org>) repeatedly mentions the need for independence in students, which is why the lack of independence that I was viewing in Mrs. Hill’s classroom was concerning to me.

The term independence and independent learning is defined in many different ways. In my opinion, Bowman (2001) defines it best:

Does it mean that students learn completely on their own, without interaction among classmates or teachers? Certainly not; students cannot learn in a vacuum. Independent learning means that responsibility for learning is transferred from teacher to student in a progression that begins in elementary school until, by high school age, students are capable of directing their own learning within the scope of defined subject areas.

([www.teachers.net](http://www.teachers.net))

This need for independence becomes even more apparent as teachers shift their views to the literacy block. The authors of the CCLS also calls for “Guided Reading and Accountable Independent Reading” (GGIR), which is defined as:

additional literacy time within the school day where teachers can work with students in developmentally appropriate groupings to meet their individual needs. This is an opportunity for the favorite traditional read aloud work, literacy based centers, and immersion in text, where teachers can facilitate student choice from existing leveled libraries based on interest, availability, and readability. The purpose of this time is to build independent, interested, and capable readers (<http://engageny.org>).

As teachers begin to implement literacy instruction in their classrooms, there has to be a balance of independence and guidance (<http://engageny.org>). While the teacher is meeting with small groups, the rest of the students need to be able to independently complete the tasks mentioned in the GGIR. According to Herber and Nelson-Herber (1987), this independence within students “is developed by design, not by change” and this design “is a carefully orchestrated interplay between guidance and practice” (p. 585). As teachers develop these independent tasks, which I have seen mostly as center activities, it is important for teachers to do as Boushey and Moser (2006) suggest and “ask[ing] ourselves, what meaningful activities does research say my students should be engaging in that puts them in charge of their own learning, is self-motivating, is worthy of their time and effort, and will improve their skills?” (p. 20). The answer to that question is one of the many that I sought to answer through this self-study.

When reflecting on the components of the CCLS and observing the students' lack of independence in Mrs. Hill's classroom, I began to think about the significance of this problem. According to Boushey and Moser (2006), in order to gradually help students build these independent behaviors that can be sustained over time, teachers need to explicitly teach, model, and practice what they are expecting the students to do. I believe this becomes challenging when teachers are being given a new set of standards to follow and implement, when the range of students' needs continues to increase, when class sizes grow larger each year, and when students are continuously leave the general education classroom to receive special education services. As the challenges that teachers face become greater, this need for student independence continues to grow because teachers are being stretched thinly between diverse students with many different needs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

During my five years as a substitute teacher, I have observed many different classroom environments. From what I have seen, every environment has a teacher who has his/her own way of providing instruction, managing behavior, engaging students and sustaining independence. The ways in which the teacher goes about doing these things may often depend on the age of the students, the time of year, and other characteristics of the classroom environment. A teacher's method may also depend on their pedagogy and the way their experiences have shaped their philosophy of teaching and learning.

One thing that has been common within most of the classrooms that I have observed is the fact that when students aren't able to work independently, it is challenging for a teacher to run a balanced literacy block. A balanced literacy block

requires students to remain independent as they read and write by themselves, with peers, and within a small group. This balanced approach to instruction is based on a “comprehensive view of literacy that combines explicit instruction, guided practice, collaborative learning, and independent reading and writing” (Tompkins, 2000, p. 18). During the literacy block, the teacher meets with small groups of students for guided reading groups while the rest of the class completes their literacy block activities quietly by themselves or with other students with no guidance from the teacher. Literacy block activities can take many forms, but generally consist of reading, writing, and word work activities that students work on to further develop their literacy skills (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

At the beginning of the school year, the teacher provides scaffolds for students during the literacy block that can take the form of guided practice, differentiated instruction, and modifications to the curriculum. This guided practice and other scaffolding enables the teacher to “gradually build behaviors that can be sustained over time so children can be trusted to manage on their own” (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 19). After several weeks, the students acclimate to the routines, procedures and expectations of the literacy block and the teacher no longer has to direct the students’ every move or give step-by-step directions (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

I believe that guided reading is fundamental to a student’s development because it allows for direct instruction directed at the individual needs of the student. The smaller groups provide a greater opportunity for teachers to use instruction that scaffolds and engages the learner, which has proven to be an effective way of teaching (Ford & Opitz, 2002). In order for guided reading groups to be effective, the rest of the students in the

class need to be engaged in other meaningful literacy activities so that there aren't interruptions to the guided reading instruction. With minimal distractions and interruptions, the teacher can deliver continuous and meaningful instruction to the students in each group. If there is a lack of independence during this time, then running this type of literacy block may end up being problematic (Boushey & Mosher, 2006). From my own experiences and research I have come to believe that teaching and establishing attributes of independence is something that is essential for this balanced literacy block approach. In order for students to demonstrate independence, they need to show motivation and take control over their own learning by making choices and self-regulating themselves.

I expected that by using literature and research to inform my own techniques for fostering independence and managing students to create an autonomous literacy block, I would become a more effective teacher of literacy. More specifically, I anticipated that I would find information about the foundations of student self-autonomy and how I could help my students develop the concept. I anticipated that I would be able to apply this information to my instruction in all content areas, not only reading and writing, and it would be useful to teachers of various grade levels.

A goal I set for myself through this self-study research was to help my students work within the 90-minute literacy block with independence and excitement about what they were doing (Samaras, 2011). I wanted students to be able to have choices in their learning so that they could remain accountable and engaged. I would to be able to teach guided reading without losing time during transitions and student interruptions. I would like students to using their classroom environment, such as the literature on the walls,



their student dictionaries, and each other, as resources so that they can support their independent literacy learning. By enabling and teaching my students to use all of their resources, I anticipate that they will be able to function as more independent and self-sufficient learners.

One of my goals as a teacher is to create a learning environment and design instruction that enable my students to continuously grow and reach their greatest potential. Finding ways to gradually release my students from some of my support during the literacy block will help them become independent and eventually life-long learners.

To guide my self-study research (Samaras, 2011), I focused on the question, How can I create opportunities for my third grade students to develop attributes of independence during literacy block activities? These attributes of independence were the elements of my instruction and classroom that I regulated, encouraged, and made priority, such as engagement, student choice, self-regulation, and motivation.

### **Study Approach**

My research was a self-study of my work as a long-term substitute teacher as I utilized the classroom environment and my own management techniques to support students' literacy development and independence. A self-study would be most appropriate in my teaching situation due to the fact that I saw an area of need in my temporary classroom and had the opportunity to take action and implement change. I anticipated that it would take a lot of professional research from experts and experimentation to fill this need. According to Samaras (2011), self-study teacher

research consists of several components, including “personal situated inquiry” and “a transparent and systematic research process” (p. 10).

During the study, which lasted from October of 2013 through March of 2014, I collected data from each day that I taught with most of the focus being on my observations during the literacy block. Using a research journal, I recorded observations of my teaching practices, and what I was experiencing. According to Samaras (2011, p. 69), a research journal can demonstrate the “self-initiated,” “improvement aimed” and provide an “interactive” process.

### **Rationale**

I chose to conduct a self-study for many reasons. One reason, as suggested by Samaras (2011), is that self-study allows for “improved learning” and a chance for teachers to study their own teaching (p. 11). As a teacher who was relatively new to the field, I knew that I have a lot to learn. The process of conducting this self-study allowed me to reflect on my own teaching practices with the purpose of bettering myself and improving my teaching. Another reason that I chose to conduct this self-study was to help educate others and to better the field of education. Samaras (2011) reminds teacher researchers that self studies aren’t only about the teacher conducting the study, but they are also about “what you can do for your students and education” (p. 12). By turning this self-study into an authentic learning opportunity for me, I felt that I would be able to grow as a teacher and have a bigger impact on the success of my future students.

As a teacher, I believe a classroom environment developed with students’ literacy goals in mind will support student growth and achievement. When thinking of the goals

that I have for my students, I know that I want them to develop literacy skills that will encourage life-long learning, motivation, and independence. Nota, Soresi, and Zimmerman (2005) agree “one of the most important goals of education has become to help students acquire self-regulation skills, not only to improve learning during school years, but also to prepare them to further their education” (p. 199).

### **Summary**

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), students are able to “be independent, manage their own learning, and follow their own interests” (p. 3), which is what I also believe to be true based on my own experiences. As I have reflected on my own teaching and observed many different teachers of literacy, I recognized that I needed to establish certain attributes and then build upon them in the classroom and with each individual student. I believe that the attributes of engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy are what work together to foster students’ independence. My goal in conducting this self-study research study was to find ways to foster attributes of independence in my students so that my students could use the attributes to fully engage in literacy learning.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), “effective literacy programs foster active, responsible learning” in which students are able to “be independent, manage their own learning, and follow their own interests” (p. 3). Teachers work purposefully to help their students develop a level of independence by creating motivating and engaging learning opportunities within a learning environment made to suit the needs of each student (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Teachers discover ways they can create a balanced approach to instruction that enables students to take charge of their own learning so that the teacher is available to meet the needs of all students (Tompkins, 2000). Boushey and Moser (2006) reiterate this idea when they state, “when students execute the skills of independence they have been taught, teachers are free to focus their time and energy on instruction” (p. 19).

In this chapter, I discuss the components of the balanced literacy block and examine the different strategies that teachers use to foster independence (McKenzie, 2002). The strategies that are discussed are strategies that work to positively affect the student’s independence, engagement, and motivation in the classroom. I explore aspects of the learning environment and give insight into how an independent classroom can be established (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

### **Balanced Literacy Block**

According to McKenzie (2002), balanced literacy is a prescription concocted by the U.S Department of Education to bring together the best of reading research while combining many different education philosophies. For example, the balanced literacy

framework combines the fundamentals of letter sound correspondence, word study, and decoding while also providing experiences in all areas of literacy, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening (McKenzie, 2002). From this perspective, teachers have created a literacy “block” or “framework” within their classroom that incorporates these components in an effort to address the CCLS that students are expected to meet in the area of English Language Arts.

Using this framework, teacher researchers Boushey and Moser (2006) created a model called The Daily Five, which many teachers use as the base of their literacy block. The Daily Five consists of five literacy-based centers that have students focus on word work, reading to self, reading to someone, listening to reading, and working on writing. The activities in the five literacy centers incorporate foundational elements of reading, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Boushey and Moser (2006) give many different examples of activities that students may be engaging in at each literacy-based center. For example, when students are at the word work centers they could be spelling words using magnet letters, clay, Wikki Stix, or stamps (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 86). At the writing center students might write about topics of their choice or adding onto their writing using ideas from a previously taught mini-lesson (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 81).

The Daily Five model and many other balanced literacy blocks are based on Vygotsky’s Gradual Release of Responsibility theory (Fisher & Frey, 2007) where teachers provide the needed support to students until they can become independent. Teachers model expected behaviors or strategies and the students practice them. As the

students practice, the teacher provides different scaffolds for each student until the student is able to “assume all of the responsibility” of completing the task independently (Fisher & Frey, 2007, p. 34). Teachers often follow the structure of whole group, small group, and individual learning settings during the literacy block (Tompkins, 2000). This enables the teacher to identify and support the needs of the students in a way that each student can expand his or her learning.

### **Student Independence**

Student independence is a key component in a classroom where students are productively able to work within the literacy block. However, independence is not something that is simply taught or learned (Herber & Nelson-Herber, 1987). There are many individual attributes of independence, such as motivation, engagement, and self-checking, that must be encouraged, modeled, taught, practiced, and orchestrated together in order for a student to be truly independent and in charge of his or her own learning. Teachers may know that their students have honed these skills if the students are completing their work on their own, asking the teacher fewer questions, taking responsibility over their own learning, and managing their own behavior and effort (Bowman, 2001). During the balanced literacy block, when teachers need uninterrupted time to work with small groups of students, a high level of student independence becomes invaluable (Ford & Opitz, 2002).

From my observations, the level of student independence may vary, depending on the grade level, student needs, and amount of teacher support required at different points throughout the school year. Therefore the students in each classroom may develop their

independence in different ways and over different spans of time. Also, the ability for a student to work independently develops over time and is a skill that he or she builds upon from year to year (Herber & Nelson-Herber, 1987).

Despite those circumstances, there were several attributes of independence that I came across repeatedly in my research and these were attributes that I believed could be applied to all types of classrooms (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Some of the independence attributes I discovered through my review include motivation, student choice, engagement, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. Each of these terms will be defined and explained below. My review of the literature also revealed other components that have an affect on student independence, such as the classroom learning environment and specific strategies that foster independence. These attributes will also be discussed below.

### **Student Motivation**

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), “to be motivated means to be moved to do something” and people have different amounts of motivation as well as different kinds of motivation (p.54). Ryan and Deci (2000) go on to explain the differences between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as doing something because it is “inherently interesting or enjoyable”, while extrinsic motivation refers to doing a task “because it leads to a separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). When putting a focus on education and the success of students, it is important to look at intrinsic motivation because “this natural motivational tendency is a critical element in cognitive, social, and physical development because it is through acting on one’s inherent interests that one grows in knowledge and skills” (Ryan & Deci, 2000 p. 56).

The research of Ryan and Deci (2000) regarding intrinsic motivation can be used within our own teaching philosophies and teachers can begin to think about what motivates students intrinsically. Ryan and Deci (2000) remind teachers that it is important to remember that intrinsic motivation will only occur “for activities that hold intrinsic interest for an individual” (p.59). As teachers, we need to find out what students are interested in, what drives them, what challenges them, and how we can make our instruction interesting for a wide variety of learners. We can do this by tapping into our student’s background knowledge, giving students authentic learning experiences, and creating opportunities for students to explore their curiosities (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56).

Zimmerman (2000) supports these ideas of motivation with research on the concept of student self-efficacy, which is defined as “personal judgments of one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions to attain designated goals” (p. 93). Self-efficacy is highly correlated with student’s intrinsic motivation and students that hold these self-efficacy beliefs tend to motivate their own learning “through [the] use of ... self –regulatory processes [such as] goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and strategy use” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 87). In order for students to build this self-efficacious beliefs, it is important that students understand the purpose for their task because it “establishes motivation and becomes a force that keeps them persevering”, according to Boushey and Moser (2006, p. 22). The remainder of this chapter will focus on the attributes that foster motivation and independence in students.



## **Student Engagement**

According to Tomlinson (1999), “engagement is the magnet that attracts learners’ meandering attention and holds it so that enduring learning can occur” (p. 38). To me, engagement is when every student is attentive in an effort to achieve an understanding of what is being taught. To me, engagement is when students demonstrate curiosity by asking questions, posing questions, or finding ways to come to a better understanding. In my experience, engagement happens when students’ interests are peaked, when a purpose is set, and when students are completing authentic learning that can be applied to their real lives. Engagement may look different in different settings, during different activities, and while working with different students. Many components effect student engagement, such as student choice and self-regulated learning, which will be further discussed in this chapter (Tompkins, 2000).

## **Student Choice**

One component that effects motivation is student choice. Student choice is one attribute that I, as well as Boushey & Moser (2006), believe is highly engaging and it puts students in charge of their learning. When Boushey and Moser developed The Daily Five literacy framework, they kept in mind the idea that no one likes being told what to do and when to do it (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Even with adults, when someone has some say in the matter, they are much more motivated to complete it. This is what led Boushey & Moser to giving their students choice. They taught their students to make strategic choices that would help them accomplish their individual reading and writing goals (Boushey & Moser, 2006). When this student choice was combined with other habits of

The Daily Five, Boushey and Moser, along with other teachers, saw engagement, which later led to great successes in literacy for their students. In their classroom, they saw greater productivity, students completing quality work, cooperation and collaboration among peers, and instead of students being off-task, they were working towards their own literacy goals (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

Koh and Frick (2010) support this idea when they say “students [must] be given autonomy to engage freely with their learning environment” (p. 1). Koh and Frick (2010) go on to explain three different types of autonomy that affect student engagement. Organizational autonomy is when teachers “give student choice to manage the learning environment”, such as letting students choose group members, seating arrangements, and rules for the classroom (Koh & Frick, 2010, p.7). Procedural autonomy is when teachers “give students choice over the form of their work”, such as how students display their projects, what materials they use, and what resources they use” (Koh & Frick, 2010, p. 7). The third type of autonomy is cognitive autonomy which is when teachers “give students ownership of the learning process”, such as how they solve problems independently, how they ask questions, and how they voice their opinions (Koh & Frick, 2010, p.7). By fostering all three of these types of autonomy in the classroom, students are more likely to be engaged and intrinsically motivated in the classroom (Koh & Frick, 2010).

### **Student Self-Regulation**

Another component that effects engagement is student self-regulation. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) support this belief with their ideas of self-regulated learning where

students are taking “ownership” over their work and responsibilities to exercise their independence (p. 89). One way that teachers can encourage this self-regulation in students is by developing a learner-centered classroom where students take the initiative to think for themselves (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Boushey and Moser (2006) encourage teachers to build that learner-centered classroom by creating a sense of community that “provides members with ownership to hold others accountable for behaviors of effort, learning, order, and kindness” (p. 21). Students may redirect each other so that they stay on task or help each other come up with ideas. Students will work to keep their learning environment positive and free of disruptions because they are responsible for it. Students will celebrate each other’s progress and work on setting goals as a class (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 22). Once this learning environment is established among all students, engagement will grow, making students more independent and enabling teachers to focus their time and energy on instruction (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

### **Learning Environment**

So what does this learning environment look like and how can teachers create such an environment in their classroom? First and foremost, it is important that everything that a teacher decides to do within the classroom is done with the students in mind. Having this student-centered classroom allows the classroom to be controlled internally, by the students themselves. According to Sanacore (1999), “externally controlled environments can negate young people’s sense of self-determination”, which would then have a lasting affect on their engagement (p. 38). Teacher’s can create this student-centered environment physically and socially.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) define the “physical environment” of a classroom as “how the space and materials are organized” (p. 89). When physically setting up a classroom, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) suggest setting up a “community meeting area”, “small group meeting areas”, “conferring areas”, a “library”, a “writing supply area”, and a space for “technology (p. 91-4). Every area in the room needs a purpose and each area should be filled with materials that are organized for “optimal student independence” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 89). Students would show their independence by receiving a task, going to appropriate work area for that task, getting out the appropriate materials, using the materials correctly, and then reorganizing those materials once the student is done using them. The environment needs to be accommodating for all students so that they are all comfortable in each work area and the room should be accommodating for large groups, small groups, and individuals working on their own. Displaying student work or other creations that students “own” as well as displaying references that can be used by students is another way to build that sense of belonging and purpose (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 95). By accommodating students in every way possible, students will feel as if they belong and they will too take ownership over the way in which the classroom is organized and used (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) define a classroom’s “social environment” as “how the people behave in the environment” (p. 89). The atmosphere of a classroom is essential to maintaining a positive learning environment and the social environment cannot be established fully until the children have entered the classroom for the first time (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Students need to be taught and modeled the appropriate use of their voice levels during all working situations, whether it is independent work or with small

groups. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) also believe that a positive social environment in a classroom must foster “cooperation”, “mutual respect” and “inclusion” of every member (p.96). The atmosphere that teachers want to create in their classrooms is one of students working together with “common purposes” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 96).

Final key components to the classroom environment include time management, schedules, and routines (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Managing time in the classroom can be challenging due to the limited hours in a school day, but establishing routines immediately in the classroom make it a little easier (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Students should know the routine for getting out and using materials, the routine for using the bathroom or leaving the classroom, and the routine for packing up at the end of the day. If students learn the routine for these minor actions, then more time can be committed to actual instruction and the teachers can take a step back and trust the students to follow the routine that has been taught. When developing schedules for each day or for the week, teachers should keep time slots for each content area consistent (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) suggest that teachers establish a “productive and easy-to-accomplish- task that students perform every morning as they enter the classroom” so that those first moments of the day are being used “productively” (p. 97). Once schedules are established, they can be posted in the room and briefly reviewed each morning so that students are aware of the need to “stick to it” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p.101).

No matter how many hours teachers spend preparing the classroom environment before the first day of school and no matter how great of a vision teachers create for the social structure of the classroom, there is bound to be change (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). As students enter the classroom, they bring about their own expectations, behaviors,

habits, and personalities that need to be taken into consideration. As the year progresses, teachers may find that changes can be made to the space and organization of the classroom or teachers may find that aspects of the social environment need to be modeled and practiced (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), students should be involved in these changes and have a say in the way in which their classroom is managed. Again, by doing this, students take on a sense of ownership over the classroom and they feel more responsible for it's success.

### **Differentiation**

Because students' achievement levels differ, as well as their interests and "preferred ways of learning", teachers continuously modify instruction so that all students can be successful (Tompkins, 2000, p. 362). When applying this knowledge to student independence, one can assume that the levels of independence also vary and this variance can also be addressed using differentiation. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction "means 'shaking up' what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn" (p. 1). When we are designing instruction as a teacher, we want students to be able to demonstrate their understanding independently so that we can assess how much they know. In order to achieve this, teacher need to use "tiered activities" so that students are all focused on the same skills and understandings, but at "different levels of complexity" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 83). This will allow all students to achieve success as their independent level. Tomlinson (1999) goes on to explain that "By keeping the focus of the activity the same, but providing routes of access at varying

degrees of difficulty, the teachers maximize the likelihood that each students comes away with pivotal skills and understandings and each student is appropriately challenged” (p. 83). Differentiation is just another way that we can adjust our own instruction to encourage both academic success and independence.

### **Summary**

As a substitute teacher, whenever I first walk into the classroom that I will be teaching for the day, I take all of the components that were discussed in this chapter into consideration. I find myself, acting like a student, as I observe the schedules that are posted, the arrangement of the room, the classroom rules that are posted and signed, and the resources that are made available to the students. As I greet the students when they arrive, I watch as they follow routines. I see that some students are motivated to make choices and independently get started on their morning task. I also observe that others need a few more reminders and some encouragement to get started. It is always helpful to me when I can direct those students to the daily routines or schedule that is posted. As the day continues, I continue to observe students and begin to notice those that need a little more guidance and those that can work independently as if I am not even there. I see students make choices, encourage one another, and hold each other accountable.

Not every classroom functions in this way and not every student demonstrate these same capabilities. I generally see bits and pieces of what has been described but it is obvious to me that the teacher has made some attempt to make his or her students independent learners. Without fostering attributes of student choice, motivation, engagement, self-regulation, students will struggle with finding their own level of

independence. According to Johnston (1984), without this independence, “two-thirds of the class time may be effectively lost”.



### **Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures**

Elementary teachers strive to establish a balanced literacy block within their classroom where students are working independently through a series of literacy activities that will foster their literacy development (Tompkins, 2000). I believe that during the balanced literacy block, students should have opportunities to read, write, and think independently. Students should be able to independent make choices on what they want to read, what they want to write, and what they choose as their focus for that time. While substitute teaching, I have seen this become a challenge for teachers as they work hard to manage a classroom full of students with different needs, interests, strengths, and abilities. It becomes hard to teach small groups or instruct a whole group when students are not able to work independently because the teacher is unable to focus on their instruction (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

Students develop the ability to work independently over time and through repeated opportunities to practice this independence (Herber & Nelson-Herber, 1987). I believe that students need to be engaged, motivated, and responsible for their own learning in order for this independence to take place. I found that some students already have this independence at the beginning of the school year but many do not. For those students who do not yet portray this independence, accommodations need to be put in place and instructional strategies need to be used to meet the needs of those less independent students. This guidance needs to be put in place by the teacher and the teacher needs to create a learning environment that fosters this independence as well.

As a long-term substitute teacher who was teaching at the beginning of the school year, I was hoping to make these changes within the classroom and foster this

independence in many different ways. I conducted this research in order to explore the different methods that I could use to foster student independence, especially during the literacy block where independence is so crucial. As stated in Chapter One, my research question is “How can I create opportunities for my third grade students to develop attributes of independence during literacy block activities?”

In this chapter I explain how I conducted the study to answer the research question. I will reveal information regarding the participant along with the context that the study was conducted. I will define the weekly procedures of my study so that my research process appears “transparent and systematic” to the reader (Samaras, 2011, p. 80). I will also explain the process and strategies of data collection and the analysis of the data. I conclude the chapter by sharing the validity of my research, which will be verified, and the limitations that bound the study will be exposed.

### **Context of the Study**

The study took place within my classroom at a suburban elementary school in rural western New York. The school had 890 students in grades K-6. According to the 2011-2012 NYS Report Card, 92 percent of students were Caucasian, 3% of students were Hispanic or Latino, 2 percent of students were Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 1 percent of students were Black or African American, and 1 percent of students were Multiracial. Seventeen percent of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch and this percentage had increased from year to year.

Out of my 23 third graders, 13 of them were male and 10 of them were female. Twenty-one of my students were White, one student was African American, and one

student was Mayan Indian. Two of the female students had Individual Education Plans (IEP), which is why I received support from the special education teacher during my math block, reading block, and writing block. One student was an English Language Learner (ELL) but did not receive any support services. Four students were in need of special education services and were being brought up to the Instructional Support Team (IST).

The layout of the elementary school was unique. There were six small wings that house the classrooms, called “pods” that stem off from the central building. Each pod had six rooms within it and the rooms had no doors and the walls were also collapsible. There were between three to four classrooms in each pod and the other rooms were either empty or used as books rooms, storage, or meeting places for service providers. My classroom was located in a pod with three other classrooms; two first grade classrooms and a second grade classroom. There was also an empty classroom in my pod and a room where special education services were provided. In the center of our pod, called the core, there were ten laptops and a printer. Despite the openness of the pod, the teachers and students still functioned as if they were in closed classrooms located in a hallway.

My research took place in my classroom, which had four rectangular tables and three desks for students. One student sat at each desk and there were five students sitting at each table. One wall of my room was lined with bookshelves that housed teaching materials along with games, books, and materials for students. Opposing the bookshelves was a wall that had chalkboards and two bulletin boards. In front of the chalkboard is the interactive SMART Board, which is on wheels and required a projector cart that was positioned five feet in front of it. The back wall of the classroom was lined with

windows. There were metal cabinets that sat just below the window and inside those cabinets was storage for supplies and math materials that only the teacher had access too. There was a sink at the end of the metal cabinets. The students were able to reach the top of the metal cabinets so that was where they had their own personal “cubby.” The cubby was just a small box that stored their folders, notebooks, and books in a vertical position. This cubby system was put in place because the students didn’t all have desks so they needed a space to store their belongings and school supplies. To the left of the cabinets was a door that gave access to a storage closet where all extra supplies, books, and materials were stored out of reach of the students. To the left of that door, was another set of chalkboards and a carpet sat in front of those chalkboards. That carpet was the meeting place for mini-lessons, read aloud and some whole group discussions. To the left of those chalkboards was access to two bathrooms, an entranceway to one of the other classrooms, and a door that led outside. My desk was also located in that corner. Two small round tables sat in each corner of the room; one for small group instruction and guided reading and the other was for general daily use by the students. Scattered throughout the room were two more small bookshelves used for storage of student books. Students kept their coats, book bags, and lunchboxes in two large standalone cubbies that had hooks for each student and two shelves in each. These were located right outside of the classroom entrance.

The schedule changed slightly from day to day. Students followed a morning routine when they arrived, which they were supposed to complete quietly and independently. Math began at 8:30a.m. and lasted until 9:30a.m. Then students had a quick snack until content centers began at 9:45a.m. Students were supposed to move

throughout a series of four centers related to their content areas while the teacher met with small group to deliver either social studies or science instruction. Centers lasted an hour until the students went to lunch at 10:50a.m. When students came back from lunch at 11:25a.m., they filled out their agendas and then we did a whole group read-aloud on the carpet. Five students would leave for reading services from 11:30a.m.– 12:30p.m. The literacy block that previously existed in the classroom was now broken into a reader’s workshop and a writer’s workshop. Reader’s workshop began at 12:00p.m. and student’s would work independently through a series of literacy centers while the teacher met with four or five guided reading groups. Writer’s workshop began at 1:00p.m. and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour depending on which special the students had that day. Students went to their gym, art, or music at 2:00p.m. and arrived back at the classroom between 2:40p.m. and 2:50p.m. Students spent the last 10-20 minutes of the day completing the dismissal routine, which they were supposed to do quietly and independently.

### **My Positionality as the Researcher**

I was conducting a self-study so I was the only participant. As a long-term substitute teacher, I interacted with 23 third grade students along with one specials education teacher and one teacher aide. According to Samaras (2011), “even though the term *self-study* suggests an individual approach, ... an effective self study requires a commitment to checking data and interpretation with others”, which would be evident in my research journal (p. 69).

I am a 23-year-old White woman who was raised in a suburban town in western New York. I attended two different suburban school districts during my upbringing due to my parent's separation and moving between houses. After high school, I attended The College at Brockport: State University of New York to pursue a bachelor of arts degree in English and to complete the teacher certification program and obtain my teaching certificates. I obtained my childhood inclusive certificate and my students with disabilities certificate. I graduated from The College at Brockport: State University of New York with summa cum laude honors in 2012. Currently, I am pursuing my master's degree in childhood literacy at The College at Brockport: State University of New York.

I began substitute teaching five years ago and I have worked as a daily substitute as well as a long-term substitute. The school districts that I have taught in were all in suburban areas. The demographics and school size within each school district varied slightly. Last summer, I tutored elementary students in the area of reading while also volunteering my time working with students at a reading clinic.

My educational and professional experiences have shaped my own literacy beliefs and values. I believe that all students are capable of learning and succeeding with the support of their parents and effective teachers. I have had the opportunity to see just how much engagement and motivation can affect a student's outlook on learning.

When it comes to education, I value a learner-centered classroom, described by Bridges (1995) when students have an "internal focus of control" by taking the initiative to think for themselves and assume responsibility for their own learning (p. 26). Once the teacher and students establish a learner-centered classroom, I believe that motivation and independence is fostered and teachers are able to make the most of each learning

opportunity. In my opinion, this independence and motivation is exactly what is needed to conduct a balanced literacy block as demonstrated by Boushey and Mosher (2006).

When it comes to the ways in which I assess students, I believe in using forms of assessment that assess what is being learned by the students as well as the instruction being given by the teacher. Whether I am collecting data on student behavior or achievement, it is important for me to reflect on my own teaching as well. To monitor progress over the course of the year, it is important for teachers to conduct a variety of assessments, both formal and informal, that demonstrate student growth.

### **Data Collection**

Throughout this self-study I kept a research journal of my long-term substitute experience as a third grade teacher. I focused on aspects pertaining to literacy, engagement, motivation, and student independence. I began by “collecting baseline data” as suggested by Samaras (2011) so that I could see what was taking place before I began my study (p. 162). My notes consisted of details about the students in my class, the classroom environment, observations of students during independent work times, the structure of the literacy block, resources used by students, and instructional strategies used by myself to motivate and engage my students while fostering their independence. I also included records of my own personal reflection as a teacher, which Samaras refers to as “memos”. These memos are “*think-pieces* about the research over time” (Samaras, 2011, p. 179). These “memos” act as data that will help me “journey, understand, self-critique, and analyze” my data (Samaras, 2011, p.179). Looking at all of these data

components allowed me to develop a better understanding of how I fostered independence within a third grade literacy block.

According to Samaras (2011), “in self-study research, [one] wants to be sure [they] are collecting data that provides information about [his/her] efforts to improve [their] practice and ... students learning” (p. 161). In order to accomplish this, I created a data collection chart to narrow down the specific information that I needed in order to answer my research question. This chart allowed me to document student behavior throughout each rotation within the literacy block. I used a tally system to mark down the times that students were engaging in off-task behavior or activities, which showed that they weren’t being independent. The tallies were totaled for each day. Anecdotal notes also accompany each week’s chart, which documents any factors that may have affected my study and individual student behavior. Once the data was collected, I was able to analyze it and look for patterns from rotation to rotation, from day to day, and from week to week. In order to develop answers to my research questions, I conducted observations of my classroom, collecting artifacts from students, documenting conversations with students, researching literature related to my topics, implementing different tools and recording their effects, and tracking my own reflective journey as I went through this experience with my students.

### **Data Analysis**

After collecting my series of notes and observations, I carefully analyzed what was written in my research journal. Reading and rereading my research journal allowed me to reflect while also detecting patterns and common themes. It was these patterns and



themes that I could then develop into categories to better organize my research. The following categories were developed from my research: reading, writing, independent behaviors, and off-task behaviors. The time period of the literacy block was also noted. Once categorized, I was able to view my research as a whole and see what exactly I did in order to foster independence in my classroom literacy block. During my data analysis, I believed it was important that I remained honest, just as Samaras (2011) suggested, “it is more valuable if you are willing to explain what you learned and what you might do differently” (p. 13).

### **Procedures**

My data collection took approximately 15 weeks, lasting from the end of September to the end of January. I conducted observations five days a week and collected 70 days of data. Below are the details of the research completed during each of those weeks.

#### **Week One**

- collected baseline data about classroom environment and students
- developed research questions and brainstormed about what I could do to foster independence

#### **Week Two**

- observed students and their literacy abilities through formal assessments and conversations

- implemented new behavior management plan and developed rules and expectations for students
- identified students' strengths and needs regarding their independence
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block

### **Week Three**

- planned reader's workshop and created guided reading groups
- researched and developed ideas for reader's workshop centers
- held an open house event for parents and students to attend
- met with students' service providers and communicated our current knowledge about students strengths and needs
- continued to observe students behaviors, abilities, needs, and independence
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block

### **Week Four**

- implemented reader's workshop centers and began meeting with guided reading groups
- developed center reference sheets for students which explained student choices, material use, and expectations
- introduced a writing resource called *Banish Boring Words* (Scholastic, 2009) to help them add descriptive words to their writing independently.

- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block

### **Week Five**

- adjusted reader's workshop centers to increase independence and created I-Chart's to review students jobs and the teachers job during the literacy block
- identified many problematic areas within the classroom and began to develop solutions for these problems
- introduced a writing resource for my students called a *QuickWord* (Curriculum Associates, 2013) to help students spell words independently
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- began analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Six:**

- observed students current use of resources and their level of independence during the literacy block
- began giving mini-lessons prior to starting independent writing time to review the focus of the day
- directed students to use their resources, reference sheets, and I-Charts instead of giving them immediate help

- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Seven**

- introduced writing buddies to students and the writing buddy checklist as another resource
- introduced self-checking checklist for students to use as a resource during writing time
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Eight**

- recognized off-task behaviors and implemented solutions to increase engagement and independence
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- reflected on my own instruction, the literacy block and the independence I was observing in my students

- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Nine**

- added new choices to reader's workshop centers to increase engagement
- develop a system for writing conferences with students
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Ten**

- reflected on data collected from literacy block and used data to make changes to the reader's workshop schedule and center rotations
- reviewed and raised expectations and roles of students during the literacy block
- adjusted management of reader's workshop to address meet raised expectations
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Eleven**

- met with ELA specialist to reflect and collaborate on the implementation of reader's workshop and writer's workshop
- developed student objectives to foster attributes of independence
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Twelve**

- added new center choices to reward students for displaying independence
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

### **Week Thirteen**

- reinforced positive behaviors and adjusted center choices to address students not meeting specified
- developed an I-chart to address what students should do while waiting for the teacher during writing time
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block

- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

#### **Week Fourteen**

- added a new center that allowed students to have more choice in their activity during reader's workshop
- created content area vocabulary posters to encourage independence during writer's workshop
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- continued analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

#### **Week Fifteen**

- added a new center that allowed for students to reflect on their objectives and behaviors
- conducted observations to collect data and document students independence throughout the literacy block
- concluded analysis of observations and collected data to identify trends, themes, and patterns

#### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

The purpose of my self-study was to improve my own teaching practices and to give insight into ways of fostering student engagement, motivation, and independence.

My research process was interactive and contained reflection each and every day. My research journal “help[ed] increase [my] audit trail” which increases the validity of my study (Samaras, 2011, p. 164). I collaborated with my thesis advisor on a weekly basis through e-mail and phone conversations. I also collaborated with colleagues and I immersed myself in professional literature, which allowed me to develop an understanding of effective literacy research. This collaboration is what LaBoskey (2004) define as being “interactive”, which was one of the important characteristics of self-study methodology.

The prolonged engagement that my data collection entailed coupled with my persistent observations that took place on a daily basis demonstrated my dependability and commitment to my research. As recommended by Samaras (2011), my research journal provided a detailed and “transparent analysis” which allowed others to see the steps that I took to increase my credibility (p. 165). LaBoskey (2004) also discusses the importance of making our data, methods, and linkages between data, findings, and interpretations visible, which was what I did in my research journal. My own participation in the research process made it so that I was held accountable for my own actions and my research directly affected my own practice. Due to the fact that I was conducting research in order to improve an aspect within my classroom, I predicted that my results would be of great utility for myself and possibly for other educators.

### **Limitations of the Study**

When conducting this self- study, there were several limitations that I faced. Due to the transition between the former teacher and myself on the third week of school, many



routines were interrupted and students were required to go through a shift in instruction since someone else was delivering it. Although the former teacher and myself worked hard to make the transition smooth and seamless, the change still had an effect on instruction and the students. Also, the transition took place at a crucial part of the school year where routine and consistency were so crucial as expectations were being established.

Another limitation existed as I was planning instruction and thinking of what I could do to motivate and engage these independent learners. Not being in a classroom of my own was a large part of this limitation because I didn't have full access to materials and I didn't feel as though it was acceptable for me to change too much in the classroom since it was not my own. This affected the instructional decisions that I made and it limited me in many areas. However, this limitation was a reality of working as a long-term substitute teacher. Another limitation was that I was working with a single grade level for a short period of time. I wasn't able to compare students across grade levels and more growth would take place in my own students after I was finished conducting my study.

### **Summary**

Working as a long-term substitute offers many daily challenges and it can be more challenging than daily substitute teaching because of the long-term affect that you have on the classroom and on the students. In most cases, the classroom is your own and most teachers do trust your judgment and your instructional decisions. I found that during my study, many of my instructional decisions were done by trial and error. I implemented

something, such as a new center or student resource, and then stood back to observe what happened. Then from my observations, I made a new instructional decision or I changed a previous one. This process was a learning experience for myself as well as the students. Together, we communicated and collaborated to find ways to sustain accountability, engagement, motivation, and independence. Overall, the strategies, resources, and instruction that I delivered during this study to foster attributes of independence had a positive outcome.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

I conducted this self-study in order to explore the different methods that I could use to foster this independence, especially during the literacy block where independence is so crucial. Throughout this qualitative study, I experimented with various types of student resources, center activities, classroom management, and student expectations. As stated in Chapter One, my research questions are “How can I foster independence in a third grade classroom?” and “How can I increase motivation and engage students in their own learning?”

The following research journal excerpts documented my weekly observations from the literacy block in my classroom. My data collection took approximately 15 weeks, lasting from the end of September to the end of January. I conducted observations five days a week and collected 70 days of data. My notes consist of details about the students in my class, the classroom environment, observations of students during independent work times, the structure of the literacy block, resources used by students, and instructional strategies used by myself to motivate and engage my students and foster their independence. I also included records of my own personal reflection as a teacher.

### **Summary for Week One**

This week was the transition week for the third graders. I met the teacher on Monday and was introduced to the 23 students. On Monday evening, I attended the open house where I met the students’ parents. I visited the classroom on Thursday and Friday to continue observing the students and the teacher. It was during this week that I

established my research question as well as a baseline of data. I took this week to familiarize myself with what was already in place in the classroom and I began to reflect and brainstorm about what I could do to help the students become more independent and successful during the literacy block.

## **Reflection**

### **What went Well**

I think that attending the open house event made parents and students more comfortable with the transition that was going to be taking place once Mrs. Hill left. I was able to reassure them of my qualifications and answer and questions that they had.

I think that spending two days in the classroom just observing the students and Mrs. Hill also had a positive affect on the students attitudes and my own. Being able to observe students, routines, instruction, and teacher interactions made me feel more comfortable and confident in my ability to take on the role of the classroom teacher.

### **What was Challenging**

Although it was nice to have two days to observe in the classroom, I still felt unprepared to take on the role of the classroom teacher. It was difficult to observe from the corner of the room without being a distraction to the students because they wanted to ask me a dozen questions. As much as I wanted to interact with the students and ask Mrs. Hill questions, I couldn't because I didn't want to interfere with instruction or their daily routines.

I also felt as though me being in the classroom to observe was a distraction, even though I tried to stay out of the way as much as possible. Mrs. Hill had a hard time keeping them focused and on task at times.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I would have liked to set aside time to meet with Mrs. Hill to review the classroom schedule, routines, and management. The little time that we had to talk throughout the day and after school wasn't nearly enough to have my questions answered. Also, having more time to observe Mrs. Hill and the students would have made me more knowledgeable of students needs and abilities prior to starting instruction.

### **Summary for Week Two**

This week was my first week alone with the students. I spent time getting to know each student and collecting observations about what kind of literacy learner each child was. I spent time completing Developmental Reading Assessments and having conversations with each child. I implemented a new behavior management plan during this week. I worked to make routines more concrete and established. I created my rules and expectations and communicated them to the students. I spent a lot of time handling challenging behaviors, becoming familiar with the school and classroom, and establishing good communication with parents and service providers. I was able to identify the students' strengths and needs regarding their overall independence. Mrs. Hill had not yet established the literacy block so I began to formulate a plan and got input from the students.

## **Reflection**

### **What went Well**

I think that most students were excited about having a new teacher and they were very interested in getting to know me. I made sure to make time for them to ask questions so that they could learn about me and feel comfortable with having me as their classroom teacher.

I was able to maintain the daily routines and schedules with the help of the students. I managed to keep myself organized, maintain expectations, and felt that there was good communication between the students and myself.

Administering the Developmental Reading Assessments revealed a lot of useful information regarding each child's reading skills. I felt that I was able to develop a good picture of the type of instruction that I would need to deliver during guided reading in order to meet the needs of each student.

### **What was Challenging**

There were a few students that were testing boundaries during the first few days. These students were demonstrating behaviors that they knew were not normally accepted by Mrs. Hill. I knew that I had to manage this behavior, but I also didn't want to begin building any poor rapport with any of the students. I wish that I had been less lenient with those students.

Developing a new behavior management plan was tricky because a majority of the students were very helpful, kind, and on-task. I felt that I was trying to develop a

whole class management plan that targeted specific students. I struggled with this because I didn't want the whole class to suffer due to the actions of a few students.

### **What I Would do Differently**

Having more time to communicate with Mrs. Hill regarding individual students would have been beneficial. Knowing information about each student would have prepared me better to plan for students academically and behaviorally. I would have been able to address or even prevent those off-task behaviors that I observed from a few students. Knowing more about the students also would have given me the opportunity to develop a behavior management plan sooner.

### **Summary for Week Three**

A majority of my time this week was spent organizing and planning the reader's workshop literacy block, which was where a majority of my data collection took place. I worked to create guided reading groups based on DRA scores and information I have about the literacy skills of each student. I also began researching and developing ideas for reader's workshop centers that the students will eventually be able to complete independently. I took a lot of my research into consideration when I was trying to develop motivating, engaging, and purposeful center activities that cover all areas of literacy.

I continued to learn about my students' independence, strengths, and abilities as I continued to instruct them and have conversations with them. I held an open house event where I was able to meet with parents and talk about their children. This also gave me

information regarding how each parent viewed his/her child's strengths and needs, which proved to be useful information. Students created an I-graph this week to show their parents at open house, which had them thinking about themselves as learners. The information from the I-graph was useful to me because I was able to see what my students' interests were and how they learned best.

I met with all of my students' service providers this week so that they could help me establish a reader's workshop schedule that would work with their service times. This allowed me to communicate my observations about select students with them and hear their feedback and suggestions as well. Many of the service providers were able to give me resources or suggestions of what they thought may work within my reader's workshop schedule.

## **Reflection**

### **What went Well**

I was able to create guided reading groups centered on the students reading levels and reading needs. Once groups were established, I was able to develop the reader's workshop schedule and the centers. I think that I developed center activities based on what I know about the students' needs and strengths and I am hoping that these activities will encourage engagement, motivation, and independence.

I began establishing communication and positive relationships between my student's service providers and myself. The service providers were able to give me many suggestions for my literacy block, such as center activities, and for my guided reading



instruction. They also gave me many resources that I can use with the students during the literacy block.

### **What was Challenging**

Developing guided reading groups was challenging because no two students are identical when it comes to their reading strengths and needs. It took a lot of time to create student groupings and I found myself changing them several times before making any decisions.

Developing the reader's workshop schedule was also challenging because a few of my students are pulled out of the classroom for reading support or special education services. I had to keep these students in mind when developing the schedule and the guided reading groups because I didn't want these students to be missing out on instruction or not participating in their literacy block activities.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I would have liked to have the opportunity to observe another third grade teachers literacy block so that I didn't have to develop everything on my own. By doing this, I think that I would have been able to choose center activities that have proven to be successful. I would have also been able to see the way that another teacher managed the literacy block, each center, and the transitions between each center. This would have saved me time and I would have felt more confident in my decisions.

## Summary for Week Four

This week I implemented a simple reader's workshop center rotation and began meeting with guided reading groups. I discussed with the students what my goals were for the reader's workshop and how I expected them to work independently. We discussed the limitations that were currently on choices during these literacy centers and I informed them that as they became more independent, they would have more choices in their learning. I modeled the use of materials and made sure that the learning materials were all accessible to them. I made reference sheets that explain the choices at each center for each child to have in their reading folder as well as in a large poster version to hang in the classroom. Many changes to this reader's workshop center rotation were noted throughout this week's trial run.

In writing this week, I introduced one resource for my students to use on their own called *Banish Boring Words* (Scholastic, 2009). This is a kid friendly packet that contains hundreds of descriptive words that students can use in their writing. Students received their own copy of the packet and I put a poster of descriptive words on the wall so students could easily reference that as well. As we are working on our narrative writing pieces, I hoped that students would reference this packet first before coming to me for help or ideas.

The table below demonstrates student independence during each center of the reader's workshop over the course of the week. Redirection was given for off-task behaviors that demonstrated a lack of independence. This redirection was given using hand signals and verbal reminders.

**Table 4.1: Redirection Needed During Week Four**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	5	3	3	2	4
Rotation 2	4	3	3	4	4
Rotation 3	4	4	3	4	5
Rotation 4	5	5	3	4	4
Rotation 5	6	7	8	7	6
Daily Total	24	22	20	20	24
Notes	Most redirection was given for voice level				

### **Reflection**

#### **What went Well**

Students were very excited about the reader's workshop centers and they showed a lot of engagement when I was introducing the activities. Even though it was time consuming, modeling and practicing each center activity with the students allowed for me to foresee any problems and to make any adjustments that I thought were needed. Modeling each activity allowed for me to establish expectations for each activity and then having students practice allowed them to show me that they understood the expectations. I felt that this raised the accountability of the students.

The concept of independence was repeated over and over as I was introducing the reader's workshop centers to the students. Having the reference sheets available to students in many different locations encouraged this concept of independence and I believe that they understood my expectations regarding independence.

Students were engaged during writing as we worked together to come up with descriptive words to include. They were excited about getting their *Banish Boring Words* (Scholastic, 2009) packet and nearly all the students used it during writing.

### **What was Challenging**

Although modeling and practicing each center activity and developing expectations is important, it was very time consuming. I found that a majority of this week was spent on the literacy block and other content areas were pushed to the side. I do believe it was time well spent but I kept wondering if there was a better way to do this.

While students were taking time to practice each center activity, there were a few students that were off-task and not meeting the expectations that were set for each activity. I found that a lot of my time was spent redirecting and remodeling with them instead of reinforcing the positive actions that I was seeing from the majority of the class.

### **What I Would do Differently**

Starting this teaching position so early in the school year left me with a lot of responsibility that normal long-term substitutes don't generally have. Usually when substitute teaching, the classroom is organized and established by an experienced teacher prior to you coming in. I would have wanted to know what had already been established in the classroom before starting the job so that I could better prepare and implement these things earlier in the school year.

I think that I would have benefited from having observed another teachers reader's workshop. Seeing as how this was my first time implementing my own reader's workshop, I felt that I may have over planned and spent too much time doing certain things. Observing another teacher implement a reader's workshop would have allowed me to be more knowledgeable and prepared. Also, I would have been able to go to that same teacher for help with addressing problems and off-task behaviors.

### **Summary for Week Five**

This week I began to make small changes to the reader's workshop center rotation in an effort to get it to be more meaningful and more independent. The students and I reviewed the choices that they had for each center. For each center, we created an "I-Chart", also known as anchor charts, which is a concept that comes from *The Daily Five* (Boushey & Mosher, 2006). Each chart focused on the students' role versus the teachers' role during a specific center. Students thought about what their job was for the center and what the teacher's job was for the center. The charts helped students to recognize the importance of being able to work independently so that the teacher was able to do his/her job as well, which in this case was meeting with guided reading groups. I was also able to identify many problem areas for our classroom. For example, my students have a really difficult time listening and staying in control of their bodies when sitting on the carpet together. After recognizing this problem, I began to develop a solution and am working to create a different meeting space that we can meet before we begin our reader's workshop centers. I attempted to make time at the end of each reader's workshop rotation to meet and reflect with the students. They enjoy sharing their

feedback with myself and with each other and they are beginning to recognize that they have a role in the success of this workshop as well.

In writer's workshop this week, I introduced another resource for my students that I am hoping will help them to be more independent. The resource I introduced is called a *QuickWord* (Curriculum Associates, 2013). The *QuickWord* contains hundreds of words commonly used by third graders. The words are alphabetical and students can check to see if the word they are trying to use in their writing is in their *QuickWord*. If it is, they can copy it. If the word isn't in the book then I can jot the word on the page provided for each letter of the alphabet.

Students know that if they are having trouble with spelling a word, they can check their *QuickWord*, look for the word around the room, ask another student, use a different word that has the same meaning, stretch the word out, or ask a teacher if they have exhausted all of their other strategies. We made a poster at the end of the week titled, *What To Do If I Can't Spell A Word*, and put all of those strategies on the poster for reference. If students came to me without trying on their own, then I can simply point them towards the chart.

**Table 4.2: Redirection Needed During Week Five**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	3	3	2	2	2
Rotation 2	4	3	3	2	3
Rotation 3	3	4	4	4	5
Rotation 4	4	5	4	4	5
Rotation 5	6	5	6	5	5
Daily Total	20	20	19	17	20
Notes	Justin, Jadon, Karl, and Ethan needed redirection frequently				

**Reflection**

**What went Well**

I saw an increase in independence during the literacy block. Students had began to help one another and direct each other to appropriate resources around the room. The students were enjoying the fact that I was listening to their feedback regarding the reader's workshop centers. I felt as though the students were comfortable with voicing their feelings and thoughts, which told me that they felt comfortable and secure in our classroom environment.

The I-charts and posters that we had made had proven to be useful for both the students and myself. Many students went right up to the poster or chart for guidance without any prompting. When students asked me for help, I always had something to direct them to and I encouraged them to ask a buddy before coming me for help.

## **What was Challenging**

The student *QuickWord* (Curriculum Associates, 2013) was a terrific resource but many students were coming up to me during writing to ask me to put in a new word that they didn't know how to spell. I was not sure if I should be encouraging them to use another word that had a similar meaning or if I should have been writing the words in. If I was writing the words in, then I felt as though they were not being as independent as I wanted them to be.

There were a few students who were still not meeting expectations during the literacy block and were often getting other students off-task. I separated their desks but they often got off-task during transition times. I verbally addressed those students individually and spent time reviewing expectations with them and the whole class. I was finding it challenging to come up with a management system that worked for these few students.

## **What I Would do Differently**

When introducing the *QuickWord* (Curriculum Associates, 2013) as a writing resource, I told students that I would add words that they didn't know how to spell. Instead, I wish I had introduced the *QuickWord* as just one of many tools that can be used to spell words. Students need to know that they have many resources available to them and if those resources aren't suitable, then they need to stretch out the word and spell it. My inexperience with this tool ended up increasing dependency when I wanted it to do the opposite.



Most of the center activities had students completing their work in their journal, on the computer, or on a separate worksheet. Any work that was on paper was then turned in at the end of each center. I then collected the papers in the bin at the end of each day and looked at them to ensure that my students were producing quality work and meeting expectations. I found that a few students were choosing the same activities that didn't require them to complete a worksheet or students were not getting as much work done during the center as others. I would have liked to develop some end product for each center to ensure that my students are being accountable and productive even when I am not watching.

### **Summary for Week Six**

During reader's workshop this week, I observed to see the ways in which students were using the I-charts and posters that we had created together. When students came to me with a question or problem, I simply directed them to the resource in the room that would help them most effectively. Many students were able to work quietly with one another and students were giving each other reminders as to what expected behaviors and jobs were during the workshop.

I began to see my students' independence during other literacy areas, such as writing, this week. I found that if I was able to engage my students with an exciting mini-lesson and share stories of my own with them then they are more motivated and listen better. This week in writing we worked on writing narrative stories like storytellers instead of news reporters. I gave examples of each using a story of my own and my students seemed to love every second of it. I asked for the students' reactions to both

versions of my story and I felt that I actually accomplished the goal of my mini-lesson, which was for students to be able to differentiate between the two styles of speaking and writing. They were then able to apply that knowledge from the mini-lesson to share stories verbally with one another and then they began transferring stories into their writer’s notebooks.

Throughout the week I started our writer’s workshop this way and I began to write during writer’s workshop too. I would ask students to not interrupt me and to keep their voices down so that I could focus on my writing, and they did just that. I think that they recognized that I had a job to do as well and we all worked hard to independently write this week. By the end of the week, we were able to write with great stamina, lasting nearly 40 minutes.

**Table 4.3: Redirection Needed During Week Six**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader’s Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	4	3	3	4	2
Rotation 2	3	2	3	3	3
Rotation 3	2	2	3	3	5
Rotation 4	3	3	3	4	4
Rotation 5	7	5	5	4	5
Daily Total	19	15	17	18	19
Notes	Some redirection was needed due to misplacement of materials				

## **Reflection**

### **What went Well**

The students really showed their independence during the writing block this week. They were engaged in the type of writing we were doing and they were able to remain focused during the mini-lesson. Students were becoming more automatic with using their writing resources and I noticed that if a student was stuck, they would often look around the room to see what other students were doing and this would often signal to them what resource they should use.

This was the first time that I felt like the students really understood the fact that I have a job too while they are working. I feel like coming to this understanding this week will lead to students being more independent in the future. The students loved that I was writing while they were writing and they couldn't wait to hear what I had written at the end of writing workshop. They were independent while I did "my job" and I felt that I was setting a model of what writers should be doing during writing workshop as well.

### **What was Challenging**

Although it was fun to write while the students were writing and it did have a positive effect on my students, I know that this can't be done every day. I need to make time to meet with students in groups and individually. I need to develop a system for writing conferences. I need to be available to provide guidance and support for my struggling writers. I think that this is one of the most challenging parts of teaching writing. How can I foster independence in my students while also providing the necessary

support to those that need it? How can I provide challenging writing opportunities for those students that need less support?

Teaching mini-lessons on the carpet has proven to be a challenge each time. This week was more successful than others, but it is still hard to keep the kids sitting still and focused for those ten minutes of instruction. I like having a meeting area for us all to be together but the carpet is too small and the space is not conducive for a class of third graders.

### **What I Would do Differently**

Having a community meeting area in the room where the whole class can be is so important when setting up a classroom. I would have liked to have had a different meeting area or just expand the current meeting area so that all students could sit comfortably and be less distracted. There were some students who do appear more focused when sitting in a chair or when separated from other students so I would be sure to take that into consideration when choosing a community meeting area.

When looking at the structure of my writing block, I saw many opportunities for adjustment and change. When I entered this position, I knew nothing about my students as writers and I didn't give them any assessment to gain this information. Instead, I just observed their writing, analyzed their writing, and had conversations with them about their writing. Because of this, it took me nearly six weeks to really understand what kind of writers I had in my classroom. Collecting a writing sample during the first week would be beneficial for me to do because I could then plan mini-lessons based around the

students' needs. These writing samples may also give me insight into what my students enjoy writing about and how I can engage them further in the writing process.

### **Summary for Week Seven**

This week was spent observing students to see how they were independently working throughout reader's workshop centers. Some students were having a difficult time making choices right away, which resulted in them wasting their work time. There were a few specific students in particular that needed more redirection and reminders from myself and the other students.

During writer's workshop, I introduced students to another resource: writing buddies. I assigned students to a partner and students received a writing buddy checklist that they glued into their writer's notebooks. I assigned students to each other as writing buddies based on their interests, ability levels, and needs. For example, I matched a student that had trouble with punctuation with a student that had a good understanding of punctuation in his or her own writing. I matched a student that had trouble using details and descriptive words with a student who wrote with great detail. In other situations, I matched two of my lower writer's together so that I could easily give them direct instruction. The writing buddy checklist that they glued into their notebook gave them a procedure to follow when meeting with their buddy. For example, they chose a piece of writing to share, read that piece of writing to one another, then gave a compliment and a suggestion to one another, and then spent time editing their writing pieces together. They had several opportunities throughout the week to model and practice appropriate writing buddy interactions and they are very excited about having a buddy to work with.

Towards the end of this week, I introduced students to self-checking checklist. Since students finish writing pieces at different times, it is hard for me to check their writing for completion while also helping other students get started with writing or continue writing. So, when students are complete with a writing piece, they take out their writing checklist and reread their writing, checking for each item on the list. The reread their writing to check for meaning, then for spelling, then for capitalization, then for punctuation, and then one more for meaning to ensure that the changes they made didn't change the meaning of their writing.

**Table 4.4: Redirection Needed During Week Seven**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	3	2	3	2	3
Rotation 2	3	2	2	1	3
Rotation 3	2	4	2	2	4
Rotation 4	3	3	2	3	3
Rotation 5	6	4	7	6	5
Daily Total	17	15	16	14	18
Notes	Jadon, Ethan, and Evan needed redirection frequently				

### Reflection

#### What went Well

Giving the students writing buddies seemed engage students in sharing their writing and editing their writing. They all had their writing checklist available during their conference with their buddy and I observed students giving good feedback to one another. Having this writing buddy time seemed to hold more students accountable and

motivate them to write because they knew that they were going to have time to share with their buddy at the end of the writing workshop. When students were conversing about each piece of writing, they were asking each other questions that asked for clarification or that asked for the writer to expand upon something. This then encouraged the writer to edit or add to their writing. Having writing buddies gave students an audience to write for.

Having writing buddies also gave me 15 minutes at the end of the writing workshop to meet with small groups of writers. During this time, I was able to give direct instruction to my struggling writers. I was also able to have conversations with my more skilled writers about how they can challenge themselves as writers.

During the writing workshop, I often have students finishing pieces of writing at different times each day. The writing self-checking checklist proved to be a great tool because when students were finished, they often raise their hands for me to come read their writing but now they have a resource to help them do it on their own. When going through each item on the checklist, they are catching their own errors. When I was able to get to a student that had finished a writing piece, I could tell if they had used the checklist or not. Having this resource available for students is holding them more accountable and making them more independent.

### **What was Challenging**

When matching students with a writing buddy, it was challenging because not everyone is going to be happy with the person that you place them with. The boys don't

want to be with the girls, some students don't get along, and some students are off-task when together. Although I tried to be fair and discussed with students how as writers it is important to get feedback from many different people, there were still some disappointed students.

A few students are still not holding themselves accountable and struggling with this transfer of independence. During writing, many students say that they are done and that they have checked their writing using the self-checking checklist but it is obvious that they did not. Many times, I could simply read the first few sentences and see that they did not self-check and I would just hand the paper back to the student and tell them to use the checklist carefully. I feel that many students feel that it is the teacher's job to read and correct their writing. It is challenging for me to get students to understand the process of writing and the idea that no one's writing is complete after one draft.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I would like to come up with a way to give students a rotation of writing buddies. For example, a student would meet with a different buddy every day of the week. These buddies could be matched based on skills, interest, needs, and other criteria. Doing this would allow students to receive many different kinds of feedback and they would see the importance of that. As my students begin to develop longer writing pieces that take more than a day to draft, they could end up sharing the same writing piece five times with five different people. I think that this would be very beneficial for the writer and the students reading the writing.



## Summary for Week Eight

Now that students had really begun to grasp the reader's workshop routine and the workshop routine, I began to notice that many students were starting to show off-task behaviors. As I observed and kept notes throughout the week, I also began to think of ways that would allow my students to be more independent. I spent this week closely observing students, the choices they were making, their behaviors during transitions, what they were doing well, and what needed to be worked on. I spent a lot of time reflecting on my own teaching, on the reader's workshop schedule, and on the independence of my students.

I was finding similar things happening during our writer's workshop where students were losing focus, weren't able to sit and listen to a mini-lesson, and were needing more guidance and modeling. To make my students more engaged, I moved my mini-lessons from the meeting area on the carpet to their seats. Instead of modeling writing to them by writing on chart paper, which is slow and takes time, I moved to the computer. I began to type out my stories instead of writing them by hand and I found that the students were much more engaged. I also found that this was much more true to the writing process for me because I make more mistakes on the computer when I am typing fast rather than slowly writing by hand. Using technology allowed my students to still get the same instruction and see the same writing, but just in a different form and in a form that kept their attention.

Towards the beginning of this week, I had several students who were putting off writing and displaying off-task behaviors because they couldn't think of a topic to write about. I tried engaging in conversations with them to spark ideas and I tried listing off

topics that I thought would appeal to them. Nothing seemed to work. By the middle of the week, I decided to take a day of our writer’s workshop to develop topic lists of our own that could stay in our writer’s notebooks. Students worked with their writing buddies to come up with fiction and non-fiction topics. They enjoyed bouncing ideas off of each other and when we shared our topic ideas out loud, students continued to add to their own list. At the end of the week, I gave each student a copy of writing topics for them to keep in their writing folders. This list of writing topics included topics that they had created along with many more topics appropriate for elementary students.

**Table 4.5: Redirection Needed During Week Eight**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader’s Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	5	3	2	2	3
Rotation 2	3	3	3	4	3
Rotation 3	5	4	3	4	5
Rotation 4	3	4	4	3	4
Rotation 5	4	5	7	5	5
Daily Total	20	19	19	18	20
Notes					

### Reflection

#### What went Well

The change of the meeting area from the carpet to the student’s desks made a huge difference during the mini-lesson. Students’ seats were already arranged based on where I thought they learned best so it was beneficial to have them there during the mini-lesson. The students loved being able to watch me type because of how fast I can type. I

made sure to type quickly but I still wanted to model to them the importance of being thoughtful and careful when putting down my ideas. I was able to model to students how I can stretch out a word that I am not sure how to spell on the computer the same way I do on paper. I was able to have student walk up to the computer to type or to point out something and they didn't have to step over each other like they do on the carpet. Using the computer kept the students focused and made them much more engaged during the mini-lesson. I was able to keep my writing up on the computer during writing workshop for them to look at or reference to if they needed to.

Developing the topic list for writing was also very beneficial and I wish that we had done it sooner. Because we were working on narrative writing, I had students develop topics about small moments in their lives. We then developed topics about things we knew a lot about, such as sports or hobbies. Then I let students write down topics about anything else that they wanted to write about. They really enjoyed this experience because there is no such thing as a bad topic and they were able to learn a lot about each other just by hearing the topics that other students came up with. I think that this topic list will really help my students that say, "I don't know what to write about" because now I will have something to direct them to which will foster their independence.

### **What was Challenging**

Using the computer to type out my stories was beneficial in the fact that it was engaging to students, but I felt as if I was not teaching the physical act of writing. I still want students to know how to edit as they write, how to form paragraphs, how to check

for spelling using their resources. Using a computer doesn't always model those things to students in a way that they will be expected to do.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I would want to have developed these topic lists for writing during the first couple weeks of school. I believe that giving students a choice about what they are writing is so important but some students really struggle with making that choice or they avoid making that choice so they don't have to write. Developing this topic list gave my struggling writers and my reluctant writers a starting point and I saw many of them acting excited about the topics that they were coming up with. Doing this earlier in the school year would have created a more positive writing experience for those students and a lot of time wouldn't have been wasted just thinking of a topic.

I would like to come up with a way to use the computer and Smart Board together so that I could type my ideas quickly, but then slowly go back to edit and revise using the pen tool on the Smart Board. This would model good writing behaviors but still keep my students engaged during mini-lessons.

### **Summary for Week Nine**

Now that students have begun to demonstrate their independence, they have earned a new choice in reader's workshop. Students were shown how to use [Spellingcity.com](http://Spellingcity.com), which is a website that offers games and activities using their word study words for the week. Since computers are located outside of the classroom, this center requires a lot of student independence and trust. Expectations will be set for this

center and the use of spellingcity.com will be modeled and practiced during computer lab this week.

In writer’s workshop, I will be establishing a system for writing conferences with students. As students begin to take on more independence, I can now step away and work with students one on one or in a small group. Before starting conferences, I will engage students in a discussion to review the expectations of the writer’s workshop and we will create an I-chart to review the role of the teacher and the roles of the students during this conferencing time.

**Table 4.6: Redirection Needed During Week Nine**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader’s Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	4	3	2	2	3
Rotation 2	3	2	3	2	3
Rotation 3	4	4	2	4	2
Rotation 4	3	4	4	3	3
Rotation 5	6	4	4	4	5
Daily Total	20	17	15	15	16
Notes	Most redirection was needed during transitions and at the SpellingCity center				

### Reflection

#### What went Well

Students were really excited about the new center that allowed them to use the computer. Many students had used this website before with previous teachers. Going to the computer lab to model and practice the use of this center was great because every student got the chance to use the computer and follow along with me. The website was

also easy for me to use and for me to prep for each week. Many students wanted to use this center during reader's workshop this week.

### **What was Challenging**

Although I was able to introduce students to spellingcity.com and they were all able to practice using it in the computer lab, students were off-task while on the computers. Due to the fact that our class set of computers is located in the hallway outside of the classroom, it is very hard for me to manage. Also, there are different expectations at the hallway set of computers as opposed to the computer lab set of computers. I was unable to demonstrate these expectations in a whole group due to the fact that the computers were not easy to access.

Many students also struggled with logging in to their computer and finding the website, even though this information was explained, modeled, and practiced by each student. This problem that I did not foresee caused many interruptions and needed intervention on my behalf.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I would have liked to been able to take small groups out to the hallway computers to model to them behaviors and expectations. The I-chart we created for the Spelling City center could have also been hung in the hallway near the computers instead of in the classroom.

To help students when they get stuck, I would have liked to create a reference sheet that stayed at the Spelling City center. This reference sheet could have information

about logging in to the computer and finding the correct website. I also could have assigned students from each group to become technology helpers. These students could be the ones that other students go to for help instead of the teacher.

### **Summary for Week Ten**

After taking the time to reflect on the reader's workshop and the ways in which my students were and were not demonstrating attributes of independence, I decided to make changes during this week. From my observations and notes, I noticed that students were becoming less independent towards the end of each center as well as during the last center. Before the start of this week, I changed the reader's workshop schedule so that it contained four centers instead of five. Each center was twenty minutes long with one minute for transition in between each center. On Monday, I explained the change to the schedule to the students and the reason for the change. I repeated expectations and students agreed that this would help them to be more independent.

I also had a discussion with students about raising the expectations of reader's workshop, now that they were nearing the middle of the school year. The students and I came to an agreement regarding what the consequences should be if they are displaying off-task behaviors during reader's workshop centers. We decided that if students were wasting time by displaying off-task behaviors or by not working on their center activity, then they would have to do that center activity during their recess time at the end of each day. Since I was already keeping notes and observations on students, I told students that I would keep track of the students that were doing this. The students agreed that this was a fair consequence. I am hoping that this change in workshop management will get the few

students who are off-task more than others to be more accountable and responsible for the choices that they are making.

**Table 4.7: Redirection Needed During Week Ten**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	3	2	3	2	3
Rotation 2	2	3	3	4	4
Rotation 3	4	4	3	3	3
Rotation 4	3	2	4	2	2
Rotation 5					
Daily Total	12	11	13	11	12
Notes					

### Reflection

#### What went Well

With one less rotation during reader's workshop, I think everyone felt a little less crunched for time. Now that I had five additional minutes with each guided reading group, I felt that I was able to be more focused and give better instruction. Having longer centers also meant that students would be spending more time on each activity and I felt that the quality of their work was better because of it. Overall, reader's workshop just felt more meaningful and purposeful and not as rushed.

According to my data, the amount of redirection that was needed during the final center was less. Typically, my students were the most off-task during the last center because they knew it was getting closer recess and snack time. This week, I saw a huge shift in my students and they seemed much more focused and they were holding each



other accountable. I heard several students remind each other that if they didn't finish their work then they would have to do it at the end of the day. I think that the new consequences and the change in the reader's workshop schedule made a huge difference on the independence of my students.

### **What was Challenging**

It is hard to find ways to truly hold students accountable when you don't have time during the day to look at every worksheet they complete and you can't hover over each of them to ensure they are doing their best work. As a class, we developed consequences for students that choose to be off-task and have unfinished work. However, this becomes challenging when some students are being pulled out for services or some students are coming in to reader's workshop late because they are at the nurse. Also, one student's best work can look much different from another students. When creating expectations and criteria for accountability, it is challenging to make it fair for all students.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I wish that I had made these changes much earlier in the school year for reader's workshops. Having had experience implementing a reader's workshop or being able to observe another teacher's reader's workshop would have made me aware of the problems that could arise. Now that I see the positive affect that these changes have had on my reader's workshop, I will be able to apply this knowledge next year.

## Summary for Week Eleven

This week I met with the ELA specialist in my school to discuss the implementation of the reader's workshop and writer's workshop. After expressing my desire for more student engagement, motivation, and independence during the literacy block, the ELA specialist suggested developing learning targets. These learning targets are objectives that are developed to give students a goal or a focus for each content area. They are posted in the room, reviewed at the beginning of the week, and reflected on throughout the week and at the end of the week. The ELA specialist told me that by posting these objectives and making a point to reflect on them, I would be holding students more accountable and students would be able to define the purpose for the tasks that they were completing during the literacy block.

Before the start of the week, I thought about the instruction for the week and developed objectives for the students in each content area. I phrased the objectives as "we can" or "we understand" statements. For the literacy block this week, I had a different objective for the reader's workshop and the writer's workshop. For the reader's workshop, our objective was: *We can make independent choices during reader's workshop centers quickly and while thinking of our individual literacy goals.* For writer's workshop, our objective was: *We understand the effect that descriptive words have on our writing and will use our resources to make our writing more descriptive.*

We reviewed these objectives each day before the start of the literacy block and students discussed the ways that they could meet these objectives. I am working on developing a way for us to reflect on our own success with these objectives. I am also thinking of ways that I can get more student input when developing these objectives.

**Table 4.8: Redirection Needed During Week Eleven**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	2	2	1	2	3
Rotation 2	2	3	2	2	2
Rotation 3	3	2	3	4	3
Rotation 4	3	2	2	3	2
Rotation 5					
Daily Total	10	9	8	11	10
Notes	Most redirection was given for Spelling City center				

### **Reflection**

#### **What went Well**

Meeting with the ELA specialist in my school gave me the opportunity to share successes and problems that I was facing during the literacy block. The ELA specialist was able to give me a lot of feedback, suggestions, and she assured me that these problems were normal for every teacher, no matter how experienced. This left me feeling proud of the work that was done so far this year. The relationship that I have developed with the ELA specialist has been very beneficial to myself and to the students.

Designing learning objectives was a positive experience for the students and myself. When thinking about each content area and the focus for the week, I began to think about the goals that I had set for these students. The goals that I had set for the students were all attainable goals and they were positively phrased as “we can” statements. Doing this really allows students to understand the purpose for each task and this purpose if what motivates them to complete their task to the best of their ability. As

a teacher, I am able to focus my instruction on the objective of the week and it allows me informally check to ensure that students are meeting the objectives.

### **What was Challenging**

Designing the objectives was not an easy task because it is difficult to narrow down your learning for the week into one sentence. I used the CCLS to help me do this because I felt that by doing that, I would be able to ensure that I was meeting the state standards as well as my districts standards. It is also difficult for students to really become involved in this process of designing objectives. It took a lot of time to share the objectives and to give examples of ways they can achieve each objective, however it was time well spent.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I would have liked to develop objectives for each week ahead of time so that I could make sure they line up with the district standards and the CCLS. I feel that now that I have these objectives in place, I am unsure of what standards have already been met in previous weeks and what has yet to be done. Developing these objectives ahead of time would have allowed me to focus my instruction in a clear manner from week to week. The mini-lessons for the week could also work towards each objective if I had planned it ahead of time.

## Summary for Week Twelve

Students are continuing to show more independence throughout the literacy block so I decided to reward them with what they have been begging for ... buddy centers! This week I added two centers that allow students to work independently or with a buddy. The first center that I added is *Read with Someone*, which allows students to coach each other through a book and enjoy a book together. The second center I added is *Roll, Say, Keep*, which is a game that students roll a dice, choose a sight word card, and practice saying the sight word on the card. We took time in the beginning of the week to model and practice the appropriate behaviors when working with a buddy during the literacy block. Then students got the chance to practice each center with a buddy while I observed them and praised or redirected their behaviors.

Students are continuing to demonstrate independence during the writing block and we have been able to write consistently for 35 minutes a day. I have been flexible in where I have students sit for mini-lessons depending on the overall focus of the group and what we will be learning. I feel that this small change in routine keeps them engaged and on their toes. Students have independently been using their writing tools and resources. On Friday, I allowed students to choose their own writing buddy for the writing block to give them a little more choice and as a reward for their hard work during the week.

**Table 4.9: Redirection Needed During Week Twelve**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	2	2	2	1	2
Rotation 2	2	2	3	2	2
Rotation 3	2	3	3	2	3
Rotation 4	3	2	3	3	3
Rotation 5					
Daily Total	9	9	11	8	10
Notes	Most redirection was given during the buddy centers				

### **Reflection**

#### **What went Well**

Students were very excited about being able to work with a buddy during centers and this is something that they have been asking for since the first day of school. It seems as if as soon as I give them any assignment their first question is, "Can I do it with a friend?" The students did an awesome job practicing the two new centers. Although a little noisy, the students were on task and engaged during the buddy centers and it seems to be everyone's favorite choice during center time.

I was pleased with the independence that I have been observing during center time. I have been able to successfully hold writing conferences with students with minimal interruptions. Students needed fewer directions to use resources and they really seem to understand the purpose of each resource.

### **What was Challenging**

The student's excitement about buddy centers was apparent because the noise level seemed to climb this week during reader's workshops. Even though noise expectations were discussed at the beginning of the week, the students still need more practice with using a whisper voice when working with a buddy. The noise level was distracting to my guided reading group and to other students that were working independently during reader's workshop.

### **What I Would do Differently**

I think that I should have spent more time modeling buddy centers to the students. Perhaps this first week should have been a simple practice week where I was available to reinforce their positive behaviors and correct off-task behaviors. Instead I was behind the guided reading table instructing and unable to be attentive to those that needed it.

I have seen classrooms that use a class hand symbol for when the noise level gets too high. When the noise is too high and student isn't able to focus, they simple hold up the class symbol and then other students begin to notice and the noise is slowly brought back down without anyone yelling "Shh!" or "be quiet". This may be something that I will try in the future.

### **Summary for Week Thirteen**

Students needed a few more reminders this week as they began to engage in buddy centers but most of them remained independent and on task. I took time this week to observe students in their new center activities and to reinforce the good behaviors that I was seeing. Mid-week I had to close down the *Spelling City* center where students were

in the hallway on the computers because they were having a hard time meeting the established expectations for that center. This resulted in a whole group discussion spent reviewing expectations and discussing the reasons behind my decision to close down the center. I was impressed that students agreed with my decision and most of them were determined to prove to me that they could be independent so that I could reopen the center for use.

In writing this week, I continued to confer with students and work with them individually or in small groups. We had a whole group discussion towards the beginning of the week to discuss what students should do if a teacher is conferring but you need help. We collaborated to discuss and chart different ideas so that students were not wasting any of their writing time waiting for the teacher. I have found that as students wait for the teacher, they begin to chat with others and get themselves and others off task. By developing this chart of ideas, titled *What to Do While you Wait*, students are held more accountable for their actions and I can refer them to this chart if they are waiting for the teacher during conference time.

**Table 4.10: Redirection Needed During Week Thirteen**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	3	3	2	1	1
Rotation 2	2	3	1	2	1
Rotation 3	2	4	2	2	3
Rotation 4	3	4	3	3	2
Rotation 5					
Daily Total	10	14	8	8	7
Notes	Spelling City center was closed on Wednesday				



## Reflection

### What went Well

I was pleased with the way that student's responded when I closed the Spelling City center on Wednesday. Usually, I have a few students that the class tends to blame for off-task behavior but this time the students really took responsibility as a class. There was no finger pointing or calling out names. The students agreed that they needed to earn back their choices and many of them even seemed excited for this challenge. I am hoping that this consequence will serve as a reminder as to what could happen if students are not on task.

Developing the *What to do While you Wait* chart was a good time to reflect on the independence that we have developed over the course of the school year. Students were easily able to come up with a list of activities that they could do independently while they wait for the teacher. Generally if I had students raising their hands and shouting my name for me to come help them, I would just ask them, "What can you do while you wait?" Now I have a list of activities to direct them to and they are activities that are making them better readers and writers while keeping them on-task and not distracting to others.

### What was Challenging

My decision to close the Spelling City center was challenging for me because I knew that not every student was being off-task at that center and I didn't want to punish every student. However, after all of the conversations that our class has had about being accountable and working as a team, I felt that it was the best decision at the time. Because students have different levels of independence and responsibility, it becomes

difficult to hold them all to the same level of accountability. I often ask myself, “am I being fair?” I have to remind myself of the high expectations that we set as a class before I can answer that question.

### **What I Would do Differently**

To be fairer to students, I think that I should have developed a plan for consequences earlier in the school year so that they need what to expect if expectations we not met. I think it important to know that choices are a privilege and they are something that they earn and they are something that can be taken away. In order to earn these privileges, students need to demonstrate accountability, responsibility, and trust with each other and the teacher. I would like to build that aspect into my behavior management plan and the implementation of the reader’s workshop.

### **Summary for Week Fourteen**

In reader’s workshop, students were rewarded for their hard work throughout this week. I added a new center, titled *Choice*, where students could choose any of the reader’s workshop activities that they wanted. I decided to give each group one day with a *Choice* center throughout the week. Students came up with the idea that if they did a good job throughout the week during reader’s workshop then they could earn another *Choice* center on Friday. This *Choice* center gives each student a little more freedom and reward for their hard work, but it is also being used to motivate each student to do their best work. The students are very excited about this new center.

In writer’s workshop this week, we were working on informational writing pieces based on research we were doing in the library. Students were writing informational pieces about an Arctic animal of their choice. At the beginning of the week, I noticed students were having trouble spelling vocabulary related to their research on the Arctic and these words were not listed in any of their writing resources. I made the decision to stop their writing to come together for a whole group discussion. The students and I worked together to create *Arctic Vocabulary* poster where we could share words that we came across and were difficult to spell. The students were able to list off dozens of words while sitting together on the carpet. Then as students worked throughout the week on their informational writing pieces, they were asking me to add more and more words to the poster. This became a great reference for this particular writing piece and it is something the students mentioned doing for all of our content areas.

**Table 4.11: Redirection Needed During Week Fourteen**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader’s Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	1	2	2	1	2
Rotation 2	2	1	1	3	3
Rotation 3	2	1	3	2	2
Rotation 4	1	2	2	1	2
Rotation 5					
Daily Total	6	6	8	7	9
Notes	Students had more choice on Friday				

## Reflection

### What went Well

I think that my students have been able to sustain engagement during reader's workshop because of the change in centers and the different choices that they had. This new *Choice* center is something that they are willing to work for and I think they are seeing that their positive behaviors and work habits do earn rewards.

The vocabulary poster that we created in writer's workshop acted as a temporary word wall for students to reference to. Because the students were all writing about similar topics, they were all able to add to and use this vocabulary poster to improve their own writing. I saw many students take the time to write some of the words from the vocabulary poster into their own *QuickWord* (Scholastic, 2009).

### What was Challenging

Within minutes, the vocabulary poster was nearly full of words that related to the Arctic. I had a hard time making sure that students knew how to articulate each word and if they understood what each word meant. Because the words were just put onto the poster as students came up with them, it was difficult to go back and find particular words because they weren't sorted in any way.

### What I Would do Differently

I think that having a whiteboard space available in the room could be used as a vocabulary resource for students. Complicated vocabulary is used in many different content areas and not always throughout the entire course of the year, so it would be

beneficial to have a space where we could put these content area words for when we need them. Students could even add words themselves as they come across common words for each content area. It would be important to take the time to discuss the meaning of each word on the vocabulary poster as well and I wish I had made more time for that.

### **Summary for Week Fifteen**

This was the final week of my observations of my students during the literacy block. I took the time during this week to spend a lot of time watching specific students to see the resources they were using and how they were demonstrating their independence. I was able to closely observe those students that were struggling with their independence and began to think about ways in which I could continue to foster their independence in new ways.

I created a new center during the last week to replace their *Work on Writing* center on Friday's. This new center is called *Friday Reflection* and it is a worksheet where students reflect on the learning targets of the week and give evidence that they met each learning target. It also provides students a chance to give feedback to the teacher, raise concerns, and reflect on their high points of the week as well as their areas for improvement.

**Table 4.12: Redirection Needed During Week Fifteen**

Number of Times Redirection was Needed during Independent Reader's Workshop					
Day / Center Rotation	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Rotation 1	1	1	2	1	0
Rotation 2	1	2	1	0	1
Rotation 3	2	1	1	2	2
Rotation 4	2	1	3	1	2
Rotation 5					
Daily Total	6	5	7	4	5
Notes					

### **Reflection**

#### **What went Well**

My students demonstrated their independence this week and very little redirection was needed. I saw improvements in noise level during buddy centers and I observed many students giving each other friendly reminders to keep their voices down or stay on task.

The results I got from the *Friday Reflection* were positive and I was able to see students take ownership over their own strengths and weaknesses. When filling out the teacher feedback section, many students stated how much they enjoyed centers or how they wanted to have more choice time on Friday's. It became apparent to me that the students understood the idea that we make the reader's workshop successful when we work together as a team and when we hold each other and ourselves responsible. I think that the students understood the purpose of tasks, the expectations, their role, and the teacher's role during reader's workshop and writer's workshop.

### **What was Challenging**

Getting students to think reflectively is challenging because they haven't had a lot of practice thinking about their own learning. I model my own reflectiveness throughout the day and we often reflect at the end of our workshops as a whole class but the *Friday Reflection* was the first time I had them independently reflect on themselves and put it into writing. This was challenging for some students and the responses that I received varied greatly.

### **What I Would do Differently**

In order to get students to begin thinking reflectively, I would like to offer more opportunities to offer reflective activities. Perhaps at the end of each day we can spend time reflecting individually on our day as a whole. Then eventually, students can start to think about their own skills, strengths, and weaknesses and they will be able to reflect on that. I may need to edit the *Friday Reflection* so that all students are able to partake in this reflective process.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations**

As a teacher researcher, I designed this study to explore the ways that I could foster attributes of independence in my students, such as engagement and intrinsic motivation, during the literacy block. I completed a fifteen week study to seek answers to the question: How can I create opportunities for my third grade students to develop attributes of independence during literacy block activities?

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions I have made based on my research and the data collected throughout the study. I also describe the ways in which students could benefit from the findings from this study and how I envision my own teaching might be affected as a result of what I have learned through this research. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for future research.

### **Conclusions**

How can I create opportunities for my third grade students to develop attributes of independence during literacy block activities?

### **Engage Students Through Active Learning**

When designing the reader's workshop centers, it was important that my students were engaged in a variety of activities so that they could sustain independence over an extended period of time. It was important that my students were engaged because engaged students have determination and believe in their capability to succeed and reach their goals (Tompkins, 2000). This was something that I wanted for all my students. I began thinking about when my students were most engaged throughout the day, whether



it was during lunch, recess, or specials, and used that information to drive my planning of the centers.

It was easy to recognize that my students were engaged when they were moving. On the playground, in the gymnasium, in the computer lab and playing mum ball in the classroom usually resulted in my students being on-task, excited, and focused. I used this information to design centers that required students to move in some way, besides putting a pencil to a piece of paper. For example, students were using hands-on materials such as Wikki Stix and stamps, to practice spelling their spelling words. Some students rolled dice while playing a game with a buddy on the carpet. Students worked in any area that was comfortable to them and conducive to their learning. This meant that some students laid on their stomachs on the floor while others stood at their desk. I also encouraged movement during writing, as students were freely able to go and get resources, work with their writing buddy, and write in a way that worked best for them. I believe allowing this little bit of movement during center activities kept students more focused and engaged in their activity.

Another time when I observed how engaged my students were was in the computer lab. Whether they are typing, researching, playing games, or reading something on the screen, while they are in the computer lab was when my students were the most quiet, independent and focused. I knew that I had to incorporate technology into the reader's workshop centers and I chose to do this by creating the Spelling City center. By going to the Spelling City website, students were able to practice typing their words and play games involving their words. This ended up being the students' favorite center and when their time at this center came to an end each day, I would often hear them say "Aw man"

or “I don’t want to switch yet!” Incorporating technology in this way engaged students actively in their learning while also keeping their minds focused and on task. I recognize throughout the week nine study that I only needed to redirect my students due to their noise level, not for off-task behaviors. Students got to work right away and were engaged in the center the entire time.

### **Motivate Students to Participate in Learning by Using their Interests**

I realized that intrinsic motivation was a key component to fostering independence in my students. I recognize that I have to differentiate the way that I motivate students because they are not all are motivated by the same things or in the same ways. One way I intrinsically motivated students was by finding out what they were interested in. I did this by having conversations with them, reading their writing, and being observant of what they chose to do for fun.

The center activities that I created reflected my knowledge of their interests. I found that many of the female students love coloring, drawing and being creative. I used that information when creating the stamping and rainbow words activities, where the girls stamped each word or wrote each word in different colors. I found that many of my male students enjoyed building and working at the computer. I used that information when creating the building words activity in which students used Wikki Stix, and the Spelling City activity in which students played word games on the computer. Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 56) claim that “through acting on ones inherent interests that one grows in knowledge and skills,” which I kept in mind when planning each activity. Having several

activities for each center gave each student the opportunity to make a choice that interested him or her and this increased the level of intrinsic motivation.

Another way that I appealed to my students' interests was through the Work on Writing center. One choice the students could select in this center was to use picture prompts to generate ideas for writing and then use those ideas to write a story. I included pictures of animals, athletes, monster trucks, sports cars, and other interesting photos as a way to spark ideas in all of my students. When at this center, students would choose a picture from the bin that interested them. They would then use the picture to create a story. I encouraged them to think creatively and use the pictures to either spark ideas or to take on the role of the person, animal, or object in the picture. By doing this, I believe the students knew I valued their interests, which then motivated them to participate in these learning opportunities. I recognized that the students were motivated to write and work independently at this center because they were engaged in what they were doing.

In order to maintain intrinsic motivation I made sure to take time to recognize and celebrate the students' achievements and work. I often provided reinforcement, especially during the first few weeks, to individual students as I saw them demonstrating positive behaviors and work habits. This reinforcement often sounded like "I like the way Jadon is getting his materials quickly," or "I love the way that Ava is getting started at her center right away." Other times, I would simply just say "Good job, Justin!" or "Great choice, Max." This verbal recognition and reinforcement was something that made them smile and they seemed motivated to get more positive remarks so they would often continue to demonstrate those same positive behaviors and work habits.

Another way I tried to help students develop intrinsic motivation was by taking time at the end of reader's or writer's workshop to reflect on how the workshop went with the students. The students and I would talk about what could be improved upon, but we spent more time talking about what we did well. These conversations seemed to provide students with a boost of confidence and motivate them to invest in their work the following day.

As I described during week five of my study, the students and I reflected on our use of the class meeting area. They provided me with feedback while I listened. We talked about how our meeting area worked well and then we discussed how it could be improved. This time provided us with a chance to reiterate expectations and end our day on a positive note; I found myself reinforcing positive behaviors and work habits as a way to motivate students to engage the following day.

I also emphasized the students' learning strengths to help them develop and stay intrinsically motivated. I did this by creating centers that worked for multiple learning styles. I included a variety of choices at each center that enabled the students to work independently, collaborate, create, draw, listen, and write. When students were at the reading center, they could read with a buddy, read by themselves, or listen to reading using the CD player. During writing workshop, I made sure to give mini-lessons verbally and using some type of visual aid to support the students' process. We created posters and references and hung them around our room so that visual learners could access the information easily. Perry and VandeKamp (2001) believe this is a feature of student-regulated environments where students are demonstrating independence. I believe that keeping the students' strengths in mind when I was developing the reader's workshop

and writer's workshop enabled them to feel valued, and it motivated them to access learning in their own way.

### **Give Students Choices in Their Learning**

To foster independent learning, I believe that students need to be making the choices. I believe that if students are making a particular choice it is because they want to do it and they know how to do it on their own. When I was creating the reader's workshop centers, I believed it was important to have several activities at each center so students could have the freedom to choose. By doing this, students were able to go to the same center several times throughout the week, but never repeat an activity. Sometimes I had students who enjoyed completing a particular activity, so they chose to do it several times throughout the week. I believe that student choice is empowering to students and it puts them in charge of their learning. It enables me to hold the students accountable because I can remind them that they made that choice, not me. I believe that when I trust the students to make their own choice, the students understand that it is a privilege and a reward for their independent behavior. If students were not on-task or not making good choices, I would often ask them, "Do you need me to make a choice for you?" and this would trigger them to quickly get on-task. I was able to see student choice positively affect my students because they took more responsibility over their learning and delivered quality work. I observed them being engaged, accountable, and they worked hard to complete their center activity before the center was over. During reader's workshop, if students were not making good choices, then their choices were taken away until they could be independent and trusted. By treating choice as a privilege, I was able

to extrinsically motivate students as well, which some of my students who weren't easily intrinsically motivated needed.

### **Provide Resources to Scaffold Students' Learning**

A major part of fostering independence is the gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student (Fisher & Frey, 2007). As the year began, I was very much involved in student learning and giving explicit instruction. As the year progressed, I replaced my instruction with student practice and scaffolds. I began to slowly remove some of the guidance and students began to “gradually build behaviors that [could] be sustained over time” (Boushey & Mosher, 2006, p. 19). Eventually, after modeling and practicing, the students were able to complete the task without any of my guidance, taking on full independence.

I followed this approach when introducing reader's workshop. For example, when introducing a new center, I explicitly taught students the expectations for that center. Then, I modeled the center activity for the students so they were able to see the expectations in action. We reviewed what the expectations looked like and sounded like. Then students had the opportunity to practice the center while I walked around and provided reinforcement and remodeling. After the students participated in guided practice, they did the center activity all on their own with very little guidance from me. I put scaffolds into place, such as an anchor chart for students to refer to or a reference sheet with directions for the center. Finally, I had students complete the center independently.

We followed this process in writer's workshop as well. The mini-lesson was a time for students to have explicit teaching from me on a targeted skill or strategy. I modeled the skill or strategy. My students then practiced this skill or strategy with my guidance. I gradually took my guidance away and encouraged the students to use their writing resources for help. Eventually, they were able to complete this targeted skill or strategy independently.

I recognized that the gradual release of responsibility coupled with the student resources I provided encouraged students to slowly take on independence. The amount of guidance I provided varied depending on each student's needs and on the particular skill or strategy I was teaching. I differentiated these scaffolds so that students were working at an instructional level until they were able to independently complete the skill.

Independence is something that can be taught, modeled, and practiced (Ford & Opitz, 2002). I think that by gradually releasing my students' ownership of the activity and providing them with appropriate scaffolds, enabled them to gain independence gradually and successfully.

### **Develop and Maintain High Expectations for Students**

In my classroom, I established high expectations and held my students accountable during both the reader's workshop and the writer's workshop. The students and I created expectations regarding voice level, student roles, student behaviors, teacher roles, and learning objectives. I believe that by doing this, they were able to see what I expect of them and also what I think that they can achieve. Students understood that I had high expectations for them individually and as a whole class. When introducing reader's

workshop center activities through modeling and practice, the expectations were demonstrated and reiterated. For example, students knew the expectations for writer's workshop because we created a chart that listed the student's jobs and the teacher's jobs. We then discussed expectations of behaviors and voice level and put that information on the chart. The students then practiced these expectations. I corrected any behaviors or habits that were not meeting expectations. When, for example, Jadon chose to write underneath another student's chair, I intervened by going over to him, reiterating expectations regarding his role and behavior for the workshop, and modeling for him the correct way to choose a writing spot. I reinforced any behaviors and habits that were meeting. For example, when Ava was using her *QuickWord* (Curriculum Associates, 2013) to help her spell a word independently, I reinforced her on-task behavior by saying to the class, "I love how Ava is using her *QuickWord* to help her spell a word!" I posted the charts that explained expectations of students in the room and we reflected on these expectations several times throughout each week. There was a time when I raised my expectations during reader's workshop during week ten of my study because I felt that my students could be even more successful and even more independent. I felt that students came to an understanding of what was expected and they began to hold each other to high expectations as well.

As I mentioned earlier, when developing expectations it is important that I model and student's practice expected behaviors and work habits. The students should be able to observe the expected behaviors and work habits as they watch me model them. I believe that it can sometimes be beneficial to model what is not expected as well, so that students are aware of the types of behaviors that need to be corrected. Giving students time to then



practice these expectations is crucial for students to be independent (Boushey & Moser 2006). This practice allows me to step in and correct or reinforce the behaviors and work habits so that students know what is expected of them at an independent level. By having students practice expectations repeatedly, student accountability is established because students have successfully met the expectation and I expect them to do it again independently.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

The results of this study had positive implications for many individuals, including the students in my classroom. My students became more engaged, motivated, accountable, and resourceful, which resulted in increased student independence. In addition, my students were able to possess many attributes of independence such as, engagement, motivation, and self-regulation, which had a positive effect on their learning and work habits.

### **Students are More Engaged in Learning**

I noticed a shift in my students' attitudes about learning once we began our reader's workshop centers. I agreed with Boushey and Mosher (2006) when they said that they believed that choice is "highly motivational" and "puts students in charge of their learning" (p. 20). Throughout the study, I noticed that when I gave students choices and created center activities fashioned around their interests increased each student's engagement in learning. Students were given a choice in which activity they were going to complete each day for each center that they went to. I designed their center choices with their interests in mind and I added new choices every couple weeks to keep students

excited and interested. Prior to the start of my study, I noticed that my students seemed disengaged and demonstrated little interest in literacy activities. They were used to being given a series of worksheets that they completed either by themselves or with Mrs. Hill. When I introduced the reader's workshop to them, they had no idea what "centers" were. When I told them that they would be traveling to five different centers throughout the course of the workshop they responded asking, "We can move around the room?" When I introduced the first center, the reading center, I explained to the students that they could either read to themselves or listen to a book using the listening center. I could see by their expressions of "Yes!" and "Awesome!" that they were so excited to use technology and to be able to move about the room. When the students showed that they were independent by remaining on task during these center activities, I added the choice of reading to someone activity where they read with a buddy. When I explained that they now had the choice to read with a buddy for this center, students started clapping and looking around at each other with raised eyebrows and smiles on their faces. Their reactions showed me that they were excited.

During the writer's workshop, I saw a shift in my students' attitudes and engagement as well. Prior to my study, I had several students who never once picked up a pencil and put it to the paper during the workshop time. Many students told me they "hate writing," they "are bad at writing," or they "have nothing to write about." The students were up and out of their seats, losing focus, and not producing acceptable work.

As I began implementing the writer's workshop, I attempted to get students excited about writing by showing them that I was a writer, too. I shared my ideas and stories with them during the mini-lesson. I used technology and creative activities to

engage students in the mini-lesson. I wrote while they were writing. I provided students with writing buddies so that they could have opportunities to share their writing and have an audience for which to write. I slowly began to see my students open up to me during week eight of my study and I realized that many of them really didn't know what to write about. By defining their interests, we were able to develop topic lists. I had a student who played hockey and I asked for him to teach me all about hockey with his writing. I had a student who loved her dog so I encouraged her to write a fictional story about her dog. Every topic that the students brought to me I was able to encourage them to find some way to write about it. When my students saw me act excited and interested in their topic, I saw their attitudes change for the better.

### **Students Hold Themselves Accountable**

Throughout this study, I recognized how my students held themselves and each other accountable. As the students became more intrinsically motivated, they no longer depended on me to correct or reinforce them. During reader's workshop, students were engaged in their learning throughout the length of each center, and they were completing quality work, even though I didn't always collect and grade it. I knew it was quality work because compared to the work at the beginning of the year their work was now neater, contained complete sentences, contained details, and demonstrated more thought. I observed how the amount of redirection that I had to give my students decreased exponentially over the course of my study. Part of this was because many of my students started redirecting others and working hard to hold each other accountable. I believe that they understood that having choices was a privilege and because of this, they worked

hard to keep the privilege that they had earned. This had a positive affect on their accountability.

During week thirteen of the study, students were not being accountable and independent. Many students were not remaining on task, completing their work, or producing quality work, particularly while at the Spelling City center. To counteract this, I decided to remove this center from reader's workshop. When reflecting on our reader's workshop one day, I explained my discontent with my students work habits and behavior while at the Spelling City center. I explained to them that I had observed students talking loudly, touching each other's computers, and not being on task. I then asked the students if they had observed anything similar or different. We had a discussion about the center expectations and I told students that because of this, I chose to take the Spelling City center choice away until I saw a change in their behaviors and work habits. The removal of one center choice resulted in a simultaneous change in my students. Students worked hard and encouraged each other to make appropriate choices so that they didn't lose any more privileges during reader's workshop.

### **Students Use Resources to Assist their Learning**

As I took my guidance away in an effort to foster student independence, students were able to find ways to assist themselves in their learning processes. There were times when I was working with a guided reading group or in a writing conference and unavailable to all the students. With my redirection and reinforcement, my students learned to independently use the resources available to them. Prior to starting my study, it would not be uncommon for a student to raise his or her hand as soon a problem or

question occurred. I often heard them say, “Ms. Russell ...” or “I need help!” This was extremely time consuming because instead of giving instruction, I was running back and forth among students.

If a visitor walked into our classroom a couple of weeks after I began the study, he or she would have seen something much different. For reader’s workshop, each center had its own I-chart poster created by the students and myself. The poster listed the students’ role, my role, and the expectations for that center. Students used these I-charts when they needed reminders of what they should be doing or how they should be acting. If a student was being noisy or was being off task, I would simply point him or her in the direction of the I-chart and he or she could then read to realize what the expected behavior or work habit was. Each center activity had its own reference sheet with an explanation of how to complete each center activity and the materials needed for each center activity. The students’ use of the information on the I-charts enabled them to log in the computer, find the Spelling City website, or learn what they had to do at a certain center activity. In the beginning of the year, my students needed a lot of redirection to use these resources. After a few weeks, instead of pointing them to the poster they needed to reference, I would simply respond to their questions with a question, “Where can you go to find that out?” As each week passed, I witnessed how the students began to use reader’s workshop resources on their own.

In writer’s workshop, I gave the students many resources and we often called them our “writing tools.” Prior to beginning my study, I would get the students started writing and immediately find myself being called in a dozen different directions. Students

would ask me how to spell words, tell me they had nothing to write about, or avoid writing in any way that they could.

One resource that I introduced to the students was *QuickWord* (Curriculum Associates, 2013), which was a booklet containing words commonly used by third graders that students could use to help them to spell words. However, some words were not in the *QuickWord* so we developed the *What to do if I Can't Spell a Word* poster. My goal was to have the students use a series of strategies on their own before asking me. The information on the poster encouraged students to do that. Another resource that students used was a *Banish Boring Words* (Shelton, 2009) packet that included hundreds of descriptive words that they could use in their writing to make it more detailed and vivid.

As a class, we compiled a list of topics students might write about and I gave the students a copy of the list so that they would always have ideas for their writing. When used by the students, all of these resources encouraged students to be working at an independent level I was slowly able to release students with the use of these scaffolds (Fisher & Frey, 2007). This not only taught my students how to be resourceful problem solvers, but it also yielded uninterrupted time for me to hold writing conferences and give instruction as it was needed.

### **Students Self-Regulate their Learning**

Toward the end of my fifteen-week study, I noticed how my students no longer seemed to rely on me to do what they were capable of doing on their own. I encouraged the students to be “self-reinforcing,” which Johnston (1984) believes produces “greater

learner autonomy” (p. 343). Students no longer relied on my positive remarks to do their best work but instead, it seemed to now be what was expected and it was instilled in them. I believe that they seemed to understand that this what was expected of them. During week seven of my study, students were given a writing checklist to encourage this self-regulating behavior. The checklist was for students to use after they were done with a writing piece. My students were self-regulating their work using writing checklists instead of raising their hand and waiting for me to through their writing and make corrections.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

Conducting this self-study gave me the opportunity to look closely at my literacy instruction and the opportunities I provide for students to gain independence. The process of reflection has given me insight into how my own teaching has changed and how I want it to continue to change. I recognize that I have benefited from the self-study research process and anticipate that the findings will inform my future work and enable me to continue to grow as a teacher. .

### **Be Flexible, Reflective, and Modify Instruction in Response to Students’ Needs**

As a young, teacher with limited experiences, I know that I have a lot to learn. Having the opportunity to implement a reader’s and writer’s workshop all on my own was challenging. I experienced many successes, but even more failures. I learned the importance of trying new things, even if I am not sure they will work. By being flexible, I was able to try new centers and provide resources to my students. I learned that change is

good. I changed the center activities, I changed the length of the centers, and I changed the reader's workshop schedule to better fit the needs of my students. I then used feedback from the students and reflected on the affects that my teaching had on my students. I reflected on what I was observing, and I reflected on conversations that I had with colleagues. I used this information to then make modifications to my instruction. When I saw that my students were really struggling with the fifth center rotation and needed redirection, I chose to modify the schedule and omit the fifth center.

I discovered that teaching requires constant adjusting and it's not just because I am a teacher with limited experience. Each school year brings an opportunity to work with a new group of students with different needs, interests, and strengths. This will require me to be flexible, reflective, and continuously modifying instruction year after year. I think that I am a more effective teacher when I look closely at my student, and it is a practice that I will continue to engage in throughout my teaching career. .

### **Continue Professional Development**

There were several times throughout the course of my study when I felt like I wasn't really prepared for the teaching that I was doing. During week one of my study, I felt unprepared to take on the role of the classroom teacher because I was only able to observe two days of instruction. Not only am I a teacher with limited experience, but also the expectations of the education system have changed drastically over the last three years with the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and the ways in which teachers are being assessed. I know that in order for me to be effective, I need to



be conscious of my own weaknesses and seek out professional development in those areas.

I am a life-long learner and know that I would benefit from having had the opportunity to have more professional development in the area of literacy instruction. According to Samaras (2011), the “self-study of teaching practices begins to build the muscle for professional development ... [and] it reminds us that some of the hardest and most important work is working on oneself” (p. 17). Professional development will give me the opportunity to see the ways in which other teachers teach literacy and gain insight into how I want to modify my own instruction.

### **Observe Literacy Instruction of Experienced Teachers**

In the future, I plan to explore the different ways the literacy block can be structured, implemented, and run. I plan to take time to observe experienced teachers during their literacy block. Experienced teachers generally have a system in place that is successful. I am interested in knowing what resources they use and where their resources stem from. By taking time to observe literacy instruction from a variety of teachers, I anticipate that I will be able to make better instructional decisions for my own students. I also anticipate that observing teachers who are experienced will provide me with a foundation of effective literacy instruction and enable me to develop a bank of resources I can use moving forward, instead of just creating everything on my own. I suspect that observing the literacy instruction of experienced teachers will inspire me to make positive modification to my own teaching and my teaching philosophy.

### **Collaborate with Colleagues**

Collaborating with other teachers and service providers in my school will widen my view on literacy instruction. I have only had the chance to reflect on my own experiences, but I would like to hear about other teachers' experiences. I believe I would benefit from having other colleagues observe my literacy block and provide me with feedback about ways I can become more effective. I would like to take time to talk with other teachers about their struggles and successes during the literacy block.

I would also like to collaborate with grade-level colleagues to make modifications to the literacy block and discover resources together. I would also like to talk to an administrator to ask what his or her expectations are for each teacher's literacy block. An administrator or English Language Arts specialist could also provide me with support and feedback after observing my instruction during the literacy block. I anticipate that collaborating with colleagues will support my growth as an educator and enable me to become more confident in my future teaching.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While I have established conclusions related to my research question, I now have new questions that I believe are worth examining as I continue to explore aspects of my literacy instruction. I anticipate that exploring these questions would extend my own learning and benefit my teaching practices as well as the experiences I offer my students.

### **Explore Results of use of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

Even though my goal was to have my students develop intrinsic motivation, I realize that every student is motivated in different ways. Different types of motivation exist in schools, at home, and in the real world. Throughout my study, I spent time researching different ways of motivating students. Koh & Frick (2010) supported the use of intrinsic motivation in the classroom while Ryan and Deci (2000) discussed the ways in which teachers could use intrinsic motivation as well as extrinsic motivation, such as stickers, candy, and prizes. I would be interested in exploring the results of using intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation. I would be interested in learning how different kinds of motivation affect student outcomes, behaviors, and attitudes. Exploring this further would give me insight into how I can possibly motivate students in many different ways and it may provide ways in which I can motivate those students that are hard to motivate.

### **Explore Integrating of Technology into the Literacy Block**

Throughout the course of this self-study, I was able to incorporate a small amount of technology during the literacy block. I observed how my student's use of technology excited and engaged them. Unfortunately, there wasn't a lot of technology available for me to use seeing as how our classroom had access to one iPad and had to share a set of ten computers with 3 other classes. I would be interested in exploring the different ways that technology, such as iPads, iPods, laptops, and tablets, could be incorporated into the literacy block. According to Bowman (2001), technology permits students to become lifelong learners by giving them choices and control over the course of their learning. I

am imagining iPads for students to use for reading and phonics games. I am imagining computers or laptops that can be used for research and publishing students' writing. I am interested in exploring what affects, if any, that technology has on students and how student independence may or may not be fostered. I am interested to see if and how the use of technology can move learning from the classroom into the real world (Bowman, 2001).

### **Final Thoughts**

In chapter one, I shared a look into a classroom of third graders who appeared to be unmotivated and who didn't seem engaged in their learning. The students appeared to rely on the teacher and there seemed to be a shortage of expectations and structure. I walked into that classroom, eager and overwhelmed, with a vision of what I thought a classroom full of students that were able to work independently would look like. With determination and knowledge from professional literature, I was able to implement a reader's workshop and a writer's workshop during the literacy block. The expectations, structure, and instruction of both the reader's workshop and the writer's workshop worked together to foster student engagement, motivation, self-regulation, and accountability, which led to students being more independent learners. I followed Bowman's (2001) belief that "the most that we can do to facilitate effective learning is to teach our students how to learn, guide them in appropriate directions, and turn over responsibility and control of that learning to the students" to guide me throughout my journey.

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