Motivating Students to Write About Their Reading in a Third Grade Classroom

By

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A Master’s Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education – Reading

University of Wisconsin - River Falls
2019
Abstract

One way to strengthen the reading/writing relationship and increase relevance for students is through a method called Write about Reading. When students have the ability to write about their reading, connections are enhanced and making meaning becomes clear, which leads to deeper levels of comprehension. A student's motivation to take part in a task can be affected by many different aspects. This action research study examines the relationship between students’ motivation and Write about Reading in a third grade classroom. Three different modes of writing were used to determine which resulted in the highest motivation. Results indicate that student motivation increases when they have the opportunity to write digitally. However, further research would be beneficial to see if providing choice to students when writing about their reading would be just as motivating.

*Keywords*: writing, reading, motivation, elementary, literacy instruction
According to McGinley et al., (1992) “the relationship between learning to read and learning to write is well-established and therefore teachers consciously and purposefully link the two during classroom instruction and activities” (as cited in Tunks, 2011). However, often times students are unmotivated and unwilling to actively participate in this relationship. In particular, students may have a negative outlook on writing about what they are reading. Because writing takes extreme effort, keeping motivation levels high can be difficult. “As McLeod (1987) states, how authors motivate themselves differs widely, but motivation is presumably a necessary ingredient for attaining writing success” (as cited in Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers, & Lawrence, 2013).

As a third grade teacher for the past four years, I have had the opportunity to work with students as they form a reading/writing relationship. A part of my district’s reading curriculum ‘Lucy Calkins Units of Study for Teaching Reading’, students start to write about their reading on Post-It notes in second grade. Write about Reading continues into third grade, progressing into writing both on post-it notes and in a reader’s notebook. When I ask my students to write about their reading in either mode, I hear a collective “Do we have to?” and “Uh, again?” This is a challenge because I need to continually motivate students in their reading/writing relationship. So, in the past I have compromised with students saying, “You only have to write one stop and jot” or “write two sentences in your reader’s notebook.” When I make this compromise, I am taking away a major part of my students abilities to understand, connect, and communicate about what they are reading. My students need to learn how to develop their connections and continuously work on making meaning from the reading/writing relationship. This does not happen if I continually compromise with them. Therefore, for this study I will
focus on two questions: How can I encourage motivation with my students to write about their reading? Does the mode a student uses to write about their reading motivate students more?

**Literature Review**

**Motivation**

Motivation is complex subject “that influences how individuals choose to invest their time, how much energy they exert in any given task, how they think and feel about the task, and how long they persist at the task” (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). A variety of factors including purpose of work, social interactions, student accountability, and encouragement can affect how a student decides to approach their academics (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Schiefele (1991) suggests, “individuals with strong personal interest in a topic or activity will pay greater attention, persist longer, enjoy their involvement, and acquire more knowledge than those lacking interest” (as cited in Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers, & Lawrence, 2013). Over the years multiple theories on motivation have developed. Some of these theories have been on individuals needs, drives and beliefs. One particular theory developed was behaviorism. In these theories’ perspective, an individual's motivation to engage in an activity comes from previous experience with similar activities (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). While completing these activities, if a student is praised or given positive feedback, the student is more willing to repeat the activity. However, if the feedback given is negative or non-existent, the student will be less likely to repeat it. Providing students with positive feedback is essential. This feedback could be given to students in a variety of ways by the teacher or by the students’ peers. Until recently, research has suggested that individuals who have low motivation should work one-on-one with teachers developing strategies to improve motivation (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). However,
there has been some more recent discoveries and a shift in thinking caused by the Social-Cognitive perspective. Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) argued, from this perspective individual’s academics can be influenced by many social factors. Information from the teacher about the activities difficulty, peers’ abilities, and the importance of learning the content play a factor. So, according to this perspective, motivation isn’t solely about the individual. Motivation includes the social context within the classroom.

Also, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation becomes a factor. Miller and Meece (1997), found that students were intrinsically motivated to complete activities when collaborating with peers than while working alone. Another factor to consider is social milieu. Social milieu is the “social environment, classroom climate, and community” (Julien, 2018). Social milieu is an important aspect of a students life. Because students often have no control over decisions being made, they want to feel safe to learn in their classroom environment. Any emotional or physical threat, interferes and distracts attention away from learning (Julien, 2018). Table 1 summarizes some motivating factors.

Table 1. Summary of Motivation Factors (Julien, 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Social milieu</th>
<th>Expectancy</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>The social environment where learning takes place</td>
<td>Self-efficacy, belief in ability to succeed, and perception of competence</td>
<td>The worth of the activity or subject matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related questions</td>
<td>• Is this a safe place to learn?</td>
<td>• Can I succeed at this?</td>
<td>• Is the topic interesting, of use, relevant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do I have friends here?</td>
<td>• Will making an effort improve my performance?</td>
<td>• Do I care about this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Am I appreciated?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do I belong?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>Boredom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Harsh judgement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Punishment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors that may undermine motivation</td>
<td>• Caring and safe environment (emotional and physical)</td>
<td>• Repeated failure</td>
<td>Novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors that may support motivation</td>
<td>• Relationship building</td>
<td>• Attribution of success or failure to external factors</td>
<td>Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Working in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978)</td>
<td>Connections with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Positive reinforcement</td>
<td>Connections with life outside of school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Write about Reading

Reader response is a person's ability to respond and interact with a text before, during, and after reading. This can be done in a variety of ways. The outcome is for the person to show that they have made connections and meaning with a text. As a text is read, the words enter into the readers’ mind activating memories, thoughts and associations, which become part of the readers’ experience of the text (Probst, 1992). “Meaning, in this conception of the literary experience, is not resident in the text. Rather, it lies in the mind of the reader, created and shaped as he works with the words on the page” (Probst, 1992).

Reader response activities enable personal meanings to emerge and encourages critical thinking (Colwell, Hutchison, Reinking, & Fink, 2012). Louise Rosenblatt’s (1985) reader response theories and views of readings as a transaction between texts and readers is a good reason to include responding activities in a classroom. Reader response theories emphasize how readers make meaning from their interactions with a text. “Constructing meaning requires readers to engage in any number of active processes, which may include bringing personal experiences to bear on text, predicting, filling textual gaps, interpreting text and illustrations, evaluating author or illustrator craft, and making connections to other texts (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo 2011). Currently, researchers are interested in how reader response has shaped classroom instruction and literacy development (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo 2011). An important aspect of reading and learning to read is when a student “has the ability to hear the speaking out loud voice in their heads while reading. When students can do this, they have experienced interacting with text. They are active readers. They mentally engage with text by connecting what they already know to what they encounter as readers” (Skeans, 2000).
Skeans (2000) stated that active readers monitoring their comprehension by reflecting on their understanding is equally important. Considering the fact that reader responses require students to engage, predict, evaluate, and draw on their prior knowledge, this enhances the reasons to include reader responses into a daily language arts classroom. To support their students in becoming active readers, teachers need to offer opportunities to do reader response activities. It is important to teach students that writers consider their readers as they compose text. Writers act as their own readers, writing and reviewing what they have written as their own audience. As readers comprehend a text, they respond actively to what the writers are trying to get them to think or do. The readers use knowledge of their world and the text to form meaning. The reader realizes that the author is providing cues to try to get them to think or do something (Skeans, 2000). Teachers need to remember that there are a variety of times that students can write about their reading throughout the reading such as before, during and after reading. While Skeans (2000) argues that writing activities before and after reading a text are important, it is also important to include writing activities during reading. This helps build the transactional relationship between writing and reading. “Written response to literature is a powerful means of preserving those special transactions with books that make reading a rewarding, personal journey” (Hancock, 1993).

**Modes of Write about Reading**

According to Rosenblatt (1994), writing in response to reading creates choice for the student. Their purpose is to explain, analyze, and summarize their reactions (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011). There are multiple ways for teachers to provide students with the opportunity to respond to their reading. Some of those choices include paper/pencil and digital
MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO WRITE ABOUT READING

journals. Also, it is important to remember that students continue to need feedback in some form. Hancock (1993) states that teachers seeking support using written response journals should turn to Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory. This theory supports student’s thinking, real-life connections, and meaning-making encounters with texts. According to Ruppert & Brueggeman (1986), “the literature response journal has been repeatedly suggested as an effective means of capturing emerging reader response while linking writing to the reading process” (as cited in Hancock, 1993). Hancock (1993) argues that not only does the reader's response journal provide choice to focus on personal thoughts. It also elevates reading to an active process. “Wollman-Bonilla (1989) utilized dialogue journals on the premise that children would invest more energy and interest in journal writing when the teacher wrote back to them” (Hancock, 1993). Continued opportunities to write about texts in journals support students meaning-making and nurture deeper responses (Martinez & Roser, 2008). Martinez and Roser (2008) found that research suggests writing in journals has the potential to deepen students’ understand of texts.

As discussed above, writing a written response on paper with pencil is one mode of writing about reading. An additional mode would build upon this idea by adding in feedback from a peer or an adult other than the teacher. According to Barksdale, Watson, and Park (2007), “when students respond to letters written by a pen pal they are engaged in an authentic literacy task” (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011). Responding to letters from an adult pen pal requires the student to read a message and understand its meaning to compose a meaningful and similar reply (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011). Technology continues to advance each year. Adding in a way for students to write about their reading
digitally seems like a proper next step. In elementary schools, blogs and social networking sites are becoming more popular. Gray, Thomas, and Lewis (2010) reported that 35% of elementary teachers use blogs and wikis in their instruction and that 22% use social networking sites for instruction” (Colwell, Hutchison, Reinking, & Fink, 2012).

Write about Reading requires students to make meaning with a text, which is an active process. In order to be active, students need to be motivated to put in time and energy into writing about their reading. Many different aspects can affect a student’s motivation: social interactions, personal interests, social milieu, and feedback. So, importance lies with the teacher to understand the motivations of the students when choosing the mode in which the students will respond to their reading. Putting thought into students’ motivations and the mode students will write, makes for a powerful reading/writing transaction.

**Methodology**

In this action research study, I investigated these two questions: How can I encourage motivation with my students to write about their reading? Does the mode students use to write about their reading motivate students more? Action research is reflective in nature while trying to solve a problem that currently exists. This makes action research a good fit for this study. I needed to determine how to motivate my students to write about their reading. Also, I know that in order to get the most out of this study, I needed to be reflective throughout the research process.

**Participants and Setting**

The participants in this study are twenty third grade students, eleven female and nine male. All students are between the ages of eight and nine years old. The students in this study
attend a single-section, rural school located in the outskirts of a suburban city. Four of the twenty students receive Title 1 services for thirty minutes, four times a week. These students receive Title 1 services because they are currently below grade level in reading. Sixteen of the twenty students are reading at or above grade level. The whole class of twenty students participated in the study. The students who participated received a pseudonym name to ensure safety and security.

The study was conducted in my general education classroom setting for approximately thirty minutes a day. The thirty minutes were broken up into two separate times on Wednesdays. The first part is during morning work and the second a ten minute period called “Write About it Wednesday.” The rest of the writing time took place during independent reading, which is part of the reader’s workshop time block, over a six-week time period, including the pre- and post- survey questions. There were three different rotations throughout this study. Each rotation took approximately two weeks to complete.

**Materials and procedures**

Several sources were used to collect data: pre- and post- student surveys, surveys after each mode of Writing about Reading, informal observations, checklists, and rubrics. These sources provided a triangulation in order to answer my research questions.

**Pre-survey.** Students were asked to take a pre-survey (Appendix A), which contained ten questions. This survey gauged their opinions on Write about Reading and what their motivations to Write about Reading might be. In this study, the survey is used as the pre- and post- measurement. Before giving the pre-survey, I talked to the class about the purpose for taking the survey. Also, I discussed the language used in the survey to avoid confusion.
Previous to giving the survey, I had the students practice using Google forms to become familiar with the formatting.

**Journal writing.** There were three different modes of Writing about Reading that students took part in throughout the study. The first was writing about their reading in a journal format. Each student received a notebook just for this purpose that included a small area for illustrating and a lined section for writing. Students wrote about their reading for ten minutes every Wednesday. There was no prompt or question that they needed to answer. Also, there was no requirement for length, only that they were working for the full ten minutes. After the students completed their ten minutes of writing, the students were then given the choice to do additional writing during their independent reading time later in the day. This choice occurred daily. At the end of the week, I collected all of the students journals to look over. I returned the notebooks to the students on Monday to restart the cycle. At the end of the two-week period, students were given a Google form survey (Appendix B) to reflect on this mode of Writing about Reading.

**Pen pal writing.** For the second mode, students became pen pals with a peer in the classroom. This mode continued to be paper pencil format, but in a packet form. Students wrote about their reading on Wednesday for the ten minutes and continued to have the additional time during independent reading later in the day for the rest of the week. However, this time students gave their packets to their pen pal at the end of every independent reading time. Students had five minutes to respond back to their pen pal before giving the packet back. Again, at the end of the two-week time period, students were given a Google form survey (Appendix C) to reflect on this mode of Writing about Reading.
Digital writing. The third mode was done digitally through Google slides. I provided students with a previously made Google slides template that included directions and an example. Then, students added onto the slides creating their own digital journal where they responded to their reading. Students had the option of adding pictures, graphs, and other items to aid in their writing. Students had the same amount of time on Wednesday to write and there were seven Chromebooks available for students to use, if they chose, during independent reading. For a final time, at the end of the two-week time period, students were given a Google form survey (Appendix D) to reflect on this mode of Writing about Reading.

Post-survey. At the end of the six weeks, students took a post-survey (Appendix E). This survey contained the same questions as the pre-survey with some minor changes. This survey was a final reflection for the students and provided me with results on how the students changed through the course of this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the six-week time period, I collected all of the different modes of Write about Reading the students had completed along with any data I had collected from observing the students. I analyzed the data using rubrics (Appendix F), observations, and checklists (Appendix G). The rubrics I created were used at the end of each week. I filled out a rubric for each student independently. The rubric assigned a point value of one through four, one being the lowest point value and four the highest point value. The rubric included the following information: the length of the student’s writing in sentences, the amount of time spent writing the responses, the student’s motivation and whether the student appeared to be engaged. The time started at less than five minutes and went up to twenty minutes. Each student should have
received at least two points if they were engaged during the ten minute time period on Wednesday. Students could receive additional points if they chose to write during independent reading. Also, the rubric included engagement and motivation towards writing their responses. This information was initially kept on a checklist format, which I updated throughout the week as I observed the students. At the end of the week, I added this information into the rubric. I observed periodically throughout the six-week period. I observed each student throughout the two-week rotation, which amounted to three times throughout the six-weeks. These observations were considered informal to fulfill checklist and rubric data. Finally, at the end of each two-week period or when one mode of writing was complete, students took a short survey on Google forms. The purpose of the surveys was to record data on the student’s thoughts after completing the particular mode of Writing about Reading. These surveys always included the question, “What would make writing about your reading better?” and “What did you think about the amount of time you wrote about your reading?” The goal was to see how students responded to Write about Reading and the current mode they used on an individual level.

I collected data from all twenty of my students, however, I studied six students’ writing closer than the rest. I chose these six as focal students because they represent a range of students in my class (Table 2). Two students are above grade-level in literacy, two are at grade-level, and two are below grade-level. The grade-level was determined by interim reading assessments, current running records, and eligibility for Title 1 interventions.
Table 2

Focal Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade -level</th>
<th>Students’ Pseudonym Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Anna and Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At</td>
<td>Pat and Susy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below</td>
<td>Sally and Larry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings and Results

The purpose of this study was to find out how I could improve motivation with my students to write about their reading and whether the mode affects motivation. Through the process of collecting and organizing the data, I decided to arrange the findings and results chronologically.

Pre-survey

For the first part of this study, students took a pre-survey. The purpose was to gather initial opinions about Writing about Reading. Also, to collect students’ thoughts on how to motivate them more. In this initial survey, 90% of my students stated that they liked to write; however, I did not specify writing about what. When asked if they enjoyed sharing their writing with others, 50% did and 50% did not. 70% of my students thought Write About it Wednesdays were okay or liked them. 70% of my students thought stop and jots were bad/horrible or terrible. This was not a surprise, as I knew my students disliked stop and jots. I knew this from past experiences where students would make negative comments towards needing to do stop and jots. This is the mode of Write about Reading that my students are most familiar with from my district’s reading curriculum, Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study for Teaching Reading. When asked
why they thought Write about Reading was important, students responded in a variety of ways: 30% of my students responded by saying that they don’t think writing about their reading is important. While the other 70% responded with phrases like: “so I don’t forget,” “helps me learn,” and “so others know how I feel.” To get a better understanding of what motivates my “students to write I asked, “What would motivate you to write about your reading?”

![Figure 1. What Motivates Students to Write. This figure illustrates methods that motivate my students to Write about Reading.](image)

Finally, the last question I asked was which writing option would they would like to try. This was important because I wanted to know, in advance, which mode of writing might be the most motivating. 35% chose writing about their reading in journal mode, 25% chose writing about their reading in a pen pal mode, and 40% chose writing about their reading in a digital mode on Google slides.
Looking at the results of the pre-survey, I learned that my students actually do enjoy writing. So, this means that their motivation to write about their reading is possible, I just need to find a way to bring it out. Also, I learned that most of my students do not think that Write about Reading is important. This is a topic that I will need to address more in the future.

Teaching my students that Write about Reading is important, could initially increase motivation.

**Journal Writing**

The first mode of writing that I chose to use with my students was journal writing. I chose this first because this is the mode of writing that they would be most familiar with. In the past, they have written about their reading in notebooks and created books similar to the ones I created for them. Students were hesitant to start this journey. They were not looking forward to having to write about their reading and have me paying such close attention to what they were writing.

During the first week, all students participated in Write about Reading for the ten minutes during morning work time, however, engagement level varied. After analyzing the first weeks checklist, I saw that 70% of my students chose to write about their reading during independent reading at some point. I was happily surprised that such a large number of my students chose to write about their reading (it being the first day and their overall poor attitudes towards starting that morning). The second week was more of a struggle. Students continued to participate in the morning Write About it Wednesday; however, engagement and motivation seemed to be very low with many students not doing the required task. I saw this translate into independent reading time too. After looking at the checklists, the amount of students who chose
to participate dropped to 10%. It is likely that the lack of motivation is due to the mode being similar to stop and jots.

Table 3 summarizes the writing my focus students did over the course of the two-week period. The number of sentences and engagement time is a combined total of both morning work and independent reading. Overall, my two students who are above grade level readers spent almost no time writing about their reading over the two-week period, with little to no engagement when they were writing. This made me wonder if they perceive Writing about Reading as not challenging enough.

Table 3

**Focal Student Writing Observations: Journal Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Anna: 3 sentences with less than 5 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mark: no sentences with no engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At</td>
<td>Pat: 9 sentences with 10-15 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susy: 5 sentences with 10 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below</td>
<td>Sally: 3 sentences with 5 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larry: 1 sentence with less than 5 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the two-week period, I gave students a Google form survey to gather data. I wanted my students’ thoughts about the mode of journal writing about reading: the parts that
they enjoyed and disliked. 10% of my students said that they enjoyed Writing about Reading in the journal mode, 80% thought it was ok, and 10% didn’t like it. When asked about the length of Writing about Reading time, 30% said it was too long, 30% said it was too short, and 40% said it was just right. Based on these numbers, I decided to keep the amount of Writing about Reading time the same for the next mode of writing because most of my students thought ten minutes was an adequate time. When asked what was the most challenging part, I received a variety of responses. However, there were three responses that appeared multiple times: not being able to think about what to write about, not being able to remember enough from the book, and nothing. These responses not only made me aware of their thinking but provided me with which students needed support in the area of comprehension. Finally, when asked what would make Write about Reading better, I again received a variety of responses, but two appeared frequently: more illustrating and more time to read. I understood students wanting more illustrating time because this was a motivator my students had initial brought to my attention in the pre-survey; however, I was curious about more reading time. This was something I wanted to keep my eye on during future surveys.

**Pen Pal Writing**

The second mode I chose for my students was pen pal writing. For this mode, I chose to make a paper packet for students to write and respond in, which my students were comfortable with; however, I added the element of sharing their writing with other students in the classroom. When explaining this mode of Writing about Reading, there was a lot of excitement over being able to pick their pen pal. During the first week, 70% of my students were participating in writing about their reading at some point during independent reading. This is the same amount
as the previous mode during the first week so I was happy to see that most of my students were back to choosing to participate. I was left wondering if this was because it was something new for them or if they wanted to write about their reading. Either way, students were engaged.

In the second week, 75% of my students were participating at some point during their independent reading time. This was terrific to see because I was concerned that engagement and motivation would drop similar to the previous writing mode. Also, I was hearing positive comments from my focal group. Susy said, “I really like this.” Table 4 summarizes my focal groups Writing about Reading during the pen pal mode. Most of the students could not wait to trade papers with their pen pals and then have them returned to read their pen pals comments. Also, I noticed the students who chose to not write during independent reading time would still try to write a sentence or two when I gave a time reminder before trading with their pen pal. This made me wonder if there was an aspect of peer pressure at play or was it motivating to be able to receive a response from their pen pal. This could be a topic to research in a future study.

A final observation was the number of students who seemed to be able to multitask between reading and writing. Many of the students participating had their book, pencil, and packet out writing when they found it necessary. This was one of my proudest moments looking around the classroom. Since the students are making this choice, they might be comfortable and confident with Writing about Reading. I could tell that this was something they were motivated to do and it was not taking away from their reading time either. My hope is that after this study is done, these students will continue to make this choice, which will lead to independence.
Table 4

_Focal Student Writing Observations: pen pals_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Anna: 8 sentences with 15-20 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mark: 5 sentences with 10 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At</td>
<td>Pat: 20 sentences with over 20 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susy: 6 sentences with 10 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below</td>
<td>Sally: 6 sentences with 5-10 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larry: 10 sentences with 10-15 minutes of engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the two-week period, I again gave my students a Google form survey. The questions on this survey were the same as the previous survey with the addition of one asking which mode of Write about Reading they liked more. When asked what they thought about pen pal writing, 50% said they enjoyed it, 30% said they thought it was ok, and 20% said they didn’t like it. When asked what they thought of 10 minutes of writing time, 55% said it was just the right amount of time, 15% said it was too short, and 30% said it was too long. When asked what the most challenging part was, again students responded in a variety of ways. However, the two most common responses were: forgetting what the book was about and thinking. I’m understanding students response of ‘thinking’ to mean that they either could not remember what was in their book or could not think of what to write. When asked what would make Write
about Reading better, students wrote responses that were unique to them. For example, some
students did not enjoy working with the partner they had, some wanted more time, and some
could not think of anything. When asked which mode of writing they liked more, 80% said
Write about Reading to your pen pal, 15% said Write about Reading in their journal, and 5%
did not answer the question.

**Digital Writing**

The final mode I chose was writing about their reading digitally. Originally, I had
chosen to use the Google docs platform as quite a few of my students had used it in the past.
However, I ended up using Google slides instead. Slides allowed my students to pretend like
each slide was a different page in a notebook, which they enjoyed. This platform also allowed
me to provide my students with an example entry for modeling this mode of Writing about
Reading without any difficulties. Based on observations of my students, this was the mode of
writing that they seemed most excited about. When writing during Write About it Wednesday, I
observed that all students seemed motivated and engaged. There were some students who took
longer to get to the Google slides due to not being confident with a Chromebook. During
independent reading, I brought in seven Chromebooks. This seemed like a good amount based
on the amount of students who had participated in Writing about Reading during the past
modes. However, the demand for the Chromebooks was higher than expected leaving some
students unable to participate when they wanted to. When observing my classroom in general,
students seemed motivated to write on the Chromebooks and engaged when actually using
them. However, after observing my focal students closer, I noticed that much of the time that
students *looked* engaged in writing was actually getting taken up by logging on and finding their
Google slides. After this, I noticed many of my focal students writing a quick sentence and then spending a great deal of their time looking for a picture to go along with their sentence. Table 5 summarizes the work my focal students conducted during this mode of writing.

Table 5

_Focal Student Writing Observations: Digital_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Above</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna:</td>
<td>8 sentences with 20 minutes engagement</td>
<td>Anna: 3 sentences with 10 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark:</td>
<td>2 sentences with 5-10 minutes engagement</td>
<td>Mark: 4 sentences with 15 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat:</td>
<td>5 sentences with 10-15 minutes engagement</td>
<td>Pat: 4 sentences with 10-15 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susy:</td>
<td>2 sentences with 5-10 minutes engagement</td>
<td>Susy: none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally:</td>
<td>4 sentences with 10-15 minutes engagement</td>
<td>Sally: 6 sentences with 20 minutes engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry:</td>
<td>3 sentences with 10-15 minutes engagement</td>
<td>Larry: none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the two-week period, students were given their Google form survey. This survey had the same questions as the previous two. In addition, this survey expanded on the question ‘Which did you like more’ by adding in another option. Students were choosing between the last two modes of writing about their reading. When asked what they thought about writing about their reading digitally, 80% said they enjoyed it, 15% said it was ok, and 5% said they didn’t like it. When asked what they thought about ten minutes of writing time, 50% said it was just the right amount, 30% said is was too short, and 20% said it was too long. When asked
what was the most challenging part, the top two responses were: thinking and finding the right letters. When asked which mode of writing they liked more, 75% of the students said Google slides and 25% said Pen pal writing.

**Post-survey**

The post-survey was given to students to compare and contrast response from the pre-survey. I wanted to see what had changed in the eyes of my students. I gave the post-survey a week after all modes of writing had been completed. When asked how they felt about writing about their reading, 65% had a positive response (awesome/fun/love), 25% said it was ok, and 10% said it was annoying. When asked how often they would want to write about their reading, students 40% said everyday, 50% said once a week, 15% said once a month, and 15% said never. When asked why they think Write about Reading is important, 50% of the class said it helps you remember your book, 40% said it doesn’t and 10% didn’t know. Figure 2 shows a comparison from pre- to post-survey of Writing about Reading choice that they preferred.
Figure 2. Pre-to Post-survey Results. This figure illustrates student’s choice of mode during pre-and post-survey.

Discussion

There is a relationship between learning to read and write that can be enriched through purposeful classroom instruction (Tunks, 2011). Through this study, my students and I have been able to find a deeper relationship between reading and writing. With my students, I have focused on how to engage them in Write about Reading and how different modes affect their motivation. By looking at the collected data, I have found that the little things make the biggest difference in motivating my students to Write about Reading. Through surveys, many students expressed that having room to illustrate or writing in pen motivated them to write more. My data suggest that the mode of writing does affect a student’s motivations. My students were motivated most when writing about their reading digitally. However, the data show that over
time student motivation decreases. As a result of this, I believe it is critical to provide students with a variety of options to be successful with Write about Reading.

Based on the research Urdan and Schoenfelder state, the awareness of individuals in regards to their academics is influenced by social-contextual factors such as, messages from the teacher about the difficulty of the work, abilities of classmates, and importance of learning the work (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). “From this perspective, motivation does not reside entirely within the individual or entirely within the context, rather, it emerges from the interaction between individuals within the social context of the classroom and school” (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). The interactions made between the students previous to this study played into their motivation to Write about Reading during the pen pal mode. The student’s choice of a partner greatly impacted the length and content of what they wrote. In some cases, I found evidence of this happening in the students’ packets. In some instances the student’s pen pal writing turned into a place to recommend books to each other rather than writing about what they were reading. On the other hand, some students picked partners who pushed each other to try harder. I noticed comments like, “Please write more” or “How come you didn’t write today?” If no feedback is given, students are less likely to be motivated to complete a task. So, providing students with feedback is essential. This feedback can be given to students in a variety of ways by the classroom teacher or by peers (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). I believe this is why some students were more motivated during the pen pal mode of writing. Students were able to give and receive almost immediate feedback about their writing from their pen pal.

Overall, my original thinking has changed because of this action research study. I previously thought that the students who were more motivated to read would be the students
who would be motivated to write about their reading. However that did not seem to be the case -- in fact quite the opposite. Pat, Larry and Sally were the students from my focus group who struggled with motivation and engagement during reading, yet, they were the most motivated to write about their reading. It could be that there is a connection between students’ original reading motivation and having an alternative such as Write about Reading. This connection is most likely why so many students who are above grade level chose not to participate, and why students at or below grade level chose to participate. By providing students the opportunity to participate in Write about Reading, we are strengthening students’ abilities to make connections and meaning.

“Research shows that constructing meaning requires readers to engage in active processes, which include personal experiences, predicting, filling in textual gaps, interpreting, evaluating, and making connections to other texts” (Martinez & Roser, 2008). While reviewing my students Writing about Reading, I noticed many of my students were struggling with these active processes. After reviewing the survey data, I saw a connection. Over three of the five surveys given, 26.6% of my students wrote that remembering details from their books was challenging. Having the ability to review my students’ writing reinforced these survey results, and I was able to see large gaps in comprehension. This data tells me that Writing about Reading can be a beneficial tool for teachers in their literacy instruction and a benefit to the students by identifying areas of need.

As I began this study, I was concerned about how much of my students’ reading time might be lost due to writing, but throughout this study I was impressed by the number of
students I saw who were able to multitask with reading and writing. No time was lost at all! Many students were both reading and writing during this time.

**Limitations**

As in all research, there were some unexpected limitations to this study along the way. The biggest limitation that I faced was finishing my data collection in time due to several days off of school for winter weather. Along with days off, many of my students were either out of school due to illness or vacations, which led to me to eliminate one student’s data. Another limitation I faced was measuring engagement and motivation during Write About it Wednesday. There was a lot happening throughout the morning -- students arriving late to school or eating breakfast that took my attention. I believe this caused my checklist accuracy to be less reliable than I hoped. Finally, the number of Chromebooks available to my classroom at the time of my scheduled reader’s workshop block was limited. It is likely that if more Chromebooks had been available to use, more students would have taken advantage of writing about their reading digitally.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, throughout this study I gained knowledge about my students’ attitude towards Writing about Reading, what motivates them the most to write about their reading, and what modes of writing my students prefer. Surprisingly, I learned about some of my students’ reading comprehension abilities too. Through this study, I have a better understanding of how to support my students in the area of literacy. In my future teaching, I will be able to use these findings to help me plan my literacy instruction. For example, in order to meet the needs of the students who were have gaps in their comprehension, I can form small groups during my
writing and reading curriculum time. Realizing that there are gaps that exist in my students’ comprehension has made me wonder if these gaps also exist in other classrooms. With this thinking in mind, I was able to have a discussion with my districts’ literacy coach and the director of curriculum. During this discussion, I brought forward my recent discoveries on my students’ writing and comprehension gaps. They were able to confirm that they have noticed that teachers are facing similar challenges throughout the district.

If I were to continue this research next year, I would be interested in delving deeper into a few different aspects. These would include taking a closer look at the quality of my students’ writing along with the content of their writing. I would also be interested in conducting an additional action research study to provide clarity on whether it is the mode of writing or the change in routine that is more motivating to my students.

I know that Writing about Reading digitally and giving students options, such as writing in pen or adding illustrations motivates students write about their reading. Also, having the choice to Write about Reading to a pen pal is another excellent option to motivate students that prefer personal interactions. I will continue to ask my students to write about their reading because I know it benefits comprehension; however, in the future, I will offer my students a choice of how to respond to their reading. By providing choice, I can keep students’ motivation to Write about Reading high without regression over time. By incorporating Writing about Reading into my daily literacy instruction, I provide my students with the opportunity to be successful future readers.
References


Troia, G., Harbaugh, A., Shankland, R., Wolbers, K., & Lawrence, A. (2013). Relationships between writing motivation, writing activity, and writing performance: effects of grade,
sex, and ability. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 26*(1), 17-44.


Appendix A

pre-survey Questions

I like to write?

I like to write in a notebook?

I like to type on a Chromebook?

I like to share my writing with others?

What do I think about stop and jots?

What do I think about Write About it Wednesday?

Why do I think that it is important to write about what I read?

What would make writing about what I read more fun?

What would motivate you to write about what you are reading?

Which writing option would I like to try?
  Writing about my reading in a journal
  Writing about my reading in Google Docs
  Writing about my reading to a pen pal
Appendix B

Journal Write About Reading Survey Questions

What did you think about writing in your journal?
   Enjoyed it
   It was ok
   I didn't like it

What did you think about writing for 10 minutes?
   It was just the right amount of time
   It was too short
   It was too long

What is the most challenging part about writing about your reading?

What would make writing about your reading better?
Appendix C

pen pal Write About Reading

What did you think about writing about your reading to a pen pal?
   Enjoyed it
   It was ok
   I didn't like it

What do you think about writing for 10 minutes?
   It was just the right amount of time
   It was too short
   It was too long

What is the most challenging part of writing about your reading?

What would make writing about your reading better?

What parts of writing to a pen pal did you like?

Which did you like more?
   Writing about your reading to a pen pal
   Writing about your reading in your blue journal
Appendix D

Digital Write About Reading Survey Questions

What did you think about writing about your reading digitally?
   Enjoyed it
   It was ok
   I didn't like it

What did you think about writing about your reading for 10 minutes?
   It was just the right amount of time
   It was too short
   It was too long

What is the most challenging part of writing about your reading?

What parts of writing about your reading did you like?

Which did you like more?
   Writing to your Pen Pal in yellow book
   Writing digitally on Google Slides
Appendix E

post-survey Questions

How do you feel about writing about your reading now?

Would you want to write about your reading…
   Everyday
   Once a week
   Once a month
   Never

Do you think writing about your reading helps you remember information from your books?
   Yes
   No

Did you like writing about your reading for morning work on Wednesdays?
   Yes
   No

Do you think it is important to write about your reading?
   Yes
   No

Why do you think it is important to write about what you read?

Which Write about Reading choice did you like best?
   Writing in your blue journals
   Writing in your yellow packets to a pen pal
   Writing on a Chromebook digitally

Why did you like that one the best?
Appendix F

Student Writing Rubric

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>Student writes 1-2 sentences.</td>
<td>Student writes 3-4 sentences and adds picture/illustration.</td>
<td>Student writes 5-6 sentences and adds picture/illustration.</td>
<td>Student writes 7-8 sentences and adds picture/illustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Less than 5 minutes</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
<td>15-20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Student appears disengaged</td>
<td>Student appears disengaged</td>
<td>Student appears engaged</td>
<td>Student appears engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
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Appendix G

Date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Chose to Participate in writing during independent reading Yes/No</th>
<th>Engaged during writing responses Yes/No/Somewhat</th>
<th>Motivation towards writing responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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