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Fostering Student Interest and Motivation in Second Grade Writing

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FOSTERING STUDENT INTEREST AND MOTIVATION
IN SECOND GRADE WRITING

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education.

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Abstract

Dorow, N. Fostering Student Interest and Motivation in Second Grade Writing (2019)

The research question addressed in this project was, how can writing curriculum offer choices for second grade students in a manner that increases interest and growth? It documents one teacher's creation and implementation of a fifteen-lesson writing curriculum focused on offering student choice. The lessons were developed based primarily upon the research of Carol Dweck, Bill Meyer, Naomi Haywood, Darshan Sachdev, and Sally Faraday; in connection with second grade, Common Core Standards. The author details the implementation of the lesson, including both successes and difficulties in the process. The author concluded that the implementation of the student choice writing curriculum was largely successful in their classroom, with students displaying increased interest in writing, improved confidence in their abilities as writers, and greater performance on informative writing assessments. Student growth was strongest in the areas of writing interest, and development of ideas and details in their writing.

"You cannot teach a man anything.
You can only help him discover it within himself."
-   Galileo Galilei

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone is to investigate how motivation can be affected by opportunities for student choice in second-grade writing. In this first chapter we will be overviewing the research process from a few key perspectives, including the rationale for choosing to study the impact of student choice on second grade writing; how this affects student motivation; and the reasons why this subject matter is important to me. This chapter will also work through the significance of this topic to education as a whole, and how further insight could impact other second grade classrooms. Finally, this research project aims to reduce or remove apprehensiveness toward allowing multiple options for students in the classroom.

Teachers are respected and admired for their strong work ethic. Statistics from a 2016 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) suggest that the average public school teacher in the United States works roughly 53 hours per week. The same study found that 57 percent of teachers held some sort of post baccalaureate degree (Walker, 2018). As well educated, hard-working professionals, we know that teachers are also highly organized and plan lessons that are designed to provide students with what they need. Teachers have a deep desire for their students to learn. Children are naturally curious, and enjoy the process of learning. However, research suggests that children become less interested in school over time. A 2010 student poll found that 75% of 5th graders reported feeling engaged at school, while only 32% of 11th graders felt engaged

(Lopez, 2010). As a second grade teacher, I believe that one of my most important responsibilities is to keep students interested in coming to school each day.

Curriculum providers, school districts, and classroom teachers put an incredible amount of time into finding ways to assess what students have learned. Ensuring that students are accountable for meeting the standards is of utmost concern. Interventions, support staff, and paraprofessionals are valuable resources for students who do not initially meet grade level expectations. These systems in many ways are reactive, where we have opportunities to be proactive. Some students will always benefit from these supports. Yet, if students are actively interested, engaged, and motivated to learn on their own; students would be more likely to have a full understanding of the material the first time they covered it in class.

There are many ways to help elementary students enjoy school. Entertaining games, activities, and enthusiasm throughout the day are all helpful. Providing a safe, comfortable environment is crucial (Earthman, Cash, & Van Berkum, 1995). Building a strong rapport with students is something I hope all teachers strive toward. Beyond all of these keys to helping students enjoy school, is the need for students to feel like they have a purpose for being at school. As adults, the importance of meaningful work is key to job satisfaction. This sensation is equally necessary for our children, in their work. I believe that one of the keys to guiding students toward satisfying, purposeful work is to allow student choice. Options allow children freedom, where school can often feel rigid and restrictive.

We live in a world where people have an incredible amount of choices available to them. Whether it involves the food we eat, which entertainment and news we interact with, or where and how we live. The ability to choose is exciting, and provides tremendous variety in opportunities for individuals. The value of student choice in the classroom has been widely discussed in recent decades. The emphasis on inquiry, genius hour, maker spaces, and student-driven learning has all increased drastically over the past few years. For example, the number of International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, often hailed for their inquiry based curriculum model, increased by 39.3% between 2012 and 2017 (IBO, 2019). These structures and ideologies can be used to help identify what is currently working in student-led learning, and where there may be room for adjustments to best fit the setting of second grade writing lessons.

Purpose

This year will be my sixth year as a classroom teacher. I have taught primary grade levels for all five previous years (four years in second grade, one year in first). It is common knowledge that people enjoy what they perceive themselves to be good at. I recall spending my childhood frustrated by writing assignments because I was "not good at it". Even now, like many adults, I approach writing with a level of anxiousness about embarrassing myself with foolish mistakes or uninteresting writing. Second grade is a critical year in child development as a writer. A year in which children can develop opinions regarding whether they are a good writer, or a bad writer; and whether or not they like writing. These opinions often linger for years. In second grade students take part in the writing process (typically for the first time). Second graders are also expected to be

able to identify and create examples of three different types of writing; opinion, informative, and narrative (English Language Arts Standards, 2017). Research projects in writing are also a common expectation, in which being able to provide details and staying focused on a topic becomes necessary. Opportunities for excitement, and tremendous writing growth are plentiful in each of these new writing experiences. It is critical that we treat them with the attention and care that they deserve.

Background in Student Choice, and Student Motivation

One of the best pieces of advice I received as a student teacher was to write lesson plans from the student's perspective. If the focus stays on what the students will be doing, the lessons will be more engaging and are more likely to connect with the learning objectives. When viewing lessons from the students' lens it becomes much more difficult to justify spending large portions of the lesson telling students the information that you want them to know. You can also recognize the patterns that push students to complete work because they have to, and not because they are genuinely interested in it. When students work out of obligation their work may be sloppy, often designed to meet minimum requirements, and may lack the creativity of other assignments.

In the classroom I have been considered by many to be a "relaxed teacher". I strive to follow a policy of allowing any suggestions or new ideas to be implemented, as long as they have the potential to improve student work. If the new idea does not work, I do not allow it in the future. Yet, if it does work I tend to allow students to continue with that option as long as the students continue to be successful in it. For example, this past year our class was taking part in a simple writing assignment in which the students write

half a page or more regarding their previous weekend. When overviewing expectations a student raised their hand and asked, "Could I write about something I am doing over Winter break?" I responded by saying, "Sure, as long as you can still complete all of this (gesturing to the whiteboard with the expectations)". This is a simple change, but in a classroom where similar projects take place every week, it has a snowball effect. The next week, we were journaling again. This time the students were to, again, write about their weekends. Since the previous student was highly successful with writing about Winter break, as they requested, writing about future events was an option on the board as well. When detailing instructions this time, a student said, "Mr. Dorow, today is my Dad's birthday. Could I write about my Dad?" This seemed perfectly fair, so I once again, allowed the option. As this process went on, our weekly journal went from writing specifically about the student's weekends to journaling about anything that was important or interesting in the student's lives at that moment. The goal of writing about our weekends each week had already been rooted in students practicing writing about their experiences. All of the added options kept the students within the same objective. In retrospect, I could have allowed the students to freely journal much earlier. However, the development of choices over time naturally created a structure where students had more freedom, as they grew more comfortable with classroom expectations. There were plenty of suggestions throughout that were simply not allowed. Suggestions that required lowering expectations, or ideas that would change the writing to no longer consist of journaling were not accepted. As long as the lessons can stay within the initial objective

and framework, I am most comfortable with allowing any and all suggestions and new

ideas.

Summary

I believe that fostering student engagement, curiosity, and motivation in

elementary classrooms should be a major priority for teachers. Educators work tirelessly

to craft lessons that will meet content standards, and learning objectives. The appropriate

progression would be to look at how to provide students with more options in how they

acquire this knowledge. People are motivated, and satisfied when there work has purpose.

My professional experiences so far suggest that allowing children the freedom to create

purposeful work has the potential to improve their enjoyment of school, their confidence

as a writer, while fostering the skills to be self-starters in the future. Thus, the current

project seeks to investigate how writing curriculum can offer choices for second grade

students in a manner that increases interest and growth.

 Preview of Remaining Chapters

In Chapter Two I will be reviewing current research surrounding the areas of

student motivation, choice in elementary education, and how these areas can impact

writing for second graders. Providing context for the research that has already occurred

will help with understanding what has and has not worked in the past. Another important

piece will be looking at intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and if student choice can be

expected to motivate second graders in either area. I am taking part in this research in the

hopes of finding structures that allow for teachers to keep students interested in writing.

In Chapter Three I detail the choice in writing curriculum, including the theories and

models that were used to create it. Chapter Four focuses on reflecting on the capstone

process. This will include what I have learned, the results of the curriculum

implementation in my classroom, and how my project can be used outside of my own

classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of the literature review chapter is to discuss relevant research in the area of my topic: *How can writing curriculum offer choices for second grade students in a manner that increases interest and growth?* The sources reviewed will help to understand the purpose for creating a writing curriculum surrounding student choice, and the results that we can reasonably expect.

This chapter will be broken down into three separate sections. Fostering student motivation will be the focal point of the first section. This is a topic with a tremendous body of research. I will be specifically noting factors that affect elementary student motivation. Factors include the differences and roles that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play, student needs, teacher-student rapport, classroom management, learning styles, and student backgrounds.

Research regarding student choice will be the focus of the second subsection. Definitions for student choice will be provided, along with misconceptions and background information. It will be noted that offering more options can require greater structure and limitations; details on how other classrooms and schools have created these structures suggest possibilities for my writing curriculum.

The third section will focus on second-grade writers. This will include discussion of writing curriculum, classroom environments, and grade level expectations. Related research at the second grade level will be used to identify strengths, needs of students,

and opportunities for student choice. This section will also describe how elementary

writing teachers have attempted to address student motivation in their classrooms.

Student Motivation

"In recent years, enthusiasm for the concept of academic engagement has

emerged from many lines of theory, research, and practice" (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, &

Parks, 2004). Motivational researchers consider outward signs of engagement such as

energized, enthusiastic, focused, and emotionally positive responses to be critical for

producing learning. Beyond that, children's active, enthusiastic, effortful participation is

a predictor of future academic achievement (Daniels, 2018). "Student motivation can be

defined as the process by which children's goal-directed activity is instigated and

sustained" (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Researchers have attributed student motivation to

a wide variety of factors, noting that engagement does not reflect any one personality

trait, but is rather made up of many different interactions based on both individual

assignments and social contexts. Some of the factors that have been connected to student

motivation include growth vs. fixed mindset, course content, home environment,

classroom management, teacher-student rapport, learning styles, and individual student

needs (Skinner, 2008).

Intrinsic motivation. Children have an innate curiosity regarding their

surrounding world. Interacting with the environment provides learning opportunities, and

allows children to develop knowledge. This occurs without provocation, rewards, or

praise. This natural desire for learning is an example of intrinsic motivation. Aside from

curiosity, intrinsic motivation can come from feelings of satisfaction, sense of purpose, or

other internal sources (Kittrell & Moore, 2013). Fostering intrinsic motivation is a valuable tool for helping children become independent, self-starters.

Intrinsic motivation is made up of three basic psychological needs. These three needs have been thought of as innate in human beings, and include the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy or self-determination (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Connecting with these psychological needs can help in understanding how to develop motivation in people at different stages of their lives. For example, when newborns interact with their environment they begin to feel a sense of control over that environment. "This sense of control strengthens feelings of competence within the child and leads to further exploration and experimentation" (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Relatedness refers to the ability to feel comfort in social context, and to both develop and have developed secure relationships. In regard to relatedness, we can understand how close family connections, and safe classroom communities play a vital role in student motivation.

Autonomy, the third need, requires a particular level of balance that teachers play a vital role in providing. The need for autonomy becomes increasingly important as children grow older. Autonomy refers to the need to regulate behavior, as well as the need to direct and initiate one's own actions (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Autonomy presents challenges in that providing too little structure will leave a learning environment where children do not have a sense of direction, while a controlling environment restricts learning and restricts the child's ability to grow in independence. The tasks that provide a proper balance in allowing children to develop autonomy vary by age, and each

individual child's background. Young children need opportunities to explore, and

develop mastery of their environment, while older children need tasks that allow them to

be challenged persisting through meaningful work. Self-regulation and learning skills

throughout life are developed in childhood through opportunities that foster intrinsic

motivation (Carlton & Winsler, 1998).

        Extrinsic motivation. Motivation falls into two categories: intrinsic motivation as

previously discussed, and extrinsic motivation. While intrinsic motivation comes from

internal sources, extrinsic motivation comes from outside sources. Often associated with

tangible rewards, extrinsic motivation can also include praise, fame, or grades (Kittrell &

Moore, 2013). The use of external motivational tactics is common in schools, and can be

connected to frequently used systems, including Positive Behavior Interventions and

Supports (PBIS), Class Dojo, and clip charts.

        Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are frequently described as if they are opposing

forces, in which intrinsic motivation is good while extrinsic motivation is bad. This belief

is largely inaccurate, as they can coexist and are not contradictory (Lemos, & Veríssimo,

2014). Previous research was often one-dimensional, and had shown that students rely

more on intrinsic motivators to complete tasks, which was often misinterpreted to suggest

that extrinsic motivation was not valuable. More recent research indicates that students

frequently engage in academic tasks for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. In forming

goals students have a tendency to seek both internal and external achievements. Some

studies have concluded that there is, "No significant negative relationship between

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation" (Lemos, & Veríssimo, 2014). Student learning has also

been shown to be supported by external motivation when working on uninteresting tasks.

It is important to note for the purposes of my research (which is specific to second-grade

students) is that the compatibility of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations may change over

the course of time for children. For example, younger children often prioritize pleasing

their teacher, and enjoy activities as a result of this desire. By the end of elementary

school, this desire is typically much less significant. Indicating that the connection

between the two areas of motivation may be more closely linked in early elementary

students than older children (Lemos, & Veríssimo, 2014).

   Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory is a theory of motivation

aiming to explain goal-directed behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In self-determination

theory the three psychological needs mirror those that are believed to impact intrinsic

motivation; competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness. Furthering these

ideas, self-determination theory suggests that people choose to participate in activities

that allow them to satisfy these needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). One example would be

continually participating in a sport that a person has felt success in before, with

like-minded peers. Under this theory individuals pass through a continuum relating to any

given activity.

   As noted in Table 1 (see below), the far left end of this continuum would be

amotivation. In amotivation the individual lacks perception of any of the three needs

being met, and feels a lack of control over their ability or participation within that

activity. The continuum between amotivation and intrinsic motivation consists of

extrinsic motivators. Rewards are preferable to amotivation but suggest that the three

needs are not being met. Other extrinsic motivators suggest that certain needs are being met, or that the individual is developing a comfort or confidence in their abilities within that domain. More autonomous behavior suggests greater and sustained engagement (Li, W., Lee, A. M., & Solmon, M, 2008).

Table 1
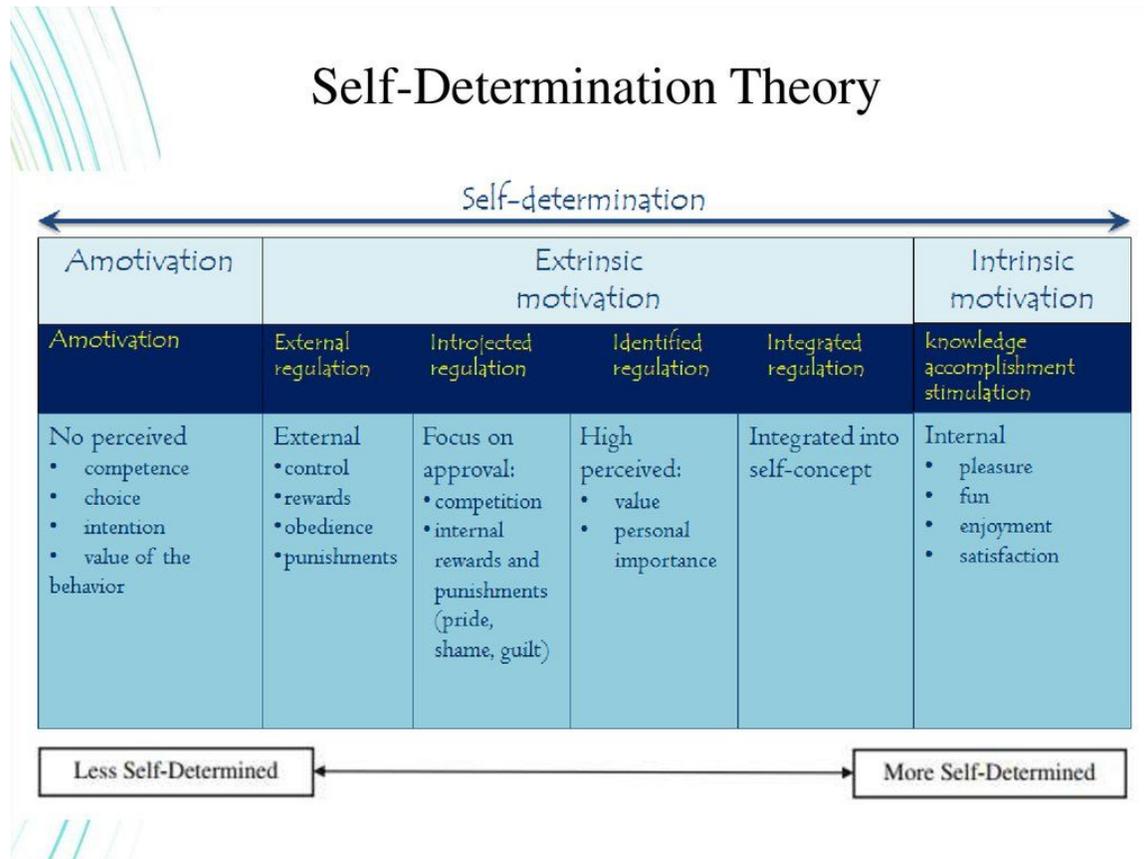
(Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Factors in student motivation. Motivation has kept people moving, even in times of crisis. Great leaders, great managers, and great teachers all rely on the ability to motivate (Iguisi, 2009). One challenge in inspiring motivation is that people are not motivated by the same techniques. For example, a recent study found that in five separate

countries (France, Italy, Netherlands, Scotland, and Nigeria) cultural values played a different role in motivation across each nation (Iguisi, 2009). The following are a collection of major factors that teachers can expect to influence the motivation of students in the classroom.

One ideology that has shown a connection to behavior and motivation of individuals is *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* theory. Under Maslow's theory needs at the lowest levels need to be satisfied before people are willing to place emphasis or focus on the less critical of their needs (Iguisi, 2009). The first tier is physiological needs, and includes the items that are essential for survival. In the second tier are safety needs, such as employment, health, and a stable home. Third, are the needs related to love and belonging. The fourth section is the esteem section, focused on earning respect, recognition, and freedom. Finally, the highest tier of needs is categorized as self-actualization. This is the need for one to fulfill their potential (McLeod, 2018). Viewing student motivation through Maslow's model can help provide perspective on how individual needs and backgrounds impact students. Variation in student needs is one possible explanation for variance in student preparedness for coursework. In a given classroom some students may need to feel a sense of belonging; others may not have the appropriate food or a stable home life; and others may be able to focus on maximizing their potential.
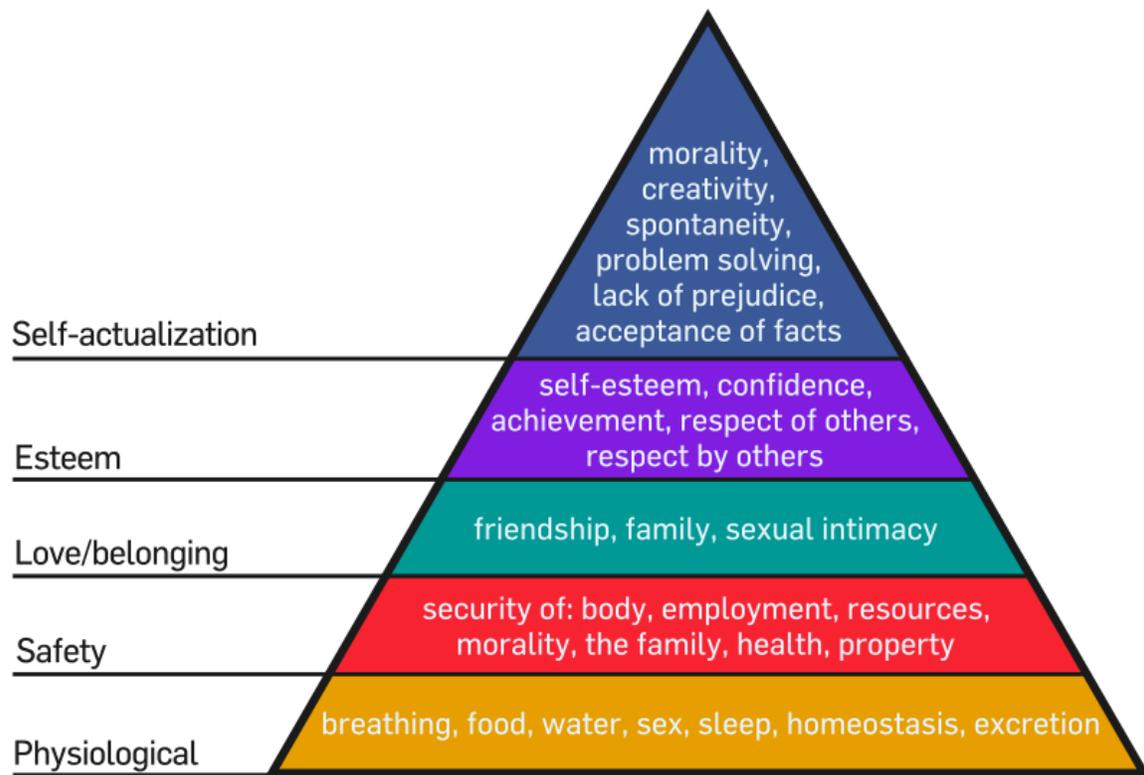
Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

An area of emphasis in classrooms and educational research over the course of recent years has been on student mindsets. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck is credited with the work behind what is described as "growth and fixed mindset" (as cited in Truax, 2018). A fixed mindset is when someone is of the belief that his or her abilities are unable to be changed. This belief often derives from the assumption that people are born with ability in a given subject, or that they are not. A growth mindset on the other hand, suggests that our abilities are malleable, and capable of consistent change. Studies have shown that teachers are capable of producing a shift in their student's mindsets. Research also suggests that self-efficacy is closely related to motivation (Truax, 2018). This

connection suggests that students who adopt a growth mindset may be more susceptible to being motivated in academic tasks.

When studying factors that influence student motivation, it is important to address what teachers can do to create change. A 2017 study of 110 classrooms found significant statistical evidence that teacher's classroom management and attitude can impact student motivation (Schiefele, 2017). One takeaway from this study was that educator interest in course material is a major predictor of their instructional practices. In the same study, it was found that teachers' classroom management skills had a strong connection with educational interest. In well-managed classrooms, students were more autonomous, competent, and motivated. Finally, both subjective and objective measures of learning environments have been shown to influence student motivation (Schiefele, 2017).

Summary of Student Motivation

The review presented in this section indicates that low student motivation is one of the most persistent concerns of teachers. This concern is particularly pressing because educators also tend to feel underprepared to improve student motivation (Daniels, 2018). Recent research has shown that there is a consistent decrease in student motivation from elementary school through high school. This decrease in motivation was consistent each year from third grade through ninth grade in a study of over three thousand students (Gillet, N., Vallerand, R., & Lafrenière, J, 2012). Teachers that provide opportunities for autonomy, and parents supporting independence can help children maintain or increase motivation, particularly intrinsically (Gillet, N. et al., 2012). Thus, one of the main goals

of this capstone project will be to see if opportunities for student autonomy through choice in writing impacts motivation of second grade students.

Student Choice

"Instructional choice is a low-intensity strategy that requires little preparation, is easy to implement, and supports content instruction in the classroom" (Lane, Royer, Messenger, Common, Ennis, & Swogger, 2015). Student choice refers to the ability for students to independently select between two or more options in completing a given assignment. Student choice can be implemented through a variety of structures and formats. In recent years there has been an increased interest in student choice. International Baccalaureate (IB) inquiry-based learning, Google Genius Hour, individualized course content, and choice boards are just a few of the programs and strategies that have been placing an emphasis on instructional choice. In this section we will be looking at what research tells us about student choice, the formats and structures we have seen it used within, and how it could be used to motivate second grade writing.

Fostering independent learning. Two studies have suggested that students that learn independently benefit in many different ways. Independent learners were shown to work to higher standards. These students also had higher-self esteem than other children. Amongst other benefits were increased motivation, a greater ability to form opinions, improved problem solving, and a wider variety of strategies used within schoolwork (Meyer, Haywood, Sachdev, & Faraday, 2008). Educators understand the importance of fostering independence. As previously noted, students that are able to work autonomously are more intrinsically motivated, and perform better on academic tasks.

One of the key benefits of instructional choice is that the increased options shift part of the learner responsibility from the teacher to the student (Meyer, et al., 2008). When choices are presented, students are expected to self-direct, and take part in independent learning. This shift can only occur with proper structures in place. In a study by the *London Department for Children, Schools, and Families*, researchers Meyer, et al., identified five valuable ways that teachers can promote independent learning. The first way is through scaffolding. Teachers are to gradually shift responsibility to their students over time; in particular, teachers need to be prepared to adjust flexibly to their student's preparedness instead of following any predetermined path. The opportunity to self-monitor is the second suggestion. Responsibility can be shifted to students by helping them create goals, and then guiding them through internal feedback, as well as providing external feedback on the effectiveness of their strategies throughout the goals process. Third is modeling expected behaviors for students. The fourth suggestion is to communicate using language that is focused on learning. Finally, the fifth recommendation is to provide consistent feedback on coursework and homework. To provide meaningful feedback on student work teachers are recommended to emphasize individual, targeted skills for students to work on. In writing, feedback has been shown to be most valuable when provided during the writing process as opposed to following its completion (Meyer, et al., 2008). Creating an environment that emphasizes these five strategies can help shift the learner responsibility from the teacher to the student.

In a 2012 action research study (Sanden, 2012), a team of researchers spent six months observing highly effective teachers to determine what they do differently from

others. Principals and colleagues throughout districts identified the eight teachers across the Pacific Northwest. The researchers found that highly effective teachers demonstrated the following traits: "excellent classroom management, implementation of instructional density and higher order thinking activities, extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation, and high expectations for all students" (Sanden, 2012).

Across-task choices vs. within-task choices. There are two distinct types of choices that teachers typically offer in the classroom setting:, across- task choices and within-task choices (Lane, Royer, Messenger, Common, Ennis, & Swogger, 2015). Across-task choices refer to options that allow students to alter the order or format of the work they are completing. One example of this would be to provide students with what's described as a choice board or an options menu. The design behind both choice boards and menus allows the teacher to create a set of tasks that would allow students to accomplish the learning goal, while allowing the child to work in a manner that best suits their interests. Choice board tasks can be as varied (allowing for students to create songs, skits, artwork) or fine tuned (providing various choices within one or two mediums), as the teacher prefers. Within-task choices are much more simple. These refer to providing students with options in a predetermined task, such as whether to use crayon instead of colored pencil, where to work, or who to work with. While within-task choices may seem simplistic, it is important to note that both styles have been shown to have a similar impact on students (Lane, Royer, Messenger, Common, Ennis, & Swogger, 2015).

Potential drawbacks. Researchers have identified and highlighted many possible benefits that can come from offering student choice. This does not mean that instructional

choice always works, or should be offered in every lesson. In fact, many of the studies

that have promoted instructional choice have found aspects that were problematic for

both students and teachers. In one-study (Lane, et al., 2015) researchers worked with a

special education classroom to offer both across-task and within-task choices for students

with autism. The study found that all four students (ages ranging from 5-11) responded

with at least one negative behavior (examples included screaming, aggression, or verbal

protesting) during both baseline and withdrawal phases (Lane, et al., 2015).

A common criticism of offering student choice is the potential increased

preparation time for teachers. It has been previously noted that teachers spend a

tremendous amount of time on their work; a study found the average public school

teacher in the United States works 53 hours per week (Walker, 2018). Offering effective

instructional choice requires the teachers to provide options that are catered to their

student's needs. As the instructor, it becomes their responsibility to identify, and provide

materials that will fit these student needs. This creates a potential increase in preparation

time for the teacher.

Summary

In the previous section, it was noted that researchers (Sanden, 2012) identified

many common traits of highly effective teachers; such as excellent classroom

management, implementation of instructional density and higher order thinking activities,

extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation, and high expectations for

all students (Sanden, 2012). These teachers displayed these traits through their

experiences in offering instructional choice. In my capstone project, I will be seeking to

evaluate whether these potential benefits outweigh the possible drawbacks of increased problematic behavior or the amount of required teacher preparation.

Second Grade Writing

There are seven common core standards that are unique to second grade. By the end of second grade students are expected to be able to compose opinion pieces, informative texts, and create narrative stories. Second grade students should take part in the entire writing process, including revising and editing. They are also expected to take part in research, gathering information from provided sources, and publish or produce using digital tools with assistance (English Language Arts Standards, 2017). In second grade students create simple essays, develop handwriting ability, and grow in understanding of grammar and phonics knowledge. These expectations for growth can also come with significant excitement or frustration. Student interest or disinterest in writing can be connected to their experiences in the elementary classroom (Norris, 2015).

Evidence continues to indicate that expected gains in United States students' literacy achievement, which was expected through the implementation of rigorous standards and mandated high-stakes assessments, have failed to occur (Au & Valencia, 2010). The common core standards include an explicit call for routine writing over both extended and short time frames. One possible explanation for the failure to meet expected gains despite the expectations for frequent writing is that standards-based education measures and reports achievement without addressing the practices of teaching language arts (Au & Valencia, 2010). "If a student is going to spend a significant amount of time to shape and polish his writing, it is important that he has a vested interested in the

writing. One way of doing this is to give students choices in the writing assignments they complete" (Norris, 2015).

How do students feel about writing? Decades of research show that student beliefs regarding the writing process and their writing ability has a significant impact on how they approach writing tasks, how they persist through challenges in those writing tasks, and their proficiency as writers (Zumbrunn, Ekholm, Stringer, McKnight, & DeBusk-Lane, 2017). Researchers have emphasized the importance of the classroom environment for many years. Suggesting that a supportive environment is critical for students to have positive writing experiences. Creating a supportive writing environment requires the teacher to focus on student safety, and is ready to react to student needs (Zumbrunn, et al., 2017). In their study, *Student Experiences with Writing: Taking the Temperature of the Classroom* Zumbrunn et al., created a five-step process to help teachers identify and respond to student's feelings about writing.

1. Ask your students to draw a picture of a recent experience they had with writing and how that experience made them feel.

2. What did students draw? Ask them to write a description of their drawing.

3. Bring the class together to discuss the students' drawings. Take note of common ideas that emerge during the discussion.

4. Analyze students' drawings and written responses.

5. Reflect on the class conversation and your analysis. Use the data to plan your instruction and foster student writing engagement and success.

Through this process the research team found that their study's participants valued choice and modeling as ways to improve the writing experience. For example, one student noted getting excited whenever they could write about mythology. While another student noted that the freedom to create a writing web was particularly helpful. Another common suggestion was for teachers to write with their students. The act of modeling writing appeared to serve two main benefits: guiding student work and helping students to view their teacher as part of the classroom writing community (Zumbrunn, et al. 2017).

Choice in the writing process. Second grade writers are expected to take part in the writing process, often for the first time. Learning the writing process presents many benefits, but also presents challenges for students. Taking part in brainstorming and editing when students are accustomed to moving on to new tasks and topics throughout the day requires extended focus. These new steps and strategies as part of the writing process offer many opportunities for student choice. Starting with prewriting, students can be offered different graphic organizers, allowing for the within-task choice of which organizer most appeals to them (Giouroukakis, & Connolly, 2015). In prewriting, teachers could also offer the opportunity to complete a graphic organizer on their own, or take part in some prepared brainstorming questions with a partner, allowing for an across-task choice. During the initial draft teachers could offer various sentence stems, could model using an example paper or thinking aloud as they compose initial sentences, and could provide books relevant to the topics students are writing about (Giouroukakis, & Connolly, 2015). The revising and editing process is one that students rarely look forward to. Teachers can offer the simple within-task choices of color-coding their

corrections using different materials or allowing students to choose whether they will edit their own paper before submitting the draft or to have a peer complete the initial edits (Giouroukakis, & Connolly, 2015). When preparing for the implementation of curriculum using student choice it is important to consider opportunities throughout the writing process.

　　　　Creative writing. Teaching for creativity is messier than teaching calculated learning objectives. Creativity is non-conforming and can be uncomfortable. When teaching for creativity you cannot expect uniform behaviors, each individual may be noticeably different (Saunders, 2012). Teachers seeking classrooms with conformed behaviors may quickly shy away from teaching in this manner. Other barriers could be crowded classrooms, building/district expectations, and a lack of training (Steele, 2016). Proponents of offering creative writing remind us that reading and writing are artistic. They should not focus on being technical, or technical ability. Emotion and creativity are the goal, not repetition of skills. Even when teachers are able to offer creative writing, the vast majority of these opportunities are in creating fiction narratives. Researchers suggest that not only is there an argument that all writing is creative writing, but that a creative process may improve ability in all genres, and creates growth in areas like vocabulary development (Steele, 2016).

　　　　Research has shown that there are many ways teachers can become more effective facilitators of creative writing. The learning environment affects student creativity. Allowing students planning time, a willingness to take risks, generating discussions with open-ended questions, openly accepting and adapting through feedback, using student

centered approaches, providing appropriate scaffolds for tasks, and consistent classroom management techniques are the factors that were connected to thriving student creativity. This combination of factors demonstrated that the teacher was both flexible and focused on task appropriateness (Steele, 2016). One technique that was recommended for teachers working to allow more creative writing was to work to create "No Wrong Answers" questions. Then facilitating the writing period as students take their own path through writing. These simple questions can create the positive challenge that comes with mild discomfort in an environment that often only asks students to produce the "correct answer". Another strategy that was recommended when implementing creative writing was to provide more immediate feedback. Teachers often wait until students have completed a writing to provide feedback, and focus largely on writing conventions. Instead, during the writing time teachers can act in the style of a sports coach, quickly adding simple suggestions or reminders. It is noted that the more teachers can focus on the details of the writing, such as word choice or the direction the student's narrative is taking the better. Teachers should not feel the need to sacrifice creativity in an attempt to prioritize areas such as readiness or achievement. It is possible to meet the standards, as well as preparing students for future endeavors without sacrificing opportunities for creation (Steele, 2016). Fostering student creativity is one point of emphasis in creating a learning environment where instructional choice is the norm.

Summary

Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown (2013) state, "Learning to write is a complex and mysterious journey; hence, learning to teach writing can be an equally puzzling path".

Second grade represents an important time in a child's writing development. Second graders are expected to engage in research, the writing process, and be able to compose three different styles of papers (informative, opinion, and narrative). This is to take place while developing a better understanding of grammar rules and writing conventions. Adding opportunities for student choice may boost student creativity, engagement, and writing prowess. It also may present barriers in the form of extra noise, a lack of uniform behaviors in the classroom, and possible challenges in working within building or district guidelines.

Constructivism, and Connection to Curriculum Model

The primary theory that this curriculum is grounded in is Constructivism. In recent years Constructivist pedagogy has seen an increased emphasis in the United States schools (Krahenbuhl, 2016). Constructivism is built upon four focal characteristics that are believed to influence all learning. The first of these elements is the idea that learners construct their own meaning. As educators, when we realize that learners construct their own meaning, it comes with the realization that lecture and the sharing of facts does not equate to creation of knowledge in that subject matter. In the case of this writing project, it implies that if we tell students what to write that it will not foster learning for that student. The second focal point is that social interaction plays a key role. When taking part in student-centered learning, the sharing of knowledge and understanding between peers allows for rapid growth. In relation to this project, choices that allow students to work in partners, groups, or different locations can open up opportunities for positive social interaction. Authentic learning tasks are the third focal point. This means that

students need to take part in activities that are purposeful, and have significance to their lives. This is the area where student choice can have the greatest impact. When students are allowed to make their own decisions tasks are inherently more likely to have authentic purpose and meaning to them. The final focal point is that learning is dependent on existing understanding (Krahenbuhl, 2016). This focal point is where proper modeling and scaffolding becomes critically important. When educators provide a foundation of knowledge, with the appropriately gradual release, students can use the knowledge that they already have to create new understanding. Constructivism provides a highly important framework for this curriculum due to its focus on "active, physical engagement from the students" (Krahenbuhl, 2016). This aligns with the critical components of instructional choice, which focuses on fostering student engagement.

Synthesis of the Literature

The main purpose of this review has been to examine whether previous research offers a solution: *How can writing curriculum offer choices for second grade students in a manner that increases interest and growth?* Studying the different types of motivation, and their roles in schools can help in understanding the needs of second grade students. Literature on instructional choice has allowed for a better understanding of the systems and structures that allow for creative freedom in other classrooms. Research on second grade writing reveals the expectations and opportunities for growth that should be addressed in my capstone project.

The included research suggested that fostering intrinsic motivation is critical to academic success. While extrinsic motivation, at least at the second grade level, can also

be beneficial and coexist with intrinsic motivation (Lemos, & Veríssimo, 2014). Different students require different strategies to become more motivated, but developing autonomy can have a drastic impact for many students.

The research I focused on suggested that student choice can be as simplistic or as complex as educators are willing to make it. Both across-task choices and within-task choices can provide benefits such as increased engagement or academic growth (Lane, Royer, Messenger, Common, Ennis, & Swogger, 2015). Offering student choice also poses some potential problems. Student misbehavior has increased in the initial stages of some studies, and teacher preparation time may increase in order to create new materials that allow for student choice (Lane, Royer, Messenger, Common, Ennis, & Swogger, 2015).

Second grade writing teachers face a heavy burden of expectations. It is a year where significant growth across literacy skills is necessary. Second grade writing also presents many opportunities for teachers to allow for writing to become an engaging artistic process (Steele, 2016). This may be done through a variety of creative exercises, some of which could include student choice. Pursuing further research and incorporating student choice into a curriculum in a disciplined manner will be valuable to learn about the effect that student choice can have on students as writers, and if it helps them to see writing as a more enjoyable subject. Chapter Three focuses on the details of the capstone project. This includes the lesson structure; guiding theories and methods for the lessons, the implementation timeframe, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. Additionally the rationale for the format, resources that are used, and the audience for the

project are included.. All of these details focus on the goal of assessing whether or not

student choice can increase second grade student motivation and interest in writing.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Outline

Introduction

I am grateful to be preparing for my sixth year as a classroom teacher. During the previous five years, all of which have been in primary education, I have noticed that student motivation is infrequently discussed at staff meetings and in professional development courses that I have attended. In classrooms the importance of student interest is difficult to overlook. At any given moment one student may be nearly bursting out of their seat with enthusiasm surrounding a topic while another student may appear to be completely oblivious to the happenings of the classroom. I frequently hear staff members and families note that certain children are motivated while others are not, without much suggestion of the possibility for change. Through the literature review process I have been able to identify and learn about practices that teachers have successfully used to improve student engagement, interest, and motivation. This process also prepared me for potential pitfalls, and techniques that should be emphasized in order to maximize efficiency. In this chapter I will overview the methods that will be used to answer the research question: *How can writing curriculum offer choices for second grade students in a manner that increases interest and growth?*

The resource created for this project is a writing curriculum that encompasses fifteen writing lessons, intended to be taught over the course of five school weeks. Each lesson offers a variety of options that the instructor may use to offer choices for students. Each lesson will include both across-task choices (those that impact the format of the

work) and within-task choices (relating to student environment or materials used) for students (Lane, Royer, Messenger, Common, Ennis, & Swogger, 2015). Included with the lessons will be information on preparing students, opportunities for scaffolding, and implementation expectations for teachers.

Audience and Context

The audience for this curriculum is second-grade classroom teachers. In particular, the resources included are designed to help those that have not previously emphasized student choice to become more aware of opportunities to implement instructional choices in their daily practice. While the lessons are designed for the students to enjoy and grow as writers, the maximum impact can be achieved if teachers are able to use the writing lessons to assist in habitually seeking out room for greater student independence. For educators that are already comfortable in offering student choice, the lessons provide a clear structure with consistent formatting to assist in developing a culture of independent learning early in the school year.

In this project, the curriculum will only be implemented in my second grade classroom. The rationale behind having the new curriculum adopted in my own classroom at first is to allow for maximum control over possible variables. While the lessons included are designed to take five weeks to complete, the entire project (a case study, if you will) is designed to be completed over the course of ten weeks. The extended period of time allows for the use of evaluations before, during, and after the lessons take place. This second grade classroom is located in southern Minnesota. The district is relatively large, with a student population of over fifteen thousand students.

The particular school building that the case study will take place in has a student population of roughly eight hundred thirty students, kindergarten through fifth grade. There are five second-grade classrooms in the school, comprising a second-grade student population of roughly one hundred-thirty students (26 per classroom). In the previous school year eleven percent of the student population were English Learners (EL). Thirty two percent of the students have qualified for free and reduced lunch. The student population is fifty nine percent white, twenty one percent Hispanic, ten percent Asian, six percent black, and four percent other or undefined.

I have been teaching at the same elementary school for the past five school years. Throughout this time the building has not purchased or required the use of a specific writing curriculum. The district does however have specific assessments that they require to be used at each grade level. Building administration requests that classroom teachers use the standards to guide writing lessons connected largely to reading, science, and social studies curriculum. A designated class period, or frequency for writing work is also not mandated within the school building. Creating and sharing writing lessons, materials, and ideas has become a very normal practice in the building. It is my goal to be able to share the materials and curriculum created, whether through the files themselves or sharing the research process at a school staff meeting following the case study.

Grounding Theories

The primary theory that this curriculum is grounded in is Constructivism. Within Constructivism there are four focal characteristics that are believed to influence all learning. These areas are at the forefront of the design process for this curriculum model.

1. Learners construct their own meaning.

2. Social interaction plays a key role.

3. Authentic learning tasks are crucial for meaningful learning.

4. Learning is dependent on existing understanding (Krahenbuhl, 2016).

This curriculum is also built based on two very popular theories of motivation: Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-determination theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory. Self-determination theory focuses on the idea that individuals are motivated by their needs to be competent, autonomous, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory is particularly relevant to this curriculum, where the emphasis is on how people can grow from the amotivation stage to self-motivated is similar to the process that I am attempting to replicate with second grade students. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory is particularly popular. It places a focus on individuals having their most important needs met in order to become fully efficient and independent. Taking individual student needs into account when implementing and designing lessons can help ensure maximum growth in student motivation (Mcleod, 2018).

Curriculum Description and Elements

I chose to complete a curriculum model that includes both design and implementation materials. The rationale for this is two-fold. First, we currently do not have a writing curriculum in my school building. This meant that there was not a set of lessons that I had experience with that I could use to revise or use as building blocks. Along with this, I believe lessons that focus on student choice need to be centered on student choice from the initial planning process. Adding choices to an existing lesson is

very possible, but may not be as natural compared to a lesson that is built around offering instructional choices. The decision to create implementation materials is because of the need to support teachers in allowing instructional choice. Researchers have found that teachers are often anxious about releasing students to direct their own learning (Lane, et al. 2015). Offering choices is not a common practice for some teachers, so creating materials that emphasize implementation can provide tools for teachers to try it in their classrooms. For those reasons I believe that the potential to impact more classrooms, and to be successful in those classrooms is much greater when both design and implementation materials are included.

The writing curriculum has been developed based on the *Understanding by Design, Backward Design* framework. In this process lessons have been built upon the end goals and essential questions. For example, early lessons in this unit are on developing informative writing. Essential outcomes for these lessons are students to be able to clearly identify their main topic, and provide relevant facts. In the *Backward Design* framework, the next step phase in lesson design is to determine assessment evidence. Using the same example from before, I took this step to create rubrics for assessing student outcomes. For informative writing, this includes outcomes such as, "Writer connects content to the topic, and demonstrates knowledge about the topic throughout" and, "The writer uses academic vocabulary related to the topic". Creating rubrics in the second stage allows for focused design in step three, planning learning experiences. Using the goals for the unit and individual lessons I developed lessons that

allowed for student choice while focusing on finding ways for students to create the necessary knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Instructional Strategies

In this choice-based writing curriculum, each lesson will follow the *Writer's Workshop* lesson format. The Writer's Workshop structure was developed by Donald Graves and Donald Murray, and has seen increased popularity in recent years through Lucy Calkins and the Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University (Calkins, 2006). Our school has participated in the Lucy Calkins Reading Workshop in recent years, which allows for some familiarity for students. In this structure the teacher is to guide a mini-lesson in front of the classroom for up to fifteen minutes, before providing independent work time, and ending with an opportunity for students to share their work. In my experiences, the most critical aspect of this structure is how the teacher uses the student's independent work time. In the Writer's Workshop framework teachers can best support students by providing immediate and consistent feedback to students while they are writing. In this curriculum, the ideal feedback is provided individually and is focused on helping to continue assisting students in generating ideas, reminding them of the format expectations, and providing notes on spelling and grammar (Calkins, 2009). One area where flexibility is afforded is in the mini-lesson portion. The curriculum is designed so that teachers spend fifteen minutes each lesson instructing on the materials for the given week. With three lessons scheduled for each week, this amounts to roughly forty-five minutes of whole-group instruction. Teachers are encouraged to review or add

material based upon student needs during the other two days of each school week, during the implementation of this curriculum.

Writing Standards and Lesson Structure

There are seven common core writing standards that are unique to second grade. By the end of second grade students are expected to be able to compose opinion pieces, informative texts, and create narrative stories. Second grade students should take part in the entire writing process, including revising and editing. Lastly, they are expected to take part in research, gathering information from provided sources, and with assistance publish or produce using digital tools (English Language Arts Standards, 2017). Through this curriculum instructors will be able to guide students in practicing five of these seven standards. These expectations were used as the basis for creating lessons that offered instructional choice to students.

Five Focus Standards

1. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2

   Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

2. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.5

   With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

3. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.6

   With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

4. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.7

   Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of

   books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).

5. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.8

   Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided

   sources to answer a question (English Language Arts Standards, 2017).

First week of lessons. The first three lessons are focused on understanding and composing informative writing. These lessons include a graphic organizer and brainstorming ideas, and are meant to encompass one week of writing instruction. By the end of this week's lessons, the students are to craft a three-paragraph informative writing. Areas that the instructor will focus on will include how to brainstorm through the use of graphic organizers, basic conventions (capitalization, use of punctuation, appropriate spacing), and how to identify a main topic. Opportunities for student choice in this unit will include allowing students to choose from a variety of graphic organizers, providing a list of topics that students can write about, and allowing students the option of whether or not to share their compositions with the class.

Second week of lessons. Building off of the first week of lessons, the second week of instruction focuses on taking part in the writing process. Using writing from the previous week, students are to choose whether to self-edit or have a peer edit their informative essays. They will also choose from a variety of provided samples to practice

the editing process. In the final lesson of the week, students are to use the writing process on a writing sample that they've made in a previous unit.

Third week of lessons. The third week of instruction is focused on how to take part in research projects. Students are to practice using a variety of resources to help them choose topics for a research project. The research project will follow an inquiry style model. This week's goal for students will be to choose from the available resources in order to help them craft a research question. Opportunities for choice in these lessons will include the opportunity to work collaboratively, using books from the school library or internet databases, whether or not they would like to use a graphic organizer, and making an initial decision of how they would like to present their project.

Fourth and fifth week of lessons. The final two weeks (six lessons) focus on their final, informative research project. These projects are to be self-directed, and based around the topics that they previously chose. In the final two weeks the learning objectives will center on proper implementation of the writing process, including submitting both rough and final drafts of their informational writing. In the spirit of emphasizing choice, this can be completed through a variety of media. Suggested options included a student essay, a typed document, poster, scripted video, Powerpoint presentation, or a scripted skit. Students will also demonstrate the ability to use resources such as encyclopedias (physical and digital), online databases, informational texts, and more to acquire information for answering their research questions. Allowing students to take part in the research process is both part of the key standards and a great opportunity for students to take part in self-directed work.

Measuring Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this new curriculum will be evaluated through a variety of qualitative measures. One key method of evaluation will be through video review of lessons. I will have short (15-20 minute) tapings of the class during the writing period before, during, and after implementing the instructional choice writing curriculum. Video will be used to provide examples and to witness changes in student engagement over time. Another important means of measuring effectiveness will be student interviews. Students will be asked questions throughout the period of the case study related to their interest and performance in writing. In a further effort to vary evaluation methods, students will be provided with surveys. Similar to the interviews, these surveys will focus on student perspectives on interest and performance in writing. The surveys will also be provided both before and after the curriculum has been implemented. Finally, a series of three assessments will be used to measure student progress throughout. Each assessment will provide students with a series of three different writing prompts. Students will then be asked to complete a response to the prompt. Students will be provided up to thirty minutes to complete each assessment, in order to minimize the possibility of increased work time, or a lack thereof impacting their performance. Student effectiveness on the assessments will be measured using a rubric focused on proper structure, use of writing conventions, and length/ideas.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the structure and purpose for this capstone project, which is creating a new curriculum. Specifically, the following question has guided my

project: *how can a writing curriculum offer choices for second grade students in a*

manner that increases interest and growth? The primary audience for this project is

classroom teachers, particularly in primary education. This project is built upon the four

focal characteristics of constructivism, and their importance in learning. The overall

goal for this project is to learn more about student motivation, and how opportunities for

student choice can impact intrinsic motivation, specifically in writing. The entire

implementation of the new curriculum will take place over a ten-week period in the fall

of 2019. The writing lessons will occur over the course of a five-week period. This is a

qualitative case study. This capstone project will be evaluated through student surveys,

video observations, interviews, and student assessments. In the final chapter, I will focus

on the project conclusions. Chapter four will focus on the project conclusions. Including

evaluations of student surveys, assessments, interviews, observations, and personal

reflection. I will also discuss how this project can be interpreted, and opportunities for

this project to be used by myself and others in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

The goal of my capstone project was to answer the research question of *how can writing curriculum offer choices for second grade students in a manner that increases interest and growth?* As a second grade teacher, helping my students to have a positive attitude toward school is a priority. In many subject areas I have felt the ability to influence the vast majority of my student's interest. One area where I have struggled to have that consistent influence is writing. Many second graders come into the classroom with strong feelings about writing, whether positive or negative. One way that I believe I can connect with all students as writers is to offer students more agency in their writing through opportunities to make choices. Developed with the research from my literature review and the plan outlined in Chapter Three, I have created a curriculum consisting of fifteen lesson plans. The lessons include corresponding resources, and allow teachers opportunities to adjust based on the needs of their class' in a way that may motivate students while fostering growth as a writer.

Chapter Four is a reflection on the capstone process. I will be looking at what I have learned as both a classroom teacher and a researcher. Taking note of what I learned through developing this project, and the implementation of the lessons that I created for it. I will also be looking back on the literature review, and which information most heavily influenced the design of the writing curriculum. Next, I will be focusing on the measures of effectiveness for the project. The results and conclusions that I arrived at,

how these compared to my initial expectations, and the limitations and challenges that occurred. Lastly, I will be focusing on how to use this project to improve future instruction. This includes adjustments that can be made in my own classroom, opportunities for professional development, and future research projects that may connect with the work from my capstone project.

My Learnings

A recent college graduate, and pre-service educator, I visited the Minnesota Education Job Fair in the spring of 2013. At the job fair, I spoke with a potential employer and they mentioned that, "Effective teaching happens by design". He certainly was not the first to say this, there is an abundance of information regarding lesson planning, learning targets, and goal setting for students. However, I found myself reflecting on that discussion frequently throughout the capstone process. This is my sixth year as a classroom teacher. Taking part in my capstone project, allowed me to be drastically more intentional about my classroom practices than I had been in any of my previous years.

Initially, I doubted my preparedness for the capstone process. I had a large variety of interests, and topics that I wanted to learn more about. Much of the hesitation I had was whether the work I completed would be of value in light of how much education research already exists. Eventually, through the guidance of my classmates, colleagues, and professors my perspective changed to what makes my classroom unique within my own school. In my classroom, student choice has been a major focal point for years. Further thinking about student choice, helped me to understand that student motivation

one of my highest priorities. Becoming more intentional about offering student choice required me to think more critically about what I do and do not allow from my second graders. I realized that many of the choices I have offered in previous years existed to fill my student's time in an enjoyable way. For example, I would allow students to create a drawing or write a second version of a story when finishing work. Now, I try to plan student choices through the lens of motivating students. If I offer a different format for project completion, a different location to work in, or the opportunity to work collaboratively will it benefit my student's learning? I have witnessed a shift in student productivity through this change.

Entering the capstone project my views on action research were positively impacted by courses through the Hamline MAED program. Even so, I felt that action research was for teachers who do not have their own classrooms, or for those who particularly enjoy leading presentations. Taking part in the research process has helped to understand how educators can use their strengths, in connection to research, to build stronger professional development. Knowing the value of collaboration in education and actually experiencing educational research has allowed me to grow into someone more comfortable with sharing and learning from others. In the past, I have mostly used writing to accomplish what is necessary for my work. Taking part in this capstone project has allowed me to become a more confident and thoughtful writer. I recognize how my writing can be used to share knowledge with others, and that I am fully capable of developing resources and lessons for other elementary teachers.

Literature Review

Taking part in the literature review was a highly valuable process. In collecting resources, reading through them and organizing the literature review I came across an incredible amount of information regarding student motivation and student choice. Developing a greater understanding of these topics allowed me to feel confident in the decisions and structure of the project itself. In studying student motivation, my key takeaway was how numerous individual differences and factors can have a drastic impact. Studying student choice helped me to recognize where opportunities lie for student choice within any lesson. Becoming more aware of these possibilities helped me to craft a curriculum where student choices were purposeful and motivating.

Understanding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was critical to crafting a successful project. Carlton and Winsler noted that intrinsic motivation is made up of three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy or self-determination (2008). In creating my curriculum I attempted to instill a sense of competence through the drafting process, and positive praise that came in successful completion of initial drafts of both informative essays and research projects. Developing a sense of relatedness requires much more than can be accomplished in fifteen lessons. A strong classroom community is necessary for students to feel motivated in this sense. In the lessons themselves, the ability to share and discuss ideas with classmates was very important to me, and opportunities to work with peers were another means of developing relatedness. Increasing student autonomy or self-determination is a goal of many classroom teachers. In this process, student choice and the opportunity to be self-guided are critical to allowing second graders to become independent learners.

While developing intrinsic motivation was a key goal of my capstone project, as previously noted, there are many other factors involved in student motivation. Learning about how extrinsic motivation can coincide with intrinsic motivators allowed me to develop a more multi-leveled approach. Specific praise, classroom rewards; such as extra break time for exceptional work, and reminders of the people that their projects may be shared with were used to help students maintain engagement throughout the implementation of the curriculum (Lemos & Verissimo, 2014). Further study of theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset were also revealing. It was important to remember that second graders enter the classroom each day with a different level of preparedness. Some may have basic needs that are not being met, while others are capable to focus the entirety of their attention on our coursework. While some students enter the classroom with a growth mindset, others need their classroom teacher to help them develop such an attitude and understanding (Iguisi, 2009).

When choices are presented, students are expected to be self-directed, and take part in independent learning. Reading through research on student choice allowed me to make strong connections between student choice and student motivation. One of the key benefits of instructional choice is that it shifts part of the responsibility to the learner (Meyer, et al., 2008). This connects greatly with autonomy as a key factor in developing intrinsic motivation. Further study into student choice allowed me to understand how I could mix across task choices (options that allow students to alter the order or format of the work they are completing) and within task choices (options in a predetermined task, such as whether to use crayons instead of colored pencils, where to work, or who to work

with) to seek out meaningful opportunities within each lesson (Lane, et al., 2015). Some lessons benefited from allowing students the chance to use a variety of formats to complete them, while for others incorporating more subtle opportunities such as choosing between working at their desk or around the room provided benefit. An awareness of opportunities when developing the writing curriculum allowed me to offer a wide variety of choices that centered around helping students efficiently reach the desired outcomes.

Taking part in the literature review was vital to creating and implementing a purposeful project. Developing a greater understanding of student motivation, student choice, and second grade writing allowed me to craft a curriculum that was goal-oriented and structured in a manner that would serve the needs of my students. Being aware of the opportunities for student choice, and how the choices would work within the classroom while lesson planning was possible because of the readings and writings in the literature review. Other details, such as rubrics, student interview questions, and survey questions were created using the information collected in the literature review as well.

Final Project

I am very proud of the contents of my capstone project. For this project I created a ten week writing curriculum, that offered student choice in each lesson, and focused on five second grade writing standards. The curriculum includes fifteen lesson plans, two rubrics (one for the informative essay and another for the final research project), and resources for each of the lessons. One of the most enjoyable and challenging aspects of the capstone project is that I was able to implement the lessons in my own second grade classroom. This allowed me to use surveys and interviews to gauge student interest and

motivation to write, and how it changed over time. The students also completed an informational writing assessment prior to the lessons, halfway through the implementation of the curriculum, and again following the final lesson. This process has allowed me to measure student improvement as writers over the course of implementing the writing curriculum.

The student choice, writing curriculum was designed intentionally for the use of classroom teachers. I created the lessons with classroom teachers in mind, and included opportunities to adjust lessons or choices based upon the needs of their students and to be flexible to their classroom schedule. Prior to implementing the student choice writing curriculum, student surveys provided valuable information relating to how students viewed writing, and themselves as writers. Shown in the figure below, students responded to nine different prompts. Before the writing curriculum, 10 students (35%) stated that they "liked writing". At the end of the curriculum, 16 students (57%) stated that the liked writing. In response to the prompt "I like to choose what I write about, prior to implementing the curriculum 16 students (57%) responded positively, while 23 students (82%) responded positively at the end of the curriculum. Student perspectives made significant change in many more areas. 16 students (57%) responded that writing was important prior to the curriculum, while 22 students (79%) did afterward. 4 students (14%) stated that they enjoyed sharing their writing prior to the curriculum, while 14 students (50%) responded positively following the lessons. In the other five prompts, student perspectives shifted as well, but to a lesser extent. I had hoped to see greater growth in student confidence in their writing, and beliefs in the creativity of their ideas.

Overall, I felt very positive about the change in student perspectives, as shown by the

survey results in figure 2.

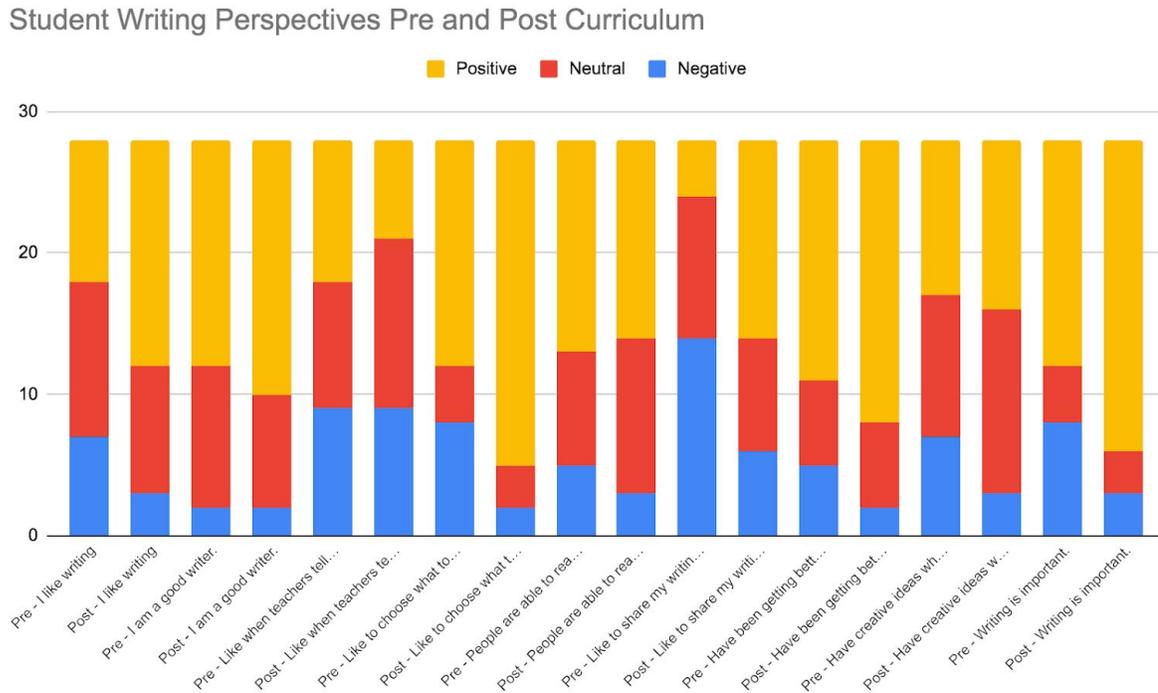*Figure 2.* Student Writing Perspectives Pre and Post Curriculum

Student Survey Statements

1. I like writing.

2. I am a good writer.

3. I like when teachers tell me what to write about.

4. I like to choose what to write about.

5. Other people are able to read my writing.

6. I like to share my writing with other people.

7. I have been getting better at writing.

8. I have creative ideas when I am writing.

9. Writing is important.

   Student observations provided further information on student interest and motivation throughout the implementation of the student choice writing curriculum. I had the opportunity to videotape two different lessons (lessons 3 and 10) to use for observing students during writing. In lesson 3 *Prewriting and Graphic Organizers* the main takeaway was that opportunities for choice and exploration appeared to lead to much more collaboration than I had anticipated. Following modeling of the different options, students quickly took to their classmates to share ideas and work together to find the best resources, and how they could efficiently use them. I noted a similar trend in lesson 10 *Choosing a Topic and Creating Guiding Questions,* in which students were heavily influenced by the decisions of their peers. While there ended up being sixteen different topics selected, students watched videos together, discussed possible options, and often chose similar topics to their friends. For example, a group of students selected to study the history of the Minnesota Vikings, quickly afterward, another student selected to study the history of the New Orleans Saints. This spirit of influence and collaboration extended into both the informative essay and research projects. The opportunities for choice, informative focus, and need to use a wide variety of resources led to many opportunities for students to engage and teach collaboratively. While this was not the main goal of my project, I believe this was the most beneficial byproduct of the lesson structure.

   Student interview responses, summarized in the table below, helped me to capture the specific feelings of students toward the midpoint of the writing curriculum (interviews were completed following lesson 7). Generally, these interviews showed that

students were confident in their work, and felt a sense of pride in their growth throughout the year. The interviews also revealed details that could not be measured otherwise. For example, when asked how they felt about writing, one student responded, "I feel like I miss my Dad". This student's focus clearly was not on our writing work that day, and served as a sad, but important reminder that our students needs have to be met before we can focus on their writing growth. This particular interview, quickly shifted into a conversation about personal concerns and needs. Student interviews were also a reminder of how students enjoy and dislike a wide variety of aspects of writing. Four students listed the occasional ability to draw a picture to go with writing as their favorite part, while two other students listed drawing as their least favorite part of our writing time. I believe this variance is another example of how student choice can be beneficial toward enjoying writing.

Table 2

Question and Student Response	Negative	Neutral	Positive
How do you feel your informative essay went?	0	8	20
Do you feel like you have been getting better at writing this year?	1	3	24
How do you feel about writing?	2	7	18

Student growth on the informative writing assessments provided me with a tremendous sense of pride. As displayed in the table below, students made significant growth over the course of the implementation of the student choice writing curriculum.

Writing assessments were scored using the created rubrics on informative writing. Each assessment had a unique informative writing prompt, in which students were allowed twenty-five minutes to independently respond to the prompt. The greatest growth was made in the areas of ideas and details. I believe this curriculum's strengths are in helping students to work on developing in those particular areas.

Table 3

Category/Score	Pre-Curriculum	Midpoint	Final
Structure (of 4)	1.90	2.51	2.86
Ideas (of 4)	1.86	2.55	2.90
Details (of 4)	1.76	2.41	2.86
Vocabulary (of 4)	1.79	2.31	2.59
Conventions (of 4)	2.03	2.52	2.66
Total (of 20)	9.34	12.31	13.86

I am incredibly proud of the student choice writing curriculum. I believe the goals of my project, to increase student interest, motivation, and improve performance were achieved. The lesson structure, of fifteen lessons over the course of ten weeks, is one that I will be excited to share with other educators. I am confident that others can replicate the success that this project had with my class, within their own classrooms. Students showed a consistent interest in collaboration, learning to use new resources, and a willingness to explore new interests and topics throughout the implementation of the student choice writing curriculum.

Next Steps

Following the completion of this project, I am most excited to continue to make changes in my own classroom practices. Being highly intentional about focusing on student choice in informative writing has made me very curious about the possibilities for units focusing on narrative writing, or basic writing conventions. I have reached out to my administrators regarding presenting a summary of the project at a school staff meeting. As our school is particularly large (nearly 900 elementary students), I am excited to have this opportunity. Depending upon response and further learnings throughout the school year, I would be interested in sharing my views on student choice with district staff during our next school year's workshop week.

In my own practice, and in sharing with other second grade teachers, I would recommend teaching these lessons later in the school year than I had. The pacing of the student choice writing curriculum needed to be slowed down frequently in my implementation, and I do not believe this would have been necessary if the lessons were taught in the second half of the school year. I also believe that there is opportunity to add even more resources and depth to the curriculum over time. If students were able to spend greater time on understanding facts and opinions, or were able to study informative literature more ahead of time, they may have been better prepared in future lessons.

Summary

In conclusion, completing the capstone project has been highly rewarding. This experience has allowed me to grow as an educator, and to become comfortable with taking part in educational writing and research. I am very proud of the cumulative resources and curriculum that has been created through the capstone project. I believe

that other educators can benefit from what has been created, and that is has already been

a highly positive influence in my own work with the second grade students in my

classroom. Student growth in their writing ability, confidence in themselves as writers,

and abilities to collaborate and use the available resources met the outcomes that I desired

when beginning this capstone project. I hope to make continued growth in the areas of

fostering student motivation, and allowing student choice throughout my teaching career.

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