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The Joy Of Reading: Increasing Intrinsic Motivation Through Choice Texts And Reading Conferences In Middle School

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THE JOY OF READING: INCREASING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
THROUGH CHOICE TEXTS AND READING CONFERENCES IN MIDDLE
SCHOOL by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Rationale

Reading has always been a passion of mine, and that love grew into a desire to become an English teacher and foster that love in students. Throughout my career, it has become apparent that not every student has the same relationship to reading as I do. A noticeable trend is that middle school is the time many choose to abandon recreational reading for the rest of their lives (Baker, 2002; Edwards, 2009; Froiland & Oros, 2014; Harmon et al., 2019; Oldfather, 1995). To try and combat this, I have created a project around my research question: *How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences?*

This chapter will begin with the exploration of my personal experience with the idea of independent reading and then transition into the experiences I have had with reading as a teacher and what I have observed in my students over the last decade of my career. I will then briefly discuss some of the struggles and concerns centered around the lack of reading amongst students in our country today. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a breakdown of the additional chapters in my capstone project. **Experience**

As I introduce this topic, I will begin by discussing my personal experiences with reading for pleasure and the benefits I have gained from a life of this practice. I will then move into how I have observed independent reading play out in my students and the increasing amount of resistance I have seen over the last few years.

Personal Experience

Growing up, I was always the individual who carried a book around everywhere I went. Even if it was just a quick car ride to run errands with my parents, I would sneak a book into my coat and use those minutes of travel time to immerse myself in another world. I fell in love with the notion of entire universes full of adventure and possibility coming to life in those pages. I was not picky in terms of genre; I simply devoured them.

Over time, I maintained this desire to read. However, when I look back at my schooling, I do not feel there were many opportunities that gave way for me to explore this love in the classroom outside of the prescribed texts that would be read as a large group. Simply giving students time to read and explore texts, outside of the very rushed trips to the school library, was something rarely experienced in an educational setting; instead there was always a need to get through a lesson and move on to the next topic.

This caused a feeling of isolation when it came to reading. While it is an individual experience, there is joy that can be gained from sharing what has been read with another person and being exposed to something new. Because of this isolation, I was the outcast who would rather read than join in on other activities because of the unspoken rule that reading was something a person did because it was an assignment; but that was the extent of how far a person was supposed to interact with books. While that stigma remained, it was a notion I dismissed as I entered my formative

years. Instead, positive relationships involving the discussion of literature and shared recommendations became the norm with like-minded people. By the time I was in college, reading was something that could be a way to bond with another person. Sharing a favorite book and exposing others to new possibilities was a very intimate practice as each story revealed a little bit about their personality, and selecting a book for another person caused me to stop and think about what kind of message each selection provided. It was also a way to push and challenge a person by exposing them to new ideas.

As life progressed, my time to read for pleasure was consumed by the other obligations that arise throughout life. Because of this, my relationship with books has become somewhat distant. The only exception to that now seems to be when a book is recommended by a friend or peer. This act of conferencing with another person has become crucial for me and my continuation in exploring new texts. While it was something that I never really experienced in schools, it has perpetuated my desire to read.

If this were present when I was a student, I would not have felt othered, but as someone who connected with peers as others would have found the same joys. Until my college years, many of the people I interacted with simply saw reading as something one does passively--a teacher told them what specific text to read and then the class analyzed and dissected it multiple times until the students were exhausted by the process. Due to a lack of personal connection to books, many students simply gave up and never engaged in this practice. This is also

something I have attempted to combat now that I am a teacher, but I have noticed that my colleagues and I still struggle with engagement.

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Professional Experience

When I started teaching, I wanted to remove some of the stigma around reading. Today I work with students who devour multiple books each week and others who do whatever it takes to avoid reading. To try and get most of my students in the habit of reading, I dedicated the first portion of class for time to read. I do not care what the students are reading or in what format, as long as they are engaged in some kind of text.

When I started this practice it went through various revisions. The reason for this was the realization that providing time for students to read would not be enough for them to engage with texts. If they had been resistant to reading in the past, being told to go and do it on their own would not be effective. I needed to find ways to motivate my students and show them that there was more to this than over-analyzing a novel.

One of the first obstacles that I found for many students was that they provided responses such as “it was boring” or “there was nothing worth reading”. This made me realize that many students were unaware of the vastness of topics that were present in books written at their level. At this time there has been an increased focus on providing highly engaging stories targeted at young adults. This translated to the understanding that students did not know how to look

for books that met their needs. While providing time to read was an important factor in getting more young adults to read, they also needed to know how to look for books that catered to their interests and access those materials.

I discovered that many classroom libraries consisted of hand-me-down books teachers had for years that did not appeal to students and became aesthetic decor rather

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than important assets. If students were going to work toward becoming lifelong readers, teachers needed to find out how to create classroom libraries that had high interest books that were both relevant and featured characters in which students could see themselves represented. In many cases, classrooms instead had books that featured mainly white middle-class characters that dealt with problems that students could never relate to, so it made sense that they were not going to want to read these irrelevant texts.

I diligently work on staying up to date and reading as many young adult novels as possible in order to provide the best recommendations for my students, but even telling them about new books is not enough. Many of them need to have a connection with another person in order to be motivated to read. In the last two years, I have been trying to add the additional element of meeting with students to discuss what they are reading. My hope is that through this process, I am able to confer with them one-on-one and try to troubleshoot particular problems that students have with wanting to read. No matter how much a

student is unmotivated, I want to uncover a way to confer and instill intrinsic motivation in all students. This is the area I would like to further explore.

My goal is to revise and create a strong format for reading conferences for students during this sustained reading time in order both engage and motivate them to connect with texts, as well as working on individualized skills that help them feel more confident in reading. Using the format and guidance provided by Serravallo (2019), I want to create a curriculum centered around conferencing that allows me to hone in on individual needs. Serravallo (2019) emphasizes the value of this practice because when done correctly, reading conferences helps a teacher meet each student at their level and

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provide specific content, curriculum, and literature.

I have an understanding of which components are necessary in order to equip students with the tools to engage with texts of their choosing, but I need to figure out how to design a curriculum that supports conferring with individual students and a series of mini-lessons to best support these conferences--especially in terms of motivation and stamina. When looking at what has transpired over recent years, this process is crucial. **Significance of Capstone**

The number of students who are choosing to read for pleasure is decreasing at an alarming rate. There is evidence that there is a direct correlation between reading comprehension and engagement with texts (Ellis, 2020). This means that because fewer students are choosing to read for pleasure, there is a widening gap in test scores

and an increased rate in students who are struggling with simple reading comprehension.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the country in 2020-2021, which forced many students to stay at home for a year or longer, there has been an even greater struggle getting kids to interact with texts. They have been working through screens for up to eight hours a day and their way to unwind after a day of distance learning is to play video games, go on social media, or engage with their device in another way. A recent study saw that 71% of parents of students under the age of 12 are concerned with the amount of screentime their students are experiencing (Ray, 2020). This has drawn alarm about the lack of attention that students can exert on a particular task before getting distracted and moving on to something else. Because reading requires such focus, many students are quickly losing the ability to maintain the

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energy to read.

This vicious cycle is accelerating the resistance that some students have toward reading so it is crucial that a curriculum is established in order to provide students with the time and support to reenter the world of literature. By creating a process to conduct reading conferences, I will be able to meet with students one-on-one to help cultivate a set of recommendations that will appeal to a student and focus on particular strategies to help build intrinsic motivation.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction and context to both the personal and

professional reasons I want to pursue my capstone question: How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences? Growing up, I was an avid reader, but it was a passion I did not share with my peers. Because there were no supports at school to explore this love of reading, it was something that I grew up understanding as something that is to be done alone. It was not until much later in life that I realized the joy in having discussions with my peers about books that were not tied to any specific curriculum. This allowed me to continue reading at a recreational level due to the connections made when sharing books with others.

As a teacher, I see the effects of not giving students opportunities to read for pleasure as many of them have become resistant to reading and lack the motivation to do so.

Simply giving students the time to read is not enough, there needs to be a system

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in place where reading conferences happen on a routine basis so I can connect with individuals about their book choices, their concerns, and focus on particular skills. This is particularly urgent now that many students are emerging out of a global pandemic and some no longer have the necessary attention span or motivation to want to read.

In Chapter Two, I will conduct a literature review focused on the motivational levels of middle school students, how to create an atmosphere that supports a desire to read, and how to successfully implement a system of reading conferences. Chapter Three will consist of a detailed description of the curriculum I plan to build around

choice reading time and the conferences that support it. Chapter Four will conclude with my reflections on this project and my intentions moving forward.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

One common struggle that many middle school teachers face is a decline in students' intrinsic motivation to read, especially if that reading is not part of an assignment. While teachers struggle to motivate students to read in all grades, middle school is an especially critical time to make sure that adolescents understand the benefits and joy that can come from reading for pleasure. In Chapter One, I looked at the topic of motivation and reading from my personal lens, both as an individual who enjoys reading and as an educator. In this chapter I will review what the research has to say in regards to the question How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school

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students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences? This chapter will begin by looking at the concept of intrinsic motivation. It will discuss why there is a decline in motivation in middle school students as well as how the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 has accelerated this problem. In addition, it will also break down ways teachers can respond to reluctant and unmotivated readers and how stamina also plays a role in motivation. The chapter will then move into an analysis of how independent, choice reading time can impact motivation, specifically through atmosphere, acquisition of

classroom libraries, and the use of book talks during this time. Then there will be a discussion about what the research has to say about reading conferences and identify their purpose, the format they can take, and the skills and mini-lessons that are being used during this time. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the research and some of my personal insights.

Intrinsic Motivation

While every student has a different opinion on the topic of reading, it is a fundamental skill that each individual needs to continuously work on in order to achieve success.

While some students struggle with skills to improve upon their reading, others have the ability to be successful in this area, but they choose not to engage. These students are ones that Layne (2009) described as disengaged readers due to their reluctance. Often, students are reluctant because they lack intrinsic motivation which “arises from an individual’s personal interest in a topic or activity and is satisfied through pursuit of that topic or activity” (Uranu & Schlackman, 2006, p. 81). To

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circumvent this, students are more likely to respond to a task like reading if they see it as both valuable and enjoyable (Froiland & Oros, 2014). This section of the literature review will look at possible reasons middle school students lose intrinsic motivation in reading, how teachers can respond to this issue, and how stamina can be linked to motivation.

Middle School Motivation

Reading is a fundamental skill that is quickly being abandoned. In the last two decades,

Americans who chose not to read increased at a consistent rate (Layne, 2009). The effects of this have been wide-ranging as there has been a high correlation between poverty and illiteracy as well as with crime since 75% of inmates have been found to be functionally illiterate (Cuevas et al., 2014). Motivation plays a role in wanting to read as a study conducted by Froiland and Oros (2014) found that students who had high intrinsic motivation had a tendency to be more successful in the English language arts (ELA) classroom. There have also been studies that show those students who engaged with texts possessed higher levels of reading comprehension (Ellis, 2020). One issue that has been overlooked is how to motivate students who are opting to not read because federal, state, and local governments have been more concerned about targeting students who cannot read rather than those who do not want to read (Layne, 2009).

Once students enter middle school, the motivation for them to engage with reading drastically decreases (Froiland & Oros, 2014; Harmon et al., 2019; Oldfather, 1995). It is right at the end of elementary school that these negative feelings become visible (Baker, 2020; Gambrell, 1996). At this point in time, it has even been labeled as

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an epidemic (Edwards, 2009). One study found solid evidence to support this by stating that the average middle school student reads for 21 minutes a day whereas an average elementary school student reads for 33 minutes a day (Harmon et al., 2019).

There have been multiple theories as to why it occurs at this point in an individual's life, but several studies conducted by Akmal (2002), Edwards (2009), and

Layne (2009) have all argued that it is due to an increasing preference toward video games, the Internet, television, and the instant gratification these mediums offer. Other theories include the notion that middle school students have been seen as social beings who would rather engage in peer interactions over performing a solitary activity (Edwards, 2009). Middle school is also a time when students lose some autonomy in their learning and there are fewer opportunities for self expression and when that option fades away, student motivation decreases (Oldfather, 1995).

While this is a concern for many students, there are certain populations where this is more pertinent as boys have declared themselves as nonreaders at a higher rate than girls (Morgan, 2013). This has caused males to be categorically behind females in both engagement and reading measures (Martinez, 2010). Not only that, but a study conducted by Unrau and Schlackman (2006) found that there was also a negative correlation with Hispanic students and their desire to read.

Ability also plays a factor in motivation as some students have been unsure of which texts to select due to previous struggles with reading (Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020). Because of this, those who are considered to be the poorest readers have read the least (Miller, 2012). This lack of positive and authentic experience with reading has led to

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many students abandoning reading altogether (Layne, 2009).

When students do not have a choice in reading, they see it as a school activity and are disengaged (Worthy, 1996). What is being read in classrooms plays a large role in this because if students do not enjoy the books they read in class, they will not be

motivated to read recreationally (Locher et al., 2019). Martinez (2010) supported this by finding that males would rather fail a class than read texts in which they were not interested.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 has also had a role in this issue. While there is not a large body of research on the impact of motivation and reading correlation at this point, there have been some studies (Bennett et al., 2021). At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, 52% of students were starting the year at home and because so many libraries were closed, access to books was greatly impacted (Warnke, 2021). This lack of access impacted many families as two variables that influence students becoming successful readers are access to texts and poverty (Bennet et al., 2021). Many families, especially those who identify as Black and LatinX, elected to keep their students home at a rate that was 10% higher than the national average (Dorn et al., 2020). This greatly impacted many students' engagement with reading because of a lack of resources, and studies have found that most students lost one-and-a-half months of reading instruction and while white students have found to be on average four to eight months behind on reading instruction, while Black and LatinX students were projected to be six to twelve months behind (Dorn et al., 2020). Even when students did have access to texts, there were concerns about

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engagement as well because even if a teacher created time for reading, it was unsure if students who were in distance learning were actually using it for that purpose (Warnke, 2021). Even if they were reading, Warnke (2021) found that students were often

accessing books in a digital format. This also caused concerns because while middle school students tend to abandon reading for activities like video games and the Internet, this only increased their usage of screen time, and in a study conducted by Ray (2020) 71% of parents expressed concern about this increased use of screen time. The study found that in addition to increased screen time and a decrease in other pursuits, including reading, parents were reporting concerns about depression, ADHD-related behavior, poor sleep, and high blood pressure (Ray, 2020). With all of these concerns, it is becoming apparent that students need some kind of intervention at the middle school level to re-engage with reading, especially those who have become reluctant.

Interventions to Reluctant Readers

When attempting to work with reluctant readers, one of the first things a teacher needs to do is establish a relationship with students (Akmal, 2002; Martinez 2010). By building relationships, trust is created and students will be more apt to take the recommendations of the teacher and attempt to read (Boreen, 1995). One of the quickest and most informal ways to initiate this process is to simply ask the student how they are doing; while content is not being discussed, this foundation of a relationship will allow the student to start opening up a little more (Martinez, 2010). Once this is done, the teacher can start digging a little deeper by providing the student with interest inventories (Layne, 2009), informal surveys on reading (Martinez, 2010), or discuss a

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student's literary history in which the teacher finds out which books were important to a student in the past and capitalize on those themes (Tovani, 2000). Once these

practices have been established, it is important to not only begin to urge the student to participate in reading, but to model the same behavior as that will be another way to strengthen the relationship (Gambrell, 1996).

In addition to relationships, in order to get students to read, choice in text selection is another important factor (Baker, 2002; Locher et al., 2019). This is important because when given choice, students become more accountable to themselves since they made the conscious decision to select a text (Bott, 2019). Gambrell (1996), supported this notion in a study that found that 80% of students claimed they had increased enjoyment in reading when they were able to select the books. It was also revealed that even if books were bought specifically for a student, if they did not have a say in the texts, they were less likely to read them (Worthy, 1996). One possible reason for this is because no one book would ever be able to meet the needs or interests of all students in the class (Miller, 2012). When reading is presented in this mode, and does not come across as being mandated, it would lessen the risk of student fragilities being exposed and instead highlight positive aspects of reading such as competency level and interests (Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020).

Another way to increase student motivation to read is to include some form of social interaction with this process (Gambrell, 1996). Preferably, these interactions should be unstructured and informal (Harmon et al., 2019). While reading is the central component, a study found that when students did not have time to discuss their reading

with anyone, their attitudes and motivation did not change (Morgan, 2013). It is also

important to note that these discussions should not be teacher-centered because that also caused students to detach--rather they needed to have opportunities to authentically share their ideas (Oldfather, 1995).

The teacher does still have a role to play in these conversations, like modeling a thought process aloud when reading so students understand how the process works, but students need to be at the center of the conversations (Tovani, 2000). In addition, the teacher could use these times for social interaction to discuss the purpose of reading, because if students do not understand the purpose, they will not complete the task (Tovani, 2000).

The last way to respond to reluctant readers deals with accountability, specifically to not attach any kind of formal accountability to reading (Morgan, 2013). When directly attached to performance, motivation to read actually falls (Locher et al., 2019). One study found that only 35% of teachers attached reading to a grade and a formal assessment such as a book report (Nagy et al., 2000). Instead, students should encounter something more lowstakes like a conference whose routines have been established so students feel comfortable and know it is something in which they can succeed (Boreen, 1995). During this time, all reading-related victories can be celebrated regardless of merit or difficulty of text (Miller, 2012). This will cause an increase in motivation because students will feel more competent in these low-stakes scenarios (Locher et al., 2019). And once students begin to engage with books, the teacher needs to think about how to increase reading time and stamina to maintain this practice.

When students are motivated to read, this will also increase the stamina a student possesses to read (Serravallo, 2015). Dedicating specific time for reading that slowly increases can potentially be challenging as it is a habit that is performed over a long period of time and cannot be truly shaped in one school year (Hiebert, 2014). Despite this being a practice that takes years to establish, there is a direct correlation between time spent reading and reading comprehension because the more time students spend with their eyes on print, it will have the biggest impact on individuals as readers in all content areas (Serravallo, 2015). This is because the volume of reading is often associated with better oral language skills, spelling, reading comprehension, and general knowledge (Fisher & Frey, 2018).

Despite the benefits of building stamina, there have been some concerns with buy-in because it is often seen as a problem for many students who struggle with reading, so those who need to build it the most, have the most difficult time doing so (Hiebert, 2014). In addition, many teachers share a concern about how to dedicate time to increasing stamina because even though there is an acknowledgement that stamina and sustained reading are necessary skills students need in order to demonstrate their understanding of standardized tests, it is a topic that is never actually addressed in the standards in most states (Hiebert, 2014).

To combat that problem, there has been research dedicated to addressing ways of building stamina in students. Hiebert (2014) proposes that the first solution should be to expose students to more opportunities to practice reading, including having targeted

activities with scaffolds during this time, not just sustained silent reading. This could be paired with an engagement inventory to observe students and record behavior to see who needs the most support (Serravallo, 2015). In addition, the class could discuss instances of stamina in texts or real world events and then create charts and reminders around the room to emphasize these situations in order to motivate them to push forward and students could refer to these signs when they are struggling (Allen, 2009). Setting goals are also effective ways of increasing stamina as students could track their progress and earn small extrinsic rewards for completing them (Serravallo, 2015). It is with these practices in place that students are ready to begin reading, but before that can happen, a time and place for reading needs to be established in the classroom.

Choice Reading

An effective way to give students time to form a relationship with reading in schools is not to focus on class-mandated novel studies or group read alouds, but rather dedicating time for students to choose their own texts and authentically engage with them in a comfortable and safe setting (Harmon et al., 2019). This section will start off with information on what authentic choice reading time looks like in a classroom--both in terms of how to implement it and what the environment looks like. It will then transition into explaining that in order for choice reading time to be successful, teachers need to build an effective classroom library, including having high-interest and culturally representative texts. Finally, it will end with an analysis of how to conduct book talks and how this practice is the foundation for increasing the long-term success of choice reading time.

Atmosphere and Structure

Whether students are in a program such as sustained silent reading (SSR) where everyone, including the teacher, has dedicated time for reading and is doing nothing else, or a program like independent silent reading (ISR) where the teacher can be conferring and working with students, multiple studies have found that there are benefits to both (Cuevas et al., 2014). Students who have dedicated time to reading have been found to improve their reading comprehension by 1.5 grade levels against students who do not have this designated time (Cuevas et al., 2014). While a program like this does not happen in every classroom due to time constraints and addressing other standards (Nagy et al., 2000; Williams, 1996), when there is dedicated time for this program, many researchers have discovered benefits when implemented correctly (Worthy, 1996).

One of the biggest disputes among researchers concerns the time that should be allotted for an independent silent reading program. The one thing that is agreed upon is that there needs to be dedicated time for this skill, otherwise students will never build stamina nor have motivation to read (Fisher & Frey, 2018). While the number of minutes varies from author to author, the consensus is that students should read approximately an hour each week in approximately 15 to 20 minute blocks (Cuevas et al., 2014; Harmon et al.; Martinez, 2010; Morgan, 2013; Nagy et al., 2000). Serravallo (2019) argues that this should take more prominence and there should be at least 30 minutes each day reserved for this practice. Regardless of how a teacher makes time for

it, independent reading should be made a priority instead of a warm-up or a “when

students are done” activity (Harmon et al., 2019; Miller, 2012).

Once time has been reserved, the teacher also needs to think of the environment students enter when they engage with reading. This can be done by creating a comfortable space that includes beanbags, comfortable chairs, sofas, soft lighting, and rugs (Harmon et al., 2019). While teachers often do not receive additional funds to build this kind of atmosphere, nor is there space at times due to school mandated furniture, if the feeling of a reading lounge can be achieved, students will feel more comfortable engaging in the process (Layne, 2009). Besides furniture, there should also be multiple indicators that the teacher is an active reader (Layne, 2009) as well as multiple charts that list the different types of questions and strategies a student can use while reading to reflect (McClure, 2017).

In addition, books should be displayed at all times (Bott, 2019). Allowing students to have access to books is important so they are easily accessible and a focal point of the classroom (Routman, 2018). It is also important to note that there should be a particular emphasis on what kinds of books are present for students to access.

Classroom Libraries

While having access to books is important to engage in reading, this does not happen often in middle schools; one study found that only 25% of classrooms had libraries because the focus was to address other standards (Harmon et al., 2019). This goes against what most of the research recommends because when students have access to

books, more reading will occur (Harmon et al., 2019). This initially seems easy to accomplish because over 3,500 new books are published each year for a young adult

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audience (Akmal, 2002). Some teachers struggle with building a library because they are left to build this on their own without financial support from schools (Bott, 2019; Harmon et al., 2019), but it is an important component as it creates relationships with students because handing them a physical book is an intimate and personal action (Bott, 2019).

When building a library, the most important piece is to provide choice and have a wide variety of topics (Baker, 2002; Bott, 2019; Serravallo, 2019). Students need to be able to access texts in which they can emotionally invest (Gambrell, 1996) and contain events that connect to their own experiences (Ellis, 2020). One way of making sure these texts exist is to allow students to have input on which titles are present as it allows for student voice and the teacher to show that they care about what the students have to say (Harmon et al., 2019). It is also important to have a selection of graphic novels and Manga due to the use of the visual aspect that specifically attracts middle school students (Edwards, 2009).

Not only is providing choice important, but so is providing representation of all cultures in various texts (Baker, 2002). It is critical that students see themselves represented in books and not provided with old discarded books that serve as decor (Bott, 2019). These texts should help shape a positive identity and be grounded in real world experiences instead of just focusing on the struggles and hardships of black and

indigenous people of color (BIPOC) (Ellis, 2020). This is specifically important for BIPOC boys as these texts draw them in and this is when they often abandon reading permanently (Ellis, 2020).

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Knowing what kind of texts to obtain is important, but so is being aware of genre as contemporary fiction, fantasy, and science-fiction are those in most demand (Locher et al., 2019). This recommendation is often followed as one study found that realistic fiction and fantasy books are the most stocked in school libraries, and in addition, 30% of the collection is classified as multicultural literature and 20% of the texts deal with social justice issues (Harmon et al., 2019). While these are the most in demand, Routman (2018) argues that 50% of any collection should be nonfiction books. Other considerations should include investing in series of books as those are more appealing to boys because they attach to characters and the world that is created (Martinez, 2010). Also, there should be multiple copies of each book because one common issue is that students are looking for high interest books that have already been checked out of the classroom library (Worthy, 1996).

Once the books have been secured, there also needs to be thought about the organization of the classroom library because regardless of how it is arranged, it is important for students to locate books (Harmon et al., 2019; Serravallo, 2019). Some researchers argue that texts should be organized by topic so students can easily look for multiple books that would appeal to their interests (Fisher & Frey, 2018), while others state that they should be arranged by reading level so students can access texts that

meet their needs (Williams, 2014). There should also be student buy-in to maintain the library so they have a sense of ownership and this can be done by having them display student picks each week (Routman, 2018).

When building a library, it is also important to emphasise to students that books
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are not decorations but rather something they can check out without fear of fines or repercussions if they become damaged (Bott, 2019; Harmon et al., 2019). Every student should feel comfortable engaging with the library instead of viewing it as the teacher's library (Routman, 2018). There should also be no repercussions if a student needs to use the classroom library or request something that does not have literary merit instead of supplying their own materials (Nagy et al., 2000). One way in which teachers can easily get students onboard with interacting with the library is by showcasing the texts in a series of book talks.

Book Talks

By providing book talks, the students see that the teacher is also a reader who is passionate about the process (Bolt, 2019). This is important because this practice is then done by someone the students trust, which makes them more apt to engage with a book (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Miller 2012). While there are more books out there than a teacher can read and recommend, there are resources that can be used such as the school librarian (Russell, 2014) or sources like the Newberry awards or other lists of top books (Layne, 2009).

Completing book talks help expand a student's reading repertoire because it allows

for recommendations of similar authors or styles of books so students can expand on their interests (Bolt, 2019; Miller, 2012). This can also help build a student's knowledge base of what they like to read which will further engage them (Russell, 2014). While the focus does not have to be on quality books, they should be of high interest (Worthy, 1996) because if they are poor recommendations, students will lose

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the motivation to read (Russell, 2014).

When implementing book talks, it should be presented as an informal conversation so it comes across as more low stakes (Harmon et al., 2019). Russell (2014) suggests that the most effective way to do this is to provide background information, a hook to grab the students' attention, and end with a cliffhanger so students want to continue to read. This should also be done in a narrative voice of one of the characters to increase engagement (Layne, 2009).

One of the other methods is to simply read aloud the first page or chapter to entice students (Miller, 2012). This can be done with books that teachers are reading at the moment to show that they are engaged in the process and are modeling reading behaviors (Harmon et al., 2019). For the maximum effect, book talks should take place three times a week with at least ten minutes dedicated to multiple talks (Fisher & Frey, 2018).

By using book talks, Fisher and Frey (2018) found a direct correlation with an increase in engagement in texts. Their study found that 93% of teachers said there was a direct impact on students wanting to spend more time reading because they liked what

the teacher recommended, multiple testimonials that students would rush to grab the books that the teacher just discussed, and there was a 9% increase in library checkout rates. At this point the teacher is ready to start implementing the use of reading conferences during this time as students are engaged with reading and have structures established to engage with their texts.

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Reading Conferences

Reading conferences are a vehicle used for teachers to both form relationships with individual students and create personalized instruction in order to both address the student's strengths and improve on their weaknesses (Serravallo, 2019). The first part of this section will define the purpose of a reading conference, how it functions, and what are the goals and outcomes. It will then move into a breakdown of the types of conversations teachers and students have during reading conferences. It will end with an analysis of what kinds of mini-lessons, including the targeted skills, are used during these conferences.

Purpose and Goals

The main intention of a reading conference is to have designated time to tailor instruction to individual needs with the goal of having readers become thoughtful reflectors who can articulate the complexities of the text they are reading (Serravallo, 2019). This should be viewed as an opportunity for each individual to share their thoughts and give input on what they are reading (Boreen, 1995). This is done through informal conversations with students in which there is discussion, comparison, and

consultation (Allen, 2009). McClure (2017) found that 72% of the time, these conferences were text based, but when students are reading below grade level, the focus shifts to reading behaviors.

When implemented, conferences build relationships between the teacher and student because students are given an opportunity to show who they are as readers, writers, and individuals (Allen, 2009). By doing this, teachers give students their

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undivided attention which fosters strong relationships (Serravallo, 2019). This then allows students to become metacognitive readers who think about their reading and through this process, teachers obtain the most useful and authentic information about students and their reading habits (Allen, 2009). Reading conferences recognize the value and challenge of providing the best and most timely support for an individual student's needs (McClure, 2017). In addition, it provides the teacher with a formative assessment of a student's reading abilities through conversation (Lillge & Crane, 2019).

While there are benefits to conducting reading conferences, there are also limitations as this is a relatively new concept and there is little research that exists about its effectiveness outside of validating students' interpretation of literature through reader response conversations (Boreen, 1995). In addition, while there have been publications about reading conferences, there is minimal research about how conferences are actually being conducted by teachers in a classroom setting (McClure, 2017). It also presents problems because students in middle school often have varied reading experiences and may not have practice in sustained and continuous

conversations about texts (Lillge & Crane, 2019).

For these conferences to be successful, predictability and routine are key for students to be comfortable (Allen, 2009). This is done by making the practice a priority through the creation of a schedule, arranging the room in a comfortable way, having strong classroom management practices, and establishing routines (McClure, 2017). While these components are important, students need to feel that there is no pressure to perform or have a correct answer; they should instead focus on creating an open

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dialogue and sharing their opinions (Boreen, 1995). This keeps the social aspect of the conference at the center and builds a relationship between the student and the teacher (Allen, 2009). When this is established, students will have the ability to set their own goals which will then increase their intrinsic motivation (Serravallo, 2019). There are many different ways in which a teacher can implement these reading conferences. In some aspects, all the research has reached a consensus while other areas see individual researchers with differing ideas when it comes to the format.

Format

In order for conferences to be successful, the teacher needs to be aware of their role, which is to nurture students through the thinking process by focusing more on listening rather than talking during this time (Allen, 2009; Boreen, 1995; Gilson & Little, 2016). While listening is the main priority, teachers may need to begin by asking questions until students become confident in this process; then the teacher will transition to modeling and asking questions to make students become inquiry driven

readers and ultimately they will become interpretative listeners who process and make meaning out of what the student is saying during this time (Gilson & Little, 2016).

Throughout this process, the teacher should be taking diligent notes (Serravallo, 2019).

This allows teachers to provide students with immediate feedback about patterns they have noticed since the last conference (McClure, 2017).

One important factor to consider is the level of formality of the reading conferences as they should be more focused on the student's current emotional needs and what is going on in their lives in order to build a relationship (Akmal, 2002). One

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additional way to add informality to this process is to have teachers travel to the students and conduct them at their desks rather than the students approaching them (McClure, 2017). Students also need to be aware of the fact that while notes are being taken, they are not being used as an assessment, but rather a place to gather evidence to release students into independent reading without individual supports (Allen, 2009).

Much like independent silent reading, there are conflicting views as to how much time should be spent on reading conferences. Some researches suggest that approximately three conferences a day should occur (Martinez, 2010), some that one entire day each week should be dedicated to conferences (Boreen, 1995), and others suggest that it should be the main focus where each student has a conference at least two times a week (Serravallo, 2019). Regardless of how much time a teacher spends on conferencing, the research suggests that each individual conference should last between four to seven minutes (Allen, 2009; Martinez, 2010; Serravallo, 2019).

There are also different theories as to how a reading conference should be structured. Allen (2009) proposes that a conference should consist of three main components: start with explicit instruction for the student, allow students to put that learning to immediate work (usually half the time of the conference), and then finally providing students with time for reflection in which they share their new insights. Serravallo (2019) opposes this by stating that a conference should begin by assessing an area of weakness, set an immediate goal with the student, notice strengths, teach a strategy, and then converse about what is being read. In contrast to both of these, Boreen (1995) states that it should be a simple conversation that focuses on open-

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ended questions in order to get students to talk and converse about reading. Despite the differences in format, a study found that more teachers prefer to have individual conferences to small groups because it is easier to foster relationships and it also allows individual students to know what to expect which increases engagement (McClure, 2017).

Regardless of the format of conferences, all of the research suggests that each conference should entail setting some kind of goal for the students. The priority should be on goal setting and strategy application while the teacher provides scaffolds and feedback (McClure, 2017). The goal could even be having the student read a certain number of pages each week, but it should still be established (Akmal, 2002). By putting an emphasis on this, the students will be able to quickly name their goal at the start of each conference and what they have been doing in order to improve upon it (McClure,

2017). This allows for a majority of the time to be spent on assessment and student self reflection (Serravallo, 2019). This allows the teacher to provide specific, clear, and simple feedback to the student on a specific skill that is being targeted (Serravallo, 2019). In the time allotted for a conference, it may not seem that there is much a teacher can do to target a specific goal, but there is ample research that suggests specific areas to target.

Skills and Mini-Lessons

When conducting a reading conference, a majority of the time should be spent in conversation in which students can share what they are reading, teachers can give recommendations, and students and teachers can truly get to know each other (Boreen,

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1995). For this to be successful, there should be a focus on open-ended questions that allow the student to steer the conversation instead of having the same list of questions for every student (Boreen, 1995; Lillge & Crane, 2019). The teacher should avoid quizzing students and really only step in when the conversation is not moving along (Lillge & Crane, 2019). Even if the teacher asks only one high-quality and thoughtful question to get the student thinking, that is enough (Allen, 2009). It is encouraged that the teacher limits the amount of coaching and support during this time in order to get the students to attempt to increase their conversation skills on their own (Serravallo, 2019).

During these conferences, the students should walk away with some kind of plan or goal in mind about what they want to specifically improve upon (Allen, 2009). This

will increase student self-awareness and independence (Serravallo, 2019). In order for a teacher to target a specific skill, the teacher needs to collect data on their reading level (Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020). And to demonstrate their understanding of a specific skill, students need to be able to articulate whether they are reading a text for themselves, for someone with which they have a relationship (like a teacher), or for someone they may never meet (like taking a standardized test) as each purpose will demand different skills (Allen, 2009).

When trying to determine which specific skills to focus on with a student, they will usually provide teachers with indicators about what needs to be targeted because if they are allowed to talk they will often leave gaps about content like characters or theme when they continually confer (Lillge & Crane, 2019). These skills can be general as

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helping a student understand, remember, extend meaning, or enjoy a text, or focus more on specific targeted areas such as graphophonic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, schematic, or pragmatic work (Allen, 2009). Serravallo (2019), has done significant work on targeted skills during reading conferences that cover areas such as reading from pictures, engagement, print work, fluency, comprehension of plot and setting, comprehension of character, comprehension of vocabulary and figurative language, comprehension of theme and ideas, comprehension of main idea, comprehension of key details, comprehension of text features, conversation, and writing about reading (Serravallo, 2019). But no matter which specific skills is being targeted, they all need to be approached on a continuum and instead of trying to master one area, teachers

should help students progress to the next level as there is always room for improvement and this will further engage and motivate students to continue reading (Serravallo, 2019). Once this practice has been in place and students are used to the structures, that is when the teacher will see all components of motivation, reading, and conferring come together.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of Chapter Two was to look at what the research and experts had to say in an attempt to address my question: How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences? In order to do this, I needed to look at what research stated concerning intrinsic motivation in middle school students, the most effective way to create a time and space for

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independent choice reading in the classroom, and the methods to implement successful reading conferences with a focus on how to create conversations with students. While much of the research was in agreement with each other, there were points where small details differed. One conclusion that I was able to take away from this, however, is that all three of these areas are deeply connected with one another and in order for a student to gain an interest in reading, a teacher must think about how to connect these three components.

Concerning intrinsic motivation, it is very apparent that there is a sharp decline in the amount of time that students spend on reading during their middle school years.

This is due to multiple factors including desires for more immediate gratification from media like video games, the Internet, and social media; middle school students are more social individuals so they want to engage in more active practices with their peers; and this is the time where many of them lose the ability to have autonomy in their reading which deters them. This has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 due to an increase in screen time and many teachers losing the ability to have students be accountable for reading due to distance learning.

In order to address this, teachers need to focus on building relationships with their students and getting to know them as individuals. When these relationships are forged, students will build trust with the teacher and be more apt to read if they are encouraged and will also take in the teacher's recommendations. By creating this social aspect to reading, in conjunction with allowing students to choose whatever kind of text they would like and not attaching any formal assessment to it, they will become

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motivated to read. This motivation will also play a role in building stamina which is something that many reluctant readers identify as a struggle. But when a relationship is present and students are allowed to set their own goals, stamina will grow.

Another component to engage students in the art of reading is to create a space in the classroom for independent silent reading. This is done by making books a focal point in the classroom. Reading should not be viewed as something to do when the real work of class is done, but instead is a priority. To do this, teachers need reserve time (on average an hour each week) for students to simply read and provide them with

comfortable seating and lighting which will allow them to relax. Books also need to be taken into consideration as it is important that students have access to books that represent all cultures and identities and are of high interest. They need to feel comfortable selecting any book from the classroom library without fear of losing or damaging a copy. While genres like fantasy and science fiction are usually in the highest demand, teachers need to make sure there is a wide variety of topics that are arranged in a way in order for students to easily access what they are looking for. This can also be done through the use of book talks in the classroom as that will expose students to similar stories and authors they already enjoy. It also strengthens the relationship between the student and teacher which will also increase the trust they have in the teacher and the emphasis that reading is important.

When students finally have the books selected, the teacher can then begin to implement reading conferences in the classroom. While the research is fairly new in this area, the overall goal is to have an individual conversation with a student that lasts for

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approximately five minutes. There are two different directions these conferences can take: to simply discuss what the student is reading, or to focus on a particular skill that the student needs to address. Regardless, the role of the teacher should be one of an active listener and to let the student drive a majority of the conversation. This can be done by framing the conference around goals that the students set with the teacher. With a combination of conversation, goal, informal assessment, and reflection, teachers can use these conferences to improve personalized reading skills which will increase

students' reading abilities.

When I think about all of this research, the one throughline that connects all of these topics is that of relationships. Teachers need to find ways to spend time with students to get to know them not just as a body in a desk, but as a unique person. This formation of a relationship will create a bond and the teacher can get to better know the students interests and recommend texts that will appeal to who they are as individuals. Students will also be more apt to take these books as they already have a relationship with the teacher and trust them. Reading conferences are a perfect vehicle in which teachers can create time and space to get to know students on a deeper level and promote reading during the same time.

While there are differentiating thoughts on what content should be addressed during a reading conference, it seems that skills and mini-lessons cannot come before relationships. If a teacher does not take the time to get to know a student and that student begins to trust the teacher, then immediately implementing targeted lessons will not increase motivation to read. Instead students will see it as another assessment

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being forced upon them. If the true goal is to motivate students to read and create lifelong readers, implementation of skills could possibly come at a later point during the year, but a priority needs to be made for the student to feel comfortable and that they are being seen and heard.

With this in mind, Chapter Three will transition into a description of how I will use the knowledge gained from this research in order to design a curriculum that

creates a space for independent silent reading while individual reading conferences are being conducted. This chapter will discuss the framework that goes into curriculum planning as well as an overview of the audience, setting, and timeframe of this specific curriculum. Chapter Four will then conclude with my final reflections on this curriculum and my intentions moving forward.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

As the literature review suggests, middle school can be a time where many students abandon reading for pleasure and teachers can become frustrated. Given the number of benefits that come with reading, many teachers become concerned due to the number of skills that students will not be able to obtain if they choose to no longer read. With this in mind, the research question How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences? has led me to design a curriculum for middle school students that allows them to continue to

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engage in the reading process. Through the implementation of independent silent reading time while the teacher conducts individual reading conferences to both address motivation and target particular skills, I provided a curriculum that will assist teachers in finding ways to further motivate students who are choosing not to read.

In this chapter, I will describe my capstone project: a curriculum for middle school students. I will begin by providing the research that supports the framework for

my curriculum design and then move into a detailed description of how that curriculum will look. Following that, this chapter will explain the setting and participants of the intended curriculum. I will conclude this chapter with a timeline for implementation and how the curriculum will be assessed before providing an overall summary of this chapter.

Project Description

My project was to design a curriculum that was centered around reading conferences for middle school students that targeted individual needs in a meeting that lasted for approximately five minutes while other students were engaged in silent independent reading. In order to accomplish this, three components needed to be addressed: establishing a routine for students to understand how independent choice reading time worked, providing access to highly engaging books that students could easily use, and creating a systematic routine and series of mini-lessons to support reading conferences.

For this capstone, my intention was to design and implement this curriculum in my 8th grade language arts classroom. The need for this curriculum has already been

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established, so it was time to develop individual lessons targeting students and their needs. The first step was to organize the classroom in a way that books were the focal point and students could easily assess texts that were at both their interest and reading levels. This was done through researching and reading popular literature for young adults by looking through lists provided by the American Library Association (ALA) and

winners of awards such as the Coretta Scott King Award, the Newbery Medal, and others. Once these titles were collected, those books needed to be obtained.

When the classroom library was constructed, students needed to understand how to interact with the texts in the classroom. This was something that was immediately introduced to students by giving them short opportunities to read anything they desired. They did not need to read to completion and could abandon a book whenever they wanted if they felt like it was not something they could connect to as long as they continued to read. This time was gradually increased as the class went on in order to build stamina for students.

Finally, I needed to create a series of lessons that allowed students to have conversations around books and included interest inventories that would help the teacher provide the students with recommendations about books. As the curriculum progressed, there was a shift towards goal setting and targeting individual needs in certain areas of reading, but these lessons would only be implemented once students were comfortable with reading again and could maintain this practice for long periods of time.

The intention was in addition to design, this curriculum would be implemented

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as well since this is an urgent need and students need to begin reading as quickly as possible in order to not be further turned off by the process.

Research

The foundational research that supports this method of curriculum design is

based on the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2011). When approaching curriculum design, a person should be thinking of three main components. There was an emphasis on starting with a desired outcome for students and being able to clearly identify what it was the student should be able to do by the end of this curriculum. Once that had been stated, the designer needed to work backwards to create evidence to prove that these outcomes have been met. Finally, that person then needs to design individual lessons to help students get to these desired outcomes. This approach of backward design helped ensure that everything that was done in the classroom worked toward ensuring that students were able to meet specific outcomes and objectives.

A big emphasis when I was designing curriculum was to focus on Module D: Developing and Initial Unit Sketch as it was very useful for those who are holistic designers who like to draft the entire unit at once. This is something that I usually do as I like to look at the big picture and start getting a rough sketch of each lesson or objective before going into any specific details. When working on this module, I was forced to think about what the students were supposed to take away at the end of the unit, what assessment evidence could be used to show that students have met these goals, and what were the key learning events that students need in order to gather that evidence. This really helped shape my design as it forced me to have those specified student

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outcomes at the forefront of each individual lesson or activity.

With the goal being somewhat intangible because there is no one concrete way to show that students have an increased motivation to read, this module, along with

Module G: Determining Evidence of Understanding and Developing Assessment Tasks

really helped me understand ways to measure whether my students were actually making progress toward my desired outcomes by providing evidence shaped around the six facets of understanding: explain, interpret, apply/adjust, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. Understanding and applying these six facets of understanding was crucial for the curriculum work that I designed. Each student is in need of a different level of intervention to increase their reading motivation, so for those who are extremely resistant to reading, they could be assessed by just being able to explain what they have read to show they have interacted with a text; while those who are more avid readers can be assessed on the opposite end of the spectrum via empathy and self knowledge.

Setting

The intended setting for this project is that it could take place at any middle school setting. While this kind of work could apply to any grade level, it was created with the specific intention of being implemented in both seventh and eighth grade.

For my personal intentions, this curriculum was designed for a middle school located in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul (Twin Cities) area that serves 759 students and 104 staff members. This means that the curriculum would reach approximately 190 seventh graders and 190 eighth graders in classes of roughly 30 students at a time.

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48.37% of the students in the school qualify for free and reduced lunch. 48.57% of students identify as White, 31.3% identify as LatinX, 8.57% identify as Black, and 11.56%

identify as either Asian, multi-racial, or Native American. This school is also a 1:1 iPad school where every student has access to this technology for the four years they are enrolled at the school.

Approximately 62% of students have met the reading standards on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) according to the Minnesota Report Card. Their class periods last about 50 minutes, but this specific portion of the curriculum would last for only 15-20 minutes at the start of class. While this curriculum was designed with this specific school setting in mind, it is adaptable to any middle school.

Participants

The intended audience for this curriculum is for middle school students, specifically in grades 7 and 8 and any teachers who need assistance in establishing a routine for reading conferences and implementing silent independent reading in their classroom. This curriculum is also designed for anyone who is noticing students disengaged in reading and are looking to find a way to connect with individuals on a personal level and increase their motivation to read.

Timeline

The timeline to design this curriculum took approximately three months to create. However, when implementing this work, the intention is that it can be sustained for an entire school year. While the content only lasts for one nine-week quarter, once reading conferences have been established and students become familiar with the

process, it is one that can continually be repeated each quarter.

The first quarter focused on creating interest inventories and getting to know students and their reading habits. This quarter was to establish a relationship between the student and the teacher and the prompts and surveys allowed the students to start talking about what they are reading. When thinking about specific time allotted, a teacher could assume to spend ten to twenty-five minutes each day on this practice. Once students began to get familiar with the process, additional elements were added including extended reading time to build stamina and a goal setting process so students could not only engage with reading but challenge themselves in a low stakes environment throughout the process. These goals were the foundation of the reading conferences as they set a framework for discussions and students were able to articulate specifically what they wanted to get out of this experience.

Even though the curriculum provided lessons for one specific quarter, this curriculum was designed to be replicated each quarter so it would last throughout an entire school year. While the time allotted for reading should not revert to the original ten minutes, the rest of the process could be repeated since students can always set new goals and engage with new texts.

In addition, the second half of the year could later support students through targeted individual lessons honing in on particular reading skills. It is important to note that this addition should come later in the year because students would not have as much buy-in in the reading process if they were immediately forced into skills-based lessons.

Since this curriculum was designed to focus on intrinsic motivation there are

resources provided for teachers to eventually move to the next phase, but the actual curriculum that was designed solely focuses on increasing motivation and helping students form relationships with texts.

Assessment

An important component of curriculum design is assessment. Based on my research question, I wanted to ensure that I was assessing both engagement and an increase in reading motivation. These assessments took place in many different forms, but many of these methods would not be attached to a grade, since the research indicates that is not best practice.

Informally, I could observe students during silent reading time. If I witnessed an increase in the amount of students engaged in reading and they were able to sustain this practice for longer periods of time, I knew that this directly correlated to increased motivation. Also, during reading conferences, if students were able to continually talk about their books and take more charge of the discussions, this would also be an indicator that they were better able to sustain reading and were more invested in the process.

In a more formal setting, there were several indicators that allowed me to know that intrinsic motivation had increased. First, there were multiple surveys. This provided direct feedback about whether students were enjoying reading over time. In addition, as the curriculum progressed, students were setting goals based on their reading habits and if they were able to achieve them, this possibly indicated whether or not they were

more motivated to read. The final component was the readers' showcase as it was both

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an assessment of students displaying their understanding of the texts and a celebration of the accomplishments that the entire class achieved both through personal goals and sharing their increased interest in reading with others.

Summary

This chapter covered the curriculum design process to help support the research question: How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences? It discussed a brief rationale for why this curriculum was necessary as well as some of the foundational research that outlined the specific curriculum methods that were implemented in order for this to be executed. This curriculum is intended for middle school students and teachers in order to raise intrinsic motivation in students and their reading habits. The intention of this curriculum is that while it is designed to be a nine week, one quarter unit, it can be repeated throughout the school year either with new reading goals or one multiple quarter goal.

Chapter Four will contain my conclusions and reflections on this capstone process as well as the curriculum that has been designed to support it.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout the creation of this capstone, and especially now that it is coming to a close, I have been continually anchored by one notion--the ultimate goal is for every student to find something enjoyable to read. At the very start of this project I was reminded of the joy I had as a student of coming across a new book and being completely consumed by it. I was aware at the time that this was not the same sentiment that all my peers shared, but as I grew I was able to interact with more like minded people and share that love of reading with others. Then, as I entered the world of teaching, I saw a wide range of opinions from students when it came to reading, and as I move closer to the present day, I have seen a sharp decline in the number of individuals who truly engage in the reading process. This awareness and concern ultimately led me to ponder, How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences?

In this chapter I will be reflecting upon my journey through the capstone process. I will start by identifying some of the major learnings I was able to gather from this process.

This will then transition into a reflection on the literature I used as a basis and identify which sources were the most relevant to my project. I will also reflect on what implications this work has for middle school teachers and students as well as identify some limitations to this work. I will also discuss any future work or research that

could benefit this project. Then I will explain how I plan on sharing this research along with how it could benefit others before providing a final summary and conclusion to this

chapter.

Major Learnings

At the start of this work, I initially had the mindset that the focus of this project should be on the reading conferences themselves. All the other components from the mini-lessons to the classroom libraries to the independent silent reading time is used to help support these conferences as they are the priority. As I continued to work on this, there was a gradual shift in that I realized that the conferences are instead a vehicle to help support students with reading. The ultimate goal is to get a book in the hands of every student, so while creating a system of conferences can help by creating goals and having students show some accountability for their reading, the priority is really that students need to have time to read. If sustained reading becomes sustainable in the classroom, then that is an accomplishment that needs to be given priority.

Not only should creating a culture of reading be the priority for this curriculum to be implemented, but students need to take the time to understand what reading actually looks like in the classroom. To simply tell students that they need to sit down and read will not set many students up for success. Instead, they need to be provided with the tools and proper atmosphere in order to ensure that each individual is able to complete this portion of the class. Not only should the atmosphere change in the classroom through lighting and music, but the continual push to interact with new books and always have some kind of rotation of how they are displayed is critical. In the past, I

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simply had books lining bookshelves along my walls and told a student that if they did

not have anything to read they needed to go look for something. Without any thought of organization or emphasizing new books that should be continually added to the collection, I realized that I was doing a great disservice to my students because just being told to go read was not going to increase any motivation in my students; instead they needed to observe the amount of care and effort that went into cultivating a classroom library for them to truly get excited and motivated about this process.

Once the atmosphere was created, I also learned many helpful strategies in order to effectively implement reading conferences. In the past I was in total control of the conference and would ask the students a series of questions and they would respond. Instead, the biggest learning about this process is that the teacher has to give up control during this time and allow the student to take ownership of this conversation. By giving students opportunities to share their thoughts with supports in place to allow them to lead these conversations, they are able to hone in the parts of reading that they actually enjoy rather than reciting facts for a teacher's benefit. I have also found that this creates more student buy-in when it comes to creating reading goals because it allows for the student to take control of their learning and better articulate what it is they want to get out of reading. By allowing them to create something that is achievable in their eyes, they are more likely to continue to participate and challenge themselves over the course of their reading career.

With all of these insights, I believe that the biggest adjustment that I have made to my practice already is to focus on relationships more than outcomes. While I always

have attempted to keep this in the forefront of my teaching, working on this capstone helped me understand the importance of this practice. I have come to understand just how diverse students are with their opinions about reading, so to simply sit down with someone and have a conversation, even if it is not about reading, really helps create a foundation for trust. By slowly building upon this, I have noticed students becoming much more willing to attempt to engage in this process because they no longer feel as if the teacher is out to get them or get upset if they are not one hundred percent on task. By getting to know my students on this deep of a level, I have been able to make more progress with their attitudes about reading in just one quarter than I have over the course of an entire year when I was focused on solely making sure they were reading. While every student will have a different outcome, it is more important to acknowledge that each student is participating and engaging in the process. This is a concept that was present from the very start of my research and has been a consistent reminder to me as I continued on to my literature review.

Revisiting the Literature Review

While I found all of my research to be valuable, those who are experts in the area of reading conferences were the ones I found to be the most foundational for what I created. The works of Peter Allen (2009), Erin McClure (2017), and Jennifer Serravallo (2019) were the ones that provided me with the best scope of how reading conferences should play out in the classroom and what the best approaches were to incorporate them into a middle school curriculum.

Once I was able to have a better idea of what I ultimately wanted to design, I

needed to take a step back and think about how these eventual reading conferences were connected to intrinsic motivation and getting students excited about this process. In order to do this, I relied on the work of Steven Layne (2009) and Louis Martinez (2010) as they both proved to be crucial resources on both the importance of creating relationships with students and how to best provide strategies in order to get a better insight into students' reading habits. These two experts highlighted the need for students to engage in the reading process and provided me with many new strategies to get them to start opening up and being honest during the initial reading conferences. Not only that, but Kecia Ray (2020) was one of the few resources I was able to locate that provided me with insight on how the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic has impacted young adults as readers. Because there has been so little information printed about long-term effects, I very much relied on the expertise of Ray and am curious to see how this aspect will continue to play out over time as additional research is bound to be published on this issue.

Finally, when it came to organizing my classroom and making books a showcase of the room, I found the work of Harmon et al. (2019) to be invaluable. These researches specifically outlined the best approach to make books accessible to students in a middle school setting and assisted in also having me be very conscious about the overall design and flow of how my room is physically arranged. While many teachers may pass over this aspect of the room because there are more important matters to address at the beginning of the school year, this research really allowed me to pause and think about

to readers.

When I look at these experts, I was able to see that so many brought specialized and unique perspectives to creating my project and have already influenced what I have modified in my teaching, but they all centered around the idea that the ultimate goal was to get more students reading. Through various lenses of conferring, reading, or motivating, everyone had the same goal. Because there is such a strong emphasis on getting more students reading, there are several implications for educators in this field.

Implications

The implications of this curriculum is that reading needs to become more of a priority in the classroom. In an age where there is a major push for both student and teacher accountability and an increased emphasis on formalized and standardized assessments, students need an opportunity to take a step back and have some autonomy in their day. Middle school students need to engage in reading strictly for enjoyment without any formalized assessment attached to it because of the sharp decline in reading that happens at this age.

As an educator who has begun to pilot this program of conferencing and providing time for reading on their own for pleasure, I have already started to witness these benefits. I

have had the opportunity to have more meaningful conversations with students and have also seen their opinions shift on the experience because they are being provided with time to pursue their interests in a low-stakes environment. I have witnessed more

engagement in students, and the purpose of this work is to equip more teachers with the necessary tools to have this success in their own classrooms.

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The intent of this work is for teachers to use this curriculum in their classrooms in order to help address this issue that is growing at an alarming rate. While there is no direct implication at both the policy and state levels of education, I do believe that this project can be beneficial to those policy makers who are continually addressing illiteracy and underachievement on state-level testing. By thinking about methods to better motivate students to read, this work could provide the foundation to approach this situation from one angle, but there are some limitations to the work as well.

Limitations

One of the largest limitations to implementing this kind of work is due to access to resources and the amount of funding that is needed to maintain a classroom library. Because so much of the success of this project is dependent upon building and maintaining a classroom library that features the newest titles that are highly engaging to students, teachers and schools need to find continual resources to update and add to these libraries. Since the research has indicated that students should not be penalized for lost or damaged books, this would also indicate that the cost would fall on the educators. Not only that, but in order to maintain the feel of a bookstore, additional lighting and seating may need to be acquired which would either add on another cost or not even be viable depending on the space a teacher has in their classroom.

In addition, there may be a limitation on support from both the administration

and parents about implementing a program like this because of the lack of accountability and deviance from state standards. Because each student would be reading their own book, and the emphasis would be on increased motivation and

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enjoyment, some may become concerned that there is not enough progress being made in a language arts classroom since there is no one way to measure quantitative gains through independent reading or conferencing. Not only that, but in order to successfully implement this kind of program, an entire school would need to be onboard to pilot this process as it takes several years to see both results in this kind of work and an increase in student reading stamina. While the research does suggest that it has its benefits, it is not designed to be measured in a way that can provide definitive proof, which is why it is important to consider opportunities for future research.

Future Research and Projects

As I have indicated at multiple points throughout my project, there are definitely opportunities to continue to conduct research and expand upon the curriculum I have created. While the overall focus of my curriculum was to increase motivation in students via reading conferences, Serrvallo (2019) repeatedly states that their intention should be to personalize and target individual skills in students in order to help grow their reading comprehension. While this is a valuable pursuit, I chose not to explore that because my feeling was that by adding additional skills-based assignments, students would see this time as another form of assessment with their voice and choice getting lost in the process. I began to introduce this concept through goal setting, but again,

those goals were centered around accomplishing something related to engaging in the reading process.

The next logical step would be to then research and design mini-lessons that target individual skills so once students have become used to the process the teacher

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can begin work on particular areas of growth for each student. I supplied multiple resources and references of where that work could begin, but I did not go as far as designing those specific lessons. Instead, I chose to focus on creating the introduction to this work and am focusing on communicating this work to others before moving onto the next step.

Communicating Results

While this curriculum is something that I have designed on my own, the intention is to share it with other language arts teachers both in my school and throughout my district. Over the last three years, my middle school language arts department has been going through a curriculum revision and one of the biggest additions is to begin offering reading conferences to all students in grades five through eight. While the plan is for teachers to do this however they see fit, there has been no official guidance on how to properly implement them as different teachers have different comfort levels with this process. My goal is to work with teachers both at a building and district level to share what I have designed so all educators in the district can start from the same point when implementing reading conferences. This will directly benefit students because if they are exposed to the same routines and formats for four

years, they will be able to increase their stamina and spend more time enjoying the reading process instead of being continually reintroduced to it when many are considering abandoning reading altogether.

In addition, the intent of this work is to be shared with any educator who is looking to find ways to motivate students to read and move toward the reading

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conference format which is why it will also be available to any educator in the Hamline Digital Commons.

Benefits to Profession

This curriculum is beneficial to the profession because it provides a full set of resources for educators to help students find high interest books to increase their motivation to read. At a time where many students are struggling to stay focused and read, this curriculum provides resources to not only combat that issue but to also implement mini-lessons to better know students as individuals and readers. Students vary in abilities, needs, and interest areas so it is difficult to find one class-wide text or strategy to engage every student in reading. By implementing a system of conferences, educators will be better able to work with students on an individual basis and help meet them exactly at their level. Providing students with time for independent silent reading that is in conjunction with reading conferences allows each student to set their own goal and find continued success in the English language arts classroom.

Summary

From an early age, I have been an avid reader and that passion led me down a

path to eventually become an English teacher. As I continued down this career, I saw the many different attitudes that people had toward reading which led some to abandon it altogether. This led me to ask, How can I impact intrinsic motivation in middle school students by creating a space for independent, choice reading time in the language arts classroom when supported with individual reading conferences?

Through this question, I was able to design a curriculum that both motivated

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students to read and implemented a system of reading conferences in the classroom. This process led me to understand that while there are many facets to a curriculum like this, the ultimate goal is not necessarily any major summative assessment but rather to find ways to motivate students to read and get more books in their hands. The literature review I conducted in Chapter Two reinforced this because even though there are various approaches to implementing reading conferences and structuring a classroom, all the research pointed to developing relationships with students. By getting to know them better as individuals, a teacher is more apt to have them buy into the reading process.

Because this curriculum allows for so much autonomy in text selection and goal setting, there needs to be a bigger push in the classroom for time for students to just read and enjoy the process without needing to attach a formalized assessment with it. This could cause some limitations in the implementation process because some administrators and parents may argue that it is not directly tied to any method of quantitative data collection. There is also the added limitation of funding to ensure that every student has access to highly engaging texts. This could be combated, however, in

future research by extending this project to include targeted mini-lessons at individual reading skills once students have become acclimated to the reading process and have begun to engage with texts.

By being provided with these introductory materials, educators can find a new approach to introduce reading to middle school students in a way that is enjoyable and low stakes. This will allow for more students to see the benefits of reading and continue

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seeking out new titles. And while every student may not become a passionate lifelong reader, through this curriculum each student will at least find some success and joy in the reading process.

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