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Scaffolding Full-length Texts in a Middle School Classroom to Promote Reading
Engagement

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Ever since the COVID pandemic, I have noticed more and more students within my classroom become overwhelmed when given reading tasks. They may take one look at a book and before even opening the first page decide that it is too much for them, that they cannot read, or that they are not smart enough to understand. Coming into a post-COVID learning setting, many students in my classroom approach reading as if they have either never learned or have forgotten the skills needed to approach a longer text. After a year on their own, walking back into the expectations of reading within a traditional classroom has been a difficult transition. It has gotten to the point that the phrases “I can’t read” or “I hate reading” are in the overwhelming majority when I tell students they will be reading a novel in class.

When students are presented for the first time with having to read a full-length novel, without it being read to them by the teacher or an audiobook, many students shut down or are unable to stay engaged. At least in part, this seems to be because of the length of the reading. For this reason I would like to explore the following question: *How can teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?* By exploring this question I would like to find ways to scaffold and build reading stamina in middle school students and to determine how best to approach engagement. Reading is an essential skill and must become something students are able to approach independently as they grow into adults. It is important, then, that educators consider how best to help them gain the skills needed to approach this independence.

Why Reading?

As a young person, most of my time was engaged in reading stories. I always found books to be the perfect escape; they were a way to learn about the world and have fun at the same time. I remember being so engrossed in my books that I would miss entire conversations or would have friends get upset with me because I was too distracted by my stories. On more than one occasion I was reprimanded by teachers for reading during class. In middle school, the library was my favorite place in the entire building; I remember they had a cart of new arrivals that I would scour through every day. To this day, friends poke fun at me for reading books too quickly; they hate having me in book clubs. For me, reading has never been scary or overwhelming, but has instead been exhilarating and joyful. When I read a book it consumes me and I cannot put it down until I have finished the story.

My personal experience with literature is why I am so interested in addressing the current trends I see in my classroom surrounding novels and other longer texts. I want to explore how I as an educator can help shift students' mindsets when they approach a novel. How can I decrease their anxiety and pique their interest? What practices work best for engaging students? What practices can overwhelm or bore students? How can I help students get back that desire to keep reading? The desire to find out what happens next?

Within my own classroom I have been struggling with these questions, particularly in regards to the two novels I currently teach: *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton and *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander. I remember vividly the first time a student

came up to me and said, “Oh that book? Yeah, I never read that.” It was crushing knowing that I had poured time and effort into teaching this book and students had never even cracked the cover. As a new teacher, it was disheartening and made me question my approach to teaching novels. I kept asking myself, what am I doing wrong? Why won’t they even try? I found when I supported them through audiobooks or reading to them, students would just zone out and not retain any of the story. How then could I get them to engage with the story if they would not read and they would not listen to me read? It took getting a few years under my belt as a teacher to start asking more pertinent questions. Instead of why won’t they try: what is preventing them from getting started? How could I change my approach to better meet the needs of my students? How could I explicitly teach students how to read a full-length text? How could I promote engagement? All of these questions rolling around in my head are what have led me to this point and have made me consider the differences in two novels I currently teach.

I have found that between the two books that I currently teach, the challenge lies with engaging students in *The Outsiders*. This discrepancy in reading engagement has also spurred my interest in this topic. I have discussed these novels at length with colleagues to determine why students are more successful with *The Crossover*. Several reasons have emerged: the text structure, content, and style of reading. This book, unlike a typical novel, is written in verse making the number of words on a page much less than a book like *The Outsiders*; the content is current and uses language with which they are familiar; and students must read aloud during class in small groups. While some of these hint at why students lean towards one text, it is not an answer to the question of how to build strong independent readers because it is unrealistic to assume that throughout their

lives students will only need to read concise, approachable, collaborative texts. Often in the past year I have found myself second-guessing or unsure of how to approach a more rigorous text. This is why I believe the scaffolding of reading stamina and the exploration of best practices for engagement are essential.

Students' reading stamina has diminished in my classroom in just the three years I have been teaching. Reading stamina can be understood as the length of time that a student can engage with a text within a single sitting, before losing attention (Wood, 2016). COVID may have played a role in this trend, but there are other factors to consider—like how much time students are expected to spend on assignments or homework outside of the classroom. For example, at my school the trend since COVID has been to focus more on work in the classroom and send less homework home. This means that the approach to reading time within the classroom has to be carefully considered. Within this project I would like to explore the best practices for how long to have students read within a single sitting and also examine the impact of expectations surrounding independent reading both within and outside of the classroom.

Secondary to reading stamina, I would like to explore best practices for engagement and, in so doing, address the questions of how to best keep students engaged with longer texts, both fiction and nonfiction. With a longer text there is more content for students to sift through and a higher likelihood that they will be overwhelmed or unable to keep their attention on the reading. In her book *Readicide*, Kelly Gallagher (2009) determines that teachers are partially to blame for the lack of student engagement with reading due to both the over and under teaching of literature. I would like to answer the question of how to best keep students engaged with a longer text, both fiction and

nonfiction by finding an approach that grabs students' attention without overwhelming them. It is key that students not only comprehend what they are reading, but that they are able to stay engaged enough to think critically about the text and draw conclusions that can apply outside of the reading. These two areas will be the main focus of my research in this capstone.

Rationale

As an educator in the field of language arts, literacy is at the forefront of every conversation, professional development, and curriculum decision; everyone is asking how we can help students to become stronger readers. Before addressing the question of how we can facilitate reading growth in students, however, we must first consider how to help them pick up a book and stick with it. Looking at a longer text—like a short story, play, novel, textbook, or guide—can lead to anxiety and an inability to get started, similar to staring at the blank page when beginning a piece of writing. It is essential that we as educators help students to overcome this roadblock through the use of scaffolding and strategies that promote engagement and independent reading skills. Scaffolding within this context can be understood as the support and assistance provided by the teacher in order to guide students towards new learning and understandings that would not be accomplished independently (Wood et al, 1976).

There is often a disconnect between elementary and secondary education where it is assumed that students will have explicitly been taught the skill to read larger portions of text, but often that is not the case. As they enter their middle school classroom and are tasked with new amounts of independent reading, students must be taught the skills needed to approach and be successful with this new experience.

Literacy, when it comes to longer texts, applies not only to the language arts classroom, but to other classrooms and the world beyond school. Students must learn to break down larger pieces of writing for comprehension as they fill out applications, read manuals, buy a car, etc. In our current culture, we gain information in a million short bursts. Characters are limited and one must be concise in order to share critical information to the masses. Details and description are nowhere to be found. How then can students be expected to sit and read a 200-300 page text without scaffolding? How can we help them to retain the information when their brain shuts down after the allotted 280 characters on Twitter? In order to guide students to become successful citizens of our world, we need to give them the necessary skills to find that success. Reading has to be at the forefront. Without it, no other skill can be gained, no new information learned.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the core problems that this capstone hopes to address, namely the challenges students face when tasked with reading full-length texts. My own passion for reading, combined with the worrying trends I see within my own classroom, have driven my interest in this topic. In a society that focuses on concise bursts of information, I aim to gain insight into how students learn the necessary skills to become competent independent readers by building reading stamina and engagement. Through this research I will add to the conversation by identifying best practices for promoting both independent reading skills and student engagement with rigorous texts in a middle school setting. Once identified, I will create a unit of curriculum that implements these practices.

This project looks at the best practices surrounding the task of having middle school students read a full-length text. It will examine how they read, how long they read, and how they are engaged with what they read. In Chapter Two I will review the literature surrounding these ideas in order to determine different practices, strategies, and theories that may be useful for educators as they approach teaching texts within their own classrooms. The first of three themes in the review will be based on the history of teaching novels within a middle school classroom. The second theme will focus on research surrounding the scaffolding of reading skills as well as discussion of ideal reading length and styles both within and outside of the classroom. The final theme will delve into the different strategies for promoting engagement during the reading process. In Chapter Three of this capstone I will discuss the process for designing my project; Chapter Four will focus on the implementation of the project and process for how it can be utilized by educators within the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The concern surrounding student reading habits and engagement has been growing within the educational community for years. There is abundant research surrounding reading engagement and motivation within the classroom as well as the explicit and scaffolded teaching of reading skills. These skills, however, are often focused on elementary aged students, and do not necessarily continue into middle and high school grades. As students are presented with different types of media that focus on short bursts of information, it can become challenging to engage them with longer, more dense texts. Teachers must therefore consider how to re-engage students with longer texts in a meaningful way which leads to my research question: *How can teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?*

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore several different areas of research concerning approaches to student reading and engagement as it pertains to reading within a classroom setting. First, I will assess research around different approaches to student reading within the classroom, then I will look at methods of engagement. This will be accomplished through three relevant research themes. First, I will look at the history and reasoning behind different approaches to reading in the classroom including both group and independent reading. I will then look at practices for successful implementation of both read alouds and silent sustained reading in the classroom. This research will connect to the second theme of my literature review which will explore the influences and potential barriers to student reading motivation in the classroom. Finally, I will review

what the experts consider best practices, scaffolds, and strategies for student engagement with a critical reading of a text. By synthesizing the work of these established experts I hope to work towards answering the question of how best to approach teaching an extended text within a middle school setting.

Reading Approaches

It is a long-held understanding that in order to improve at anything, one must practice; the same can be said for reading. As students move out of elementary school and into middle school, reading expectations increase as text length and complexity increases. One of the most well-known approaches to reading practice both inside and outside of the classroom, especially for a longer text, is silent sustained reading (SSR). SSR has long been considered by educators to be a way to promote reading achievement, particularly with elementary aged students (Garan, 2008; Horner and Shwery, 2002; Rasinski, 2012; Reutzel & Juth, 2014). Within this reading method, students are expected to independently and silently read for a given amount of time. This reading approach has also been given significant attention by teachers as it is the most time-effective way to get students through a longer text.

As a completely independent student activity, research has also attempted to answer the question of whether or not students read during given SSR allotted time in the classroom. While traditional SSR advocated for teacher's to model reading for students by participating in the SSR along with students, new approaches give teachers the opportunity to engage in more student monitoring (Garan, 2008). Along with more rigorous monitoring by teachers, other innovations to the original formatting of SSR include more structured routines such as requiring students to stay in their seats during

the entire SSR time and giving pre-arranged bathroom breaks before beginning (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2006). While time-effective, the validity of this model as a method to significantly improve reading achievement has been questioned and seen studies with varying results for the past 20 years (Garan, 2008). These studies, however, while often focusing on reading fluency, specifically reading rates, often do not reflect on changes or impacts on student reading comprehension (Garan, 2008).

Reading fluency is often connotated with the idea of reading fast, but can also be defined as reading with and for meaning and can be examined through two main components: automaticity and prosody (Rasinski, 2012). Rasinski argues that for students to truly grow as readers and experience success with reading, they must practice both automaticity, the ability to recognize and read words automatically, and prosody, the ability to read with expression whether that be orally or mentally. Repeated reading practice such as SSR helps students to practice these skills necessary to become competent readers. This approach to understanding reading fluency focuses on how it can positively impact comprehension. As students become more familiar with words and read with more automaticity, it opens their cognitive energy to focus on making meaning (Rasinski, 2012). Similarly, as students practice reading with prosody, or expression, they increase their ability to infer meaning from the text, thereby increasing reading comprehension overall (Rasinski, 2012). Rasinski further posits that some of the decline in interest in reading fluency amongst educators is related to both the focus on oral fluency and reading rates rather than silent reading and comprehension.

While later grades often focus on silent reading, experts do find places where oral reading is used to guide reading comprehension. In elementary settings, for example,

group and paired readings are often utilized, especially to assess reading fluency. For example, in a hybridization of a traditional SSR model, it is thought that a young student may benefit from either subvocalization (saying words inside one's head while reading) or buddy reading in order to practice fluency (Rasinski, 2012). Furthermore, oral performances such as speeches, poems, and plays can also give students an authentic reason to engage in repeated reading of a text which has positive impacts on reading fluency (Rasinski, 2012). Wexler et al. (2020) posit that partner reading also has a place in the middle school classroom as a part of a critical reading routine which, along with feedback and modeling, has led to success for a diverse group of learners. Within this student-centered model, students must practice comprehension by explaining their reasoning and using textual evidence, while teachers are given the opportunity to take a step back and act merely as a facilitator (Wexler et al, 2020). According to Falter (2015), collaboration may also influence reading engagement as students experience peer encouragement.

Read-aloud practices are also supported by experts such as Hollie (2017) who argues that despite a focus on silent reading in later education, educators must consider the implications of cultural literacy practices such as storytelling; students with ties to specific cultures with strong histories of storytelling may experience increased motivation and engagement with reading when given opportunities to read aloud, a factor that Hollie argues cannot be ignored in the conversation of literacy. Walker and Hutchinson (2021) found that by implementing teacher and peer read-alouds with middle school aged Black male students, they were able to introduce students to texts that may have otherwise been challenging or frustrating. Similarly, Gulla's (2012) observation of a ninth grade literacy

classroom found that teacher read-alouds of specific sections of a book allowed for some struggling readers to keep up in the class because they received exposure to the reading passages before being asked to look at them independently.

What is Scaffolding?

A concept first introduced by Vygotsky (1978), scaffolding can be defined as the support and activities provided by an educator to support students as they move through the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development, according to Vygotsky, is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This theory believes a child's learning process is positively impacted by outside assistance rather than solely individual exploration and problem solving. As students become more familiar with a particular concept or task, scaffolds are reduced until the individual is able to accomplish or understand them independently. A study by Wood and Middleton (1975) had mothers support four-year olds in building block structure. The results showed that while no single strategy to help stood out as the best, mothers who varied their strategies in response to their child's needs were most effective. In other words, the scaffolding worked best when it was flexible and adjusted to best match the needs of the learner.

Student Accountability

A major question that many experts attempt to address when working to improve reading fluency and achievement is how to ensure that actual reading is occurring during such an independent and difficult-to-visually-address activity. Research has found that

while students may sometimes appear to be reading, they are actually just staring at the book without comprehending the text (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2006). In order to ensure that students are practicing reading skills during independent reading times within the classroom, several methods of student accountability have been posed by experts. Reutzel and Juth (2014) have developed an approach to scaffolding silent reading in order to increase positive reading outcomes that focuses on several key areas including reading stamina, student accountability, and allocation of time. To make sure students are not simply faking reading, teachers can engage in several measures to ensure on-task behavior including active monitoring and the use of reading logs or reader response notebooks to track student progress (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). Gallagher (2009) has students fill out a one-pager detailing key information from their book once a month in order to hold students accountable to their reading. Another key necessity, according to these researchers, is that educators regularly allocate specific amounts of time to reading in order to give students a consistent opportunity to build on their skills (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). While conducting a research study of a ninth grade literacy classroom, Gulla (2012) noted that students had a set routine for the independent reading portion of their class; students arrived, found their materials (including a reading log) and began to read immediately as the teacher walked around the room and conducted one-on-one check-ins with students about their progress in their books. This clearly scaffolded routine increased student accountability towards their independent reading and allowed students to slowly build reading stamina over the period of the literacy course (Gulla, 2012). In order to continue to promote student accountability and self-regulation in reading, Horner and Shwery (2002) assert that teachers can use the methods of cognitive apprenticeship

(modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration) to help struggling and reluctant readers who may lack practice with varied reading strategies discover and implement new reading processes in accompaniment with routine reading opportunities in the classroom.

Similarly, Horner and Shwery (2002), believe that setting specific, short-term, and attainable reading goals—such as deciding to read a set number of pages per week—can help students increase reading accountability. Furthermore, if students are given the opportunity to create their own reading goals it can even lead to an increase in motivation for students as it increases the value placed on the task (Horner & Shwery, 2002). If students are not given a specific purpose for reading, it can lower the task value; students may think that the only goal is to complete the reading as quickly as possible in order to get a grade (Horner & Shwery, 2002). Another way to create student accountability with independent reading tasks, is for the teacher to present a specific purpose for the reading thereby encouraging students to place a higher value on the task.

The difficulty of helping students to consistently and effectively build skills in reading were laid out within this theme. Research has worked to find approaches to reading that give students the best opportunities to improve their reading stamina, strategies, fluency, and comprehension. Experts have identified several approaches to student reading, both independent and oral, that can contribute to and promote positive reading practices and habits within middle school settings when students are tasked with reading full-length texts.

Factors Influencing Student Reading Motivation

Another area of consideration when it comes to using the independent reading of full length texts to increase literacy is student motivation. Studies show that student reading motivation can have a positive impact on student attitude towards reading and overall reading achievement (Baki, 2018). But what factors influence motivation? Horner and Shwery (2002) propose student reading motivation is closely tied to a student's self-efficacy, or their belief in their own capabilities; the less confident a student is about their ability to decode words and comprehend a reading the less motivated they will be to complete the reading task, thus creating a cycle in which struggling readers are not motivated to practice their reading skills and may continue be frustrated by reading. In a 2017 study of middle school students, Baki determined a negative relationship between reading levels and reading anxiety. The study found that struggling readers experience more anxiety with reading tasks, which often has a negative impact on reading motivation and the consistency of reading habits. Furthermore, reading anxiety impacts reading achievement as it can interfere with cognitive processes such as memory (Baki, 2017).

Similarly, in a study on reading motivation of 6-9th grade students Tegmark et al. (2020) explored motivation through the Self-Determination Theory which posits that intrinsic motivation (doing something because it is naturally interesting) leads to better learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation (doing something because it leads to a desired external outcome); moving a step further, this study questions not just what students do, but rather what they are capable of doing. The study aimed to answer three main questions:

- How do students perceive themselves as readers?

- How do students perceive their school-related reading difficulty?
- What types of motivation for school-related reading do students express?

(Tegmark et al., 2020).

The study concluded that by the time they reach 9th grade, students generally want to be good readers and believe they know how to do so. The results determined that of students who stated that they found reading easy, it could often be traced not to reading instruction they had received, but rather to themselves, also indicating a strong self-efficacy.

Conversely, students within the study indicated higher levels of extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic reading motivation decreasing as students got older. A study on 6th grade students also found that extrinsic motivators, such as parent and teacher monitoring of reading, were highly influential in driving student reading (Falter, 2015). Both studies indicate that teachers cannot ignore the influences of extrinsic motivators in increasing students' reading outcomes.

A student's sense of purpose when it comes to a reading task is another highly discussed subject in literacy research. Students are more likely to read if they believe that they can learn something from the reading (Falter, 2015). Dweck (2000) identifies two types of motivational goals that students experience: learning-oriented goals and performance-oriented goals. With learning-oriented goals, students are interested in mastering new knowledge or a new task and will often keep trying even when met with challenges. Performance-oriented goals in contrast are goals in which students attempt to appear or be perceived to have understood or mastered a task. With performance-oriented goals, students are less willing to push through challenges and are more likely to attempt to avoid a sense of failure. The discrepancy between these types of motivational goals,

according to Horner and Shwery (2002) can be seen in students' sense of self-efficacy. Students who have low self-efficacy are more likely to view reading as a performance-oriented goal and will place less importance on the reading task and have a harder time creating consistent reading habits. Conversely, students who have high self-efficacy are more likely to view reading as a learning-oriented goal and will place a higher value on the reading task and therefore are more likely to self-regulate and stay on top of their reading tasks.

Another well-studied method to create purpose and interest is to give students a choice in their reading. Choice given to students regarding which books they read has been shown to increase both interest and engagement (Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013). Reutzel and Juth (2014) also support text choice when it comes to scaffolded SSR in order to promote reading fluency and high on-task behavior, but caution that students need teacher facilitation in order to choose appropriately challenging texts. In the Tegmark et al. (2020) study of 6th-9th grade students, half claimed that they would be more motivated to read if their schools had higher interest texts available. The same study found that students who found specific texts challenging, blamed the difficulty on the text rather than their perceived reading ability, indicating that text choice has a high impact on students' motivation to complete a reading task.

During a 2020 study, in an attempt to engage reluctant readers with books, a small group of male elementary students were chosen for a book club in which students were not only given voice to text choice, but also to the naming of the club and reason or purpose of the club (Tichenorq, 2020). The goal was merely to increase student motivation and engagement in reading outside of an academic setting, but resulted in

increased test scores for several participants as well as gains in both reading volume and reading rates, supporting the theory that purpose and intrinsic motivation play a role in reading achievement (Tichenorq, 2020). Furthermore, students within this study were able to choose books that reflected their own culture and interests. Hollie (2017) advocates that culturally responsive text choices are extremely important for increasing literacy motivation and engagement of students of color within the classroom.

Text choice, however, stated to have significance to student reading motivation, can also be a potential barrier to student reading motivation and achievement if thoughtful text choices are not made. Reutzell and Juth (2014) conclude that while freedom of text choice is important, teachers must facilitate the choosing of texts, in order to avoid students disengaging as they become frustrated with an overly difficult text. In addition, if appropriate text choices are not made, schools that are attempting to implement SSR may see a lack of student growth in reading (Williams, 2014).

Along with text choices, the teacher's role and influence in student reading motivation must also be considered. In the 2020 study on 6-9th grade students, Tegmark et al. (2020) determined the following:

When teachers...make sure that students read extensively to develop their competence and encourage and challenge them to read what they see as interesting and meaningful texts, students are more likely to start to identify themselves as readers and to develop more autonomous motivation and self-determined behavior. (p. 113)

According to these researchers, it is not enough that students are given exposure to reading opportunities, but that teachers make clear and purposeful efforts to encourage

student reading habits and push for them to develop their reading skills. Reutzel and Juth (2014) also promote that it is the role of the teacher to create discussion with students through one-on-one conferences during silent reading. This is supported by research showing that discussion and other social interaction surrounding reading can help to develop both literacy skills and reading motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997).

Additionally, positive reinforcement as well as effective assignments that connect the classroom work to student interests are also thought to encourage students to achieve classroom reading expectations (Falter, 2015). In an observational study of a 9th grade literacy classroom, Gulla (2012) credited the teachers' relationship-building efforts with the strong community and learning opportunities witnessed throughout the semester. Overall, experts agree that teachers play a role both in holding students accountable to reading and in the self-efficacy felt by students as they engage in the reading process.

Other Barriers to Student Reading Motivation and Engagement

The factors that influence student reading motivation give insight to the most prevalent barriers educators face to increasing student reading motivation and engagement. Gallagher (2009) posits that schools often create *readicide*—the effect of killing the desire and motivation of student to read in students—as a result of four major factors:

- Schools value the development of test-takers more than they value the development of readers
- Schools are limiting authentic reading experiences
- Teachers are over-teaching books
- Teachers are under-teaching books (p. 5)

In essence, Gallagher (2009) posits that an over-focus on covering large amounts of material in order to create higher test scores in fact harms students and their reading motivation because it does not allow for a full immersion or enjoyment of a text. If focus is placed on the quantity of materials learned instead of quality, then less time can be placed on reading full-length texts. The implication then is that school-wide reading can impact student reading motivation and achievement. In a 2020 study, Neugebauer and Blair overwhelmingly found that “students identified successful reading as a distinctive skill related to pronouncing and accessing word meanings, rather than connecting reading with developing content knowledge” (p. 325). The implication is that students associate reading with word identification and are not transferring the skill to true reading comprehension or critical thinking. The researchers further posited that this construction of reading was a result of the lack of authentic, or culturally relevant, texts used by teachers throughout the school, with more emphasis placed on texts that led to the quick identification of information (Neugebauer & Blair, 2020).

Of course the tools to change schoolwide reading culture are not quick or easy. Williams (2014) describes the literacy overhaul of a school in which in order to implement a new SSR protocol teachers were required to have students read every day. Thirty-five minutes were given in the middle of the day for reading which meant a change in the daily schedule, time was cut from electives, and teachers had to attend specialized professional development related to the program. These factors are a commitment for a school in both time and money that not all schools may be able to make. Similarly, in Daniels, Marcos, and Steres (2011) study of Parkdale Middle School it was determined that three main factors influenced an increase in reading engagement:

prioritizing reading, modeling from adults within the school community, and the implementation of motivational learning environments. These researchers, however, also stated the limitations of budget and staff on these types of major school wide strategies. While schoolwide reading culture may play a role in student reading achievement, there are significant barriers that may prevent schools from being able to fully endorse a remodeling of their approaches to reading.

Gallagher and several other experts further state that low-income and minority students experience the most barriers to reading engagement. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2019) the achievement gap between white students and students of color increased from 2017 to 2019, while overall student reading scores went down. Many experts agree that students are not provided with ample opportunities for authentic reading experiences within their educational day. Hollie (2017) believes that this can be difficult for schools and educators to accomplish because of the lack of culturally-specific texts available to consumers and goes further to state that even when these texts are available, their use in classrooms is sporadic at best. Because of the large achievement gap between students of color, specifically Black male students, and white students, they often become the subject of literacy research. In an attempt to address the problem, Walker and Hutchison (2021) created a curriculum focused on using culturally relevant materials in a critical reading framework and saw increased levels of engagement from black male students within the study. The discrepancies in authentic texts and learning opportunities for students of color, help to explain the barriers faced by these students and the reason why their reading scores continue to fall behind those of their white peers.

While there are a plethora of factors that influence student reading motivation, experts have tried to identify the keys to promoting students' willingness to read within the classroom. By being aware of the challenges and barriers to student reading motivation and reading success, experts aim to help educators find ways to overcome these challenges within the classroom. By being more aware of student needs, educators can better differentiate reading instruction and practices to meet the needs of individual students when it comes to reading a full-length text.

Classroom Scaffolds and Strategies for Reading Engagement

So far this review has explored the implications of different reading strategies and influences and barriers to student reading motivation. The final step, then, is to consider how educators can engage students in a critical reading process in which they are engaged in not only reading a text, but in discussion, analysis, and acquisition of knowledge. It has been established that social interactions can increase student reading motivation, but are also understood positively influence reading comprehension. Social Interaction Theory, for example, posits that students learn by talking and listening with others (Vygostky, 1978). Many experts agree that discussion plays a crucial role in a critical reading of a text. Wexler et al. (2020) argues that through peer-led discussion, students are able to take more control of their learning, allowing the teacher to facilitate, rather than lead. This in turn increases both opportunities for student engagement as well as critical thinking as students are asked to show understanding through text evidence. Almasi (1995) actually found that student lead group discussions are more likely to lead to high-level discourse than teacher-lead groups. In peer-led discussions it was found that students were more likely to create their own interpretations of the text, rather than

teacher-led discussion which focused primarily on searching for the explicit answer to the question provided by the teacher. In a study on the impact of group discussion on related reading assessments, Fall, Webb and Chudowsky (2000) found that students scored higher on exams when working collaboratively with a group to discuss the book and could provide better descriptions of both the main idea and key plot points. The conclusion of these studies suggest that group discussion plays an important role in the critical understanding of texts.

Based on this understanding, Falter (2015) lays out specific group discussion activities that are meant to scaffold and promote collaborative learning and student engagement:

- *Explain the Evidence:* This activity has students as homework select a piece of text evidence to bring to their group discussion in the next class period.
- *Gallery Walk with Two Stay & Two Stray:* In this jigsaw activity groups are given different readings from the class text and must analyze the impact of word choice on the tone and mood of the passage. After groups have finished their discussion, two group members stay to explain their analysis while the rest of the class completes a gallery walk of each other's work.

Both examples demonstrate how student-led discussion of a text can be facilitated within a classroom setting in which the teacher acts as a facilitator and students gain a higher-level of control of their own learning.

Another similar method of bolstering student discussion that also allows students the opportunity to choose the given text they will read are literature circles. Daniels (2002) promotes the use of literature circles in the classroom in which students choose

from a selection of texts and are placed in groups based on their text choice; the groups then work together through the reading meeting regularly to create discussion questions and hold conversations about the book to be shared with the class at the end of the reading. In this scaffolded reading model the teacher acts as a facilitator, with students guiding the learning. Latendresse (2004) has hybridized Daniels' model of literature circles with 7th and 8th grade students to give even more control to students; in this model of literature circles the nightly tasks performed by students as homework to prepare for group discussion in the next class period included elements of both reader response, or having students focus on how they relate and react to the text, as well as modern literary theory, in which students were asked to look at the text through different lenses such as Feminism and Cultural Studies. The benefit, Latendresse (2004) argues, is that students experience more control over their learning while simultaneously critically dissecting the text on several levels.

As stated earlier, Gallagher (2009) believes that one of the major barriers to student reading motivation is an overteaching of the text, which is to mean that teachers are spending too much time having students stop their reading in order to discuss and analyze specific passages or themes and are thereby disengaging students from the flow and enjoyment of reading a book start to finish. In order to balance this issue Gallagher (2009) proposes a method of Big Chunk/Little Chunk in which students do a lot of independent reading, specifically for immersion and enjoyment of the text, and then will go back over specific, smaller portions of the reading with either small groups or the teacher in order to scaffold understanding and engage in more critical thinking of the text. This philosophy, while thought to promote student engagement, also ties into thoughts on

reading fluency. Rasinski (2012) states that in order for students to achieve true reading fluency it is important for them to not only engage in wide reading, or reading a large number of texts, but also deep, repeated reading in which students improve their prosody and make meaning from a text through scaffolded, repeated readings. The Big Chunk/Little Chunk methodology, then, is thought to both keep students engaged with reading and simultaneously help them improve fluency and comprehension.

Before Reading

It has been established early in this literature review that student text choice can play a large role in student reading motivation. Approaches to classroom reading, such as SSR and Literature Circles, can provide students with opportunities to make choices regarding their reading in areas that are high-interest to them. Hollie (2015) takes this a step further by stating that educators need to be providing students with culturally authentic texts, which can be defined as the following:

A culturally authentic text is a piece of fiction or nonfiction that illuminates the authentic cultural experiences of a particular cultural group—whether it addresses religion, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, nationality, orientation, age, or geographic location. The language, situations, and illustrations have to depict culture in an authentic manner as well. (Hollie, 2015, p. 145)

In addition to defining culturally authentic texts, Hollie (2015) provides educators with insight as to how to avoid the fallacy of choosing texts that merely look to be authentic because they depict a person of color on the front cover, including the advice to critically analyze how characters are portrayed in the story. This approach to choosing texts of course requires the teacher to have a sound understanding of the cultural makeup of their

classroom in order to seek out appropriate texts. Latendresse (2004) on the other hand believes that text choices cannot be made by a teacher judged solely on whether or not a student might relate to them; Latendresse cautions students being allowed to only focus on their personal relation to a text, instead they must consider the large implications of the text on a wider, societal level. While both experts advocate for text choice, approaches on how to choose appropriate texts are not always agreed upon.

While discussion plays a large role in keeping students engaged during the reading process, many experts also support pre-reading strategies to help heighten student interest and engagement before the reading has even begun. Anticipation guides are an established, but often overlooked, pre-reading strategy that provide an opportunity to scaffold understanding of the text. An anticipation guide consists of a series of statements about a reading that students are asked to respond to (often in an agree/disagree manner) in order to activate any prior knowledge they may have on the given topic. Kozen, Murray, and Windell (2006) are proponents of the use of anticipation guides in the classroom for the following reasons:

- They can be used across multiple disciplines and content areas.
- They are easily accessible to different groups of students and can easily be differentiated.
- They are engaging for students as they involve active participation and encourage discussion.
- They can be used in a pre/post response method in order to evaluate student understanding, content mastery, and ability to use appropriate text evidence.

Essentially, anticipation guides scaffold the text by helping students preview the content they will soon need to understand and getting them thinking about the knowledge they may already have access to; they can serve to spark student interest and anticipation for the text (Kozen, Murray, & Windell, 2006). Gallagher (2009) also describes the importance of framing a text before asking students to read and employs several strategies to do so such as previewing final exam questions to give purpose to the reading, introducing relevant vocabulary and historical context, anticipation guides and discussions. Gallagher (2009) posits that without framing, a teacher cannot expect students to fully comprehend the text because there is no guarantee that they will even have the prior knowledge needed to understand the context of the text.

A consensus among many experts around how to increase student engagement during the critical reading of a text is to give students some autonomy in their learning. Whether students are leading discussions or choosing their books for literature circles, they are practicing a student-centered approach to learning in which the teacher is able to act merely as a facilitator. These experts also contend that reading has to be an enjoyable task for students. Choosing inappropriate texts, not framing the text, or overly breaking down a reading are cautioned against as they may cause students to disengage from the critical reading process. Overall, researchers have shown that students will read, and learn from their reading, if given scaffolded opportunities.

Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the existing literature around the differing approaches to reading, student reading motivation, and reading engagement. All three of these themes are critical to understanding the guiding research question: *How can*

teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?

In order to look at reading accountability it was necessary to consider how students are learning to read and what methods are used during reading practice within classroom settings. Through the research it becomes clear that student reading is on the decline in the classroom, with strategies such as SSR, only being implemented sporadically. The lack of consistent reading expectations across the nation correlates with the decline in reading scores and reading stamina. The need for effective and consistent approaches to student reading is clear, as is the need to promote student reading motivation.

The review also focused on both the positive and negative influences on reading motivation and the potential barriers faced by students. The myriad factors influencing motivation were overwhelming, but most consistently, researchers found that reading motivation tied directly to a student's perception of their own reading abilities. It was important, then, to note the strategies used to help students gain higher self-efficacy and self-confidence with concern to their reading in order to increase student motivation. The research shows that the review of student reading motivation helps establish the challenges faced by students and identify steps that can be taken to motivate reluctant or struggling readers.

The review also highlighted strategies and scaffolds for engaging students in critical reading, exploring effective learning strategies that allowed students to maintain reading motivation while still building critical thinking skills and allowing for critical discussions of the text. These are all strategies that could be employed in a middle school

classroom in order to facilitate the reading of a full-length text both in English Language Arts classrooms and other content areas. This exploration was completed in order to establish strong practices for teaching relevant and engaging reading curriculum.

As a result of this review of relevant literature, a concept for how to adapt this knowledge towards creating a curriculum based on the effective reading approaches and critical reading strategies has been identified. In the following chapter the methodology for a curriculum unit using literature circles within a middle school classroom will be outlined using this knowledge. The curriculum will feature collaborative strategies that allow for a student-centered approach to learning. The project specifics will be reviewed along with a rationale of the intended audience, context, and frameworks.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

As middle school students enter the classroom there is often an assumption that they have been taught reading strategies and skills and therefore successfully understand how to read. However, in a fast-paced learning environment and media culture that focuses on consuming large amounts of information in very short, quick bursts of information, students often do not master the skills necessary to engage with a longer text. When asked to read longer chapters or full-length novels in a classroom setting, students may struggle to keep up with the large amounts of reading and comprehension required, especially given the independent nature of such tasks. Without proper scaffolding of these types of reading tasks, it can be challenging for students to experience success and gain confidence in their reading skills.

In this chapter I will lay out a curriculum unit that seeks to address these concerns by both scaffolding and creating reading supports for students as well as providing engaging learning opportunities surrounding reading tasks in the hopes of answering the research question: *How can teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?*

The first section of this chapter will lay out an overview of the project including the setting and audience that the unit is focused on. The next section will lay out the specific curricular approaches with examples and the research that backs each component. Finally, the summative assessment will be described and a summary of the chapter will be provided detailing how this unit effectively provides students with opportunities to increase their reading skills.

Project Overview

This project is a literacy unit dedicated to reading engagement. The unit is focused on usage in a middle school English Language Arts classroom, but can be adapted for other content areas by simply switching out the text choices. The purpose for teaching this unit is to continue the teaching of specific reading skills and strategies past elementary age, which is where the focus on specific reading skills and strategies often taper off. When students enter the middle school classroom, the expectations surrounding reading begin to grow, and students need the opportunity to continue to learn and practice specific reading skills and strategies in order to successfully meet these increased expectations. This unit implements reading strategies by asking students to participate in a literature circle as they read a novel. Students will be given the opportunity to practice reading fluency, comprehension, independent reading skills, and critical reading skills in a collaborative learning environment.

When making the choice to create a unit surrounding reading engagement and reading skills, I had to consider my own positionality as well as the setting and audience of the unit. As a middle-class learner who had a strong interest in reading, I did not experience many of the challenges that reluctant or struggling readers have to contend with when approaching reading such as lack of consistent access to books or finding frustration when reading. Because I was able to find such joy and engagement with reading, I want to understand more about how to best encourage and engage students who lack interest or confidence in reading so that I am better able to help them within my own classroom. As a white, female teacher I also cannot fully understand the reading or school experiences of students of color or other genders. By being aware of these limitations I

hope to use reflective practices to ensure that I have taken a culturally responsive approach to this curriculum.

This project was created to take place in a 7th grade middle school classroom at an urban charter school. This school is a college-preparatory focused charter school serving students in grades 6-12. The student makeup of this school is incredibly diverse due to the urban setting and the class sizes are quite small (20-25 students maximum). Students have varying reading levels and interests in reading as this English course is a requirement for completion of the 7th grade.

Curricular Components and Design Framework

This project utilizes several different learning strategies supported by various experts to help increase student motivation and engagement in the reading process including formative assessments, discussions, goal setting, and projects. The curriculum has been created using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The following section will detail how each of these components are implemented throughout the six week unit in order to prompt increased use of reading strategies by learners.

To start, students complete this unit in literature circles. Within a literature circle, students work in small groups to read a specific text, with each group reading a different text. Students choose their top three choices from a group of selected texts and are placed in groups accordingly. Giving students choice in their reading materials is supported by several experts discussed in Chapter Two (Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013; Reutzel and Juth, 2014; Tegmark et al., 2020). Multiple texts also allow for easier differentiation in reading levels to make reading more accessible to all students. Literature circles are

used because they can help to promote student reading engagement and discussion of the text by allowing for student choice in reading materials and placing students within a collaborative learning setting (Daniels, 2002). This theory of the benefits of collaborative work is also supported by Vygotsky (1978) who states that students learn from talking and speaking to one another.

Much of the unit is based on reading and discussion within the literature circle, with the teacher acting as a facilitator to student learning. Several experts have found that student led discussion, rather than teacher directed discussion, leads to more positive outcomes in comprehension and critical reading (Almasi, 1995; Fall, Webb, & Chudowsky, 2000; Wexler et al., 2020). Part of the formative assessments for this unit stem from student discussion responsibilities which include pre-discussion reading and reading tasks. Using Latendresses' (2014) approach to literature circles as a guide, students will be provided with specific learning tasks each lesson when reading is assigned ranging from summarizing, characterization, identifying vocabulary, asking open-ended questions, reader response journals, analyzing themes, and making predictions.

These tasks are part of the framework for student discussion. Discussions are scaffolded for students with each student being given a specific group role for the discussion as well as a graphic organizer to complete the work for the role. The role of the teacher within this portion of the unit is to provide lessons on the specific skills and learning targets being practiced each week, such as close reading and analysis skills, and to give a framework to guide discussions and prompt discussions within groups as

needed. While facilitating each group's discussion, the teacher assesses the level of student engagement and comprehension of the text and makes adjustments as needed.

In addition to the focus on discussion, much of this unit focuses on student reading habits and accountability. Pulling from much of the research surrounding silent, sustained reading practices, students will be given consistent and specific amounts of time to read in the classroom and will be asked to complete reading tasks to track their progress (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). To further hold students accountable as they work to develop independent reading habits students will work together as a literature circle group to create consistent reading goals.

Learning around the benefits of reading habits and reading goals will first be introduced by the teacher, then the literature circle groups will lay out a plan for how much reading they need to accomplish for each week. The setting of specific weekly reading goals is supported by research from both Horner and Shwery (2002) as well as Reutzel and Juth (2008). The role of the teacher within this portion of the unit is to facilitate these goals by completing daily check-ins with groups on their reading journals and goals and address any concerns from the group about individual accountability. In addition to reading tasks, there will be several reading checks to ensure accountability. The reading tasks, checks, and teacher check-ins each serve as formative assessments of student reading engagement and mastery of the desired independent reading skills.

Repeated and close readings also play a role in this unit as each group is tasked with looking at specific smaller portions of the text in order to provide analysis on various components of the text. By approaching repeated readings in smaller chunks,

instead of asking students to analyze longer chapters, which can increase student enjoyment and immersion within the text (Gallagher, 2009).

The main scaffolds utilized throughout the unit are as follows:

- Reading Log, Goals, and Tasks Graphic Organizers
- Opportunities for Discussion
- Discussion Frameworks and Sentence Stems
- Close Reading Graphic Organizers
- Anticipation Activity

Summative Assessments

This unit ends with a summative assessment that is meant to determine the level of student mastery on the overall learning objectives within the unit. As the focus of the unit is increasing reading engagement and discussion of the text, the summative will focus on allowing students to present their learning on their chosen novel through academic conversation. Success of the unit can be measured by how well students are able to demonstrate their comprehension and critical thinking about their chosen text through academic conversation as well as their performance on the varied formative assessments integrated into the project including the reading tasks, discussions, reading checks, vocabulary quizzes, and group reading goals.

Each literature group will work together first to create a final presentation on their respective novels. Within the presentation students will be asked to provide a full summary of the text, key plot elements, reader responses to the text, an analysis of the character, and an analysis of the main themes. The second portion of the summative assessment will be student participation in a socratic seminar about the main character of

their novel. Using what was learned from the group presentations, students from different literature circle groups will participate in a socratic seminar with guiding questions in which they must make connections to the characters from their chosen novels. The first portion of the summative project will allow students to demonstrate their comprehension and insights gained from their reading of the text and group discussions. The second portion will allow them to demonstrate their critical thinking and speaking skills through academic conversation.

At the beginning of the unit students are also tasked with completing a survey regarding their reading interest, engagement, and process. The survey is given again at the end of the unit to assess any shifts in reading engagement and independent reading habits. This will allow students to evaluate their own reading habits and how they can adjust their habits in the future to advance their own confidence and success with reading tasks. The survey will also serve as evidence as to whether or not the unit successfully scaffolded reading engagement and independent reading practices for students.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of my capstone project as I attempt to answer the question: *How can teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?* The timeline for this capstone project is six months. Chapters One, Two, and Three have been researched and completed from June-August 2022 and Chapter Four, the project itself, was started in September 2022 and submitted in December 2022. This project, which is meant to take place in a middle school classroom, utilizes literature circles in order to facilitate the reading and analysis of a full-length text. The purpose of this unit is to give

middle school students the opportunity to continue to build on their reading skills in order to better meet the reading expectations of their classes. By providing students with an opportunity to lead discussions and to create consistent reading habits and goals, this unit pushes to promote student accountability as well as student engagement in the reading process. Chapter Four will focus on the creation of the unit outlined within this chapter. It will also provide a reflection of the outcomes of this capstone project by considering what has been learned, what connections have been made to other research, and what limitations were found.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The primary goal of this project was to design a reading curriculum that followed the best practices for reading engagement in order to answer the question: *How can teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?* Chapter Four reports my learning and reflection on the capstone curriculum I have created. I will revisit the literature review and detail new connections I have made between the research and my project. Additionally, I will discuss possible implications, limitations, and future uses of this project. To conclude I will speak to how the project is of use within the field of education.

Major Learnings

The process of creating this capstone unit has created new connections and understandings for me in many areas including curriculum design and research. While I have created curriculum in the past, it has never been this extensive or researched of a process. My experiences with curriculum development within my own career have focused on adapting and modifying pre-made resources to fit within my own needs. This experience has allowed me to gain a more well-rounded understanding of curriculum development and all of its key components. I appreciated being reintroduced to the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) curriculum development framework because it helped me to focus on the key learning targets for my unit before getting stuck in the mess and detail of the individual lesson plans (Wiggins and McTighe, 2011). It also aided me in

creating relevant assessments for my unit, which I feel can sometimes be challenging. Going through this process has informed the unit designs I currently implement in my classroom and has already given me ideas on how to better approach my curriculum.

The research process for the Literature Review was also a major learning area for me. This was the first time I had to create such an extensive review and while at first I found it challenging to identify resources that would be relevant and beneficial to my question, I eventually felt that I gained a more meaningful understanding of my question as a result of the process. Reflecting on the research also allowed me to discover gaps in my thinking of which I was previously unaware. Seeing how others approached related topics to mine allowed me to create the connections necessary to develop my own thinking around the topics of reading accountability and engagement. Similar to my learning with the curriculum design process, I have been reflecting on how additional research may be beneficial for the unit I currently teach within my classroom.

Valuable Literature

The portion of my literature review that became essential to my unit was the understanding of best practices for independent reading tasks and discussion of a text. One of the biggest questions I had when beginning this research process was how to hold students accountable to reading an entire predominantly on their own while still keeping them engaged. Amongst experts such as Reutzel and Ruth (2014) and Horner and Shwery (2002), it is agreed that scaffolding independent reading practices through the use of goal setting, reading logs, and reader response notebooks can lead to increased student reading success. Within my own curriculum I implemented several of these scaffolds to support student reading. I thought it was important to give students a single document through

which they could set their weekly reading goals and conduct small reading tasks throughout the unit. In order to continue to create structure around independent reading, as advised by Reutzler and Ruth (2014), I also built the reading tasks and goal check-ins into the beginning of each lesson. I additionally found the research on literature circles from Latendresse (2004) and Daniels (2002) imperative to the creation of the unit. By implementing literature circles within the independent reading process, I hoped to give students additional accountability by having them set their reading goals as a group and check in regularly with each other about their progress.

Equally important to reading accountability in this unit is the focus on reading engagement. I used the literature circle approaches from Latendresse (2004) and Daniels (2002) to create three main discussion opportunities for the literature circle groups during the unit. I thought it was incredibly important to promote engagement by allowing students to guide their own learning, which was supported by experts within my literature review (Wexler et al, 2020). The researchers additionally held that students learn through listening and speaking to one another and create more student opportunities for critical thinking than teacher-lead discussion (Almasi, 1995; Fall, Webb, and Chudowsky, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). With the support of this research, I decided to make discussion one of the main standards I used to determine student learning within the unit. Throughout the creation of the unit I found that this approach to discussion-based learning also met the suggestions of the researcher who had prompted much of my thought around this research question, Gallagher (2009). According to Gallagher (2009), it is important not to overwhelm students with interruptions during the reading process. I reflected on this heavily while creating my unit and ultimately decided that literature circles and

discussions created a structure through which I could allow students to keep up the flow of their reading, while also creating opportunities for critical thinking and learning.

Implications

Some possible implications of my project are for schools to consider how they are promoting consistent reading practice and opportunities for full-length texts within their school community. The research clearly shows that consistent reading opportunities promote reading growth for students (Garan, 2008; Horner and Shwery, 2002; Rasinski, 2012; Reutzel & Juth, 2014). This unit is just an example of a way to implement a full-length text within one specific classroom, but speaks to the need for similar reading approaches on a school and district wide level. I also believe that with several adjustments this unit could be implemented outside of an ELA classroom to help students connect the importance of reading to multiple disciplines.

Limitations

One limitation of this unit is that it does not allow for complete student text choice. While students can choose their preference from a short list of books, the content is focused on memoirs, and their choice is limited to the options on the list. Research has shown that this is an important element of creating student engagement and on task-behavior with independent reading approaches (Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013; Reutzel and Juth (2014). While I attempted to create a culturally responsive list of books, with the advice of Hollie (2015) in mind, I found it difficult to imagine a unit in which the literature circles groups would have complete text choice.

I also found choosing culturally relevant texts to be a challenge. Hollie (2015) posits that in order for teachers to truly choose a culturally authentic text, they must have

a sound understanding of the cultural makeup of their classroom. I approached this project with the makeup of my classrooms in mind, I feel that I chose several texts that would be appropriate for a variety of my students, however, were this unit to be implemented by a teacher in a different classroom, I believe that changes to the selected texts would most likely have to be made.

Future Research Opportunities

A natural extension that could be made to this project would be the implementation of a complementary writing unit based around personal narratives. The unit's focus on personal stories would make for a clear connection to personal narrative writing. By implementing a writing standard alongside the reading and discussion focus of the current unit, students would be exploring an even wider variety of learning methods and would be tasked with applying their critical thinking skills in new ways.

This could also open up opportunities to look at other types of personal stories which I did not include within this project such as narratives, essays, songs, plays, and poetry. By referencing a variety of texts, students would be able to compare and contrast the different methods of personal storytelling and could potentially choose from a variety of methods through which to explore their own stories.

Finally, future research could also include an exploration of changes in learning attitudes surrounding reading full-length texts after taking part in a discussion-based literature circle unit. With a goal in mind to increase student engagement and comfort with reading longer texts, such studies could look to the benefits of scaffolding reading accountability and engagement in this way.

Communicating Results

I created this unit with my particular classroom in mind. I already have plans to partially incorporate the unit into my classroom this school year. After completing the unit within my own classroom, I plan to take time to reflect on the success and challenges that I faced with implementation before sharing the unit to a wider audience. My current plan will be to approach the ELA professional learning community within my school once I have completed the unit in order to receive feedback and advice. Ultimately, my goal would be to share my curriculum with other educators through a free curriculum sharing website such as Linktree.

Benefits to the Profession

This unit has several benefits to the profession. For one, it creates a consistent structure through which educators can approach independent reading and learning of a text. By considering both how to ensure student accountability and how to emphasize engagement, the unit provides educators with a framework through which they can create student reading growth. Because of the changeability of the text choices, the unit can also be implemented in a variety of classroom settings and content areas.

The curriculum is also designed to promote student confidence and engagement in discussions and critical thinking through student-centered learning processes. By giving students the opportunity to practice and become comfortable with discussions in a small group setting, the unit works to promote overall student speaking confidence which is a key skill in any classroom.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has focused on my reflection of my capstone project which was created with the goal of answering the question: *How can teachers scaffold a full-length text in order to increase reading accountability and engagement from students in a middle school setting?* By considering the curriculum creating process, I considered how much I have learned about curriculum design and how to use research within my own classroom. I reviewed how several main experts guided my understanding of reading and discussion best practices to help me create a unit that promoted both reading accountability and engagement. My project, while successfully creating reading structures that could be used in other classrooms and schools, is also limited by my personal classroom experiences when considering culturally relevant texts.

Fundamentally, this project was created to give middle school students the opportunity to continue their reading growth by creating a curriculum that uses scaffolds to provide consistent reading structure while simultaneously using student-led discussion opportunities. Through the process of determining a focused research question, conducting a literature review, creating a curriculum unit, and reflecting on the unit I hope to have produced a project that can be utilized by a variety of educators within diverse classroom settings.

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