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HOW DOES PLAYFUL ACTIVE LEARNING MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO WRITE AND

AFFECT PERFORMANCE IN WRITING?

by
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ABSTRACT

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HOW DOES PLAYFUL ACTIVE LEARNING MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO WRITE AND
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Dr. David Hespe
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This study examines students' writing and how educators can motivate students to write. The problem that this study attempts to examine is the effect that motivation has on student writing. This study used teaching methods that incorporate active learning and guided play into the curriculum. Over the course of a three- week period, a classroom of fourth graders was examined to determine if they could be motivated to write. Surveys, a focus group, in class lessons, and a writing journal were used within this study. At the conclusion of the study, it was determined that playful active learning can be an effective teaching tool for motivating students to write. Implications for teaching and suggestions for future research are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Imagine a classroom in which students are seemingly busy playing. Students are interacting with one another, either feverishly talking in huddled circles or sitting in small groups with their peers. The volume of the classroom is higher than your typical classroom, a direct result of the twenty-some individual voices joining into one unison pitch. Students appear to move around the room at their own leisure. One might suspect that this room is in utter chaos. However, that statement is far from the truth.

Upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that the students are actually busily engaged in a lesson. The teacher is far removed from the traditional location of the front of the room, consistently lecturing the students. Instead, this teacher chooses to stand as a voyeur of the emerging situation, engaging with the students as it becomes necessary. Most often she is seen acting as a place of resource for the children, offering not simply the solution but ways to arrive at that solution.

Looking even closer, the tight circles of students appear to be loosening up. The room has gradually grown quieter, as students begin to intently focus on the journals propped in their hands, on their laps, or against the floor. However, there still remains a constant murmur as students occasionally converse with one another. Within each circle there is a pumpkin lying on a sheer plastic tarp, contents scattered into small clumps. Suddenly, the situation becomes transparent and the giggles heard before make sense.

The students had been working together to discover, first hand, how to describe a pumpkin. Using each other's reactions and their various senses, they write about the pumpkins before them.

As the students begin to share their work with their peers, it becomes apparent that their writings reflect the playful experience. Rich details reverberate throughout the students' writing. Sentences that would have normally consisted of "A pumpkin is orange and has seeds inside," transform into "The yellow-speckled pumpkin sits on the floor. It's slimy, slippery seeds lay scattered inside its large belly."

The research presented within this study attempts to recreate the teaching and learning found within this fictitious classroom –a place wherein active involvement inspires and motivates children to become better writers.

Purpose Statement

The problem that this study attempts to look at is the effect that motivation has on student writing. Can students' writing performance increase, when given proper motivational tools?

Statement of Research Problem and Question

This study attempts to look at the way writing is taught and the affect that teaching has on writing performance. The question becomes "How does motivation affect a student's performance in writing?" More specifically, it asks "How does using the teaching methods of active learning and guided play motivate students to write?"

The motivation specifically used within this research is active learning, used in combination with guided play. The research presented within this study shows that

engaging students with a playful educational atmosphere frequently leads to greater motivation to write.(Giles, 2005, Scully, 2002, Saracho, 2001).

There are several general definitions that define active learning. According to Petress (2008), active learners use multiple senses to learn new information, and more importantly to understand this information in their own way. Active learning can, in a sense, be divided into two basic components. The first is active learning through intellect in which students are actively engaged in discussions, debates, and questioning. The second component is active learning through kinesthetic experiences, where students are actively engaged in playing, moving, and discovering. Together, these experiences can help make "writing real, engaging, and authentic" (Scully, 2002, 93).

This study argues that students' performances can increase when given the proper motivational tools. Informed by the ideas and concepts presented within chapter two, this study looks to give student's an outlet in which they feel connected to the writing they are creating, while allowing student's to feel and understand that writing can be an enjoyable experience. The study hopes to show that using children's playful tendencies can also promote positive academic affects on writing performance.

Story of the Question

As a student-teacher, I had the opportunity to attend my first of sure-to-be many professional development presentations. The presentation was focused around the works of Ruth Culham and Vicki Spandel and the six traits of writing they have developed as being essential in teaching children to write. This presentation pushed me to think in new ways about teaching writing. I realized that my teacher-prep courses had not given much attention to teaching writing. Yet, writing is one of the three core "R"s of the education

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about which we have all heard so much. I have never yet thought about how I, as a future teacher, would teach my students to write. Panic stricken, I sat through the lecture attempting to absorb as much information as possible.

However, while the lecture did present many ideas, a lot of the information focused on using read-alouds to inspire and motivate children to write. While I understand and appreciate this method of teaching, it left me wanting more. After hearing many of the teachers discuss how they would implement these ideas, I was left with a bitter taste in my mouth. The inspiration for the students seemed to be bland and two-dimensional. The idea of solely using read-alouds as inspiration seemed just as monotonous as the test-prep prompts that teachers used. At that moment I felt that there must be a more effective and more engaging approach to inspire students to write. I needed to think out of the box, and it was then that my question was born. I was determined to examine effective ways to motivate student's to write.

Before I studied the works of others, I decided to reflect upon my own works . What inspired *me* to write as a child? I rummaged through old boxes to find saved pieces of works from my elementary days. I found a short story written in first grade, a ghostly Halloween story. I still remember the thrill of writing this piece, and the excitement of being able to use the new word-processors in my classroom. Being able to type my writings made me feel as if I was among the world's finest published authors. I remember writing about how to braid three pieces of string together, and being able to read my writing as I actually demonstrated the task in front of my peers. I remember the passion I put into creating poems based on a book I had read, or being able to write and perform in a play about recycling for my peers. After this reflection, I realized that I was to capture

this passion and excitement and find a way to translate it into similar experiences for my student's. Yet, in a current culture of test-based results equivocating with both teacher and student performance, I knew I'd need to draw from the research of others in the educational field to help. Thus, my journey as a teacher-research began; in a quest to find a highly motivating way to positively affect a student's performance and perceptions of writing.

Organization of the Thesis

The chapters to follow will take the reader on the same journey as the teacher-researcher, from an inquisitive beginning to an ending that looks to find a solution. Chapter two serves as the foundation for this study, and provides relevant information about using guided play and active learning as a motivational tool to inspire young writers. Chapter three will provide information regarding the context of the study, elaborating on the setting and subjects of the study, as well as detail regarding the methodologies used. The final two chapters will introduce the reader to the actual study itself, culminating in a conclusion that attempts to make sense of the previous chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

"You can learn and it is fun" (Roberts, 2000, 105). That quote is from a young

student who recounted her year of successful, playful and active instruction in second

grade, after failing to learn to read and write in first grade. As the International Reading

Association reports in 2000 making a real difference in the classroom means making

teaching different (McVicker, 2007, 85). However, we currently live within an era of

standardized testing, where therefore a correlation exists between a school's performance

and their students' scores. Thus, accountability is given to the schools and student

performance is assessed through quantitative methods. As a result, the pressure to

formalize instruction increases (Barbour and Seefelt, 1993). However, often when

instruction is formalized, and centered solely on paper, pencils, and books, the fact that

active involvement is essential for children's cognitive growth is ignored (Bredekamp

and Copple, 1997).

Active Learning

This active involvement, or active learning as it may also be referred to, is an important

educational method. Essentially, active learning allows students to be a part of their

learning experience. As author Mel Silberman argues, "Learning can't be swallowed

whole. To retain what has been taught, students must chew on it" (Silberman, 1996, 40).

Essentially, students must be able to experience what they are learning, absorbing it at

their own pace . Silberman adds, "When learning is active, the learner is seeking

something an answer to a question, information to solve a problem, or a way to do a job"

(Silberman, 1996, 6). An active learner uses multiple senses to learn new information,

and more importantly to understand this information in their own way. The active learner

uses their teacher not only as someone they are dependent on, but as a guide or a

resource. The active learner takes an energetic role in their learning, and as a result of the

student's active participation the learning is self reinforced (Petress, 2008).

Guided Play

For the elementary school student, especially those found in the primary grades,

play can be a great resource for active learning. As Martin Buber once said, "Play is the

exhalation of the possible" (Ban Brethnach, 1995). Children as a whole can be

characterized as having playful tendencies, and allowing children to give into this desire

to play allows them to reach their maximum learning potential (Scully, 2002).

Psychologists Dewey (1916), Piaget (1962), and Vygotsky (1976) all held that the action

of play was an essential part of children's growth. Advances in the study of the brain

show even more a correlation between play and children's growth (Scully, 2002). In

addition, there is evidence that links play with the development of neural pathways.

These neural pathways are essential for healthy brain development (Shore, 1997). As

children engage in play, multiple senses are being used to analyze and synthesize

language. As a result, this information is being encoded into the children's brains in many

ways (Enfield and Greene, 1991). This allows for more connections to be made between

the child and the information, as well as allows for a higher success rate of informational retention

According to Stone, play can be defined as an act that is "intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, process-oriented over product-oriented, nonliteral, and enjoyable" (Stone, 1995, 46). However, this definition can be more accurate for those students who are of a younger age, and who rely on the social context of activities to differentiate between work and play (King, 1987). These younger students also define activities as play "only when the children believe that their participation is voluntary and free of direct supervision by the teacher" (King, 1987, 145). For the primary grades, the term play and active learning can be used interchangeably to describe activities that encourage creativity and investigation (Wasserman, 1990). Expanding the definition further, to include a broader range of all children, play in instruction includes activities that encourage children to be active, to investigate, and to communicate with each other (Wilford, 2000).

Active Learning and Literacy

The question emerges as to how does the use of guided play relate to the world of literacy? How can guided play have a role in helping students write? More specifically how does this active learning motivate students to write? To answer this question, one must first understand that literacy instruction should occur in a natural context (Saracho, 2004).By allowing students to engage in their natural tendencies of play, and incorporating literacy instruction, learning is automatically done within a natural context. In addition, according to the National Research Council, teachers are able to encourage language and literacy growth using play-based literacy instruction (National Research

Council, 1998). Within this natural context, children begin to understand literacy, and in essence are able to use their experiences in a way that allows the child to understand the relation between these experiences and their medium of print (Saracho, 2004). To sum these ideas up, Roberts concludes that by, "allowing children the freedom to experiment and play with language is key to them constructing their own relationship" (Roberts, 2000, 99).

Several studies demonstrate a strong correlation between children's literacy development and play (Jacod, 1984; Roskos& Newman, 1998, Saracho&Spodek, 1996). In one study, kindergarten-aged children were introduced to the formation and uses of written language when they engage in play (Jacob, 1984). Here, students become an active participant of their own learning. In a similar study, children are engaged in the creation of written language through play. During guided play, children took part in a variety of activities. Children composed shopping lists while preparing to take a fantasy trip to the food store. Instead of using money, student-created food stamps were used to purchase goods. In another activity, students role-played that they were doctors or patients, and as a result of play the patients obtained written prescriptions from the doctor (Woodward, 1984). Going even further into the uses of written language within the context of play, Roskos (1988) assumes that children apply reading and writing to substantiate their pretend play, express themselves and document information within play events. Essentially, children use the creating of writing to further their own imaginative play. They use writing to fulfill gaps within their own fantasy world, or to bring authenticity to the play they have created. In addition, in can be concluded through the aforementioned studies of Neuman and Roskos (1989) that children apply the functions

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of literacy when they are (a) exploring their environment, (b) interacting with others, (c) expressing themselves, (d) conforming incidents, and (e) transacting with text (Saracho, 2004). In addition, in can also be concluded through the studies of Roskos and Christie (2001) that "play can serve literacy by (a) providing settings that promote literacy activity, skill sand strategies; (b) serving as language experience that can build connections between oral and written modes of expression; and (c) providing opportunities to teach and learn literacy" (Roskos and Christie 2001, 59). Essentially, and poignantly, "play makes writing real, engaging, and authentic" (Scully, 2002 ,93).

Teaching Strategies for Integrating Playful Active Learning

For the emergent writer, there are many ways to make writing engaging and encourage the child to become an active learner. One such teaching strategy is to integrate literacy-related activities into other curricular areas (Thompkins, 2005). One area that provides instant engagement is outdoor play. By placing literacy into a new context, they "provide abundant motivation and continual inspiration on the playground for reading and writing… There is no limit to the number of possibilities for taking literacy learning outdoors" (Giles, 2005 248). The following ideas come from Wellhousen and Giles (2004). One can simply leave sidewalk chalk for writing and drawing, making sure to encourage children to label their pictures. In snowy climates, old markers can be used to turn snow into a writing tablet. Let writing become an extension of outdoor play by leaving magnetic letters, chalkboards, and alphabet blocks around the play area. Attach easel or dry erase boards to a fence to allow children to write side by side together. Leave outdoor themed books on a blanket for children to easily browse. Leave clipboards and pencils outside, along with props, to allow children to give weather

reports. Use the clouds as inspiration for a journal write. Give children a notepad and allow them to record what they see during a nature walk (Giles, 2005). Within this context of play, children's expectations of success can stimulate them to explore the written language on their own and therefore lead them into mastering the prerequisites for formal reading instruction (Saracho, 2001).

By examining Wasserman's (1990) definition that play and active learning can be used interchangeably to describe activities that encourage creativity and investigation, one can discover more ways to actively engage young writers. One such form of writing that benefits from this idea is expository writing. "When expository writing is linked to a concrete object of experience in a playful manner, children become engaged in learning to write in a different way" (Scully, 2002 97). A real object, or first-hand experience instantly engages a student, captures attention, inspires a new set of vocabulary to be learned, and encourages language skill development. In simplest terms, the inside of a pumpkin can change from simply being deemed as "yucky" into "it looks like wet spaghetti" (Scully, 2002 97). Students can also engage in experiences that lead to expository writing. A painting can be produced after a fall walk, which then develops into writing about the painting. A recipe can be written after sampling a class treat, such as individual servings of egg salad. It is much easier for student's to generate ideas after they have a real experience to write about (Scully, 2002). For allowing active learners to begin to understand new vocabulary on his or her own, have students watch a gardener replant a tree. Then allow the students to write about the experience. As students attempt to recreate the situation they witnessed, it then becomes a necessity to use words such as trowel and mulch (Scully, 2002).

While play can also be used to enhance writing involvement for older children, there are a variety of other opportunities to intertwine active involvement within the literacy setting. An example of this is the integration of video technology into the literacy curriculum. A technique often referred to as Reader's Theatre can be utilized to incorporate movies into the classroom. Here students watch a short segment of a movie, usually lasting no more than ten minutes. The students are asked to write a description of what they have just seen. Afterwards, students are told to expressively read their description as the movie's soundtrack plays in the background (Hoffner, 2003). This allows for more information to be synthesized and generated by the student, yet while still keeping a playful nature to the exercise. After conducting such an activity with a group of fifth graders, Hoffner concludes that students enjoyed reading and performing in front of their peers. While engaging in the activity, it is important to note that "students engaged in purposeful rereading and received constructive feedback from their teachers, classmates, and other members of the school community" (Hoffner et al., 2008, 578).

Another, similar technique, is the use of descriptive video in the classroom. Also known as described programming, this technology was created to allow individuals with visual impairment access to visual media. Activating the Secondary Audio Programming (SAP) on a television, VCR, or DVD player can access this additional audio track. This audio track contains a detailed narration that allows the listener to hear an explanation of a film's visual elements. However, when applied to the general population, this technique can be used to enhance "the viewing experience by guiding the viewer and expand [sic] his or her vocabulary" (Hoffman et al., 2008, 578). One such application would be to show a short segment of film, such as used in the aforementioned Reader's Theater.

However after writing a description, the student's are exposed to the same segment once again. This time, the video is shown with the additional SAP audio track. Again, the students are asked to write a description of the segment again. Then, students read both pieces aloud to the class and make comparisons to how their writing changed. Most students noted that second attempt at writing a description of the film did include a richer and more descriptive vocabulary (Hoffman et al., 2008). Thus, the student's are using their teacher as merely a resource in their own attempt to make connections between their own pieces of writing. Here the playful nature of the activity is nurtured by allowing students to watch familiar films such as classic Disney animated films. At the same time this allows the students to be actively engaged in their own learning and understanding of the subject matter.

Like the videos mentioned above, another appropriate form of active learning within the literacy setting is the use of popular comic books. Research has shown that connections can be drawn between a student's knowledge of popular media and the literacy values commonly seen in schools (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; March & Millard, 2000). Because comic books, as well as other forms of popular media tell stories in their own way, this media can serve as both a frame of reference and a place of familiar territory for young students (Newkirk, 2002). The following activity came from a first-grade English as a Second Language teacher, who used comic instruction throughout the year to inspire her students using "all ages" versions of the comic books Wild Girl and the Incredible Hulk. This situation was presented playfully, yet provided the children the necessary framework to engage in a critical study on gender. The teacher simply proposed the question of whom the children thought was stronger. The group of children

participated in a discussion within the class, and students took turns expressing their feelings and debating with their peers. Eventually a class list was created to compare what strength meant to them. Students became active participants in their own understanding of what it means to be strong. By the end of the lesson, students were asked to include strong characters in their writings of that day (Ranker, 2008).

Conclusion

The research presented here shows that active learning and guided play are both an important part of children's learning. When used in conjunction with literacy-based instruction, a student can become more interesting in writing and ultimately more motivated to write.

The question may linger as to how to justify play based and active learning in school cultures that demand quiet and also seem more concerned with test scores than individual children (Scully, 2002). However, "One of the strongest justifications is that children are intrigued by playful activities and more motivated to engage and complete tasks that allow them to learn actively. Furthermore, playful activities engage various learning styles and allow children to learn through different modalities" (Scully, 2002, 98).

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Statement of Research Question

How does playful active learning motivate students to write and affect

performance in writing? This study attempts to look at the way writing is taught, and the

effect it has on a student's own writing performance. Specifically, this study looks to

answer how using the teaching methods of active learning and guided play motivate

students to write.

Context and Community

The study described within this chapter will take place within a suburban New

Jersey school. All names have been fictionalized to protect confidentiality. A. D. Smith

Elementary School is a K-5 school located just twenty miles east of Philadelphia, ninety

miles south of New York City, and about one hundred-fifty miles north of our nation's

Capital. According to the township's Public Schools' Information Guide & Calendar

(2008), approximately twenty-eight thousand people reside within the township where

the study will take place. Of this group of people, about twenty-six percent of the

population are eighteen-years-old or younger. Educationally speaking, twenty-five

percent of the population hold a bachelor's degree and fifteen-percent hold graduate

degrees. According to a New Jersey Department of Education socio-economic rating, this

township is an "I" on a scale of "A" to "J". It is based on several community

characteristics, including income and real estate value, and places this town as one of the top rated districts in New Jersey. Specifically, A. D. Smith is home to currently over five hundred students, ranging from Kindergarten through Grade Five. The staff is comprised of approximately seventy adults.

Looking at the context even closer, this study will take place within a fourth grade inclusion classroom. The classroom is comprised of twenty-four students, twenty-three of whom consented to participate in the study. Nine of these students are female, while the additional fourteen students are male. Regarding educational level, three students are classified as requiring special education, having specific learning disabilities that require the attention of an Individualized Education Program. One additional student is classified under Section 504, for reasons relating to attention difficulties. There will also be two adults supervising and visible during the study. One of the adults is a tenured professional at A. D. Smith Elementary School. She is Cindy Rand, a fourth grade teacher with twelve years experience with this grade level. I will be the second adult. I will be in the classroom as a student teacher, currently fulfilling my requirements to receive my Master of Science in Teaching Degree, along with dual certification as an elementary teacher and a teacher of students with disabilities.

The study will take place during a three-week period during the spring of the 2008-2009 school year.

Research Design

The research design of this study is simplistic in its ideals. Essentially, all participating students will be immersed into a writing intensive environment that motivates through active learning. The research paradigm is qualitative, with several

research methods being instituted. The choices selected are participant surveys, a focus group, in-class writing activities, and a writing journal. The choices and their rationales are described below.

The research shown here is a qualitative, teacher-research design for several reasons. Ultimately, this design "has a primary purpose of helping the teacher-researcher understand students and improve practice in specific, concrete ways" (, p. 3). This type of data allows me, as the teacher-researcher, to see the products of the students and properly gauge the motivation of the students.

First, all students participating in the study will be given an anonymous survey at the commencement of the study. The purpose of this survey is to be able to determine a baseline for the students' views towards writing. The survey will consist of one multiple-choice question, and three open response questions. The multiple-choice question will be "Which best describes your feelings towards writing?" and will have the possible answers of "happy, don't care, angry, excited, and frustrated". The three open response questions will consist of "What are your favorite things to write about?", "What do you wish you had the chance to write about more in school?", "What could your teachers do to make writing more fun? (List as many ideas as you have ☺)."

A second survey will be given at the end of the study. The survey will consist of the same three questions as the first survey. This will help determine if there have been any changes in the students' feelings towards writing during the time period the study has taken place. However, the question "What could your teachers do to make writing more fun? (List as many ideas as you have ☺)" will be replaced with the questions, "What was your favorite writing activity?" and "Would you continue writing in a writing journal?

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Why or why not?" "What was your favorite writing activity?" will be asked to determine which writing activity implemented was the most enjoyable, and therefore helped motivate the student to write. The last question, "Would you continue writing in a writing journal? Why or why not?" will be asked to help determine the effectiveness of the writing journal.

Next, a focus group will be created to help get a more intimate view of how students perceive writing and themselves as writers. This group will meet at both the beginning and at the end of the study. This group, selected at random, will consist of four students. As opposed to individual student interviews, the goal of the focus group will be to allow these four students to create collaborative responses. The questions will consist of "Do you like to write", "What things do you like to write about?", "Do you think you're a good writer", "What things do you dislike writing about", and "How could teachers make writing more fun." The second meeting of the focus group, which will contain the same four students, will take place after the study has taken place. The questions posed will remain the same as the first, with the addition of one question. The question added will be, "What were your favorite things we wrote about," and will be geared towards the writings the students complete both in class and in the writing journal.

The core of this study itself will be the writings that the student participants create during the three-week period. The writings can be categorized into two different types of instruction. The first type of writings the students create will be based off in-class instruction and assignments. The second type of student writings will be at-home or independent writings that are written in an individual writing journal.

The in-class instruction and assignments will consist of three different activities. The first lesson presented to the students will be teaching the students the use of descriptive writing in expository text. As stated in the literature review, "A real object, or first-hand experience instantly engages a student, captures attention, inspires a new set of vocabulary to be learned, and encourages language skill development. In simplest terms, the inside of a pumpkin can change from simply being deemed as "yucky" into "it looks like wet spaghetti" (Scully, 2002, 97). Taking this idea, the participating students will be asked to rotate in small groups around various learning stations. The stations will consist of a "sight station", a "touch station", a "sound station", a "smell station", and a "taste station". Each student will actively engage with the objects at the stations, working with each other to try and think of different words and phrases to describe the objects. Station one, the sight station, will consist of a light up die, a blank CD, and a bag full of iridescent glitter. The second station, the touch station, will consist of a plate full of cold spaghetti, strips of Velcro, and a ball of aluminum foil. The sound station, station three, will contain a bag of marbles that the students must shake, a cheerleading pom-pom that the students must wave, and an audio file that when played sounds like the ocean. Station four, the smell station, will have a scented candle, a tissue box filled with cinnamon, and a tissue box filled with bacon salt. The final station will be the taste station. Here, students will each be given two different flavored crackers. One will be ranch flavored, while the other will be pizza flavored. As the students go around to each station, they will be required to place their collective ideas into a packet. Then, at the culmination of the stations, each student will be asked to create a descriptive sentence based on their findings. This activity was selective because not only will the students be actively

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engaged in using each of their five senses, they will be discussing ideas with their peers. Also, the selection of the objects will keep this whole lesson very playful.

The next in-class lesson presented to the students will be about persuasive writing. The students will be asked to create an invention of their choice. There will be no limitations on the invention. The students will be able to either create something that is completely unrealistic, has never been created, or will be able to improve on an invention that already exists. After drawing an invention on the piece of paper provided, the students will then be required to write a paragraph that describes the their invention. Most importantly, the paragraph will have to be written in a way that convinces others to purchase the invention. This activity was selected because the nature of the inventions keeps the learning atmosphere playful. Students are actively involved with their writing, since they are basing it completely on the invention that they created.

The last in class lesson will be a free choice for the students, all having been based around a specific in-class activity. As a class, we will all create tie-dye shirts. Each student will take a white shirt, place rubber bands around the shirt, and then take turns squirting bottles of red, blue, and yellow dye onto their shirts. After the completion of the shirts, the students and I will brainstorm ideas on the board. Students will be asked to think of what they can write about, using the tie-dyed shirts as inspiration. After we have thought of several ideas, then each student will be allowed to create a writing piece of their choice.

The second type of student writings will be at-home or independent writings that are written in an individual writing journal. At the beginning of the research study, each student will be given a writing journal. Each journal will have a brightly colored cover,

and be labeled "writing journal". Students will be able to decorate the cover as they wish, as well as use this journal at anytime during the study to create unassigned writing pieces. This adheres to the previously stated definition of play, "when the children believe that their participation is voluntary and free of direct supervision by the teacher" (King, 1987, 145).Periodically, throughout the three weeks, various independent and at-home assignments will be given to the students. The students will be informed that there will be no requirement for the length, and they will only be graded on the basis that they did or did not complete the assignment. The content of the journal will not be judged or evaluated. The goal of having a writing journal ultimately is to maximize the amount of writing time available, and to allow the students to actively choose what they want to write. The pieces that will be evaluated for the purposes of this study are as follows.

The students will first be asked to create a free-write. This will be their chance to use what they gave answers to in their initial surveys, specifically using their answers to "What are your favorite things to write about?"and "What do you wish you had the chance to write about more in school?" This will be their opportunity to fulfill these desires. Again, students will not have to worry about being graded on content, mechanics, or length.

The next journal entry will be to answer the scenario, "Write about a trip you have been on (examples: the beach, Philly, Zoo, Disney). Use descriptive words and phrases to make your paragraph great!). Students will be using prior experiences to help make their writings more authentic, and will be able to use this background knowledge to create a strong foundation for the students to build upon. Ultimately, this will help enhance the

ideal that "play makes writing real, engaging, and authentic" (Scully, 2002 ,93). Also, the subject matter of the writing keeps this piece playful in nature.

Students will also be asked to spend some time playing or participating in their favorite game. By placing literacy into a new context, they "provide abundant motivation and continual inspiration on the playground for reading and writing... There is no limit to the number of possibilities for taking literacy learning outdoors" (Giles, 2005 248). However, to avoid limiting children's ideas, they can decide to write about an indoor or outdoor sport they play, a board game they enjoy, or any other type of game-like activity they may enjoy. After playing or participating in their favorite game, the students will then be asked to create an entry within the contexts of their individual writing journals.

Lastly, to incorporate other curricular areas, students will need to write about the project that they are currently working on in their art class. Again, it is much easier for student's to generate ideas after they have a real experience to write about (Scully, 2002). The students will spend time making individual puppets in art class, then as an assignment they will be asked to write about their creation in their writing journal.

The last portion of this study's research design will be the incorporation of a teacher journal. This journal will be where I will record my observations of both the student's actions during the study, as well as my observations of the writings they all create in the activities described above. The purpose of this teacher journal will be to effectively document how motivated the participants are in this study to create the writing samples described above.

Overall, the study will look to determine what difference the above methods have had on student perceptions and performance, and to determine the effect that active

learning can have in motivating students to write. Chapter four will describe the data collected during the implementation of this research design. The final chapter, chapter five, will discuss the findings and implications for teaching.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of the study, all completed to answer the research question. Student surveys, a student focus group, in-class writing activities, an independent writing-journal, and a teacher-researcher journal will all be used to draw conclusion about my research question: "How does playful active learning motivate students to write and affect performance in writing?"

Research Findings

Introductory In-Class Survey

"To mabe [sic] just write about anything that happened in our lives that would make it

more fun"

The first component of the research study is the completion of the commencement survey for all student participants. The survey consisted of one multiple-choice question, and three open response questions. For the first question "Which best describes your feelings towards writing", eight students responded that they feel happy. Eight students also responded that they feel excited. The next most frequent responses were don't care and frustrated, which each received three votes respectively. One student chose to respond with both happy and frustrated, adding the annotation that it "depens [sic] what

we are writing about." For the next question, "what are your favorite things to write about," the answers were as different as children themselves! However, there were commonalities to the student's responses. Five students wrote that they enjoy writing about animals the most. Three students wrote that they enjoy fiction, while another three identified mysteries as their favorite subject to write about. Two students chose sports, historical fiction, and family as the things they most like to write about. The third question, "What do you wish you had the chance to write about more in school," again had common answers. Five students wrote that they wish they could write about animals more, while seven more students wrote that they wish they could write more fiction stories. Two students each wrote that they wish they could write more about sports, non-fiction, and computers. The rest of the responses were varied, with some sample selections being vacations, life, and myself. For the last question, "what could your teachers do to make writing more fun," there were two strong front-runners among the students' responses. Overwhelmingly, students wrote that they believed teachers could make writing more fun just by allowing the students to write in groups. Seven students choose this response. An additional five students selected the next popular response. These students all wrote that they felt writing could be made more fun if the kids themselves were allowed to select the writing topic.

Focus Group: Initial Meeting

"Yes, I like to write. Only at home though, then I can pick up a pen and paper and write what I like."

A focus group was created to help get a more intimate view of how the students perceived writing and themselves as writers. The focus group consisted of four students,

who were picked at random. The students were two girls, Lauren and Katie, and two boys named Eric and Matt. Eric gets pulled out of the classroom weekly to receive gifted and talented instruction. Lauren, while she is not qualified for a gifted and talented program, is one of the higher achieving students in the classroom. Matt can be described as a learner who struggles often with the subject matter that is being taught. The last student, Katie, receives special education because of a learning disability. This group met at both the beginning and at the end of the study.

At the beginning of the study, after the first survey was given, I pulled these four students into the hallway. I explained to them all that I was going to ask them a few questions, and we all were just going to talk about them as a group. I warned them that the questions were to be related to the survey they had taken, and that they didn't need to worry about the answers they gave.

The first question I asked was, "Do you like to write?" At first, the students hesitated with answering. I reminded them that no one else would know what they said and that it's okay if they said that they didn't like to. I recorded in my observation journal that I thought the students were afraid to actually tell a teacher-figure, me, that they didn't like to write. Eric started our conversation off.

> Eric: "I guess I like to write, but with school there is no time to enjoy it."
>
> Matt: "I don't like to."
>
> Katie: "Yes, I do! At home I work on writing articles."
>
> Myself: "What kind of articles do you like to write?"
>
> Katie: "The kinds of articles that could be in the newspaper."

Lauren: "Yes, I like to write. Only at home though, then I can pick up a pen and paper and write what I like."

The next question I asked was "What things do you like to write about?" For this question, I observed that students couldn't wait to answer and describe what they liked to write about. Matt started this conversation.

Matt: "I like to write about sports."

Lauren: "I love to write about Harry Potter…or animals. Anything fiction, really."

Katie: "I like adventure stories!"

Eric: "I like adventure stories too! I also like non-fiction."

Katie: "Me too! I like to write expository text."

Matt: "I like architect stuff….cause I want to be an architect."

Eric: "I want to be a patent attorney…so I like to write because it will help me be that."

Lauren: "I like to write about things that interest me, not the topics they make us write about in school."

I asked the next question to determine how these students perceived themselves as writers. I found that the students were slightly uncomfortable with this question, and were hesitant to elaborate on their answers. Matt again started this conversation off.

Matt: "I think I am."

Eric: "I enjoy writing, but I don't know if I am."

Lauren: "I kind of am."

Katie: "Kind of, too, I guess."

Next, I asked the students what they disliked writing about. Surprisingly, there was some commonality in the students' responses. The students were very excited to answer this question. I noted in my observation journal that it appeared as if the students had never been asked this type of question before. It was as if they were earnestly hoping I, as their teacher, would take their answers to heart. Lauren started this conversation.

> Lauren: "Dying. I hate to write anything about things
>
> dying…people..things..animals. I don't like when we do that."
>
> Eric: "I don't like to write poetry. It's hard to write and I never know what my teachers want."
>
> Katie: "I don't like poetry too. I don't know how to do it."
>
> Matt: "Any assignment by yourself. I like writing with friends. Its easier."
>
> Lauren: "I like anything where you can make it up yourself."

The last question, "How could teachers make writing more fun?" This question was asked to help me get an understanding on what these students perceived as fun when being asked to write. Again, the students seemed excited to be asked this question. It was as if they had never been asked their opinion about what they were asked to write. Again, Lauren began this conversation.

> Lauren: "Definitely they should let you pick!"
>
> Eric: "Make it something that I can relate you."
>
> Katie: "Let you work with a partner."
>
> Eric: "If we're doing speculative writing, have us do it as a class so we know what we're doing."
>
> Matt: "Have us do activities and set them up real good."

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Lauren: "Let us help each other for ideas and what to write and stuff."

In-Class Lessons

Descriptive Writing Stations

"Slimy, sticky, mushy, moiste [sic], squashy, damp, cold, feels like worms"

The first lesson presented to the students was having the students use descriptive writing. The participating students were asked to rotate in small groups around various learning stations. The stations consisted of a "sight station", a "touch station", a "sound station", a "smell station", and a "taste station". Each student engaged with the objects at the stations, and worked with each other to try and think of different words and phrases to describe the objects. The above selection is selected student responses to describe the cold spaghetti found at the touch station. For the sight station, selected student responses for the iridescent glitter include shiny, glittery, white, tiny, glistening, colorful, rainbow, colorful, and sparkling. The third station contained a bag of marbles that the students had to shake, and then record what they heard. Student responses were that the marbles sounded like crackling, ice falling, fire cracking, like hail, noisy, clanking, and loud. The next station, smell, had the students smell cinnamon. Student responses consisted of sweet, good, tasty, spicy, buttery, yummy, fabulous, and like cookies. The final station required the student participants to taste two differently flavored crackers. For the pizza-flavored cracker, student responses were that the cracker tasted good, tastes like pizza, spicy, herby, garlicky, baked, cheddar, crunchy, tasty, and delicious. For my own observations, I recorded that the students appeared to be interested in all of the stations. Engagement was definitely noticeable; all student participants willingly took part in each station. Conversation between peers, laughing, and excitement was constantly occurring.

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The activities that drew the most interest from the students were the ones that required the most involvement. The cold spaghetti was a favorite, with squeals and giggles being omitted from the participants as it was their turn to feel. Another activity that the students enjoyed was smelling the two mystery scents from the tissue boxes. This provoked the students to hold much conversation, especially about what exactly was in the boxes. The last activity to engage the students was the taste station. Again, the flavors of these crackers were a mystery. As a result, debates were held over what flavor the crackers were. Also, the fact that they were getting to each individually taste the crackers excited the children.

"Strawberries are very tasty and delicious. They are also filling. Strawberries have light green seeds and green leaves. A strawberry is mostly ruby red. They feel bumpy and lumpy. The're [sic] really sweet and filling. They smell tart. Crunch!!!! That's what a strawberry sounds like when you bite into it!"

Students were then asked to create a descriptive sentence for homework, using either ideas from the stations or to find a new object to describe. A few students choose to describe objects from the in-class activity. One student wrote, "The disk was sparkiling [sic], and bending when you saw the disk from your eyes. It was also different colors when you stared it. The pretise [sic] thing." Others, like the selection above, choose to describe a new object. In general, the students choose to create two to three descriptive sentences. Students also were able to create descriptive sentence that helped enhance the mood of their writing. One student wrote, "The misty sky was very dark and eerie. You could hear the owls hooting in the night and the bats whisking down and coming so close to you [sic] face you could almost feel there [sic]wings".

<u>Persuasive Writing Inventions</u>

The next in-class lesson presented to the students was a persuasive writing piece.

The Sea Survivor 3000 (S.S) is the best sea survivor tool ever. First, you turn the waterproof device upside-down (which does no harm to it), and then stick it in the saltwater or dirty water, and push the vacuum button. This will vacuum up the water and will store up to a gallon of it in a tube at the top. Next, you use the crank at the bottom to decide how much you want filter at once. After that, you push the filter button, wait a few seconds until the noise stops, empty out the dirt/sand, and pour the fresh water from the tube at the top to drink it. S. S.'s come in all colors, except the tubes are reinforced glass.

The S. S. should be the world's most useful tool. It only costs $19.99. This device will never disappoint you. You should buy it because you will not have to pack any water. Also, it weighs 1 point, and comes in many different sizes. The S. S. is the world's most useful tool.

The students were asked to create an invention of their choice, and they had no limitations on the invention. The students created completely new inventions, or tried to improve on an invention that already exists. After drawing an invention on the piece of paper provided, the students then wrote a paragraph such as the student sample mentioned above. Students created inventions such as "the Time Portal", the "Homework Helper", the "Teleportation Pod", and "the Greatest Pencil." Based on my own observations, the students were very engaged with this activity. I noted that the students

were very excited when they found out that they were going to be able to think of their own invention. Some student's did struggle with creating their own idea, however when they were prompted to think of how to improve an object that already exists they ran with this idea. Students were very interested with keeping their inventions secret from their peers, with most of them making walls around their papers. Once the inventions were created, the writing appeared to come naturally. Students quickly filled their papers with the description of their inventions, and included details that would persuade the reader.

"Tye-dye" Free Write

Intro:

Tye Dye Thief (TDT): I am a thief. I wear tye-dye. I steal jewels. I sell jewels. I steal precious items. I sell precious items. I am a rich tye dye thief. I steal tye dye things too. I keep them. (Setting- museum)

Story:

Bob (museum director): Ah!! My precious, I mean, the museums precious Igabooga tye dye gem donated by the blue and yellow striped Igaboogas from Fairytale Land is missing!! (Calls 911).

The last in class lesson was based around a specific in-class activity. As a class, we all created tye-dye shirts. Each student took a white shirt, placed rubber bands around the shirt, and then took turns squirting bottles [or] of red, blue, and yellow dye onto their shirts. After the completion of the shirts, the students brainstormed ideas on the board about what we could write. The students came up with the ideas of writing a poem, a mystery story, a how-to paragraph, a list of steps, an expository text, a descriptive paragraph, and a persuasive paragraph to convince someone to buy their shirt. Each

student then picked an idea of his or her choice to write. In the example above, the student chose to write a mystery movie-script. She collaborated with another student to create scripts that included the same characters.

The other student participants wrote in many types of genres. Some went for a simple description, such as "My tie dye t-shirt has a lot of cool colors. My t-shirt is me, it has my favorite colors and designs. We made them at our classes Spring party, that was so much fun and had great food. I had a Blast!" Other students decided to create poems. One student-created poem was "Tie Dye is cool, dye is crool [sic], you make circles, triangles, anything that you want!" Students also created fiction stories. An example started, "Once upon a time there was a little boy who hated shirts with tie dye and only like his shirts plain". Lastly, some students decided to create an informational piece that described how one could create a tye-dye shirt of their own. One boy wrote, " Tie dying shirts may seem like fun and games, but there are a ton of steps. The first step is to dampen the shirt in a type of chemical. Next, put rubber bands on the shirt in any shape. Then, take die and squirt it on your shirt in funky designs and patterns. Finally, wait about two days and BAM, a beautiful tie-dye shirt!"Based on my observations, I found that the students had easier times writing because it was based off an event that they had experienced. Also, since the students had discussed all the possible types of writing they could create as a class, I found that no student hesitated when it came to writing. A lot of students stepped "out-of –the-box" with their thinking, creating poems, suspenseful mysteries, movie scripts, poetry, and vivid descriptions.

Independent Journal Writing

An independent, smart, and trustworthy inventor named Benjamin Franklin was born on a cold day in January 1706. He was later named one of the founding fathers of our country. He started out in Boston, Massechussetts [sic] as a young uneducated kid exept [sic] for two years of grammer school. He was a very gifted kid because he taught himself to read. Benjimin [sic] was given an apprenticeship to his brother James by his hardworking dad that raised 17 children. After that he header on a cold and brutle [sic] trip to Phladelphia [sic] in order to work for one of a few printers. Later on he came to discover one of the most important findings called electricity. He used a thin piece of string, a hard metal key, and a worn kite to make the extrodinary [sic] invention. This man is still known today as an astounding person to our country.

The second type of student writings was at-home and independent writings that were written in each student individual writing journal. At the beginning of the research study, each student was given a writing journal. Students were able to decorate their journal, and many choose to write in it even when they weren't assigned to. Overall, I found that this allowed the students to create an ownership of the journals and motivated them to write. Throughout the course of the three weeks, students would often ask me if they were allowed to write in their journal. If no homework assignment was given, students would often ask for one to be assigned. I noted in my research journal that I feel that this journal allowed all students to feel successful. I also found that, even though I didn't always check their writings, students would often approach me to read what they had written. Students often asked if they would be able to share what they had written to

the class. I also found that the students enjoyed the freedom they were given with these journals. Students could write in print or cursive, marker or pen, skip a line or just keep writing. Spelling and grammar was not judged, neither was content. All of this allowed the students to take an active stance on their writings. Students were marked only in terms of if they had completed the assignment or not. Over the course of this study, each student averaged over 95% completion rate for all assignments given.

<u>Journal: Free-Write</u>

The Case of the Missing Dog: One day as Fred was letting his dog out in the front yard, he heard his phone ring, and it was his friend John. It is summer and strangely, the ice cream man almost never came except for this day. He left to go get the ice cream man with John without noticing his dog Sparks is still outside. When it came to him, Fred said to John, "I left my dog outside in the front yard! I have to go home!" When Fred got home his dog was missing. He thought of three suspicious people that could have taken his dog. Could it be Jimmy from down the street. Bob the bully, or Ned the neighbor? …

The students were first asked to create a free-write. This allowed them to be active participants in what they were being asked to write. Students were able to use what they had written in their survey as an inspiration. The responses were completely varied, and it was obvious that the students were taking this opportunity to write what came the most naturally to them. Some students chose to create fascinating stories, like the example above. Other took this time to explain what they like to write about. A few students decided to write about historical figures. Another common theme of these free

writing pieces was students writing about activities they participated in, trips they had been on, or other facts about themselves.

Journal: Past Trip Experience

Last year I went to Tennessee. We stayed in a cool condo in the mountains. We had our own unit with a fireplace, kitchen, bathroom, and a great view of the mountains. We went to a indoor water park and we had fun! The pool was hot and it had a jaccuzzi and outdoor seats. I went horse back riding and saw a bear in the woods. I went to Dolly Wood and went on some cool rollercoasters. That is my trip to Tennesse.

The next journal entry was to answer the scenario, "Write about a trip you have been on (examples: the beach, Philly, Zoo, Disney). Use descriptive words and phrases to make your paragraph great!)." Students used prior experiences to help make their writings more authentic, and used this background knowledge to create a strong foundation for writing. Looking at the length, all students were motivated to write much more than the two-sentence requirement I had assigned. By using an event that they had experienced first hand, the students were easily able to add key details and descriptive words. For example, once student described his trip to Lake Placid as "two long, falling, slipping, sliding, freezing days."

Journal: Game Playing

"My favorite online computer game is called Runescape. Runescape is an online Role Playing Game, nonviolent, with swords, magic, and many other cool things. You can also complete complicated quests, which make you think. There are a few reasons why Runescape is my favorite game."

Students were asked to spend some time playing or participating in their favorite game. After they had experienced their favorite game, they then needed to write about it in their journals. Students could either explain their game or activity, or write about why it was their favorite. By allowing students to choose either a sport or game, all students were allowed to find a subject that inspired them to write. While most students wrote about soccer and basketball, others were able to find a voice in other activities. The student above wrote about an online computer game. Others wrote about games such as chess, checkers, and tag. Activities such as cheerleading, dance, and horseback riding were described in detail as well.

<div align="center">Journal: Art Class Puppets</div>

"This is about our art project. Our art project is a puppet. My puppet is a [sic] creature called Matineror. I named him this because my brothers name is Matt and he is usually evil!"

Lastly, to incorporate other curricular areas, students needed to write about the project that they were currently working on in art class. This was selected because it is much easier for student's to generate ideas after they have a real experience to write about. The fact that they were creating puppets helped keep a playful atmosphere regarding their writing. All students were able to easily retell the details of their puppets, since it was an actual piece that they had created. The colors of the puppets, name, and process of creating the puppet were actual events that the students could draw from.

<div align="center">Culminating In-Class Survey</div>

"I would continue to write because it is so fun and you can write about so many things"

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After the completion of the study, all student participants completed a second survey. The survey consisted of one multiple-choice questions, and four open response questions. For the first question "Which best describes your feelings towards writing," ten students responded that they feel happy. Ten students also responded that they feel excited. The next most frequent responses were don't care and frustrated, which each received one vote respectively. One student chose to mark both happy and excited. For the next question, "what are your favorite things to write about," the answers were varied. The most common answer was fiction, which six students responded with. The next common answers, with three votes each, were animals, mysteries, and fiction. Other answers given include vacations, sports, and family. The third question, "What do you wish you had the chance to write about more in school," had very few common answers. The most frequent response was sports, which received only three votes. No other students named the same writing topic. Sample selections from the students include: about when you grow up, fiction, fantasy, mysteries, book reports, anything, persuasive writing, and myself. The fourth question was "What was your favorite writing activity?" This, again, had very few common answers. The most common, however, were both the descriptive writing stations and the persuasive writing using inventions. These each were mentioned by three different students. All other responses were tied into the participants' free writing selections. For the last question, twenty-one of the participants wrote that they would continue to write in their writing journal. The remaining two students wrote that they would not like to continue to use a writing journal to write.

"I like writing movie scripts. The story I wrote with Michelle was so cool. We're not even done yet. We're going to write a sequel!"

The focus group met again at the end of the study, after the second survey was given. I again pulled Lauren, Eric, Matt, and Katie into the hallway. I explained to them all that I was going to ask them a few questions again, and we all were just going to talk about them as a group. I warned them that the questions were to be related to the survey they had taken, and that they didn't need to worry about the answers they gave. The questions posed remained the same as the first, with the addition of one question. The question added was, "What were your favorite things we wrote about," and was geared towards the writings the students complete both in class and in the writing journal.

The first question posed was, "Do you like to write?" The students were more responsive to this question than they had been the first time. Lauren began this conversation.

>Lauren: "Yes, I like to write. I liked when we got to write in our journal anytime we wanted."
>
>Matt: "I like it more now. I liked that you didn't make us write things."
>
>Myself: "What do mean, Matt?"
>
>Matt: "You gave us a lot of choices when we wrote, so I could always think of something I liked to write."
>
>Eric: "Yeah, I liked that too. I never had to worry about thinking of ideas."

Katie: "I like to write all the things in my journal. I liked it more that I didn't have to worry about getting a grade. I could write however I wanted."

The next question I asked was "What things do you like to write about?" Again, I observed that students couldn't wait to answer and describe what they liked to write about. Matt started this conversation.

Matt: "I like writing about myself and things I do."

Katie: "I like writing stories, my silly one was the best."

Lauren: "I like writing movie scripts. The story I wrote with Michelle was so cool. We're not even done yet. We're going to write a sequel!"

Eric: "I like writing when I have free choice. I got to write a lot of historical fiction which was something I never get to do."

I asked the next question to determine how these students perceived themselves as writers. I found that the students were much more comfortable with this question, and unlike before they all thought of themselves to be good writers. Eric began this conversation.

Eric: "I think I'm a good writer."

Matt: "Me too."

Eric: "I want to share some of the things we wrote about."

Katie: "I think I was a good writer in my journal."

Lauren: " Yeah! I think I was a great writer when I could think of the ideas. The invention I wrote about was so cool."

Eric: "I like my invention too, especially since I want to be an inventor. It was something I was good at."

Next, I asked the students what they disliked writing about. To help understand the context of these responses better, it is important to note that the students had begun reviewing for the state-wide fourth grade test that they would be taking in a few weeks. Matt was the first to speak.

Matt: "I don't like writing by myself or when a teacher tells us how much we have to write. That's hard."

Lindsay: "I don't like to write about dying or anything else that is gross like that."

Katie: "I don't like writing about books we're reading."

Eric: "I don't like it when we're we have to practice writing for the tests. It gets boring."

Katie: "Me too. It makes me worry that I won't do good on the test."

Lindsay: "I'm a good writer, but sometimes the question makes it so that I'm not one."

Next I asked the group of students "How could teachers make writing more fun?" This question was again asked to help me get an understanding on what these students perceived as fun when being asked to write. Like before, the students seemed excited to be asked this question. Katie began this conversation.

Katie: "Teachers shouldn't ask us to make something so many paragraphs."

Matt: "Let us work in groups. I don't think we get to work together enough."

Eric: "I like when we worked together at the stations. It was fun to see what everyone else thought of."

Lauren: "I liked working with Michelle on our story. I also like when we get to write whatever we want."

Katie: "I like the times when you let us free write in our journals."

The last question I asked the students was, "What were your favorite things we wrote about?" I wanted to know how effective the writings the students completed both in class and in the writing journal were. The students seemed to be excited to answer, with Lauren and Katie both starting to speak at once. Finally, Katie began this conversation.

Katie: "I like the journals and that you didn't check what we wrote all the time."

Lauren: "I liked the journals too. I like that you let us write in there all the time, even if we weren't supposed to. I like that we could decorate them."

Eric: "I liked that we didn't have to worry about spelling or anything in there. It made me write more."

Matt: "I liked when I got to write about myself and the sports I liked."

Eric: "Me too. I liked when I got to write about things I had done."

This completed my data collection. In chapter five I will discuss my findings and implications for teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This study looked at the way writing is taught and the affect that teaching has on a student's writing performance. Specifically this study looked to answer the question "How does using the teaching methods of active learning and guided play motivate students to write?"

The motivation used within this research was active learning, used in combination with guided play. The research presented within this study showed that engaging students with a playful educational atmosphere frequently leads to greater motivation to write (Giles, 2005, Scully, 2002, Saracho, 2001).

Essentially, the researcher engaged the participating students in a writing intensive environment. The research paradigm was qualitative, with several research methods being instituted. The methods that were selected included participant surveys, a focus group, in-class writing activities, and a writing journal.

Overall Findings

This study sought to answer the question, "How does using the teaching methods of active learning and guided play motivate students to write". The findings of this study showed that, yes, students can be motivated to write when given the proper teaching methods. This conclusion is supported by previous studies cited in Chapter Two. When

looking at the previous literature on the subject of active learning, and guided play, it was shown these educational techniques could provide motivation for students. It was first shown in Chapter Two that active learning helps students self reinforce what is being taught (Petress, 2008), and that play is essential for children's growth (Scully, 2002). When the study was completed within the classroom, each part displayed interesting findings. First, there was the survey that was completed by all of the student participants. It is interesting to note that the student responses for the first question changed from six students marking that they didn't care about writing or felt frustrated about writing to only two students marking that they didn't care or felt frustrated about writing. This shows that through the course of the study, at least a few students were able to have their perceptions of writing change.

Based on the focus group and student surveys, it was definitely evident that these students had never been asked to become an active part in their writing. I felt as if many of these students were excited to actually be allowed to think of ideas to write about and asked what they enjoyed writing about.

I feel that having the students actively involved with all of their writings greatly removed frustration, and therefore motivated students to write. For activities such as the journal writing activity in which the students needed to write about a trip they had been on, very few students showed any frustration or hesitation in writing. Since they had experienced first-hand what they were writing about, the details and information were able to flow freely.

By keeping the activities playful, students were again motivated to write because they viewed the activities as "intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, process-oriented over

product-oriented, nonliteral, and enjoyable" (Stone, 1995, 46). The descriptive writing stations were very successful because of the playful elements they contained. Students enjoyed feeling cold spaghetti and smelling "mystery" scents. It was obvious that they enjoyed it not only from the giggles that emerged throughout the activity, but with the work they collaboratively produced.

I felt that the most successful lesson was the persuasive writing piece that the students created around an invention they had created. This lesson allowed students to become completely active in the subject they were writing about, since it was based off a drawing they had created. The playful element of allowing students to create an invention of their choice was also a success, as shown by how seriously the students took to creating an invention.

Overall, the student participants of this survey produced wonderful writing pieces throughout the three-week course of the study.

Implications for Teaching

Based on the overall findings, this study presents several implications for teaching. Below are descriptions of the four implications made for teaching from the research presented in this study.

1. When teaching writing, it is imperative that students are allowed to become active participants. By allowing students to become active participants in their learning, they are more likely to become motivated and have a sense of ownership towards their work.

2. By allowing students to write within a playful context, students are more able to become motivated and interested in the subject. Play allows students to perform in a context that they inherently understand.

3. Incorporating a writing journal that has few limitations will reduce the frustration many students feel when writing. Observing the students in this study, many of them were excited to be able to write in this journal.

4. Do not focus on mechanics and length when teaching writing to younger students. For all of the activities given to the students over the course of the study, there were no length requirements and students were informed that spelling and grammar were not being marked. As a result, students put all of their effort towards the content of the writing they were creating. This removed frustration for many students

Suggestions for Future Research

The literature presented within this study and the study itself is only a small piece of the puzzle. There is still much to be researched in the studying of playful active learning when applied to writing. Primarily, much of the literature discussed in Chapter Two regarding guided play is confirmed regarding students who are just learning to read and write. More research needs to be done when guided play is modified to relate to the upper-elementary level. Also, a study that takes place over a longer period of time would be more accurate in deciding what effect playful active learning has overall on a student's performance. It would also be interesting to see how students retained what they had learned over the course of this study, and if they kept the same attitude and perceptions towards writing as they became older and moved on to a higher grade level.

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