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What motivates middle school students to become better writers?

Julie Mahoney

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WHAT MOTIVATES MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BECOME BETTER WRITERS?

by

Julie Mahoney

A Thesis

Submitted to the

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Abstract

Julie Mahoney
WHAT MOTIVATES MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BECOME BETTER
WRITERS?

2014

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The purpose of this research study is to examine and evaluate adolescents' perspectives on academic writing and investigate ways in which a teacher can motivate these students to become better writers. Common Core curriculum was used along with collaborative, technology-based and independent writing tasks in which students learned how to identify their writing motivations in a variety of writing tasks. Qualitative inquiry strategies such as student surveys, student written work and observations were used to collect data. The data revealed that the students were motivated by writing assignments in which they knew they would present to the class and receive some sort of teacher or peer feedback. Students gained motivation through presenting and sharing their writing. When they knew this was going to be done, they put more effort and showed more concern in the writing task. Also, when writing assignments were written independently without guidance, students struggled to get started. However, when they when they received teacher-guiding instruction at the beginning of the writing task they began more willingly and had more confidence. Collaborative assignments were proven to be useful, but only when students had an option to do it independently. In all cases during this study students were motivated through the social aspect of writing, especially through conversations

during pre-writing and presentation feedback at the end. Implications for motivating middle school students who are reluctant writers are discussed throughout this study.

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Chapter 1

Scope of Study

Introduction

Students are expected to write throughout elementary school, middle school, high school and college. Depending on their future job and life choices they will most likely be writing throughout their entire lives. During the entire school day the middle school students at my school are writing in every content area. In each content area students are expected to write with a specific organization style depending on the specific subject and task. Yet in all subjects the teachers expect proper mechanics, physical appearance and spelling. Students tend to avoid and dislike writing; it seems to be a rare occurrence when students show enthusiasm for a writing task. Writing is an essential part of academic success, but many students lack motivation and confidence in their ability to write. There are many degrees and accomplishments that people are able to achieve because they are motivated to write, but what motivates them to write?

During this research study I will be focusing on the need to motivate middle school students to become better writers. I will investigate the differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, writing's link to the overall success and the instructional strategies that influence writing motivation in adolescents. The intent of my research study is to research middle school students' writing motivation. A wealth of empirical evidence on writing motivation exists, as well as research linking motivation to other types of learning outcomes.

Motivation refers to reasons that underlie behavior that is characterized by willingness (Ballinger, 2011). Educational practices and instructional strategies directly

affect students' writing motivation. Research suggests that motivation can be manipulated through certain instructional practices, although studies demonstrate both positive and negative effects (Guthrie, 2004). Motivation in children predicts motivation later in life, and the stability of this relationship strengthens with age. The motivation that a student has to write effects the effort a student puts into becoming a better writer and improving how they write (Harrell et al, 2006). With the new Common Core Curriculum Standards, PARCC and the overall push to higher student achievement, writing has never been as crucial to success as it is right now.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine and evaluate adolescents' perspectives on academic writing and investigate ways in which a teacher can motivate these students to become better writers. As I previously mentioned, people use writing throughout their lives. Therefore, it is essential to develop a strong ability to write before leaving middle school, but how do we motivate adolescents to become better writers? Teachers in all content areas struggle with this question. Teachers try to set up their classrooms to foster writing achievement. They give students a variety of writing assignments, they encourage their students to write and they give constructive and positive writing feedback. Often times, this is not enough to motivate middle school students to write and teachers hear the moans, groans and complaints that often come with assigning a new writing assignment. Lucy Calkins (1994) and Nancie Atwell (2002) both state the importance of the motivational factor and stressing to students how their personal opinions and voice tend to be more effective through well-developed writing.

Many times, people use writing to gather, organize and express their thoughts and feelings. Writing allows a person's opinions, studies, stories and facts to develop into an organized structure. This allows for clearer communication of what a person wants to say, the audience they want to say it to and the purpose it is meant to have. Many middle school students do not understand the importance or benefits that well developed writing can have on their future. When students become better writers, they also become better communicators. Communication is such a key component in not only their future jobs, but also their future relationships and all around life.

It is important for middle school students to feel motivated to write and gain the confidence they need to feel good about what they are writing. A student's writing motivation is just as important as the writing instruction itself. Graves (2002) claims that the problem in today's classrooms is that students do not see themselves as writers, and therefore lack the confidence and motivation they need to write. Teachers can do this through explaining the power writing gives a person in expressing what they want to say in a clear way. Teachers should increase student motivation by engaging the students with a variety of writing tasks. In this study we take a look at a variety of writing tasks that motivate students and include components such as: excitement, collaboration, technology and curiosity.

Atwell (2002) believes that writing assignments should be a mixture between specific set guidelines and freedom of choice. Teachers need to know just how much choice and how many guidelines to give their students when assigning a writing task. After a writing task is finished students need to feel that their writing matters. One way this can be accomplished is through positive experiences in writing (Broach, 2005).

Teachers can build these positive experiences through providing students with the chance to share their writing and receive positive feedback. Teachers should stress the important fact that everyone has areas in writing that need to be improved and that's okay as long as they are working to make improvements.

Story of the Question

When I was in seventh grade my mother pulled me out of private school and enrolled me at the local public school. She thought it was time for me to go to school with the kids who lived in my community since I would eventually be attending the local high school. In private school we were taught to copy what the teacher wrote and use the teacher's ideas. We were continually getting graded based on the physical appearance and the sentence structure of our writing. The content did not seem to matter to the teachers and the entire class always received the same topics when assigned writing tasks. I didn't like writing, it was boring and repetitive but I received good grades and that's all that mattered to me. I was a straight A student and I treated writing just like any other school assignment, a job. I got it done exactly how the teacher wanted it, turned it into the bin and moved on to the next task.

Soon came the first day of seventh grade, the first day at my new public school. It was around ten o'clock in the morning and the teacher announced that it was time for writing. I took out my notebook, pencil and turned my body to face the overhead projector. The teacher then said, "Just like last year I want you to keep this notebook for free writing, remember that you need to write at least five pages a week." I asked what we were supposed to write about and she said, "Anything you want." I again raised my hand and questioned the directions, "What format do you want our writing in? What does an A require?" The teacher proceeded to explain that you would only receive a bad grade

if you did not complete five pages each week. She then passed out a sheet of paper with possible topic ideas and told us to keep it in the front of our notebook if we needed inspiration. After getting over the initial shock, I went home that night and began writing. I wrote about the book I was reading, a list of my favorite things, the friends I missed from my old school and some basic details about my life. It was fun and didn't even feel like a job. I was shocked at how different writing class was in my new public school. I actually began to enjoy writing and I got a lot better at it. In class we always had different topic choices and I loved when we got the opportunity to share with the class. This year was when my personal intrinsic academic motivation was established. I realized that I had a voice and what I had to say actually mattered.

Later in life I continued to strengthen my writing skills. When I decided to become a teacher I knew that writing was going to be my favorite thing to teach. I couldn't wait to inspire my students and see great writers prosper. I attended Florida Atlantic University and learned best practices and strategies to teach all subjects to elementary school students. The optimistic undergrad that I was would plan pretend lessons for my classes and imagine the amazing debates, persuasive essays, research projects, journals and plays that my future students would create. I was looking forward to broadening their perspectives on writing through interactive lessons with endless possibilities. Then, on my first day of my first practicum placement, which was in fourth grade, I realized something. Something I was oblivious to during my own educational experiences in both private and public school. I realized that not every child writes when the teacher says to. Most children claim to hate writing, and therefore they don't do it. In this particular fourth grade class, 22 out of 24 students said that writing was their least

favorite subject. Most still wrote but did it without confidence, effort or any concern in making improvements. Again, my naïve undergrad self thought it must be because the teacher doesn't teach good lessons. I thought she must be doing something wrong, but I soon learned there was not a simple explanation. The teacher gave good lessons, they were interactive and the kids seemed engaged. Until, they went back to their seats to write. The students lacked confidence, struggled with ideas, complained and continually claimed to be finished. I came to the conclusion throughout this practicum placement that writing would not be my favorite subject to teach and it left me with the question, "How do teachers motivate students to write?" Throughout my other practicum placements I continued to struggle to motivate students to write. I realized many things during these different grade level placements, including the fact that reading and writing were commonly identified as the students' least favorite subjects.

In the winter of 2012 I was placed for my final undergrad requirement, student teaching. I was placed at Forest Park Elementary School, a Title 1 school in Boynton Beach, Florida. My first day of student teaching was a teacher workday and the entire staff was in a state of panic. At 8 a.m. they were told they would receive departmentalized positions, they had until three o'clock to prepare for this transition. The school had just decided to become departmentalized during the holiday break because of low-test scores on their winter diagnostics. I was placed with a cooperative teacher who was now going to teach reading and writing all day for the first time in her career. My cooperative teacher and I had no idea how we were going to teach reading and writing effectively to three groups of fifth graders in one hour and thirty minutes each day.

Ultimately, it became a team effort, with significant guidance from our school's

Reading Specialist. Together we discovered how to successfully teach literacy to fifth graders and I decided that fifth grade was my new favorite grade to teach. It was also when I decided to apply to graduate school online through Rowan University to become a certified Reading Specialist and receive my Graduate Degree in Reading Education. I was later accepted into the graduate program at Rowan and would begin in January of 2013. I knew there was so much more to learn about literacy education in order to be a more effective teacher and I was still struggling with motivating students to read and write.

In May of 2012 I received my Bachelors in Elementary Education from Florida Atlantic University and was offered my first teaching job. I couldn't wait to empower my students to achieve greatness. The same optimism I had during undergrad was still in me and I was ready to set the world on fire, starting with my first fifth grade class. I came to the conclusion that I knew how to motivate my student now; I had prize incentives and class incentives. I had no doubt that my students would find academic motivation in these classroom incentives. This was a Title 1 school in South Florida and the students were on average two grade levels behind where they should be. I continued to become very close with our school's Reading Specialist and she supported me with resources, encouragement and lesson modeling. She was always so supportive and as I started graduate coursework in December, her heart and persistence continued to inspire me. I survived the year with her help but my students still lacked motivation, especially in writing.

I ended up moving back to New Jersey and continued to earn my Master's as a Reading Specialist. I absolutely loved my fifth grade class in New Jersey. They were so

creative and most were really motivated to learn. I thought to myself that maybe it was just Florida students who lacked motivation. Most of these fifth graders did the assignments and got excited about a majority of them. They still struggled with mechanics, spelling and grammar but it was certainly an improvement. I was satisfied with their performance and felt like I was improving as a teacher.

However, everything I thought I knew about good teaching was about to change once more. In August of 2014 I was offered a full time middle school position teaching English Language Arts at Oldmans Township School. It is now almost winter break and I feel very comfortable in my new teaching position. In English Language Arts I use the Pearson Curriculum, along with writing workshop, book clubs and student centers. Most of my students seem to enjoy my class, but it is very obvious that they lack motivation to improve their writing. This has become my greatest concern because it hinders them from reaching their full potential. If given the option they would choose reading over writing on any given day, they say it takes less effort. To put it bluntly, I find that trying to motivate middle school students to write is similar to pulling teeth. I refuse to accept that they are giving me their best work because the lack of effort is obvious. I want to provide them with the best instruction possible in order to prepare them for high school, college and their overall future. The Common Core State Standards and PARCC stress writing techniques and writing development in students of all grades. Writing motivation is needed in my eighth grade classroom and every middle school classroom throughout the United States now more than ever.

Reflecting back to my seventh grade year, I realize that I am aware of when and how my writing motivation first originated. My motivation originated through having

choices when writing and keeping journals. On the contrary, my students are already used to having writing choices, keeping journals and partaking in interactive lessons. Yet, they are still not motivated to write. Through my own experiences as a student and as a teacher, I've realized just how important being a good writer is. Being a good writer and expressing thoughts and ideas effectively directly connects to educational success. My goal is to develop and improve my students' writing before they enter their high school years. The first step to improving students' writing is to improve their writing motivation. However, how do I develop the motivation in my students in which they are lacking? This thinking led me to my question: How can I motivate middle school students to become better writers?

Limitations

During this study I was under a four to six week time constraint. This time constraint rushed interviews and did not allow for long-term observations, data and research. Also, the sample size for this study was only one small eighth grade class and therefore it was difficult to see further significant relationships from the data. Finally, the study was conducted in a classroom in which the writing curriculum could not be changed. I originally planned to use lessons pre and post interviews after a technology based writing assignment but I was not allowed to take away from the established curriculum.

Summary of the Study

In chapter two I will investigate the ways in which motivation has been defined by researchers, investigate adolescents, share empirical studies, and discuss motivational writing assignments. In chapter three I will discuss the context of the study and the research design. In chapter four I will describe and analyze the data collected during the study. In chapter five I will state my conclusions and implications for teaching.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Most teachers recognize the importance of motivation in supporting student learning. Motivation has been a key to education since the beginning. It is recognized that students need some sort of motivation in order to succeed in school, college and the work place. Educational psychologists and teacher researchers continually investigate where student motivation comes from, both intrinsically and extrinsically. Between the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment writing has become a primary focus throughout the changes that are occurring in education. The need for student writing motivation has never been as necessary as it is for students right now. The purpose of this literature review is to explore the ways in which motivation has been defined by researchers, investigate an abundance of studies that have been conducted regarding motivation, learn techniques and strategies on how teachers can encourage and create writing motivation in their students and to review the need for further research specifically regarding writing motivation.

What is Motivation?

Cumberworth and Hunt (1998) found that the “lack of student motivation and cognitive awareness of the purpose of the writing process is a concern of writing teachers nationwide” (p.12). Various dictionary definitions and literature have trouble capturing the fullness of meaning implied in the term “motivation”. Motivation is basically the

process or state of determination that enables a person to see a task through to the end. Skinner (1993) discusses in his research that ability refers to what a person can do and motivation refers to what a person will do (p.575). However, a clear definition of motivation cannot be determined in a single sentence. By restricting discussion of motivation exclusively to the process of language learning, the situation becomes both simpler and more complicated. Unlike other topics such as “the motivation to do laundry” or “the motivation to buy an umbrella,” the motivation to read and write is closely tied to a person’s sense of self identity and as a result carries a variety of complicating factors such as: personality, attitudes, emotions, social context, attributions to the past and dreams of the future.

Intrinsic verse Extrinsic

Motivation refers to reasons we do or do not do something. Guthrie (2004) mentions how literacy motivation is based on interest, dedication and confidence. These three contributes can make or break a person’s motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that comes from within, when something is done for personal enjoyment, interest or pleasure. Extrinsic motivation comes from gaining a tangible reward or specific outcome based on achievement. According to Deci’s (1999) self-determination theory, extrinsic incentives can undermine intrinsic interest. However, other research studies have shown that a mixture of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation has been the most effective (Reiss, 2009). Most educators consider intrinsic motivation as more desirable and to result in better learning outcomes while creating lifelong learners (Deci et al., 1999). The problem with intrinsic motivation is that it has to be internally built and that gets harder and harder to tap into as students mature into their adolescent years.

Researchers such as Guthrie (2004) and Deci (1999) have made several recommendations for educators interested in supporting students' motivation, including the limited use of rewards, using rewards to provide information about competence, increasing student autonomy and choice, using collaborative or cooperative learning methods, and creating a supportive classroom environment with respect to goal structures, attributions, and external evaluation.

William McDougall (2003) observed that every human is created to seek, to strive for, and to desire certain goals and the attainment of which goals satisfies the desire that moves us. Psychologically speaking, certain natural stimuli function as reinforcement and motivation for humans. According to McDougall (2003) genetics and environment play a big role in our receptiveness and reaction to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Another important role to consider when discussing motivation is the age of the person. Adolescents find motivation in a very different way than elementary school students. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations affect a middle school student very differently due to their emotional, physically and mental state during the adolescent years.

Adolescent Education

Adolescence is a period of difficulty, confusion and problems. "Just as academics start to get complex, school is the last thing on their minds" (Bong, 2004, p.290). Historically, researchers have focused on the process in which writers engage as they compose a text. Entwisle et al. (1986) found that first-grade children have very positive self-concept and high academic expectations for themselves. However, research by Broussard and Gutthrie (2004) suggests that motivation tends to decline over time once children leave elementary school. Adolescence has long been characterized as a time

when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit in the social world they live in (Spear, 2000).

An empirical study performed by Wentzel (1996) examined adolescents' perceptions of pedagogical caring in relation to their motivation to achieve positive social and academic outcomes in middle school. The implications for understanding links between teacher behavior and student achievement are discussed in this study. It was concluded that, "perceived caring from teachers was related significantly and positively to students' pursuit of social responsibility goals and to students' academic effort" (Wentzel, 1996, p. 414). According to this study, the way students perceive a teacher as "caring" varies immensely, but according to most middle school students; knowing a teacher cares is a common correlation to student writing success (Spear, 2000).

"When students proceed to junior high school from elementary school, rapid changes in the environment occur, which may cause various behavioral and emotional problems" (Spear, 2000, p. 12). It has been reported that the intrinsic academic motivation of middle school students also markedly decreases from elementary school to middle school. The present findings suggest that decreases in short term memory or working memory capacity and story comprehension during divided attention processing are significantly correlated with the prevalence of decrease in intrinsic academic motivation among 7th-, 8th-, and 9th-grade students in junior high school. These findings suggest that capacity for verbal memory influences the severity of decrease in intrinsic academic motivation in junior high school students (Mizuno, 2001).

Over the last couple decades, a variety of researchers have been studying the effects of middle school environments. These studies include an obvious decline in motivation, personal competency beliefs, and general self-esteem after the transition into middle school. Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) concluded that the decline in motivation appears to be linked to specific classroom characteristics including the quality of the student-teacher relationships, lack of opportunities for participation in classroom decision-making, and an increase in classroom ability grouping. They recommended that “serious efforts be made to improve, and expand, the nature of student-teacher relationships in schools that serve early adolescents” (p.539). There is an abundance of research literature on the roles of teacher-student relationships and students’ social motivations in achievement. A teacher should work towards creating an environment of trust, respect for others and compliance with rules (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009).

In addition, adolescent education became a focus of study in 1986 when the Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD) to highlight the challenges of the adolescent years. Their findings, published in “Turning Points” (1989) were not positive and led to the conclusion that all too often we exacerbate the problems that our youth face. This impedes learning and preparation for adult life; it increases adolescents’ levels of risk and their vulnerability to a wide array of social-emotional problems and self-destructive behaviors. However, it also offered essential principles for improving middle school education. The updated “Turning Points 2000” combines research on middle school improvement since 1989 using seven specific principles that now tie into the Common Core State Standards.

“American students today are not even meeting basic writing standards” (Graham & Perin, 2007). The most recent Carnegie report of adolescent literacy by Graham and Perin (2007) announces that the educational community faces difficult challenges because the way students have been taught to write about a subject matter has not kept up with the new educational demands. Every year in the United States large numbers of adolescents graduate from high school unable to meet their college or employer demands (Graham & Perin, 2007). Recent reports by the National Commission on Writing have helped make the importance of writing proficiency known to the public. From this Carnegie report, along with many writing research studies (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2006; Smagorinsky) new classroom writing strategies and school-wide literacy interventions have been occurring nationwide to improve writing of adolescents and young adults. Within these new implementations, motivation seems to continue to be of high importance based on evidence and theories, in order to improve adolescent writing. Over the years there has been an abundance of theories and evidence in the area of motivation. Many of these studies can transfer over to academic writing motivation as discussed in the next section.

Evidence and Theories

Thorndike and Pavlov researched how motivation could be controlled through an externally imposed system of stimulus and response (Atkinson, 1964). This research gave rise to the “behaviorist” models of Skinner. Atkinson’s “achievement theory,” suggests that humans direct themselves to act on the basis of a desire to either “achieve success” or to avoid failure.” The “expectancy-value framework” suggests that people are motivated

to act in so far as they believe that the outcome they will receive as a result of their action is both attainable and important to them (Atkinson, 1964). Schumann's (2001) "mental foraging hypothesis" believes people are motivated to take part in intellectual pursuits because it created neurologically pleasurable sensations in their brains.

The Pain-Pleasure Theory of Motivation describes the significance of efforts put by an individual to avoid pain (Naeem et al., 2011). According to this study, a person's pleasure and pain levels have a lot to do with their levels of motivation. The study broke the levels of pain and pleasure down into five different stages. If an individual is at the first stage all of their food and shelter basic needs are met but they do not have a job, education or wealth. If a person gets stuck at this stage, they will either show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In the case of satisfaction, they will not put any more effort to reach next stage; they will be happy with whatever they have. In case of dissatisfaction, they are going to face two situations; they will put more efforts to reach next stage and may manage to reach the target stage; otherwise, their dissatisfaction would lead towards anxiety and depression (Naeem et al., 2011).

This empirical study can relate to the motivation of a person towards their education in connection to their success in academic grades based on achievement expectations from parents and individual achievement goals that students set on their own. Some students are happy being C-average students, while others are not. The students who are not satisfied at this stage will work to earn higher grades. If they succeed they will feel successful, but if they fail they will experience depression and sadness as a result. In many students, these feelings of failure take away their original motivation to improve. As a result, they may try to become satisfied with the grades they

have earned previously in order to avoid disappointment. Students who are highly motivated will continue trying, working harder and pushing forward in order to obtain a higher grade. The study shows how crucial motivation is in academic achievement and self-efficacy.

All motivation theories have their strengths and flaws, but they do give us an insight into some of the factors and mechanisms, which play an important role in motivation phenomena. A wealth of empirical evidence on the manipulability of motivation exists. However, these studies demonstrate both positive and negative effects. Instructional strategies can be obtained through gaining knowledge about past studies and theories in regards to motivation. Studies like those done by Deci (1999) and McDougall (2003) often suggest how classroom contexts increase or decrease students' motivation or lead us to further ideas for our own research and investigation.

Broussard and Garrison (2004) observe that contemporary motivation research tends to be organized around these three questions: Can I do this task? Do I want to do this task and why? What do I have to do to succeed in this task? Empirical research supports the notion, suggesting that individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to be more motivated and successful on a given task. Another theory states that individuals should be more motivated when they feel that they are in control of their own successes and failures. Motivation research posited that motivation is an unconscious instinct-driven desire to either enjoy pleasure or to avoid pain (Reiss, 2013). There is an abundance of research available on the topic of motivation and can easily be applied to its role in education.

Specific Instructional Strategies

One researched strategy for fortifying student motivation is the use of collaborative or cooperative learning methods (Guthrie, 2000). In fact, Guthrie (2000) argues that motivation is one of the potential mediating processes where cooperative learning affects achievement. According to Bong (2004), peer encouragement may improve task engagement, and the novelty of collaborative learning tasks causes students to shift intentional resources. Working with others promotes academic engagement through the added responsibility of group performance, which causes individuals to persist at difficult tasks longer than they normally would. Also, collaboration provides opportunities for peer modeling, and models of successful student performance can be more motivating to students than models of teacher performance (Ballinger, 2011). Finally, collaboration provides opportunities for students to experience disequilibrium, which can spur curiosity and interest.

Another method for improving students' motivation is through classroom environment. When teachers embrace mastery or learning goals as opposed to performance or achievement goals for their students, they tend to internalize these goals. Learning goals promote risk-taking, willingness to engage in difficult tasks, higher effort and more enjoyment in learning activities. However, performance goals can have negative effects, especially on students with very low self-efficacy. Research suggests that classroom environments likely to stimulate students to hold learning goals tends to define success as progress, emphasize effort and working hard on challenging tasks (Broussard & Garrison, 2004).

Graham and Perin's (2007) report includes eleven effective strategies based on empirical evidence to improve writing of adolescent in middle and high schools. The author's came to the conclusion early on that there was no single approach to writing instruction because all students have different needs. Collaborative writing, prewriting, inquiry activities, process writing approach, study of models, writing for content learning are just a few of the elements they mention in their report (Graham & Perin, 2007). They decided that a mixture of these 11 key elements in everyday writing tends to increase writing motivation and academic achievement in grades 4 to 12 (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Evaluating Motivation

Motivation tends to link directly to academic achievement but how do we evaluate motivation? The study performed by Cumberworth and Hunt (1996) employed several metacognitive strategies to increase student awareness of the importance of the writing process and to improve negative attitudes towards writing. A writing survey was administered to establish a baseline at the beginning of the study and to question their attitudes toward writing. They were also asked to complete a Writing Questionnaire about the process. In order to increase student awareness of the need for writing in adulthood, they had to interview three adults using an Adult Writers Survey. At the conclusion of this study, the survey and questionnaire were administered once again.

Motivation is frequently assessed using either self-report measures or rating scales completed by teachers or parents (Guthrie, 2000, Patton, 2000). Such instruments usually include questions organized under several subscales, such as interest, attributions, self-perception and self-efficacy, preference for challenge, curiosity, mastery orientation,

persistence, and enjoyment of learning. Other researchers use behavioral indicators of motivation. Behavioral indicators of persistence include asking for help, asking oneself questions, or talking oneself through a task. Students who are highly motivated will persist at even difficult or challenging tasks; whereas students with low-motivation will tend to decrease their effort or engagement with tasks when presented with unexpected challenges.

Conclusion

First and foremost, more studies need to be done on adolescent, middle school aged children. This adolescent period in a child's life is often a deciding factor in their future motivation and academic achievement. There are numerous studies showing the correlation between academic achievement and a motivation decrease during the middle school years. The goal of this study is to research and observe the contributing factors to an adolescent's writing motivation. The results of this study may also provide potential insights for future writing instruction and become a reference for future research in the area of writing motivation.

Upon reviewing the literature it is clear that, even though there is no easy answer in properly motivating middle school students, it is not for lack of effort. There are a variety of studies that have been conducted relating to adolescence, student motivation and writing success. Researchers often contrast intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and student perceptions to both. Research studies have also identified the key factors in reluctant adolescents and the possible motivation strategies. Extensive studies have been performed on the metacognitive factors of adolescent decrease in motivation. These studies conclude a variety of insightful tips to helping our youth succeed. However, there

is always a great gain in more data and more research to help steer instruction, especially in middle school.

Chapter 3

Research Design & Context

Introduction

Chapter three consists of two sections. The first section discusses the research design including the procedure and analysis of data through the use of qualitative research. The second section discusses the context of the school, classroom, and community in which my research was conducted. This chapter also discusses the data sources used in the study.

Research Design

A research paradigm is a perspective about research held by a community of researchers that is based on values, concepts and practices. The qualitative research paradigm is the framework of this teacher research study. According to Cresswell (1994) “A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people’s words, actions and records. “We use practitioner inquiry and practitioner research as conceptual and linguistic umbrellas to refer to a wide array of educational research modes, forms, genres, and purposes.” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 39) This paradigm is typically used in analyzing data collected in academic groups, to be investigated by teacher researchers. According to Smith and Lytle, “...teacher research refers to the inquiries of

K-12 teachers and prospective teachers, often in collaboration with university-based colleagues and other educators.” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 39)

The goal of qualitative research is to discover patterns, which emerge after close observation, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis of the research topic. When considering a classroom research study one must consider the different student levels, needs, experiences and interests. With this being said, objectivity is not a realistic goal when conducting a teacher research study. Therefore, teachers completing a qualitative research study become subjective and consider an abundance of factors including learning environment, teacher practices and individual student needs (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teachers can then take into account multiple factors within a qualitative research study and analyze them deeply. This study aligns with the qualitative design of research because the goal is to improve student writing motivation through the examination of teacher and student practices within the classroom setting.

The decision to conduct a qualitative research study occurs for various reasons. First of all, they are often selected because of the nature of the research question. The question often begins with *how* or *what* and there is not necessarily an easily identified cause and effect relationship. The qualitative study also needs to be explored and theories need to be developed. This form of research also allows for a very detailed view on the topic and an abundance of different perspectives can be analyzed. The qualitative approach also allows researchers to write and record data in a literary style using personal storytelling as a form of narration. (Shagoury & Power, 2012) This is a qualitative research study because it focuses on an inquiry question that examines adolescents and allows for multiple perspectives to be explored and analyzed.

There are many characteristics of good qualitative research studies. The study should begin with a single focus or idea, a problem that the researcher wants to understand. This is more than a casual relationship of variables or comparison of groups, relationships might evolve and comparisons might emerge later during investigation of the primary research focus. The study must include detailed methods to data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The details of the study should be written in such a detailed way that readers can experience things as if they were actually there, engaging the readers. Data is analyzed on multiple levels and often presented in different stages that combine into larger themes or perspectives. This qualitative research study data includes surveys, interviews, observation and is written in a narrative writing style.

In conducting teacher research, the teacher's goal is to inquire information regarding an educational concern in order to make changes and improve instruction. Teachers should question, evaluate and continue to search for ways to improve their classroom community in order to assist students in reaching their fullest potential. "Teacher researchers work in inquiry communities to examine their own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and gathering data..." (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004, p.39) Community and collaboration are two elements of practitioner research and take many forms. "In some versions of practitioner inquiry, "researchers" also include participants who are not practitioners..." (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.41) When practitioner research is extended to communities, families and parents even more knowledge can be gained concerning the specific inquiry. This teacher research is conducted by one classroom teacher, but then shared and discussed with fellow classrooms.

When conducting a practitioner research study teachers are just as much involved in the study as their students because their own practices are being evaluated during their research study. Reflection on self is essential to conducting research because teachers must examine their own practices and evaluate their own assumptions about teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teacher researchers work within their own classroom and school settings to question, uncover and change issues in order to improve learning for their students. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) explain that “all of the participants in inquiry communities are regarded as knowers, learners, and researchers.”

Practitioner inquiry is often disputed and critiqued. The knowledge generated by practitioner inquiry challenges the idea that knowledge can be transferred from one site to another without any problems (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Every class is made up of very diverse students and no two classes will have identical responses to the same teaching technique or method. “An important feature shared by many forms of practitioner inquiry is that notions of validity and generalizability are quite different from the traditional criteria.” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.43) There are many major critiques out there in regards to practitioner research. However, the main purpose is to gain new knowledge that can help improve the classroom community. With that being the essential purpose, practitioner research will always be worthwhile and purposeful. “Teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching. It is observing students closely, analyzing their needs, and adjusting curriculum to fit the needs of all students.” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p.3)

This study examines adolescents’ perspectives on academic writing and investigates ways in which a teacher can motivate these students to become better writers.

The study analyzes the results of student writing in a variety of tasks, records classroom observations and interviews students about their personal writing motivation. The purpose of this strategy is to identify the writing motivations within an eighth grade classroom; including the reasons students are reluctant to write in order to improve instruction. The teacher research method will be used as the framework of this study in order to gather, interpret and analyze data. This method is beneficial in transforming and improving teaching, learning and leading (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.118). The purpose of using the teacher research method in this study is to examine student feelings, attitudes and writing within the classroom.

Data Collection Tools

The qualitative inquiry strategies used to conduct this study include student questionnaires, recorded interviews with students, student writing samples, and a teacher research journal. I began my study by collecting writing samples and writing motivation surveys. The writing samples were taken from their classroom writing portfolios to get a general view on the students' writing styles. The survey was given out the entire class for them to complete honestly at the start of my study. The survey had twelve statements about writing that they had to rate somewhere between strongly disagree to strongly agree. After they completed the survey I handed out pre-interview questions for the students to answer about their experiences with writing. This data gathered ideas as to the students' perspective and feelings towards their own writing.

Throughout the study, I conferred with students about their writing. I also took notes as I observed the way in which students approached a writing assignment. I

collected this data when I walked around the room while the students were writing. When I asked students to show me what they had so far I observed how they were organizing their essays, how much they had written and what struggles they were having. After each writing assignment I had students reflect on their writing task through a writing interview questionnaire.

At the end of the study, students were given a post-survey in which they were given the same statements about writing and asked to rate the statement's truth between strongly disagree and strongly agree. They were then also given a post-interview questionnaire where they answered the same questions about their writing experiences. We then had a final class discussion on their writing motivations, opinions and beliefs. The post-survey and the class discussion gave me an understanding of how the students perceived their experiences with writing during the last four weeks.

Procedure of Study

Week one. I began my study by having students complete a writing survey. The survey asked them to rate the truth in twelve statements about writing. I explained to the students that the purpose was to get their honest perspective. I then had them complete a writing motivation pre-questionnaire that asked students specific questions about their experiences with writing. The students completed the surveys and questionnaires in class. I collected the papers and reviewed their responses that evening, creating charts to compare their writing survey responses.

During the next few days I observed and assisted students as they completed a character comparison essay, using the main characters from two short stories we read in

class. The writing task involved comparing and analyzing the characters' challenges due to outside forces, setting, time and place. I assisted the students through pre writing graphic organizers and going over what needed to be in each paragraph. The students were told to write a five paragraph essay and had the entire period to complete the assignment. The next day the students were handed back their essays and asked to answer several questions about this particular writing task in regards to their writing. I then asked for students to print me out a second copy with their "fake name" for my research study. I took the responses home to compare and analyze.

Week two. The students continued writing in class and I continued keeping my observations in my teacher research journal. The next writing task I collected for research purposes was a fictional narrative writing assignment. The students were told to create a fictional story. There were no other guidelines except that grammar and punctuation would count and it should not be more than five pages. The students worked on this assignment for a week and then presented it to the class using visuals and any other presentation techniques they felt would add to their narratives. Most students completed their pre writing, rough drafts, revision, edits and final drafts during this time. This process was completed during their English Language Arts period, Writing Plus period and select students chose to continue working at home.

Throughout the week students were continually encouraged to add more details and elaborate. I continued to record observations in my teacher research journal while walking around the room during their writing period. Students were also given a presentation rubric and instructed to prepare to present. The students then presented their narratives using visuals. The rest of the students took notes towards each presentation,

writing down one thing they liked and one thing that could be improved. After each presentation a few students in the audience shared the notes they wrote down with the presenter. The following Monday students were handed back their essays and asked to answer several questions about this particular writing task in regards to their writing. I took note on their expressions and questions while completing the reflection questionnaire.

Week three. Students read two short story narratives, one fiction and one non-fiction. They were then asked to write a three paragraph open-response, which asked them to compare fiction narratives to non-fiction narratives. I asked my students hand write their responses which is something they were not used to doing this year. I took notes in my teacher research journal as they completed the task. I took note of how quickly they got started, their facial expressions, questions and organizational methods. After they were finished I asked them how they felt about hand writing this assignment. After they left I took notes on their responses and conversations during our class discussion.

The next day I handed back their assignments and grades. I then asked them to complete another questionnaire regarding this writing assignment. I took note on their expressions and questions while completing the reflection questionnaire, which differed slightly from the last questionnaire because it focused on the difference between typing and a handwritten assignment. After they completed it I collected it and asked them what they thought was the biggest difference between a typed and handwritten writing assignment. I took notes on their expressions, engagement and enthusiasm in this discussion.

In the middle of the week students wrote a short story Thanksgiving story. The story was a collaborative assignment in which the students worked with a partner or in groups of three. I took notes throughout the skit creation of any disagreements, issues, reactions and observations. Half way through, I told them they would be presenting this story and recorded their reactions. After the presentations were over, I told them that this assignment would not be graded. I recorded the feedback that students had to this announcement in my teacher research journal and then had a discussion regarding their reactions with my students. After the discussion they completed the same after writing questionnaire as I have used throughout most of this research study. I then lead them in a class discussion about the difference between independent writing and collaborative writing. I asked them which one they preferred, which one is easiest and how they differ. We created a Venn diagram comparing the two on the chalk board. After students left, I took notes of the discussion using the Venn diagram to remember everything that was discussed.

Week four. Students began working on their Holocaust research papers this week. They have chosen a specific topic in regards to the Holocaust and have started writing a thesis. Some students have even begun their first paragraph. During the beginning stages of the research paper I took notes on students' reactions, questions, opinions and struggles.

During this last week of my observations I interviewed students in small groups and individually during their lunch period. I questioned them about the assignments they completed during the last four weeks and asked them questions regarding each assignment. I recorded their answers and later took notes on the conversations.

On the final day of my research study I gave students a post-survey and a post-questionnaire. We then had one final class discussion regarding their writing motivations and how they have changed over the years. I recorded the highlights of the discussion in my teacher research journal.

Data Sources

To establish data for the research portion of this study, I used a variety of multiple qualitative research techniques. To begin this study I gathered data about the eighth grade students within my English Language Arts class relating to their writing techniques, grades and attitudes through observation, school records and a writing survey. I then used this knowledge in creating a variety of lessons that used different instructional strategies and techniques such as collaborative and technology enhanced assignments. Throughout this study I used audio recordings to document student interviews in order to analyze students' reactions, opinions and thoughts about assignments, effort and motivation. I turned student responses into charts after each different assignment. This allowed me to compare the students' individual responses to different assignments and analyze the class differences. Additionally, throughout the study I kept a teacher research journal where I recorded my own thoughts, feelings and reflections about the daily observations and data collected each day. Through this research journal I reflected on both my behavior and my students' behavior throughout this study. Finally, student-writing samples were used to gain further insight and reflect between their writing production and their motivation interviews.

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the course of this study was used to help draw conclusions regarding adolescent writing motivation and its connection to student writing success. It was also used to draw conclusions regarding students' differences in writing motivation based on the type of writing task, topic, technology use, collaboration and presentations. I reviewed the writing samples collected throughout the four weeks and the questionnaire responses. I determined the writing level of the students, looked for their approach to writing and the writing motivations they had. I determined their motivation based on the time, effort, questionnaire responses, writing samples and pre/post surveys.

I compiled the surveys and analyzed the results. There were surveys given on the first day, prior to the research study and surveys on the last day when the study was completed. I looked at these surveys to see if they showed any change in students' perceptions of writing. I then reviewed the pre/post questionnaires and compared the students' responses at the beginning and at the end. I looked to see how the students felt about each different writing task, what challenges they faced, what they learned, what they would change and what their favorite part was. This allowed me to determine any differences in answers that had occurred within the last four weeks.

I read over my teacher research journal and notes taken after classes and during writing assignments. My teacher research journal allowed me to find trends among reflections about the students' responses to each writing assignment from the first week through the fourth and final week. I compared my teacher research journal notes with their questionnaires to see if my perceptions and feelings about their writing matched. I

looked through the students' writing samples, grades, questionnaires, surveys, and my teacher research journal to look for changes, differences and similarities.

Context

Community. Oldmans Township School is a K-8 elementary school located in the Salem County public school district. According to the 2010 census report; Oldmans Township has a total area of 20,381 square miles and borders Carneys Point Township and Pilesgrove Township. Oldmans Township School is one of the eleven small K-8 schools located in Salem County. There are a total of 1,773 people living in the towns of Pedricktown and Auburn, both send students to Oldmans Township School.

At the 2010 United States Census, there were 1,773 people, 652 households, and 502 families residing in the township. There were 652 households, of which 31.3% had children under the age of 18 living with them. 58.9% were married couples living together, 11.7% had a female householder with no husband present, and 23.0% were non-families. The average household size was 2.71 and the average family size was 3.04. The racial makeup of Oldmans Township in 2010 was 87.48% white, 6.99% Hispanic, 0.23% African American, 2.31% Pacific Islander and 1.35% were other races.

The Census Bureau's 2006-2010 American Community Survey showed that the median household income was \$66,016 and the median family income was \$68,077. Males made a median income of \$55,565 versus 32,283 for females. About 5.2% of the population was below the poverty line.

However, Oldmans Township is a Choice School and accepts students throughout Salem County. Therefore, it is hard to get a completely accurate background for the

students who attend. The school currently has 48 choice students enrolled and there are currently a total of 322 students enrolled in grades K-8.

Classroom. Ms. Mahoney's 8th grade English Language Arts fourth period class is made up of 12 students. Seven students are female and four students are male. Student participants include 1 African-American, 2 Asian Americans, 1 Mexican-American and 7 Caucasians. Participants included in the study will be students in the investigator's classroom. Only students whose parents' or guardians have signed consent forms will be able to participate. Students participating in this study must belong to this class. I will not exclude anyone in this class.

Students. The student behavior is mostly respectful and pleasant. This class has two students who are classified as receiving basic skills instruction for being below grade level. I also have two students with IEPs. The rest are average or above average for their grade level. Most of the students in this group are very reluctant to write and do not choose to partake in a writing task by choice. Chapter Four of this thesis discusses the results of the student writing surveys, student interviews, class discussions, student samples and my personal teacher research journal. Chapter Five then presents the conclusions and implications of this study as well as recommendations for further topics of study.

Conclusion

The way in which the data was determined to be collected was based on teacher research studies that I have investigated and read about in the past. I looked at the way researchers within the Shangoury and Power (2011) text conducted research studies effectively. Using these outlines as a guide, I decided to collect research in which I could get a true understanding of how my middle school students felt towards writing in general and how that differed depending on the type of writing they were partaking in. With this procedure of data collection I hoped to draw some conclusions on how to motivate adolescents to become better writers.

What's Next?

In chapter four, the results of the surveys, questionnaires, writing samples, group discussions and notes within my teacher research journal are presented. In chapter five, the conclusions, implementations, and recommendations for further research are discussed.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, “How can I motivate middle school students to become better writers?” As I sorted and categorized my data sources (surveys, questionnaires, discussions, interviews, writing samples and teacher-research journal) I identified key data to report. A look across all data sources seems to suggest a variety of themes that occur throughout the research study. These include the benefits and restrictions of teacher guided writing, presenting writing assignments, the writing process, collaborative writing, no technology writing, allowing for choice and incorporating a music analogy.

Revisiting the Study

As chapter three explained, I collected data over a four-week period in which students were given various writing assignments during their English Language Arts class. First, I used a pre-survey and pre-questionnaire to learn more about the students’ past writing experiences and their attitudes towards writing. This information was charted so that I could find patterns in their writing motivations as a group. By conducting weekly reflection surveys on their writing assignments I was able to chart student responses and gain insight into how they were feeling towards each writing assignment. Using my teacher research journal, I recorded and analyzed student behaviors throughout the course of the study to look for changes and growth in writing motivations. Additionally, at the end of each writing assignment I asked students specific questions about their writing. I held a class discussion, post-survey and post-questionnaire on

student writing motivations. I then reviewed the pre/post questionnaires and compared the students' responses at the beginning and at the end. I looked to see how the students felt about each different writing task, what challenges they faced, what they learned, what they would change and what their favorite part was.

The Study of Writing Motivation

Throughout this research study I learned what motivates adolescents to become better writers. Allowing students the opportunity to present their writing became a primary factor in their motivation. During this study, students wrote collaboratively, independently and worked with and without teacher assistance. These writing tasks involved a variety of both fiction and non-fiction writing. The collaborative writing activities involved research writing, narrative stories and open-ended responses. The independent assignments included a narrative, open-response, and a character comparison based on text. Some writing tasks allowed for teacher guided writing and others were completed independently. Technology was incorporated in different components throughout these assignments and writing instruction. Students normally worked on their writing assignments using their laptop. However, in order to see the difference in writing motivation between writing it by hand and typing it, there was one assignment that was handwritten. It was found that students were most motivated when they were given the opportunity to present their writing orally to the class. Chapter four further discusses the results of the data collected through surveys, students' writing samples, notes taken in my teacher research journal and students' interviews.

Beginning Resistance

On a gloomy fall morning in 2014, I was ready to begin my research study with my eighth grade class. I took the last fifteen minutes of my eighth grade English Language Arts class to discuss my research study with my students. I explained for my students who did not already know, that I was a graduate student at Rowan. I told them that I needed their help in completing my last requirement for graduation. Their eyes widened and the hands started to rise. “If we don’t participate do you fail?” shouted Bob. “Ugh why does it have to be writing, that’s the worst topic you could have chosen,” moaned Shanay. I requested their attention once more and continued to explain what I needed from them. I will not be using your real names in my research” I told them. Therefore, you have nothing to be worried about so please share as you normally would during class discussions. The students sported smiles from ear to ear. They started reciting crazy names they wanted as their alias.

I showed a blank student survey underneath the Elmo and explained what it was asking them to do. I explained to them again the importance of their honesty on the surveys by telling them that this had no effect on their grade. I also told my class to be completely up front about their thoughts and to share anything they felt the need to. Lastly, I explained that the study was for school and the only one that was getting graded was Ms. Mahoney. I spent a long time explaining this to my students because I wanted the most accurate answers possible.

My students began to complete the pre-writing motivation survey at their seats. The survey included twelve statements about writing. The students were to decide how they felt about the statement in regards to them and their writing personally. They could

select between the following: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. Through this survey I found that most students thought they were okay writers because they chose neutral. I discovered that student preferred writing fiction text and most did not write for fun. This survey also taught me that my students did not like writing about what they read. Then, these survey responses were elaborated on during the questionnaire.

After they completed the survey I handed them the writing questionnaire. This document asked them a variety of open-response questions, again relating to their personal writing experiences. During the questionnaire I received a variety of questions regarding their answers. Bob raised his hand and groaned, "I literally like nothing about writing." After this comment a few students around the room began to ask, "What if I don't like anything about my writing?" I told them to just be honest, "Don't say what you think I want or don't want you to put, just tell the truth," I stated in a nonchalant voice. The students continued answering the questions.

The students finished answering the questions in the same order in which they usually finished any given writing assignment. The deep thinkers, high achievers and neat writers took their time and thought about their answers before writing them down. Meanwhile those students who tend to be the reluctant writers, quickly rushed through the questions and declared, "I'm done" within seven minutes of receiving the questionnaire. The first student to hand his survey in was Fred, a C average student who usually needed a lot of help getting started on a writing assignment or handed in effortless work. When he handed it to me it was obvious through his handwriting alone that he rushed. However, the answers seemed pretty honest. The last student to turn her

paper in was Alice, the class's straight A perfectionist. In contrary to most of my other eighth grade students writing is her favorite subject and in fact, she hopes to have a writing career someday. After all the surveys and questionnaires were completed and turned in, I told the students that anytime I need to collect something for my study I would ask them to print out two copies so I could keep one for my data collection along with their reflections on the assignment.

Pre-Surveys and Pre-Interviews

Based on the pre-survey responses, I found that only two of my students identified writing as their best subject. I also discovered that not one student marked that they did not like writing fictional text. However, the majority of my students did not like writing in other classes or writing about what they read. Only two students claimed to not like working with others during writing and only one person didn't like using technology during writing. Half of the students were neutral about putting effort into their writing and the other half claimed to put forth a lot of effort into their writing. This specific question may not be very accurate considering their writing teacher administered the survey. However, for the most part I feel that the pre-survey gave me an accurate view on how my students view writing.

Also, the pre-interviews gave me similar results with more reasoning and details. The pre-interview was made up of six questions. The first question asked students to describe a writing project that they were really excited for and how long that feeling lasted. Half the students wrote that they were never excited about writing. For example Fred wrote, "I don't like anything about writing. It is boring and hard." Sierra wrote, "I did not like it at the beginning, middle or end." A few other students wrote about projects

they had done when they were younger. Ava mentioned a persuasive essay she had to write in sixth grade, Suzie mentioned the brochure we had done earlier in the school year and Sandy mentioned a poster she did in fifth grade.

The next question asked about a time that they willingly volunteered to write. Many mentioned the “Musical Writing” collaborative writing activity we did at the beginning of the year which involved students to pass papers in a row while having one minute to add. They liked this activity because it was not graded, the stories came out funny and grammar did not matter. Many others honestly stated that they have never written voluntarily with the exception of Linda, Samantha and Alice. Linda and Samantha shared that they liked keeping a journal and Alice shared that she volunteered to write our class play this year.

The next three questions asked about writing hurdles, goals and improvements. Students mentioned hurdles, goals and improvements such as; spelling, grammar, figurative language and punctuation. Ava mentioned how research reports seem hopeless but they are hurdles that she gets through in order to earn a good grade. Jennifer, Ava and Samantha mentioned that they have trouble adding descriptive words and making writing interesting. Bob stated that he hasn’t done anything to improve his writing and added that the hardest part about writing is when others judge it. Linda wrote that she struggled with story length and found it difficult to write long stories. Other students wrote down basic improvements they’ve worked towards making such as vocabulary, grammar and sentence variety.

The final question questioned whether or not you regarded yourself as being a self-starter in writing or not. Many students asked what a self-starter was when

completing this question. I explained that it was the ability to receive a topic and get started without follow up questions, teacher guidance or any assistance during the beginning. About three-fourths of the class regarded themselves as self-starters while the rest said they struggled getting started. All in all, it was made obvious through the pre-survey and pre-interview that the majority of my students did not like writing.

Teacher Guided Writing

The benefit of teacher-guided instruction during the writing process was the first theme I identified throughout this teacher research study. During the first week of my study the students had just finished reading two short stories in ELA, “The Finish of Patsy Barnes” and “The Drummer Boy of Shiloh”. I wanted to study the motivation of my students when guided at the start of writing by a teacher. Also, in the beginning survey many of my students claimed to dislike writing about what they read, therefore I also wanted to see how they responded to this type of writing task. The essay they were assigned to write was comparing the two main characters within these two short stories, Patsy and Joby. I passed out a pre writing graphic organizer and together we broke down what needed to be included in each paragraph of the essay. I used an enlarged version of the pre-writing sheet that I handed out. My sheet was on a large anchor chart in the front of the room.

During this prewriting process the students were engaged and interactive. Alice continually had up her hand to add her input, as per usual. However, during this class prewriting discussion Jennifer, Fred, Sierra and Bob all contributed to our prewriting paper. Jennifer raised her hand and said, “At the beginning, we should mention the two story titles.” I told her that was an excellent place to start and then asked, “What else

should be included within the first paragraph?” She wasn’t sure what to put next. I asked the class if anyone could elaborate on Jennifer’s beginning thought. “I guess we should mention that the two boys went through hardships and stuff,” Sierra called out. I reminded Sierra to raise her hand but thanked her for the additional input. I proceeded to write the students ideas on the large anchor chart and they wrote at their seats. Bob continually forgot that he needed to write it down so I continued to refocus him.

Next, we proceeded to decide what our three body paragraphs needed to consist of and what order they should be placed in. Fred raised his hand and mentioned how time and place really affected the characters. Alice elaborated on that topic and we added a few details to our prewriting organizer. The students came to the conclusion that the next paragraph should talk about the boys’ motivations and conflicts. I added that they might want to mention the “outside forces that affected the characters” because that was one of our literary topics this week. We finally completed the prewriting sheets. I looked around the room and noticed that Bob and Fred did not include every detail that students added to the anchor chart. The girls all took rapid notes on what we were writing, besides Suzy who had trouble keeping up. However, the boys wrote very little and when I asked why Fred responded, “We can just look up there on your chart”.

The next day the students began writing their essays using the prewriting starter as a guide. Many of the students pulled out their laptop and sat there for a few minutes, not sure where to start. Alice, Shanay and Sierra started typing right away. I found that Suzy, Bob and Fred needed my assistance to get started on the first paragraph. In some cases they were just looking for approval and in other circumstances they needed me to guide them into a first sentence.

Fred: I don't get it.

Me: Well what is the assignment?

Fred: I don't know. We are comparing the characters I guess.

Me: Exactly, so to start yourself off you just need to start writing about any of these topics we wrote on our prewriting sheet. You can worry about adding a hook later. Right now just write about one of these.

Fred started typing, "The main characters in these two stories were..."

I went over to Bob and he asked me if his first sentence was good. I nodded and he continued typing. Suzie wanted to know how to indent and then questioned how to double space. I showed her and helped her gather her thoughts for the first two sentences. Once she got started she continued typing on her own. They were now all typing their essays. Although these three students had a little trouble getting started more students than usual got started on their own right away after being walked through the prewriting. This showed me the benefits of prewriting in helping reluctant writers get started.

Presenting Writing Assignments

The classroom door was closed and the front lights were dimmed. Sandy was in front of the smart board reading her narrative writing essay. I stood in the back of the room as I watched her share her writing with the class. Displayed on the smart board throughout her presentation were different pictures on a PowerPoint slideshow. She confidently switched the slides when she was reaching a new element of the plot within her story. Sandy's slideshow allowed for background visuals to be displayed as she was reading her narrative. It also strengthened her excitement and confidence in presenting her narrative to the class. As she read, she loses her place, accidentally repeats one line

and mispronounces a word. Yet she keeps reading with a smile on her face and all eyes on her. When she is finished the entire class claps and the discussion begins. Sandy stays up front as her classmates share a few things she needs to improve on and what she did well in her essay and the presentation of it.

After this discussion Sandy takes her seat and five hands go up instantly. “Can I go next?” a few students beg. The students sat anxiously at their desks, their essays and disk drives neatly placed on top of their desks. They have been preparing their narratives for one week and were more than excited that it is finally time to share. These were a few of the behaviors I saw in my eighth grade classroom during writing presentation days while implementing my study. The students were not always enthusiastic about writing during my study and often times they questioned the purpose of the assignment.

During the writing process they struggled through getting started, editing and revising. However, when it came time to prepare how they would share their stories with their classmates, they couldn’t control their excitement. They decided that visuals were a necessity and many of my students came to the conclusion that PowerPoint would be the easiest way to add to the oral presentation of their essay. During this study there were many times when they did not have the opportunity to present. Knowing that they were going to share their writing pieces with the class motivated them to get through the writing process because they were excited for the end result, presenting it to their class. Not only was this proven through teacher observation but also in their grade averages. The class grade average was always higher on presented writing assignments.

The Writing Process

When I introduced the narrative writing assignment I started off with a lesson on character development. I gave sample sentences from popular books like *Fault in Our Stars*, *Divergent*, *Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter* and *The Giver*. These sentences were carefully selected from each book because they revealed some sort of character characteristic. I had the students discuss and identify the way the authors of these books decided to share character details in a way that created interest and excitement. After the initial lesson, students got into groups, received a bag of props and a character questionnaire. Using the items in the bag, students had to complete the character questionnaire and then present their character to the class. The students loved this lesson and really grasped the concept of building a character before beginning to write a fictional narrative.

At the beginning of this assignment students were so excited. They were so excited that they were given the chance to create any type of story they wanted. Bob decided he would write an alien narrative. Two of my students, Fred and Shanay decided to write about their alter egos as celebrity basketball stars. They decided that their characters would be best friends in each of their stories. Alice was the first one to begin typing and it seemed as if her fingers could not keep up with the pace of her mind. Sandy asked for help coming up with an idea and after careful consideration decided to write her narrative in diary style and in all different years. Towards the middle stages of this assignment students became less focused and claimed to be finished before they even reread their narratives. It was a big challenge trying to get them proofread, edit and revise. I wasn't sure how to motivate them to work towards improving what they already wrote. I would sit one-on-one with students and demonstrate how to read and make their

writing better. However, they complained that this took too much effort and said that their narratives were “good enough”. At the end of this assignment the students’ excitement came back while they planned and presented their narratives to the class. However, I still struggled on how I could explain the importance of becoming better writers beginning with the process of editing and revising.

Collaborative Narrative Writing

The students entered the classroom and I announced that they were going to do a collaborative writing assignment. “What’s that?” questioned Fred. I explained to him that it is when you write with a group or a partner. Fred and Shanay looked at each other and visually agreed to be partners. Sandy, Sam and Jennifer quickly formed a group of three. Alice looked puzzled and quickly raised her hand to ask, “Do we have to work with a partner?” I explained that for this writing assignment everyone needed to work with at least one other person. I explained that they were to create a Thanksgiving narrative with their group. Their eyes showed uncertainty as they began to get out their laptops, papers, pencils and talk in their groups. It was clear that the students were thrown off by the broad topic they were given and the fact that this was a group assignment.

Alice’s group, made up of Sierra and Suzy, quickly designated Alice to type the story. Sierra began to give ideas to Alice. Alice thought about Sierra’s ideas, processed them and then using Sierra’s thought would respond, “Okay, we can say it like this...” This group seemed to be off to a good start, but Suzy did not seem to be giving many ideas or input. Fred and Shanay were on a laptop laughing about the silly story they had verbally written. As Shanay started to type, Fred corrected any errors he saw along the way, usually very obvious ones. Jennifer, Sandy and Sam had out a piece of paper and a

pencil. They decided to write it by hand first and then type it. The three girls in this group were taking turns writing and sharing ideas. Ava, Bob and Al were arguing at the back table. “We have a conflict!” Bob exclaimed. I took a seat at their table and sighed, “What is the issue?” Ava responded, “We can’t agree on anything!” “I questioned what the group had written down so far. “What we have makes no sense” she murmured. I proceeded to tell them to try and work it out because they must complete this by the end of the period.

While observing the collaborative writing assignment I had many students working beautifully together, they happen to all be girls. The groups with boys seemed to struggle in agreeing on what they were writing. While they were writing Sandy asked, “Are we going to have to present these?” I got an idea of something I had been wondering about how presentation effects writing motivation. “Do you *want* to present these? I asked. “Yes, ours is awesome” she responded. “Yeah” said Sierra, “Can we present?” she asked. The rest of the class heard our conversation and many eyes turned to face me, as if to ask the same question. I told them that they would present their narratives after lunch during our writing plus period. All of a sudden, heads turned toward their groups and the writing seemed to become more intense. “Okay, well if we are going to present we need to make sure the ending makes sense.” Shanay told Fred. Various groups gained some sense of urgency and excitement about this writing assignment after I announced that they would be presenting. However, the group with Ava, Al and Bob had the opposite reaction, “We have to present?” questioned Ava “we only have one sentence.” I told them yes and all of a sudden Al’s head dropped to his

desk as he let out a giant sigh. They refocused and worked towards completing one paragraph so that they would have something to present.

After the students presented I asked them what they thought about this assignment. Many students said that they liked working with a group but it was hard to make sure everyone agreed. Fred and Shanay mentioned their narrative writing and how they worked together while planning but then wrote their own stories. They said that they preferred this method of collaboration better because they could change things they wanted to while still getting ideas off each other. Upon hearing this a few other students agreed. I handed out another questionnaire for the students to answer about this collaborative assignment.

Through the questionnaire I learned that some students struggled with this assignment because of its broad topic and collaborative component. Many mentioned that it would have been easier if they all came up with a basic idea, but then all wrote their own essays. Sandy, Sierra and Sam all stated that they loved this assignment because it was easy to write in a group. I noticed that this form of collaboration made the task easier for some students and harder for others. However, all students said that they liked some sort of collaboration within the writing process because it helped them widen their thoughts and strengthen their ideas. This assignment and the student responses showed me that collaborative writing helps motivate most students through the writing process. However, they must have the independent component too in order to improve their individual writing and avoid one person doing all the work. It also proved that when students know they are going to have to share they work much harder and take greater pride in the writing they produce.

No Technology Writing

At my school each student is assigned a laptop that he or she carries around all day and uses when needed in any subject. Since this is my first year teaching at this school it did not occur to me that maybe students weren't used to typing all their writing assignments in previous years of English Language Arts. When I was creating my research study on middle school writing motivation it never occurred to me that there is a significant difference between a student's writing motivation when handwriting and typing. However, while doing this study and talking with content area teachers throughout the school I soon saw the need to investigate the difference.

The students had just finished reading two texts, "A Glow in the Dark" and "Up the Slide". I usually assess them through a multiple-choice assessment and an open-response. In the past, I have always had them type the open-response. Today I told them they must write it by hand. Suzy was relieved because her typing skills are not nearly up to eighth grade standards. She constantly struggled in completing tasks on time because of her slow typing. Samantha and Fred were also thrilled that they got to handwrite. Shanay, Bob, Al, Sierra, Sandy, Fred and Ava were not happy about writing the old fashioned way. Alice and Linda did not seem to care either way.

As the students wrote I observed that they seemed to forget basic mechanics like indentation and spacing. When I reminded them they would say, "Oh yeah" and quickly fix their mistake. Towards the end many they got stuck on what else to say and add. They then became annoyed and frustrated that they couldn't move around sentences and change the beginning sentence as easily as when they type it. Many did not take their time or put as much effort into their writing as they would normally do when they type it.

At the end of the writing assignment we discussed their experiences. I then handed out a few questions for them to answer. This no computer writing task showed me how students' quality of writing can differ when handwriting it and typing it. It also showed that the two students that were not confident with technology gained greater motivation when they were told to handwrite the assignment. Their lack of confidence with technology directly correlates to the lack of confidence I have been seeing in their writing when typing. Yet for the most part, students were less anxious and motivated when they had to write it by hand. This shows that technology is definitely a strong contributor to my students' writing motivations.

Allowing for Choice

During the last week of my study the students were beginning their Holocaust research assignments in English Language Arts. This particular assignment is always dread by students and in the past I have been told that they do not put very much effort in it. In the past, they have been assigned a specific topic but this year the social studies teacher and I decided to let them choose their topics off a list. I announced to the students that today we were beginning out research paper. I heard numerous moans and groans throughout the room. I then proceeded to hand out the list of options. The atmosphere began to feel a bit more relaxed. The boys started talking about the "killing squads" and the "medical experiment" topics. The girls started discussing the "daily life in the camps" and "children of the Holocaust" options. The room was not exactly excited but they weren't bored or disinterested either. I told students that today they could begin crossing off topics they absolutely didn't want and putting stars next to the topics they might want.

I told them to use the Internet to research a little bit and that topics were to be selected by the end of the week.

On Friday, students came in with their topics selected. I demonstrated the first step of the research paper, which was the thesis statement. I demonstrated how to write a thesis statement and gave two examples of various Holocaust related thesis statements. Three students jumped right onto their computers and jotted down the first thing that came to their head. Many others had no idea where to begin. Some students tried copying the examples and revamping them to work towards their topic. This is only the beginning of the research project but from the observations I collected students are going to need a lot of teacher support in this process. However, by giving students choices in their topics, they were much more willing to begin this research paper process.

Grand Discussion

During the last day of my teacher research I had one final grand discussion about the various writing assignments completed throughout the last four weeks. I asked the students what their favorite assignment was and they all said that the narrative assignment was their favorite. Not one person disagreed. I questioned them on the reason this assignment was their favorite and I got a lot of the same answers.

Me: Why did you like this assignment the best?

Linda: It was fun presenting it to the class.

Alice: I liked seeing the class reactions when I read the ending.

Me: Did your level of excitement about the assignment change at all while writing?

Shanay: Well, at the beginning I was really excited. That feeling lasted a while but then I got annoyed when I had to edit.

Me: Why didn't you want to edit this piece and make it better?

Shanay: Well I mean, I already thought it was pretty good.

Me: Did you think you could make it better?

Shanay: Well yeah but I just didn't feel like it.

Al: When I write my stories they are like a child to me and they shouldn't be perfect, they should be mine. I hate when people judge my writing.

Me: Okay, well I think it's very hard to make a story perfect the first time. That's why we go back to catch our mistakes, make additions, edit and make it even better, right?

Sierra: I see what Al means though. If I didn't catch the mistake the first time, I am not going to catch it the second time.

Me: I see your perspective. However, I know personally that when I am typing or writing my thoughts are moving faster than my fingers. That makes it very easy for me to make a mistake. Do ever experience this?

Sierra: Yeah sometimes I read what I wrote and get confused because I didn't write what I meant to.

Alice: When I write, I take pride in my writing. If it's not good, it's not mine. I take my time and reread every few sentences to make sure I am saying what I want to say, exactly how I want to say it.

Me: Alice, that's a great way to monitor your writing during the process. Everyone's different though, right? Some of us like to edit as we go and others like to do it every paragraph or even at the very end. So why is it important to make our writing even better?

Sandy: I just hate editing. I really hate it and think it's stupid.

Shanay: I agree. I wish you could just do it for us.

Me: Okay, well what if I did that. I took your initial rough draft and I edited and revised it completely for you.

Linda: That would be awesome.

Me: Then you would receive it back and it might not be at all what you had in mind. I might add things you didn't want and changed things you wanted to keep. Would this writing still yours?

Alice: No, it is not.

Sandy: I mean I am fine with that.

Me: But then it's no longer your writing. It is not longer your piece of art.

At that very moment, a light bulb went off in my mind. I am not quite sure where it came from or why it made such an impact, but it did. I realized that every single student in this class loved music. I had a few students who were really into bands like: The Beatles, The Doors and Nirvana. I had another group who were into the alternative rock scene and really lived for the new hip bands such as: Bring Me the Horizon, My Chemical Romance and Sleeping with Sirens. Regardless of the type of music they listened to, they all listened and they all loved music. This is where my next conversation topics came into play, I was going to relate the writing process to the song writing process. As obvious as the similarities may seem to an adult, the similarities are not so obvious to eighth grade adolescents who see school as a job and music as an outlet.

Me: Does Bring Me the Horizon hand over their song to the producer and say, "do whatever you want, here's my rough draft?"

Sandy: No, they're not sell outs.

Jennifer: It wouldn't be their song anymore and they'd have to put other co writers on their album.

Me: And doesn't an audience really appreciate when a song is written by the artist?

Shanay: Yeah, it makes it better.

Ava: It makes it more meaningful.

Me: Ah ha. Okay and when Taylor Swift, Bring me the Horizon, The Beatles and other artists sit down and write songs those songs as not recorded and put onto iTunes the next day, are they?

Jennifer: No, they have to make it better.

Me: Hmm they have to make it better. How do they do that?

Ava: By playing it a few times to see if they want to change some words or the beat.

Alice: They probably want to add other instruments too.

Me: So if our favorite bands and artists are not perfect the first time, why do we expect to be?

Sandy: Ms. Mahoney, stop making sense. My mind is blown.

Ava: That's actually a good point.

Samantha: Yeah, we have to like add some lead guitar, violin and bass.

Me: Exactly. We have to sing it again or reread so that we can make sure the words we wrote are giving off the affect we want them to. Then, we need to add the instruments the things that make a good song or writing assignment go from good to great.

Sierra: You forgot to mention drums. Drums are like the flow of your writing. You can't have a great song without drums.

Me: (laughing) Yes, we must add those drums.

Shanay: Yeah, this was your brilliant analogy Ms. Mahoney. So don't forget about the drums.

This conversation turned out to be a huge piece in this teacher-research study and the way I believe middle school students are motivated best because of it. I realized that middle school students need those collaborative conversations to make sense out of their writing and gain insight. I also gathered data that reflects the importance of explaining why they need to become better writers and why editing and revising are necessary in that process. The truth is my students are smart; they can't be tricked into being motivated. They must gain their intrinsic motivation somehow, through something. Alice has gained this motivation through reading and aspiring to write like her favorite authors. However, many of my students are now avid readers and have developed their writing motivations differently. Some students are motivated because they want their voice to be heard. For a few select students in my English Language Arts class this motivation came through looking up to their favorite bands and artists, while aspiring to go through the writing process the same way as they would while writing a song.

Post-Surveys and Post-Interviews

When I administered the post-survey and post-interview I did not receive many changes in student responses. For the most part, at the end of this four week study students maintained their same perception of writing. However, I did notice that the post-interview responses were much more detailed and articulated. The students seemed to really have a clear understanding of why it was important to work towards improving their writing through editing and revising. A few select students like Samantha, Sandy and Shanay had a whole new outlook on what it meant to be a good writer and why it was

important to take your time and make improvements. This was made evident when they completed their post-survey responses and post-interviews, even the handwriting was neater. They now understood that writing was like creating a song, they needed to make it the best they could by changing words, format and adding the instruments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the writing motivation of middle school students does vary from student to student. However, through this research study I have learned some of the most beneficial ways to intrinsically motivate students through different writing assignments, analogies, presentation factors and feedback. In the post-survey and interviews students' opinions about writing only changed slightly, but their responses became more in depth and thoughtful. Their post-interviews made it clear that these eighth grade students were much more aware of their writing motivations than they were at the beginning of this research study. They also included a few of the assignments that they completed during the four week study as their favorite writing assignment. I found that students were motivated through sharing writing with their classmates, providing each other with feedback and relating writing to music. Students' motivation is directly correlated to their need in knowing that their writing matters. They need to know that their writing tasks have a purpose. Without this relevance, why should they be motivated to become better writers? However, by identifying and developing the relevance in what they write most students will work towards becoming a better writer. As discussed in Chapter four, I sorted and categorized my data sources (surveys, questionnaires, discussions, interviews, writing samples and teacher-research journal) and then identified key data to report. A look across all data sources seems to suggest a variety of themes that occur throughout

the research study including the benefits of collaboration, the excitement in presenting and the benefit of feedback, which will be analyzed and discussed in chapter four.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Implications

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, “How do I motivate middle school students to become better writers?” As I sorted and categorized my data sources (surveys, questionnaires, discussions, interviews, writing samples and teacher-research journal) I identified key data to report. A look across all data sources seems to suggest a variety of themes that occur throughout the research study. These include the benefits of collaboration, the excitement in sharing writing with visual presentations, the correlation between motivation and achievement, and the benefit of teacher and student feedback during the writing process.

Revisiting the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and discover ways in which teachers can motivate middle school students to become better writers. I collected data using surveys, interviews, questionnaires, writing samples and my teacher research journal. This data showed me that specific writing motivation was different for all students, but through the data I collected I found many patterns within my small class of eighth graders. My data was collected over a four week time period in which students were given various writing assignments during their English Language Arts class. As discussed in Chapter four, I sorted and categorized my data sources (surveys, questionnaires, discussions, interviews, writing samples and teacher-research journal) and then identified key data to report. A look across all data sources seems to suggest a variety of themes

that occur throughout the research study including the benefits of collaboration, the excitement in presenting and the benefit of feedback.

Conclusions

As discussed in chapter four, I found that collaboration and conversation is a key component in student writing success. Students become especially motivated when they are able to share their ideas before writing. This helps them build excitement for the task and also broaden their perspectives and ideas for the assignment. It is that social aspect that helps build motivation in middle school aged students. The presentation component is also contributed to students' motivations. When students knew that they were going to present their writing assignment they worked to making it even better. They wanted to get positive feedback and reactions from their classmates so they took pride in their work. Students also knew that their writing mattered and had a purpose when they were given the opportunity to present.

Also, I found that writing motivation is a key contributor to student writing success. William McDougall (2003) observed that every human is created to seek, to strive for, and to desire certain goals and the attainment of which goals satisfies the desire that moves us. I discovered the importance of taking the time to create that desire before beginning a writing task. The extra time spent increasing students motivation towards that assignment will make all the difference. When students were motivated to complete a writing assignment they put forth more effort, enjoyed what they were writing and therefore scored much better. During the writing assignments that students thought were pointless and were reluctant to write, they did not score as high. This is caused by their lack of pride in their writing, during these assignments they did not proofread, edit or

revise. This data correlation demonstrated the link between writing academic success and writing motivation.

In the same way, technology is a huge contributor to students' writing motivation. When most students use a laptop to type they feel a sense of empowerment and importance. Students also feel a sense of freedom while typing because they have the ability to backspace, add and edit that they do not necessarily have as easily when they are writing with a paper and pencil. It also gives them the freedom to begin in the beginning, middle or end because they can always change things around through a simple copy and paste.

Nancie Atwell (2002) stated that teachers should provide students with a structured environment for writing that includes flexibility and choice. Giving student choice for their Holocaust research study did just this. The list of topics that they got to choose from was organized to fit into the general idea but allowed students to focus on what they were the most interested in. The students knew the expectations and basic format for this research study but are given options. Students also must present their research paper's topic in a very flexible way using whatever presentation methods they want. While the environment was structured, students had flexibility within the writing tasks.

Last, I discovered something I did not expect to. I discovered an analogy for writing as it is linked to music. Through connecting the writing process to the song writing process I was able to relate to my students and create a sense of relevance in their writing. I explained that when their favorite bands and artists write they don't just hand the producers the rough draft, they make it the best it can be. Students understood that in

order to make their writing the best it can be they needed to use stronger words, edit the structure and add the “instruments” otherwise known as figurative language. Adolescence is a period of difficulty, confusion and problems. “Just as academics start to get complex, school is the last thing on their minds” (Bong, 2004, p.290). By connecting and relating writing to the things that are the most relevant in adolescent minds we will help students’ motivation increase.

Therefore, while looking through my teacher research journal, student surveys, writing samples and student interviews I found that middle school writing motivation is fostered through collaborative components, presentation opportunities, classroom discussions and choice. Most importantly, I found that for a majority of reluctant adolescents writers, motivation must be recreated during the introduction of a new writing assignment. Creating this instant motivation will increase students’ writing achievement, gain a positive response and increase overall motivation in the long run.

Limitations

There were two main limitations in this study. The first was time. I conducted the study in four weeks when this study should take place over the span of an entire school year for the most accurate results and conclusions. There were also limitations in the amount of time I had to conduct the interviews. Therefore, I had to conduct these interviews on paper instead of face-to-face. For more descriptive results I would have liked to interview each student after each writing task, one-on-one. This would have helped me build a better idea of their thoughts and asked specific follow-up questions to gain further insight. Most teacher research studies are conducted within at least six weeks in order to gain more accurate results and data. Also, I used a sample size of twelve

eighth grade students. In order to achieve a more detailed view on middle school writing motivation a larger sample size including various grade levels should have been used.

Implications for the Field

After analyzing the data I collected throughout the study in order to draw conclusions about middle school writing motivation, I found that there were certain areas that could be further investigated. One area in particular would be how the data results would change over a much longer period of time. Teacher researchers who plan to conduct similar research in their classrooms would likely benefit from designing such a study to span an entire marking periods or even an entire school year. This would allow for a more in depth look at each type of writing and students' motivation towards them. It would also allow for the possibility to explore more individual motivation and how students' diverse backgrounds impact motivation.

Another implication for future researchers is the age of the students who participate in the study as subjects. I only used eighth grade students but in all reality multiple middle school ages should have been researched within this study. While eighth graders are an excellent age group, they are not the only age group in a middle school. All students need to build writing motivation in order to be successful in their future and develop their writing skills. This study can give teachers ideas and set them up for successful data-driven instruction that will benefit students' writing needs. Additionally, this could provide parents with instructional strategies and information that may benefit their writing motivation in every area of their lives.

This study could also be improved by providing parents with more opportunities to provide their input into their child's past and current writing motivations. This would

allow the teacher to get extended background knowledge for each individual student in order to draw further conclusions and make more connections. Parents and teachers working together can always benefit students' academic success.

Remaining Questions

I would like to look closer at the connection between presentation and feedback in students' writing motivation and success. During this study I found that when students knew they were going to present their writing to the class they were much more driven to do a good job. Also, they worked harder because they wanted to get positive feedback from their classmates. Jasmine and Weiner (2007) state that by talking about their writing with the teacher and their peers, students are able to create fully developed stories. I found that while taking part in conversations about their writing students were able to elaborate and complete writing assignments more successfully. I also came to the conclusion that students are extremely impacted by the feedback that they receive from peers and teachers. However, I would be curious to see if writing for authentic audiences would increase middle school writing motivation even more. I am curious as to how their efforts make increase if they were to write to an editor, blog or community organization. Similarly, the question remains, how much does presenting and discussing a writing piece affect a middle school student's motivation and how might writing to authentic audiences improve their motivation?

Conclusion

I found that writing motivation is a key contributor to student writing success. William McDougall (2003) observed that every human is created to seek, to strive for, and to desire certain goals and the attainment of which goals satisfies the desire that moves us. I discovered the importance of taking the time to create that desire before beginning a writing task. The extra time spent increasing students motivation towards that assignment will make all the difference. When students were motivated to complete a writing assignment they put forth more effort, enjoyed what they were writing and therefore scored much better. During the writing assignments that students thought were pointless and were reluctant to write, they did not score as high. This is caused by their lack of pride in their writing, during these assignments they did not proofread, edit or revise. This data correlation demonstrated the link between writing academic success and writing motivation. All in all, when middle school students are motivated and excited to write, they produce much better work and it is a more enjoyable experience for all.

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Appendix A

Pre-Survey

Directions: Respond honestly by checking off one box for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Writing is my best subject.					
I like writing.					
I like writing fictional text.					
I like writing non-fictional text.					
I get high grades in writing.					
I am a good writer.					
I put forth a lot of effort in my writing.					
I like to write about what I read.					
I like to work with others during writing.					
I like using technology in writing.					
I participate in class writing discussions.					
I like writing in other classes.					

Appendix B

Pre-Interview

Describe a writing project you were involved in that really excited you? How long did that feeling last?

Tell me about a time when you willingly volunteered to write. Why were you so interested in this specific task?

Tell me about a hurdle which got in the way of achieving an ambitious writing goal. How did you go about overcoming it?

Tell me about a writing goal you achieved which at some points seemed hopeless? Why did you keep going on?

Can you tell me at least three things you have done in the last year to improve your writing?

Would you regard yourself as a self-starter in writing? Can you give me a recent example where you displayed this quality?

Appendix C

Post-Assignment Questionnaire

What grade did you receive on this writing assignment?

What was your favorite part?

What do you think was your greatest strengths on this assignment?

What do you think was your greatest weakness on this assignment?

What did you learn from this piece of writing?

What do you intend to do in the next draft?

What surprised you in the draft?

Where is this piece of writing taking you?

What do you like best in the piece of writing?

What questions do you have of me?

Appendix D

Post-No Computer Questionnaire

What was your favorite part?

How did your writing quality differ compared to when you type your writing?

What do you think was your greatest strengths on this assignment?

What do you think was your greatest weakness on this assignment?

What did you learn from this writing assignment?

What do you intend to do in the next draft?

Do you prefer typing or hand writing? Why?

Appendix E

Post-Survey

Directions: Respond honestly by checking off one box for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Writing is my best subject.					
I like writing.					
I like writing fictional text.					
I like writing non-fictional text.					
I get high grades in writing.					
I am a good writer.					
I put forth a lot of effort in my writing.					
I like to write about what I read.					
I like to work with others during writing.					
I like using technology in writing.					
I participate in class writing discussions.					
I like writing in other classes.					

Appendix F

Post-Interview

Describe a writing project you were involved in that really excited you? How long did that feeling last?

Tell me about a time when you willingly volunteered to write. Why were you so interested in this specific task?

Tell me about a hurdle which got in the way of achieving an ambitious writing goal. How did you go about overcoming it?

Tell me about a writing goal you achieved which at some points seemed hopeless? Why did you keep going on?

Can you tell me at least three things you have done in the last year to improve your writing?

Would you regard yourself as a self-starter in writing? Can you give me a recent example where you displayed this quality?