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# I want to read because...reading motivation in a first grade classroom

Laurie Ann Powell

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**I WANT TO READ BECAUSE...  
READING MOTIVATION IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM**

by  
Laurie Ann Powell

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
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at  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Valarie Lee

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Laurie Ann Powell

## **Abstract**

Laurie Ann Powell  
I WANT TO READ BECAUSE...  
READING MOTIVATION IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM  
2014  
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Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purposes of this study were to determine what makes first grade students motivated to read, which best practices motivated first graders to read, and can first graders say what motivates them to read. The study lasted for thirteen days and all instruction was based on a goal-oriented weather unit. The study was divided into five phases. Each of the first four phases lasted for three days and during each phase a different best practice was put into place. The best practices were student choice, hands-on activities, the use of high interest texts, and peer collaboration. On the final day of the study all of these best practices were used in conjunction with each other. After triangulating the data, it was found that a goal-oriented unit motivates students, first-graders struggle to express what motivates them to read, and the teacher can be a motivating factor. In conclusion, teachers should use goal-oriented units, while interacting with their students in a constructive and supportive way in order to increase student motivation. Students should also be allowed to interact with their peers and teachers in order to show motivation and engagement.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Sometimes I wonder why did I always want to be a teacher? There is a video of me at my pre-school graduation and in this video I get up in front of the audience of family and friends and I say loud and proud, “When I grow up I want to be a teacher.” I never looked back after that. There were times I debated whether I would want to teach high school Math or if I did belong in the elementary setting, but I knew I would never do anything else. I spent much of my time in elementary school having teachers tell me I would be a teacher and one even told me I would be her principal. It was an idea that I embraced and never looked back on.

It took me a year after graduating college to get my first teaching job. At my first job I was a Title I teacher where I worked with students who were struggling in Reading, Writing, and Math and helped these students in a small group setting. Though at first I was sad that I was not a classroom teacher who got tons of gifts at Christmas and the end of the year, had a grade level to collaborate with, and a curriculum to follow, I quickly realized in my two years in that position I was gaining more teaching experiences than some teachers will in a lifetime. I was working with the most needy students in my building. These were the students who needed me to not only teach them about what they needed to learn to pass their next test, these students needed to be taught what was going on all around them, since no one else would. I did not have a curriculum to follow, but I was able to develop my own lessons that were interesting for the students and really met the students’ needs. I might not have had a grade level to plan with, but the most

influential part of this job was I worked closely with the reading specialist and reading coach in the building. These two women lead me to want to become a reading specialist.

Both of these women did extraordinary work with their students and colleagues. Everyone respected them and wanted their students to work with them. I had a new goal. I wanted to become a reading specialist and be as good at my job as they were, so I would be the person people wanted their children to come work with, a person they knew they could trust to help their students. I wanted to go back to school in order to have the skills to become like these women.

Thinking about this also helps me to answer that first question, why did I always want to be a teacher? I think the answer is that I wanted to be able to help people, while working closely with others. Yes, even as a kid I thought summers off would be wonderful (and they are), but there was more. I realized that as a teacher I could help others to learn, which is something I love to do. When I decided to become a reading specialist I realized I could take my lifelong goal of working with others to help people learn and I could go out and learn how not only to help children to become better readers, but how I could also help my fellow teachers to become better teachers. It was time to pursue this new goal.

### **Story of the Question**

The last step before I could become a reading specialist was completing a teacher research project. This was something that to be honest, had me quite terrified. I was unsure of what my research would be about and how would I collect all of this data and how was I going to find time to do all of it. I slowly realized that I actually always did forms of teacher research. Whenever I give a test I look for patterns in questions that



students get wrong and reflect back on how the topic of that question was taught in the unit or what wording did I use when explaining it and was it similar to the test. I think about why a lesson worked or did not work and try to recall what the students were saying and doing along with what I was saying and doing in order to figure out how and why everything happened the way it did. I realized this was now a chance for me to do things I already did everyday in a more formal matter.

I started to think about my new class of twenty-three first graders whom I had only known for about three weeks and thought about if there was anything I really wanted to know about them and literacy. So far I had realized they were a smart group of students with almost all of them reading where they were supposed to be for the beginning of first grade. I thought about fluency instruction and how that was an area of my teaching I felt needed improvement. I considered doing something with the integration of nonfiction texts in order to meet the standards of the Common Core. I considered doing a study about new literacies as I am highly interested in new literacies in general, but then after listening to presentations at class I realized there were so many more options out there then I had originally thought.

The presentations at class talked much about the fact that research can also have a tie in to social justice. All of the ideas I had about using new literacy in a classroom did not seem like they would have that lasting of an effect on my students. I wanted to do something that I felt would at least have a long-term effect on the teaching decisions I made and on my students' future as readers.

I started to think about one student in my class who views himself as a poor reader and doesn't really enjoy school, which is very different from many of my other

first graders. Even when thinking about research questions involving new literacies, I knew I had wanted to also look at Guthrie's theory of motivation and engagement. I started to think about how I could somehow use this theory to help motivate, not just this one student, but also my whole class. I feel that making sure students leave first grade with not only the skills they need to read successfully, but also an actual desire or motivation to read is very important. We all know it is only going to get harder for the students as they move throughout the grades and by figuring out what makes first-graders motivated to read I could use this to help my students to develop a desire to read.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to determine what motivates first graders to read and if there are some best practices that are more motivating for first graders than other practices. This study is based on John T. Guthrie's theory of motivation and engagement, which first appeared in *Reading Engagement: Motivating Readers Through Integrated Instruction* (1997), which he co-authored with Allan Wigfield. This book described Guthrie's theory of motivation and presented research on the effects motivation has on reading achievement. In 2004 Guthrie published an article in which he analyzed the current research and shared "instructional practices for reading engagement in the classroom" (p. 11). These practices will be used throughout the study in order to see which practices work best with first-graders in order for the students to become more motivated to read. Providing choice, using a goal-oriented unit, hands-on activities, high interest texts, and collaboration are all explained and examples are given of ways in which these practices could be used within the classroom (Guthrie, 2004).

The practices of providing choice, completing hands-on activities, reading high interest texts, and allowing students to collaborate with peers are all things I typically try to do, but I had not thought of them before in connection to the motivation of a student. I wanted to gather data on the roles each of these best practices could have in a first grade classroom and see if any of these practices work better than the rest or if a combination of all the practices through the use of a goal-oriented unit would be the most effective.

Motivation in reading became a research topic because researchers started to ask the question, if students know many strategies that will help them to read, why do “students choose (or [do] not choose) to use strategies they have learned for reading” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 4). Early researchers also stated that when students read more the students’ reading achievement increased. It is important to do more research on motivation because motivation is directly related to the engagement of a reader. As with anything, the more motivated you are to do it the more engaged you are and usually this leads to enjoyment. If students are unmotivated and thus unengaged, and then do not have any interest in reading when they are only in first grade, how can these students be expected to read and learn as they reach the higher grade levels. In looking at the research that was available on motivation in reading there were some studies conducted exclusively with first graders, while other studies worked with older students, but had aspects related to motivation in reading that would be relevant across any grade levels.

Coddington and Guthrie (2009) worked with first grade students and teachers in order “to compare teacher and student perceptions of motivation for reading” (p. 1). The authors also raise questions about how students and teachers view a child’s motivation in different ways and they looked at the differences between boys’ and girls’ reading

motivation. Though this was a study conducted with first graders, nothing specific was reported about what makes a first grader motivated to read.

A study conducted by Wigfield et al. (2008) entitled *Role of Reading Engagement in Mediating Effects of Reading Comprehension Instruction on Reading Outcomes*, looked to see if “engagement practices in classrooms increase reading comprehension” (p. 433). This study looked at fourth-graders’ reading engagement. Many conclusions were made at the end of this study and in thinking about implications for further research Wigfield et al. (2008) determined that, “it is important to study more closely the variety of instructional practices that influence students’ motivation to read during instruction, as well as outside instruction” (p. 444). My study will be doing exactly this. In my research question I want to see what makes first-graders motivated to read.

Wilson & Trainin’s study of first-graders’ motivation in reading, writing, and spelling, (2007) found that “teachers need to be aware of students’ development of literacy self-efficacy” (p. 278). These researchers drew conclusions on the link between motivating a young reader, like a first-grader, and the long-term effects on the way the student views themselves as a reader and any future reading struggles. I want to study the best ways to motivate my young readers in order to instill a lifelong motivation to read.

In reviewing this research, I further realized how important motivation was with reading in a first grade classroom. Guthrie had developed best practices for motivating readers, but I could not find any research that had been done with the use of these specific practices in a first grade classroom. Wigfield et al. (2008) clearly stated that more research was necessary in order to fully determine what practices could be used to motivate readers. The problem of how a lack of motivation to read can have a long-term

effect on a child was very clear and I now knew that I had a clear problem I wanted to solve.

### **Research Problem and Question**

The purpose of this study is to find out more about first grade readers and what makes them motivated to read. Different practices that have been theorized to help motivate readers will be put into practice in my first grade classroom. All of the reading instruction and practices put into place will be developed around a goal-oriented unit. This unit will be about weather. My objectives are: to learn what motivates first graders to read, to develop an understanding of what first-graders think motivates them to read, to learn what effect student choice, hands-on activities, high interest texts, and peer collaboration has on student motivation to read, and to learn if a goal-oriented unit increases student motivation to read.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter two provides a review of the literature on reading motivation, especially in the areas of the definition of motivational theory, the best practices for motivating readers, ways to assess motivation in readers, and the importance of motivating children to read. Chapter three states a brief description of the type of research being conducted, how the study is completed, what data collection tools are used, how the data is analyzed, and a summary of the students with whom I work during the study. Chapter four looks at the data and research and it is analyzed. Finally, chapter five is where conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of the research and data and suggestions for further research is shared.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

When people outside of the field of education think about teaching reading, they probably think about two things. Readers need to know how to read the words and have a basic understanding of what the text is about. Those within the field of education know teaching reading encompasses so much more than this. Many factors go into developing readers who can read the words and comprehend the text. Students need to learn a variety of strategies and skills in order to become readers. These skills must be taught using a variety of reading materials, as every book, magazine, or article is entirely different and a good reader needs to know all of the different ways these skills and strategies can be used. Another major factor that is a part of teaching children how to read is motivation.

Motivation is not exclusive to literacy. People need to find motivation to mow the lawn, go to the food store, or sometimes even get out of bed. How many people on a rainy day say, "I just could not get myself out of bed today." Children, like adults, need to be motivated in order to complete things. This also applies to literacy. A lack of motivation to read can have a negative effect on children's reading abilities. This literature review will synthesize and analysis some of the many articles that are available on motivation and reading.

The literature review will begin by defining motivation theory for literature. Practices that have been used to motivate readers will be examined and ways in which

motivation can be assessed will be discussed. Finally, it will be determined why motivation in reading is something that needs to be studied.

### **Motivation Theory Defined**

John Guthrie and Allan Wigfield are frequent collaborators whose work is continuously cited in any research article about motivation and reading. Before Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) began their research on reading and motivation many people only focused on the cognitive aspects of reading. Motivation in reading started to become a research topic as it was noted that students knew many strategies that would help them to read, but why did “students choose (or [did] not choose) to use strategies they have learned for reading” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 4) and that when students read more their reading achievement increased. Both of these elements were a “question of motivation” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 5). Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) consider many of the themes and principles of motivation and acknowledge that there are many elements to motivation. The importance of motivation to reading achievement is clearly defined.

When reading about motivation the word engagement is found throughout the literature. The word engagement is used in a variety of ways, but Guthrie (2004) notes that engagement has four common meanings. These meanings include: “*time on task*”; “*affect*”, which is defined as “such qualities as enthusiasm, liking and enjoyment”; “cognitive qualities of the reader”; and “activity-based” (p. 3-4). All of these phrases can instantly be linked to the definition of being motivated and the link between engaged readers and motivated readers becomes very clear. The behaviors of an engaged reader can be seen by an observer, who may be looking for engaged and thus motivated readers

(Guthrie, 2004). Making the connection between motivation and engagement is an important aspect of looking at any of the literature on motivation theory. Many researchers, including Guthrie, will use these terms interchangeably and it is important to note that the two terms can be used in similar ways.

Another major part of motivation theory is whether the reader is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Linda Gambrell and Barbara Ann Marinak (1997) compiled a variety of articles and studies in order to define intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation happens when “actions are performed out of interest, and [the] satisfaction that accompanies them” (Gambrell & Marinak, 1997, p. 206). When a reader is intrinsically motivated the reader desires to read without any outside motivation. An extrinsically motivated reader is motivated by “forces outside the individual, it is something that is imposed on the individual” (Gambrell & Marinak, 1997, p. 206). Readers can become extrinsically motivated by verbal praise or feedback or by direct rewards. Verbal praise and feedback, or nontangible incentives, have been found to be motivating to students, while direct rewards, or tangible incentives, have been shown to both increase intrinsic motivation and in cases these incentives have been detrimental to a reader’s ability to intrinsically motivate themselves (Gambrell & Marinak, 1997, p. 207). Gambrell and Marinak (1997) conclude that more research must be done on the use of extrinsic motivation in order to determine on how both tangible and nontangible incentives can affect reading motivation, but it is noted that choice and specific, yet challenging, learning goals are a key factor. Gambrell and Marinak (1997) conclude:

When incentives are linked to the desired behavior and promote engagement in the desired behavior, motivation can become self-determined and can foster high-quality learning. Further, appropriate incentives offered for goal-oriented, challenging reading performance can enhance intrinsic motivation to read. (p.215)



The work of Guthrie is extremely relevant to any discussion of motivation and reading. Guthrie himself has synthesized, analyzed, and discussed much of the research and literature on readers and motivation. After defining motivation theory, engagement, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, it must be determined what practices are used in order to foster motivation.

### **Practices for Motivation**

Many different practices to motivate readers are developed, discussed, and shared within the literature. Many of the aspects of these practices overlap. One of the major practices for motivating readers is Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). CORI was developed in order to:

foster elementary school children's reading comprehension, motivation, and engagement in reading. CORI is a reading comprehension instructional program that integrates science (or social studies) and reading through activities and the use of science books in reading instruction. Students learn a variety of reading strategies documented in the National Reading Panel Report (National Reading Panel, 2000) as being effective for fostering reading comprehension. CORI also includes several instructional practices designed to foster students' engagement model of reading development. (Wigfield et. al., 2008, p.433)

CORI is a model that is based on motivational theory (Wigfield et. al., 2008). Wigfield et. al. (2008) conducted a research study to see if CORI had an effect on engagement with fourth graders. The results concluded "that students experiencing CORI had higher reading comprehension, reading strategy use, and reading engagement than did students experiencing either strategy instruction or traditional reading instruction" (Wigfield et. al., 2008, p. 443). These results show that the CORI model can be successfully used as a way to increase motivation in readers. This study was conducted at the fourth-grade level

and further studies would need to be conducted in order to determine if the CORI model could be successfully applied at other grade levels.

Guthrie (2004) developed five instructional practices for reading engagement in the classroom. These five practices are:

using concept goals in a conceptual theme for reading instruction, affording choices and control to students, providing hands-on activities related to the content goals, using interesting texts of diverse genre for instruction, and organizing collaboration for learning from all texts (Guthrie, 2004, p. 11-12).

All of these practices can be used together (Guthrie, 2004). Using concept goals is also a part of CORI. In all of these practices students are given a clear direction and are allowed to make some of the decisions. The students are allowed to choose what they read and are given opportunities to work with texts in different ways.

Applegate and Applegate (2010) consider the idea of thoughtful literacy as a best practice for motivating readers. Thoughtful literacy is defined as when an answer to a question goes much deeper than where did the story take place, but the reader needs to make a decision or make connections, or “[apply] ideas to new situations” (Applegate & Applegate, 2010, p. 226). Though the study did not determine that “the inclination to respond thoughtfully to text will have an effect on motivation” it was obvious that the “two factors appear to be related” (Applegate & Applegate, 2010, p. 230). Though in this study there was not enough evidence to conclude that readers who are able to give thoughtful response to literature are more motivated, it does open an area of motivational literacy that needs to be studied further. More studies should be done to see if students who are able to make thoughtful responses are motivated readers.

Gambrell (2011) developed the seven rules of engagement. These seven rules are all research-based practices that can be used within the classroom. The rules include:

allowing students to read things relevant to their lives, offering students a variety of materials to read, time is given to read, students are given choice, students can work with others, students are able to be successful with challenging texts, and classroom incentives relate to reading (Gambrell, 2011). The rules of engagement developed by Gambrell clearly align with the five best practices mentioned by Guthrie. Both researchers mention student choice and collaboration. Using all of these elements in conjunction would be another area that could be studied further in order to determine if this would cause a large increase in student motivation.

All of the practices mentioned in this section are meant to motivate readers. Many of these practices can be easily implemented within a classroom and all of the practices are based in research. The practice of thoughtful responses to literature needs to be further researched before it can be determined if it could be used as a practice to foster motivation or if it is just a way motivated readers think. These practices for motivation can be put into place, but now it must be determined how can it be assessed whether the students are motivated or unmotivated?

### **Ways to Assess Motivation in Readers**

In the qualitative research that is going to be conducted, student surveys, questionnaires, and student interviews will be used. In reviewing the literature it was found that studies have been conducted using surveys, questionnaires and interviews in order to assess student motivation. Wilson and Trainin (2007) worked with first grade students in order to assess student motivation and self-efficacy in Reading, Writing, and Spelling. The researchers used the Early Literacy Motivation Survey (ELMS) in order to “examine the relationship between self-influence constructs and the reading, writing, and

spelling achievement of first grade students” (Wilson & Trainin, 2007, p. 259). This was a new survey at the time. The ELMS was designed for use with students in the primary grades, so happy and sad faces were used on the survey (Wilson & Trainin, 2007). The ELMS is one potential survey option for working with young students in order to assess their reading motivation. More studies would need to be found in order to see how the survey was used.

Coddington and Guthrie (2009) also assessed motivation in first grade students. The Young Reader Motivation Questionnaire (YRMQ) was used. The YRMQ was considered research as it was developed. Questions were used as research showed this is easier for the primary students to understand (Coddington & Guthrie, 2009). Students first replied yes or no to the questions and then they were asked if this was something they always or usually did (Coddington and Guthrie, 2009). This questionnaire was research based and gave the researcher time to speak with each of the students involved in the study. This questionnaire was a way of allowing the students to speak for themselves and it was designed with first grade students in mind.

A final way of assessing motivation in reading is having a conversation with students or conducting a student interview. Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) conducted conversational interviews in order to determine what motivated fourth graders to read. The conversational interview portion of the Motivation to Read Profile was used (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). The purpose of this study was for Edmunds and Bauserman to ask the students directly what motivates them to read. This study was conducted with fourth grade students and more research would need to be collected in order to see the effects of student interviews with first grade readers.

When using surveys, questionnaires, student interviews, and other methods of student self-reporting there are possible limitations of these data collection resources. Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzone (1996) developed *The Motivation to Read Profile* (MRP), which was designed for students in second-sixth grade and includes a Reading Survey and a Conversational Interview. The Reading Survey is a self-report and can be administered to a whole class, while the Conversation Interview is completed individually with each student (Gambrell et. al., 1996, p. 519). The MRP is considered reliable and has been validated, but the authors still caution about the use of the MRP since it is a self-report (Gambrell et. al., 1996, p. 531). The authors write:

For example, it is impossible to determine from self-report instruments alone whether or not students actually feel, believe or do the things they report. Even though the elaborate, descriptive information gleaned from the interview can substantiate survey responses to some extent, only careful observation can verify information derived from the MRP. (Gambrell et. al., 1996, p. 531).

When using any self-report it is important to consider the results in conjunction with observation that is conducted by the researcher throughout the study. This is especially important in the field of reading motivation as a student's motivation can even be different depending on the literary task at hand (Gambrell et. al., 1996).

In qualitative research studies, assessing motivation can take the form of student surveys, questionnaires, or student interviews. Each of these forms of assessment allows the teacher to see what the students he or she is working with are really thinking. The researcher is able to follow up with the students in many of these forms of assessments. The researcher must be cautious of not over-relying on these forms of self-reports and observations and other forms of data collection should still be conducted in order to have a full view of the student. Now that a student's motivation to read has been measured, it

must be determined why is it important to use these results and develop motivated readers?

### **The Importance of Motivating Readers**

Reading is much more than just knowing the words and understanding the text. Afferbach, Cho, Byeong, Kim, Crassas, and Doyle (2013) discuss how “students’ reading development is often equated with growth in cognitive strategies and skills” (p. 440). Afferbach et. al. (2013) argue that there are “‘other’ factors: metacognition, engagement and motivation, epistemic beliefs, and self-efficacy, as they interact with strategy and skill, in students’ reading development” (p. 440). Throughout the article, Afferbach et. al. (2013) state how though strategies and skills are important, the four “other factors” also affect how a child reads. A first-grader named Hank was unmotivated to read. His teacher knew that “subtle differences in teacher language can influence children’s motivation” and because of this his teacher used feedback that is positive and is directly related to what Hank was just successful in (Afferbach et. al, 2013, p. 443). Helping Hank to increase his motivation and engagement with reading allowed Hank to further develop his reading strategies and skills. By becoming motivated and engaged the reader has a better chance at success.

Julianne Turner (1997) specifically looked at strategies for engaging young literacy learners. Turner (1997) looked at both open and closed literacy activities. Open activities “are those which students select the literacy process they use or the products they create” and in closed activities “the process to be used or the solution is constrained” (Turner, 1997, p. 185-186). By looking at research and conducting observations, Turner concluded that students can become intrinsically motivated when open activities are used

and the activities being used are appropriately challenging, give the students choice, and students are able to work with their peers (Turner, 1997, p. 198). The conclusions by Turner made within a first grade classroom correlate to the conclusions developed by Guthrie when writing about the best practices for motivation.

Morgan, Fuchs, Compton, Cordray, and Fuchs (2008) conducted a research study in which they asked “Would first-grade children experiencing consistent failure at learning to read report being less motivated than peers experiencing initial and consistent success?” (Morgan et al., 2008, p. 389). The results of this study “suggested[ed] that the reading skills-reading motivation relationship emerge quickly (i.e. by midway into first grade)” (Morgan et. al., 2008, p. 399). It was also concluded that poor readers do have less motivation to read than more skilled readers. This study thoroughly shows the need for more research to be done with first grade students. The results showed that the correlation between poor reading skills and being motivated starts before the end of first grade. By conducting more research on ways to motivate first graders to read, this could help this result to occur less.

## **Conclusion**

The review of the literature focused on defining reading motivation theory, compiling best practices for motivating readers, determining ways to assess motivation, and using research to understand why it is important to further study motivation and reading. The qualitative research study that will be explained in the next chapter will further look at reading motivation in a first grade classroom. After reviewing the literature it is apparent that determining which of the best practices developed by Guthrie to motivate readers is something that has yet to be concluded. The CORI model will also

be used in order to develop a goal-oriented unit around a science concept. Motivation will be assessed using a survey, questionnaire, and student interviews in order for the researcher to have a variety of results as no method of assessing motivation was used in all of the research studies. The researcher will also conduct observations, as self-reports need to be considered in conjunction with other forms of data collection. The researcher will draw a conclusion about which best practice motivated her students the most.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Design/Methodology**

This study will be completed using qualitative research, which is a type of research that is conducted throughout many academic fields. Qualitative research is research that is collected by making observations, interviewing subjects, completing surveys, and researcher reflections through the use of a teacher journal or other note-taking device (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 40). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not include the collection of numerical data in which statistics and other mathematical elements are used. Qualitative research is more objective than quantitative research, since the results are not being interpreted using a formula, but rather the results are being interpreted by the researcher and analyzed based on trends and commonalities in interviews and observations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 40).

A type of qualitative research is teacher research. It can be argued that teacher research takes place everyday in classrooms across the nation. Anytime a teacher makes a note about a student's behavior or academic performance, or reflects on how a lesson went and what could have made the lesson more successful, the teacher is collecting and beginning to analyze data. More formal teacher research is designed around a question or a problem in which the teacher would like to gain more information (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 40). Data is then collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and then shared in a formal report. Other teachers can then use this research in order to develop their own research or practices to be used within their classroom (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 41).

Qualitative teacher research is the type of empirical research that is being used for this study. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study, as the researcher is not collecting any data that needs to be statistically evaluated. The researcher will be using observations, interviews, surveys, and researcher reflection as her main means of collecting data. The study will be conducted in a first grade classroom where students are eager to speak with the researcher. The researcher will be implementing different practices into a classroom and will need to make observations in order to determine which practice worked best with the first grade students. This type of data collection is much more objective and thus is in line with qualitative research. The qualitative research will be in the vein of teacher research. The researcher is the teacher of the subjects of the study. The teacher will be looking at her own practices as she implements the different parts of the study and will need to constantly reflect on the way she presents the new practices and if that had any effect on her research. The teacher will be studying herself as much as her students when she completes her teacher research.

This study is specifically looking at first graders and their motivation towards reading. Four different best practices will be put in to place in order to determine which is the best practice to increase motivation in first grade students. Students will complete a survey before and after the study, four students will be interviewed throughout the study, the teacher will conduct daily observations, and the researcher will keep a teacher researcher's journal. The researcher will need to make close observations throughout the study and she will need to interview students throughout in order to determine which practices are the most successful. Qualitative teacher research is the type of research that

is the best method to use in order to collect data that is accurate and can be easily interpreted in order to determine what practices motivate first graders to read.

### **Procedure of the Study**

Before beginning my study, I had to determine what unit of study my research would be based around. One aspect of my research question is using a goal-oriented unit in order to implement the best practices. I decided to base my goal-oriented unit on weather. Weather is one of the science topics in my district's curriculum. It is a unit that will last well past the length of my study. I also knew that there were a variety of books, hands-on activities, and high interest texts related to the weather unit. I determined that each day the study would begin during my reading mini-lesson. During this time, I would teach a specific reading skill by using a text about weather. The students would also be learning about specific weather topics. The unit would begin with an overview of weather, the water cycle, and then each of the four seasons would be discussed and typical weather characteristics of each season would be studied. Finally, the students would learn about clouds and the day and night sky. After the mini-lesson the students would complete the best practice for that day. I would conduct observations during this time. During the last day of each practice, I would take extra time to interview the four students who I determined would be interviewed throughout the study based on their survey results. The rest of the class would be completing Daily Five activities during this time.

The first day of the study I had all of the students choose their own pseudonym and as a whole group every student completed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.

I reviewed the directions of the whole survey before administering it to the class and read each item orally.

On the first, second, and third day of the study I implemented student choice. I first completed a whole group lesson on a weather topic. I then laid out all of the weather books I accumulated and gave the class 15 minutes to choose whatever weather books they would like in order to read to self. On the first and second day of implementing student choice, I walked around the room and made uninterrupted observations. I made notes about which students were reading the whole time and how often students were getting up to change their book and which students kept the same book throughout the entire 15 minutes. On the third day of the study, and the final day of student choice, I gave the class another 15 minutes to read to self where I again made uninterrupted observations. At the end of this time I called each of the four students to be interviewed individually to meet with me at the back table. I asked the students questions from the interview questions that I had previously developed (see Appendix A). Each of these interviews lasted about five minutes.

On the fourth, fifth, and sixth day of the study I implemented hands-on activities. On each day of the study the class and I completed a hands-on activity. These activities were a water cycle bracelet, a four seasons wheel, and a leaf etching. For each activity I walked around to take notes as the students were completing their project. I listened for the ways students were talking to their peers as they completed the activities and looked for signs of engagement. After the whole class completed the activity on the third day of hands-on activities, I again interviewed the same four students. I asked the students

questions from the interview questions that I had previously developed. Each of these interviews lasted about five minutes.

On the seventh, eighth, and ninth day of the study I implemented the use of high interest texts. From the many weather texts I had collected, I went through the books and looked for texts that were nonfiction, had interesting photographs, and other characteristics of high interest texts. Each day I randomly distributed different high interest texts to each student. The students were then given 15 minutes to read to self. During this time, I completed uninterrupted observations and began to compare and contrast student behavior with what I had seen during the implementation of student choice and hands-on activities. After the 15 minutes of reading to self was completed on the final day of reading high-interest texts, I again interviewed the same four students. I asked the students questions from the interview questions that I had previously developed. Each of these interviews lasted about five minutes.

On the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth day of the study I implemented the last of the four best practices, which was peer collaboration. In order to not allow students to also be having choice, I randomly choose the students partners by using Popsicle sticks, which had every student's class number on it. I gave each pair five different books to read during the 15 minutes of observation time. During this time I again began to think about the differences I was seeing in student motivation to read and engagement compared with the other practices. I also made notes of some of the partnerships and considered the dynamics of the students working together in order to have informed research. After the last day of peer collaboration, I again interviewed the same four students. I asked the

students questions from the interview questions that I had previously developed. Each of these interviews lasted about five minutes.

On the thirteenth day of the study I implemented all four of the best practices in conjunction with each other. I laid out all of the weather books I had in the classroom. Each student in the class was allowed to come up and pick out three books. I had made two piles of books. One pile was all of the books that were high interest texts and the other pile had all of the rest of the books. The students had to pick one book from each pile and their third book could come from whichever pile they wanted. I then asked the students to pick a partner to work with. Students were allowed to choose the peer they worked with, so more student choice was given. Finally, I handed out a 3-2-1 worksheet for the students to complete as they read through the book. A 3-2-1 worksheet has students writing three facts they learned, two questions they still have, and one opinion they now have. I reintroduced the word opinion before the class started. Each partnership only had to turn in one completed 3-2-1 worksheet. During this time I continually walked around and made observations. I compared the students using all four best practices to how the students were working during each of the different sections of the study. Finally, I again interviewed the same four students. I asked the students questions from the interview questions that I had previously developed. Each of these interviews lasted about five minutes. I re-administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. I again read the survey out loud to the entire class and had every student complete the survey.

## **Data Sources**

Four major data sources were used throughout this study. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey was used on the first and last day of the study. This survey allowed me to have information about each student's attitude toward reading at the beginning and end of the study. The information collected from this survey was used to determine which four students would be interviewed throughout the study. An unmotivated, highly motivated, and two average motivated students were chosen based on the survey results. These students were interviewed for five minutes on five different occasions throughout the study. The students were asked questions based on the teacher created student interview questions. A third source of data was the observations conducted by me. During each best practice, I took notes and recorded what I saw the students doing. As the study continued I began to make comparisons between student behaviors in each of the different aspects of the study. I made notes about students who were able to work the whole time or students who needed to constantly get up for tissues, drinks, or the bathroom. I also thought about where the students were sitting in the room and whom they were working with. Finally, I kept a teacher researcher journal. This journal allowed me to take notes about all aspects of the study. I wrote about what I saw during my observations and reflected on what I might have said or did to skew any results. I thought about ways that I might need to do something differently on the next day of the study and made notes about what parts of the weather unit I should be re-teaching or moving on from. I used this journal as a way to self-reflect on my teaching, my research, and my study results.

## **Data Analysis**

All of this data was used in order for me to gather results on first graders' motivation to read. The Elementary Reading Attitude survey was used to gauge which students were motivated, unmotivated, or only somewhat motivated at the beginning of the study. It was then used at the end of the study to see if students became more motivated, less motivated, or their motivation stayed the same. When using the survey for results, I took into consideration that the survey was a form of self-reporting. Students may have answered questions in certain ways in order to please me and give me the results they thought I would want to see. The student interviews were used as a way to be able to ask four students specific questions about each part of the study. Each student was given an opportunity to share how he or she felt about the best practice. Students were encouraged to share what they did and did not like about it. The observations were used in order to look at what behaviors were noticed during each part of the study. The observations were reread to look for trends across individual students and the whole class. Finally, the teacher researcher journal was used as a way to look for reasons why other data results may have occurred and to reflect on if any changes needed to be made to the study itself. Again, trends were looked for in order to determine if any factors affected the way in which I continued on with any aspects of the study. Finally, all of this data was triangulated in order to look for themes in the research.

## **Context**

**Community.** Millbridge Elementary School is located in Delran Township, New Jersey. It is one of four schools in the district. Delran Township is located in Burlington County. Delran Township has a population of 15,536 people. 49.2% are male, while



50.8% are female. These people live in 15,518 houses and apartments. The average household size is 2.67. There are 2,879 married couples with children.

Delran has representation from eight racial groups. 81.4% of the population is identified as White Non-Hispanic, while 9.2% is Black. 3.3% of the population is Hispanic or Latino, 28% is Asian, and 2.7% identifies themselves as being two or more races. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and American Indian and Alaska Native make up .1%, while .5% is another race.

The median household income in 2009 in Delran was \$43,962. This had increased from \$34,389 in 1999. In 2009, 18% of residents had an income below the poverty line, while 7.2% of these people had an income below 50% of the poverty level.

Millbridge Elementary School has over 700 students attending the school in pre-school- second grade. There are over 60 staff members including classroom teachers, special educators, administrators, special area teachers, instructional aides, and one-on-one aides. The student to teacher ratio is 24:1. 81.5% of the students are White with African American students being the next largest demographic group. Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and two or more races are all represented in the school district.

**Classroom.** Ms. Powell's classroom consists of 23 students. There are 12 girls and 11 boys. All of the students are either 6 or 7 years old at the start of the study. All students in the class went to Kindergarten in the previous year with two of the students coming from Kindergarten in a different school district. The ethnic make up of the class is 16 White students, 3 mixed-raced students, 2 African American students, and 2 Asian students.

All students came into the school year reading at least at a first grade level. No students in the class have an IEP. The Child Study Team is currently evaluating one student, but that is due to complications with his hearing from a prior surgery. Any services that the student is determined to receive will occur after the study is completed. One student receives speech intervention twice a week for 20 minutes in each session. This is a program that is designed in the response to intervention model in order to help students before they might need a speech IEP.

The class has already made great progress throughout the year and they have all developed a strong relationship with their classroom teacher. The class is enthusiastic about helping their teacher to complete her “homework”. They are a good group of students who generally love to learn. They especially love to write and when given a choice the majority of the class will choose to write. They are a mature group of first graders who love to learn and help.

Chapter four of the study will be an analysis of all of the data collected throughout the study. All four of the data sources will be used in the analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter four contains an analysis of the data collected throughout my study. All of the data was collected in an attempt to answer the question, “What motivates first-graders to read?” After reviewing and analyzing the data I collected from observations, student interviews and questionnaires, a student survey, student work samples, and my teacher researcher journal, I identified three themes. The three themes are: the positive effect of a goal-oriented unit on motivation, the difficulty first-graders have expressing what motivates them, and myself and my instructional choices as a motivating factor.

#### **Revisiting the Study**

As explained in chapter three, my study lasted for thirteen days over a four-week period. I began the study by administering the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* to all study participants. There were five phases to my study and after each phase was completed I interviewed four different students. I interviewed two male and two female students. The students were picked based on the survey results, so there would be a student who scored as a highly motivated reader, an unmotivated reader, and two students who had average levels of motivation. During my final interview with the students I also administered the *Young Reader Motivation Questionnaire* to see how those student’s viewed himself or herself as a reader. Throughout the study, I completed uninterrupted observations as the students completed each best practice within the five phases of the study. I collected work samples and took pictures during this time. Finally, I reflected

on the study in my researcher's journal in order to begin to think about my decisions as a researcher and the effect these decisions had on my study and the participants.

### **Goal-Oriented Units**

My entire study was based around a goal-oriented unit on weather and throughout the study I saw the positive effects of teaching one topic in detail through my reading lessons. Typically, I will use a picture book that the class and I will read over the span of two to three days in order to introduce and teach any new reading strategy. I now was using all weather books to teach a variety of reading skills, while simultaneously teaching the science curriculum. The integration of the weather unit into my instruction helped to increase my student's motivation.

Each day when I began my whole group instructional time with a weather book the students would be anxious to read about the next topic in our weather unit. In my teacher journal on the third day of the study I wrote, "Many students are asking me when we are doing the research today because they want to read more about weather." The students wanted to learn more on their own, so they would be able to share the knowledge they had added to their schema by reading the weather books during the previous day's observation period. Brandon in particular always came down to the carpet with his hand in the air ready to share the new facts he had learned. In observing Brandon choose books on the third day of the study, he spent quite a bit of time trying to recommend a book to Justin.

Brandon: This is a good book! You should read this book. Read *Wake Me Up in Spring!*

Justin: I was just about to get that.

Justin was the student I had chosen as my unmotivated reader based on his survey results. Justin scored a 39 out of 80 points on the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey*. Justin was always the most honest of my students during the interviews and he did not mind holding back from me. During the first interview when I asked Justin, “What did you like about getting to choose your own books?” His response was that he liked that there was lots of nonfiction books and stuff with thunder, lightening, and floods. When I asked him what he did not like about choosing his own books, his only complaint was that some of the books he wanted were taken. Justin wanted to read about a variety of weather topics. When observing Justin during the reading time, he was always one of the first students to go back to the table to pick a new book. When I reflected on this in my researcher’s journal, I first thought this had to do with the fact that Justin was struggling to read the books and that since many of the books were above his current reading level, he was just pretending to read. When looking at all of the data together, I see that Justin was actually just looking for books on other topics. Using his own words, he liked that “there were lots of nonfiction books.” Justin was willing to read more when he was engaged in a specific topic and reading nonfiction texts that allowed him to learn more about the topic.

My students were also becoming motivated by all of their surroundings. On day seven of the study Jackson and Paul both grabbed rain books right away from the table. It had been raining outside that entire day and as Paul picked his books he was singing “It’s raining, it’s pouring...don’t come another day.” Jackson was again in a similar situation when he was reading with Lexi on the eleventh day of the study. Jackson and Lexi had just finished reading the book *Ice* and had switched to the book *Shine, Sun* and

it was a very cold day outside. Lexi was telling Jackson, “This is a much more happier book then being cold inside here.” All of these students were using the literacy skill of making connections, something I did not explicitly teach during the study, while reading a variety of weather books. The students were using their surroundings in order to choose what books to read and to determine what type of mood the books put them in. The class was aware of what broad topic they were reading about and they wanted to connect it to other parts of their day. The students were motivated to learn because they knew exactly what they were supposed to be learning about.

The final way in which I saw the class becoming motivated through a goal-oriented unit was when members of the class were talking or writing about weather in other parts of the day. On the second and seventh day of the study Olivia completed writing and a drawing of the water cycle. When I asked her why she did this she answered, “I thought it was interesting.” Olivia was motivated enough about the water cycle to take what she had learned and write a piece about the water cycle during the Work on Writing time of the day and then a whole five days later in the unit, she gave me a diagram of the water cycle. Pete also found weather outside of the research study in an unconventional way. When playing sight word BINGO Pete said, “Ms. Powell, this game would be good for weather.” I was very confused at first and asked him why and Pete replied, “Because there are rainbows on the box!” Though we had only briefly mentioned rainbows Pete was making another connection to the unit outside of the time we were learning about it.

A goal-oriented unit is very motivating for first-graders. The goal-oriented unit allows students to make connections to their surroundings. This is a very motivating

practice for first-graders, as they love to share. By using a goal-oriented unit the students are also very aware of what they are learning about and it allows the students to focus in on specific topics in order to reach their learning goals. Though as a researcher I could see the students becoming more engaged and motivated, it was extremely hard for the students to express what motivates them.

### **First-Graders and Expressing What Motivates Them**

My research question is “What motivates first-graders to read?” Attempting to have these first-graders explicitly express what motivates them to read was extremely difficult. On the first and final day of the study I administered the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* to 17 of the 19 students who participated in the study. Knowing that using a self-report can be difficult with any set of students, on both occasions before administering the survey I went over what it means to be true and honest with the class and reminded them this was not a test and I wanted to see how they felt about reading. In my teacher researcher’s journal I reflected back on some of the choices I made as I administered the survey. When reading each question aloud, I tried to make what each picture meant clearer for the class by naming each of the different Garfield pictures. There was the love it, like it, eh, and yuck Garfield. I did this in order to help my students have a clearer idea of what to circle. I also gave examples from things we had done in class on some of the questions. Question 20 is “How do you feel about taking a reading test?” We do not take any formal reading tests, so I told my students to think about the MAPs assessment that they took in the fall. I did this with several questions throughout the survey. I followed this same procedure when I administered the post-survey on the final day of the study.

When looking at the survey results (see Appendix B) it becomes clear that there are no obvious trends or conclusions that can be drawn just by analyzing the scores themselves. Nine of the seventeen students motivation for reading decreased from the first to the last day of the study. Another four of the students scored an 80/80 on the post-survey meaning they are extremely motivated. Two of those students had scored an 80 on the pre-survey as well. When looking at these results in order to demonstrate how it is extremely difficult for the first-graders to express what motivates them, one student in particular stands out, Parker.

Parker was one of the four students I interviewed throughout the study. She originally scored a 58/80 on the pre-survey and I considered her to be a student with average reading motivation based on the survey results and on observations I had made throughout the school year. Parker had the most difficult time answering the interview questions and I often reflected in my journal about how I could try to get more of a response out of her. I was very wary of changing the wording of the questions too much because I did not want to influence her response anymore then I may have already been doing. I also knew that Parker could be a “people-pleaser” who did not like to get into trouble. I would begin each interview with Parker by saying, “Please try your best to tell me the truth about this part of the study.” She often seemed confused when answering and did not want to talk to me or answer my questions, when typically she is always sharing things with me.

The first question in all of the interviews was “What did you like about getting to (work with your classmates, choose your own books, use hands-on activities, use high-interest texts, or do all of these things together)?” In all five of the interviews Parker



would always first answer this question with how she felt. When choosing her own books she first answered “alright,” for hands-on activities, peer collaboration, and the combination of all the strategies, she felt “good”, and finally when using high interest texts she felt “happy.” Parker did give more of a response when I asked her “What do you think made you like or not like (working with your classmates, choosing your own books, using hands-on activities, using high interest texts, or doing all of these things together)?” When answering this question for choosing your own books Parker said, “We got to pick and there wasn’t a lot of books I really knew (had read before).” She also expressed that reading these different books made her want to read more. Parker was able to state that high interest books made her “learn more”, but when answering the next question of “Did using high-interest books make you want to read more or less?” Parker said, “Less, because I kinda wanted to read fiction books.” In reviewing Parker’s interview data (see Appendix C) with regards to the last question in every interview where Parker was asked to rank the practices we had used up to that point in the study from the practice she wanted to do again to the practice she least wanted to do, no conclusions can be drawn as there is not a clear pattern. Hands-on activities never ranks lower than second, but the practice of student choice was the option she would least like to do again for the first four phases of the study, but then at the end of the study student choice was ranked third out of the five best practices.

Ellie, another student who was interviewed and I considered to be an average motivated reader based on her survey results and observations I had made within the classroom, also struggled with giving any answers that were more than one word. I rephrased the questions as much as possible and when I would look back at the

interviews and consider my day's findings I would always wonder why Ellie had such a hard time expressing herself. She is a highly intelligent girl, but she like Parker could not express herself. In each interview Ellie said no to "Was there anything you did not like about the best practice?" and said the practice made her want to read more. During the student choice, hands-on activities, and high interest texts phases of the study Ellie said she would read more because "It was fun!" During peer collaboration she wanted to read more because "We talk to each other" and finally during the combination of all the practices she wanted to read more "Because it was great!" The only answer that gives me any idea of what motivates Ellie is when she said we talk to each other. I saw this aspect of Ellie's motivation as I was observing the students on the twelfth day of the study and Ellie was reading with Paul to practice peer collaboration. For most of the time I was observing them Paul and Ellie each had their own book out in which they would read a page and then the other partner would read a page from their book. Paul and Ellie were taking turns going to the pages in the books they had out and reading each other the jokes that were at the top of most pages. I then realized that both of them had out the same book. Ellie and Paul were becoming motivated through a common text and the ability to share it with someone. When I interviewed Ellie she was only able to express to me that she could talk to someone and could not explicitly say she was able to collaborate with someone on the same text.

Though much of the inability to express their motivation that I saw within my first grade classroom happened during the student interviews, when I was observing the students as they completed the different phases of the study I realized that the students even in a non-interview setting were unable to tell me what motivated them. When I

walked around the classroom to complete my observation I did not try to speak to the students. I wanted to be fully present to see what they were doing and talking about. This was a decision that I went back and forth with in my teacher researcher's journal, as I was worried that sometimes by not directly questioning students I was taking away from observations I made. Luckily, there were still many opportunities for me to question the students, as they would frequently want to share things with me as they were reading. Maddie was a student who every day that the students were reading the weather books stopped me at least one time to either show me a picture in the story or a text feature or share a fun fact. On the seventh day of the study when she did this I asked her, "What makes you show me these things?" Maddie looked at me very closely and then shrugged her shoulders and said, "I don't know." I had this same conversation with various students throughout the study and I never got more than a shoulder shrug or a questioning look on their face in reply.

Though it was difficult for the students to give me any verbal evidence of their motivation, I was able to find many signs of engaged readers as I conducted my observations. On the first three days of the study the students were supposed to be reading to self, which would mean the only talking I should have heard was the voices of the students who still read out loud when reading to themselves. On the first day I witnessed four different students showing classmates who were sitting nearby pictures from their books. I reflected about this in my researcher's journal and decided I was not going to redirect any child who was talking to share information. I realized that these interactions would not affect the best practice that was in place (student choice) and the students' interactions would be valuable for me to observe. On the third day Pete and

Jackson were showing each other pictures throughout the whole reading time, as were Brandon and Justin. Brandon then started to read and discuss another book with Stewart:

Brandon: Let's look at the map to see if we have tornadoes.

Stewart: Okay, you know we did have a hurricane.

Interactions like these continued throughout the rest of the study.

Expecting first-grade students to be able to express what motivates them to read in a coherent way that can be analyzed for patterns or commonalities was found to be unrealistic in my study. Whether surveys, student interviews, or direct questioning was used the first-graders found it very hard to say what motivated them. Many answers were given in order to please me and give me the answer I wanted to hear. I could tell by my students' interactions with each other that they were motivated to read, but using their own words was not giving me any clear answers.

### **The Teacher as a Motivating Factor**

I designed my study in order to see what established best practices for reading motivation would be the best to use in order to motivate students to read in a first-grade classroom. When I look at the student interview data and reread all of the observations and reflections that I recorded, I do not have enough data to say that any best practice within the study had my students more or less motivated to read, but there was one element that emerged that I had not considered when beginning my study. This was the role the teacher has as a motivating factor.

On the thirteenth and final day of day of the study I wrote in my teacher researcher's journal, "Am I the big motivating factor?" I kept thinking about this and continued to write:

The one thing that has consistently happened during this study is that my students have continued to share with me aspects of their books as they are reading. There has not been a single day where I have walked around the room and not had a single student show me something they are reading or ask me a question about how to say a word or what it means. Students especially love to share with me anything they find that has to do with what we have just reviewed in the whole group lesson like a bold word or table of contents. Is my enthusiasm as a teacher motivating them? If I taught things in a different way or did not emphasize certain parts of books would the students no longer come up to me? Is there even a way to measure the effect a teacher has on a student's motivation?

After writing all of this I began to look for this evidence within my observations and it became very clear. On the first day of the study Elsa, who was one of the students who liked to share things with me the most said, "Look what I found!" It was a copy of the book I had just read to the class during the lesson. Elsa then made sure to take that book right back to her reading spot. After this first day I would purposely put the book I had read at the beginning of the lesson in the pile with all of the books the students got to choose from. Paul showed me the word droplet, which had been a vocabulary word in the mentor text, in the book he was reading. The next time I walked by he was showing me how the word was in the story a second time. After we learned about the water cycle on day three, Allison was heard saying "THE WATER CYCLE!!" as she flipped to the next page in the book. On the seventh day of the study Ellie, who especially struggled with expressing what motivated her, was observed showing off the book *The Four Seasons* which I had read to the entire class the previous day. When Justin found the book *Blizzards*, which was the mentor text on the eighth day of the study he yelled "Yeah!" Jackson made a point of coming over to me to show me a picture of snowdrift which was a vocabulary word we had just learned from the *Blizzards* book.

A point of emphasis I made throughout the unit was nonfiction text features. This was something that the students could not wait to show me when they found the features within the books. This especially increased when a student witnessed me praising another student for identifying the feature in the book they were reading. Arianna had not even started to read yet on the first day of the study, but as she was choosing her books she made sure to tell me “These books have lots of details.” Elsa wanted me to see the flaps that were in one of the books. On day seven she made sure to point out that she picked out a book with a table of contents. I asked her why she had picked a book with a table of contents and she said, “Because it tells you where everything is.” She then stopped me again to show me a diagram within the book. I asked her if the diagram made her want to read and learn more. In reply she shook her head enthusiastically. Parker and Jackson both made sure to point out diagrams and photographs with labels. On the eighth day Paul stopped me to show me a pronunciation key. On the final day of the study, Maddie showed me a glossary and told me how this made her book like the book I had read to the entire class during that lesson. Allison and Elsa had me view a bold word and then showed me the definition of the word in the glossary.

Though I was looking to see which best practice was the most motivating for first-grade students, when looking at my research I realized that though each of those practices motivated the students in some way the only factor that motivated the students throughout the entire study was me. As soon as I came near students they wanted to share things with me. If I had just read a book to the class, it was the first book that was picked off the table. As I taught text features the students could not help themselves from telling me about the features in their book. The students were motivated to read in order

to find things to share with me and to impress me. They did not necessarily care what practice they were partaking in, but they just cared that I was observing them and I thought what they were doing was impressive.

### **Conclusion**

By compiling and analyzing my data I was able to find three major themes. These themes were using a goal-oriented unit had a positive effect on my students' motivation, first-graders struggle to express what motivates them to read, and that I as the teacher could be a major motivating factor. I used evidence from student surveys, student interviews, my teacher researcher's journal, and observations in order prove the three themes that I had found.

In chapter five I will share a summary of my findings, draw conclusions based on my study and the work of other researchers, consider implications of my research, and discuss limitations to my research and think about what aspects made need further research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for the Field**

#### **Summary**

In completing my research, I learned more about first-graders and their motivation to read. Through the use of four best practices for motivation and a variety of data tools, I was able to see three themes within my research. These themes helped me to draw conclusions and think about implications for the field. The three themes are: the positive effects of using a goal-oriented unit on student motivation, the difficulty first-graders have with expressing what motivates them, and the teacher as a motivating factor.

Using a goal-oriented unit made my students become more motivated as they were focused on one topic and became mini-researchers themselves as they read books to learn more information. Students showed signs of motivation by pointing out various connections they made to the weather unit throughout the school day. Students handed me diagrams and nonfiction stories they had written about weather. The students also were consistently talking to their peers and sharing facts they were learning as they were reading. The students wanted to continue to read more in order to be ready for the next lesson with new facts.

Though I could see that the students were motivated and engaged through their actions, it was difficult to have any student express exactly what was motivating them to read. I interviewed four students at the end of each phase of the study and most of the answers I received were simple yeses or no's or "it was fun", "good", or "it made me want to read more". When I followed up with a why question, I would receive a blank stare and a shoulder shrug in reply. This happened outside of the interviews as well when



students would come up to me to share something they read that was cool or something that we had already learned and I would ask them “What made you do this?” I would then get the same reply, a blank stare and a shoulder shrug. The students were unable to say what made them want to share.

Finally, I realized that I was a motivating factor to the students. When students would come up to share something with me it was because we had just read about that book’s topic in class and they wanted to show me how the book they were reading had the same information. Students would also always grab the book I had just read to the class to read and on a few occasions students would reserve the book for when the first person was done. If I had mentioned a text feature in the book, like the table of contents, all of the students were sure to show me their book’s table of contents. They wanted me to see that they had been listening and were working hard. By reviewing all of these themes I was then able to draw conclusions about my study.

## **Conclusions**

After reviewing the literature on motivational theory, I found that my study helped to answer the question of what motivates a first-grader because the study used many of the already established best practices for motivating students. Concept-Oriented reading instruction increases “reading comprehension and motivation to read in comparison to an instructional program that relied primarily on basal texts” (Wigfield et al., 2008, p.433). This aligns with my own evidence and helps to further emphasize the importance of a goal-oriented unit. In my own observations I saw an increase in my students’ intrinsic motivation, as they had a desire to read for information. Using this information in conjunction with what Wigfield et al. (2008) wrote, that students reading

comprehension also increased, the use of a goal-oriented unit was further supported. When instruction becomes integrated through the use of a goal-oriented unit students begin to have a desire to read and to understand what they are reading. This desire to read and understanding the text are two of the biggest goals of any teacher.

As first-graders, my students will struggle with most inferential questions and this became even more obvious as I conducted my student interviews and got limited responses. When writing about the *Motivation to Read Profile* (MRP) Gambrell et al. (1996) noted cautions that must be made by the researcher when using surveys and interviews. Gambrell et al. (1996) said, “Even though the elaborate, descriptive information gleaned from the interview can substantiate survey response to some extent, only careful observation can verify information derived from the MRP” (p. 531). This reiterates what I discovered in my own research and leads me to draw the conclusion that observation is key to assessing any type of student behavior. Students, especially primary level students, want to please their teacher. The students want to do well and do not want to get in trouble and will get nervous or upset when they are in trouble or about to be in trouble. Though any researcher before conducting an interview or administering a survey will tell students to be honest, tell me everything you want to share, and remind the students it is not for a grade, these students still might lie to please the teacher or they might just not yet have the capabilities to answer the question. This needs to be considered and then careful observation must take place. These observations can then be used in conjunction with survey results and interview transcripts in order for the researcher to determine what actually was happening with the student.

My last major finding of a teacher as a motivating factor was something that I had not expected to discover during my study. When looking back at the research I began to think of myself as a motivating factor more in terms of praise. Gambrell (2011) wrote seven ways that students become motivated to read and her final reason related to my own findings. Gambrell (2011) stated, “Constructive and supportive teacher feedback provides a powerful and motivating incentive to learn” (p.174). When my students would share information with me during the study I always would reply with something like “That’s a cool fact!” “Thanks for sharing that with me.” “We are going to learn more about that tomorrow.” These are all examples of feedback that is both constructive and supportive. I was letting my students know that they were doing a good job and to keep it up. This leads me to believe that if teachers continually give students constructive and supportive feedback a student’s motivation will increase. By continually doing this the student will know that they should keep doing what they are doing and he or she will then be more motivated to continue.

If teachers can develop goal-oriented units in which students are immersed in one topic for the entire unit, student motivation will increase. This integrated approach to instruction will cause for higher levels of student motivation, while allowing the teacher to teach two subjects in one lesson. In order to determine if these students are motivated, the teacher could administer a survey or interview students, but the most important thing will be that the teacher makes careful observations throughout the whole process. Making observations is where teachers are going to be able to align any data they have from surveys and interviews with what they are actually seeing. Finally, when working to increase student motivation, it is important for the teacher to offer constructive and

supportive feedback. This is another motivating factor that when used affectively will increase student motivation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The major limitation of this study was time. This included time in the school day for the study, the length of the study, and the time of year when the study took place. The whole group lessons that were developed in order to have the study be based around a goal-oriented unit were used within the reading block of the day. The students immediately following the whole group lesson then completed each of the best practices. If there was more time in the student day or if I did not have a curriculum that I was still following and teaching throughout the study, I would have liked to have the students complete each best practice for a longer amount of time. I also would have given the students more exposure to all of the weather texts I had, by putting a time period in each class day where students were just expected to read and I could see if the students requested the weather books or would they use their own books.

My study only lasted for thirteen days and these thirteen days were in the months of November and December with Thanksgiving break in the middle. Only completing a thirteen-day study lead me to not collect as much data as I would have liked and the students only completed each best practice for three days. I would have liked to have the students complete each practice for at least five days in order to gather more data and allow the students to become more immersed in each aspect of the study. Also, being the time of year that is was in a first-grade classroom makes teaching slightly more difficult as the students begin to only want to talk about Thanksgiving and Christmas. These three aspects of time all limited my research study.

## **Implications for the Field**

After analyzing the data in order to draw conclusions about what motivates first-graders to read, I found that there were areas of the study that could be researched further. One area would be for the study to be conducted again, but for a longer period of time. A longer study that lasted for at least six weeks and did not take place during the winter holidays would be able to gather more information on motivation and put each phase of the study in place for a longer time. This would also allow the researcher more opportunities to see if the students continued to stay motivated throughout an entire goal-oriented unit and not just a small part of the unit.

Another implication in further research would be developing more surveys that measure motivation. A wide variety of surveys would allow future researchers more choice and more opportunities to pick a survey that their study participants would be able to answer honestly. Survey length and administration should also be considered.

A final way in which more data could be collected in a future study, is involving the participants' parents. Parents could be involved by sending home a survey at the beginning, mid-way point, and end of the study to ask the parents what they are seeing at home in regards to motivation for reading. Questions could ask: has the student asked for books about the topic of the unit, has the student picked up more books when usually he or she would be playing a video game, and has the student started to talk to you more about what we read that day in school.

Teachers can also use my findings in order to help motivate their own students. Teachers should use goal-oriented units whenever possible with their class. A goal-oriented unit allows students to become immersed in a topic and thus more engaged and

motivated. These students should also be given ample opportunities to read and engage themselves in books within this topic, so they feel like they are becoming experts on the topic. Students should be encouraged to share information about the topic with both their teacher and their classmates in order further promote motivation. Teachers could use these methods in other elementary grade levels to see if the same results of an increase in motivation occur in classrooms other than first grade.

In summary, motivating first-graders can be accomplished through the use of a goal-oriented unit, where students are given opportunities to receive constructive and supportive feedback from the teacher. The results of the study suggest that though no best practice is more motivating than the rest, the goal-oriented unit will increase a first-graders engagement with the text. Also, students become intrinsically motivated when they are given opportunities to share what they have discovered while reading with either their teacher or their classmates. When students become motivated in first-grade it will make the students want to read more, which will only help the students to become better readers who not only want to read, but understand what they are reading. These first-graders can then take this motivation to read with them, as they go on to the higher grades where being motivated to read will make the more difficult aspects of reading manageable.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Student Name:\_\_\_\_\_ Date/Week of Study:\_\_\_\_\_

Best Practice:\_\_\_\_\_

- 1. What did you like about getting to (work with your classmates, choose your own books, use hands-on activities, or use the high-interest texts)?**
- 2. Was there anything you did not like about it?**
- 3. What do you think made you like or not like (working with your classmates, choosing your own books, using hands-on activities, or using the high-interest texts)?**
- 4. Did it want to make you read more or less? Why or why not?**
- 5. Would you rather (work with your classmates, choose your own books, use hands-on activities, or use the high-interest texts)? [Students will place the practices used so far in order from what they would want to do again to what they would not want to do again.]**

**Appendix B**  
**Survey Results**

Student Name	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Justin	39	32
Olivia	67	61
Jackson	67	80
Stewart	75	80
Brandon	56	56*(skipped 1 question)
Luigi	61	54*(skipped 2 questions)
Elsa	68	70
Maddie	80	80
Parker	58	38*(skipped 1 question)
Pete	56	67
Gianna	71	65
Ellie	54	50
Lexi	69	58
Chris	65	64
Allison	42	41
Ariana	80	80
Paul	75	73

\*Highlighted student name's are those who were interviewed throughout the process.

## Appendix C

### Student Interview Data

	<b>Parker</b>	<b>Ellie</b>	<b>Stewart</b>	<b>Justin</b>
<b>After Choice:</b>	Yes, I would like to choose books again.	Yes, I would like to choose books again.	Yes, I would like to choose books again.	Yes, I would like to choose books again.
<b>After Hands-On:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Choice</li> </ol>
<b>After High Interest:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. High Interest</li> <li>3. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Choice</li> <li>3. High Interest</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. High Interest</li> <li>3. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Choice</li> <li>3. High Interest</li> </ol>
<b>After Peer Collaboration: (Peer Collab. in chart)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. Peer Collab.</li> <li>3. High Interest</li> <li>4. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Peer Collab.</li> <li>2. Hands-On</li> <li>3. High Interest</li> <li>4. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. High Interest</li> <li>3. Choice</li> <li>4. Peer Collab</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Interest</li> <li>2. Hands-On</li> <li>3. Peer Collab</li> <li>4. Choice</li> </ol>
<b>After Combination: (Combo in chart)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Interest</li> <li>2. Hands-On</li> <li>3. Choice</li> <li>4. Combo</li> <li>5. Peer Collab.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Combo</li> <li>2. Peer Collab.</li> <li>3. Choice</li> <li>4. High Interest</li> <li>5. Hands-On</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hands-On</li> <li>2. High Interest</li> <li>3. Peer Collab.</li> <li>4. Combo</li> <li>5. Choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Peer Collab</li> <li>2. Choice</li> <li>3. High Interest</li> <li>4. Combo</li> <li>5. Hands-On</li> </ol>