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Engaging Literacy Activities A Case Study

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ENGAGING LITERACY ACTIVITIES

A CASE STUDY

A Project Report

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

Master Teacher

By

Tiffanie Dawn Meridth

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ABSTRACT
ENGAGING LITERACY ACTIVITIES

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The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in Washington State has adopted Common Core Standards. The reading curriculum given to teachers most often reflects the appropriate grade level materials, but does not necessarily meet common core standards, engage students in learning, or prepare students to pass the end of year exams. In this study, engaging classroom literacy activities will be developed and aligned with learning targets associated with common core standards for sixth grade students. A variety of materials will be used for activities to include: novel sets, picture books, social studies curriculum, and additional teacher resources. It is instrumental in the sixth grade that students start to have the desire to read more independently and develop a sense of who they are as readers. Implementing engaging activities using a variety of resources which link students to the world of literacy may increase their desire to become more effective readers. The problem is most literacy curriculum does not increase the desire for young adolescents to want to read more outside of the classroom.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although curriculum is valuable in the classroom, often times the curriculum does not reflect the standards issued by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The practice books and the assessments do not use the same type of questions, graphs, or formatting for which the students are tested at the end of the year during the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP); likewise they are not cohesive with the Common Core Standards. Both the reading practice books and the accompanying stories do not always engage the students in reading or give them students the sense of wanting to read more of the written word. This study will align engaging classroom activities to the Common Core Standards, along with the learning targets. The activities will be based on Literacy College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR), the Grade Level Specific Standard, and the suggested learning targets. Assessments will be built for each activity using stem based questioning format distributed by the OSPI, Common Core scales, and/or project based rubrics. Assessments, rubrics, and projects will reflect the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALR) and/or the CCR for sixth grade. Using literacy activities in the classroom will increase student attention and engagement in the classroom along with increased reading scores and interest level.

Many school districts are moving towards using Standard Based Referencing as a method to report students' achievement. O'Konnor (2007) claims that many teachers include behavior in student grades, and he believes that grades and behavior should be separated. Standard Based Referencing relies upon assessment results to provide evidence of students' knowledge and ability to meet state standards. However, according to Llosa (2011), the success of using standard-based classroom assessments and instruction is dependent on the teacher and his or her training. Daily work and activities should be considered practice work and should not be graded. With the new reform of Standard Based Referencing, teachers are expected to give student grades based on assessments that will provide evidence whether a student has met standards, and use activities to teach the standards.

The new reforms in education have required districts to adopt a framework to evaluate teachers (OSPI). The framework which will be referenced in this study is Marzano. Marzano and Pickering (2011), authors of *The Highly Engaged Classroom*, point out, "student engagement has long been recognized as the core of effective schooling." Engagement in the classroom may be measured in different ways; such as, "motivation, engagement, attention, interest, effort, enthusiasm, participation, and involvement" (p. 3). For clarification in this study, the word "engagement" will be all inclusive.

The purpose of this study is to develop literacy learning activities to be used in the classroom which will motivate students to become involved with their learning using scholarly based research. Providing an enriched literacy environment, which allows students to become engaged and become excited about their reading, will encourage students to become lifelong readers. The best way for students to become better readers is for them to read. In addition to the curriculum, the teacher introduces different materials in the classroom such as novels, non-fiction sources, and trade books. Along with creating opportunities for students to share their books with others, students will have activities to accompany their books that they will present to the classroom. The sixth grade reading class at McKenna Elementary has built all the assessments using stem questions issued from OSPI, along with assessments which integrate Common Core standards. The teacher has attended training from the reading specialists at OSPI and has a K-12 literacy endorsement.

Rationale

Teachers are given curriculum in the classroom which they are expected to follow. Although curriculum is a great tool for teachers to use, the materials do not always coincide with the state standards or Common Core Standards and students may find the activities or workbook uninteresting and confusing. At the beginning of the year, a reading survey went out to all sixth grade students at McKenna Elementary. Many of the students stated they did not enjoy reading.

They would much rather watch movies and play video games. Movies and video games are much more exciting and engaging to sixth graders than reading a book. In order to balance their desire to watch television and play video games, they first need to become excited about reading. One way to increase excitement about reading is by creating situations where students are exposed to multiple genres and activities.

Students who enter the sixth grade already have a generalized opinion about themselves as a reader. They either have been a successful reader or have failed as a reader. According to O'Brien, Beach, and Scharber (2007) middle school students who are struggling in reading have low perceptions of themselves and have experienced failure as a reader. They further explain that typically struggling readers are not engaged in reading inside or outside the classroom, resulting in a deficiency in their reading skills (p. 52). When students are engaged in activities, their classroom experience will reflect a more exciting, enjoyable positive experience (Marzano & Pickering, 2011, p. 4). Encouraging students to become lifelong readers and enjoy reading outside the classroom may be a difficult task. Literacy activities are one way to bring a positive reading experience into the classroom in order to help students become engaged, confident, and excited about reading.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to develop engaging reading activities in the classroom which will increase student enthusiasm about reading and have a positive effect on sixth graders in becoming lifelong readers.

Hypotheses

Implementing engaging literacy activities in the classroom will increase students' reading interest and attention in the classroom. It will also increase students' engagement in the reading activities and in their learning.

Implementing engaging literacy activities in the classroom will have no effect on students reading interest and attention in the classroom and will have no change in the students' engagement in the reading activities and their learning.

Research Question

Will students be more active in their learning, be more apt to read on their own, and be more engaged in the classroom if their teacher implements engaging reading activities in the classroom which students may feel more enthusiastic about?

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations are that students' engagement will be measured by teacher observation and end of activity surveys. Some students may pretend to be engaged when they feel they are being watched and not all students may

answer the survey honestly. Students will not be followed throughout their schooling to determine if they are still reading. The delimitations are that all students attend core reading instruction by the same teacher. All students were surveyed at the beginning of the school level about their reading interests. Students will receive a survey after every activity which will be answered anonymously. Students who are absent the day the survey will not be surveyed.

Operational Definitions of Terms

Curriculum - A course of study used by an educational institute

Dysphoria – feelings of inferiority based on how one is treated by others

Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) - A test given by Washington State to determine whether a student meets the state standards

Activities - Something that students takes part in or does to help the achieve the learning objectives

Standards - based grading- Grading that defines student performance on a standard often in terms of the following four categories: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. This type of grading does not move students on to the next level until proficiency is met at the current level.

Standards - referenced grading- Grading that defines student performance on a standard like standards-based grading but does move students to the next level after reporting the student's performance on a standard whether or not they have met proficiency in the current standard.

Stem Questions - "Stem questions were developed to standardize the testing process and are used in Washington State when creating the MSP to ensure liability." They may be used as a template by teachers for testing and to develop lessons (OSPI).

Strands - The strands identify whether the question is comprehension, analysis or critical thinking.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The role of literacy instruction in a highly engaged classroom is important for student achievement among adolescents. According to Dotterer and Lowe (2011), engagement in the classroom has a direct relationship to student achievement (p. 1652). Providing literacy activities in the classroom, which sparks students' interest, will provide a successful classroom environment. Marzano and Pickering (2011) points out that information must be processed into working memory in order for information to be stored in permanent memory. Because the working memory has minimal ability to hold information, the instruction provided must spark and maintain interest for the information to be processed in the working memory and eventually be stored into the permanent memory (p. 8). When considering engaging literacy activities in the classroom, one must first know the developmental stage of the students, Common Core Standards and assessment, different ways of engagement in the classroom, and literacy activities which improve student achievement.

To determine whether the literacy activities have value to one's learning, it is important to understand the cognitive development of early adolescents. Young adolescence is a time when change in the students' development is significant and should be taken into consideration when developing age

appropriate literacy activities. Additionally, one needs to consider the state standards and the expectations of the district. When developing the activities for the classroom, Common Core Standards were considered; along with the assessments, whether paper and pencil or project based. This would support standard-based grading. The third consideration was to decipher what motivates and engages students to learn and create a highly engaged classroom, and different ways to meet multiple intelligences. The final consideration was foster activities which support high literacy practices, while meeting the needs of all students. Ensuring all four criteria are met is important to both student achievement and engagement in and outside of the classroom.

Student Behaviors

Powell (2001) explains the middle school classroom and the approaches to interacting with middle schoolers and their behaviors. She discusses the development of the middle school learner and teaching practices in the classroom which will be developmentally appropriate and increase engagement for the student. Student behavior, both positive and negative, affects student learning. Some of these behaviors discussed are due to cultural influences. She continues to discuss the classroom and effective teaching. She explains and gives examples how to develop student-focused discussions such as active student engagement; using a variety of strategies; including student choice and inquiry, and building on-going assessments (p. 202). Other instructional

strategies Powell suggests are using technology in the classroom, inquiry based learning, using Bloom's taxonomy for questioning, and using a variety of classroom management strategies; such as, think-pair-share, jigsaw, and think-alouds. These are just a few examples (p. 215).

In the book *Adolescence*, Santrock (2012) discusses the roles and behaviors of adolescent children and their development using theories from philosophers; such as, Erickson, Piaget, Gardner, and Vygotsky, to name a few. He focuses on the developmental stages of adolescences, the theories and approaches of these philosophers to better develop and understand adolescents and their behaviors. Santrock explains behaviors in adolescence and works with them to make connections. He also explores normal development, along with factors that could affect on adolescent's life. Additionally, he discusses activities adolescents use and that are important to them; such as, television, computers, video games, and music. Santrock studies the adolescent holistically. This provides a clear understanding of the needs of the adolescent which includes cognitive development, behavior patterns, and academic issues.

Smagorinsky (2013) explains that from a Vygotskian perspective, life should be treated holistically. In other words, emotions are intertwined with all aspects of school and that with all the testing now, the feeling towards school cannot be helped (p 195). He continues to discuss the aspects of speech in the classroom and how often students are corrected for their grammar prior to

finishing their thoughts. This could create an emotional wall leading to greater loss of cognitive development due to anxiety about speaking in class and dysphoria (p. 195). Another major concern is the social adaptation in school. Smagorinsky promotes activities such as role playing to create empathy and respect among the students in the classroom. Vygotsky's work suggests not only teaching students at their level of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), but also to consider the differences in the classroom. Smagorinsky takes this a bit further and suggests teachers include cultural understanding and consideration of students' ZPD. The teacher may need to help students adapt to the cultural norm of the classroom. He further examines the need to foster a classroom environment that has an enriched environment where differences are respected, along with empathy, and where students feel they can achieve and are valued.

Common Core and Grading

The Common Core State Standards (CCS) has been adopted by most states, including Washington State. According to Bomer and Maloch (2011) there has never been a nationwide adoption of a standard or policy with this much significance (p. 38). These standards were developed to provide a standard among high school graduates entering college. Many high school graduates were entering college with different skill levels. The K-12 Common Core Standards are "based upon what they called Anchor Standards, which are College and Career Readiness Standards" (p. 39). Bomer and Maloch (2011),

further explain that the adoption of Common Core Standards bring many changes for teachers, and they hope that teachers will make professional decisions to make the most out of teachable moments (p. 38). They are concerned that the CCS expects kindergarteners to engage in the same type of literacy as the "college ready" students, the only difference is the standards are cognitively appropriate. They further argue that the CCS does not compliment research based development in concrete thinking for young children in works such as Dewey (1902), Piaget (1969), and Montessori (1965) (p. 41). Although the Common Core states the word "evidence" 136 times, Bomer and Maloch claims that the developers of the Common Core have no evidence that these standards improve readiness for a college career; rather they are based on research alone without any data to support the researched theory.

Cox (2011) reviewed standard based grading in two high schools. The schools allow retakes on tests, minimum scores given were 50%, and late work was accepted. The article also discusses assessments and the agreement between the teachers to teach the standards. The schools based the majority of the grades on district wide assessments. These assessments had a significant impact on teaching practices among the teachers. The result of the study confirmed that student behaviors did have an effect on the students' grades.

Dalton (2012) discusses the Common Core Standards and the use of multimodal literacy media in the classroom. The Common Core Standards

assume that someone who is literate is interchangeable with being digitally literate (p. 333). This article describes the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content (TPAC). Teachers should use media as a device in reading and writing for students to express themselves, but should also explore the text. Some students tend to work better starting with a visual representation, where others do better starting with the text. The author suggests that teachers start with a media that they feel comfortable with and slowly start to integrate different media. She also suggests using private student web pages, twitters, or blogs for students to discuss work and communicate and share information with each other. The Common Core Standards realize the importance of 21st-century literacy and has identified the need for students to express themselves using media for developing critical thinking and understanding of how modes carry meaning (p. 338).

The Common Core Standards reading level expectations are much higher than the levels which are expected under current standards. Heibert (2011) argues that although texts have been "dumbed" down in the last 50 years and the developers of the Common Core Standards suggest middle school and high school students are not being prepared for college, raising the standards at the elementary level will not develop higher readers quicker. She goes on to explain that students are already struggling to meet current reading standards and that they are not necessarily lower standards than in years past. By increasing the

Lexile Level for elementary students according to Common Core Standards, the problem that currently exists with students not meeting current Lexile levels will be solved. Instead of pushing students at a higher, quicker pace, the problem of why students are not meeting current literacy expectations needs to be addressed.

Llosa (2011) examines the effect of standard-based assessments in the classroom and English Language Learners (ELL). The study was completed in large urban schools in California. The purpose was to determine the measurement of classroom assessments compared to statewide standard-based assessments. The effectiveness of the assessments depended on the teacher's knowledge of standard-based assessments and his or her implantation of standard-based instructions in the classroom.

Strickland (2012) addresses the issue of incorporating Common Core Standards into curriculum and instructions. The intent of the Common Core is to integrate multiple disciplines which include: critical thinking, oral speaking, research and media, reading challenging text, and cumulative progression towards higher education. Strickland provides basic guidelines to developing a unit plan which incorporates Common Core Standards using literacy activities connected to the state goals for social studies, science, writing, and includes media, guess speakers, and field trips.

Student Engagement

Marzano and Pickering (2011) wrote the *The Highly Engaged Classroom* as a tool to guide teachers into the 21st century classroom. The beginning of the book describes the research and theory behind a highly engaged classroom and the interests of the students. They suggest using humor, media entertainment and enthusiasm during instruction. It also stresses that a teacher should build positive relationships with the students by treating students fair, showing interest in their lives, and showing affection for the students. The authors explain different ways to bring into the classroom interesting facts. They encourage wait time and different ways for students to respond; such as, calling on random students and paired shared responses (pp. 70-71). Other activities Marzano and Pickering encourage in the classroom for students are self-evaluations and assessments, personal projects, unusual information, and the use of quotes. There is a plethora of information provided to increase motivation in the classroom and to have a highly engaged classroom by using intentional classroom strategies.

Ryan (2008) discusses middle school students and the use of multiliteracy practices to engage students in learning. Middle school may be tough years for many students. Ryan suggests that teachers develop class curriculum using the student-centered approach to help motivate the student. She suggests having students develop a project based learning which incorporates the students'

interests in making connections in the students' lives. She describes such multiliteracies designs as visual, gestural, audio, linguistic, and spatial. These are similar to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. Teachers do not have to be experts in the project to allow students to participate in the project. Additionally, teachers may need to provide skill building activities during the projects to improve student learning. In one classroom a teacher worked on the development of a community skate park. The students who participated in the multiliteracy project improved in assessments and in school attendance. During the project, students used a variety of resources to develop and support the project which included technology and research.

Prensky (2005) has argued that teachers can no longer teach in traditional ways to engage students. They must use 21st-century methods. Students are used to multi-tasking and need to be provided with simulations in the classroom which are similar to their way of thinking. These simulations do not necessarily need to consist of electronics, but should emulate "game play" (p. 9). He also stresses the importance of student involvement in decision making in the school, including students in classroom curriculum decisions, technology opportunities in the classroom, and school-wide teacher student collaboration. The upcoming device is not computers, but rather cell phones. The author explains that many countries use cell phones in the classroom to enhance instruction. The United States is falling behind because we are worried they would use them for the

wrong reasons. He further explains that students need 21st-century tools. There are programs which advance students in the world today; such as, Google, Flash, and gaming. Additionally, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to learn up-to-date skills in technology and medicine by bringing in experts to help with meaningful lessons. It is important for educators to listen to and value the students' opinions; otherwise the students will not be engaged in the classroom (p. 13).

Literacy

Bryce (2012) explains the "Mano a Mano" project adopted by New York school, James Weldon Johnson Leadership Academy in East Harlem. It is cross curriculum integration in learning. Students, teachers, and parents work towards a theme from kindergarten through eighth grades. They include nonfiction literacy and writing approaches which includes all interdisciplinary subjects. The school building committee decides on a theme. After the theme is decided, the teachers go to work to develop a grade level specific plan. During the unit, the school transforms using visual art into the themed unit. The teachers use nonfiction text and writing, along with art and other special subjects, to motivate and engage students in their learning. Parents volunteer in the school to help transform the hallways into a magnificent piece of work. For example, one year the hallway was transformed into a longhouse (p. 180). The students were able to represent their learning through art and writing with accuracy. Most teachers

appreciated the unit of study. Some teachers felt the unit created a lot of extra work and some did not particularly have an artistic eye. These teachers often worked in teams and the art teacher worked closely with them. They were able to use their gifts inside the classroom using nonfiction reading. The unit provided an engaging way to use literacy to expand the students' knowledge in culture, while providing a way to express themselves and achieving a high understanding of historical events.

According to Collier (2011), teaching literacy in the content areas using teaching teams is an effective approach to improving literacy. The idea was that the reading strategies students were learning in English and Reading class were not transcending to other content areas such as Social Studies and Science (p. 7). Using a team approach allows other teachers to refer back to the use of terminology another teacher may use for the same section of text. Students are more likely to make connections from one class to another if teachers are able to link concepts together. Teachers also were able to work together to "develop common approaches" to teaching (p. 7). Test scores have improved in many areas using the team approach. The teachers are able to integrate literacy and content areas creating a better understanding of grade level expectations and authentic real-world application.

Gambrell (2011) stresses the importance of motivation in literacy and ways to motivate reading within the classroom. She provides seven rules of

engagement and classroom tips to accompany the rules in the classroom ranging from providing an enriched literacy classroom environment and instruction to intrinsic motivation for the student. She further explains that the literacy instruction in the classroom should be able to make life connections with the student. She addresses the use on classic books within the classroom and how classic books are valuable, many students do not connect with them and are not motivated to read. The classroom should be rich with genres and a variety of sources for reading. The more genres the teacher can introduce to the class and suggest books, the more likely the students will discover books he or she finds interesting. She also discusses time spent in class for Silent Sustained Reading should be increased and time should be permitted for social interaction between peers to discuss what they read for the day. Students also need to have choice in their reading. This may be difficult for struggling students who tend to read books which are too difficult. She suggests collaborating with the student by creating a list of five or so books which the student is interested in reading. Students who are more intrinsically motivated are more likely to read. In a recent study, students who read for enjoyment, regardless of their family background, tended to perform higher reading achievement (p. 172).

Lapp, Moss and Rowsell (2012) discuss literacy practice in the classroom and the vital need to incorporate new 21st century analysis skills. Traditional teaching of literacy in the classroom is no longer affective in the classroom and

in life. They suggest using the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model (p. 368). The GRR provides the opportunity for students to receive teacher instruction first and then it gradually releases the lesson to the students using the model of direct instruction guided practice, collaborative learning and independent learning. By using this model, Lapp, Moss, and Rowsell (2012) explain, students go from passive learning to active learning (p. 369). The authors suggest using literacy as integration into other subjects. They observed a fourth grade teacher integrating a standard-base reading unit about the gold rush. One of the methods used by the fourth grade teacher was bringing multiple literacy devices into the classroom. Lapp, Moss, and Rowsell (2012) suggest that using not only curriculum, but other literacy devices, will allow students to read as a part of the community.

Sanden (2012) completed a study on the effectiveness of independent reading in the classroom. Although the National Reading Panel has been unable to gather substantial evidence to support increased impacts on reading ability; they did suggest independent reading in schools is not necessary (p. 223).

Another source, the National Assessment of Educational Progress states that students who read fewer pages a day perform lower on assessments. Sanden explores the practice of independent reading or Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) programs through expert classroom teachers. Common denominators for effective SSR are student book choice, reading text at appropriate reading levels,

and exploring text without adult help (p. 234). Independent reading does not mean teachers are not involved with the students' decision on what to read. While it is important for students to choose books of interest, it is important for teachers to monitor and guide students' choices to ensure that students are finding books that are "just-right" for their reading level. Teachers must also monitor students while reading and establish good classroom practices by "explicitly modeling what independent reading looks like" (p. 226). Most of the teachers incorporate some type of formative assessment after independent reading to hold students accountable. Additionally, some of the teachers realized that some students need to read aloud or need other methods of reading and the teachers used a variety of strategies to accommodate the needs of their students. Finally, Sanden reiterates the effectiveness of teacher involvement during SSR and the need to influence students' growth in independent reading.

Serafini (2011) examines the activities which classroom teachers require students to complete before, during, and after reading. He proposes that teachers look at the activities that they are requiring the students to complete determine whether they are activities to recall information or are they activities that have instructional value (p. 240). The classroom teacher should consider authentic activities which foster lifelong learners and development of lifelong readers. He also suggests that because readers normally choose a book to read that is a great story and they normally read silently. The majority of the reading

in the classroom should be read silently, and the classroom environment should allow opportunities; such as, the right to read anywhere, to read silently or aloud, to read anything, to skip pages, and to be able to quit non-interesting books (p. 241).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The consideration of best practices and instruction were considered when researching engaging activities in the classroom. The diversity of the classroom was a major consideration. As Whatts-Taffe, S., Laster, B.P., Broach, L., Marinak, B., Connor, C.M., and Walker-Dalhouse, D. (2013) suggested, there are many components that create diversity in literacy and the use of instructional methods which promote student growth while providing instructional practice that promotes student experience along with student learning (p. 305). When considering which activities to use or create to increase student engagement in the classroom, the use of scholarly text-books, journals, and articles helped guide the activity development.

Criteria for Evaluating Sources

The criteria for evaluating sources was to use scholarly journals, books, articles, and internet websites which also support activities or ideas supported from different sources. Some sources include, but are not limited to, other professional teachers, teacher websites, and activity books. Sources that are not considered scholarly were validated by researched-based instructional methods and practices.

Plan for Implementation

The learning activities have been implemented in the sixth grade classroom. Each activity correlated to the learning targets and goals. The students first receive instruction on the learning target through direct instruction. Then the students have a small activity using guided instruction. Finally, the activity would be introduced for students to work on independently or in partner pairs. After the activity is completed, there will be an assessment to assess understanding of the learning target. The activities may be used in addition to curriculum.

Literacy Circles

Students were given the opportunity to choose one of the following books: *The Giver* by Lois Lowery (2002), *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999), *Mr. Chickee's Funny Money* by Christopher Paul Curtis (2007), *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen (2009), *Holes* by Louis Sachar (2000), or *The Egyptian Box* by Jane Louise Curry (2008). They ranked the books from greatest to least interest in reading. Most students received their first or second choice. Students were placed in table groups according to their books. At the beginning of each class, a reading strategy would be introduced. After group discussion, students had a reading journal to fill out that would be focused on the reading strategy. Students would be able to work independently or in groups while working in their journals. Each book had a mid-book and final assessment, using reading

strategies which students practiced. Students were allowed to use their books to assist them with the assessments.

Greek Flip Charts

The students created flip charts for the all major Greek Gods and Goddesses. Using construction paper students created a flip chart with each major Greek God or Goddess which included: their name and godly role, a picture of each, and a guide sheet for students to fill out while reading about each God. The guide sheets consisted of the Gods' parents, animal or object sacred to him or her, their occupation, and type of myth (whether it was hero, nature, or creation). Then students had the opportunity to add any additional notes about the God on their flip charts. This lesson was integrated with the Social Studies curriculum.

Multicultural Cinderella Stories

Students use Cinderella stories from all over the world to compare and contrast. Students choose two different stories to compare. They then complete a compare and contrast activity foldable comparing the two stories. The front of the foldable is the title, author, and visual of the two stories. When the foldable is open a map of where the story took place along with the difference from each story is placed in the inside. The foldable has a secret compartment. This is where the students describe the similarities of the stories.

Poetry Unit

The students used several poems from the book *Opening a Door: Reading Poetry in the Middle School Classroom* by Janeczko (2003) and the reproducible to go along with the poems. The students studied the different elements of the poem. The students were first asked to reflect about something that was meaningful to them, and this would lead into the poem of the day. The students would then read the poem several times in many different ways. When the students were done reading the poems there was an activity for each poem. The students were given a poetry brochure, along with a poem, to assess what they learned. This was integrated with writing when the students made a poetry book using several different styles of poetry.

Each activity met several different reading standards. The students were using the journals, flip charts, reproducible sheets, and compare and contrast activities while they were reading their stories. The students were reading while finding information in their books. Most students tended to stay focused on their learning and the activity they were using in conjunction with their reading. After each unit was over, the students were given an anonymous survey asking for their motivation or engagement level in the activities. Most of the students rated the activities between a three and a five. There were very few ratings of one's or two. There were some minor adjustments after each unit based on the students' feedback.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

There are wide range of literacy standards and many ways to present them to students to achieve the learning goals. A few important factors to consider are the engagement and motivation of the students, the cognitive appropriateness of the activity, and if the students are excelling. Using guidelines from the literature review, four activities were designed to increase student motivation while participating in a unit of study. When developing the activities many aspects were considered; such as, do the activities support state standards and learning objectives, can the activities be integrated into other disciplines, was there means within the classroom to support completion of the projects, and would the project increase students' knowledge of literacy and influence their reading in a positive manner. Cummins (2012) states that there is power in choice, and "allowing students to have some say in the book selection enhances motivation" (p. 3). In all activities the students had the opportunity to have some choice in either the books they read or in part of the activity.

Four activities were developed, or enhanced from already established activities, to be used in the classroom. Each activity focused on a different aspect of literacy development. Some activities were developed to support

integrated learning. Strickland (2012) suggests that Common Core Standards support integration across curriculum learning (p. 25). Other activities were developed to support literacy through social aspects. All activities supported stated standards and could be adjusted to differentiate instruction.

Literacy Circles

The first activity was literacy circles. This activity is designed for students to choose a novel they may be interested in. The teacher introduces each book and provides the students with an oral summary of each book. Then students are given time to look at each book and rate the books, with one being their book of choice and six being their last book of choice. Then students are instructed to cross off any book they may have read in the past. Most students receive their first or second choice. According to Kanavy and Zile (2001) "A literature unit that integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening; addresses national and state standards; considers student learning styles and intelligences" (p. 5). They continue to explain that literature units incorporate real world learning along with technology to create an exciting learning environment. The classroom was set up to immerse students in their novel. Students were placed in table groups, according to their books with a picture of their book above each group of desks.

Each group developed a poster with a group name, symbols related to the setting of the story, interests of the group, and group rules. Each book was

divided into parts. The students read a part a night and came to class with a "big question" for group discussion. Big questions were explicitly taught using higher level questioning. At the beginning of each class a reading strategy would be introduced. Group discussions followed after the mini-lesson. Students had task cards to ensure groups ran smoothly. Groups would discuss what they read the night before and the "big question," they wrote from the reading night before. The students would work together to complete their Reading Response Journal, which focused on the reading strategy taught at the beginning of the lesson. The Reading Response Journals were made from reproducibles from chapter three of *High-Interest Literature Units: Survival* by Kanavy and Zile (2001). Each book had a mid-book and final assessment, using reading strategies which students practiced. The assessments were made using stem-based questions or Common Core Standards. Students were allowed to use their books to assist them with the assessments. After completion of the book, each student complete a project which represented the book he or she read. There were ten projects per book for each student to choose from.

Greek Flip Charts

The Greek flip charts, as shown in figure 1, supported an integrated unit in social studies where students were studying ancient Greece. The student read with partners about the twelve major Gods and Goddesses using stories from the book *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire's

(1962). To help the students organize information they read, they created flip charts that outlined all the major Greek Gods and Goddesses. The student used the flip charts to collect information about each major Greek God or Goddess to include: their name and godly role, a picture of each, and a guide sheet for students to fill out while reading about each God. The guide sheets consisted of the Gods' parents, animal or object sacred to him or her, their occupation, and type of myth (whether it was hero, nature, or creation). Then students had the opportunity to put any other notes about the God in their flip charts.

The students were allowed to use their flip charts to assist them in taking their unit assessment. They were also able to use the flip charts in their debates. The students each chose their favorite Major God or Goddess and debated why their God was superior. The students had one minute to support their view point and thirty seconds to rebute their opponents view point.

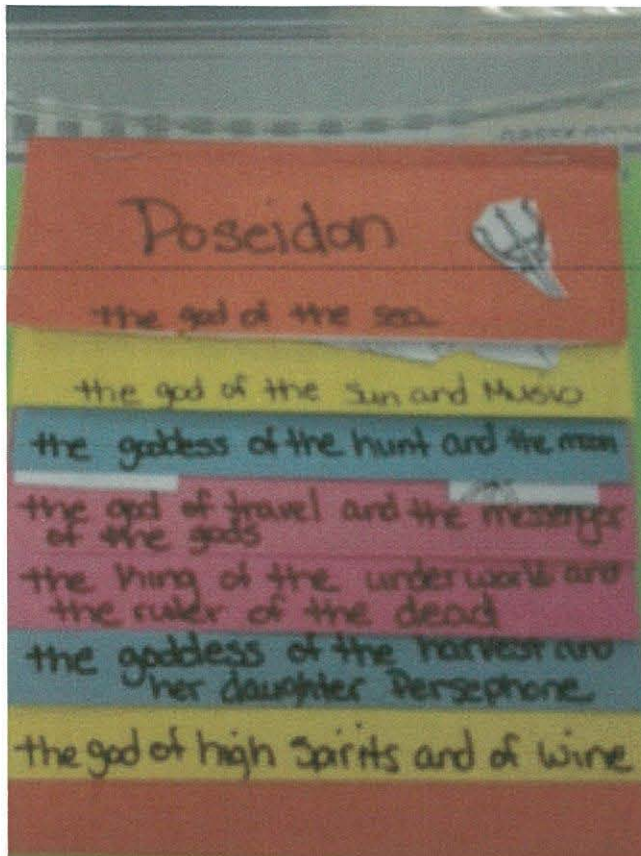


Figure 1

Greek Flip Chart

Multicultural Cinderella Stories

There are over 1500 Cinderella stories from around the world according to Fleischman (2007). The lesson began by discussing the different genres and specifically the genre of Traditional Literature. The students led a discussion about the differences between fairy tales and folk tales. The teacher then read a Cinderella story which intertwined many of the different Cinderella stories from around the world using the book *Glass Slipper Gold Sandal: A WorldWide Cinderella*, by Paul Fleischman (2007). During the read aloud, the class discussed comparisons and contrasts for the stories and the cultural influences. The teacher then provided over twenty different Cinderella stories from around the world for the students to choose from. Students were given the choice whether to read with a partner or by themselves. The students chose two different stories to compare and contrast.

While the stories were being read, the students were given a note taking sheet. They could choose a Venn Diagram or a T-chart to complete the comparison. Once students were finished reading their two stories, they were ready to complete the activity. The activity consisted of a foldable with a secret door, see figure 2. On the front flap students included the title, author, illustration from a scene, and origins of the folk tale. The inside flap consisted of a map illustrating the location of where the story took place. The inside window consisted of representations of four differences, four cultured influences, and the

date the story took place. Finally, the secret door consisted of six similarities from the stories.

List of Cinderella Books

Ayres, H. R. (1999). *The golden sandal: A middle eastern Cinderella*. Pittsburgh, PA: Holiday House.

Climo, S. (1989). *The Egyptian Cinderella*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Climo, S. (1993). *The Korean Cinderella*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Climo, S. (2001). *The Persian Cinderella*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Coburn, R. J. (2000). *Domitila: A Cinderella Tale from the Mexican Tradition*. Walnut Creek, CA: Shens.

Cohlene, T. (2003). *Little firefly: An Algonquian legend*. Vero Beach, FL: Troll Communications.

dePaola, T. (2004). *Adelita: A mexican Cinderella story*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.

Fleischman, P. (2007). *Glass slipper gold sandal: A worldwide Cinderella*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.

Jaffe, N. (1998). *The Way Meat Loves Salt: A Cinderella Tale from the Jewish Tradition*. New York. NY: Henry Holt & Company.

Jolley, D. (2009). *Pigling: A Cinderella story: A Korean tale*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group.

Louie. A. (1982). *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella China*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.

Martin, R. (1998). *The rough-face girl*. New York, NY: Putnam & Grosset Group.

- Mayer, M. (1994). *Baba yaga and vasilisa the brave*. New York, NY: William Marrow.
- Mehta, L., & Brucker, M. (2002). *Anklet for a princess: A Cinderella story from India*. Walnut Creek, CA: Shens.
- Oaly, J. (2000). *Fair, brown & trembling: An Irish Cinderella story*. Great Britain: Frances Lincoln Limited.
- Pirotta, S. (2008). *The golden slipper: An ancient Egyptian fairy tale and also Cinderella*. North Mankato, MN: Sea to Sea.
- Pollock, P. (1996). *The turkey girl*. Canada: Little, Brown & Company.
- San Souci, R. D. (1998). *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- San Souci, R. D. (2000). *Little gold star: A Spanish American Cinderella tale*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- San Souci, R. D. (1994). *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella story*. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Sierra, J. (2000). *The gift of the crocodile: A Cinderella story*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Steptoe, J. (1987). *Mufaro's beautiful daughters: An African tale*. New York, NY: Shepards Books.
- Thomson, S. L. (2012). *Cinderella*. Las Vagas, NV: Amazon.

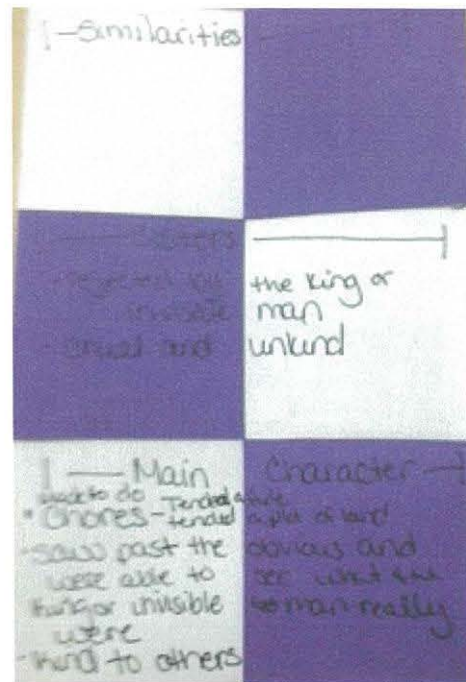
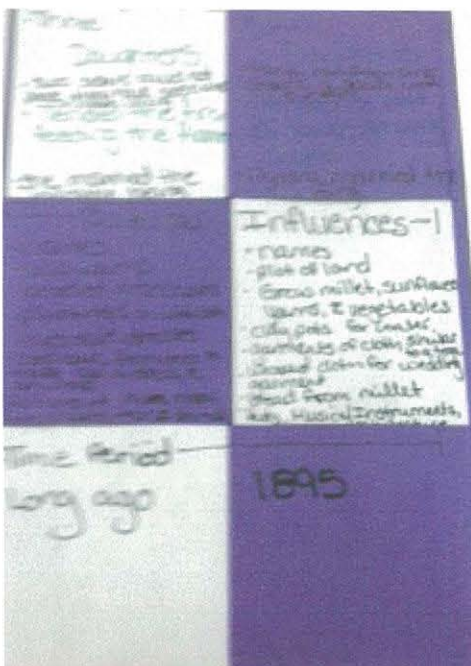
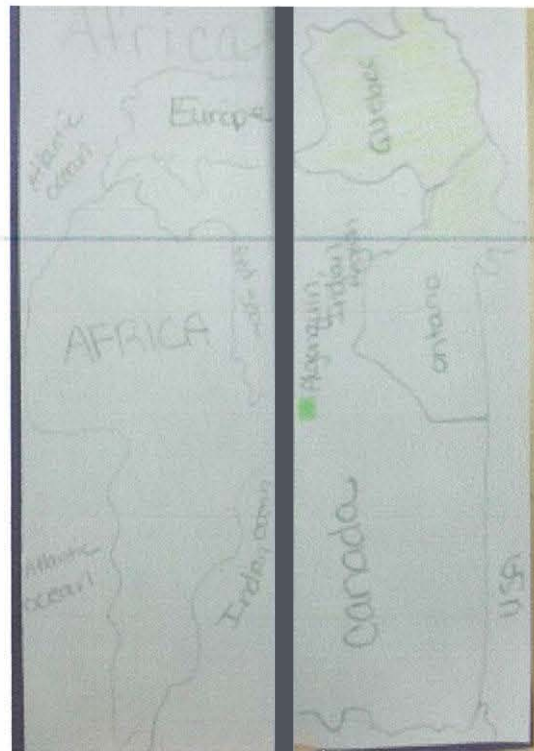


Figure 2

Multicultural Cinderella Stories Foldable

Poetry Unit

This Unit consisted of choosing poetry for students to connect with, while providing an enriched source of literature to help students understand figurative language, authors' style and tone, and imagery. The book *Opening a Door: Reading Poetry in the Middle School Classroom* by Paul B. Janeczko (2003) provides poems that are cognitively appropriate for middle school. It has interactive lesson plans and reproducible pages for each poem. The students studied the different elements of the poem. The students were first asked to reflect about something that was connected to their personal life in their reading journals. The reflection was to help students engage and lead them into the poem of the day. The students would then read the poem several times to self, to shoulder and face partners, and then a couple of students would read it aloud to the class. After the students finished reading the poem several times, they would then explore the poem by highlighting, underlining, and taking notes about their findings of the poem.

After the students completed several practice poems, along with activities for each poem which would focus on the element of the poem, they were then given a poetry brochure along with a poem to apply and assess their learning. The literacy brochure reflects the Common Core Standards. In addition to reading the poems, this activity was integrated with writing where they were taught several formats of poems and they were provided the opportunities to

write free form poems. The students' poem collections were then binded with a cover page.

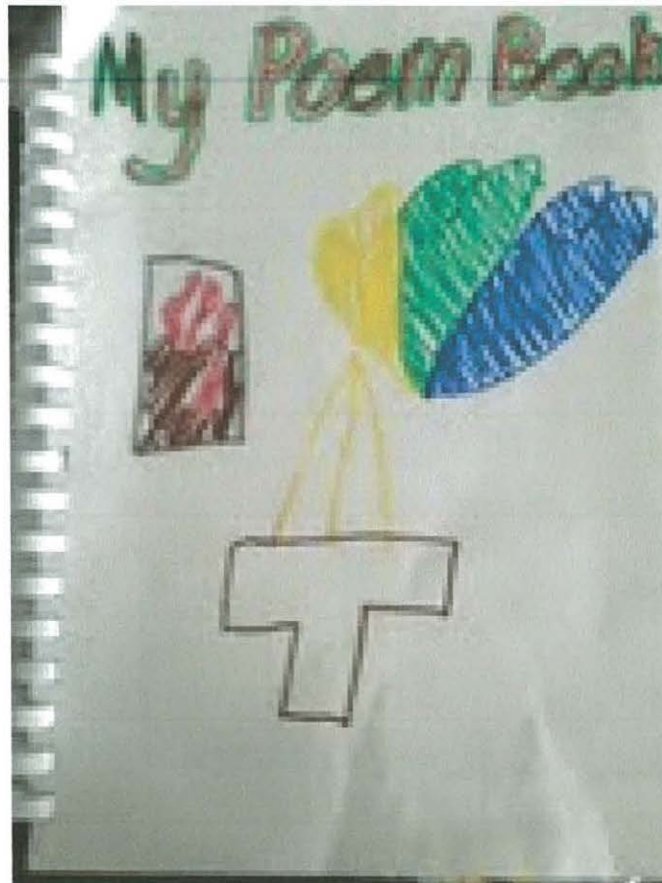


Figure 3

Poetry Writing Book

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

Given the 21st century student, teachers must no longer use traditional methods of teaching. Students are used to multi-tasking and being highly engaged in the digital world. There are many aspects to include or consider when planning a lesson. Teachers need to implement engaging activities which will motivate students to learn and which will captivate their attention. Activities in the classroom are ways for students to practice skills to meet the learning objectives. According to Marzano (2011), it is important for teachers to maintain the student's interest over time (p. 7). Providing activities which include elements of engagement; such as, game-like activities, peer interaction, technology, and friendly controversy are just a few of the many ways to engage students in activities. Skillen and Clark (2001) advise teachers to "honor the stories that students' value" (8).

In order to motivate students while learning in the classroom, four activities were developed. The first activity focused on novel reading in emulated lifelong reading along with addressing state standards. According to Grambell (2011), students are motivated and engaged in reading when they are granted the opportunity to make choices in what they read and are provided the opportunity to socially interact with others. The Greek flip charts, multi-cultural

Cinderella stories, and the poetry unit integrated curriculum to develop more of a holistic approach to learning. Additionally, the activities provided opportunities for students to have a choice in their learning.

Conclusion

After each activity was completed, the students were given a survey to determine engagement level and suggestions to improve the activities. The Literature Circles were among their favorite activity. After the Literature Circles were completed, the students exchanged books and read books from the groups. During parent teacher conferences, many parents expressed their excitement that their son or daughter had become a reader this year. The students found the Greek Flip Charts valuable. They suggested adding more required information to them and the debate was a hit. The students rated the multi-cultural Cinderella story activity as highly engaging. They were sharing their stories with others and participating in many book talks. They were able to identify how culture can influence a story. Finally, most of the students found the poetry unit valuable in identify author's style of writing. The other sixth grade teachers noticed that the students' poetry writing was richer than in years past. The students suggested that instead of doing the poems all at once, to spread them out throughout the year and start at the beginning of the year. They indicated that this would help them identify tone and mood of stories to their narrative stories. Developing literacy activities in the classroom which

support student engagement and state standards is important, because motivation does make a difference in learning.

Recommendations

Considering the 21st century students, engaging activities are essential for student learning. Using literacy activities in the classroom, which are designed with student motivation and engagement along with learning objects, is an effective tool in the classroom. Teachers should veer from the traditional lecture and implement effective activities in the classroom. Additionally, when at all possible, the activities should include digital technology; however, not all schools have technology available to students on a regular basis, then the activities should include aspects of the technology world. Literacy activities should be interdisciplinary and taught across curriculum. Teachers should keep in mind activities which promote lifelong readers, with the end goal for the story itself to be what motivates the students to read more.

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