A STUDY OF ENGAGEMENT AND LITERACY CHOICE WITH PRIMARY STUDENTS

by

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Action Research Study

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Abstract

This research study focused on monitoring the effects of giving first grade students literacy choice. The researcher determined how literacy choices affect reading achievement scores. According to available literature on the subject, offering choice to students increases engagement. The researcher found limited literature regarding primary students and worked to fill this deficit.

Students chose a literacy activity rather than the teacher assigning specific tasks. The researcher used a personal journal and instructional coach observations to help monitor engagement. Quantitative data through achievement tests determined reading growth and if higher engagement through literacy choice was a factor in increasing reading ability. The researcher implemented the project in September 2012 and collected data until May 2013. Once the researcher collected the data, the researcher analyzed and published the results. The intent of this research has been to study the impact of literacy choices on students engagement and the learning of young readers.

Key Words: Engagement, Choice, Literacy, Primary, Reading
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Chapter One: Area of Focus

In first grade, many students’ favorite part of the day is reading groups during reading instruction. During this time, groups of four or five students cycle to different reading stations. The teacher directs students as to which station to begin with, explains how to complete the task and who is part of their rotation group. Stations included meeting with the teacher, literacy games, spelling, phonics or reading practice pages, reading activities, reading silently, reading with a friend or listening to reading. After seven or eight minutes at a station, a designated student rings the bell indicating students to switch to the next station in the rotation. All students visit each station during reading groups.

Students often ask, “When is group time?” which suggests students welcome moving around the classroom. Even though students seem to enjoy group time, the classroom teacher often needs to remind students to stay focused on completing work independently or redirect them to continue reading silently. Students often ask questions about how to complete worksheets or finish early and ask “Now what?” The teacher spends precious time focusing on off-task or unengaged students, rather than on the small group of students at the teacher’s table.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if giving students more literacy choices would increase engagement, and furthermore, if that engagement would lead to higher reading achievement scores. Rather than the teacher assigning what students do at each reading station, students would have choices of tasks to complete during reading time. In this study, student choices included read-to-self, buddy read, listen to reading, spelling/word work, journal and meet with the teacher. The teacher researcher established a process to help students select effective choices and monitored student engagement. The teacher researcher anticipated students would
need fewer reminders to stay on task and would be able to switch tasks without asking, “Now what?” This would allow the teacher more uninterrupted time to teach essential reading skills to a small group of students. This study helped determine if choice engages students and increases their reading proficiency.

**Literature Review**

**Motivation, Engagement and Achievement**

Research proves engaged students learn best. Engagement is vital for student learning (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio & Turner, 2004) and in order to achieve engagement, students need motivation. Research reveals that students’ intrinsic motives predict their reading achievements and a significant relationship exists between reading motive and reading achievement (Ulper, 2011). Active engagement in the learning process produces an increase in academic performance (Housand & Reis, 2008). Students engaged in reading tend to be better readers. As Cummins (2011) suggests, literacy engagement is a primary determinant of literary achievement. Perks (2010) maintains that motivation is a fundamental link to achievement and motivated students tend to learn more. Research clearly suggests student engagement is important for learning to flourish.

**Choice**

Across the curriculum, teachers encounter students that prefer not to read. Even though teachers can portray useful strategies to improve students’ reading skills, as Ulper (2011) suggests, students will benefit from those strategies only if they are motivated for reading. Teachers may assign students texts that do not interest them or texts that are too difficult and they simply cannot read. Unsurprisingly, this results in significantly lower student motivation and learning (Wilson, 2011). One way to motivate students is to offer choice. Free choice
increases the breadth and depth of reading and relates to the development of intrinsic motivation (Gordon & Messenger, 2012). In her work with high school AP students, Dredger (2008) found that engagement increases when students have freedom to choose their own reading. If students have choices, they take ownership over their learning (Smathers, Camp, Hampson, Alcock, Ison & Stephens, 2010).

Classrooms vary widely in how they support student autonomy to make choices. Research suggests humans need to feel they are in control of their actions and decisions and can determine the course of their lives (Daniels & Steres, 2011). When young people have opportunities to determine their own course of action, their freedom to choose can positively affect their general well-being, their behavior and values, their growth and development, and their academic achievement (Sanacore, 1999). Developing learners’ autonomy is important in producing successful learners (Ebata, 2010). In her research on effective language learning, Ebata (2010) confirms that autonomous learners have increased motivation towards learning. Some teachers implement “extensive reading” in which students select the reading material based upon its relevance to their interests, experiences, and knowledge (Lyutaya, 2011). Other teachers implement “self-regulated learning” in which students have opportunities to make choices in regards to setting goals, record-keeping, planning, self-evaluating, self-monitoring and assessments (Housand & Reis, 2008). Housand and Reis (2008) propose that students who successfully make choices and self-regulate their learning actively engage in gaining knowledge.

Offering choices to students can be motivational, but research also suggests the choices need to be effective. Choices should give students a sense of competence (Perks, 2010). Offering inadequate choices will not be effective in improving student reading ability. Providing little opportunity for students to exercise some level of control will not easily lead to motivated and
independent thinking (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio & Turner, 2004). Well-crafted choices have the potential to have a powerful impact on students’ attitudes (Perks, 2010).

**Successful Reading Environment**

The environment students learn in plays a significant role in their success. What teachers do and say can have powerful effects on student intentions for learning, learning behaviors and engagement (Stefanou, et.al, 2004). A teacher’s approach influences students (Yoon, 2007). Housand and Reis (2008) conclude in their research on self-regulated learning that successful implementation accompanies explicit expectations, instruction, and modeling of the behaviors and strategies. If students are aware of the expectations for learning and behavior, they are more likely to see success.

Creating a culture in a classroom, school, or district begins with setting up a successful environment. Conditions that contribute to successful and engaged readers include making reading a top priority, modeling by adults in the school, and creating a motivating learning environment (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Environments that emphasize reading as a school-wide priority significantly influence student engagement. Research suggests that educators must provide a literacy-rich environment for students to have access to a wide variety of reading material (Sanacore, 1999). Classroom environments are significant to assist in literacy development, especially for young children according to Bansberg (2003). Classrooms need to provide a widespread presence of print and literacy activities that are accessible to students (Bansberg, 2003). Students are more motivated to read and engage in reading if the literature matches their interests. Such environments are conducive for reading and writing. Providing choice and time to read, write, think and share reaffirms the value of each student’s choice of reading and writing (Sanacore, 1999).
Along with giving students choice, research suggests providing students a purpose for reading. In their book *The Daily Five*, Boushey and Moser (2006) indicate that purpose plus choice equals motivation. Mission, purpose and goals direct our energy towards the things we value. The more students appreciate, comprehend, value and consciously work toward goals, the more likely they are to achieve them (Clarken, 2011). The more meaningful an activity is to those doing it, the more likely they will be motivated to continue (Perks, 2010). In setting up an engaging environment, research strongly implies that students have a defined purpose.

To create an autonomous learning environment, it is important to consider how students are energetic and in need of constant stimulation and challenge. Students desire frequent, quick-interactions, and are often bored in the traditional classroom (Black, 2010). Students can benefit from choice, including choosing activities away from their desks. Instead of watching and listening, research advocates that active engagement occurs when students process information through talking, moving, writing, manipulating, reading, discussing and exploring (Conderman, Bresnahan, & Heden, 2012). Boushey and Moser (2006) suggest five things that are important in daily literacy: reading to self, reading to someone, word work, listening to reading, and working on writing. Other research supports shared reading. Reading with someone enhances vocabulary and maintains student interest and motivation (Wang & Anderson, 2010). Listening to reading is an opportunity for students to interact with reading and enjoy reading they otherwise could not do on their own (Wang & Anderson, 2010).

Teachers need to be creative in the choices they offer students, and it is not always easy. Vokoun and Bigelow (2008) mention how school leaders are often pro-engagement and pro-student choice, but then conclude that curriculum does not allow much flexibility. Using knowledge, experience, and creativity, teachers need to come up with alternative learning
experiences that give students more control, yet also help learners meet curricular goal requirements.

Targeted students

Much of the research affirms engagement leading to reading success, but most research surrounds English language learners, upper elementary, middle school, and high school or college students. Research seems to lack in the area of primary students. College students take surveys for college campuses to learn about student engagement. A report suggests that students learn more when they are “intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning” (Mark & Boruff-Jones, 2003, p. 485). Teachers should ask the same of primary students. High school students choose which classes they should take. These choices teach students the skills that are necessary to increase independence and how to become thoughtful risk takers (Bradley & Alcock, 2010). Tidwell-Howell (2010) discusses the choices her AP English students have and the excitement in choosing alternative assessments. Middle school students are a target of many engagement and motivation research articles. Middle school teachers can plan brilliant lessons, but students need to care enough to engage with the curriculum and complete the work (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Research shows that ELL, middle school, high school and college students do not all read and learn at a teacher’s command. Offering students choice increases engagement, but limited research exists that proves motivation through student choice can aid in student engagement and reading proficiency in primary grades.
Research Questions

First grade students had more literacy choice and gained knowledge of autonomous learning strategies in the classroom during this action research project. The teacher, administration and other staff looked for changes in students’ engagement, behaviors, and reading abilities. The teacher researcher researched the following:

RQ 1: What effect will literacy choices have on student engagement?

RQ 2: What effect will higher engagement through literacy choices have on reading achievement scores?

RQ 3: What type and how many choices should students have?

RQ 4: What should teachers do to build an environment within classrooms that supports creating strong readers by offering student choice?

In this chapter, the researcher shared literature that promoted offering choice to motivate students to learn. Research suggests motivated students are engaged learners. The literature stressed the importance of engagement towards creating better readers. However, there is a deficit in the literature concerning choice and engagement in primary grades. The researcher incorporated student choice in a first grade classroom to determine if student choice in a primary grade had an influence on reading ability and achievement.

Chapter Two includes how the researcher will collect data. The researcher collected data from the online source AimsWeb as well as reading scores from NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) reading assessments. The data, in the form of graphs, indicated student growth and progress as compared to student data when they did not have similar choices. Qualitative data, collected by journaling, also included what type and how many choices students had. The instructional coach monitored each individual student for two minutes during reading rotations to
assess their engagement level. The teacher researcher, administration and instructional coach made observations to measure student engagement. Chapter Three involves an analysis and interpretation of data. This section includes the interpretation of the data collected from NWEA reading assessment scores, AimsWeb results, and observations. It also includes an explanation of the data. Chapter Four, Action Research, involves conclusions and findings of the study. This section includes recommendations and suggestions as a result of the study. Finally, Chapter Five reveals the researcher’s reflection on the study and if it was a success or things to change and improve. The researcher reflected on the process of action research and how the process changed the way the teacher researcher teaches.
Chapter Two: Data Collection

Thirteen of twenty first grade reading students agreed to participate in a study regarding literacy choice. The researcher noticed during reading rotations that some students would lose their focus and engagement. Rather than focus on a small group of students, the teacher needed to redirect and refocus students. Because of many interruptions, the researcher felt student learning opportunities suffered. The research project implemented offering students literacy choice to determine if choice would increase student engagement and boost reading achievement scores.

Data Sources

To determine if offering choice would affect students’ level of engagement, the instructional coach, principal, and classroom teacher made observations. The instructional coach monitored student engagement four times in the fall, before the researcher implemented choice and monitored four times in the spring once the teacher implemented literacy choice. The instructional coach timed each student for two minutes, scored their engagement level, and compiled engagement data for the researcher. The classroom teacher maintained a journal of observations regarding student engagement and choices as well as comments from the principal when he observed. The first-graders used a student- friendly Likert scale to self-reflect on statements about their level of engagement (See Appendix A). To determine if literacy choice affected reading achievement, the teacher collected student-reading data from AimsWeb fluency benchmark tests and NWEA reading assessments. The researcher tested and observed reading students throughout the study, before and after implementing literacy choice. The researcher triangulated the data to answer the proposed research questions (see Table 1).
**Triangulation of Multiple Data**

Table 1

*Data Sources Providing Triangulation Data for Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 1: What effect will literacy choices have on student engagement?</strong></td>
<td>NWEA Pre-Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 2: What effect will higher engagement through literacy choices have on reading achievement scores?</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 3: What type and how many choices should students have?</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 4: What should teachers do to build an environment within classrooms that supports creating strong readers by offering students choice?</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Gathering*

The researcher benchmarked students to establish reading fluency on the web-based program AimsWeb. AimsWeb fluency tests record how many words students read in one minute and the number of errors. AimsWeb data tracked growth in reading fluency in the fall, winter and spring. The researcher used AimsWeb data to compare students’ fluency prior to literacy choice and again after the teacher implemented choice. Along with AimsWeb, NWEA reading
assessment scores served as pre- and post-test data. The researcher compared student growth scores from the fall assessment to the winter assessment with growth shown from the winter to the spring assessment. The researcher analyzed if, and to what extent, introducing more literacy choices affected reading achievement.

The classroom teacher recorded observations concerning student engagement in a journal. The instructional coach and principal also observed students in the classroom. The instructional coach had training in classroom observations and monitored engagement timing students for two minutes to help determine student engagement. Students provided data through self-reflections on their engagement using a Likert scale on a ten-question survey (See Appendix A). Students completed the survey in the fall and again in the spring near the end of the research period.

Reliability. Students took quality tests to demonstrate reading ability. The NWEA reading assessment proved to be a reliable test indicating reading skill. Students, generally, can re-take the test and receive a similar score. AimsWeb is also a reliable source indicating reading fluency. Administration requires teachers to benchmark all students in the school using AimsWeb testing since it offers reliable data regarding student reading ability. To determine fluency, students read three passages for one minute each. The program monitors words per minute and establishes student reading fluency based on all three tests.

The teacher researcher, principal, and instructional coach observed students in regards to engagement. These observations are a reliable form of data since multiple professional educators offered their perspectives on student engagement. The instructional coach used a quantitative measure by timing individuals to monitor on task behavior and engagement. This and multiple perspectives ensure reliability in gathering data on student engagement.
Students had the opportunity to self-reflect and respond to statements on their engagement levels during reading time by completing a ten-question survey (See Appendix A). They used a kid-friendly Likert scale to indicate their levels of engagement. All willing participants completed the questionnaire. The researcher considered many points of view.

Validity. This study measured what it intended to measure because observers directed their attention toward student engagement. In addition, the teacher researcher monitored and evaluated the effect of that engagement on reading achievement. This study followed the validity criteria as laid out by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen. Anderson and colleagues suggested in their criteria for validity, to include democratic, outcome, process, catalytic and dialogic validity (Mills, 2011).

The research included democratic validity because the classroom teacher consulted with the school principal and instructional coach to gain multiple perspectives on student engagement. The study also incorporated multiple reading assessments to give a more accurate perception of student reading ability rather than rely on only one test. Participating students completed a survey in which they responded to statements about their level of engagement. Items on the survey were carefully thought-out to ensure accurate student engagement perceptions.

Weekly fluency tests as well as maintaining observation notes ensured process and outcome validity. The weekly tests helped answer the research questions regarding reading achievement. Anderson’s criteria for process validity recommend modifying strategies if data indicates to do so (Mills, 2011). The teacher researcher adjusted student lessons and choices according to student data and insights gathered from observation notes. The research involved outcome validity because it produced findings related to increasing student engagement. These findings led to actions that helped students become more engaged learners and better readers.
Limitations. This study examined how literacy choice and engagement affected reading ability. A limitation of this study was that the sample population was not representative of all students. Students learn at different rates and have different abilities. The growth this study indicated may be inconsistent if tested with another group of students. Students in this sample were in the advanced first grade reading group. Since they began with such high reading ability, it was more difficult for students to make as much growth as students with lower ability. The sample size was also small, only 13 students. Most of the students are not diverse but represent a similar socio-economic background and Caucasian ethnicity.

Another limitation of this study surrounds the student survey regarding student levels of engagement. Students might not answer truthfully, even if asked to do so, to please their instructor. The teacher will remind students to answer honestly and that the results of the surveys will be confidential and have no impact on student grades. During the spring NWEA reading test, the program stopped working for several students in the study. Students had to wait while the test reloaded and then continue with the test. For some, the program stopped several times. This created a poor testing environment. Although students still showed growth, the distraction may have altered scores.
Chapter Three: Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Results

This study sought to answer four research questions. The researcher will explain results in accordance to each research question.

RQ 1: What effect will literacy choices have on student engagement?

The instructional coach gave the researcher valuable engagement information during reading rotations. She came into the classroom to monitor engagement four times in the fall, before the teacher introduced choice, and four times in the spring, after students had literacy choices. Figure one (below) displays student engagement in the fall.

![Fall Class Average Engagement Scores](image)

Figure 1. Student fall engagement, prior to literacy choice.
The first time the instructional coach monitored student engagement in the classroom, October 23, she found 82.1% of the thirteen students that agreed to participate in the study, were engaged. The next time, October 25, 73.2% of students were engaged. On November 6, student engagement increased to 93.6% and the final time the instructional coach observed engagement prior to offering students choice, November 13, she noted 88.9% of students were engaged.

Figure two (below) displays student spring engagement scores after students had choice during reading rotations.

![Spring Class Average Engagement Scores](image)

Figure 2. Student spring engagement, with student choice.

The instructional coach monitored student engagement again after the teacher introduced literacy choice during reading rotations. On March 12, 92.3% of participating students were engaged. The instructional coach found 83.3% engaged on March 14 and 84.6% on April 2. On her final
spring observation of student engagement, the instructional coach noted 100% of students were on task.

After collecting fall and spring engagement data, the researcher compiled the data to show student engagement growth (see Figure 3). Six students of thirteen, 46%, increased their engagement after students could choose their reading rotation activity. Four of the thirteen, 31%, decreased their engagement and three of the thirteen, 23%, showed no change in their engagement.

![Engagement Adjustment Summary](image)

Figure 3. Student engagement growth from Fall to Spring.

To further analyze student engagement growth from fall to spring, the researcher examined individual student growth (see Figure 4). Three students did not show change with or without literary choice. Six students showed positive growth from the fall measurements to spring.
Students C, D, and J, exhibited growth of five to nine percent increase. Student I increased thirty-three percent. Student A increased forty percent and student L increased engagement by seventy-five percent. Students that showed negative growth (B, F, and H) dropped only five percent and student G dropped thirteen percent.

Figure 4. Individual student engagement growth from Fall to Spring.

Students completed a ten-question survey in the fall and completed the same survey again in the spring to help the researcher monitor how students respond to literacy choice. The students rated themselves using a kid-friendly Likert scale. The biggest smiley-face is equivalent to five points and scales down to a sad face, which is equivalent to one point. The researcher paired similar questions on the survey to discuss results as they vary between fall, when they did not have literacy choice, and spring, when they did have choice.
Figure 5. Student survey regarding perceptions of their reading work

Figure 5 (above) reveals how students rated themselves using the kid-friendly Likert scale on getting started on their reading work and if they considered themselves a hard worker during reading time. Fall scores were .4 higher than spring scores on question one, “I start right away with my reading work during reading time”. This indicates students felt they got started faster when they did not have choices during reading. However, on question two, “I work hard during reading time”, increased .2 on the spring survey, suggesting students feel they work harder when they have more autonomy.
Figure 6. Student survey questions regarding staying on task.

Students answered questions regarding their ability to stay on task during reading groups. Figure six (above) shows results of question seven, “I stay on task with my reading activity the whole time”, and question eight, “it is hard for me to stay on task during reading time”. Results from question seven of the survey showed students scored themselves .2 higher in the fall than in the spring indicating students felt they stayed on task the whole time more in the fall than in the spring. Conversely, results from question eight reveal students felt it was harder for them to stay on task in the fall than in the spring. Students scored themselves an average of 1.2 points lower that it was hard to stay on task in the spring. This suggests students found it harder to stay on task without choice.
Figure 7. Student survey questions regarding needing reminders to stay on task.

Figure seven (above) displays survey results regarding students needing or not needing reminders to stay on task. Students gave themselves a higher score in the fall than the spring on question three, “sometimes I need reminders to stay on task”, and on question nine, “I do not need reminders to stay on task or to keep working hard”. On average, students scored themselves .7 lower on question three, indicating that in the spring, students felt they needed fewer reminders than in the fall. Question nine reveals students scoring nearly the same at .1 lower in the spring than in the fall. This indicates students felt they did not need reminders to stay on task or to work hard.
Students responded favorably in the fall, an average of 4.8, that they could find other work to do without asking for help (See Figure 8). In the Spring, students scored .5 lower on the same question. However, students scored an average of 2.3 points that they would ask the teacher when they complete their work what they should do next. In the spring, students scored themselves .5 lower that they need to ask. According to these survey questions, students have mixed feelings on if they can independently find new work or if they need assistance.
Figure 9. Student survey results regarding knowledge of literacy choices in the classroom.

Figure nine (above) displays student scores regarding their knowledge of the literacy choices during reading rotations. In the fall, students had no choice and had to participate in the activity assigned to them. Students responded to question five in regards to their understanding of how to do the activity. In the spring, students scored .2 higher that they knew how to do the different workshop choices. On question ten, I cannot remember how to do workshop activities, students scored .8 lower in the spring than in the fall. These results indicate students felt they remembered how to do workshop activities more in the spring than the fall.

RQ 2: What effect will higher engagement through literacy choices have on reading achievement scores?

To determine if literacy choice would affect reading achievement, students took the NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) tests in the fall, winter, and spring. The researcher compared results from fall to winter with results from winter to spring after implementing
student choice in the classroom. Figure ten (below) compares the percentage of growth from their fall to winter and winter to spring NWEA reading test scores.

Figure 10. Student NWEA reading assessment growth.

Of the 13 participating students, nine of them had larger growth in the spring, with literary choice, than in the fall, without the choice. See Table 2 (below) to review student winter and spring scores. Table 2 includes individual scores, point and percentage increases, as well as the group’s average point and percent increase for both testing periods. The data reveals that average student scores increased 7% in the spring compared with the 6.4% increase in the fall.
Table 2

*NWFA Reading Assessment Scores Indicating Student Growth.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Fall Score</th>
<th>Winter Score</th>
<th>Points Increased</th>
<th>Percent Increase</th>
<th>Spring Score</th>
<th>Points Increased</th>
<th>Percent Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>188</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
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<td>H</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>182</td>
<td>186</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>10.4</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average 10.6 6.4 12.3 7.0

To ensure validity, the researcher also used AimsWeb data to monitor student reading achievement. The researcher benchmarked student fluency in the fall and compared the growth made from the fall to winter with winter to spring benchmark scores. See Figure 11 (below) to review results of individual reading fluency growth.
Of the 13 participating students, seven students gained more words per minute in the spring than in the fall. Five students made larger fluency gains in the fall and one student made the same gains in both testing periods. In the fall, students increased 265 words per minute collectively which is an average of 20.4 words per minute increase. In the spring, students increased 339 words per minute for an average of 26.1 words per minute increase.

RQ 3: What type and how many choices should students have?

The researcher maintained a journal throughout the research process to monitor student behaviors and teacher observations. A journal entry dated November 6, 2012, mentions reducing student reading rotation groups from seven groups to five. The teacher also adjusted the number of students per group from three or four students to four or five. This journal entry points out that fewer rotation groups leads to less rotations and less transition time. The teacher commented that so much transition time adds up to too much lost instruction time. A journal entry dated
November 20, 2012, revealed that having five groups was more successful than seven. However, the teacher commented that students continued to interrupt her small group during the rotations. The teacher also found herself paying more attention to students around the room and trying to ensure they were on task rather than focusing on the small group she was working with.

The teacher researcher commented on December 3, 2012, “reading groups are getting better at finishing their task without my redirection, but certain students still need reminders to get started right away and to stay focused on their work.” The journal reveals on December 10, 2012 that students were on task and the teacher rewarded them two times during the 50 minute reading rotation time. However, on December 14, 2012, the teacher commented in her journal that reading groups were very talkative and hard to keep on task. “I still find myself struggling to focus on my small group because I am redirecting student behaviors across the room.” The teacher also commented that students continue to interrupt to show their book or ask questions, but the interruptions have decreased. This may be due to the fact that students understand how to complete their assigned tasks.

In the spring semester, the teacher implemented student choice during reading rotations. The first journal entry after this implementation dated January 10, 2013, states that students “seem engaged and excited to choose their own learning activities”. The interruptions at the teacher’s table were less and the preparation work was dramatically reduced. On February 19, 2012, the teacher researcher commented that reading prep work continues to be easier than in the fall. Students also seemed engaged and tend to choose similar activities each day, even though the teacher set out several options for them to choose from.

The instructional coach also made some observations regarding student engagement. On March 14, 2013, the instructional coach commented that by having choice, students seem to stay
focused on their chosen center activity and were doing what they were expected. The noise level was low, which allowed the teacher to work with a small group. She also commented that fewer students seemed to interrupt during the teacher’s time with select students. The principal observed on Thursday, April 4 that students had built their stamina. The researcher commented in her journal that the principal seemed impressed with student improvement to stay on task. On Tuesday, April 16, the instructional coach praised students for being on task and working hard. The teacher wrote in her journal, “I am so excited that the students can independently choose a reading or writing activity and allow me to work with students at my table. It has taken time to train students, but it is paying off!”

RQ 4: What should teachers do to build an environment within classrooms that supports creating strong readers by offering student choice?

The teacher researcher kept a journal throughout the research process providing insights and observations regarding offering student choice. The workshop choices students have are the teacher’s table (which they have to do everyday), spelling/word work, read-to-self, read-to-someone, listen to reading, and journal. The teacher researcher noted that offering students choice will not work if students do not understand the choices. Before students had the option of choosing their activity, they trained how to do each choice. The teacher introduced and trained students how to do read-to-self first and had students practice several times for the first two weeks. Next, the teacher worked on training students on how to do different spelling/word work activities. After students built stamina during read-to-self, the teacher researcher introduced read-to-someone or buddy read. A journal entry from November 5 stated,

“We practiced read-to-someone today. We made rules like how to sit when reading with a buddy and different ways to read together. Students modeled how to correctly read
with a buddy in front of the class. We also modeled how not to read with someone. Then the whole class practiced.”

The teacher researcher created specific rules for spelling/word work, listen to reading and journal with students. The rules included “pick a smart spot” where students will not distract others or be distracted, “get started right away”, and “work the whole time”. The teacher commented that students often repeat the rules or had reminders before reading rotations. The teacher researcher expressed the importance of training students to meet expectations thoroughly before allowing students many choices.

Discussion

To discuss data, the researcher will interpret results in accordance to each research question.

RQ 1: What effect will literacy choices have on student engagement?

The instructional coach came into the classroom to observe classroom engagement four times during the fall semester, when the teacher assigned their tasks and students did not have literacy choice and four times in the spring semester when the teacher allowed students choice. The researcher compared engagement data from the fall with the spring and results proved that students were on task more in the spring than the fall when they had choice. Students were even on task a staggering 100% of time the instructional coach timed each student, which is what the teacher researcher always wants for students. Two days before that on April 2, however, students were only on task 84.6%. This could be attributed to being the first day back after Easter break.

The teacher researcher analyzed engagement data to find if students increased their engagement over the year. Nearly half, 46%, of students increased and 23% showed no change. Some students, 31%, decreased their engagement after the teacher implemented offering students
choice. Offering student choice helped increase one student’s engagement 75% and another student went up 40%. The largest decrease in engagement after introducing student choice was 13%. These numbers indicate more students increased engagement and also made larger increases than decreases. Some students maintained their engagement with or without choice options. The data shows that in both fall and spring some engagement scores (students E, K, and M) were 100%. These students are probably students that work hard and stay engaged without much teacher prompting. Offering choice helps students like student L and student A that did not stay on task as well before the teacher offered literacy choice during reading. Dredger (2008) found that engagement increases when students have freedom to choose their own reading in a study with AP students. It seems that engagement also increases for first grade students when they have freedom with literary choice as well.

Students responded to a ten-question survey to help the researcher monitor how students responded to literacy choice. The survey revealed mixed results. Students answered in the fall that they start right away with their reading work higher than in the spring. This could be attributed to students having specific tasks to complete during their time at each station. Perhaps they were more motivated to get started right away to complete and turn in the assignment. When students responded to how hard they worked though, they scored themselves higher in the spring. This indicates that choice made a difference in motivating students to work hard.

Students also responded to questions regarding staying on task. The survey again revealed mixed results. In the fall, students scored themselves higher than in the spring that they stayed on task with reading activities. However, they also indicated in the fall that it was hard for them to stay on task. They scored an average of 1.2 points lower in the spring that it was hard for them to stay on task during reading time. This drop indicates that students found it easier to stay
on task possibly because students had the autonomy to choose their own activities within the prescribed boundaries set up by the teacher researcher. This finding echoes Ebata’s (2010) research on effective language learning that autonomous learners have increased motivation towards learning.

Students also answered questions on the survey regarding needing reminders to stay on task. Students scored themselves higher in the fall than the spring that they sometimes need reminders indicating they felt they needed fewer reminders to stay on task in the spring. However, students scored themselves slightly lower (.1 points) in the spring for not needing reminders to stay on task or to keep working hard. Students may have scored themselves lower in the spring because they were more aware of their ability to stay on task as the teacher trained students to self monitor themselves.

Students responded to questions regarding self-direction and if they could independently find work if they finished a task. In the fall, students indicated they felt they could find other work without asking for help. This conflicts with teacher journal notes that students often interrupted group time. Students indicated in the spring that they ask the teacher what they should do next .5 points lower than they did in the fall. This confirms teacher journal notes that student interruptions decreased in the spring after implementing choice to students.

Regarding knowledge of reading workshop choices, students scored themselves higher in the spring. This is an expected result as students became familiar with reading activities throughout the year. However, students only scored 0.2 points higher in the spring than in the fall. This could be because in the fall before reading rotations commenced, the teacher researcher went through each reading station explaining how to complete each activity. In the spring, the teacher no longer had to explain the assigned activities, since students chose their own activity
and already knew how to complete their chosen task. Students also indicated they could
remember how to do workshop activities in the spring better than the fall. This result also
corresponds to growing familiarity with options over the course of the year.

RQ 2: What effect will higher engagement through literacy choices have on reading
achievement scores?

To determine if offering literacy choice would increase reading achievement, the teacher
researcher used two tests to compare growth from fall to winter, when students did not have
choice, with growth from winter to spring, after the teacher implemented literacy choice.
Students took the NWEA reading assessment as well as AimsWeb benchmark tests in the fall,
winter and spring.

Thirteen students participated in the study and nine of them showed greater growth on the
NWEA reading assessment in the spring than in the fall. For nearly half of the students (6), the
growth was not substantial, only a 1-4 point increases over their fall scores. Four students made
larger gains in the fall than the spring. Student F and L scored 3 points higher in the fall, student
E 10 points higher and student H scored 17 points higher in the fall. However, one student,
student I, made as much as an 18 point gain over the fall score on the spring assessment. Student
D increased by 7 points and student K increased 15 points over the fall assessment. This data
reveals that offering literacy choice can increase more student reading achievement scores. This
result corresponds with Housand and Reis’ (2008) research in that active engagement in the
learning process produces an increase in academic performance. It also aligns with Cummins’
(2011) statement that literacy engagement is a primary determinant of literary achievement.

Students also participated in AimsWeb benchmarking to assess reading fluency. The test
results show that more students had greater growth in the spring than in the fall. Not only did
more students have greater growth in the spring, those that increased also made larger increases than those that had more growth in the fall. The greatest growth in the fall was student K with a 39 words per minute increase in the fall compared with the spring score of a 14 word per minute increase. Several students made great gains in the spring, one student, student L, increased by 43 words per minute. Overall, students increased 339 words per minute in the spring and 265 words per minute in the fall for a 74 words per minute increase in the spring. This data confirms that offering students literacy choice makes a positive difference in reading achievement, again confirming the findings of Hundsdorfer and Reis (2008) and Cummins (2011).

RQ 3: What type and how many choices should students have?

Teacher journal notes reveal some insights regarding what type and how many choices students should have during reading. The teacher researcher relied on choice options from Boushey and Moser’s (2006) book, The Daily Five, as a starting point. These options include read-to-self, read-to-someone, listen-to-reading, work on writing and word work. The teacher adapted these choices for the classroom during the study and added the teacher table option. Since students were familiar with certain terms, the options students had in the classroom for this study consisted of teacher’s table, spelling/word work, journal, read-to-self, listen to reading and buddy read. Teacher journal entries did not reflect too many or not enough options for students to choose from. Students did not participate in all six choices everyday, but chose four and then could choose the two they missed the next reading rotation time. The teacher required students to meet at teacher table everyday. The researcher found six options for students adequate for the classroom.

The teacher researcher also wrote journal entries regarding what students chose to do during the options, spelling/word work in particular. Several entries note that student’s often pick
spelling/word work first during choice time. The teacher had several spelling/word work choices available to students and noted that many students often revert to the same three choices: spelling on white boards, phonics workbook or spelling scrabble. The other options during reading rotations did not have multiple choices. Daniels and Steres (2011) suggest humans need to feel they are in control of their actions and decisions. Spelling/word work offered students choice within choice, which could be why students seemed to enjoy that option.

Journal entries also included notes on students enjoying listen-to-reading judging by the smiles on student faces and saying the words as they became more familiar with different stories. Students could choose the book they listened to out of five or six stories options that the teacher rotated. These notes confirm Wang and Anderson’s (2010) study that found listening to reading as an opportunity for students to interact with reading and enjoy reading they otherwise could not do on their own.

RQ 4: What should teachers do to build an environment within classrooms that supports creating strong readers by offering student choice?

The teacher researcher’s journal emphasized the importance of training students and setting up clear rules and expectations to support offering student choice in the classroom. Research suggests that choices teach students the skills that are necessary to increase independence and how to become thoughtful risk takers (Bradley & Alcock, 2010). However, in an elementary setting, students need boundaries surrounding the options they have. Before the teacher introduced all choice options, students practiced each choice and had many reminders of the rules. Without training, offering choice in a primary classroom setting may not be successful. The study suggests that through offering choice, students have higher engagement and reading
achievement scores increase. The teacher researcher emphasized practicing the choice options before allowing students the autonomy to choose reading activities independently.

The teacher researcher drew from the rules Boushey and Moser (2006) indicated and referred to the rules often with students. Once students understood the rules and expectations of each reading choice, students could have the autonomy to choose a reading activity during reading group time. As Sanacore (1999) stated, when young people have opportunities to determine their own course of action, their freedom to choose can positively affect their general well-being, their behavior and values, their growth and development, and their academic achievement. This study echoes that with proper training and clear expectations, students positively influenced their growth, development and academic achievement in reading.

**Implications**

This study sought to find out if offering first grade students reading choice would affect their engagement as well as their reading achievement scores. This study found that of the thirteen participating students, more of them increased their engagement as well as their reading achievement scores after the teacher implemented choice options in the reading classroom. This implies that teachers should consider offering choice to the students in their classroom to boost engagement and achievement.

Another reason teachers should consider offering elementary students choice is because it is a motivator. According to the student survey, students tend to work harder when they have choice. Choice helped motivate students and it had a positive effect on engagement and reading achievement scores. The survey also revealed students becoming more self-aware of their behavior. They could better monitor self-engagement because of training and several teacher reminders. Teachers that consider implementing choice in the classroom for elementary students
must consider the training needed for the students to learn how to do the different choices and gain an understanding of the rules and expectations. The teacher researcher emphasized that without practice and clear rules and expectations, students would most likely not show success in staying engaged during reading choice time.

Teacher researcher journal entries noted the drastic decrease of prep time it took to prepare for student activities the teacher introduced reading choice options. The teacher replaced time preparing several activities for student independent work with creating mini lessons to present to the whole group or the small group meeting at teacher table. Decreasing time preparing center activities is another reason other teachers should consider implementing choice in their classrooms. Teachers gain valuable time to create quality lessons that can boost reading achievement.
Chapter Four: Action Research

Findings of the Research

This research study sought to answer four research questions. The researcher will discuss the findings of the research in accordance to each research question.

RQ 1: What effect will literacy choices have on student engagement?

To determine if literary choice had an effect on student engagement, the researcher asked the instructional coach to monitor student engagement four times in the fall, when students did not have literary choice, and four times in the spring, after the teacher implemented student literacy choice during reading time. The researcher compiled and compared the results from the engagement data from the instructional coach. Six students of thirteen, 46%, increased their engagement in the spring after students could choose their reading rotation activity. Four of the thirteen, 31%, decreased their engagement and three of the thirteen, 23%, showed no change in their engagement (See Figure 3). Of the four students that reduced engagement after the teacher introduced choice, the engagement dropped a maximum of 13% (See Figure 4). Students that increased their engagement showed a maximum increase of 75%. This data suggests that allowing students literacy choice increases their engagement.

Students participated in a ten-question survey to help the researcher examine student attitudes about reading choice. The researcher learned that students responded more favorably that they get started more quickly with their task in the fall when they had direct instruction or a direct task to complete. However, students responded that they work harder when they had choice. This data indicates that students need to be thoroughly aware of their task but can still have choice options to motivate them to work hard.
The survey also revealed that students feel they stayed more on task in the fall than the spring when they had choice options. They scored themselves .2 points higher in the fall. However, students responded that it was harder for them to stay on task in the fall than the winter. They scored 1.2 points lower that it was hard to stay on task in the spring. These scores suggest students feel more strongly that they could stay on task better in the spring, with choice, than in the fall with out reading choice.

Some survey questions revealed mixed results (See Figure 8). On question four of the survey, students agreed they could find new work after completing work better in the fall scoring .5 points higher than spring scores. Yet on question six, they scored .5 lower in the spring that they ask the teacher what they should do if they complete work. These results show that students feel the same in the fall and spring that they can or cannot find work after they complete a task. The study shows that allowing students to have literacy choice did not improve, nor diminish their ability to find new work after completing a task.

Students scored themselves favorably in the spring regarding their knowledge of the literacy choices. Their scores indicate students knew the workshop choices and could remember how to do the workshop activities better in the spring (See Figure 9). This data indicates that elementary students are capable of choosing and understanding literacy activities in the classroom.

RQ 2: What effect will higher engagement through literacy choices have on reading achievement scores?

The researcher tested students using NWEA reading assessments and AimsWeb benchmark tests to determine student growth in reading. The researcher compared growth in the fall, with no reading choice, with growth in the spring after the teacher implemented student
literacy choice. NWEA reading assessment results showed a 7% increase compared with a 6.4% increase in the fall. This increase suggests that offering students choice positively affects students reading achievement. Student AimsWeb data supports this finding as well. Students improved by an average of 26.1 words per minute on the spring fluency benchmark test compared to the average improvement of 20.4 words per minute on the winter test. The results prove that students improve by more words per minute when given literacy choice in the classroom than when not given choice. Results from NWEA reading assessments and the AimsWeb fluency tests indicate offering literacy choice in a first grade classroom has positive effects on reading achievement.

RQ 3: What type and how many choices should students have?

Excerpts from the teacher researcher’s journal helped determine what type and how many choices students should have in the classroom. Students could choose among six choices during reading workshop: read-to-self, buddy read, listen to reading, journal, spelling/word work, and teacher’s table. The teacher noted that these options suited the students well. It was not too many or too few options. Some choices, like listen to reading or spelling/word work offered choices within the choice, such as which book to read and listen to or which spelling or word work activity students could work on. Journal entries revealed that some students often chose the same spelling/word work choices. Since students frequently chose the same options, the teacher probably did not need to provide as many options for spelling word work. However, allowing students several options gave students the opportunity to practice different spelling or word work activities. The teacher researcher also noted in the journal that she would remind students if one option was full, students would have an opportunity to take part in that option at another time. The researcher emphasized that allowing students literacy choice during reading time lessened
the planning time required to prepare center activities and that students seemed excited and motivated to have some control of what they did and who the worked with during reading workshop time. The study found that the teacher liked implementing student choice over not offering choice. Offering choice made positive impacts for the teacher and students during learning time.

RQ 4: What should teachers do to build an environment within classrooms that supports creating strong readers by offering student choice?

The researcher’s journal during the research period offers insights to creating a successful environment in which students have choice. The researcher used others’ research to help form the choices students had during reading workshop. Before allowing all options, the teacher emphasized the importance of proper practice and training for students in all the choices students would have. Without adequate training, students will most likely not stay engaged or understand how to complete tasks. This study stresses the importance of training students in the literacy choices to have similar success shown through this research.

Recommended Action

The researcher recommends offering literacy choice to students in elementary grades as it can boost engagement and reading achievement scores as well as lessen the time needed to prepare center activities for students. The teacher saw success in this study and also recommends thorough practice and training in student options to see similar success in the future. The teacher must make rules and expectations clear so students understand their tasks. Students should also practice building stamina in the choice options before the teacher allows students to choose from all options.
Instilling choice into an elementary classroom is a methodical and systematic process. To begin offering student choice in a primary setting, begin with one of the options, such as read-to-self, and practice that option until all students understand the expectations and can independently work at it for several minutes. Once students build stamina in that area, introduce another choice, but continue to practice the first choice. Students can choose from the options they practiced and thoroughly understand. The researcher does not recommend offering choices that students have not practiced.

In this study, the teacher researcher allowed students to pick a reading workshop choice, after thorough training, and work at it for fifteen minutes. After that period, students returned to their seats, possibly watch a mini-lesson and then have another chance to choose a different workshop choice. The teacher implemented workshop choice four times, for about an hour a day. The teacher met with five students at the teacher’s table during each choice time and met with every student every day. Students also kept a chart so they could monitor which choices they selected and ensured they chose each option before selecting one twice (see Appendix B).

Responsibilities

Those responsible for implementing choice in elementary classrooms are classroom teachers. Research proves that students respond well to choice and this study reveals an increase in student engagement and reading achievement. Teachers should strive to implement strategies to engage and simultaneously boost achievement scores. Teachers can instill literacy choice in their classroom and see similar successful results. Principals or other administration personnel are also responsible for recommending and advocating strategies to help increase engagement and reading achievement.
Sharing Finding with Colleagues

The researcher plans to share her findings with school administration and colleagues in a variety of methods. The researcher’s school implements PLC’s (professional learning communities) which is a great venue to share results with grade level colleagues. The researcher can present findings at the fall professional development meetings so many grade level teachers can learn the results of this study and ask questions about how to implement similar strategies in their classrooms. The teacher will also share results with parents and explain how their children were independent workers and demonstrated improvements in both engagement and reading achievement.

Ongoing Monitoring

The teacher researcher implemented literacy choice with first grade students. In the future, the teacher will transfer to fifth grade and have an opportunity to offer fifth grade students choice and monitor engagement and reading achievement. The teacher also plans to promote offering literacy choice in other grade levels throughout the school. The teacher will offer support and guidance so teachers can see success. PLC’s will provide an opportunity to check with teachers about attitudes and responses toward implementing literacy choice. Teachers will also be able to communicate with the researcher by email or calling. The researcher is passionate about offering literacy choice and will work hard to help other teachers implement this strategy in their classrooms.

Timeline for Action

The teacher researcher will publish the results of this study spring 2013. The researcher will share results with colleagues at the final grade level PLC in the spring. The teacher plans to share results with parents by sending a letter with students before the end of school so they can
see the growth their students made and the successes they had. With administration permission, the researcher will share findings at the fall inservice and offer support to other teachers willing to implement literacy choice in their classroom in hope of similar engagement and reading achievement growth.

Resources

The Steps to Action Chart below provides findings and the timeline actions will take place.

Table 3
Steps to Action Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of findings research questions</th>
<th>Recommended action targeted to findings</th>
<th>Who is responsible for the action?</th>
<th>Who needs to be consulted or informed?</th>
<th>Who will monitor/collect data</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: What effect will literacy choices have on student engagement?</td>
<td>Teachers should implement literacy choices in primary grades to boost engagement.</td>
<td>Teachers, Principal</td>
<td>Teachers, Instructional Coach, Principal</td>
<td>Teachers, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Share findings at PLC to encourage implementing choice with students.</td>
<td>Teacher researcher</td>
<td>Teachers, principal, instructional coach</td>
<td>Teachers, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>Spring, 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2: What effect will higher engagement through literacy choices have on reading achievement scores?</td>
<td>Teachers should implement literacy choices in primary grades to boost reading achievement scores.</td>
<td>Teachers, Principal</td>
<td>Teachers, Instructional Coach, Principal</td>
<td>Principal, Teachers, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Share findings at PLC to encourage implementing choice with students.</td>
<td>Teacher researcher</td>
<td>Teachers, principal, instructional coach</td>
<td>Teachers, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>Spring, 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ 3: What type and how many choices should students have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Teachers should offer approximately 6 reading choices including: read-to-self, buddy read, listen to reading, journal, spelling/word work and teacher’s table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3.1 Share findings at PLC to discuss choices to implement with students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Teachers, Instructional Coach</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
<th>Various</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

RQ 4: What should teachers do to build an environment within classrooms that supports creating strong readers by offering student choice?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Teachers should thoroughly train students and set clear rules and expectations for each literacy choice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4.1 Share findings at PLC and discuss how to train students in choice options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher researcher</th>
<th>Teachers, principal, instructional coach</th>
<th>Teachers, Instructional Coach</th>
<th>Spring, 2013, Ongoing</th>
<th>Various</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Chapter Five: Reflection

Research supports that offering students choice is motivational and makes positive impacts on student learning. However, much of the research surrounding student autonomy focuses on middle, high school, or college students. This study sought to determine the effect of offering first grade students literacy choice. The researcher resolved to determine if offering students choice affected reading achievement and engagement. To determine the affect of offering choice, the researcher taught the first half of the year not offering reading choice and in the spring implemented offering students choice. The researcher compared growth in the fall with growth in the spring on student NWEA reading assessments as well as AimsWeb fluency benchmark tests. Students took the tests in the fall, winter and spring. The researcher gained engagement data by utilizing the instructional coach. The instructional coach observed four times in the fall and four times again in the spring. She timed each student for two minutes to establish individual engagement. The researcher compared engagement data in the fall, when students did not have choice, with engagement data from the spring, when students had choice. The researcher also looked to answer what type and how many choices students should have in the classroom and how to set up a successful environment that supports choice.

The results of this study echo previous research that offering choice has a positive affect on student learning. The researcher found that offering choice to first grade students helped them to make overall larger gains in the spring than the fall on both their NWEA reading assessments and AimsWeb fluency benchmark tests as well as increase engagement. The teacher maintained a journal of observations and insights throughout the research process. The journal entries revealed which type and how many choices teachers should offer their students. The researcher, with the help of other research, suggested offering five or six choices including read-to-self,
buddy read, listen to reading, journal, spelling/word work and work with the teacher. Journal entries also offered some suggestions for how to set up a successful classroom environment that supports student choice such as proper and thorough training in each choice option before allowing students to choose from all literacy options.

The study also included a vital component of action research—catalytic validity. This study will change the way the instructor teaches. The methods indicated improvement in student engagement and reading ability, therefore the teacher will practice this method with future students. The teacher researcher will promote the method for other teachers to implement in their classrooms as well. Before publication of the study, peers critiqued and reviewed it. Anderson, Herr and Nihlen recommend peer reviewing as dialogic validity (Mills, 2011).

The teacher researcher plans to share the study’s findings with colleagues at PLC meetings and professional development meetings in the fall of 2013. The researcher will encourage colleagues to implement student choice with elementary students because of the successful results of this study. The researcher will also implement offering students choice in a fifth grade setting to determine if offering literacy choice in an upper grade will show similar growth as suggested by previous research. The research study certainly will affect future teaching goals for the researcher.

Effects on Teaching

This research study proved that offering students literacy choice can have a positive effect on their learning. The teacher plans to implement student literacy choice in the fifth grade in hopes of similar successful results. The researcher emphasized the important of proper training for students and teachers to have success and ensure future students receive thorough training in choice options. The teacher must allow students to practice the choice options and set clear rules
and expectations for students. The teacher plans to promote the findings of the research and encourage all colleagues to implement offering students literacy choice because of the successes with this research study. After implementing choice in a first grade setting, the researcher is optimistic that offering choice in upper grades will provide increased engagement and reading achievement opportunities as well.

_Implication of the Process_

Through this research process, the researcher reflected how many things teachers do is a form of research; teachers try a new strategy and monitor if it is successful. However, with this research, the teacher carefully deliberated a plan of action and how to measure the results of the new strategy with fidelity. The teacher also enlisted the support from administration and the instructional coach. The research would have been far more difficult without the aid of the instructional coach supplying engagement data while the teacher taught lessons as well as the use of school test resources like NWEA and AimsWeb. This research was not one lesson or even a unit that a teacher reflected on and offered insights on how to improve. The research spanned the entire school year. It took time to plan and implement, help from others, and resources to measure and observe growth. All students took the fall, winter and spring tests, but because of the research, the researcher was especially excited to see growth results.

Because of the positive results the research revealed by offering choice, the researcher plans to implement offering students literacy choice with fifth grade students in the future. The teacher will implement choice options in the fall rather than waiting for spring. As the teacher implements literacy choice with fifth grade students, she will encourage colleagues to implement adding student choice with their students as well. The researcher will share findings and promote effective ways to implement offering student choice.
The research required the teacher utilize help from the instructional coach which the teacher otherwise may not have done. The principal even noted that the teacher used the instructional coach as she is intended and it is something the researcher can use again in the future. The instructional coach not only fulfilled engagement data but also brought to attention other items the teacher could work on to make things run more smoothly in the classroom. The whole process of planning to implement a new strategy, measure data and employ administration helped made the researcher a better teacher. Because the teacher researched other studies on student choice, she was exposed to several methods to consider in her study. Reading other research helps teachers to grow and learn from others.

Today as students enter the reading room, they are excited to begin reading groups. They are especially excited when they can choose whom they work with and what they work on to make them better readers and writers. The classroom is quiet as the teacher calls out a student’s name and they quickly respond to which reading workshop option they choose. Once all students pick an option, they go to their “smart spot” and get started right away. Students built up stamina so the teacher can work with a small group of students uninterrupted for the allotted amount of time. The teacher does not have to explain activities at each center. After one workshop session, students regroup at their desks to watch a mini-lesson before they choose again. This study revealed that offering choice increases engagement and reading achievement scores. This researcher will implement choice with students in the future because of the successes of the study.
References


Appendix A
Student Engagement Questionnaire

1. I start right away with my reading work during reading time.

2. I work hard during reading time.

3. Sometimes I need reminders to stay on task.

4. When I finish my work, I can find some other work to do without asking for help.

5. I know how to do the different ‘learning-to-read’ choices.

6. I ask the teacher when I complete my work what I should do next.
7. I stay on task with my reading activity the whole time.

8. It is hard for me to stay on task during reading time.

9. Sometimes it is hard to pick a ‘learning-to-read’ activity because there are too many.

10. I cannot remember how to do some of the ‘learning-to-read’ activities.
Appendix B
Student chart to select and monitor literacy choices

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