

Increasing Students' Engagement, Motivation, and Productivity
during Literacy Centers

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Description of Teaching Context	

Since August 2010, I have been working as an intern in a first grade classroom at Panorama Village Elementary School. I am currently a senior at The Pennsylvania State University, and I was chosen as one of 60 elementary education majors to participate in a collaborative 185 day, full-time elementary student teaching internship in the State College Area School District. My first grade classroom is made up of 22 different individuals. Of the 22 students, there are 13 girls and 9 boys. Culturally, this class is made up of two students from a Russian descent, one Hispanic student, one African-American student and the rest of the class identifies as Caucasian. There are four students who are new to the district this year, which is also important to the makeup of my first grade classroom.

The majority of the class is either reading at or above grade level. Specifically, 17 students are above the benchmark for the first grade reading level, two students are at the grade level benchmark, and three students are below the reading level benchmark. The three students who are below the reading level benchmark are in Title One and attend Response to Intervention (RTI). Within this class, there are two students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP). One of the students with an IEP receives

speech therapy and occupational therapy throughout the week. The other student with an IEP receives speech therapy, occupational therapy, and adaptive physical education. This student in particular is on the autism spectrum along with another student in the class. Both of these students have Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS) workers who come in the afternoon to observe their social interactions during math and recess. There are also six students in the class who have behavior concerns. These concerns include: noncompliance, self-regulation, and attention. As far as the social relationships within this classroom, the students in the class get along well together. Many of the students play together at recess, and many of the students in the class look to each other for help and support. The students in the class, despite their many differences, work together cooperatively and positively.

In order to learn and focus on literacy skills throughout the day and week in my first grade classroom, the students work in four different literacy stations during a one hour and twenty minute segment in the day where they have 20 minutes to work on each station of guided reading, phonics, word study, and independent literacy study. At the guided reading station, the students are grouped based on similar reading levels. At the phonics station, Words Their Way, the students are grouped based upon similar phonics achievement levels. At the word study, Word Wall, and independent stations, the students are grouped based on the flexibility of who is not working at guided reading or Words Their Way; therefore, some students who are at each station are not necessarily grouped on similar literacy achievement.

Main Wondering and Sub-Wonderings

Main Wondering: How can creativity help increase student motivation, engagement, and productivity during literacy centers?

Sub-Wonderings:

1. What are the most effective practices for independent work at literacy centers that help students to become more engaged and motivated to complete their work?
2. How can the use of choice and student responsibility help increase students' motivation, engagement, and productivity during literacy centers?
3. How does student interest in literacy activities correlate to their completion rate at literacy centers?

Data Collection and Analysis Process:

Survey

In order to try to answer my sub-wondering, if student interest correlates to their completion rate at my station, I took student surveys after each activity at my literacy station throughout the entire time of the inquiry process (Appendix C). Due to the fact that I planned for a variety of activities, I also used the surveys to analyze and see if the students were interested in certain types of activities. Was it a week that I gave the students more choice in the activities for the week; therefore, do the students enjoy having the freedom and responsibility for their own independent learning? I also took several parent volunteer surveys to get more feedback on their observations while helping students at my literacy center. Through email, I sent a survey to all of the parent volunteers who helped students at my literacy station throughout the inquiry

process (Appendix D). I asked the parents two open-ended questions to find out if they felt that the students were engaged in their work and if they felt the students were enjoying the activities they were working on.

Analysis

In order to analyze the interest surveys that I gave to my students, each week, I added the total amount of students who participated in the survey because some days students were absent and some days students forgot to fill out the survey at the end of the center. Then, I recorded the number of students who circled a smile face, an okay face, and a sad face for the activity. I found the percentages of the students who liked the activity, thought the activity was okay, and did not like the activity by dividing the totals of the responses by the total amount of students participated. At the end of the inquiry process, I found the total percentages of all of the surveys the students took throughout the process. With the other student surveys, I tallied the students' responses for favorite and least favorite activity to analyze the types of activities the students most often enjoyed and did not enjoy. In order to analyze the parent volunteer surveys, I reviewed the survey answers from each of the four parent volunteers, and I looked for trends and commonalities in their answers to make claims and provide evidence for those claims.

Anecdotal Notes

Each week, I made a data completion worksheet with a table including all of the students' names on the left hand-side and empty boxes to write check marks to record the students' completion rate at my literacy station (Appendix E). The check marks

depended on the different activities that the students completed each week; therefore, I also took notes, reflections, and observations of the students' behavior at my literacy station, what activity they were working on, and whether or not there was any supervision.

Analysis

In order to see if the students' productivity had increased throughout my inquiry process, I reviewed each week's data completion amongst all of the students in my class. I reviewed the comments that I made each day, and I looked at individual students from each of the four literacy groups to see if the student had an increase in his or her productivity rate, a decrease in productivity rate, or remained virtually the same from before the inquiry process to during the inquiry process.

Systematic Observations

I took data on the students' on-task behavior at my literacy center without supervision and with supervision before and after the introduction of my new literacy station. I conducted the at-task systematic observation by taking numerous sweeps of each group during Language Arts stations during their allotted 20-minute period at my literacy station (Appendix F).

Analysis

I compared the data of the students' completion rate to their time on-task during the literacy center. Reviewing the systematic observations I had conducted helped me observe and analyze students' engagement and productivity at my independent literacy

center and whether or not this correlated to the creativity from the activity the students were working on.

Interviews

Throughout the inquiry process, I conducted interviews with students from each of the four different literacy station groups to get a better understanding of how a portion of the class felt about the new change in the literacy learning at my literacy station. I asked the students a variety of questions about how they felt about the station before I changed it and how they felt about the station when I changed it (Appendix G).

Analysis

The interview gave me student feedback and allowed me to learn more about what they were thinking during the process. After I conducted all of the student interviews, I read the interview script I had created during the interview and looked for different trends and commonalities amongst the interviews.

Artifacts

Student Work Samples

I have examples of the students' work from before the start of my inquiry, and I also have examples of the students' work during and after the process of my inquiry. The samples are the completed activities that the students were working on at my literacy station before, during, and after the inquiry (Appendix H).

Station Work Samples

I am using the different activities that the students have been working on at my station as evidence for the creativity that I added to each lesson. I have examples of each theme

I used throughout the inquiry process and how I used the creative activities to help improve the students' literacy skills (Appendix H).

Analysis

After each activity the students worked on, I reviewed and corrected them for evidence of the students' completion rate and to compare the difference between their completed work before the introduction of the inquiry process to their completed work during and after the inquiry process. I also looked at the students' work each week to see the quality of the students' work. In order to analyze the data from the station work samples, I looked at the reflections I wrote throughout the inquiry process of how I felt the learning environment worked for the students. While rereading my reflections, I looked for trends in my writing that would lead me to claims about the students' engagement and on-task behavior. Specifically, looking to see how my observations of students working at my station correlated to the work the students produced.

Digital Data

I took still photographs of the themed stations that I created throughout this inquiry process. I took still photographs of what the station looked like before my inquiry and what the station looked like during my inquiry process. I also took still photographs of the students working at the literacy station in order to provide evidence for the students becoming more engaged and motivated about literacy learning. (Appendix I)

Analysis

In order to analyze the digital data I collected, I compared the different learning environments I created at my station during the inquiry and the learning environment before the inquiry to determine strengths and weaknesses of each environment.

Teacher Reflections

Finally, I asked my mentor teacher and my paraprofessional to reflect on their observations of my literacy center throughout the inquiry process. I asked them for feedback on the how they saw the students working independently at the new literacy station and their beliefs regarding the engagement throughout the inquiry process.

Throughout the inquiry process, I also reflected on my own feelings about the activities, the students' work ethic, the students' engagement at my station, the organization of the station, and the set up of the learning environment at my station.

Analysis

I looked at both the reflections from my mentor teacher and paraprofessional to find trends and commonalities that would allow me to make different claims about the students' engagement, productivity, and motivation during the inquiry process.

Claims and Evidence

Claim #1: Activities that students can complete quickly, have a high rate of success with, and are more familiar with are more effective and engaging during independent work.

Evidence A: After reviewing all of the student surveys that I took throughout the entire

inquiry process, I have found that in total 76% of the students in this first grade classroom liked the activities that they were working on at my literacy station. Overall, 14% thought the activities were okay and 10% did not like the activities at my literacy station. With these percentages, I am able to say that three fourths of the class enjoyed the different activities that I planned for them. After reviewing the other student surveys that I conducted, I found that a majority of the students enjoyed the creative writing activities that they were required to complete by the end of the week in both surveys conducted, which were taken over two weeks of planning at my literacy center. When I conducted these surveys, the students had four and five weeks of practicing creative writing at my literacy station prior to working on each activity. This leads me to believe that the students were more familiar with this activity and understood the expectations for this activity because of several weeks of repeated instruction. I also found that a majority of the students liked working with the hands-on activities that I planned for them at my literacy station. For example, in the week that I themed my station around the literacy concept compound words, I found that the majority of the class enjoyed the Flower Petal Activity. This activity allowed the students to work with construction paper flower petals that were cut in half creating a compound word puzzle. The students had to complete different puzzles to make different kid-friendly compound words and then record them with correct spelling on a blank piece of paper. With this data, I have found that students enjoy working on activities that they have a high rate of success with and are hands-on. Overall, the data I received from tallying and reviewing all of the student surveys I conducted has lead me to this claim about the

students' engagement at my literacy station with specific activities.

Evidence B: When looking at the four parent volunteer surveys that I conducted, I found that three out of four parents felt that the students were engaged in their work. I also found that four out of four parents believed that students enjoyed and showed interest in the activities they were working on. Also, three out of four parents stated that they felt that the students enjoyed being independent with their work. Regarding specific activities that the students enjoyed, one parent reflected on his observations of students working on activities that they had a high rate of success with. According to parent volunteer Jim Simon, he stated, "Of the times I volunteered in class, the activity on compound words was the one I felt best about. [...] I think it was also good to have activities that the students could complete easily to have a sense of accomplishment, prior to diving into the more complex tasks," (J. Simon, personal communication, April 2, 2011).

Evidence C: When looking at the data completion checklist that I completed each week at my literacy station, I found that certain activities during the weeks of my inquiry study had a high productivity rate with a higher quality of work produced by the students. Throughout the weeks, I used anecdotal notes on the data completion checklist to write quick reflections of important things I was observing during my literacy station. When reviewing these anecdotal notes, I found that I had written that the more hands-on activities and activities with a higher rate of success (i.e. worksheets,

puzzles, etc.), were completed first and the activities that required the students to think harder were completed last. This leads me to believe, that the students were more effective with the activities that could be completed faster, they were familiar with, and had a higher rate of success with.

Claim #2: Creatively planning a stimulating learning environment for literacy centers increases on-task behavior, productivity, and motivates students to want to learn.

Evidence A: When analyzing the data I received from the on-task systematic observation I conducted before and during the inquiry process, I have found that, at the beginning of the inquiry, on-task behavior went up by 44% from before the inquiry and off-task behavior went down by 44% from before the inquiry. Near the end of the inquiry, which was where I planned for more challenging independent work, on-task behavior went up by 32% and off-task behavior went down by 32% from before the start of my inquiry. Due to the fact that near the end of the inquiry on-task behavior went down by 12% and I had planned for more difficult and academically challenging independent work, students were more engaged and motivated to complete their work and remain on task when the activities were less challenging; therefore, when students are working independently, they will be more engaged in their work if they have a higher rate of success with each activity they are working on. The data collected from the systematic observation has also led me to discover that the students' on-task behavior overall improved. Even though it did not improve as much as I had hoped, I

have found that creating a learning environment that is creative and based upon themes increases students' on-task behavior.

Evidence B: After reviewing the data that I collected each week from my anecdotal notes, I have found that the students' productivity rate had increased throughout my inquiry as well. While analyzing this data, I looked at the different check marks that I listed for each student's work completed throughout each week. When looking at the check marks, I found that many students who struggle completing work with supervision had an increase in their productivity level from before the inquiry began to during the inquiry process. Also, many students who do not struggle completing work with supervision also had an increase in their productivity level from before the inquiry began to during the inquiry process; therefore, the students' productivity rate in this first grade classroom increased due to the implementation of a creatively planned learning environment.

Claim #3: Adult supervision during literacy centers can help increase student productivity and on-task behavior during independent work.

Evidence A: When looking at my anecdotal notes data, I have found that students' productivity during their independent work at my literacy station had increased when parent volunteers were present at my literacy station. When the parent volunteers were present, they were able to keep a majority of the students on-task and answer many

student questions that arose throughout the time during my station. The students' productivity and the students' quality of work increased when parent volunteers were present. I have found that many students were able to fulfill all expectations and even go beyond expectations when there was an adult present to supervise and help students complete their work.

Evidence B: When looking at the reflections from the paraprofessional in this first grade classroom, I found that she felt that because the students were used to direct supervision at this literacy station prior to the introduction of the independent literacy station, the students appeared to be more engaged and on-task when parent volunteers were present. She also stated that because many of the students in this first grade classroom need repeated prompting and reminding to stay on-task, "being at the table unsupervised, with minimal reminders before stations began may have been more than this age group can handle," (K. Cox, personal communication, March 27, 2011). When parent volunteers were present, the students were able to receive prompting and reminding, which, in turn, helped them produce better quality work and produce more work in a given period of time.

Reflection and Implications for Future Practice

From doing this inquiry project, I have learned more about literacy in first grade including necessary skills first grade students are to acquire throughout the year and effective ways to teach different literacy skills. I have also learned more about how my

students learn by observing and teaching to their various learning styles. Collecting and reviewing all of the data from my inquiry process has allowed me better know my students' academic achievement, which will help me to effectively teach my students throughout the rest of the school year.

I have found throughout this inquiry that it is difficult to keep first grade students engaged throughout independent work. Due to the fact that my students are ages six and seven, they are naturally drawn to socialize with each other and enjoy each other's company. Even though I struggled at times to keep my students on-task, I have learned that first grade students need to have the freedom to work in all areas of the classroom in order to have space to him or herself and to stay focused and away from distractions. In my future classroom, I will make sure to include different quiet areas where students can productively work and be comfortable doing so at the same time. Most importantly, I have found that first grade students need to have the opportunity to be taught the routine and practice the routine in order to be truly independent while working on meaningful activities.

I believe that students should enjoy the activities they work on in the classroom.

Throughout this process, I have learned more about the types of activities that students enjoy and do not enjoy. From conducting this inquiry, I have found that it is important to be consistent with activities that students will be working independently on.

Introducing new activities each week took too much academic time for the students and too much outside time for planning. In order to keep the creativity as well as the

consistency in the activities at my literacy stations in future, I will make sure to create activities that are more hands on and enjoyable for the students. I am still wondering, however, what are the effective ways to differentiate literacy stations without creating too much teacher preparation? In my future years of teaching, I will be able to use the knowledge that I gained about different types of activities and student enjoyment to improve my future classroom.

Finally, I have found that it is not just students who should be questioning, answering, and learning in the classroom but it is also the job of the teacher to continue to ask and find answers to questions about his or her classroom in order to better his or her students and to grow professionally as a teacher. From this inquiry, I will now continue to question and wonder about my future classrooms.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Inquiry Brief

Context

Since August 2010, I have been working as an intern in a first grade classroom at Panorama Village Elementary School. I am currently a senior at The Pennsylvania State University, and I was chosen as one of 60 elementary education majors to participate in a collaborative 185 day, full-time elementary student teaching internship in the State College Area School District. My first grade classroom is made up of 22 different individuals. Of the 22 students, there are 13 girls and 9 boys. Culturally, this class is made up of two students from a Russian background, one student from a Hispanic background, one who is African-American, and the rest of the class identifies as Caucasian. There are four students who are new to the district this year, which is also important to the makeup of my first grade classroom.

The majority of the class is either reading at grade level or above grade level. Specifically, 17 students are above the benchmark for the first grade reading level, two students are at the grade level benchmark, and three students are below the reading level benchmark. The three students who are below

the reading level benchmark are in Title One and attend Response to Intervention (RTI). Within this class, there are two students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP). One of the students with an IEP receives speech therapy and occupational therapy throughout the week. The other student with an IEP receives speech therapy, occupational therapy, and adaptive physical education. This student in particular is on the autism spectrum along with another student in the class. Both of these students have Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS) workers who come in the afternoon to observe their social interactions during math and recess. There are also six students in the class who have behavior concerns. These concerns include: noncompliance, self-regulation, and attention. As far as the social relationships within this classroom, the students in the class get along well together. Many of the students play together at recess, and many of the students in the class look to each other for help and support. The students in the class, despite the many differences, work together cooperatively and positively.

In order to learn and focus on literacy skills throughout the day and week in my first grade classroom, the students work in four different literacy stations during a one hour and twenty minute segment in the day where they have 20 minutes to work on guided reading, phonics, word study, and independent literacy study. At the guided reading station, the students are grouped based on similar reading levels. At the phonics station, Words Their Way, the students are group based upon similar phonics achievement levels. At the word study, Word Wall, and independent stations, the students are grouped based on the flexibility of who is not working at guided reading or Words Their Way; therefore, some students who are at each station are not necessarily grouped on similar literacy achievement.

Rationale

From the beginning of the year in my first grade classroom, I have always been fascinated with the idea of literacy centers and how they function in the classroom. At the beginning of the year, I started teaching my first grade students through literacy stations. Each day my mentor teacher would assign me an activity to teach the students about different literacy skills. For example, I taught handwriting, writing letters to family members in their Family Message Journals, spelling activities with word wall words, and other literacy activities that reinforced the different skills my mentor teacher was teaching during writing, guided reading, and the phonics station, Words Their Way.

While I was teaching the students, I always found that I was able to keep them engaged and help them complete each task with my own scaffolding and teaching. As the year continued and I began to take on more responsibility in the classroom, the word wall station during our Language Arts stations turned into an independent literacy station for the students. Even though the word wall station was structured to be an independent literacy station with activities for the students to complete that would reinforce their literacy skills, I was always able to intervene if the students seemed to be off-task or our classroom paraprofessional was able to intervene when I was teaching. During my observations of the word wall station, I noticed that many of the students were not remaining on task and were not finishing their work to the best of their abilities. After thinking about my wonderings in the classroom, I began to think of how I would be able to keep my students engaged and motivated to learn about literacy and be motivated to improve their literacy skills during literacy stations if I was the only adult in the classroom. I also began to wonder about what would help keep the students engaged and motivated to complete their work.

From the beginning of the year, I have observed that the students are constantly working to improve their skills whether it is math, science, social studies, or Language Arts. Due to the pressure of test scores and improving student achievement, I feel that many of my first grade students lack the time for creativity and fun in their busy schedule. I wondered if I could find a way to increase creativity in literacy learning during literacy stations in order to help increase the students' motivation to work and learn more productively. My consistent wonderings about literacy stations and the many ways to help my students enjoy their learning led me to the construction of my inquiry project and what I want to learn more about with my first grade students.

Wonderings

Main Wondering: How can creativity help increase student motivation, engagement, and productivity during literacy centers?

Sub-Wonderings:

1. What are the most effective practices for independent work at literacy centers that help students to become more engaged and motivated to complete their work?
2. What are the most effective practices for independent work at literacy centers that help students to become more engaged and motivated to continue to help students improve their literacy skills?
3. How can the use of choice and student responsibility help increase students' motivation, engagement, and productivity during literacy centers?
4. How does student interest in literacy activities correlate to their completion rate at literacy centers?

Data Collection Ideas

1. Survey:

In order to try to answer my sub-wondering if student interest correlates to their completion rate at my station, I will be taking student surveys after each activity at my literacy station throughout the entire time of the inquiry process. I will also be using the surveys to analyze and see if the students are interested in certain types of activities. Was it a week that I gave the students more choice in the activities for the week; therefore, do the students enjoy having the freedom and responsibility for their own independent learning?

2. Anecdotal Notes:

I will be using a data completion worksheet with a table with all of the students' names on the left hand-side with empty boxes in order to write check marks to record the students' completion rate at my literacy station. The check marks will be dependent on the different activities that the students will be completing each week; therefore, I will be also taking notes, reflections, and observations of the students' behavior at my literacy station, what activity they are working on, and whether or not there is any supervision (Was there a parent volunteer present or were the students fully independent?).

3. Artifacts:

- *Student Work Samples:* I will be taking examples of the students' work before the start of my inquiry, and I will also be taking examples of the students' work after and during the process of my inquiry. After each activity the students will be working on at my station, I will be looking at them and correcting them for evidence of the students completion rate and compare the difference between their completed work before the introduction of my literacy station to their completed work after the introduction of my literacy station.
- *Station Work Samples:* I will be using the different activities that the students have been working on at my station as evidence for the creativity that I added to each lesson. I will be giving examples of each theme used throughout the inquiry process, and how I used the creative activities to help improve the students' literacy skills.

4. Systematic Observations:

- **At-Task:** I will be taking data on the students' on-task behavior at my literacy center without supervision and with supervision before and after the introduction of my new literacy station. I would like to compare the data of the students' completion rate compared to their time on-task during the literacy center. This will also help me to observe and analyze if the students are becoming more engaged and more productive at my independent literacy center and whether or

not this is correlated to the creativity from the activity the students are working on. I will be conducting the at-task systematic observation by taking numerous sweeps of each group during Language Arts stations during their allotted 20-minute period at my literacy station.

5. **Digital Data:** I will be taking still photographs of the themed stations that I will be creating throughout this inquiry process. I will also be taking still photographs of what the station looked like before my inquiry and what the station looked like during my inquiry process. I will also be taking still photographs of the students working at the literacy station in order to provide evidence for the students becoming more engaged and motivated about literacy learning.

6. **Interviews:** Throughout the inquiry process, I will be conducting interviews with one student from each of the four different literacy station groups to get a better understanding of how a portion of the class has felt about the new change in the literacy learning at my literacy station. I want to hear the student feedback and learn more about what they were thinking during the process. Finally, I would like to interview either a current first grade teacher or a prior student teacher about his or her experiences with creativity during independent literacy stations. I would like to hear from other teachers what kinds of activities they use to keep their students engaged as well as improve their literacy skills throughout the year.

7. **Video:** In order to hear students' comments about my new literacy station, I plan on anonymously videotaping students at my station throughout the course of the day. Due to the fact that the students are supposed to be working independently, I want to listen and hear the authentic comments that my students are making to their peers about my literacy station. I feel that many of my students during interviews will try to answer my questions without revealing their true feelings in order to try to save my feelings, or if I were sitting at the station, I feel that they would try to be on their best behavior. I want to hear if students are truly enjoying their work at my literacy station; therefore, this will help give me data of whether or not students' interest in activities correlates to their completion rate. Are they talking about what they are working on? Are they using the independent time as time to socialize? What kinds of statements are they making about the activities?

Proposed Timeline

The following is a timeline that explains how I plan to implement the studying of my main wondering and sub-wonderings for the inquiry project:

January/February

Week 1 (Jan. 31st – Feb. 4th)

- Begin taking baseline data: time on-task collection chart at the Word Wall station
- Analyze data from time on-task and observation notes start inquiry next week
- Take digital data of the "before" Word Wall

Week 2 (Feb. 7th – Feb. 11th)

- Start the "new Word Wall station" with a *Valentine's Day* theme (create new bulletin board, move the "old Word Wall" to the back of the room, and plan Valentine's Day themed activities for my literacy station)
- Take anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Introduce the student surveys that they will fill out at the end of each activity at my literacy station.
- Take digital data of my literacy station

Week 3 (Feb. 14th – 18th)

- Continue making *Valentine's Day* themed activities for my literacy station.
- **Inquiry brief and annotated bibliography draft due Friday at midnight to classroom PDA.**
- Continue taking anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Continuing having the students fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station.
- Conduct a systematic observation of on-task behavior at my literacy station, while students are independently working.

Week 4 (Feb. 21st – 25th)

- Plan for *President's Day* activities for my literacy station this week. Make these activities choice activities for each group.
- Continue taking anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Continue having the students fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station.
- Take digital data of students engaged at my literacy center and working on their activities at my literacy center
- Interview a current first grade teacher or a prior first grade teacher about their experience with creativity at literacy stations.

Week 5 (Feb. 28th – Mar. 4th)

- **Revised drafts of both the inquiry brief and annotated bibliography due Wednesday at midnight to classroom PDA**
- Plan for *Dr. Seuss* activities for Read Across America Week at my literacy station
- Give mentor teacher plans for St. Patrick's Day theme at my literacy station before leaving for spring break.
- Continue taking anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Continue having the students fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station.
- Take digital data of students engaged at my literacy center and working on their activities at my literacy center
- Take anonymous video data on students at my literacy center
- Ask mentor teacher to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station by checking of each students' name for complete or not complete for next week.
- Ask mentor to remind students to fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station for next week.
- Set up bulletin board for St. Patrick's Day theme prior to leaving for spring break.

March

Week 6 (Mar. 7th – 11th)

- **Out of the classroom all week: SPRING BREAK**
- Have mentor teacher tell the students their activities for the *St. Patrick's Day* theme at my literacy station, while I am out of the classroom.
- Ask mentor teacher check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station by checking off each students' name for complete or not complete, while I am out of the classroom.
- Ask mentor to remind students to fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station, while I am out of the classroom.

Week 7 (Mar. 14th – 18th)

- **Will be out of the classroom on Thursday** for the Delaware County Career Fair.
- Plan for more *St. Patrick's Day* activities at my literacy station.
- Continue taking anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Continue having the students fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station.

- Take digital data of students engaged at my literacy center and working on their activities at my literacy center

Week 8 (Mar. 21st – 25th)

- Plan for *spring* activities at my literacy station (create bulletin board, take down old bulletin board, and other necessary materials for this theme).
- Continue taking anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Continue having the students fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station.
- Take digital data of students engaged at my literacy center and working on their activities at my literacy center
- Interview a student or students about the activities at my literacy station and their feelings toward my station.

Week 9 (Mar. 28th – Apr. 1st)

- Plan for more *spring* activities at my literacy station.
- **Will be out of the classroom on Monday** for the Penn State University Career Fair
- Continue taking anecdotal notes by creating a checklist with all of the students' names on it in order to check off the students' completion in the activities at my literacy station.
- Continue having the students fill out surveys at the end of each activity at my literacy station.
- Take digital data of students engaged at my literacy center and working on their activities at my literacy center

April

Week 10 (Apr. 4th – 8th)

- Compile data and observations into final paper
- **Draft of inquiry paper due on Friday at midnight to classroom PDA**

Week 11 (Apr. 11th – 15th)

- Compile data and observations into final paper

Week 12 (Apr. 18th – 22nd)

- No school on Thursday and Friday for the students' spring break
- Revise inquiry paper
- Begin working on presentation

Week 13 (Apr. 25th – 30th)

- No school on Monday for the students' spring break
- Finalize inquiry paper (due Sunday, May 1st, 2011)
- Continue working on presentation
- Inquiry conference Saturday, April 30th, 2011

Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography

Annotated Bibliography

Alonso, M. & Nations, S. (2006). *More primary literacy centers: Making reading and writing stick!* Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

This is a book that helps answer many of the questions that teachers have about literacy and literacy-centered work that students do on a daily basis. This book provides information and suggestions to implementing and refining meaningful literacy activities during literacy centers in the primary classroom. The authors in this book focus on the acronym STICK to implement centers in the primary classroom. The acronym stands for strategy immersion in centers; tools that target all learners; increase time in text; choice, not chaos; and keys to success. While reading this book, I have found that many of my wonderings about literacy centers in my first grade classroom, such as why are my students finishing too fast, why are centers becoming boring, and why aren't our students interested in centers anymore, were common questions that many teachers in the nation are having about literacy-centered activities. I will be using this resource as a guide to help me answer some of my own questions about literacy centers and to give me ideas on how to make my literacy center more engaging and effective for my first grade students.

Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *The daily 5: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

This is a book that gives insight to how a teacher can effectively structure the learning environment of his or her literacy classroom. The book explains that in order for the teacher to stop managing his or her students, he or she must start creating routines and procedures that foster independent literacy learning and behaviors until they become habitual. As the title of the book states, the authors have discovered five common core routines and frameworks to integrate into the elementary classroom in order to help students internalize and become engrossed in their learning of reading and writing. Due to the fact that my inquiry surrounds the idea of increasing students' engagement and productivity at literacy stations, I will be using this source as a guide to effective management techniques, which I can use at my literacy station, that will help my students become motivated to improve their reading and writing skills.

Busy teacher's café: A K-6 site for busy teachers like you! Retrieved from

<http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/>

This website is a resource I used when I was looking for specific themed activities to use at my literacy center during the inquiry process. This website is easy to use and free for teachers; therefore, teachers can save activities and documents downloaded from this website. Specifically during my inquiry, I used the themes section of this website for Presidents' Day and my spring theme. Within this website, there are also sections for strategies for teachers to use during literacy centers, sections for printable activities for other subject areas besides Language Arts, and a section for other websites that are resources for these topics as well. I found this website to be very helpful throughout my inquiry process.

Diller, D. (2003). *Literacy work stations: Making centers work*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

This is a book that focuses on literacy work stations in the elementary classroom. Specifically, this book gives information regarding what a literacy work station is, what kind of literacy work stations a teacher could have in his or her room, in depth information and strategies for the implementation of different literacy work stations in the classroom, and black lined resources for the elementary teacher for each literacy work station. From reading this book, I have become aware of the many opportunities for literacy work stations in my first grade classroom. It has allowed me to think outside of the box when it comes to ideas for literacy work stations, and the

ways in which I could manage and implement these stations for my inquiry. Throughout my inquiry process, I will be using this book as a resource for different management strategies and different literacy work stations that I could create for my students in order to help increase their engagement and motivation during independent learning.

Ford, M. P., & Opitz, M. F. (2004). What do I do with the rest of the kids?: Ideas for meaningful

independent activities during small-group reading instruction. *International Reading Association*, 394-396. doi: 10.1598/RT.58.4.10

This journal article provides information and other resources for teachers who are looking for professional development on keeping the other students in the class engaged while working with small guided reading groups. The article focuses on how to manage literacy learning centers with minimal interruptions. It also gives ideas to teachers on meaningful independent activities that the students could be engaged on during literacy stations. This resource will help me learn about different engaging activities that I could use with my students throughout my literacy station and help me find other resources to use throughout the inquiry process that relate to independence in learning centers.

Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (1998). Word matters: Teaching phonics and spelling in the

reading/writing classroom. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This book by authors Fountas and Pinnell is a good resource for effective strategies and practices regarding literacy learning. Specifically, this book focuses on the world of teaching literacy and the ways literacy teachers can learn about the complexity of the teaching-learning process. I will be using this book as a guide to my own understanding of how children learn word solving, a concept in this book that deters from the idea of teaching students skills to become successful in literacy learning but rather lovers of literacy learning, and how I can teach my students to become "word solvers." I believe that this resource will allow me learn more about my students' understandings and misconceptions about literacy in order for me to be better able to teach them to appreciate literacy. I feel that this goes hand in hand with my main and sub wonderings of my inquiry project of increasing my students' engagement, motivation, and productivity at literacy stations, while helping to improve and increase their literacy understandings.

Games and activities: Dr. Seuss. Retrieved from <http://www.seussville.com/>

This section of the Dr. Seuss website is a good resource for specific activities that relate to the Dr. Seuss books. During Read Across America Week, the students in this first grade classroom worked on different activities that were themed around Dr. Seuss and his books. I found this website to be very helpful in finding quick, fun activities for the students to work on and learn more about Dr. Seuss with. Many of the activities that I used from this website were word searches, character matching activities, and creative writing activities. A teacher could also use this website in his or her classroom as a computer lab activity during Read Across America Week. The students can travel through the website and discover more and more about Dr. Seuss.

Kieff, J. (2005). A 1st-grade teacher's survival guide to the implementation and management of

literacy centers during guided reading. *Childhood Education*, 81(5). 292K, 292L, 292M, 292N.

This journal article provides information for the first grade teacher regarding self-guided literacy centers and how the teacher can allow them to run smoothly while the teacher meets with different guided reading groups. The author, Judith Kieff, gives examples of ways to schedule literacy centers during the day that avoids complications, ways to create “clean” centers that eliminate clutter and half-finished projects, and approaches to keeping children constructively engaged in learning activities during literacy centers. After reading this journal article, I have learned that the teacher does not need to spend countless hours creating worksheets and projects that the students will be working on that create clutter, mess, and more work for myself. Rather than always using worksheets, I can use dry-erase lap boards to record their work and then allow time for sharing at another time throughout the day. Another idea I learned from this article is that I could make blank books for the students to work in and then add to our classroom library. Overall, I have found this resource to be helpful in giving me more information on ways that I could implement literacy centers in my first grade classroom and ways that I could increase my students’ engagement and productivity in my students’ literacy learning.

P. Palmer. (2011). Deep space sparkle: Art lessons for kids. [Blog]. Retrieved from

<http://www.deepspacesparkle.com/>

This blog site gives elementary teachers (K-6) ideas for different art lessons to implement in the classroom. The author of this blog is a art teacher in California. The purpose of her blog is to share her various art lessons directly from her art room with teachers all over the world. Teachers can also purchase different full lesson plans from her blog to use in their own classroom. I plan on using this website to search for different hands-on activities that relate to the different themes I will be implementing at my literacy center. I think that the students in my first grade classroom enjoy art, and I feel that it would help engage my students. I would plan on using one of these art lessons when a parent volunteer is present in order to help the students with the art materials and to have someone supervise the students while working on the lessons.

Student Center Activities, Grades K-1 (Revised, 2008). Retrieved from

<http://www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/studentCenterActivities.shtm>

This website provides information for all teachers to use for implementing literacy centers. The website also provides different student activities for teachers to print off that are organized by the different important literacy skills that students in Kindergarten and first grade should be practicing. I have used this website to help me find skill specific activities to reinforce what my students already know about literacy. In order to give the students’ a feeling of success at my literacy center, I used this website to choose skills that the students are familiar with but can practice further to reach mastery.

Appendix C: Student Interest Surveys

Survey 1

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What did you think about this activity?



Survey 2

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Which activity did you like the **most**? (Circle One)

Secret Code	Making Words
Cards for Book Buddies	Family Message Journal
How to Trap a Leprechaun	

2. Which activity did you like the **least**? (Circle One)

Secret Code	Making Words
Cards for Book Buddies	Family Message Journal
How to Trap a Leprechaun	

Survey 3

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Which activity did you like the **most**? (Circle One)

Flower Petal Activity	Compound Word Math
Story about Spring	Book Bin Search
Family Message Journal	

2. Which activity did you like the **least**? (Circle One)

Flower Petal Activity	Compound Word Math
Story about Spring	Book Bin Search
Family Message Journal	

Appendix D: Parent Volunteer Survey

Parent Survey

Dear Families,

I have been participating in an inquiry study for my internship that requires me to collect data on a specific question that I have chosen to research. As you may have

noticed, I have changed the format of stations to include more independent work. In order to hear some feedback from another audience, I was wondering if you would be willing to answer a few quick questions for me. If you could respond in the next week, it would be greatly appreciated! Thank you in advance for your time and help!

Sincerely,

Jodie McAllister

1. Did you find the students to be engaged in their work while you were volunteering?
2. Did the students appear to enjoy the activities that they were working on with you?

Motivate and Dominate – 5 Motivation Strategies to Increase Productivity. A great indication of a successful manager is one who has employees who are motivated to perform their jobs at a high level. It is easy to see that higher employee motivation leads to more productivity and therefore more profitable business growth. Therefore, it is important for a manager to understand motivation and how to garner it from their employees. We have compiled a list of motivational strategies for managers to apply in order to harness the most productivity and results from their staff, and to provide a happy, thriving working environment. Motivator 1 – Trust. This is one of the most important aspects in any organisation and it is a two way street. Increasing Motivation Engagement and Motivation. This dissertation has been approved and accepted by the faculty of the Education Department, Carson-Newman University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education. Dissertation Committee: Signatures: (Print and Sign) Electronic signature provided Dissertation Chair: Dr. Mark Gonzales. Because high motivation and engagement can be helpful tools for students as they progress through school, interventions and strategies designed to boost students' motivation and engagement may be one strategy through which to improve achievement. Background In the 19th and 20th centuries, public schooling gradually evolved toward what we all recognize today as conventional schooling. Student-centered learning Most people, thorough instruction. eLearning Continuum. Student Learning Studies show that eLearning can help increase student engagement, motivation, and attendance – key requisites for learning. Effective eLearning can also improve performance on core subjects and foster the development of 21st century skills, whether in mature or emerging countries. Engagement, Motivation, and Attendance. Promoting Academic Literacy with Technology; Successful Laptop Programs in K-12 Schools. Elsevier, 2004. Waxman, Hersch C., Lin, Meng-fen, and Michko, Georgette M. A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning with Technology on Student Outcomes.