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Reading motivation ideas by middle school students

An action research project

Karen Finch

Western Kentucky University

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# Abstract

Students in middle school are not motivated to become lifelong readers. The purpose of this study was to help motivate middle school students to be more satisfied with their reading and library classes and raise their reading levels. The participants in this study were 41 middle school students, six of whom have IEPs. Using a computer-based assessment tool, students identified their current reading levels and worked on improving them for a period of three weeks in reading class. The researcher monitored the literature circles and the novels which were chosen. The results of this study show an increase in the experimental groups' reading levels and a slight increase in satisfaction levels for reading and library classes.

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### Reading Motivation Ideas by Middle School Students

The mission of every teacher and library media specialist is to collaborate to pique the interest of all students to read and check out materials from the library. This kind of motivation can only exist when activities are designed to meet student needs. By using creative activities in the library and the classroom, students should gain more interest in reading and using the materials the library has to offer. Reading teachers can be instrumental in creating activities along with the library media specialist that will encourage the students and gain their interest.

When students are asked about their ideas that would create more interest in learning, the learning becomes more personal to them, thus making it more important. Because students know what interests them the students need to be able to give more input into what they feel will motivate them to become more interested readers.

#### Statement of the Problem

Middle school students at Sharon School are not reading as frequently as necessary to help them with improving their reading skills and background knowledge. The middle school years may present a challenge to gain students' attention because some students have already given up on learning. Sharon Middle School students may greatly benefit by being able to have some input as to what would create more of a motivation in reading. Therefore, the reading programs at Sharon School need to be more student-friendly to keep the interest of these students. Students need to be reading more to increase their reading levels as they move to higher grades. In order to attract students to reading, it is important to determine what the students think will motivate them.

### Research Question

What ideas will middle school students at Sharon School identify for why they are not reading and what motivates them to read and will the students, when given the opportunity, offer constructive solutions to the problem?

## Research Hypothesis

Students at Sharon Middle School will give creative suggestions for creating more of an interest in reading. They will suggest ways to motivate interest in reading and the roles they feel the librarian and reading teacher play in this motivation. They will also rate what they think are the most important benefits of being a life-long reader. Students will also be evaluated to see that these suggestions will increase their reading and satisfaction levels.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The study will not attempt to find out the negative aspects of the present Sharon School reading programs. The study will also not attempt to find out general attitudes toward the library media specialist or reading teacher. Neither will the study focus on any of the school's present resources or lack thereof.

# Literature Review

At the heart of student success is the ability and motivation to read. Teachers are concerned with the lack of motivation they see in their students. Although there has been some research on reading motivation, "this is a topic that teachers would like to see investigated" (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 414). According to Brozo and Flynt (2008), an important reason for the research is that children, when engaged early on, have a better chance of becoming life-long readers. Children seem to lose motivation to learn and read during the elementary years.

Therefore, if teachers wait until middle school to motivate students, they risk losing them because, according to Zambo (2007), some students have already given up on learning by then.

There are many benefits when children are motivated to read. "The more a child reads, the better reader that child will become" (Rasinski &Padak, 2008, p. 584). Some research has indicated "children who are motivated to read spend more time reading than their less motivated peers" (Brozo &Flynt, 2008, p. 172) and that "children who spend more time reading are better readers and comprehenders than children who spend little time reading" (Edmunds et al., 2006, p. 415). Pachtman and Wilson (2006) found that middle school students identified that their reading in content areas and speed and fluency improved when they were given time to read and practice.

There are however, consequences for nonreaders. When teachers and librarians do not invest in the reading programs, there are negative results (Zambo, 2007). When students do not read, they are risking important skills needed for success. They may not acquire foundational background knowledge. With this in mind, "the less time students spend engaged with content area text, the more underdeveloped their reading skills will be" (Brozo et al., 2008, p. 172).

So what can be done to motivate students and reap the benefits of their reading success? It is difficult to motivate some students, but research has shown that there are ways. Asking students their opinions is strategic in that "when student make choices about literacy activities, they gain responsibility for and control over their learning situation" (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006, p. 681.) All involved should realize that students have the ability to express what works best to facilitate their reading lives (Pachtman et al., 2006)

Students have given many suggestions over the years as to what motivates them to read. Students are motivated to read when they get to decide what they would like to read (Edmunds et al., 2006). According to Pachtman et al. (2006), when students go to choose, there was a sense of ownership and given that, everyone has their own interests, this is possibly a key to motivation because students, who were given that opportunity, read and enjoyed reading more. Students also gave suggestions that they enjoyed being read to by others and being told about books others were reading (Edmunds et al., 2006). Proximity was another important factor because students wanted access to books when they wanted and need them. Two surprising findings were that students expressed that when they were able to discuss their books with peers and the expectation to read was there, their enjoyment of reading and reading time increased (Pachtman et al., 2006). Edmunds et al. also found that students count knowledge as a motivation for them to read (2006).

Important in motivating students to read is the collaboration between the teacher and librarian. "Being aware of the importance of motivating students to be active readers is one thing; finding the right ways to do so is quite another" (Brozo et al., 2008, p. 172). It is vital that students are motivated, but it takes everyone doing their part. As Brozo et al. (2008) also points out, "Collaboration for motivation refers to critical social networks that support students' literacy and content learning" (p. 173).

Teachers need to" think outside the box" (Rasinski et al., 2008, p.584) and create a positive classroom atmosphere by "imbuing students with excitement about reading and learning from text" (Brozo et al., 2008, p.172). Teachers must take an in-depth look at motivating students to read. Teachers and librarians can be the ones to introduce students to books, allot time for

reading during the school day, read aloud to them, provide opportunities for students to share with others, provide a variety of books, and assess the child's interests (Edmunds et al., 2006). Teachers must collaborate with the librarian to get the job done.

The librarian can also have an important influence on reading. According to Edmunds et al. (2006), librarians should come up with library schedules that are flexible because "exposure to the school library as well as other libraries positively affected children's motivation to read by introducing them to a variety of books" (p. 419). Librarians also have the task of finding out the interests of students and guiding them in that particular literature (Elkind, 2006). Edmunds (2006) says teachers and librarians can collaborate to come up with topics so that the librarian can spend some time going over the resources the library has to offer on that topic.

There have been many ways suggested to motivate students to read, but teachers and librarians must be the backbone of this motivation by taking student suggestions and collaborating to create motivated readers. With all the benefits, students can reap, it is very important to do what can be done to motivate students as early as possible.

### Methodology

The methodology section will introduce the subjects, the design of the research, the instruments that will be used, and the procedures of the research. This research is searching for ways to motivate middle school students by gathering and utilizing their own ideas in the reading class and library to get them more excited about reading.

#### *Subjects*

The subjects in this study are a group of 49 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, ages 11-14 years of age. They group consists of 23 males and 26 females. There are 21 Caucasian males, two African American males, 24 Caucasian females, and two African American females. Five of the subjects have reading IEPs and are included in the regular classroom. The subjects reside in a very rural, low-income community in Northwest Tennessee. The free and reduced lunch rate for this school is 94%.

### Instrumentation

The researcher will use a computer program called STARR that assesses subjects' reading levels. This program is a product of Renaissance Learning. The subjects will be tested before and after the research project. Subjects will also be given a pre- and post-survey on reading and library satisfaction. The researcher has created these surveys. The main instrument used will be an open-ended survey where subjects will be allowed to give input as to what ideas they have that could be implemented into the reading and library classes to get them motivated in reading and library activities.

# Research Design

The researcher collaborated with the librarian to discuss areas of concern in middle school library and reading classes. It was determined that middle school students lack the motivation to read and utilize the library's resources. Therefore, the researcher began searching for and finding relevant literature on this area of concern. The researcher read many journal articles on motivating students to become lifelong readers. From the literature, the researcher found that students are more motivated when they are given the opportunity to add input as to what motivates them to read. The researcher's objectives are to find out what activities will encourage and motivate them to read and utilize the library more often and to see how these activities will impact the students' reading levels. All of the subjects will be given a STAR test which is a product of Renaissance Learning. The eighth grade subjects will be the experimental group, and the sixth and seventh grades will be the control group. The sixth and seventh grade will be taught as usual with no change to their reading and library instruction using the regular reading textbook. The sixth and seventh graders will also be given the pre-survey to assess their attitudes toward reading and library class. These students will also complete the STAR test to assess their reading levels. However, the ideas and activities that are collected from the students will be used on the eighth grade reading and library classes. The eighth graders will also be given the STAR test and the pre-survey to assess reading levels and attitudes toward reading before the research begins. The librarian and reading teacher will collaborate to use the new student-generated methods. After the research is completed, both of the groups will be given a post-satisfaction survey and STAR test to see if there is a change in the experimental groups' satisfaction and reading levels.

The dependent variable will be the eighth grade's reading and satisfaction levels. The independent variable is the activities that will be implemented into the eighth grade's reading and library classes.

# Procedures

Subjects in both the experimental and control groups will be given a STARR test before the research activities begin to assess their reading levels. The reading levels for both groups will be recorded. The pre- and post STAR test results will be analyzed using the Excel Data Toolpak. Results will be displayed in the results section as a graph. Both groups will also complete a satisfaction survey for the reading and library classes. The survey will contain questions to find out how satisfied the students are with library and reading instruction, their ability to read, the

ability to use the library, and their general attitude toward reading. A rating scale of 1-5 will be used with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. An open-ended questionnaire will be given to both groups having the subjects list ideas and activities that they would like to see implemented into the reading and library classes that they feel would motivate them to read and utilize library resources more often.

For three weeks, subjects in the control group will receive traditional instruction for the reading and library classes. These classes will use the regular reading textbook. The experimental subjects will be exposed to the new ideas and activities that are taken from the questionnaire. This instruction will consists of nine reading classes and three library classes that last for 50 minutes each. The researcher will adjust the reading instruction, and the librarian will adjust the library instruction to incorporate appropriately the subjects' ideas.

The students in the experimental group will begin literature circles as a part of the research. A majority of students indicated in the questionnaire that they would like to be a part of small reading groups as something they feel would motivate them to read. The class will take part in a book pass where the students are given a book each and will take three minutes to review the book and write down what they like and dislike about the book and rate it. After the three minutes, the books are passed to another student. Students will review nine books. At the end of the pass, the students will select a first, second, and third choice book. The researcher will assign books to groups of three depending on their choices. First choices will be granted, if possible. The book titles that were picked by the students were <u>The Outsiders, Someday Angeline, From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, The Sign of the Beaver, and Holes.</u> The students chose these books for their groups out of the nine books they used in the book pass. The

researcher collected a variety of books with different topics so that all students could find a book that interested them.

The groups will begin in their literature circle by reviewing their books and creating a timeline as to how much of the book they need to read per day. The students will read each day in their groups. Other activities, such as discussion cards where each student chooses a card and uses that prompt to discuss an aspect of the book, will be used. Each member of the group will have a job. The jobs include discussion director, word wizard, summarizer, and reporter. The discussion director will prompt the discussions in the book, the word wizard picks vocabulary that the group is unfamiliar with, the summarizer gives a brief summary of the chapters, and the reporter makes reports to the teacher and the class about the book.

During the three-week study, students will go to library classes where discussions with the reading teacher and librarian will take place about their book. The students will write at least five questions that they have about the book and use the library time to research to see if they can find the answers to their questions. Anything they cannot find in the library, they will use the computers to look up the answers to the questions. During the final library session, the reporter will share the questions and answers to the class.

After completing their book, the group will use a flow map to sequence the main events of the story. They will illustrate the events of the flow map. The reporter will then present this to the class for the group. All students in the groups will take a test on their books.

At the end of the three-week experimental study, both the control and experimental groups will again take the STAR test to assess any change in the subjects' reading levels. The subjects will also take a post-satisfaction survey. Both of these surveys' results will be entered into Excel to compare data between both groups. The data will be evaluated to see if there is a strong, positive correlation between student-generated activities and an increase in reading and satisfaction levels. If these do so, the researcher can conclude that the hypothesis is true.

#### Results

# Data Collected

Data from this study can be divided into two sections: a.) data from the STAR pre and posttests and b.) data concerning the students' satisfaction levels with their reading and library skills and classes. The purpose of this study is to see what motivates students in middle school to become more interested in reading and whether the students' ideas will lead to higher reading levels and higher satisfaction levels in reading and library. The pre and posttests for the STAR tests and the satisfactions surveys were given approximately three weeks apart. The pre and posttests for STAR give the reading levels for the students' satisfaction of reading and library skills and services before and after the study. The computer-based assessment too, STAR, scored each student's reading level. The researcher recorded each student's book choice and reading level during the first and third week.

On the questionnaire, students were asked to give input as to what would increase their desire to read for pleasure, what activities would they like to use in reading and library classes, and, in general, what motivates them to read. Out of 41 questionnaires completed by students, the responses to what activities they would like to use in reading and library classes to make reading more interesting were as follows: 2 students chose book reports, 18 students chose group reading or literature circles, 10 students reported they would like more games, and 11 students would like to do more projects and presentations. Therefore, literature circles were chosen as the activity for this study with an incorporation of reports, projects, and presentations. The questionnaire also gained insight as to what motivates students to read. The ideas given were: seventeen students said great books, twelve students chose topic as the motivating factor, nine students said prized would motivate them to read, and three said that time to read played a part in motivating them to read. Therefore, the researcher chose books carefully as books that would be of interest to the grade level with a variety of topics chosen. Time to read will be given during the study, and the library gives cash prizes for the top Accelerated Reader students in the school. All of the books are considered Accelerated Reader books.

The reading levels will be examined, the satisfaction surveys will be discussed, and the relationship between the two sets of data will be explored.

#### Analysis of Data

The STAR pretests and posttests data shows that the control group stayed at about the same reading level. Their average reading level was 6.3 at the pretest, and it was 6.29 at the posttest. The average of the control group remained the same as opposed to the median and mode which were higher at the posttest. The median of the control group's pretest was 5.2, and the posttest median was, interestingly, 5.8. The mode of the pretest for the control group was 4.6, and the mode for the posttest was 5.7.

The experimental group showed an increase in their average. The pretest showed an average of 6.67, a mode of 5.0, and a median of 6.2. The posttest showed an average of 7.2, a mode of 11.5, and a median of 6.35.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this data:

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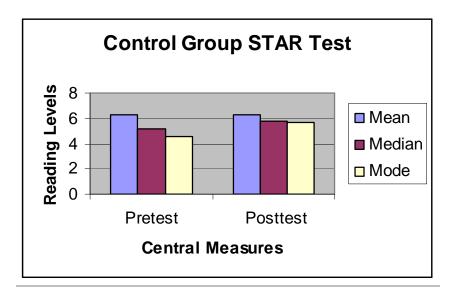


Figure 1,STAR Reading Level Assessments, Pre and Posttest, Control Group

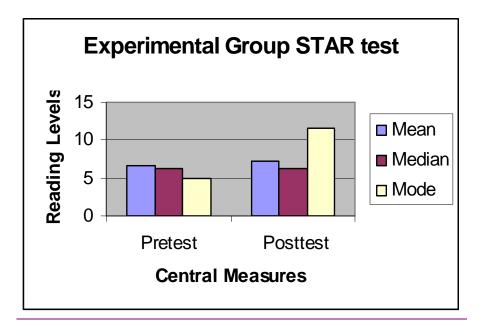


Figure 2, STAR Reading Level Assessments, Pre and Posttest, Experimental Group

The control group as a whole did not make an average gain in their reading levels, but a few students made gains since the median and mode were higher.

The experimental group as a whole made a small gain in the average reading levels, but the median stayed about the same. The biggest gain was in the mode which jumped tremendously.

Students who were in the experimental group were shown their increases in reading levels. Out of fourteen students in the experimental group, nine students made some kind of gain. The students were surprised and excited that they had made some gain in such a short time. We discussed that reading more will increase reading levels and expand vocabulary. After the study, several students asked if the class could do another literature circle group and read a different book. Overall, students showed an interest in this type of educational activity. In such a short time, students in the experimental group showed a slight degree more satisfaction at the end of the study than at the beginning of it. The beginning average satisfaction level was 34.8, and the post-survey was 35.5. The control group showed a slight decrease in satisfaction levels from the pre to the posttest. The levels fell from 35 to 33.9. Figure 3 shows these results:

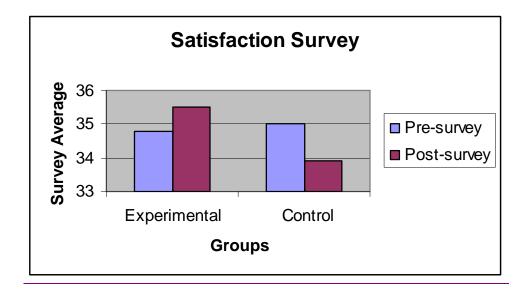


Figure 3, Satisfaction Survey, Pre and Post, Control and Experimental Groups

The surveys had a rating of 1 to 5. The ratings were from Strongly Disagree to Strongly agree. A 3 was Somewhat Agree. Both the pre and post-survey show that the average satisfaction levels were somewhere around the 3- somewhat agree, which would be considered the median of the levels. The students filled out these surveys anonymously before and after the study. They were told to fill them out honestly, because no one would know who filled out which ones.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Social Action

# Conclusions

Analysis of this data leads the researcher to conclude that students who are involved in choosing their own activities for reading and library classes will make improvements in their reading levels. The five of the fourteen students in the experimental group who did not show gain in their reading levels may have been reading books that were above their reading level or may not have done their best on the STAR test. One student had already topped out at an eleventh grade reading level before the study was conducted; therefore, gain for that student would be unlikely. One student also commented to me that it is hard for her to concentrate when she is reading, which could account for lack of gain. Although the improvement was not very significant, in and of itself, considerations must be made as to the small amount of time that was taken for this study. With a greater amount of time, it is concluded that students may make more gains in their reading levels.

The control group did not make reading level gains, which may be contributed to the fact that they were not able to choose their own activities for reading and library classes. Another important factor is that they do not have the same teacher as the experimental group; therefore, teaching styles may differ. This group also did not get any extra library time, which would affect the amount of time that the students were being taught in reading skills.

Analysis of the Satisfaction Survey results indicates that there was a slight increase in satisfaction levels of the experimental group. This data, again, accounts for a very small increase in satisfaction levels in a small amount of time. Given a larger amount of time may increase satisfaction levels significantly. Since the librarian and the reading teacher were collaborating may have made a slight difference in satisfaction levels also. The students were participating in an activity that most of them had indicated that they would like to do in the questionnaire. There is no question that when students are engaged in activities they enjoyed, their satisfaction levels will be higher for that subject area or class. Several of the students who participated commented that they wanted to participate in another literature circle activity. This could also account for the slightly higher satisfaction levels.

The control group showed a slight decrease in their satisfaction levels for reading and library classes. Having a different reading teacher, not collaborating with the librarian, and not having the choice of activities they enjoy could contribute to the lower satisfaction levels. Also, the librarian at this school does not an endorsement as a library/media specialist. All of these factors could be possibilities for the decreasing satisfaction levels.

The researcher can conclude, then, that the hypothesis is true. Students did give creative suggestions for ways to improve interest in reading and library skills. The students in the experimental group did show an increase in their reading and satisfaction levels after participating in a study that included student-based activities.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

The researcher recommends further study on the relationship between student-generated reading activities and reading and satisfaction levels for reading and library. This study did prove the original hypothesis because students chose their own activities, which generated more satisfaction and higher reading levels. The researcher, however, would recommend that the study be conducted for a lengthier period to test the hypothesis to see that the reading and satisfaction levels would continue to show gain after the research study. This would produce results that are more definitive if there were less time restrictions.

# Social Action

This study began with the problem of students who are not motivated to read. This study relied on that fact that if these student-generated activities are the center of a reading class, students would be more motivated to read and more satisfied with library and reading classes. With the educational standards being upgraded with more rigor, these activities generated by students may be an important part of helping students to become better readers and higher achievers. Although many such practices are used in the classroom, teachers should approach lesson planning more openly by asking students what interests them. The same material can be taught in ways that will get students attention and keep it.

The researcher recommends that students be given opportunities to achieve by giving their input about how they learn best and incorporate those activities with others that the teacher knows will work. STAR is a good assessment tool to begin looking at student reading levels which will help the teacher place students in the literature circles with books on or slightly above their reading level. The librarian and the reading teacher found success in this study. The results of the study were shared with other reading teachers in the school. The researcher plans on implementing these activities in the reading class more often during the next school year and continuing to use the STAR assessment to help analyze the reading levels. This will give the researcher a more definitive answer as to if this really works.

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#### **Appendix A: Project Reflection**

#### Describe the process you went through to complete this project.

To begin this project, I had to decide upon what I wanted to research. I knew that there are several problems to be addressed in middle school, especially in reading. I wanted to study something that would be of help to my students and me as a teacher. After brainstorming different ideas, I decided to study the effects of student-generated ideas on reading achievement. I decided to get the students to give me their ideas to help motivate them in reading. I also decided to see how satisfied they are in library and reading classes and to test their reading levels. The students filled out these surveys and questionnaires and took STAR tests. When these were completed, I divided the students into a control and experimental group. The experimental group took part in literature circle activities because this was the idea that was listed most frequently on the questionnaire.

The students finished with the literature circle books and activities. After this period of about three weeks, the students retook the STAR tests and completed post surveys. This was completed by both groups. I then analyzed the results of the tests and the surveys and compiled the data into Excel graphs. I completed the research paper's final sections after the research was finalized. *What are some things you learned about yourself, the research process, or anything else?* 

This was the first action research project that I have ever participated in. I learned many things, probably too numerous to mention. First, I learned that what I had worked on in past classes were not research projects, merely information gathering projects. This was so enlightening. I began telling my students about this so that they would know this fact to help them understand the difference. Another thing I learned about myself is that I could actually perform an action research project. I was very nervous and unsure of my ability, but it was an organized process that was timely, but not too complicated for a novice researcher. I learned so many things about the research process that I feel that I could perform a research study again using this one as a format. I ended up actually enjoying seeing the study unfold and getting the results of my work. *Who did you collaborate with and on which aspects?* 

The librarian, middle school teachers, and reading teachers were the primary colleagues with whom I collaborated. The librarian helped me to identify problems with the middle school students. He showed me the circulation numbers and gave me his input on what he sees with middle school students in the library. After I made the final decision about what I wanted to study, the librarian, and I discussed times to bring the students to the library other than their regular library times. During the study, I went to the library with my students, and the librarian and I helped students choose their books with a Book Pass. We also had to gather some books from the library to have enough books for each group. Discussions about the book circles were held in the library.

The middle school teachers helped me with time to give students in the study the questionnaires and surveys and to take the STAR tests. I also collaborated with the reading teachers to tell them briefly about my study and the results. Another middle school teacher, who was also participating in a research study on differentiated instruction for her master's class, and I collaborated to give each other feedback on each other's project.

Reflect on possibilities for your professional development based on designing, implementing, and assessing research for this project. What are at least two areas of your professional competence that should be a focus for further training for you?

The area of training I need a lot of help on is data analysis using the Excel Data Analysis Toolpak. I had a hard time with the statistics exercises. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out the exercises. When analyzing my data from my research study, I did not feel confident enough to use the same types of analysis as the statistics exercises did. This would benefit me greatly to be able to participate in a hands-on class for this part of the research.

Another area I need for further professional development is the actual research design. I did not fully understand all that needed to be included in the writing of that part of the paper. I probably use help in writing the research question and hypothesis to help me get started. Narrowing those two things was of some difficulty to me, but once I did get these narrowed, I could proceed with the study with little difficulty.

# Discuss how you considered the diversity of potential students.

There were some considerations with ethnicity and learning abilities when conducting this study. When choosing books for the Book Pass, I chose books that were of different backgrounds and ethnicities. Another consideration was of the reading levels of students, especially those students with IEPs. I chose some higher and lower reading levels for the books.

# Discuss how you assessed yourself during this research project.

During the whole process of the study, I considered myself a novice researcher. I followed the format and guidelines closely, as I did not feel confident to go out on my own. I found myself learning from the process. When the task was over, I could say that I had more knowledge of the

process of conducting a research study. I do still feel, however, that I am a beginner with the data analysis part and do not feel confident in using the data analysis tools.

How long did it take you to complete this project?

I started this project early in the semester, so I took about 12 weeks to work on all part of the ARP, using the calendar to make sure that I stayed on target for due dates. I worked on beginning the paper about 6 weeks before the actual research started. Then, the actual research took 3 weeks. I finished up the results and reflections during the 3 weeks after the project ended. Several hours per week were spent on each step of the process.

Select three disposition statements for the course and discuss how you demonstrated those during this action research project.

# **3.2.c** Demonstrates a willingness to adjust and revise instruction to maximize learning of all students.

Choosing this research study was based on adjusting and revising instruction to maximize learning of all students because I gave the students the opportunity to tell me what activities would motivate them to read. I then had to change my instruction to accommodate the ideas they had. Although this was one incidence of adjusting and revising instruction, effective teachers have to do this all the time in their teaching if students are not gaining the understanding needed to master the standards. Therefore, I change things in my classroom all the time to meet learners' needs.

# **3.2.a** Shows commitment to reflection and learning as an on-going professional development process.

From doing this study, I realized that I need more development in statistics. That is a weak area for me. I could use a hands-on activities course that would help me learn to use data analysis tools. Other areas of consideration for on-going professional development for me would be to learn more about the beginning of a research study. Narrowing my research question and hypothesis are two areas I had trouble with.

# **3.1.a Demonstrates an understanding of student diversity as an enhanced opportunity for teaching and learning.**

Using this study was all about student diversity in teaching and learning. The students were able to express their own ideas about what activities would most motivate them to read. They also were able to express their satisfaction levels for reading and library classes. All students learn differently and are on different levels. This study specifically addressed this because the books addressed different cultures and themes, the groups were assigned according to reading levels they were able to successfully read, and the individuals in the groups were given differing tasks to perform.

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