The Effect of Teacher-Written Feedback on the Motivation of

High School English Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of teacher-written feedback, the commentary that the teacher provides to students, on the motivation of low-achieving ninth grade English students. Motivation was defined as the mean number of words students wrote per open-ended journal response. This study used a convenience sample of two different classes assigned to intervention or control conditions. There was no significant difference in the mean journal entry word count during the intervention, comparing the feedback group (n = 23; Mean =75.47; SD =42.91) and the control group (n = 19; Mean =73.38; SD =22.59; $t(40)$ =0.10, p =.85. Practical and theoretical implications as well as threats to validity are discussed. Recommendations for future research are discussed, including the suggestions that research be conducted with different populations, that positive reinforcement could be added in addition to teacher feedback, and a questionnaire could be added for students to self-report their level of motivation before and after the intervention.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Motivating high school students can seem like a major undertaking especially when many of them are reluctant learners. However, motivation is key to academic success so it is necessary for educators to consider strategies that will help increase motivation in their classrooms and to establish best practices for engaging students in the learning process.

With the shift to Common Core state standards and the new state assessments, teachers now have new curricular standards that students must master in order to pass the new standardized tests. For those who work with intervention and reluctant learners, this curricular shift can seem daunting due to the behavioral issues, the lower cognitive abilities, and the lower academic success rate of these students. In order for these students to be successful, they need the support and encouragement of inspiring, positive, and enthusiastic teachers. Lessons also need to include scaffolded instruction which is a support system set in place and gradually reduced as students achieve and gain confidence, be student-driven, and of value to teach student in order for them to achieve success.

Another challenge teachers' face is student stamina during reading and writing activities in the classroom, as well as during standardized tests. During an 81-minute class period or during a long testing period, students often tire of reading or writing and tend to give up especially when they are struggling to comprehend or to develop a written response. As a nation, we are increasing the rigor in our classrooms and we need to help our students increase their personal stamina, their comprehension, their engagement, and their intrinsic motivation in order

to achieve academic success. Developing motivational strategies will aid teachers in this struggle to help students succeed inside the classroom.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of written teacher feedback on student motivation as measured by the word count of journal reflections.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that among low-achieving ninth grade English students, there will be no statistically significant difference between the mean journal reflection word count of the English class who receives written teacher feedback and a grade and students of the English class who only receive a grade.

Operational Definitions

Low-achieving ninth grade English students are students in an intervention reading course for the first half of the year and then English I for the second half of the year. These students have low reading levels, and low reading scores on the state mandated assessments. Many of the students have also been identified as at- risk students for attendance, behavior, or academic problems and are part of a designated intervention program at school. Many of them are also in special education or have 504 plans.

Motivation is defined as the level of interest and engagement that a student demonstrates through journal writing activities. Motivation is measured operationally by the word count in their journal entries.

Specific written feedback is the commentary that the teacher provides to students. This includes positive comments that reinforce their good writing skills and ideas. It also includes comments to students about the experiences or ideas that they write about as well as feedback as to what they could do to improve or strengthen their writing.

Priming words are the use of positive words linked to intrinsic motivation that include the words mastering, competent, and enjoying.

Lastly, the journal entries will receive a *grade* according to the check plus, check, and check minus scale established on a rubric.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review focuses on the role that motivation plays in the classroom and how it contributes to the academic success of students. It is important for teachers to understand the contributing factors of why students are reluctant learners and ways to encourage students to engage and invest in their own education.

The review is organized in three sections that focus on the importance of motivation on academic success, the problems associated with motivating students in the secondary classroom, and teaching strategies that can be implemented to ameliorate the challenge of motivating students.

Importance of Motivation on Academic Success

To begin a study on motivation, it is important to know what that means and looks like in a classroom setting. According to Daniels' (2010) article, students feel motivated when they feel a sense of control, when they develop a connection to their class or school, and if they feel that they are capable of completing the tasks they are presented. It is essential for students to understand the value in what they are asked to do so that they are engaged in completing the work. This article also emphasizes, through student responses, that it is key to allow students options of ways to demonstrate their knowledge in order to engage them which then leads to academic achievement. Teachers must also take the time to design lessons that actively engage students by connecting the content to their own lives even when the material is significantly outdated. Once again, if students can see the value or build a connection to what they are

learning or reading about in the English classroom then they are more willing to apply themselves. This directly relates to achievement goal theory that means that student recognition of the purpose of academic task is significant to their academic results (Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008). According to these authors, there are three types of achievement goals: (1) mastery, (2) performance-approach, and (3) performance-avoidance. Students who are mastery goal-oriented want to increase their skills in an academic area. Conversely, students who are performance-approach-oriented desire to showcase their competence to others and to hopefully appear more competent than their peers. Lastly, performance-avoidance students do not wish to appear less proficient than their peers. Based on evidence, all of these goals have been shown to lead to different "cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences" (Liem et al., 2008, p. 487). In addition to achievement goal theory, expectancy-value theory is important to consider when looking at student academic success. This theory includes self-efficacy that is the degree to which they are certain of their ability to achieve on an academic task and the degree to which they consider a task worth completing which is known as task value.

Problems Associated with Motivating Students in the Secondary Classroom

One of the most common problems that teachers face in the secondary classroom is what is known as the reluctant learner. This reluctant learner is a student who has the ability to achieve but they choose not to. One reason they refuse to cooperate is due to their inability to conform and accept traditional academic standards and structures (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Another reason may be because they are not interested in what their school is teaching. Furthermore, students who do not learn what is taught may become defiant and refuse to attempt their work because they are trying to protect their self-worth. They are of the opinion that what they participate in outside of school offers them more satisfaction so they do not see the need to

be successful in school. There are several other reasons for disengagement to occur "when students believe that their ability is fixed, when they do not feel that they have the skills necessary to meet challenges, and when they do not feel in control of their environments" (Daniels et al., 2005, p. 38). According to their study, with four different high school boys, they determined that reluctant learners "will engage in school if they see the value in the task" (Daniels et al., 2005, p. 45). Each boy reiterated that they would not do the work if they were not interested. This is a challenge for any teacher due to the demands of curriculum and due to the pressure to prepare students for standardized tests. It is not always easy for teachers to create lessons of high interest to each and every individual and not every student is going to enjoy doing what they have to do. In addition, the boys said it was in a teachers power to recognize and understand what students can and cannot tolerate. The major conclusion of this study was that, if students want to do something, they will at least try. It seems that if students perceive grades as the sole reason for putting in effort in the classroom then they are less likely to participate.

The conclusion presented above ties directly to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the problems of each. Motivation research suggests that when teachers provide rewards for participating and for success that they are not increasing intrinsic motivation. Students are merely engaging in the activity for a reward instead of because they enjoy it (Daniels et al., 2005). Additionally, teachers need to be cautious about providing students with too much assistance because this can cause students to become dependent and avoid taking risks. Scaffolding is important so that students can still take risks and move towards independence. Teacher and student relationships are critical to student academic performance and success. Students who perceive their teachers as caring are more willing to engage and put effort into

their studies (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).   Therefore, it is important that teachers utilize scaffolded instruction that is "meant to provide structures for learning goals which students then internalize and control. As students gain confidence and competence, the scaffolding from the teacher can be reduced and the student internalizes the methods and strategies needed for completing the work well" (Urdan & et al., 2006, p.341). This strategy will help teachers engage students and to encourage them to motivate themselves. This type of instruction will allow students to feel safe and take risks in their learning in order to achieve. Teachers need to choose topics of study that are meaningful, to give students responsibility for learning, to stress the importance or value of the learning activity and boost the confidence levels of the students. Also, if students only experience failure then they are going to believe that they are only capable of failure.

Walker and Greene (2009) cite in their research that schools are capable of giving students what they need in the sense of social support as well as academic development, but that during adolescence it has been found that schools actually tend to emphasize social comparisons of ability rather than focusing on building relationships between students and teachers. This can have a negative impact on the positive role that schools can play in the lives of youth thereby decreasing the academic motivation and engagement in their behaviors. This study illustrates the necessity of schools reforming themselves to become a place where students are cared for and feel supported.

There are many other factors that secondary teachers face when it comes to motivating students. Recent studies have found that mastery goal-oriented students tend to persevere longer when faced with challenges, they are more intrinsically motivated, and they feel more confident about their work. This stands in stark contrast to performance-avoidance goal students who are

more apt to give up when faced with difficulty, they refuse to seek assistance, they use lower cognitive strategies, and they participate in self-defeating practices (Urdan et al., 2006). Furthermore, based on the studies of different goal structures in the classroom it is suggested that educators should establish mastery goal structures instead of performance goal structures that tend to weaken motivation and achievement.

In addition to self-efficacy and achievement goal theory, a third motivational influence is how students "perceive the current task performance as instrumental to achieving personally valued futures goals" (Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004, p. 464). This means that if students do not recognize or understand how the current task will benefit them and their future goals then they are not compelled to engage or complete the assignment. This is certainly a problem at the secondary level where students have a firmer idea of where they see themselves in the future and if science or math is not something they perceive they will need, then their motivation in that area decreases. Therefore, teachers need to stress how learning activities are meaningful and relevant to each individual. Teachers should consider their introduction to lessons and motivating activities to ensure that students have a sense of instrumentality.

Another problem that can influence the motivation level of students at the secondary level is differentiating teacher treatment. Hughes and Zhang (2007) state in their article that "In those classrooms in which students perceive more differentiating teacher treatment to high and low ability students, teacher expectancy effects are larger and students' self-perceptions more closely match those of the teacher" (Hughes et al., 2007, p. 401). This finding demonstrates that students can have lower self-perceptions of their cognitive abilities based on how they perceive what their teacher expects of them compared to their classmates. Differentiating teacher practices can cause students who already have low confidence in their own abilities to avoid

tasks assigned, to have a more negative view of their ability level, and to use ineffective

problem-solving strategies. If teachers are aware of this problem then they can be prepared to

avoid this type of behavior on their part in order to foster a stronger and safer learning

environment for all students so that they are motivated to learn and do well in school.

Teaching Strategies: interventions to Ameliorate the Problem of Motivating Students to Encourage Success

Within both achievement theory and expectancy-value theory, the concepts of intrinsic

and extrinsic motivation are key to understanding ways to improve motivation in the classroom.

Intrinsic motivation occurs when a student chooses to participate in an activity out of curiosity,

because they want to complete something, or because they want to contribute to a task (Wery &

Thomson, 2013). Conversely, extrinsic motivation occurs when a student is rewarded or offered

praise for participating or completing an activity. They tend to see assignments as a means to an

end instead of an end in itself. It is essential to understand the difference between each type of

motivation because studies show that placing a heavy emphasis on extrinsic motivation can

actually weaken a student's intrinsic motivation. Therefore, it is the role of the teacher to

determine what each students needs are and what will help each student become more engaged in

the learning process. These authors offer numerous suggestions of ways to increase and promote

motivation. They state "teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and the expectations they

hold for students are also a powerful influence" (Wery et al., 2013, p. 109). It is important for

teachers to demonstrate enthusiasm for the subject that they teach and also to set high, yet

realistic expectations for students. Once students begin to succeed at challenging tasks, they will

develop confidence that can help increase their intrinsic motivation. Instead of stating the ease

of a task, it is important to acknowledge that some tasks are difficult and that they are capable of

completing it. One interesting suggestion is the use of priming words that are positive words that are linked to intrinsic motivation. This means that teachers should say words such as spontaneous, challenged, satisfied, mastering, competent, and enjoying and refrain from using words such as demanded, expected, forced, controlled, and competitive which are linked to extrinsic motivation. Using priming words can help increase motivation right away.

Additionally, projects are ways to allow for more independence in the classroom and give students a chance to choose their own learning activity so that they can engage in the learning process. Schlusser's study (2009) emphasizes that students want teachers to challenge them academically, but this must be accompanied by academic support. Some ways that teachers can help students engage in the classroom is by being flexible, giving them opportunities to achieve, and by appropriately challenging them. This will cause students to feel respected by their teachers that can help them have a positive attitude about learning. Without these elements in place, a student can easily feel disrespected and not care to learn or participate. Consequently, it is crucial that educators focus on pushing students because otherwise they will shut down.

Teachers should set high expectations and demonstrate care towards each student in order for them to feel like someone wants them to do well. Educators can accomplish this by teaching a curriculum that is student-driven rather than curriculum driven. Along with pushing students to succeed, teachers need to be aware that they need to provide them with support in order to make achievement possible. Some students disengage because they feel that they don't belong and that they are not capable so it is necessary for teachers to build a comfortable and inviting classroom to make them feel accepted.

Another study conducted at Catholic high schools throughout the country shows "'quality of human relations" was more significant than instructional techniques (Schlusser, 2009, p. 119).

This means that the teacher's attitude while giving instruction has more influence on the student's interest level. Another study of over 80,000 students at 110 high schools, found that 75% students were bored during class because the material was uninteresting and 39% said that it was not relevant to them. This indicates that it is important for teachers to provide opportunities for students to tackle real life problems in order for them to see the importance. Not only must teachers establish relevance, they must give students a voice within the classroom. This can be achieved by "sharing power with them [students] and giving students responsibility and control over their educational experience" (Simmons & Page, 2010, p.66). These researchers provided their students this educational experience when they introduced a self-directed project where they allowed heterogeneous groups to do whatever they wanted to show the theme of the work they studied. They chose heterogeneous groups because it would help students belong, so students were helping one another, and contributing on some level. They believe that this grouping strategy creates motivation because students are cooperating and involved in a bit of a competition with their peers to demonstrate their level of knowledge on a topic.

Another strategy for increasing motivation is by giving students the power to establish their own grading system. Students can create a class rubric and then use it to grade one another's presentations. This enables them to feel that they can be successful because they are the ones establishing the grading criteria and expectations.

Finally, one other strategy the teachers in this study utilized was the survey. They wanted to receive feedback from the students about what motivated students to achieve during the group project or what held them back. This was a useful tool to help them understand what

drives their productivity and their enthusiasm for participation and achievement (Simmons et al., 2010).

Summary

Motivation is key to the academic success of all students and especially for the reluctant learners at the secondary level. It is important for teachers to understand how motivation can affect achievement and also to recognize the ways to increase motivation in the classroom. There are numerous teaching strategies that can be implemented in order to assist teachers in creating a safe, creative, supportive, and engaging learning environment that will promote student motivation and academic achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The study had a quasi-experimental design using a nonequivalent control group design. The study used a convenience sample in that the participants were students in two classes taught by the researcher. The two pre-existing classes were randomly assigned to the treatment or the control group. The independent variable was whether or not students received specific written feedback on their journal entries. The dependent variable was the average number of words per journal entry. A pre-test was used to determine if the two groups differed on the dependent variable prior to the intervention. After a one-week intervention period during which data was not collected, the intervention continued for six weeks while outcome data was continuously collected.

Participants

The participants were two 9th grade intervention English classes from a high school located in a low-middle class suburban neighborhood. The total enrollment at the school is 1280 students. The school population is 40% Caucasian, 44% African American, and 16% other. There were a total of 42 9th graders between both classes. The class receiving the intervention had 23 students: 7 female and 16 male. Fifteen of the students were African American, 5 were Caucasian, and 3 were class classified as "Other". Additionally, 10 students in this class had IEPs and 1 student had a 504 behavioral plan. The class not receiving the intervention had 19 students: 13 female and 6 male. Ten of these students were African American, 7 were Caucasian, and 2 were classified as "Other". Six students in this class had IEPs and 2 had 504

Behavioral Plans. The researcher selected these two groups as they were classes she taught on a daily basis. Students were placed in this intervention class due to low reading scores, poor performance on a state reading assessment, and for special education purposes. In addition, most were placed in this course for behavioral, academic, and attendance concerns. Both classes were in a Strategic Reading course for the first semester of the year in order to develop their reading comprehension skills and to learn reading comprehension strategies to allow them to be successful in English class. They transitioned to English I for the second semester and they are in class daily for 81 minutes.

Instrument

Students were given open-ended journal prompts that were related to topics that they read about in class. The pre-assessment included two journal responses in which a word count was collected for each. Journals were collected and motivation was tracked by counting the number of words per journal reflection. In addition, each journal was graded with a rubric created by the researcher. The grade was based on a writing rubric that included a check plus, check, and check minus system worth 10, 8, and 6 points respectively. A student who wrote a well-developed response and answered the prompt completely earned a check plus which was worth 10 out of 10 points. A student who wrote a partially developed response and partially responded to the prompt received a check that was worth 8 out of 10 points. Lastly, a student who wrote a minimally- developed response and minimally responded to the prompt received a check minus s worth 6 out of 10 points. In addition to a grade, one class (the experimental group) received specific written feedback from the researcher. Journals were returned to the students before they were asked to write a new journal reflection.

Procedure

Students of both classes were given two journals to write during Week 1 as a pre-assessment. A word count was completed for each journal written and a grade was assigned on the check plus, check, and check minus scale. This allowed the researcher to collect baseline data and determine that there was no significant difference between the journal word counts of both classes prior to the intervention. There was no significant difference in the mean journal entry word count during the baseline between the feedback group (Mean = 78.58, SD = 30.43) and the control group (Mean = 96.39, SD = 40.68) [t(40) = 1.62, p = 1]. Consequently, it was not necessary to control for pre-existing differences. The researcher provided each student with a piece of loose-leaf notebook paper and displayed the journal prompt and directions on the interactive white board. Students were shown the rubric and were told that they would receive full credit for a well-developed response that completely answered the prompt. Students were asked to remain silent during the journal writing time and were given eight minutes to write as much as they wanted. The journals were collected and graded according to the rubric and a word count was performed on each journal. Journal 1 was returned to students prior to Journal 2 so they could see their first grade.

During Week 2 of the study, one class was randomly selected to receive the intervention. Throughout the course of the study both groups completed two journal entries each week. The control group received only a grade on their journal entries. The intervention group received teacher commentary and a grade. The teacher commentary included positive feedback: responses to their ideas, details, and experiences; and constructive feedback. The feedback included some priming words. Priming words are positive words linked to intrinsic motivation such as

mastering, competent, and enjoying. Week 2 gave students in the intervention group a chance to become accustomed to the teacher commentary and word counts were not conducted.

During Weeks 3-8 of the study, the two groups wrote two journals per week and word counts were collected for each journal. Students received all graded journals before they were asked to write a new one so that they could use the grade and/or the teacher commentary for motivation. Throughout the study, the teacher would remind students of the rubric requirements and would provide verbal reminders to make sure that they were addressing all parts of the prompt and providing adequate details and explanation. However, there were four students in the study who refused to participate in several of the journal reflections. One participant from the control group had four refusals. Of the three participants in the intervention group who refused to participate every time, one refused twice and the other two refused four times each. The researcher considered this to be part of the motivation study and counted those journals as zeros and included this data in the mean word count.

At the end of a six-week intervention data collection period, the teacher calculated the average word count per journal entry. An average word count per journal entry was used rather than a total word count due to variation in the number of journal entries per student. The number of entries differed per student due to some students having out-of-school suspension and other long absences in which students did not complete the make-up work. The mean word count per journal entry of the two groups was compared using an independent samples *t*-test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of the independent sample *t*-test revealed there was no significant difference in the mean journal entry word count during the intervention, comparing the feedback group (Mean =75.47, SD =42.91) and the control group (Mean =73.38, SD =22.59) [t(40) =0.10, p =.85]. Table 1 compares these results.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results for Average Journal
Entry Word Count

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t* statistic
Feedback group	23	75.47	42.91	0.85 (NS)
Control group	19	73.38	22.59	

NS = non-significant at p < .05

The null hypothesis - that among low-achieving ninth grade English students there would be no statistically significant difference between the mean journal reflection word count of the English class who received written teacher feedback and a grade and students of the English class who only received a grade was supported.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of the study accepted the null hypothesis that among low-achieving ninth grade English students, there would be no statistically significant difference between the mean journal reflection word count of the English class who received written teacher feedback and a grade and students of the English class who only received a grade.

Implications

Since there was a lack of significant difference between the mean journal reflection word count of the two ninth grade English classes, this intervention may not be sufficient in isolation to improve student motivation based on written teacher feedback. However, based on researcher observation, the intervention may improve student and teacher relationships. The researcher observed an increase in trust throughout the journal reflections as students shared more personal experiences and they would request to see their journals so that they could see the feedback and grade. The non-intervention group never realized that they were not receiving teacher feedback and instead relied solely on the grade to motivate them. The researcher observed that several of the students were excited about earning check plus's on their journals and were competitive with one another on that level. However, the students who consistently wrote under-developed responses that did not adequately address the prompt failed to see their low grade as a motivator to try harder on the next journal reflection. Consistently, between the intervention and non-intervention groups, there were still several students who lacked motivation entirely so the grade or the grade and teacher written feedback had zero effect on their drive to engage in the class activity. They would refuse to respond to the journals and they earned zeros. Throughout the

study, the researcher did observe an overall improvement in class participation and behavior during journal writing activities among the low-achieving ninth grade classes. Students tended to respect the eight minutes allotted for journal writing and did not talk or cause disruptions. Several students who normally struggled to maintain focus during assignments were also engaged in writing and surprised the researcher by demonstrating their ability to write a developed response with great detail. Lastly, the students were highly motivated to share what they had written and the researcher observed that they enjoyed the response they received from the class. Therefore, even though the study did not show an increase in student motivation based on the mean journal word count, student motivation was measured and proven successful in other ways.

Theoretical Implications

Daniels' (2010) article stated that motivation can be increased when students feel in control, are able to build connections to their class, and when they feel likely to succeed. Similarly, this study was designed to give students opportunity to control what they wanted to write as long as it answered the prompt, to give them a chance to make connections from their personal lives to what they were reading in class, and they were given a rubric and a grade and/or written teacher feedback throughout the study to help them be successful. They were given many opportunities to see the value in writing a personal response in order to make connections to what was being taught in English that should have led to student engagement. This study, in terms of statistical analysis, did not support Daniel's theory but based on researcher observation, did provide support for this theory.

Urdan et al., (2006) study discussed the idea that students who viewed their teacher as a caring person were more willing to engage in their studies and participate. However, the findings of the current study are inconsistent with this idea. The intervention group got specific written teacher feedback to every journal they wrote; however, their word count did not increase throughout the study and showed no significant difference with the control group who received only a grade as feedback. Students were not motivated to write more by the efforts and thoughtful comments the teacher made.

Threats to Validity

There were multiple limitations to the study that may have impacted validity. A threat to external validity was a possible research effect. The researcher was the teacher in the classrooms in which the study was conducted. In addition to providing the teacher written feedback to the intervention group, the researcher designed the prompts, instructed students, and scored the rubrics. It is possible that the researcher may have unintentionally done something to achieve certain results or took other factors into consideration when responding to student journals. The researcher also had a pre-existing relationship with all students since the researcher was their current English teacher.

Additionally, another threat to the external validity is the generalization of the results to low-ability and low-achieving high school students. A researcher who performed this study with high ability students or students at the elementary school age would receive different results. A final threat to the external validity is that the outcome measure may not be a measure sensitive to motivation.

There were several threats to internal validity throughout the study. It is hard to say for certain what impacted student motivation throughout the study since there were variables not taken into consideration. The journal prompts the teacher designed could have appealed to some students more than others causing them to write more or students may have had a difficult time developing a fully-developed response to certain prompts if they did not understand it or did not have much to say on the subject. Additionally, some students were engaged in the task solely for the purpose of sharing their journals with their peers since they enjoyed the positive response they received from others. Some students were significantly motivated to write the journals because they cared about their grade. Student absences possibly impacted the internal validity since students had to make-up journals and the journals no longer were used as the motivational activity of the lesson. Lastly, there were two students, one from each group, who would occasionally refuse to write in their journals. This did reflect as a zero each time they chose not to respond to a journal. Therefore, the internal validity was threatened since those zeros impacted the mean word count. There were certainly variables beyond the treatment that affected the internal validity of measuring student motivation based on the mean word count of student journal reflections.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Prior to this action research study, other studies have been performed to measure student motivation in the secondary classroom. The current study had some similarities to the Daniels et al., (2005) study that followed four different high school boys randomly selected from a list of eight boys identified as having the ability to pass standardized tests, but who were lacking the desire necessary to meet the GPA requirement. The intervention was to conduct interviews with

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the four boys throughout a period of time to get their perspective on what teenagers thought about school and how educators could improve the learning experience. In addition, the researchers conducted 10 to 20 hours of classroom observation to note each student's level of engagement within the classroom. The interview transcripts revealed that students in that study were not willing to work solely for a grade or if something did not interest them. Since the current study involved two low-achieving ninth grade English classes but did not involve specific selection of reluctant learner students, the current study likely included many students who were initially more engaged than those in the Daniels' study. However, in the current study in which there were several students who did not care about the grade and refused to write their journal reflection if they did not like or understand the prompt for the day, so there are similarities between the two subject pools. The results showed that students "will engage in school if they see the value in the task" (Daniels et al., 2005, p. 45).   That study also found "that teachers can create classrooms that foster engagement regardless of any outside influences…" (p.44).

In relation to the previous study cited above, the students of the current study were given the opportunity to write about themselves and their personal experiences in the hopes that this would engage all students to consider the theme or topic from their own point of view before reading about it in a text. The researcher also attempted to show students the value in the task of reading different stories and poems by making those personal connections prior to reading. Based on the feedback from the interviews performed with the four reluctant learners involved in the study, the students in this study should have performed better since the teacher was making an effort for students to see the value in the journal reflections, the value in increasing their

writing abilities, and the student could observe the teacher's attempt to foster engagement through journal writing and sharing.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could include the use of positive reinforcement along with teacher feedback. This would include the use of stickers, prizes, verbal praise, or a praise wall where the best journals are placed. It would be interesting to see if a reward system would contribute more to student motivation during writing activities- especially with reluctant writers. Additional studies could create a systematic rewards system to see if students would write more and produce quality work if they are motivated by a reward other than a grade and written feedback from the instructor.

In addition to student motivation measured through the mean word count of a journal reflection, the behavioral results and the quality of the work could also be measured in future studies. The research implications demonstrated an increase in student motivation to maintain focus during the journal writing time, to avoid disruptive behaviors, and an increase in student participation during journal writing and sharing times even though the average word count did not increase due to the specific written teacher feedback. A future study could assess the behavioral effects of the intervention by keeping track of the student time on task, the number of students who shared their journals with the class, and the number of students who never completed classwork before to the number who now actively engaged in journal writing. Another study could assess the effect of priming words on the mean word count of student journal reflections to determine if these words can motivate students to write more.

Another study that could show a difference in results is if one group receives no grade and no feedback, one group receives just a grade, one group receives just feedback, and the last group receives a grade and feedback. This could help determine if the grade is more motivating to students than the feedback.

Future studies could also use a different population such as advanced English students who are, for the most part, motivated by grades and by feedback from a teacher. It would be interesting to see if advanced students would produce longer written journals if they felt that the teacher really showed interest and cared about their writing by responding to each and every journal. Additionally, this study performed with younger students might also demonstrate students who respond better to the teacher feedback since they are looking to please the teacher.

In future research there could be an additional outcome variable such as a questionnaire used in order for students to self-report their level of motivation before the intervention was in place and after the intervention was in use for a period of time. This might help the researcher understand what drives student motivation and if the student perceives the intervention as having any impact on their level of engagement.

Conclusion/Summary

The results of the study demonstrate that written teacher feedback did not increase student motivation to write more based on a mean word count over a 6-week period among low-achieving ninth-grade English students writing journal reflections. However, researcher observations suggest that a journal writing activity, regardless of whether students receive

written feedback, is a valuable addition to classroom activities. Students in both the intervention and the control group demonstrated motivation in other ways such as their ability to maintain focus, their ability to avoid disruptions, their ability to produce quality work, and their ability to participate in classroom discussion. The journals were a great way to get students dialoguing about what they were reading in class and in making connections to the text. Students also enjoyed being given a voice to share their personal journals if they wished. The journals were also a great method for establishing positive teacher/student relationships since the teacher was providing written feedback to the students of the intervention group. It is essential for teachers to implement strategies in the classroom that will engage students and help them feel that what they are doing is a valuable use of time. Although future research will be necessary to further assess the value of written teacher feedback, researcher observations suggest that journal reflections could be a useful strategy in the classroom to teach on-task and respectful behavior, to give students a voice in the classroom, to increase student participation, and to allow them to practice their writing with a less formal writing assignment.

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