THE IMPORTANCE OF READING ACROSS GENRES

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Abstract
Research continues to demonstrate that motivated readers read more, yet too often students are not exposed to genres that might motivate them to continue reading. Further, students might not be encouraged to read outside their preferred reading genre. When students are unmotivated to read, they often do not read or do not finish the books they start. What would happen if students were encouraged to read from more genres and given the freedom to check out various genres of books from their school libraries? This study examines what happens to achievement and motivation when fourth-graders participate in a Genre Challenge that utilizes the Whooo's Reading app. Results indicate that comprehension scores in certain genres were impacted more than others, and while reading outside of the students' preferred genres did not significantly change, students did enjoy finishing books and were extrinsically motivated to finish the book so they could take the quiz on the app.

Keywords
intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, genre, reading comprehension

Introduction

Like many teachers, the lead researcher (Jennifer) wrestled with getting her kids to finish books. Her students would go to the library, check out the books, and then never finish them, taking them back to the library the next week—and the cycle continued. She also noticed they picked books from the same section of the library every week. Were they bored? Did they need different things to read or some additional incentive to finish a book? Further, while her students' comprehension scores were adequate, she had to believe they would improve if they got into the habit of starting and finishing various books. This study is a result of her queries.

Literature Review

Reading motivation for elementary school students is thought to be the reason students choose the books they read and the reason they read at both home and school. Roe (2012) states that one of the goals in the teaching of reading is to motivate and engage students in reading so they approach the text with expectations and interests. No educator wants to *force* a student to read. Educators want their students to *choose* to read.

How a student feels about reading, their motivation to start reading and keep reading, has to do with how comfortable they are as a reader. Wigfield (2008) writes that highly engaged readers use strategies and are internally motivated, leading them to higher reading achievement. Students who struggle with comprehension, however, show lower motivation and strategy use. Gilliam (2011) identifies these strategies as word recognition, reading comprehension, and reading fluency. Students who struggle with reading tend to read the same books repeatedly or will look through pictures and not read the book at all. Schiefele (2012) explains that unmotivated children may cause behavior problems by attempting to find others in class to play with instead of reading.

Saaris (2016) states the holy grail of reading motivation is intrinsic motivation: we want students to read because they see the value in it and enjoy it. Students tend to be motivated to read in two ways; they are either intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated. The willingness to read because the activity is satisfying or rewarding on its own is what Schiefele (2012) calls intrinsic reading motivation. Intrinsic motivation correlates with and is predictive of reading achievement (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). To increase reading achievement educators must focus on what motivates the child—what the student needs—instead of using rewards and bribing students for improvements (Williams, Hedrick, and Tuschinski, 2008).

Reading comprehension scores can significantly increase if intrinsic motivation is present (Morgan and Fuchs, 2007). Educators ultimately want students to be engaged and love to read. The comprehension will come to them naturally when they are engaged in what they are doing. However, if there's no engagement, learning can be difficult. Engaged and active readers seek to understand what they read, interacting with the text (Kelly & Grace, 2009).

Going beyond rewards is difficult because teaching students to be intrinsically motivated to read has to do with how they feel. Teachers cannot make students feel a certain way while reading. Saaris (2016) has several ideas on how this can be approached in the classroom. One is having students practice cognitive involvement. Saaris (2016) explains that when students are deeply engaged with texts, it leads to the experience of flow and better comprehension. Sarris (2016) stresses assigning texts at the appropriate comprehension level of difficulty and monitoring focus to promote cognitive involvement. When students are able to read the text fluently, they are more likely to relax and focus on understanding the text. To help guide this comprehension, students can be held responsible for responding to the text. One way is to have the students log what page they start and stop reading during their independent reading time. Having students read consistently can help with student accountability and possibly improve reading abilities (Sanden, 2014). If students are only reading five pages in twenty minutes, they can ask themselves why. Maybe they are sitting in the wrong spot in the classroom. Maybe they are reading a book that is not on their reading level. Monitoring their progress can help students see patterns for success and failure.

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Another idea on promoting intrinsic motivation is choice. Saaris (2016) argues that allowing students to choose what they read through an independent reading program communicates the value of reading for its own sake. Students prefer to read what they have selected themselves and will push to read more challenging content if it interests them (Saaris, 2016). This will lead students to read more. In time, a student might become intrinsically motivated to read, likely improving comprehension along the way.

In opposition to intrinsic reading motivation is extrinsic reading motivation. Extrinsic reading motivation is when a student reads for a specific reward and not because they want to read. The best way to motivate students who are not intrinsically motivated to read seems to be to start with an extrinsic system, or a reward system, of which there are many. When these reward systems work and students are motivated to read, it is called extrinsic motivation. Lazowski and Hulleman, (2016) state that extrinsic incentives can promote an interest in reading by motivating a student who lacks interest. Many believe using extrinsic rewards will help students reach their reading potential (Fawson & Moore, 1999). Educators and schools offer these extrinsic behavior rewards hoping that the students who struggle will see the good in positive behavior and then choose the positive behavior. Guthrie et al., (2007) explain that this can be done with reading as well, with the initial use of extrinsic incentives to motivate students with hopes of developing into an intrinsic desire. Extrinsic motivations like grades and recognition may initially be necessary for a reluctant reader. As the reader becomes more adept, motivation improves and the student reads for curiosity, the challenge, social outcomes, or self-efficacy (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1993).

Both intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation are beneficial in the classroom. Since intrinsic reading motivation is more difficult to instill in a student, the educator will often start with extrinsic reading motivation incentives, with the hope that an intrinsic motivation will eventually be found. Teachers push for this motivation because motivated readers read more, and comprehension tends to improve when reading time increases. Reading comprehension is essential in every content area and the true mark of a reader, but it is different from reading alone. When reading occurs, words are being translated into sounds and spoken words. Kowald (2016) explains that reading comprehension involves taking what was just read and making meaning from it; it is the ability to understand and recall what was just read. This means that reading comprehension will occur while the student is reading and continue on after the student has read.

> Educators have a variety of strategies to increase student motivation and engagement in reading, and one that seems especially interesting is making sure students have access to and are encouraged to read from a variety of genres.

If students comprehend what they read, they can explore new worlds because they are able to read a variety of genres. But many students do not want to read out of their preferred genres. To be well-read and to meet reading standards, students need to read fiction and non-fiction. In fiction students can explore realistic fiction, fantasy, mystery, science fiction, historical fiction, and some traditional literature. In non-fiction students can read biography, autobiography, and informational text.

Durgin (2016) notes the benefits of teaching students, particularly reluctant readers, to read many different genres. For example, Durgin (2016) suggests poetry or biographies if readers struggle with novels. Each genre also comes with an opportunity to learn new vocabulary, which can increase student comprehension (Durgin, 2016). Additionally, each genre has a set of skills tied to it for comprehension. For example, Durgin (2016) explains that students who having trouble grasping inferences for a particular genre may grasp sequence of events for another genre.

Classroom environments that promote a broad spectrum of genres are beneficial for students, but they might need encouragement. Durgin (2016) suggests providing students with lessons and activities to encourage comprehension of different genres. A way to do this is teaching the differences among genres of both fiction and non-fiction. Students need to know that fiction is more than just make-believe and non-fiction is more than just facts. For example, students can use text features to help them comprehend non-fiction text. Teachers can also help students realize that a fictional story has characters and events. They can use multiple story maps to help comprehend

the many types of fiction genres. Understanding these unique differences help students approach the texts with more confidence and a willingness to explore other texts (Sanchez, 2017).

The review of literature suggests that exposing students to a variety of genres is a key to unlocking comprehension and motivating learners. When students are able to find a genre they enjoy, their confidence will grow. With that confidence comes motivation to read and a deeper engagement, and that motivation and engagement could lead to comprehension success. Educators have a variety of strategies to increase student motivation and engagement in reading, and one that seems especially interesting is making sure students have access to and are encouraged to read from a variety of genres. Students need help, however, learning to appreciate the different genres before they take off on their own and improve their comprehension skills.

Research Methodology

The participants in this study were 17 fourth-graders in a small Midwestern rural town. Of those 17 fourth-graders, nine were boys and eight were girls, ranging in age from nine to 11. Seven read below a fourth-grade reading level and ten read on or above a fourth-grade reading level. A common comprehension test was given every week over a different genre based on the weekly story given in the Journeys curriculum, the required reading curriculum of the district.

The students started the Genre Challenge in February. They were given four different genres to read during a six-week period. The genres included realistic fiction, informational text, historical fiction, and biography. Students were also able to check out and read two books per genre. The students read these books from start to finish. Once the students completed a genre, they checked it off their list and received a bookmark. Then they answered questions about the book in an app called Whooo's Reading. This free app provides open-ended questions to assess students' comprehension of the texts and is geared for upper elementary and middle school students. This also provided students with some extrinsic motivation; they needed to read carefully and finish the book if they wanted to use the Whooos's Reading app. During the six-week period, as a class they read the Journey's weekly story. Each story was a different genre and it was read and reread as a class. Students also had leveled readers that were tied to the genre of the main story. Students were then encouraged to read books on their own from that same genre. As a result, students were exposed to multiple texts of the same genre during the course of one week, and comprehension of the texts was monitored along the way through the curriculum and assessed at the end through the app and weekly comprehension assessments provided by Journey's reading curriculum.

Results

As results were gathered, they were organized into four categories. Each category had three sections. The four categories were informational text, historical fiction, realistic fiction, and biography. The three sections in each of those categories were improved, did not improve, and stayed the same. Posttest comprehension scores taken prior to the introduction of the Whooo's Reading app were compared to posttest comprehension scores after the introduction of the app, when more reading in each genre was monitored and encouraged.

As noted in the table below, 14 of 17 students (82%) improved their comprehension scores when reading realistic fiction; 12 of 17 students (70%) improved their comprehension scores when reading informational text and historical fiction; and 11 of 17 students (64%) improved their comprehension scores when reading biographies.

Table 1: Results

	Informational Text	Historical Fiction	Realistic Fiction	Biography
Improved	12 (70%)	12 (70%)	14 (82%)	11 (64%)
Did not improve or stayed the same	5 (30%)	5 (30%)	3 (18%)	6 (36%)

Discussion

Students improved the most in comprehension when reading realistic fiction, with 82% of students improving their comprehension test scores in this area. This finding makes sense because the majority of books read during free time are in the realistic fiction genre; when students choose their own books to read, they choose realistic fiction or another kind of fiction. This also explains why the historical fiction comprehension weekly assessments were high, with 73% of the students improving. The genre that the students improved in the least was biography. The students did not seem to enjoy this genre as much by teacher observation, and while their scores did improve, their individual scores did not improve by much.

The Genre Challenge motivated students to read different genres, but the majority of students did not open their interests to other genres after the study even though they enjoyed the Whooo's Reading app. For example, they had to read a biography for the challenge, but they did not choose to read additional biographies when the challenge was over. The majority of the students enjoyed the historical fiction genre. Several students found a series to read within that genre, and other students continued to use the app, extrinsically motivated by it.

Some ideas for future research include having the students start the Genre Challenge at the beginning of the school year. Another idea for future research would include taking two weeks to cover the weekly Journeys curriculum. This would allow more time to focus on the comprehension strategy associated with the genre they are studying and allow for more wide reading of the genre. The app motivated some kids and should be used for those who were motivated by it, but it was not needed or beneficial for all students. Those with an intrinsic desire to read were not eager to continue using it.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide students with the opportunity to read a variety of genres, to finish the books they started, and to increase motivation by using the Whooo's Reading app as an extrinsic reward. Success was measured through their comprehension test scores on their weekly reading, and teacher observation. This was accomplished through the Genre Challenge. Students were able to check out and read two books per genre. The students read these books from start to finish. These genres were tied to what they were reading in their reading curriculum. Overall, all of the students made improvements from their pretests to posttests. The students became more aware of the variety of genres available to them in the school library, and they grew to understand where to locate specific genres in the library. The students learned about the characteristics of different genres, and they developed interest in new, previously unfamiliar genres. Finally, and they could check their reading comprehension by taking fun quizzes on the app. With the Genre Challenge over, many students are still logging books in the Whooo's Reading app, and still reading, and that is a great start. The teacher's hope is that the continued use of the extrinsic motivation (the app) eventually leads to an intrinsic motivation to read widely and thoroughly.

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