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Research Reimagined through Multigenre Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study chronicles the effects of completing a multigenre research project on 18 seventh grade language arts students' motivation to write. This study was conducted at a suburban middle school of approximately 150 students in northwestern New Jersey. To encourage students' desire to write, as well as to promote increased student achievement and confidence when faced with completing a research paper, students were immersed in a multigenre research project writing unit. Students were instructed in multigenre project creation through mini-lessons and collaborated with their classmates in research support groups.

Data were collected frequently through student surveys, examples of student work, conferences, as well as observations. Through analyzing the data, it became evident that when students were allowed to work closely with peers through collaboration and discussion while researching a self-selected topic they were more likely to be productive, excited, and engaged in their writing. Additionally, when given the ability to research a topic of their own choosing and express the findings in meaningful and creative ways, students were highly motivated to write. The supported independence afforded over the course of the project created satisfied, independent thinkers.

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To . . .

Mom

for . . .
expecting more, always
and
sewing all the dresses
and
listening to us all

Dad

for . . .
telling all the stories
and
editing all the movies
and
creating all the adventures

Bradley

for . . .
being the browniest
and
loving me all of the time

Ethan

for . . .
becoming a son

Michael

for . . .
all the times before Christopher

Christopher

for . . .
all the times after

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RESEARCHER STANCE

Try though I might, remembering a single memorable learning experience during my junior high school years is, frustratingly, impossible. How did an entire period of my adolescent academic career pass me by leaving no enduring understandings impressed upon my young mind? My remembrance of seventh and eighth grade years paints a bleak picture of uninspired drudgery. School, I came to learn, was not a place to explore or imagine. As a child, I spent the majority of my time outside pretending to be a gymnast on our swing-set, building bird nests out of mud, grass and twigs, and fantasizing I was a fairy in our wisteria tunnel. The reality of middle school hit me. *Hard*. Reading turned into a chore and writing became a struggle, but determined to succeed I continued to work up to my teachers' expectations of rote memorization.

High school, it turned out, did not produce any earth-shattering lessons either, and while I credit my undergraduate college with providing me some truly wonderful, eye-opening experiences - I did not always know how to take advantage of the information waiting for me because, in middle and high school, I had never been expected to explore a world beyond my teachers' expectations. I struggled to develop my own thesis statements and conduct investigations that did not exist within limited parameters. Until I delved into the world of teaching, my view of education was bound by these early experiences in a fixed state where teachers told and students did.

I started my teaching career in early childhood and elementary education where, much like my own elementary school experiences, I was able to guide students in creating, critiquing, and examining the world around them. And then - middle school reality hit me. *Hard. Again.*

During my first year teaching middle school language arts (I happened to be in sixth grade at the time), I was immersed in a seemingly endless research project in which students chose an endangered animal and through “investigation and inquiry” produced an entire project that really didn’t matter. It was just another “something” to do for school. Students were not motivated to write and therefore were not proud of what they produced. Sure, they learned some valuable research skills like how to avoid plagiarism and cite sources using the Modern Language Association’s format. Students ~~learned~~ memorized lots of information about their animal’s habitat (although how much they retained is questionable) – but most of their papers were poorly written and boring to read! And, whose fault was that? Mine. As a first-year middle school teacher, I had simply done what the other teachers in my department always did even when I noticed it wasn’t working. I could not believe after all I had learned, I had become a teacher who promoted the same uninspired drudgery I endured in middle school. As I stayed up night after night trying to slog through a seemingly endless pile of mind-numbing papers I vowed things would be different in the future.

However, as I began to plan a research project the following year (this time for eighth grade), I started to outline something very close to a yet another typical research paper. I figured I would simply allow students to write about whatever they wished and surely that would increase their motivation to write. However, as I continued plodding my way through what would surely be another disastrous unit of plans, I began to realize what I had identified as the only problem (topic choice) was not going to make my students want to write. An unforeseen secondary problem was emerging - the type of writing! So, rather than subjecting my students, and myself, to the limitations of a yet another meaningless “research” topic and extended prose piece of writing – I decided I didn’t want to tell my students what to research, or dictate how to convey their findings. What my students needed was to research personally meaningful topics and write about what they learned in ways that allowed them to be fully immersed in their subject. Slowly, and with the help of many resources, I began to plan a multigenre research unit. The new unit plans called for me to relinquish control over what students researched and employ the use of mini-lessons in the context of multigenre writing.

When exploring multigenre writing with my students for the first time, I was amazed at not only the quality of writing, but the motivation students had to write. And it all came fairly easily. Students were excited to begin their work for the day, interested to learn more about their topic, and they wanted to share their

knowledge and resources with each other. However, the “warm and fuzzies” didn’t last forever. I was surprised by how much students wanted to collaborate, as I had not planned to allow for much partner or group work. In addition some students became frustrated with their topic choices and asked if they could start over. Genre choice selection, for some, became about what was easiest instead of what would best represent the subject and mood of a particular topic. Yet, in a post-project survey nearly all students felt they became better writers. Although I considered my first attempt at planning a multigenre research unit a success, improvements needed to be made in order to successfully implement this unit in the future.

Thus, my research question will continue to explore multigenre research: *What are the effects of completing a multigenre research project on motivation to write with seventh grade Language Arts students?* I have chosen to continue improving the multigenre research unit as a challenge to myself and my students. This will be the third year I have run the multigenre research unit in my classroom. In previous years, despite students’ willingness to research, creating a project that flows with unified writing remains a struggle. I confess to forgoing meaningful lessons on genre craft in prior years because the kids were just so excited to research. Without an understanding of writer’s craft, the copious notes and amazing facts fall flat on a page where the reader is not sure of the genre he or she is looking at. According to Allen (2001), with proper guidance students

will “immerse themselves in new ways of knowing and express themselves from newfound perspectives” (p.1). I want the excitement of writing multigenre research papers to change student perspectives on literacy.

While I hoped the students I taught would come to view research as an important process over which they had ownership and took pride in their work, I knew I would encounter unforeseen obstacles as this study unfolded. However, this is what I enjoyed most about the multigenre research unit - I knew I would learn valuable lessons from my students that required me to make immediate changes to improve their research experience and make future multigenre units more successful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In many classrooms, teachers struggle to motivate their students to write. For this reason, many middle school educators have come to dread the research papers most schools require students to complete. Typically, traditional research papers are filled with uninspired writing that the student is (usually) not proud of and that the teacher (ordinarily) hates grading. Yet, how can students be motivated to write a better quality paper? Motivation is a complicated phenomenon in which various factors affect behavior (Codling, Gambrell, Kennedy, Palmer, & Graham, 1996). According to Codling, et al. (1996), two factors that have consistently emerged in research on motivation are task value and self-perceived competence. Therefore, a learner must feel he or she has the ability and skills necessary to accomplish a task, and if the learner perceives that task as personally relevant and important, he or she is more likely to pursue it with quality effort.

Students express a high level of interest in writing when they are allowed to write about self-chosen topics and receive appropriate scaffolding from instructors (Codling, et al., 1996). Research by Werderich and Armstrong (2013) supports the idea that students are more likely to engage in expressive writing through current technological means (such as texting, e-mailing, posting to social media sites and blogging), but prefer not to write standard academic essays in which they feel restricted. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require

students to understand writing as a primary mode of academic communication (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Sadly, few students are successful in their attempts to achieve this standard. Unfortunately, according to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, just one quarter of eighth grade students perform at the proficient writing level. Even more disturbing, fifty-four percent of eighth graders performed at the basic writing level; while twenty percent fell even further to perform at the below basic writing level. To achieve NAEP proficient levels, students must demonstrate the ability to accomplish the communicative purpose of their writing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The basic level indicates that only partial mastery of the required knowledge and skills has been achieved. It is clear that students are not motivated to write and do not view writing as a way to communicate ideas, but as a boring chore in which they must conform to a standardized format and formal language (Werderich & Armstrong, 2013).

The NAEP data, which showed that in 2011 seventy-four percent of grade eight students performed at the basic or below basic level on writing assessments, support that engaging students in the act of writing is important for improving their ability to communicate clearly and effectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Factors that Influence Student Motivation to Write

According to Calkins (1986), humans have an inherent need to write. Writing helps us to understand and organize our personal experiences. Young children often show an interest in writing before they can read. Despite this early natural propensity to write, by the time many students reach middle school they do not view writing as a meaningful activity (Calkins, 1986). Calkins notes some students will complete assigned writing tasks without ever becoming “deeply and personally involved in their writing” (p. 5).

A 2008 meta-analysis of 41 studies found a strong correlation between giving students choice and their intrinsic motivation for completing a task, their overall performance on the task, and their willingness to accept challenging tasks (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson). These same researchers note that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when an individual feels in control of his or her outcome, in contrast when the environment is experienced (or perceived) as controlling motivation is diminished. According to Cordova and Lepper (1996), students who were given the most choice, compared with their peers who were given either limited choice or none, showed the most engagement in learning, were highly motivated, and perceived themselves as competent learners.

Learner and Classroom Environment Factors

A learner's motivation to write is influenced by that learner's perception of task value and self-perceived competence. Within the social context of the

classroom, there are important factors that influence motivation to write. Students understand written language through interaction with their peers who are also engaged in authentic writing that conveys meaning (Codling, et al., 1996).

According to Hernández-Ramos and De La Paz (2009), students who are engaged in collaborative learning environments exhibit positive emotional benefits such as a favorable attitude toward learning, and working with others. The same benefits become all but nonexistent for students who are asked to research and write using a more traditional, isolated approach, as learners working alone in competitive environments often try to outperform other students. Contrastingly, in a constructivist environment students have the ability to focus on mastering the task at hand through collaboration, thereby fostering an environment of cooperation where students try to best their previous, individual achievements (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009).

Research by Codling, et al. (1996), indicates that social interaction played a critical role in students' abilities to retain information and their self-perception of writing skills. The need to socialize when writing cannot be emphasized enough. Students *must* be allowed to work collaboratively with their peers, writing about self-selected topics and in genres appropriate to their selected subject matter. Learners value writing and feel good about themselves as writers when they are given opportunities to engage in various kinds of writing in an environment in which social interaction is encouraged and instructional support is

provided (Codling, et al., 1996). Without these cooperative learning groups, students in a whole group setting are often isolated as the instructor teaches to the middle of the class, while one person speaks at a time while others wait for a turn that may never come. Active learning requires engaged students where many people may be talking at once (Harvey & Daniels, 2009). Middle school teacher, Nancie Atwell (1998) writes, “learning is more likely to happen when students like what they are doing. Learning is also more likely when students can be involved and active and when they can learn from and with other students” (p. 69). Atwell’s argument for cooperative learning is echoed by Harvey and Daniels (2009) who note, “learning is far too weak if we limit students’ actions, conversation, and thinking to what the one adult in the room can monitor” (p. 37).

Teacher Factors

Teachers increase student motivation when they create an environment that focuses on learning rather than performance (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). Codling, et al. found instructors who provide support and scaffolding create writers who progress in their development. Instructors who expose their students to a wide variety of reading materials and allow a significant amount of time to read in-class are more likely to encounter less resistance to writing. Educators who promote writing as important and interesting will convey the value of writing to students (Codling, et al., 1996).

In their study, Codling, et al. noted there was a strong correlation between expository writing and students' negative feelings. Learners were less confident in their ability to write an expository piece. In fact, when students were asked what type of writing they would choose to engage in for the next twenty minutes, the most frequently reported response was to write a story (Codling, et al., 1996). According to Allen (2001), when "given the choice, we do what we enjoy doing" (p. 16). Why then, are we saddling students with the seemingly impossible task of producing an enlightening term paper when the solution of an engaging project through multigenre research is possible?

Atwell (1998) ponders whether losing control is a teacher's greatest fear and perhaps the reason behind why constructivist environments where students lead the discussion are rare particularly in middle school settings. Rather than risk the possibility of overstimulation, teachers choose to limit learning opportunities by keeping students quiet and facing the front of the room. Teacher lectures, seat and busywork were what Goodlad (1984) observed in ninety percent of middle school classrooms he visited. According to Goodlad, teachers had eliminated student choice "with respect to seating, grouping, content, materials, use of space, time utilization, and learning activities" (p. 229). When choice is removed, how can students be motivated to learn?

The Multigenre Research Project

Students engaged in this type of research choose their own topic, research it and present their findings through writing. However, a multigenre research project is not an extended prose piece of writing, rather it melds research, personal experience and imagination into a project composed of many genres. Each genre stands on its own, but remains connected to the pieces within the project by theme and content. If students are motivated to write by self-chosen topics and expressing their ideas in writing that validates their subject matter, then a multigenre research project is an effective solution to counteract the monotonous expository writing and apathetic writers traditional term papers create (Romano, 2013). Through multigenre research students are able to understand that their writing can be used to communicate ideas, that their writing is powerful, and that their voice matters (Allen, 2001).

Defining the Multigenre Research Project

Multigenre research projects, according to Romano (2013), encourage students to “meld fact, interpretation, and imagination,” (p. 109) by using different genres of writing to present different aspects of their research. In his attempt to capture the spirit of the multigenre research project, Romano (2013) writes:

I am what I am.

I am imagination and metaphor. I am images

that make you see and wonder and speculate.

I am the enigmatic final line of a poem you carry for days.

I am what I am.

I resist exposition, though I am not averse to it.

I am opposition to a strict writing diet
of thesis-driven, five paragraph-you-know-whats.

I am what I am.

I am the lash in the eye of tradition.

I am not thesis, though I am pointed.

I am “not necessarily” to those who demand everything be
explained.

I am a force against the prosaic
(and that does not mean writing in prose).

I am what I am.

I am emphatically implicit, the high wire act without a net.

I am, as Whitman wrote, “Expecting the main things from you.”

I am what I am.

I am not above falling on my face.

I am Pandora’s Rhetorical Box.

I am one and I am many.

I am many and I am one.

I am not mashed potatoes. I am cioppino.

I am trust me, travel with me, be patient.

I am telling you by showing you.

I am multigenre. (p. 16)

While students are given freedom in terms of topic-choice and written interpretation of their subject, they are still taught research and documentation

skills. Each piece in the project is written in a different genre and gives information on one facet of the topic. The pieces are not connected using traditional devices and are not always in chronological order (Romano, 2000). The multigenre research project “is a collection of writing and artistic expression that engulfs and informs the reader” (Allen, 2001, p. 2). The multigenre research project, which concludes with an oral presentation, allows students to deliver the results of their investigation while also integrating creative and performing arts. Learners present their findings with passion and conviction. Although students who participate in multigenre research have different experiences and learn about different things, engaging in this unique type of research helps students build skills (Allen).

Through the multigenre research project, students are able to develop skills and build expertise within the context of doing. This project, “has the capacity to motivate students and scaffold their learning by not only tapping into their prior knowledge but also gaining new skills and knowledge in the process” (Putz, 2006, p. 156). Students learn to conduct research, routinely read, write, and reflect often, speak, listen and collaborate in small and large group settings, evaluate themselves and their peers, use technology, develop thinking, problem solving, and organizational skills, and think creatively and imaginatively (Allen).

Students learn research skills through finding information on meaningful self-selected topics. Through researching, students read voraciously as they try to

determine what information will be of value for their project. As many students collect more information than they can ever possibly use, they must read analytically to discover the most salient points (Allen, 2001). As the multigenre project is communicated largely through writing, students try writing creatively in different genres. They must select the type of writing that will best represent the results of their research. However, these pieces are not the only type of writing students are engaged in. Learners must take notes as they review information, keep process journals, and reflect on their project experience at the end of their journey (Allen, 2001; Putz, 2006).

Throughout the multigenre research unit, students meet daily with a research support group. As students work in small groups, they must discuss their research and share their writings. Over the course of the project, students monitor their performance through process journals in which they reflect upon their progress. Through these journals, students learn to self-evaluate (Putz, 2006). The use of technology also plays an integral role in multigenre research. Learners use computers to enhance their chosen genres. At the conclusion of the project, students give an oral presentation to an audience of their peers. Students learn the value of collaboration that is essential for surviving in the real world. They must collaborate with family, friends, classmates, and their teacher. They provide each other with models of writing and an exchange of ideas cited as critically important

in the research conducted by Codling, et al. and Werderich and Armstrong (Allen, 2001; Codling, et al., 1996; Werderich & Armstrong, 2013).

Multigenre Benefits and Motivation

What makes multigenre writing so beneficial? What is wrong with the traditional extended prose term paper or expository essays? According to Romano (2013) “expository writing monopolizes thinking in education” (p. 18). As students move through school they write fewer and fewer creative pieces. Poems and stories are dismissed in favor of reports, summaries, and traditional research papers where “exposition becomes their sole writing diet” (p. 18). Why should the expository genre be favored above other types of writing? Romano writes:

Writing is a big world mural, not a snapshot. Writing is book reviews, email messages, notebook entries, news stories, love notes, commentaries, technical instructions, poems of many kinds, so many genres and subgenres that assembling a comprehensive list of them will almost certainly be incomplete. (p. 18)

Students should not only be familiar with how to write in one genre, largely because when this occurs, motivation to write will decrease (Romano). Fletcher (1993) notes that students in the upper grades struggle to allow their voices to shine through in writing that involves research. He compares the transition learners make from narrative writing to traditional expository writing to a tropical plant going from a hothouse where it flourishes to arctic air where it wilts and

witners. Although students can make the transition, it is often without the passion seen in their expressive writing (Fletcher, 1993).

Engaging in multigenre research produces writers who feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. Students learn from the multigenre project, become passionate about their topic, develop research skills to satisfy their curiosity and turn into free thinkers who decide which way of writing will best connect and express their topic (Allen & Swistak, 2004). Multigenre research requires students to write in a variety of forms, in which every piece is connected to a single theme or topic. It allows meaning to influence form, instead of form dictating the assignment. This type of project allows its author to present the multitude of perspectives found in the research of one topic. Authors can weave together factual information with pieces of imagination that showcase the talents they have as writers and researchers. According to Hughes (2009), “ultimately, multigenre research can stimulate analysis and higher order thinking skills in its creator” (p. 36).

In order to motivate adolescent learners, it is imperative to focus on their interests and therefore we must “emphasize students challenging and being challenged by their schoolwork, their successfully integrating new learning into their continuously modified existing knowledge, and their exploring the ideas and questions that interest them” (Stevenson & Bishop, 2005, p. 107). Multigenre

research is the way we can accomplish this. When reflecting on her students' experiences with multigenre research, Allen (2001) stated:

I've seen multigenre research papers change students' negative perceptions of research, writing, and oral presentations. When given the chance to select their own topics to research, decide which genres to write in, and determine how they want to present their findings to an audience, students change. They become empowered. They assume ownership of their learning and display pride in showing off their accomplishments. They grow. (p. 1)

The type of working collaboration between students and subjects created by the multigenre research project, fosters an environment where learners are free to explore because there is no singular way to achieve success. Hughes (2009) reminds teachers of the benefits that will unfold through:

enabling students to think creatively, allowing them to pursue engaging activities, and empowering them with the skills of democratic citizens in their classroom communities, middle level educators can bear witness to the high expectations young adolescents will meet, and more often, exceed. (p. 35)

Stevenson (2001) notes, "every middle grades teacher, regardless of the setting, has an opportunity to show young adolescents students the joy and power of authentic learning" (p. 173). The multigenre research project is a way teachers can

engage students in collaborative learning, where through self-selected topics motivation to write is strong.

Standards and the Multigenre Research Project

According to the National Middle School Association (2003), “curriculum is relevant when it allows students to pursue answers to questions they have about themselves, content, and the world” (p. 20). One of the CCSS in English language arts created by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) calls for students to “conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation” (p. 18). The CCSS also require students to access peer guidance and support to develop and strengthen writing (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Through multigenre research, teachers have the opportunity to create meaningful lessons that relate to their students’ lives. Utilizing this type of project shows learners that teachers are partners in learning who support student growth through challenging opportunities. Through the multigenre research project, instructors can meet CCSS while helping students become better writers, thinkers, and explorers - rather than regurgitating someone else’s ideas. Students learn when they write for a purpose and with a specific audience in mind, their writing becomes powerful (Grierson, Anson, & Baird, 2002; Hughes, 2009).

Summary

In order to be motivated to write, students must be allowed to read from and write in a variety of genres. Learners need collaborative discussion with their peers and scaffolded support from their teachers to write well and willingly. Self-selected topics will, typically, yield the highest return on writing motivation and quality (Codling, et al., 1996). Through multigenre research, students are able to investigate a topic of their choosing and express their findings in ways that enhance the nature of their subject (Romano, 2013). Within multigenre research students work collaboratively with peers through research support groups (Putz, 2006). Teachers are, likely, able to successfully meet standards while at the same time promoting student engagement and increasing motivation to write when entrenched in the multigenre research project unit (Allen, 2001).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Motivating students to write a well-crafted research paper is, usually, a hard-won task. Traditional research papers tend to invoke a sense of fear and dread in both the reader (teacher) and the writer (student). Multigenre research projects give students the freedom to research a self-selected topic and present their findings through multiple genres of writing. The implementation of multigenre research projects motivates students to write by allowing their creativity to flow freely (Romano, 2013). The intent of this action research project was to investigate the effects of completing a multigenre research project on motivation to write with seventh grade Language Arts students. Student participants researched a person, event, or issue of their choice by collecting and recording information, analyzing and synthesizing it by means of teacher-led mini lessons and independent investigation. Student participants created a final creatively packaged multigenre research project consisting of multiple creative pieces in various genres. The instructional procedures consisted of regular, twenty-three minute mini-lessons within an eighty minute language arts period for modeling research procedures and creative writing techniques. Students met with a dedicated research support group throughout the course of this study in addition to working independently.

Setting

The setting of this action research project was at a middle school in New Jersey. There were approximately 150 students in the middle school which spanned from fifth grade through eighth grade. The population of the school was varied and included students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Within this seventh grade classroom, approximately three quarters of each class was dedicated to research and multigenre writing. Students used dedicated Chromebooks, and a variety of research books, magazines and periodicals to delve deeply into their research topics. The students were seated with their research support groups.

Participants

There were eighteen participants who were all in seventh grade and were approximately twelve to thirteen years old. There were nine girls and nine boys within the classroom. This classroom was heterogeneous in academic abilities and there was a wide variety of reading levels throughout the classroom. There were two students with IEPs and one student with a 504 Plan.

Procedures

One day prior to the first session together, the students were asked to complete their Pre-Multigenre Surveys (Appendix A., section i.) on their attitudes toward writing, especially with regard to research writing. This survey provided baseline data and showed where the students' attitudes toward writing and factors

that influenced their motivation to write were prior to introducing the multigenre research project. During this same class period, students were told that just as they are learning, their teacher was also a student. It was explained that over the next few months some of their work would be collected, and that conversations about multigenre writing and research would take place.

Approximately sixty minutes of each class period was dedicated to the multigenre research project. This included twenty-thirty minutes of mini-lessons on various days. Activities over the course of nine weeks took place as follows:

Week one

- Administered pre-multigenre survey (Appendix A., section i.) on students' perceptions of themselves as researchers and their motivation to write.
- Modeled how to choose a meaningful topic to research through self and world connections.
- Students selected topics and were grouped by common research interests.
- Students began to use an FQIS (facts, questions, interpretations, sources) form to track research.

Week two

- Students continued to research their topics in groups and individually.
- Students created a work-plan with goals for days/week and identify things they need help with.

- Conducted mini-lessons on source trustworthiness and research organization.
- Students conferenced with teacher at end of week.

Week three

- Conducted mini-lessons on the following genres: advertisements, interviews, letters, manifestos, memos, and news articles.
- Students began to write about their topic in different genres.
- Students conferenced with teacher at the end of week.

Week four

- Conducted mini-lessons on the following genres: obituaries, poems, recipes, resumes and short stories.
- Student writing as described in week three continued this week.
- Students conferenced with teacher at the end of week.

Week five

- Teacher conducted mini-lessons on the following genres: collages, poems (double-voice and six-room), labyrinthine sentences, and lists
- Students completed a Multigenre Research Project Quick Check (Appendix B., section i.) on their progress and made adjustments as needed.
- Students conferenced with teacher at the end of week.

Week six

- Student writing as described in week three continued this week.
- Students conferenced with teacher at the end of week.

Week seven

- Conducted mini-lessons on works-cited page and introductory letter.
- Student writing as described in week three continued this week.
- Students conferenced with teacher at the end of week.

Week eight

- Student writing as described in week three continued this week.
- Conducted mini-lessons on creative packaging and putting it all together.
- Students began to put multigenre research project together for final presentation.
- Students conferenced with teacher at the end of week.

Week nine

- Students completed multigenre research project and presented findings to peers.
- Students completed a self-evaluation (Appendix B., section ii.)
- Teacher administered multigenre research project experience survey (Appendix A., section ii.) to receive students' feedback on ways to improve the multigenre research project.

Data Gathering Methods

Student surveys

In order to gather baseline data about what motivates students to write, a student survey (Appendix A., section i.) was given before students began working on their multigenre research project. The survey asked questions related to motivation to write, and their personal attitudes and feelings about writing. The final survey (Appendix A., section ii.) students took was specific to the multigenre research project and asked for student feedback as to how the project could be improved in the future.

Participant observations

Over the course of this action research project, there was a triangulation of data collection techniques utilized including observations, analysis of student artifacts, and information provided on student surveys. Observations were based on behaviors observed during mini-lessons, over the course of research support group meetings, and throughout independent working time, student artifacts showed what the students were producing independently as well as with the assistance of their peers, and student surveys shared insights into what the students experienced before, during, and after the multigenre research project.

Observations were collected during each class period where modeling, research support group meetings and independent working time occurred. The observations were recorded in a double-entry journal. This allowed for written

observations to be recorded on one side and teacher reflections about what was being observed on the opposite side.

Student artifacts

Throughout the research study, student artifacts included authentic examples of their digital research journals and multigenre writings. The final multigenre project demonstrated students' expertise on their self-selected research topic through six different genres of writing.

Summary

The focus of this action research project was to discover the effects of completing a multigenre research project on motivation to write with seventh grade Language Arts students. The students were exposed to several mini-lessons that covered research basics, citation of sources, and creative writing strategies. Students were expected to demonstrate their ability to use what they learned through teacher-led lessons in the creation and presentation of a self-directed multigenre research project.

Trustworthiness Statement

As a teacher researcher it is essential that my students are authentically and ethically represented as participants in my study, which has been approved by Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board. My building administrator also provided written permission for me to conduct the study (Appendix C., section i.). My research question was shared with parents/legal

guardians of my seventh grade students (Appendix C., section ii.), and with the learners themselves (Appendix C., section iii.). All aforementioned parties were provided with a consent form that described the nature of my research and ensured confidentiality of all participants. All students in the study were given pseudonyms and all written data (including the pseudonym key) was stored electronically on a password-protected computer to which only I have access. Any hard copies of documents related to the study were stored in my classroom in a secure filing cabinet. This data was available only to those directly involved with the completion of my study and was destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Parents/legal guardians and students were provided with contact information for me, the building principal, and my thesis supervisor at Moravian College. My principal was provided with the contact information of my thesis supervisor at Moravian College. The consent form also provided an option to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Once the participants and their parents/legal guardians had given their consent and the study began I used several strategies to help me consider multiple points of view when interpreting data. Over the course of the study, I engaged in consistent observations that were recorded in a double-entry journal (Hendricks, 2012). This journal contained observational data from the beginning of the study through its end. The length of time data was collected has helped ensure my results were as accurate as possible. As students in my class were aware of the

research being conducted, I shared my observations with students to whom the observation directly related to ensure the validity of what I had seen. By using member-checking I was able to make certain that my interpretations of students' actions were accurate (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2010).

An additional way to ensure reliability within the study was the use of data triangulation (Hendricks, 2012). The data I gathered fell into three categories: multigenre research project artifacts created by the participants, observational data recorded by myself in a double-entry journal throughout the study (and checked with participants at various intervals), and inquiry data in the form of surveys and conferences that answered specific questions about attitudes and experience. My results were based on commonalities between these data sources. When results seemed to contradict other sources of data, I made sure to analyze these negative cases (Hendricks, 2012).

Over the course of the study I engaged in continuous reflective planning through the use and analysis of my double-entry observational journal (Hendricks, 2012). Using this journal ensured ethical research methods were followed as I made changes to better meet the needs of my students according to data interpretation.

MY STORY

This Is Gonna be a Whole Lotta Work!

As my seventh graders filtered into the classroom on a sunny Monday, I was so excited! I knew once the kids heard about the multigenre research project, in which they could research a topic of their choosing and express their findings creatively, they would be thrilled, too. After the students took the pre-multigenre survey (Appendix A., section i.), I explained the project. I spoke animatedly and with enthusiasm, but when I asked if there were any questions the room fell silent. I waited, and asked excitedly, “So what do you guys think?”

My audience remained hushed until Shane finally questioned, “So, what are we doing?” Immediately, the listless listeners began to chatter. A chorus of “we don’t get it either” hummed throughout the room. The students were, clearly, confused. I re-explained the project with even more smiling and expressive body language. This time, rather than crickets - the students began asking questions.

“So, we can research whatever we want?”

“Like, what are our topic choices?”

“What do you mean genres?”

“Wait, so I can choose my topic?”

In a whisper, I began to count down from five. The students knew this was their cue to settle down. As soon as order was restored, I answered the children's pressing questions.

“So, you’re telling me,” Chris called out from his seat, “that you are going to let us choose the topic? Let us choose how we write it out?”

“Yes, exactly,” I offered, to which Chris said, “But how are we gonna do it?” He assumed that although I had offered the class choice, there must also be a catch.

“Well, your multigenre project will take you quite a while to complete, but within that time you will explore and learn and grow. I have no doubt you will succeed in producing outstanding work.”

Chris, who was not comforted nor convinced by my attempt to assuage any feelings of fear, mumbled, “This is gonna be a whole lotta work,” as he shook his head.

Later that day, I worried about how to motivate students who, like Chris, gave up on this project before it began. A glimmer of hope appeared as I reviewed the pre-multigenre survey data (Appendix A., section i.). The purpose of the anonymous survey was to provide insights into the attitudes and beliefs my students had regarding research, writing, and what motivated them to write. It became clear as I looked through the responses that my students were in desperate need of a project like this! I learned that the majority of my students felt the act of writing was just “ok” and were largely unsure of their ability to write well. In addition to students’ sobering opinions regarding writing, when asked what they thought of when they heard the word research, I was shocked at the responses.

“ . . . just googling things at home as homework and then writing some sort of report.”

“the first thing that comes [to] my mind is homework”

“ . . . is it going to be graded, what is it about and is it going to be lots of work”

“ . . . research can be a reminder of stress . . . ”

When asked what they disliked about how research had been taught in the past, students had a strong negative reaction to their lack of choice.

“I disliked boring topics. Pick interesting ones.”

“I don't like how in the past, research was taught in the form of looking up different websites, gathering information, and then writing an essay about it. I would like it a lot more if we were given more freedom with our topics and inserted a lot more creativity and more fun activities. So that we not only learn, but we have fun doing it.”

“I did not like how we were assigned a research topic. In the past I would have liked it better if we could have chosen ourselves.”

“that it has to be about a certain topic. It would be more fun for us to choose the topic.”

“I actually like to research and make projects I can be proud of, though I tend to like to do it out of school so there is no restriction to things I can write. For example, I once wrote an entire ten page research essay and was

very pleased with the turn out, but the topic was not one you'd really be allowed to do (it regarded the rights of a certain group/community of people).”

“I would like it a lot more if we were given more freedom with our topics and inserted a lot more creativity and more fun activities. So that we not only learn, but have fun doing it.”

What I discovered, in sifting through my student responses, is that when asked what they enjoyed about research nearly all students responded, in some way, that they liked learning new things. So, students wanted to learn about the world around them. Their curiosity lead them to ask questions; but, when they had to conducted research about a topic that was not of their choosing and with no freedom to express their findings in any way other than in essay or research report forms, students developed a negative attitude toward research and became unmotivated to write. I hoped, after reviewing my pre-project findings that my students would give this project a chance.

You Can't Just Find the Answers about These Topics in a Google Search

The next day, Chris greeted me with a smile so big his brown eyes crinkled at their edges and proudly announced, “My homework is right here.” Christopher rarely completed work out of school. I walked over to his desk, and saw that he did, indeed, complete his homework which was to list three possible research topics. Chris wrote: oceans, space, rainforest. I circulated around the

room, checking to see what my other students selected as potential topics. I was surprised, but pleased, to see so many ideas. From obscure subjects such as cryptozoology and fairy tales to more traditional topics like the Holocaust and animal welfare, my students came to class armed with ideas.

Over the next few days, the students engaged in free focused writing and formulated self-questions (an inquiry related to them personally) and world-questions (an inquiry that is more global in nature) to narrow down their topic choices to just two possible areas of study. Students then spent time researching their top selections. For this preliminary research, students used their laptops to find information about their topics. Finally, we discussed which topics were the most interesting and which ones might make the most successful projects and why.

“After talking with the learners at your table, what are some of the most interesting topics you have discussed?” I questioned my students.

“Felicia wants to research the Holocaust - that is a big topic,” Beth offered.

“Well, Shane is thinking about oceans - there is so much stuff in the ocean to think about,” Michael said.

“We are thinking a lot about animals and rescue and how to treat them,” Charlie called out, as Beth, sitting next to him, nodded emphatically. “We know this is an important topic in the world and to both of us,” he added.

“Wow! You are all thinking so carefully about what topics you are passionate about,” I complimented. “What makes these choices you are talking over with your classmates good options for your project? Why will they be successful?” I inquired.

“You can’t just find the answers about these topics in a Google search!” Felicia yelled.

“Yeah, and they are big, but we can make ‘em smaller with specific questions!” Charlie responded.

“But also” Chris interjected, “these topics have got to be the ones we really, really, *really* want to research!”

As the discussion continued students were able to discern what made research topics successful (those that were broad and could be narrowed later as a theme emerged). Students were anxious to begin researching, but before they were allowed to do so their topic had to be approved. In order to receive topic approval, students defended their top two topic choices in writing by answering specific questions regarding each. My students took this task seriously and worked for nearly an hour to ensure that they received their top pick. Most students did receive their first choice with the exception of two children who wanted to research cryptozoology. Unfortunately, because cryptozoology is a pseudoscience, I was unable to award the two very hopeful young men their

dream of researching Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster. The final research subjects were diverse and wide reaching.

Since the students would spend the majority of their time over the next two months researching their chosen topic, I wanted them to have a support system in place so that they did not feel isolated as no two students had chosen the same subject. Students were split into research support groups (see Table 1) because they needed to share their ideas with their peers to be truly successful with the multigenre research project.

Table 1: Research Support Groups and Topics

Research Support Groups and Topics			
All About Animals	Historical Happenings	Imaginary Worlds	Like Nothing Else
Beth: Animal Cruelty and Welfare Charlie: Animal Rescue	David: The American Flag Felicia: The Holocaust	Carrie: Mythology Diana: Fairy Tales	Lara: Filmmaking Patricia: Forensic Anthropology
Medically Focused	Nature and Beyond	Sports	
Crystal: Allergies Heather: Social Anxiety Michael: Parasites Tori: Diabetes	Chris: Outer Space Shane: Oceans Steven: Rainforests William: Mount Everest	Alex: The Manning Brothers Owen: Soccer	

There is *Sooo* Much Information

Our third week started off with my modeling some of the more traditional genres students could write in. I chose familiar genres to ease the students into their writing. Many students seemed apprehensive about writing in even these more basic genres. Over the course of this week I modeled the following genres: advertisements, interviews, letters, manifestos, memos, and news articles. When I modeled genres for students, I would try to show them a sample that related back to what we were working on. News articles seemed to garner a lot of interest when I mentioned them in week one as I was explaining the project, so I composed a newspaper article (see Figure 1) detailing what we were doing in class as a model for my students. My learners were thrilled to see their names in print and to read comments from one of their peers.

This model news article spurred the majority of my students to try to write their own article for an aspect their research topic. While many students did not choose an article as part of their final project, those students who attempted an article early on were certainly motivated to write one because of my willingness to share my voice with them.

The Language Arts

Times

New Jersey — Monday, September 25, 2015

Grade Seven Students Embark on Research Journey

Despite spotty internet service and sweltering early autumn heat, dozens of learners began research on their topics for a multigenre research project to be completed before the Thanksgiving holiday. The students of Mrs. Grube's language arts class were seen pouring over magazines, books, and internet resources to find information that will be of use in their projects. Students are tracking the facts they find using a digital graphic organizer.

According to Charlie, who is researching animal rescue, "since my topic is in the news a lot, keeping track of everything digitally is good because I use a lot of internet sources. So I can know where I got my info from in a click." Mrs. Grube has noticed an upturn in student motivation to research which she feels may be due to their ability to find out more about a choice topic and the use of a Chromebook.

These newly acquired Chromebooks (a laptop which runs on Google's Chrome operating system and meant to be used when connected to the internet) have allowed students to find the latest information about their topic in a media rich format. Students were not only reading informational articles, but could be found viewing videos, or studying photographs and illustrations. At the beginning of the year, each student was issued a dedicated Chromebook to be used during the language arts period, Mrs. Grube has found these

miniature computers to be invaluable in providing students the information they need and exciting ways to express it through the use of Google Drive applications.

Early on in the research process, students were given multiple mini-lessons, during which Mrs. Grube emphasized the importance of evaluating sources of information and showed students how to use a google search to their advantage.

"Essentially," Mrs. Grube said, I want my students to know how to find specific information they are seeking and how to evaluate what they are reading. New information should be met with a critical eye."

To ensure students stay on-target and are using their time wisely, Mrs. Grube often sits in on their research sessions offering support to those children who need it and observing others. "My students are used to me plopping myself down with my laptop in their research support group," Mrs. Grube notes. "I hope my students understand that I'm learning from them too."

Students are beginning to really delve deeply into their research topics this week. Mrs. Grube conferences with each student at the end of every week. "Seeing the kids with their research support groups is awesome, and oftentimes I am able to support their needs effectively, but the one-on-one conferencing allows me another way to check-in that gives each student a chance to get that personal attention and feedback," Mrs. Grube explained.

Figure 1: Newspaper Article, "Grade Seven Students Embark Research Journey"

After our mini-lessons, the noise in the room, as students began to research and write about their topics, was loud at first as a flurry of activity preceded students settling into investigating and reading. A large portion of the students' research was done via the Chromebooks, but I had also visited my local library (as our school library had a limited selection of texts) and pulled any books I could find on the topics my students were researching. In addition to this, I used online databases to help students find articles on more technical topics (an online journal article on social anxiety and teens for Heather, a write-up on the plan to travel Mars for Chris). Finally, students utilized any experts they knew for interview sessions (Crystal spoke with our school nurse about allergies and Charlie chatted with one of the organizers of a local animal shelter).

As students became more engrossed in the various resources of information they had gathered, learners settled into a research and writing routine. The days of exploration were exciting as students discovered much new information and tested ways to express what they had found. When it was time to cleanup there were often many moans and groans about leaving my classroom.

"What?!" Felicia exclaimed one Tuesday morning as the bell signaling the end to our class sounded, "I'm not even done, *at all*, yet! There is *sooo* much information. I wish I could stay in here all day."

“Um, yes!” Crystal replied, “Do you know how much is on allergies I have *not even read yet?*”

Our seventh grade class would run overtime so often that my sixth graders, who waited anxiously outside my door for their class to begin, frequently commented, “What are you doing in there? Those kids are always out late!”

“We’re researching,” I would reply, “You know, you can’t rush research.”

It Is Real!

As our fourth week began, I continued modeling some of the more traditional genres students could write in. During this week I gave mini-lessons on the following genres: obituaries, poems, and short stories. After our mini-lessons, I found myself, most frequently, sitting with the students. I would float from group to group during our 80-minute block, observing and, sometimes, interacting with the kids as they worked on either finding more information about their topics, or writing up their findings in a new genre. My building principal often conducted walkthroughs during the day. On one walkthrough he came into the classroom and abruptly stopped, seemingly searching for someone, “Oh!” Mr. R exclaimed, “I didn’t see you there. I thought you were a student.” His comment made me smile, because I *am* a student in my classroom.

Indeed, I learned new things each day I worked with my seventh graders.

One of the ways I found my students to be incredibly innovative was in designing genres (especially on the computer). Tori, who researched diabetes (a personally relevant subject, as her sister has this disease), chose to present some of her

information on ketoacidosis through a series of text messages (see Figure 2) between two friends (one is in the hospital recently diagnosed with diabetes, the other is worried and asking lots of questions).

Our weeks seemed to fly by, and soon I was modeling alternative genres

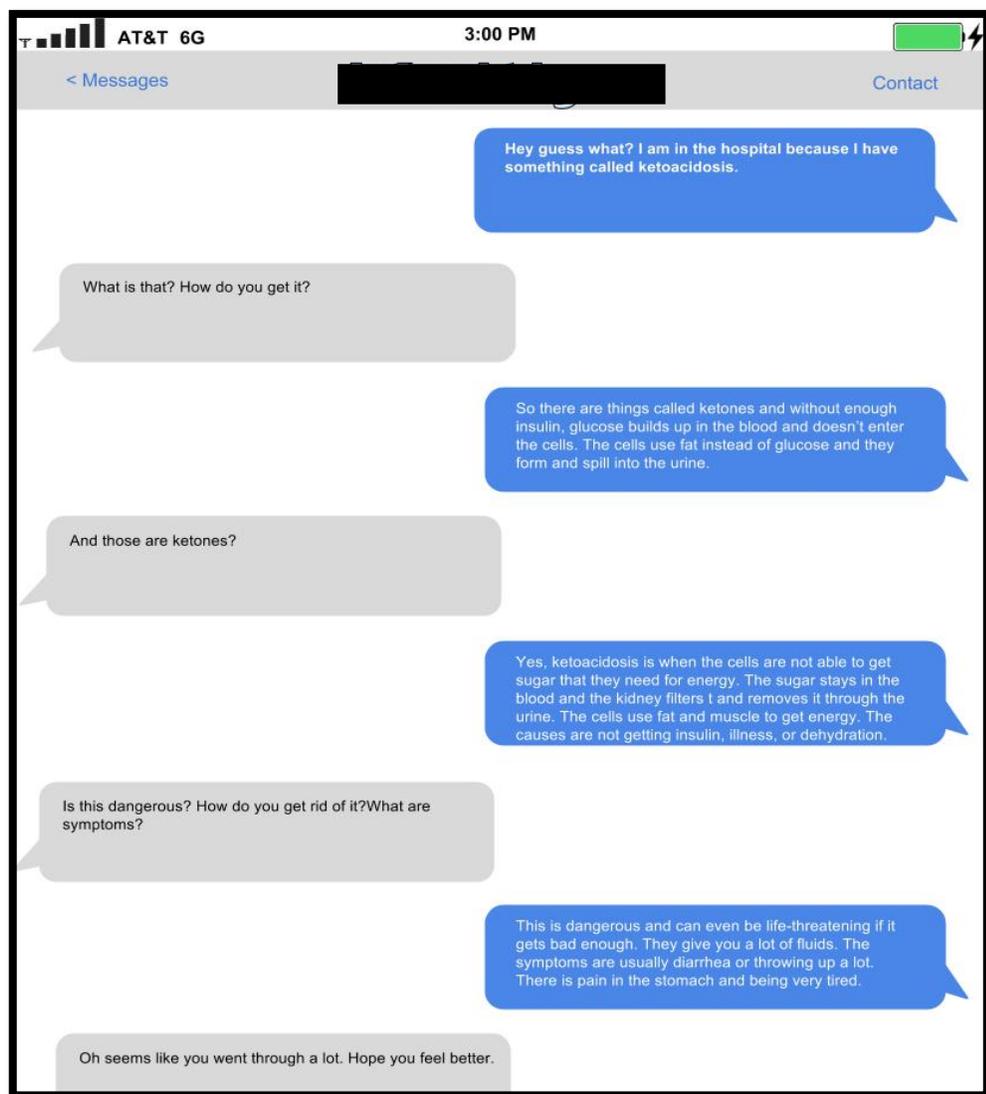


Figure 2: Student sample, Tori's text message conversation on Ketoacidosis

such as collages, poems (double-voice and six-room), labyrinthine sentences, and lists. After I introduced these unfamiliar genres, I encouraged my students to attempt writing in one, even if it didn't become a final genre for their project.

Many students did follow my advice to try writing in an unfamiliar style.

Although, at times the kids expressed such frustration because their writing was not turning out the way they had envisioned it. As I walked around the classroom, I noticed one of the benefits to research support groups was that students began to not only understand their subject, but also those of their partners within the group.

As students worked in their groups, I heard many discussions about which genres would work best for specific subjects. Those students who seemed apprehensive about what to write about were nearly always spurred on by their peers' encouragement and attempted writing that they probably would not have otherwise. The sense of pulling together as a classroom community to work collectively on researching personal topics helped instill a sense of security amongst students. The following conversation among Medically Focused research support group members, Heather, a quiet girl who was new to our school this year and researched social anxiety, and Crystal, an outgoing cheerleader with a bubbly personality who researched allergies, showed how critical communication amongst group members was.

"I do *not* want to present," Heather moaned as she stared down at her desk, head in hands.

“Why don’t you want to present?” Crystal questioned. “Your genres are so good! You have to embrace it!”

“Anxiety is a thing! I did my whole project on something I have.”

Heather, who had not yet been brave enough to share that she suffers from this condition with any of her classmates, revealed.

“Show yourself as an example of social anxiety!” suggested Crystal. “Like own it! You are your project!”

“Yeah - I could get up there and just start shaking,” Heather retorted sarcastically, “I want to show that this is a real thing. Anxiety is not cute! It’s not some shy girl who is just trying to get attention. It’s real.”

“It *is* real!” Crystal agreed.

Through this conversation, Heather was able to express herself and have those feelings validated by a fellow classmate. On the day this conversation between Heather and Crystal occurred, Heather wrote the following multigenre piece, a double-voice poem (see Figure 3) written through the eyes of two girls who attend a party:

This story follows two people; Eve, a fun loving girl with a large group of friends to hang out with, and Laura, a shy, frail girl with bad case of social anxiety, going to a party together.

I walk into the bright, loud room, looking around happily at the large amount of guests that had arrived.

I stumble into the cold, semi-lit room, a lump forming in my throat as I look at the large amount of people.

My eyes, full of wonder, dance across the room, taking in the details.

My eyes, full of fear, rapidly move from face to face, trying to recognize someone. I saw no one.

Grabbing my friends hand, I pull her along, laughing as a rhythmic music fills my ears.

Eve grabs my hand, grinning and giggling as she pulls me through the crowd. I just want to sit down and be alone. I wanna go home.

At some point, Laura escapes my grasp and is caught in the crowd. Oh well, she'll be fine.

Cold fear grips me as my hand slips away from hers. No...

I greet my other friends, forgetting about the one I left behind.

I wrap my arms tightly over my stomach, blinking away tears and struggling to keep down the vomit rising in my throat. The room is spinning.

I begin to dance, face lighting up in delight as my favorite song begins to play.

I found a small corner, and covered my ears, sinking down to the floor, trying to keep my breathing steady.

A good hour or so passes before it suddenly strikes me that my friend doesn't do well with people. I excuse myself and run off, pushing past the crowd.

I look up, tears brimming my eyes to see Eve coming back for me. She looks horribly guilty.

I felt terrible. I help her up, and bring her out to my old blue jeep. Laura visibly relaxed as I started to drive. I was glad I had been there to help her.

I was able to relax, happy now that I was away from all of the people. I looked over to her, happy to have someone like Eve to help me.

As short lived as it was, I loved it.

As short lived as it was, I hated it.

Figure 3: Student sample, Heather's double-voice poem on Social Anxiety

Although, the majority of my students had made lots of progress by this time, I did become a bit worried about Christopher's multigenre project on outer

space. Chris was new to our school last year, and prior to his arrival his family moved quite a bit. In many subjects he never seemed to catch-up to the other students. By the end of our fifth week, most students had selected all six of their genres and begun to work on at least three or more. I noticed, when observing Christopher's group, that he often started his work, but then stopped partway through class. The newspaper article he was writing about space exploration seemed to be a constant struggle for Chris to work on. When I questioned him about his progress, Chris responded, "I need a new genre."

"It might be a little late to be switching," I firmly stated.

"Yeah, but I'm not doing the newspaper article no more."

"Well, in that case what other genre do you think will work well with your topic?" I questioned.

"Maybe a journal," Chris replied in a bored tone.

"Okay, whose journal is it going to be?" I ask gently.

"Maybe that guy, the one who's in space for, like, a year." Chris replied.

Chris decided to look up information on Scott Kelly, because he knew through his research that Kelly was spending a year in space. To understand more

about Kelly’s time in space, Chris watched an interview and read the astronaut’s Twitter feed. As I checked in on Chris one morning, he was, again, frustrated.

“Ugh! Scott Kelly is just tweeting photos of earth!” Chris sighed exasperatedly. “I wonder what he does when he is not posting pictures on Twitter?”

“Great question! Maybe you can use what information you know about his daily life and your imagination and describe it in the journal?” I questioned.

It seemed Chris just needed a little nudge in the right direction, because once I mentioned he could use his imagination he got right to work and created a journal (see Figure 4) written in Scott Kelly’s voice.

<p>Oct. 27 Space walk today! It’s not fun but I have to do it. It’s nice to get out of the space station because it feels like a jail up here.</p> <p>Oct. 25 Winds and storms are noticeable from up here. Posting pics on twitter from the Cupola. They move pretty fast and so are we. It’s so cool how Earth creates beautiful art. The deserts, clouds and farmland are unique and different every time I come back to see what is outside.</p>
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Figure 4: Student sample, excerpt from Christopher’s journal as Scott Kelly: Astronaut in Space

Chris had much success with his journal and was able to imagine what it felt like to be an astronaut in outer space. Using what he learned about astronaut life in space he created a beautiful six-room poem (see Figure 5) that showed deep analysis and evaluation of his subject.

Space
Space
Space

Fire balls called stars.
Round floating spheres.
Light and darkness in corners.
Miles of emptiness.
Spacious.

Dark places in afar,
and clear light.
Quiet, silent.

Who has stepped here before me?
Are we the only ones here?
How did this all happen?

Sadness
Lonely
Curious
Safe
Shocked

Space
Space
Space

Figure 5: Student sample, Christopher's six-room poem "Space, Space, Space"

As I did each week, I conferenced with my students as week five came to a close. In preparation for my weekly student conferences, I asked my learners to fill out a Multigenre Research Project Quick Check (Appendix B., section i.) so that I was able to assess how they were feeling about their progress and where they needed help. In this document, I asked them to tell me what made them the

happiest about their work. I was not surprised to learn that students were excited to be able to choose what to research and how to express it through different genres, but I was shocked at the conviction with which students wrote:

“I really like the fact that I can use my creativity in this project instead of a boring ‘You have to do this and only this’ template.”

“What makes me happiest about my project is I get to do one of my favorite subjects and as I proceed with the project I still learn new things about Forensic Anthropology/Anthropologists. Another reason I enjoy this large project is because the teachers have enough faith in us to work on our projects independently.”

“Choosing what we want to do for the project is what makes me the happiest about the project. Also that we get to work with a group.”

“What makes me happiest about my work on this project is all of the progress I am making with it. At the start of the project, I was worried about my work progression and that maybe I would not be able to finish all of the components of my project in time. But, with the support of my research group and the work spent in class, this has helped me make more

progress on my project. And now, the effort I have put into my project shows, and I am happy with my hard work.”

Clearly, because students were allowed choice in their topic and methods of presentation they felt empowered. I began to understand the need students felt to be trusted to lead their educational journey and how they valued being given the time to pursue knowledge with their peers.

~~You Have Major Spelling Problems.~~

The beginning of our sixth week, posed many challenges as I reviewed how to cite sources, create a works cited page, and endnotes for each genre. These mini-lessons were met with many moans and groans. It seemed that during week six I constantly answered questions and assisted students as they tried to properly cite their sources and create endnotes.

During our seventh week students worked diligently to revise their genres largely through peer feedback. Using peer response and evaluation forms from Putz’s text *A Teacher’s Guide to the Multigenre Research Project* students gave meaningful feedback to their groupmates. Students were required to state what they liked about their partner’s work as well as what confused them, what questions they were left with after reading the genre, and to list any suggestions for improvement. Use of these forms helped give students parameters around

which to base their evaluations. When Crystal evaluated Tori's text message piece (see Figure 2, p. 41) she made the following comments:

I like: I like the emojis by the name.

I wonder: Why would someone text you at 3:00pm [children are still in school at this time]. Change time. & can you try to make your text bubbles smaller?

Explanation: Try to go over spelling please. ~~You have major spelling problems.~~ You have a lot of not correct spelling.

Cassie, who evaluated Diana's list, When I Am Reading My Favorite Fairy Tale (see Figure 6) had the following to say:

I like: Diana - This is so interesting! I love how you sneaked a story into it! Plus, you really did a great job of transitioning from the dream to reality in the end of the list. You also did a great job with keeping in the list format, even though the dream could have also been written as a short story.

I wonder: What would it be like if you added a part to when the person wakes up? Do they want to keep reading, or has the dream made them wary of the book?

Questions: What made you choose Sleeping Beauty? Would you ever consider doing another with another fairytale? Maybe you could have the two characters meet in a future genre.

Explanation: What I mean with the first question is, where you debating which fairytale to use for your list? Will you use that other fairytale character in another genre or leave them out?

When I Am Reading My Favorite Fairy Tale

- *Sleeping Beauty*
- Corner of my very cozy bed
- Blanket, propped up on big puffy pillows
- The room gets darker as the light seems brighter
- I imagine that I am in an enormous bed in a huge room in Sleeping Beauty's Castle.
- Someone knocks on the bedroom door telling me dinner is ready
- With my mind still in the book I go down the stairs expecting a huge table with tons of food.
- I find myself in a room with a not so huge table with just enough food and my family
- I still imagine lots of food with a huge table where knights and princesses are being served
- I eat quickly so that I can go back up and read
- Finally I am done and go back up to my bed to read
- Then I read for longer than I expected and find myself almost like sleeping beauty by shocking my finger on the lamp while turning it out to go to sleep
- After I fall asleep I dream that I am walking through the castle and everyone is sleeping around me
- I think that I should probably find help but I don't know what has happened or how I got in a castle
- Wait, I am in a castle and no one is watching, so I go to explore
- I find a mysterious room with lots of objects and machines
- Then I hear the deafening BEEP BEEP BEEP of my alarm to be up for school
- The fantasy has ended

Figure 6: Student sample, Diana's list, "When I Am Reading My Favorite Fairy Tale"

I found these peer feedback forms to be helpful for students and they seemed to like providing feedback and then deciding whether or not to change what they had originally written. The comments from peers within the research support group were met with excitement and genuine gratitude. By this point, group members had in-depth knowledge about their partners' subjects and were able to provide valuable and valid insights. Had students not worked so closely in

research support groups, the peer feedback might not have been seen in such a positive light.

#proudteacher

During weeks eight and nine, students rushed to put the finishing touches on their projects and get ready to present to the class. One of the most interesting things about conducting the multigenre research project unit was that I knew very little about the topics my students chose to research. It was through student inquiry and investigation that I learned about their topics. The students became experts and taught me and all the other students in the classroom so many interesting things through their presentations of their projects.

Each student was required to present what he or she felt were their two strongest genres. Patricia, who researched forensic anthropology, first presented one of her more creative genres – a recipe (see Figure 7) with step-by-step instructions to create the perfect anthropologist.

ANTHROPOLOGIST		
Preparation time: 2-3 years	Cook time: 48 hours	Serves: Till retirement
<i>Ingredients</i>		
● 1 litre of resilience		
● 2 tablespoons of focus		
● 1 cup of patience		
● 2 quarts of knowledge		
● 3 teaspoons of memory		

Directions

In a heavy-bottomed pot; sprinkle a bit of patience. When it starts to show, add the knowledge and keep stirring and cook over medium-low heat until you see fit. Add the focus, season with resilience and don't stop stirring. Pour in the memory, bring to a refined state and then stir until you see fit. For a smooth Anthropologist, use a college degree and passing certificate. Serves till retirement or resignation.

Variations

1. College professor's help
2. Add ¼ cup hard work and studying hours

Figure 7: Student sample, Patricia's recipe for an Anthropologist

While all of the students presented wonderful new information in creative ways, some of the presentations were outstanding and evoked an emotional reaction from the audience. When Felicia began to read her double-voice poem (see Figure 8), told from the perspectives of a Jew arriving at a concentration camp and a Nazi guard, many students began to shift uncomfortably in their seats. Almost immediately, my eyes began to well up. When she finished reading, the classroom was silent – no applause greeted Felicia as it had after every other presenter. With such a powerfully moving piece, we simply let her words sink in and reflected for a brief moment on the horrors that befell the millions of Jews who were sent to their deaths at concentration camps.

Concentration Camps: My Experience

Blue: Jew

Red: Nazi guard

I walk in

Ich sehe sie zu fuß in

(I see them walk in)

It is dark, grim, scary

Sie werden sich wie soldaten

(They are lined up like soldiers)
 Horror filled my body
 Ich konnte die Angst in ihren Augen sehen
 (I can see the fear in their eyes)
 Absolute terror was on everyone's faces
 Ich kann nicht warten um ihre rasse zu vernichten
 (I cannot wait to destroy their race)
 Dead bodies scattered everywhere
 Ihre augen wanderten zu den hunderten von leichen
 (Their eyes wandered to the hundreds of dead bodies)
 Hundreds were thin, starving
 Ich war gespannt zu beobachten, sie zu verhungern
 (I am eager to watch them starve)
 Lines leading people to inevitable death
 Ich bin an der frontseite der linie stehend führenden leute zu den kammern
 (I am standing at the front of the line leading people to the chambers)
 Disease spreading rapidly
 Sie bald krank werden
 (They will soon become diseased)
 I will never be able to survive in this horrid place
 Sie werden niemals überleben
 (They will never survive)

Figure 8: Student sample, Felicia's double-voice poem, "Concentration Camps: My Experience"

Following Felicia's dramatic reading, came a more lighthearted genre from Crystal, who researched allergies and wrote a short story (see Figure 9) from the perspective of a peanut who finds himself under the attack of his digester's immune system. As Crystal began to read, the students started to giggle. As Crystal noticed the audience's enthusiasm she began to read more emphatically while waving her hands about dramatically. Her performance was a real hit.

The Day in the Life of a Peanut

Ohhhh no... don't eat me... you will regret that... I slowly go down the digestive system it is red and dark. Slowly the inside puffs up of the throat, and it is bright pink, there are hills of bumps everywhere. I finally realize this is not normal and panic. My golden inside is damaged and I skid through a path of sylvia. Now I'm in two pieces floating quickly and passing all these hard objects... my friends told me they were called bones... I didn't know that they existed! Smash, crash, bang! That didn't sound good. I looked around where is this place... all the sudden I knew.

I was in the stomach the place where all the chewed up food goes! At least I had something to eat I chuckled. Green goo appeared in the stomach "Isn't that acid?" I screamed. I quickly ran and tripped over all of the leftover food and realized it was chasing me! The goo was after me, because I was the cause of the allergic reaction!

I ran, I ran so far up the body that I went back into the throat. I ran and ran until I just got stuck! "Oh no!" I cried! Suddenly something amazing happened a miracle! All of my food friends from the stomach came up and pushed me up. Sally, Barbara, Martha, Johnny, Mark everyone came up. I was amazed in fact I was ecstatic! I hopped out of the mouth and sadly only one part of me could make it out... At least I was safe and I didn't die down there, or have to go into the sewer system. I showered, and I went back into my peanut pouch with all of my peanut family! I peanut survived the allergic reaction to a peanut allergy!

Figure 9: Student sample, Crystal's short story, "The Day in the Life of a Peanut"

Finally, one of our last presenters Lara, who researched filmmaking, created a genre attempted by no other student – the labyrinthine sentence (see Figure 10). This genre was intimidating to many students because of the sentence's complicated structure and length. However, Lara decided to tackle the challenge and created an outstanding piece of writing.

Labyrinthine Sentence

To feel the excited buzz tingling the air, as so many people rush and hurry to reach their place, as charged panic fills the air, but also a strange exhilaration, because everyone knows that they will create something great, so there is also the pressure to work hard on everyone's shoulders, and some feel the pressure, but their other teammates are there to lift them back up and to give them a pep talk and to encourage, so everyone speeds around in the disorganized space, dodging the camera equipment and clothing racks and miscellaneous props, under the blinding bright lights and the smell of fake plastic props and preparing food, just waiting for the words that will start the magic, although you can't spot the clapperboard through the huge crowd and all of the unplaced clutter, soon enough everyone will reach their proper place, and the bustle will calm down for a while, and the feel of the panic will dull, but the determined, bright enthusiasm will still be there, as they, all of the musical composers and creative scriptwriters and precise makeup artists and excited light technicians and ready, costumed actors and more, listen, and all of the crew prepares themselves and waits for the magic words that will bring the still scene bursting back to life again, and, finally, they hear the anticipated words and loud, piercing snap as the sound of the clapperboard carries out over the crowds, they all hear the yell of, "Lights, camera... ACTION!" And the filming begins.

Figure 10: Student sample, Lara's labyrinthine sentence on Filmmaking

What They Said

Upon completion of their multigenre research projects and presentations, students submitted a self-evaluation (Appendix B., section ii.). One of the questions I asked my students was whether or not they felt that they had grown as writers and researchers over the course of the project. Most students felt they had improved in both areas:

Felicia: "Yes, this project helped me to understand the importance of writing. I already like to write, but this project helped me grow as a writer and helped me to enjoy writing even more."

Crystal: “Yes, I feel like I have grown as a writer and researcher over the course of the project. That is because I have learned so many different types of fun and cool genres and facts. I have never done a research topic this creative and fun before and I feel like that made me grow by trying something new.”

Christopher: “Yes because I never researched like this so this was all new and it helped me little by little and it was easy.”

Heather: “Researcher, yes. I’ve never liked research projects much, but I really enjoyed this one. Writer, no. I really hope I won’t sound full of myself by saying this, but I’m already a decent writer in my opinion, because I write a lot of stories at home. I used my normal writing style on all of these and didn’t really leave much room for improvement.”

Lastly, students completed the Multigenre Research Experience survey (Appendix A., section ii.) anonymously. I emphasized that this survey would be completed anonymously through Google forms (as the pre-study surveys had been) in hopes that the students would continue to really take their time and give honest feedback. The purpose of this survey was to better understand my students’ experience with the multigenre research project. All students stated that the multigenre research project was a positive learning experience (see Table 1).

The Multigenre Research Project was a positive learning experience for me.

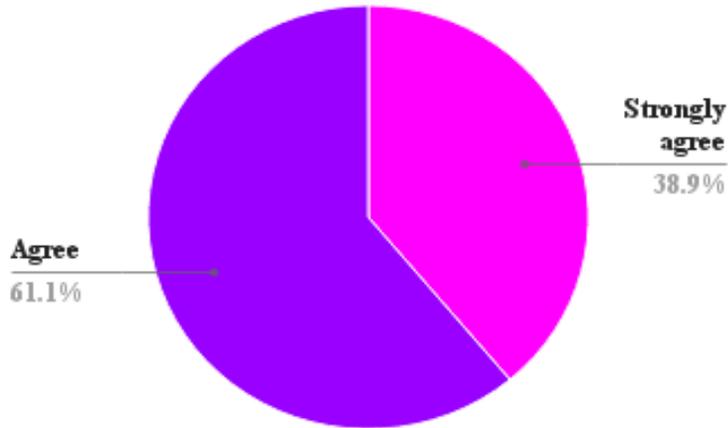


Table 2: Student Opinion of Learning Experience

When asked whether they were intellectually engaged and challenged during this unit 17 out of 18 of students (94.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed; one student disagreed (see Table 3).

Table 3: Student Opinion of Intellectual Engagement

Most students, 83.3% (15 out of 18) felt they became better writers over the course of the multigenre research project (see Table 4).

I was intellectually engaged and challenged during the Multigenre Research Project unit.

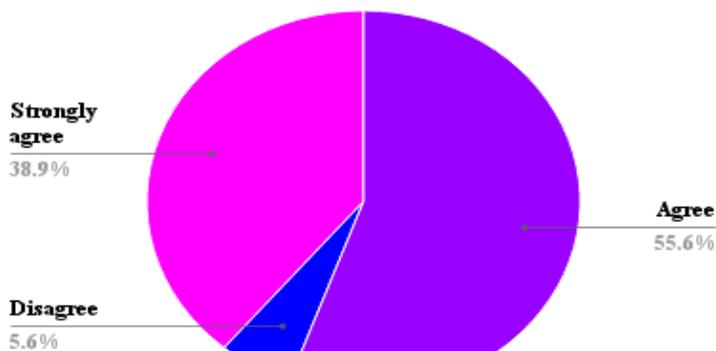
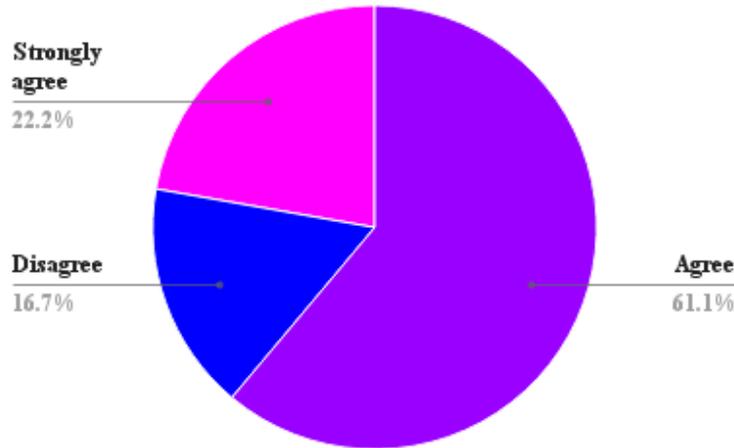


Table 4: Student Opinion of Writing Strength

I feel like I became a stronger writer during the Multigenre Research Project unit.



Attitudes about student motivation to write during the project were very favorable (see Table 5). Again, nearly 84% of students stated they were motivated to write while engaged in this project. Breaking down the responses further, nearly 40% of those students strongly agreed that they were motivated to write while just over 55% agreed with the statement. So, while 100% of students agreed that the multigenre research project was a positive experience, a small percentage of students (three out of 18) did not feel it helped to improve their writing, nor were they motivated to write during this time.

I was motivated to write during the Multigenre Research Project unit.

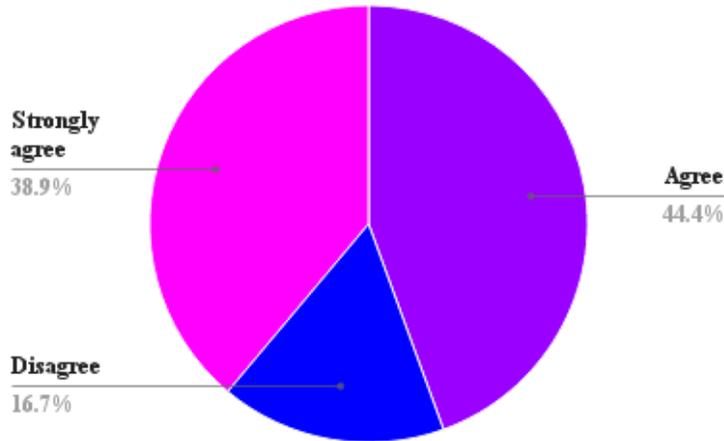


Table 5: Student Opinion of Motivation to Write

Final Thoughts

In nine short weeks, meaningful changes took place in my classroom, but most importantly was how the majority of my students viewed themselves as writers and researchers. I witnessed the transformations many students underwent as they struggled to find balance in the freedom I provided to confident researchers with outstanding voices who wrote clearly and with conviction – at times with humor or unimaginable sadness. When given the chance to express themselves creatively, my students had a lot to say about what they researched. It was such a privilege to watch them soar!

DATA ANALYSIS

Throughout the course of my action research study, I collected many forms of data. Students took surveys (Appendix A.), completed quick checks and self-evaluations (Appendix B.), and wrote multiple genre pieces for their culminating projects. Concurrently, I kept an observational double-entry journal in which I kept track of my thinking about what occurred in my classroom. According to Hendricks (2009), “The analysis of data is an ongoing process that should occur throughout the study rather than at the end of it” (p. 127). Therefore, qualitative research must be met with a consistent study of the available data. As a result, analysis of survey responses, observational data, and student work took place throughout the course of my study.

Analysis of Student Opinion and Perception through Surveys

Prior to students embarking on the multigenre research journey, they were asked to anonymously complete the Pre-Multigenre Research Survey (Appendix A., section i.). The survey data was useful in providing insights into student attitudes and beliefs regarding research, writing and what motivated them to write. Student attitudes toward writing were largely negative, with nearly 80% (14 out of 18) of students responding that they felt writing was just “ok,” or “the worst.” Learners also found the act of researching undesirable and exhibited strong reactions to their many previous experiences with research and writing which they perceived as negative. The lack of topic choice and restrictions

regarding how their research could be presented contributed to the sobering opinions regarding research writing.

Following the multigenre research unit, students were again asked to complete an anonymous survey regarding their experience with the multigenre research project (Appendix A., section ii.). In this survey 100% of students agreed that the multigenre research project was a positive experience (see Table 2, p. 58). However, when asked whether the project had helped to either improve, or motivate them to write only 83.3% (15 out of 18 students) responded positively (see Table 5, p. 60). Therefore, while all students were engaged and associated the project with positive feelings, some students did not experience the motivational influence that their peers reported.

Analysis of Observations and Student Writing through Memoranda

Over the course of the study, a double-entry journal was kept in order to journal my thoughts, beliefs, and frustrations about what was happening in my classroom. Like me, students also engaged in a fair amount of writing throughout the study. Students completed a quick-check (Appendix B., section i.) at the mid-study mark and a self-evaluation at the conclusion of our action research project. The quick-check allowed me to gain important insights as to how the students felt they were progressing with their multigenre research project, while the self-evaluation permitted me to gain a deep understanding of learner perceptions of project worth as it related to their academic efforts. To examine the tremendous

amount of self and student writing and that happened within my classroom, I wrote a variety of memos over the course of the action research study.

To deeply analyze the data I collected throughout the study methodological and analytical memoranda were key. The mid-study methodological memo in which I analyzed what data I had collected by the research study halfway point was crucial in helping me understand patterns and relationships occurring in my classroom. In this memo, I itemized and summarized the data I had gathered, while also providing insights as to each piece of data's importance to my study.

As I reflected upon what data had been collected while writing the mid-study memo, it became apparent that while the multigenre research project was indeed motivating students to write, free topic choice and the ability to work on a Chromebook were also simultaneously influencing students' engagement and motivation. When reading through my observational notes taken in my double-entry journal, I found that while students were passionate about what they were researching and excited about their writing, they were also nervous about the final outcome because they wanted to create an outstanding project. Students took ownership of their projects and wanted to be proud of their work largely because of the amount of choice that was allowed throughout the study.

To further reflect on the information I had collected, I wrote analytic memos exploring my data through the educational theories of Delpit, Dewey,

Freire, and Vygotsky. In each of these analytic memos, I selected five passages from the chosen writer's work that seemed most salient to my study. I then explicated the quotation and its relationship to my action research and its correlation to specific data from my observational journal, student surveys, check-ins and artifacts. Writing these memos allowed me to analyze my data on a deeper level and begin to formulate potential answers to my research question.

What became clear each time I wrote an analytic memo, was that I was able to relate the practices I was implementing in my study to critical views expressed by these educational theorists. Through the views of Delpit I found a connection to my research in that material must be challenging, engaging and student identity must be met without bias or judgement. A question posed by Delpit (2013) is one I often reflected upon, "what happens when we assume that certain children are less than brilliant?" (p. 6). Multigenre research allowed students to show their brilliance in the form of a final project designed to their specifications, showcasing their best work. Similarly, Dewey's (1938) views that students' experience within education vary widely and that simply having *any* experience is not enough coincided with one of my reasons for implementing the multigenre research project: the quality of the educational experience matters! Through the theories of Freire (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) I explored the data I had collected as it related to cooperative learning and knowledge gained through communication and collaboration with peers.

Analysis of Student Artifacts through a Rubric

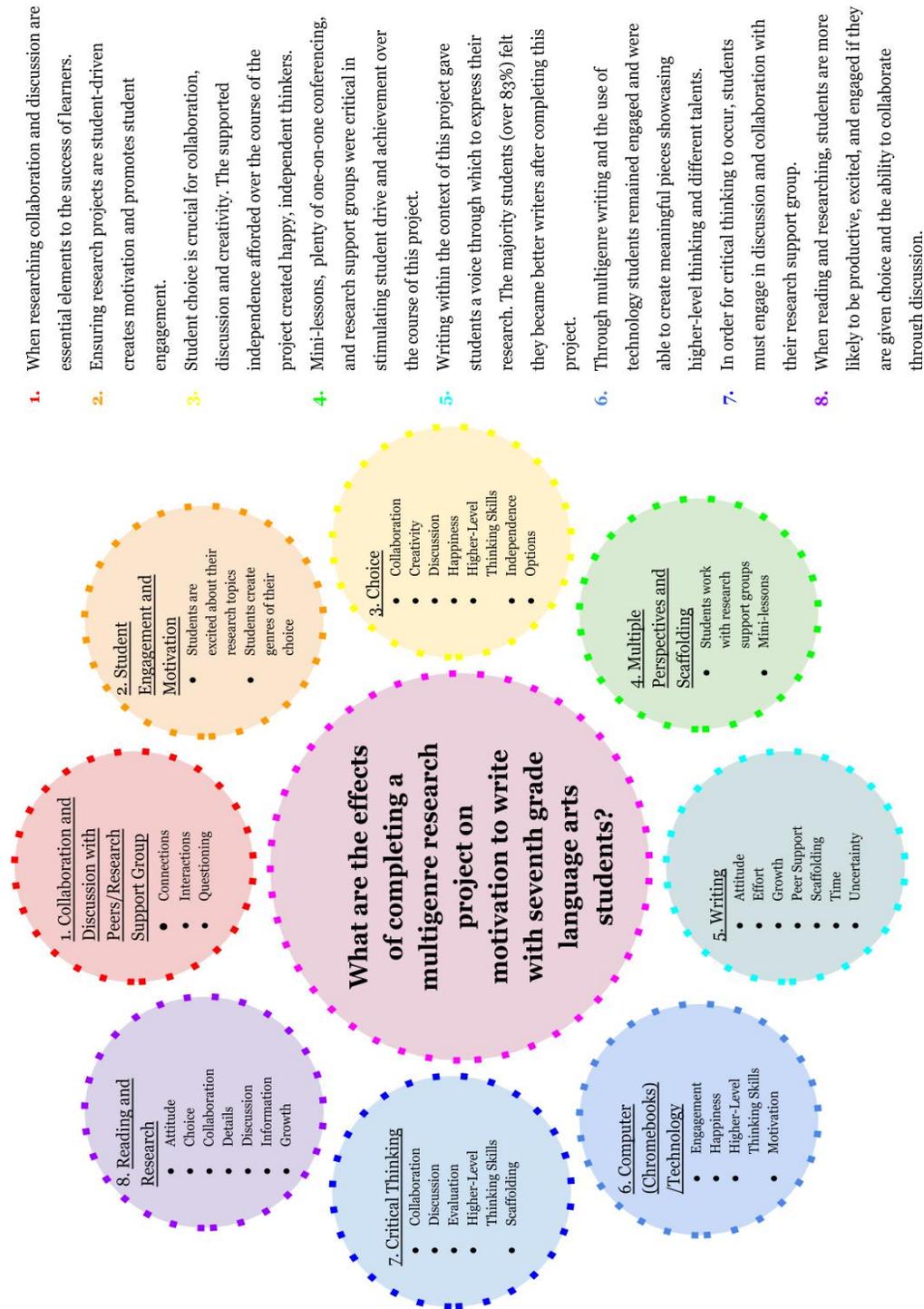
In order to assess my students' multigenre research projects equally and fairly, a rubric was utilized (Appendix D.). This rubric was given to my students before work on the project began, so that they could read and refer to the standards of quality of work expected. This rubric also allowed me to grade each project without bias and in alignment the preset standards. What the rubric indicated was how effectively each student was able to research and write about their topic. Students were required to write six different genres and in each distinct piece new information about the topic was to be presented. This category made up half of the total points for the project. Other areas where students were assessed were: overall project presentation and packaging, introductory letter and table of contents, end notes, works cited, self-assessment, and conventions (spelling, grammar, and punctuation). The entire project was worth 120 points (60 points were attributed to genre writing). On their final projects, all students scored a B+ or better with five students earning between an 86-89 and 13 students earning between a 91-100.

Analysis of Accumulated Data through Codes and Bins

In order to code my data, I read through my field log and the other forms of data collected over the course of the study. All accumulated data were organized into a binder thus ensuring that during reading all amassed work could be easily accessed in a central location. During my reading, I annotated the

margins of each page using a color-coded system to mark specific words and phrases related to that specific hue (for example red = collaboration). These codes such as “collaboration” allowed me to see what happened on a specific date and whether a pattern emerged as I continued to code the data.

Once the coding process was completed, I began to assess which codes were closely related and grouped the codes into bins. Ultimately, eight categories emerged. Each of the bins represented the related data over the course of the entire study. Bins showed different facets of the multigenre research project through which I developed common headings (see Figure 11). As I began to examine the contents of each bin, I realized that many codes were expressed multiple times in different categories. This interconnectedness shows how each bin, although it can stand alone as a category unto itself, builds upon both the one before and after it. This unification of bins and codes has been expressed in circular form to represent the continuously circling themes present within my action research study.



1. When researching collaboration and discussion are essential elements to the success of learners.
2. Ensuring research projects are student-driven creates motivation and promotes student engagement.
3. Student choice is crucial for collaboration, discussion and creativity. The supported independence afforded over the course of the project created happy, independent thinkers.
4. Mini-lessons, plenty of one-on-one conferencing, and research support groups were critical in stimulating student drive and achievement over the course of this project.
5. Writing within the context of this project gave students a voice through which to express their research. The majority students (over 83%) felt they became better writers after completing this project.
6. Through multigenre writing and the use of technology students remained engaged and were able to create meaningful pieces showcasing higher-level thinking and different talents.
7. In order for critical thinking to occur, students must engage in discussion and collaboration with their research support group.
8. When reading and researching, students are more likely to be productive, excited, and engaged if they are given choice and the ability to collaborate through discussion.

Figure 11: Codes and Bins

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research study was to find an answer to the question: *What are the effects of completing a multigenre research project on motivation to write with seventh grade Language Arts students?* I was particularly interested to see whether allowing students to self-select their research topic and forms of expressing their findings as well as their ability to collaborate with peers (all key facets of multigenre projects) influenced their willingness to write. The following theme statements represent findings (through a combination of interrelated bins) in these areas and also on related issues I had not anticipated when planning the study.

The Effects of Collaboration and Discussion on Student Engagement and Motivation and Critical Thinking

In order for critical thinking, engagement, and motivation to occur, students must participate in discussion and collaboration with their peers.

When students were researching and writing they were more likely to be productive, excited, and on-task when they were given choice and the ability to collaborate through discussion. According to Paulo Freire (1970), communication is crucial to authentic thinking. He stated, “the teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thoughts on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in isolation, but only in

communication” (p. 77). It is easy to understand Freire’s point that students cannot learn in isolation, or by having a teacher’s ideas imposed upon them.

Although no two projects were identical, students were grouped by topic similarity to ensure that they were able to engage in the communication that was so critical to their success with this project. The time learners spent interacting with each other was extraordinarily valuable to them. Students needed time together to share their ideas with their peers in order for their efforts with this project to prove fruitful. My instruction and ideas were meant to guide students in their research and writing journey, however the collaboration with group members allowed them to grow their ideas. Through talking with classmates deep thinking occurred.

When thinking about the double-voice poem written by Heather (see Figure 3, p. 44), it is nearly impossible to imagine that she would have been able to produce such an outstanding piece of writing without peer support. Although Heather knew a great deal about her topic, the discussion that occurred on the day she wrote her poem seemed to spark the stunning depiction of how a person with social anxiety experiences a party. Middle school teacher, Nancie Atwell (1998) writes, “learning is more likely to happen when students like what they are doing. Learning is also more likely when students can be involved and active and when they can learn from and with other students” (p. 69). Ultimately, without the

support of their classmates, students would not have been able to produce writing that showed such deep analysis and evaluation of their subjects.

The Effects of Choice on Student Engagement and Motivation and Critical Thinking

Learner choice is crucial when writing; student-driven projects create motivation, promote engagement and produce happy, independent, and critical thinkers.

Going into this project, I knew that keeping my students engaged in their work and motivated to write would make or break the success of this study. Not surprisingly, the amount of choice and freedom to explore was what propelled my students to success. The primary purpose of utilizing the multigenre research project was to increase students' motivation to write. Research studies analyzed by Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008) found a strong correlation between giving students choice and their intrinsic motivation for completing a task. Therefore, in order for students' engagement and motivation to remain high, they were given much free choice during the course of this study. Learners were able to choose their research topic and how their research findings would be represented through multigenre writing. This freedom to create a project nearly entirely of their own choosing allowed students to feel in control of their outcome, thus producing learners who were engaged and motivated.

Students who had previously been uninterested in writing, or struggled to write produced work that was exceedingly more advanced than previous samples.

Christopher, one of my students who loved reading, but hated writing created outstanding work over the course of this project (see Figures 4, p. 46 and 5, p. 47). Chris was engaged in his writing and motivated to do his best because he was able to study a topic he was truly passionate about. As Dewey (1938) notes, “mechanical uniformity of studies and methods creates a kind of uniform immobility. . .” (p.62). The idea that all students must perform research within a certain topic would, likely, have yielded dismal results. That immobility of which Dewey speaks would have, surely, affected my students had they all been forced to conform a standard one-size-fits-all research paper.

The Effects of Multiple Perspectives and Scaffolding and Reading and on Student Engagement and Motivation and Writing

Mini-lessons, one-on-one conferencing, and research support groups were critical in stimulating student drive and achievement over the course of this project.

When reading and researching, students are more likely to be productive, excited, and engaged if they are given choice and the ability to collaborate through discussion. Student engagement not only helped them dig deeper into their own research, but helped them become more knowledgeable about the topics their peers within the support group were studying as well. As Freire (1970) notes, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world,

with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). Therefore, it was through collaboration with others that my students were able to succeed.

What I did not anticipate, was the overwhelming success of the research support groups. The groups provided home bases for students to come together while researching and writing. When our project concluded, students were hesitant to break apart from their groups and made great shows of emotionally charged goodbyes on our final project meeting.

While I did instruct the students with a few mini-lessons per week, as the study progressed – my time in front of the class lessened as the students began to take charge of their learning. In the beginning of this study, I spent much of my time directly modeling new genres and engaging in more extended one-on-one conferences with students, but by the end, students were excited to test new genres with very little or no support from me and spent more time discussing their projects with their research support groups than speaking with me in our conference sessions. Freire (1970) describes this sort of learning environment, “The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own” (p. 81). Allowing students the opportunity to share in multiple perspectives over the course of this study, helped to enrich my understanding of

what this type of project could stimulate in learners and showed them how far they could go.

The Effects of Technology and Writing on Student Engagement and Motivation

Through multigenre writing and the use of technology students remained engaged and were able to create meaningful pieces showcasing higher-level thinking and different talents.

Writing within the context of this project gave students voices through which to express their research. Multigenre writing was something my students had not previously encountered. This freeing form of “anything goes” writing was both frustrating and liberating for many of my learners. Hughes (2009) commented on the many benefits of multigenre writing, insisting that by allowing students to be creative within a supportive community teachers would “bear witness to the high expectations young adolescents will meet, and more often, exceed” (p. 35). Indeed, this was the case, I read outstanding writing and observed mindful interactions I would not have believed possible of seventh grade students.

During this project, students were able to use individual Google Chromebooks during class. There can be no question that the availability of individual laptops played a significant role in the ability of students to write well. The Chromebooks helped motivate students in three ways. First, they allowed students to access a wide variety of research materials (including media) in

seconds – thereby increasing student productivity and engagement. Second, those students were able to creatively express their findings through the use of Google drive applications. Finally many students enjoyed working on the Chromebooks because they were able to organize all their materials in one central location in a folder on their Google drive account, and in addition they were able to easily share materials with their classmates.

Through the multigenre research project, students were able to develop skills and build expertise within the context of doing. This project, “has the capacity to motivate students and scaffold their learning by not only tapping into their prior knowledge but also gaining new skills and knowledge in the process” (Putz, 2006, p. 156). Students learned to conduct research, routinely read, write, and reflect often, communicate and collaborate in small and large group settings, evaluate themselves and their peers, use technology, develop thinking, problem solving, and organizational skills, and think creatively and imaginatively (Allen, 2001).

THE NEXT ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

Although my research study has ended, I will continue to implement the multigenre research project in my classroom. As I move forward with this project I want to ensure my students are focused on becoming better writers and researchers and continue to be motivated to write. During this study, students were required to complete six genres for their research project. While many students found success with all six genres, I noticed some students struggled to complete six genres effectively. Therefore, in future units I plan to lessen the number of genres to four. This will allow students to seriously tackle their research topics and produce higher quality writing on just a few key pieces. Although, Fletcher's (1993) position on attempting new writing techniques bears keeping in mind, "it is vastly more important that a student try a new technique in her writing, and use it imperfectly, than never try the technique at all" (p. 79).

In addition to this, it is important to me to continue to utilize technology to assist students in producing the best projects possible. This year, students were able to produce outstanding written work using a Chromebook. Next year, I would like to allow students to submit one multimedia piece with their project. Through the use of these mini-laptops learners would be able to shoot videos, compose original music, and create a gallery of photographs or original artwork. Since the primary focus of the research project is to motivate students to write, the multimedia piece would be accompanied by a written reflection. Aside from using

technology to produce, I would like to place more emphasis on using it to communicate. Why can't a student or I tweet or email an expert, or try to directly contact someone whose life is being studied?

While conducting mini-lessons in many genres, I found it extremely rewarding to share my writing with the students. Many of the samples I showed students were ones I had created, although none related to a specific topic. A goal for the next cycle of this project is to conduct my own multigenre research project with my learners. By doing this, I will be able to better understand their experiences and frustrations and, hopefully, continue to change the project in positive ways for future classes.

When I thought about the positive responses to writing so many of my students exhibited, it made me want to incorporate multigenre writing into more assignments throughout the school year. Perhaps giving students smaller mini-research assignments over the course of the school year will help to keep them motivated to write while building critical thinking skills.

Finally, an area of the project I will continue is the formation of research support groups. My learners benefited tremendously from this setup. Students who had not previously worked together were suddenly part of a team whose common goal was to finish their multigenre research project and help each other along the way. Throughout the course of the project, I was astounded by the compassion and support my students provided each other. Students who worked

together so closely were able to deeply understand the projects of their fellow group members.

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APPENDICES

A. Surveys

i. Pre-Multigenre Research Project Survey

1. How do you feel about writing?
 - I love it!
 - It's OK.
 - Ugh! It's the worst!

2. I am
 - An excellent writer
 - A good writer
 - An average writer
 - A poor writer
 - Unsure

3. Writing is something that I like to do
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Not very often
 - Never
 - Unsure

4. People who write a lot are
 - Very interesting
 - Interesting
 - Not very interesting
 - Boring
 - Unsure

5. I save the things I write
 - Always
 - Usually
 - Sometimes
 - Never

6. I feel comfortable sharing my writing with other people
 - I do this a lot
 - I do this sometimes
 - I almost never do this
 - I never do this
 - Unsure

7. Knowing how to write well is

- Very important
- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- Unsure

8. When I write it is

- A fun way to spend time
- An interesting way to spend time
- An OK way to spend time
- A boring way to spend time
- Unsure

9. I would like for my teacher to allow us to write in class

- Every day
- Almost every day
- Once in a while
- Never
- Unsure

10. When I write for school, I feel

- Confident about what I write
- Somewhat good about what I write
- OK about what I write
- Insecure about what I write
- Unsure

11. When I write stories, I feel

- Confident or very pleased about what I write
- Somewhat good about what I write
- OK about what I write
- Insecure or unhappy about what I write
- Unsure

12. Writing stories is something I like to do

- Often
- Sometimes
- Not very often
- Never

13. I would like for my teacher to let us write stories

- Every day
- Almost every day
- Once in a while
- Never

14. When you hear the word “research” what words and thoughts come to your mind?

15. If you have written a research paper(s) what were some of the topics?

16. When I write research papers, I feel
- Confident or very pleased about what I write
 - Somewhat good about what I write
 - OK about what I write
 - Insecure or unhappy about what I write
 - Unsure

17. Writing research papers is something I like to do
- Often
 - Sometimes
 - Not very often
 - Never

18. I would like for my teacher to let us conduct research and write research papers
- Every day
 - Almost every day
 - Once in a while
 - Never

19.
a. What have you disliked about how research has been taught in the past?

b. What could have made it better?

20. What have you enjoyed about research units?

21. If your teacher said you could choose from the following to do right now, which one would you choose?

- write a story
- write an essay
- write a poem
- write a letter
- write an email
- write a list
- write a comment on a social network (facebook, instagram, etc.)
- write a research paper
- write a text message
- write in a journal or diary
- write a blog entry
- write a schedule or planner entry
- write a comment on someone's webpage
- write a play

Survey questions adapted from:

National Reading Research Center. (1996). *The teacher, the text, and the context: Factors that influence elementary students' motivation to write*. Codling, R. M., Gambrell, L.B., Kennedy, A., Palmer, B.M., & Graham, M. College Park, MD: U.S.

Werderich, D.E., & Armstrong, S.L. (2013). Examining the conceptualizations, perceptions, and practices of adolescent writers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 52(4), 339-373.

ii. Multigenre Research Project Experience Survey

1. The Multigenre Research Project was a positive learning experience for me.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

2. I learned more about how to conduct research during the Multigenre Project.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

3. I was intellectually engaged and challenged during the Multigenre Research Unit
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

4. I feel like I became a stronger writer during the Multigenre Research Unit.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

5. I was motivated to write during the Multigenre Research Unit.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

6. I received the appropriate amount of teacher support during the Multigenre Research Unit.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

7. Would you rather write a Research Paper or complete the Multigenre Research Unit?
 - Research paper
 - Multigenre Research Project

8. What was the easiest or most enjoyable part of the Multigenre Research Project for you?

9. What was the hardest or least enjoyable part of the Multigenre Research Project for you?

10. What things or activities would you keep in the Multigenre Research Unit?

11. What things or activities would you take away from the Multigenre Research Unit?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences with the Multigenre Research Unit?

B. Check-Ins and Self Evaluations

i. Multigenre Research Project Quick Check

1. List the Genres you have selected to date:
2. What makes you the happiest about your work on this project?
3. What are you worried about, or what do you need help with?

ii. Post Project Self Evaluation

1. What surprised you during the process of creating your multigenre project?
2. Do you feel you have grown as a writer and researcher over the course of the project?
3. What grade you feel you deserve on this project? Why? Convince me of your grade with appropriate support.

C. Consent Forms

i. Principal Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear [REDACTED],

I am currently enrolled in the Reading Specialist Certification and M.Ed. program at Moravian College. This fall I will be conducting an action research project for my thesis in which I will investigate my teaching practices. Therefore, I will be conducting a study in our seventh grade classroom to determine how the process of completing a multigenre research project will increase my seventh grade students' motivation to write. I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from my students during this process. This study will involve only regular classroom activities. Data will be collected using teacher observation notes, student surveys, conferences, progress monitors and work samples.

The purpose of this study is to measure the effects of creating a multigenre research unit on students' motivation to write. In a multigenre project, students will research a person, event, or issue of their choice. Students will conduct research just as they would for a traditional research paper: collecting and recording information, analyzing & synthesizing it, then presenting it through writing. Instead of the single, extended prose piece of a traditional research paper this project will consist of a number of creative pieces in various genres (please see a list of possible genres on the reverse side of this consent form). This study will also help me to become a better teacher by identifying areas of instruction that can be improved. The study will take place from September 2015 through November 2015. During the study I will collect various forms of data to determine whether the multigenre research project was successful. Possible types of data I will collect include: teacher observational notes, samples of student work, surveys/questionnaires, and interviews.

Participation in this project is voluntary, and a parent or guardian may withdraw his/her child from this study at any time without penalty simply by notifying me. The names of students who participate in this project will also be kept confidential. All students will be given a pseudonym. Only my in-class support teacher, grade-level co-teacher, supervising professor, and I will have access to the teacher observation notes, student surveys, conferences, progress monitors and work samples and any other data collected during this study.

Should you have any questions regarding my research you may contact me or my Moravian College professor Dr. Joseph Shosh at (610) 861-1482 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu.

Thank you for your continued support.

Kelly Grube

6th – 8th Grade English Language Arts

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

- I give permission for my school to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent for. I have read this form and understand it.
- I do not give permission for my school to participate in this project.

Principal's Name

Principal's Signature

Date

Please find a list of possible genres below. Students may choose to create a genre not listed below with teacher approval.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journal Entries ● Personal Letter ● Greeting Card ● Schedule/Things to Do List ● Inner Monologue Representing Internal Conflicts ● Classified or Personal Ads ● Personal Essay or Philosophical Questions ● Top Ten List/Glossary or Dictionary ● Poetry ● Song Lyrics ● Autobiographical Essay ● Contest Entry Application ● Business Letter or Correspondence/Persuasive or Advocacy Letter ● Biographical Summary ● Critique of a Published Source ● Speech or Debate ● Historical Times Context Essay ● Textbook Article ● Science Article or Report/Business Article or Report ● Encyclopedia Article ● Short Scene from a Play with Notes for Stage Directions ● Short Scene from a Movie with Notes for Camera Shots ● Dialogue of a Conversation among Two or More People ● Short Story ● Adventure Magazine Story ● Ghost Story ● Myth, Tall Tale, or Fairy Tale ● Talk Show Interview or Panel ● Recipe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character Analysis or Case Study ● Comedy Routine or Parody ● Picture book ● Chart or Diagram with Explanation and Analysis ● Brochure or Newsletter ● Time Line or Chain of Events ● Map with Explanation and Analysis ● Magazine or TV Advertisement or Infomercial ● Restaurant Description and Menu ● Travel Brochure Description ● How-To or Directions Booklet ● Receipts, Applications, Deeds, Budgets or Other Documents ● Wedding, Graduation or Special Event Invitation ● Birth Certificate ● Local News Report ● Pop-Up book ● Review and Poster for a Movie, Book, or TV Program ● Board Game or Trivial Pursuit with Answers and Rules ● Comic Strip or Graphic Novel excerpt ● Power Point Presentation ● Informational Video ● Website ● A series of text messages ● A series of e-mail communications ● Future News Story ● Letter to the Editor ● Newspaper or Magazine Feature/Human Interest Story ● Obituary, Eulogy or Tribute ● News Program Story or Announcement ● Tabloid Article
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ii. Parent Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Authorization for a Minor to Serve as a Research Participant

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am currently enrolled in the Reading Specialist Certification and M.Ed. program at Moravian College. This fall I will be conducting an action research project for my thesis in which I will investigate my teaching practices. Therefore, I will be conducting a study in our seventh grade classroom to determine how the process of completing a multigenre research project will increase my seventh grade students' motivation to write.

I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from your child during this process. Participation in this study involves only regular classroom activities. You may contact me at any time regarding your child's participation at [REDACTED] or by email [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], our principal, has approved this study.

The purpose of this study is to measure the effects of creating a multigenre research unit on students' motivation to write. Students will conduct research just as they would for a traditional research paper: collecting and recording information, analyzing & synthesizing it, then presenting it through writing. Instead of the single, extended prose piece of a traditional research paper this project will consist of a number of creative pieces in various genres (please see a list of possible genres on the reverse side of this consent form). This study will also help me to become a better teacher by identifying areas of instruction that can be improved. The study will take place from September 2015 through November 2015. During the study I will collect various forms of data to determine whether the multigenre research project was successful. Possible types of data I will collect include: teacher observational notes, samples of student work, surveys/questionnaires, and interviews.

Participation in this project is voluntary, and a parent or guardian may withdraw his/her child from this study *at any time* without penalty simply by notifying me. The names of students who participate in this project will also be kept confidential. All students will be given a pseudonym. Only my in-class support teacher, grade-level co-teacher, supervising professor, and I will have access to the teacher observation notes, student surveys, conferences, progress monitors, work samples and any other data collected during this study.

Should you have any questions regarding my research you may contact my Moravian College professor Dr. Joseph Shosh at (610) 861-1482 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu. You may also contact our principal [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your continued support.

Kelly Grube

6th – 8th Grade English Language Arts Teacher

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

- I **give** permission for my child's data to be used in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.
- I **do not give** permission for my child's data to be included in this project.

Student's Name

Parent's/Guardian's Name

Date

Parent's/Guardian's Signature

Please find a list of possible genres below. Students may choose to create a genre not listed below with teacher approval.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journal Entries ● Personal Letter ● Greeting Card ● Schedule/Things to Do List ● Inner Monologue Representing Internal Conflicts ● Classified or Personal Ads ● Personal Essay or Philosophical Questions ● Top Ten List/Glossary or Dictionary ● Poetry ● Song Lyrics ● Autobiographical Essay ● Contest Entry Application ● Business Letter or Correspondence/Persuasive or Advocacy Letter ● Biographical Summary ● Critique of a Published Source ● Speech or Debate ● Historical Times Context Essay ● Textbook Article ● Science Article or Report/Business Article or Report ● Encyclopedia Article ● Short Scene from a Play with Notes for Stage Directions ● Short Scene from a Movie with Notes for Camera Shots ● Dialogue of a Conversation among Two or More People ● Short Story ● Adventure Magazine Story ● Ghost Story ● Myth, Tall Tale, or Fairy Tale ● Talk Show Interview or Panel ● Recipe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character Analysis or Case Study ● Comedy Routine or Parody ● Picture book ● Chart or Diagram with Explanation and Analysis ● Brochure or Newsletter ● Time Line or Chain of Events ● Map with Explanation and Analysis ● Magazine or TV Advertisement or Infomercial ● Restaurant Description and Menu ● Travel Brochure Description ● How-To or Directions Booklet ● Receipts, Applications, Deeds, Budgets or Other Documents ● Wedding, Graduation or Special Event Invitation ● Birth Certificate ● Local News Report ● Pop-Up book ● Review and Poster for a Movie, Book, or TV Program ● Board Game or Trivial Pursuit with Answers and Rules ● Comic Strip or Graphic Novel excerpt ● Power Point Presentation ● Informational Video ● Website ● A series of text messages ● A series of e-mail communications ● Future News Story ● Letter to the Editor ● Newspaper or Magazine Feature/Human Interest Story ● Obituary, Eulogy or Tribute ● News Program Story or Announcement ● Tabloid Article
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iii. Participant Assent Form

Informed Assent Form

Authorization for You (the Student) to be a Research Participant

Dear Seventh Grade Student,

I am currently enrolled in the Reading Specialist Certification and M.Ed. program at Moravian College. This fall I will be conducting an action research project for my thesis (which is a study) in which I will investigate how completing a multigenre research project motivates you to write. For this project you will research a person, event, or issue of your choice. You will choose a topic and research it just as you would for a traditional research paper: collecting and recording information, analyzing & synthesizing it, then presenting it through writing. Instead of the single, extended prose piece of a traditional research paper this project will consist of a number of creative pieces in various genres (please see a list of possible genres on the reverse side of this consent form).

During the study I will collect lots of data (student surveys, notes on student engagement and motivation, interviews and samples of student work) to determine whether the multigenre research project was a success. I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from you during this process. **This study will help me to become a better teacher and will take place from September 2015 through November 2015.**

Participation in this project is voluntary, and you may withdraw yourself from this study *at any time* without penalty simply by notifying me. Participation in this study will not affect your grade.

If you have any questions you may talk with me or [REDACTED], who has approved this study.

Thank You!

Mrs. Grube

6th – 8th Grade English Language Arts Teacher

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

- I **give** permission for my teacher, Mrs. Grube, to use my data to be in her study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.
- I **do not give** permission for my teacher, Mrs. Grube, to use my data in her project.

Student's Name

Student's Signature

Date

Please find a list of possible genres below. Students may choose to create a genre not listed below with teacher approval.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journal Entries ● Personal Letter ● Greeting Card ● Schedule/Things to Do List ● Inner Monologue Representing Internal Conflicts ● Classified or Personal Ads ● Personal Essay or Philosophical Questions ● Top Ten List/Glossary or Dictionary ● Poetry ● Song Lyrics ● Autobiographical Essay ● Contest Entry Application ● Business Letter or Correspondence/Persuasive or Advocacy Letter ● Biographical Summary ● Critique of a Published Source ● Speech or Debate ● Historical Times Context Essay ● Textbook Article ● Science Article or Report/Business Article or Report ● Encyclopedia Article ● Short Scene from a Play with Notes for Stage Directions ● Short Scene from a Movie with Notes for Camera Shots ● Dialogue of a Conversation among Two or More People ● Short Story ● Adventure Magazine Story ● Ghost Story ● Myth, Tall Tale, or Fairy Tale ● Talk Show Interview or Panel ● Recipe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character Analysis or Case Study ● Comedy Routine or Parody ● Picture book ● Chart or Diagram with Explanation and Analysis ● Brochure or Newsletter ● Time Line or Chain of Events ● Map with Explanation and Analysis ● Magazine or TV Advertisement or Infomercial ● Restaurant Description and Menu ● Travel Brochure Description ● How-To or Directions Booklet ● Receipts, Applications, Deeds, Budgets or Other Documents ● Wedding, Graduation or Special Event Invitation ● Birth Certificate ● Local News Report ● Pop-Up book ● Review and Poster for a Movie, Book, or TV Program ● Board Game or Trivial Pursuit with Answers and Rules ● Comic Strip or Graphic Novel excerpt ● Power Point Presentation ● Informational Video ● Website ● A series of text messages ● A series of e-mail communications ● Future News Story ● Letter to the Editor ● Newspaper or Magazine Feature/Human Interest Story ● Obituary, Eulogy or Tribute ● News Program Story or Announcement ● Tabloid Article
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D. Multigenre Research Project Rubric

<p>Multigenre Research Project Rubric</p>
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	10	9	8	7	6	5 – 0
Overall Project Presentation and Packaging	Original, surprising, gets reader's attention and interest, imaginative Unifying elements used throughout project	Functional, some imagination Some unity	Functional	Not particularly surprising or inventive	Dull	No packaging, 0
Genres *Score x6 _____/60	Project contains at least 6 distinct genres Vivid, interesting information that adds insight and depth to the overall paper Several resources are cited throughout the text so the information flows naturally	Project contains at least 5 distinct genres Interesting, though not particularly vivid writing. More research needed	Project contains at least 4 distinct genres Little interesting information	Project contains at least 3 distinct genres Rambling, unfocused, fuzzy focus writing	Project contains at least 2 distinct genres. Writing confuses the reader	Project contains 1 or no genres Plagiarized, 0
Introductory Letter and Table of Contents	Reader wants to read on, writing is compelling and interesting. Contains all of the following 1. Sets the reader up for what is ahead. 2. Discusses the importance of your topic 3. Tells how it was chosen. 4. Includes a thesis statement that gives the paper direction.	Provides useful information Contains only 3 of the following 1. Sets the reader up for what is ahead. 2. Discusses the importance of your topic 3. Tells how it was chosen. 4. Includes a thesis statement that gives the paper direction.	Some useful information, but is too brief Contains only 2 of the following 1. Sets the reader up for what is ahead. 2. Discusses the importance of your topic 3. Tells how it was chosen. 4. Includes a thesis statement that gives the paper direction.	Little useful information Contains only 1 of the following 1. Sets the reader up for what is ahead. 2. Discusses the importance of your topic 3. Tells how it was chosen. 4. Includes a thesis statement that gives the paper direction.	Information confuses the reader	Absent, 0
End Notes	Notes enhance reading of the paper; enlighten the reader about the process of creation and/or additional useful	Notes are informative and thorough	Writer tried to develop notes but did not carry through and provide useful information	Notes need to be more inclusive, too many questions about the genres left in	Limited notes that confuse the reader	Absent, 0

	information about topic and research that went into producing the piece. Gives a rationale (justification) for each piece.		about the genres	the readers' mind		
Works Cited	Complete with at least 7 sources, listed in alphabetical order according to the MLA Formatting and Style Guide	Complete with at least 6 sources, listed in alphabetical order according to the MLA Formatting and Style Guide	Complete with at least 5 sources, listed in alphabetical order according to the MLA Formatting and Style Guide	Complete with at least 4 sources, listed in alphabetical order according to the MLA Formatting and Style Guide	Complete with at least 3 sources, listed in alphabetical order according to the MLA Formatting and Style Guide	A Works Cited page with 1 or no sources will receive a 0
Self-Assessment	Thorough, detailed answers to all of the questions (see requirements on back)	Answers all questions	Self-assessment needs to be more detailed	Self-assessment is carelessly written, not all questions addressed	Self-assessment is present, but confuses the reader	Absent, 0
Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation)	Contains few errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling	Contains 3 or more errors, but meaning is not seriously affected	Contains 4 or more errors	Contains more than 5 errors, meaning is affected	More than 6 errors distract the reader	More than 7 errors which confuse the reader
Total Score: _____/120						