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Motivated to Engage: Learning from the Literacy Stories of Preservice Teachers

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Abstract

The influence of motivation on readers' behaviors has received wide attention in literacy scholarship. The importance of readers' motivations for reading becomes critical when considered in relation to readers' engagement with reading activities and their perceptions of themselves as competent. This article presents a qualitative study of pre-service teachers' literacy history stories and reflections on their identities as literate individuals. The stories represented pre-service teachers' perceptions of home and school literacy experiences that either motivated or discouraged them from engaging in literacy activities. Their reflections were an account of how their experiences may have influenced their current self-perceptions and engagement with literacy. The findings provide insight into the ways in which specific literacy practices and conditions surrounding those practices motivated students to engage or discouraged them from engaging in literacy activities across time. This study has implications for how literacy educators think about motivation and its value in supporting learners across time.



Motivated to Engage: Learning from the Literacy Stories of Preservice Teachers

Classroom teachers act as important gatekeepers of literacy access, knowledge, and motivation for elementary learners, with an influence sometimes extending well beyond students' membership in particular classrooms. As Ruddell and Unrau (2004) point out, teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical decisions are strongly influenced by the affective and cognitive factors that made up their own backgrounds in classrooms. So, teachers implement literacy instruction under the influence of their own histories, creating literacy experiences that may place a lasting stamp on their students. This perpetuating cycle continues to color the perspectives of successive generations of literacy learners.

The significance of this cycle for teacher education became clear to us as a result of reading the stories of pre-service teachers in our courses, who wrote about and reflected upon literacy experiences that they perceived to have had an impact on their current literate identities. Gathered as part of a larger study on the influence of the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 61), this collection of stories sheds light on the experiences of these students, but may also hold important implications for classroom teachers regarding a broad range of school practices and the long-lasting effects they can have on literacy learners. Applegate and Applegate (2004) explain the troubling impact that pre-service teachers, who are not readers themselves, might have on their students' literacy futures, a finding they label "The Peter Effect" (p. 556). This finding increases our urgency as teacher educators to identify school experiences from our pre-service teachers' literacy histories that tended to motivate or discourage their literacy interest. As a result of our concern, we examined these stories with the following questions in mind: 1) What patterns do we see in the literacy histories of pre-service elementary teachers? and 2) What can we learn about school-based literacy practices from pre-service teachers' stories?

We were struck by the consistency in our participants' stories with respect to experiences that they perceived to motivate and discourage them from engaging in literacy in the moment and/or throughout their lives. We were reminded of the power that teachers, ourselves included, have over who our students become. In this article, we share stories of school literacy practices remembered by our students, accompanied by their perceptions of the ways these experiences motivated or discouraged them from literacy interactions. We end with our interpretations of what the patterns in this data might reveal about the long-lasting influence of school literacy instruction.

Literature Review

To contextualize our study, and because our data were collected from students enrolled in a literacy course in their teacher education program, we consider the body of work on the use of literacy histories as a pedagogical tool in pre-service teacher education. From there we move to a review of the literature on motivation to read. This body of work is relevant as we consider the stories pre-service teachers told about the experiences that were motivating and discouraging for them as they developed their literate identities.

Literacy Histories with Pre-Service Teachers

Since the early 1990's, accessing narrative ways of knowing and learning through the use of literacy history and autobiography has become more and more common in pre-service teacher education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Conle, 1996; Heydon & Hibbert, 2010; LeFevre, 2011). It is believed that "narratives have the potential as a rich platform to make visible some of one's existing theories and beliefs about learning and teaching and from which to develop new theories and beliefs" (LeFevre, 2011, p. 781). Teacher educators engage pre-service teachers in exploring their literate pasts for multiple purposes. Research suggests that literacy histories have been used as curriculum in literacy courses to examine links between pre-service teachers' remembered experiences and their developing stances about literacy learning and teaching (Boggs-Golden, 2009; Roe & Vukelich, 1998). Literacy histories have also been used in more specific ways to support pre-service teachers in developing their understandings of diverse learners and to prepare them for diverse settings (Clark & Medina, 2000; Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006), to examine how pre-service teachers convey agency as learners

(Johnson, 2008), to explore pre-service teachers' digital practices (Burnett, 2009), and to relocate pre-service teachers' literacy experiences from a personal to a political frame (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010).

In a study that examined what and how pre-service teachers learned through sharing and witnessing autobiographical narratives in a literacy methods course, LeFevre (2011) found that pre-service teachers learned to question dominant stories, develop a community of learners, and understand different perspectives. With regard to using autobiographical stories as curriculum, one important finding from this study was that pre-service teachers' stories brought to light problematic literacy teaching practices. For example, the researcher refers to a story one pre-service teacher wrote about his experience with round robin reading. LeFevre concludes that "the intensity of emotion it created for many of his peers in class created a strong place from which to examine the limitations of a specific literacy strategy commonly used in primary classrooms" (p.784). While interactions around pre-service teachers' stories afford them powerful opportunities to critically reflect about literacy teaching and learning, we propose the narrative products themselves can tell us a lot about the literacy practices that motivate and discourage literacy learners.

Motivation to Read

The influence of motivation on readers' behaviors has received wide attention in literacy scholarship. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) define reading motivation as "the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (p. 405). Viewed in this way, motivation is a set of affective factors that leads individual readers to perceive reading and themselves as readers in certain ways. The importance of readers' motivations for reading becomes critical when considered in relation to readers' engagement with reading activities. In a recent review of research on reading engagement, Guthrie, Wigfield, and You (2012) identified motivation as one important influence that mediates readers' engagement with text. Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013) defined reading engagement as "the act of reading to meet internal and external expectations" (p.8). Thus, engagement refers to actions taken toward reading, while motivation refers to affective factors that influence individuals' engagement with reading.

While motivation is generally considered to be a set of personally held characteristics housed within the learner, Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) point out the possibilities for external entities, including classroom environments, to support or discourage readers' motivation to engage in reading. Instructional practices such as releasing control over students' learning, supplying texts related to students' interests, providing reading strategy instruction, supporting student collaboration, using rewards and praise, utilizing evaluation methods, and understanding students' background experiences have been shown in studies to affect students' motivation and achievement in reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012). These authors point out that classroom practices can influence learner motivation, stating that "affirming practices may foster positive affect and motivational growth, while at the same time undermining practices, such as negative feedback, controlling instruction, and irrelevance, may generate decreases in motivation" (p. 625).

Most of this work has been conducted in the moment, looking at students' current perspectives on literacy activities. For example, Edmunds and Bauserman (2010) questioned elementary students regarding things that excited them about different kinds of text and about reading in general, finding that elements such as personal interests and adult involvement swayed some readers toward certain kinds of books. Marinak and Gambrell (2008) studied how the proximity and choice of a reward might affect third graders' intrinsic motivation to read, concluding that links between the reward and the behavior influenced students' motivation to read. Thus, information exists to help us understand current conditions that might support students' inclination to actively engage in classroom reading activities. What appears to be lacking is a retrospective consideration of the ways that school activities affect individuals' perspectives on reading and other forms of literacy over the long term. Our examination of pre-service teachers' recollections of their own literacy experiences and the cumulative effects they have had on their current perspectives may hold important implications for classroom teachers hoping to inspire in their students a lifelong tendency toward literacy engagement.

Methods

We value narrative as a powerful force in the construction of identity. Like Bruner (1996), we recognize that the stories people tell are the ways in which they make meaning of their own experiences and that meaning shifts

and changes as stories are told and retold across social contexts. Therefore, in examining pre-service teachers' narrative accounts of past literacy experiences, we are less concerned with the accuracy of their memories than with their perceptions of the events, as it is these perceptions that shape their motivations and thus their literate identities.

We examined the work of 82 students who were enrolled in our four sections of an introductory literacy course in a teacher preparation program in a university in the Midwest. Of the 82 participants, there were 77 females and 5 males. Fifty-three participants were elementary education majors, 23 (4 males) were special education majors, 3 were middle level majors, 2 were English majors, and there was one male geology major.

The first assignment in the course required students to use a multi-modal tool to create a literacy history timeline in which they shared a full range of events from earliest memories to more recent experiences with literacy. In the assignment, we required students to include a minimum of eight stories about events occurring across the span of early childhood, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. We encouraged them to write about specific memories of literacy rituals and/or experiences that occurred both in and out of school. In addition to their timeline, students wrote a reflection that addressed how they thought the events in their literacy history contributed to their identities as literate beings.

Data Collection and Analysis

In reading and re-reading approximately 650 stories and 82 reflections written by our students, we named and coded specific practices and students' retrospective responses to them. Our initial coding process was recursive in that, as we added new codes, we returned to previously coded data with a focus on the new codes. As we conducted this initial coding, we recognized some commonalities in the home and school practices they described, such as book related projects, round robin reading, and literacy assessment; and in circumstances that students attributed to their being motivated to participate or discouraged from participating in literacy activities. From here, we posed these questions of the data: Which practices motivated students to engage in literacy activities? Which practices discouraged students from engaging with literacy activities? To answer these questions, we cross-referenced categories of classroom practices with patterns from the data revealing students'

perceptions of activities as motivating (e.g. intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, motivated by activity or program, motivated by interest) or discouraging (e.g. abandoning reading, loss of interest in reading, deterred by activity or program) to arrive at a set of classroom practices that motivated students to engage with literacy, and a second set of practices that discouraged students from engaging in literacy (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Top five literacy practices that motivate and discourage students.*

Categories of Practices that Motivate	Data References	Categories of Practices that Discourage	Data References
Choices	33	Required Reading	32
School Writing Experience	33	Grades and Test Scores	15
Multi-modal Literacy	19	School Writing Experience	11
Grades and Test Scores	15	Round Robin Reading	8
Read Alouds	12	Book Related Projects	6

We were intrigued by the fact that two categories, school writing and grades and test scores, appeared on both lists. We felt that this outcome warranted further investigation. We subsequently explored the ways that students described each practice, to identify patterns in their responses and to draw some conclusions about the conditions that might allow these classroom practices to be viewed by students as motivating or discouraging to their literacy engagement.

Findings

In creating lists of practices that motivated and discouraged our students, we were not surprised that choice, read aloud, and multimodal literacies appeared on the “motivate” list, as these are practices that are commonly regarded to be well- received by learners and supportive of their literacy interests and achievement (e.g. Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Morrow &

Gambrell, 2000; Serafini, 2011). We were equally underwhelmed that required reading, round robin reading, and book related projects appeared on the “discourage” list, also based on commonly held understandings about these practices (e.g. Allington, 1980; Pressley et al, 2003). Interestingly, though, school writing experiences and grades and test scores appeared in the top five practices on both lists. In the following sections we present data that exemplifies the ways in which school writing experiences and grades and test scores both motivated and discouraged students’ literacy involvement. Further, we explore the conditions under which students were motivated or discouraged by these activities. Finally, we discuss some implications of these findings for literacy instruction in school settings.

School Writing Experiences that Motivated Students

Our students recognized in their literacy histories that school writing experiences could be both interesting and enjoyable. For example, one student recalled:

In my second grade class, we always had different topics to write about and prompt our creativity and imagination. Some of these topics included "my best Christmas" or "my worst booboo." This began my love for writing. I could express myself in anyway that I would want to and it could never be wrong. Writing at this time always brought me great happiness. It was one of my biggest hobbies.

This student enjoyed using her imagination and being creative in her writing. She viewed writing in second grade as a space where she could express herself without ever being wrong. She learned to love writing so much that it became one of her hobbies. While some students seemed more intrinsically motivated to engage in writing, others reflected on how they were encouraged by their teachers, as this student did when she wrote, “I continued to acquire more and more of a desire and excitement for writing. I had teachers who really encouraged my writing skills and allowed me to freely write and express myself in many different ways with many different techniques.”

As we read and reread students recollections of past experiences that motivated them to want to write, we noticed and named patterns that spoke to the conditions under which students developed a fondness for writing. Students seemed to perceive writing in a positive light when teachers recognized their

strengths, when they wrote for authentic purposes, when they had extended time to work on writing, and when they experienced writing in a low risk environment.

Teacher recognition of strengths. It was common to read that teacher feedback focused on strengths in writing contributed to learners feeling more confident in themselves as writers. One student wrote:

When it came to defending something I started to believe in, the writing came to me easier. I was confident when I turned the paper in and when I got it back my teacher gave me even more confidence. I remember her remarks about how well I supported my argument and how impressed she was with my writing skills. She even kept my paper to use as an example for her future classes! This was the confident (sic) boost I needed and it drove me to work even harder in school knowing I was able to write.

This student remembered feeling a certain level of confidence in submitting a persuasive piece of writing. The positive comments from her teacher pushed her beyond being satisfied with a product to a level of confidence that encouraged her to write more and further develop her writing skills.

Another student committed to writing after being invited to participate in a writing group. She remembered:

When I was in the eighth grade, I got a sheet from my Language Arts teacher that asked me to join a writing group. It was an invite only group and I had never heard of it before. It was the first year my Junior High was doing this group and at first I was very reluctant to join it. I went up to my teacher and asked him why I had received an invitation. This is when he told me he saw great potential in my writing and knew I was a very creative individual. After hearing this, I jumped at the chance and went to the all day workshop to join it. From then on every day at lunch on Wednesdays, I went into the library and worked on my writing skills with a group instead of going out to recess. I got incredibly involved in my writing and tended to excel in my language arts classes after joining the group.

At first, this student questioned the invitation because she didn't perceive herself as a "good writer." But a few words of encouragement from a caring

teacher shifted her perspective and created a context in which this student could take a risk. She chose to engage in the group, and in doing so, made a commitment to working on writing.

Writing for authentic purposes. In addition to being motivated when teachers recognized their strengths, students were more likely to engage in writing when they were asked to write for authentic purposes. One example is from a student who described her involvement in creating a class newspaper. She wrote:

In 8th grade we had a student teacher named Miss Hasler. During her time student teaching in our English class, she did very creative units that were interesting to me. One of the units she taught was about the newspaper. She explained that we would be writing our own newspaper as a class and we would be assigned certain sections of it. I was assigned to the interview a teacher and do it yourself section. We spent a lot of class time brainstorming questions and researching information for our articles until they were perfect. In the end, our class newspaper turned out awesome! It showed that each and everyone of us had some kind of writing talent whether we previously knew it or not. Today I still own my copy of the 8th grade class newspaper!

As described by this student, the newspaper unit allowed for students to work in different ways to create a product that would have a real audience. The student acknowledged that the learners in the class worked on their articles until “they were perfect.” They became invested in their writing work.

Another student shared the experience of writing to a pen pal. “As a fourth grader, I was also privileged enough to have a pen-pal from across the country. We learned how to write and type accurate letters. It was a great experience, and a good social builder.” In this example, the student refers to writing as a positive social experience. At the same time, she acknowledges the impact it had on her writing in that genre and on her accuracy in writing.

Extended time to work on writing. Students appreciated and enjoyed writing projects that they worked on over time. One student remembered:

In seventh grade we were given the opportunity to write, illustrate, and publish a book. We spent weeks developing a storyline and drawing the pictures, and finally, after a lot of hard work, we sent

our books in to the publisher.

This student perceived the experience of developing and creating a book in a positive light, as indicated by the words “given the opportunity.” She fully engaged even though it was “hard work.” Sometimes students became more invested when they worked on writing over a period of time. Another student recalled her first experience writing a research paper. She wrote:

For this project, a certain topic was chosen for the students to study more in depth and sub-divided for each individual classroom. From there, each student choose a topic within the subtopic to do a research report on. The theme for my classroom was the animals in the Rainforest. The animal I choose was the Margay, and we spent a total of 2 months preparing for our Rainforest themed Restaurant. This was one of the first research papers I had ever written, and made me feel like my writing skills were improving.

Working on a writing project over time provided a context in which this student saw her skills improve, contributing to her motivation to engage.

Low risk environment. A final condition that contributed to students’ motivation to engage with writing was the opportunity to write in a space where all ideas are appreciated. This student recalls a fourth grade writing experience:

In fourth grade my class was required to write a story. I chose to write an adventure story about my best friend and myself. I remember being excited about the assignment and sharing my ideas with my best friend. My teacher at the time encouraged the class to be creative and she was very accepting of our ideas.

For this student, believing that her ideas were important and would be accepted, was a motivating factor and encouraged her engagement.

School Writing Experiences that Discouraged Students

While more often than not, school writing experiences were motivating for students, there were a number of stories that indicated this was not always the case. Some students found writing to be difficult, developed a dislike for it, and were discouraged from engaging in writing beyond required school

assignments. For example, one student reflected:

So in 7th grade I had a teacher, Mrs. Mead who focused a lot on grammar. I did not know much about grammar because my previous teachers did not focus on that. Up until that point I thought I was a good writer and she made me feel like I had no idea what I was doing. This class made it hard for me to want to do papers and feel like a good writer.

Again we recognized patterns across students' literacy histories that spoke to us about the conditions under which learners become discouraged. Students acknowledged turning away from writing when teachers recognized and pointed out their weaknesses, and when they felt they were working in a high risk environment.

Teacher recognition of weaknesses. Similar to the way recognition of student strengths was motivating for students, recognition of weaknesses often discouraged students from engaging in positive ways with writing. Often our students perceived teachers as being critical of their weaknesses without offering instructional support. For example, one student shared:

My problems of having the main ideas but not having my writing flow together and be choppy were coming back. This teacher made me feel like I had no idea what I was doing though. She was not trying to be helpful she just would tell me what I did wrong, and not give advice. That made me even less of a confident writer than I previously was.

For this student, who seemed to have recognized this weakness in herself, the teacher's reminder that came with no support zapped her confidence and made her less likely to engage in writing. Having weaknesses pointed out can be debilitating for students well beyond the actual experience. Another student recalled:

I remember in second grade we started to learn how to write in cursive. It was hard for me and my teacher always made me feel like I was really bad at it, and would point me out when I did not know how to correctly write in cursive. On top of learning cursive I always had to have a special name tag so I had help

writing my last name. My writing experience in second grade did not give me a good outlook on writing. I was embarrassed all the time.

For this student, the feeling of embarrassment had long-lasting negative effects on learning and her willingness to engage in classroom learning.

High risk environment. In opposition to a low-risk environment that can be a motivating factor for learners, a high-risk environment was almost always a discouraging factor. Many students shared stories of stress and pressure associated with writing assignments. For example, this student remembered and wrote about an experience from high school:

My Junior year of high school, I took an AP English course. During this class, we did a big research paper and I did mine on the occult themes in Shakespeare's writing. We spent an entire quarter on this paper so needless to say it was a big part of our grade. Due to that fact, there was a lot of pressure put on this paper which was the first big research paper I had ever written. Since there was so much emphasis on the grade, I can't say that I was too thrilled about the assignment, and to this day I dread writing research papers.

Stress, regardless of its cause, is almost always a factor that deters students from choosing to engage in writing. Timed writing assessments were another example of a stress-inducing situation that was reflected in our data. This student shared an experience she remembered about timed writing assessments. "I remember the time limit being very nerve wracking for me. I usually need a longer time to process information and comprehend a reading, so I didn't always do very well on timed writings." This is a student who was accustomed to doing well in school. She enjoyed school and learning but became stressed when she had to produce writing under the pressure of a timer.

Grades and Test Scores

Experiences with grades and test scores were obviously significant to the pre-service teachers' memories about literacy, since they appeared often in their stories. What is less clear, based on the pre-service teachers' recalled experiences, is collective agreement regarding the tendency of grades and test scores to be motivating or discouraging. Experiences with grades and test scores

appeared high on both lists when this practice was cross-referenced with students' perceptions of experiences that motivated or discouraged. When patterns in the students' stories were examined more closely, it became apparent that there were ways that grades and test scores had motivated students' involvement with literacy and ways that they had discouraged students' literacy engagement.

Grades and Test Score Experiences that Motivated Students

Some of the pre-service teachers' stories explained occasions in which they perceived the inclusion of grades and test scores to support their ongoing involvement with literacy activities. As we examined these narratives, we noticed patterns in conditions that appeared to motivate their literacy engagement, including challenges posed by assignment requirements and confidence that was increased by good grades. Alternately, the stories also expressed the pre-service teachers' perceptions of being inspired specifically by non-graded elements of literacy activities.

Challenge of assignment requirements. One pattern evident in the stories of students who found grades and test scores motivating was the challenge posed by graded assignments. Some students were motivated to pursue literacy activities when there was a graded or scored component of the experience, explaining that this presented a challenge that inspired them to proceed. One student, describing an assignment in which a grade depended on memorizing definitions and being tested on them, explained, "My teacher would give us extra credit if we found those words in books and I think that this also pushed me to read because I wanted to find those new words." This student was clearly inspired by the opportunity to pursue reading in order to demonstrate her ability. Another student was similarly motivated by Accelerated Reader (AR) quizzes, stating,

We were all involved in Accelerated Reader. I loved when I was able to go up a level. We had to gain points based off of the books we read and quizzes we took for them. It was fun to read a difficult book in order to gain all the possible points for that book.

In contrast to many other AR stories we examined, this pre-service teacher recalled the Accelerated Reader program in a positive light, clearly

motivated to pursue ongoing reading challenges in order to meet AR demands.

Confidence from good grades. In another pattern apparent in pre-service teachers' stories, successful performance on literacy tasks, as evidenced by high grades from teachers, appeared to increase students' confidence and motivate them to continue to pursue literacy experiences. As one student explained, "My grades have proved writing to be my strength in literacy. Writing keeps me engaged and focused. I feel a sense of accomplishment when I finish a paper or story. I look forward to sharing my writings with others." Another pre-service teacher described the motivation she gained from receiving a high score on a writing assignment, stating,

When first being introduced to the idea of a term paper, I was not looking the least bit forward to it. I pondered on different topics for a long time and decided to pick a topic that was interesting to me. I wrote my term paper and felt really good about it. When it was graded and returned to me with a 96 on top I could not believe my eyes. I had never received this high of score on any type of literacy project in high school. This event is what helped boost my self-esteem in the literacy subject.

It is obvious that this student viewed the high grade on this assignment as an affirmation of her writing ability, which in turn motivated her to continue her pursuit of literacy involvement.

Inspiration of non-evaluated activities. Unlike the two patterns in which students were motivated by grades and test scores, the third motivational condition is important chiefly due to what is absent. In these stories, pre-service teachers specifically noted that they were inspired by literacy activities that lacked an evaluative element. Pre-service teachers explained that they pursued these literacy activities for the intrinsic value of the experience rather than as a graded or assessed task. For example, one student explained that she began to realize the power of literacy in her life when she began to write a journal for herself rather than as a school assignment:

As I got older, my literacy skills began to change. I began to write in a journal just for personal pleasure and found that writing was an outlet for me. This is when I realized that writing does not always need to be associated with school work and assignments,

that I can enjoy writing in my free time without a grade being attached to it.

In another example, a student emphasized that the lack of literacy assessments in her experiences are responsible for her ongoing enjoyment and success with literacy tasks.

I never felt pressured to score well on an exam or a quiz, and I never felt like the school sponsored programs were a hassle. I think that this mentality is the reasoning behind my love for reading and writing. Some may argue that because I was never tested on the material I did not learn as much as I should have from the lessons; however, I'd argue that I learned more. I learned at my own pace, and took away what I felt was important or relevant from the text, inducing critical thinking, and personal connections—skills that are still helpful to me now, as a college student.

These stories explicitly acknowledge the absence of evaluation as an integral part of the value the pre-service teachers perceive to be contained in the experiences.

Grades and Test Score Experiences that Discouraged Students

Predictably, some stories expressed pre-service teachers' angst over graded activities, leading to a failure of the experiences to keep students interested in continued pursuit of literacy involvement. Two patterns in conditions that prompted students' discouragement over literacy experiences were feelings of anxiety over assessed experiences and an over-emphasis on evaluation.

Anxiety from assessment. Several pre-service teachers discussed the anxiety they felt when they were assessed during literacy tasks, as exemplified by this statement:

When I was in seventh grade, my English class started a program called Accelerated Reader. At the beginning of the year we had to take a reading test to find out what my reading level was. I was so nervous for the test. Standardized tests gave me a lot of anxiety when I was younger.

In a representative example, one student described an early experience of reading assessment and the negative way that it made her view her reading ability:

Every quarter my second grade year we had a reading activity in which one by one all of the students would go in the hallway and read a short passage to a woman sitting across from us. As we were reading the woman in front of us would have a red marker and would mark every time our pace slowed down or we pronounced a word incorrectly. During this reading activity, I always remember feeling scared and nervous during my turn. While I was reading, I remember only focusing on when this woman would make a mark on her copy of the passage. This was an activity that scared me away from reading because as a young reader, I felt that making mistakes were bad and in a way I felt that it told me I was a bad reader.

Contrary to the stories of students who were inspired by literacy challenges, these students noted their dismay over assessment experiences. For these students, the anxiety brought on by evaluation of their performance was enough to turn them away from literacy activities.

Limited by an over-emphasis on evaluation. Some stories described the way that an over-emphasis on evaluation of literacy tasks actually reduced their potential to support students' literacy learning. Numerous pre-service teachers mentioned the Accelerated Reader (AR) program in explaining that an overarching focus on assessment reduced their desire to participate beyond the explicit expectations. One student stated:

Something that had a not so positive effect on my literacy journey was the Accelerated Reader program. I no longer enjoy reading as much as I used to because of this program. This program caused me to feel inferior to my peers because I had a lower reading level than some of my friends. I also disliked this program because it put a limit on what books I could read. I strongly disliked the tests following the book where you were rewarded points. I found myself choosing the books not because I wanted to read them, but because I wanted to read a book with a high level of points to reach my goal easier. After Accelerated

Reader was finished, I was relieved to eliminate the stress of the points and found myself choosing other activities over reading because of my negative experience.

In one particularly poignant story, a student describes how constant pressure to exhibit her abilities through assessments that she felt did not display her true competence created a feeling of being disconnected from school-based literacy:

The entirety of my high school career was wrapped around the idea of me believing that I did not have much to contribute to the academic world. I was spiraling down a staircase with absolutely no intellectual confidence. Although I did encounter some hands-on classes that I really enjoyed, I was always assessed by the means of multiple choice/Scantron. I struggled because I knew the material inside and out but I was unable to fully comprehend the questions being asked. Although I learned how to become a semi-successful test-taker, I went through school feeling passionless. I glazed over Middle and High School in a passionless way, having a constant fear of failure and assumptions that someone else was always academically better than me. There was no passion in me to learn because my literacy skills were not fit for industrial schooling, and the entirety of my high school was based on industrial schooling.

These pre-service teachers perceived an over-reliance on literacy assessments to have created roadblocks to their ongoing literacy involvement as students.

Discussion and Implications

Existing research suggests that students' motivations are related to their level of engagement with literacy (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012). These authors also note that external factors, over which educators have much control, influence students to be motivated or discouraged to engage in literacy activities. Several studies have also demonstrated strong correlations between motivation and reading achievement (e.g. Gottfried, 1990; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). While motivation has been addressed extensively in literacy research, and there are clear links between motivation, engagement, and progress, we contend that this body of work has

not influenced classroom practice as much as is needed for more students to leave K-12 schools (and potentially enter teacher education programs) as confident and competent literate individuals.

Our retrospective look at pre-service teachers' stories and reflections confirmed that some practices (read-aloud, choice) primarily motivated students to engage with literacy activities, while other practices (required reading, round robin reading) caused them to be discouraged, suggesting that these practices should be either incorporated into or dismissed from classrooms, respectively. However, every practice that was reflected in our data set did not fall neatly into one, or the other, of these categories. While there is research that demonstrates the tendency of some practices to motivate or discourage students' literacy beliefs, it is clear that not all practices can be so easily categorized. There has been much practical attention paid to differentiating for learning needs but not nearly enough focus on the ways that school practices might motivate or discourage different students toward or away from literacy engagement.

Our analysis of school writing experiences revealed that the conditions surrounding writing experiences greatly influenced how students were motivated toward or discouraged from engaging in literacy activities, and that the conditions were relatively consistent across learners. For example, students were motivated to engage in writing activities when their teachers recognized and emphasized their strengths, but when teachers emphasized weaknesses in writing, students were more likely to avoid writing. This finding is consistent with some studies demonstrating the deleterious effects of negative feedback on students' valuing of literacy experiences (e.g. Strambler & Weinstein, 2010). Evidence from the current study raises important questions about issues of motivation in instructional contexts. If we consistently emphasize student strengths, when and how do we instruct in ways that extend students' current understandings? Is there a balance between positive and constructive feedback that will both challenge and continue to motivate students?

In analyzing grading practices, we found that conditions surrounding the practices influenced learners' motivations; however, there was less consistency in those conditions across students. In other words, the same evaluative conditions motivated some students to engage with and others to be discouraged from literacy activities. These varied perspectives about the motivational influence of grades, testing, and evaluation in schools mirrors a

lack of clarity on this relationship in the education research (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009). Our evidence demonstrated that some students thrived on the prospect of earning a good grade and were motivated to engage for that grade, while others feared the grade and were motivated to avoid graded activities. Again, our findings prompt practical questions. How can grading practices be used to motivate all learners? Is it possible to differentiate grading practices in equitable ways? What will grades mean if we differentiate our grading practices?

We believe that these questions hold important implications for both practitioners and researchers. While our study extends previous research on motivation, much remains to be learned about the varied roles that school activities might play in students' long-term literacy motivation. As these pre-service teachers' stories make clear, school practices have a life-long influence on the ways that they viewed literacy and its role in their lives. We urge teachers and researchers to explore these questions in practical contexts in pursuit of increased understanding regarding ways that differentiating for motivation might lead to increased literacy engagement, proficiency, and agency.

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