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EDP 313

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6 November, 2013

A High Schooler’s Reaction to Reading

Introduction and Observation

I was first inspired to look into high school students attitudes toward reading when I read an article published in *Gifted Child Quarterly* entitled “Gifted girls’ passion for fiction: The quest for meaning, growth, and self-actualization”. This article focused on gifted girls who were in the GATE program who also enjoyed reading. The study found that the female students who participated in the study “craved knowledge” and were able to satisfy their desire to learn through reading (Stutler, 2011, p. 31). The study also found that reading not only stimulated the girls intellectually but it also helped them develop understanding regarding relationships and engaged the girls’ imagination.

From personal experience, I agree that it is these three aspects that have encouraged me to become an avid reader. This similarity of experiences sparked an interest to discover if all students felt this way about reading or if it is only specific ones, such as verbally gifted ones. What I initially observed in the classroom is that many students do not like to read. Other students enjoy reading just not class materials. Instead, they will carry around personal reading books for their own entertainment.

The students questioned in this study were freshmen and sophomore English students in Mr. Matthew Verlei’s class attending East Valley High School in East Mesa. This is a public charter school in the Legacy School District. It is a Title I school situated in a low-income community where the average salary is $47,256 and more than half of the students receive free or reduced lunch. In total, about 150 students attend EVHS. The school is composed of almost equal numbers of students from a Hispanic or Caucasian ethnicity. There are also low numbers of Blacks, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Hawaiian Natives, and Pacific Islanders. Last year, EVHS students earned a 67% reading score on the AIMS test, which is 16% less than the average. From the twenty-seven students selected for this study, 44.4% of them were males and 55.5% of them were females. The ages of the students ranged from fourteen to eighteen: 18.5% were fourteen years old; 3.7% were fifteen years old; 25.9% were sixteen years old; 7.4% were seventeen years old; and 3.7% were eighteen years old.

This study was designed to discover what types of students like to read, why they like to read and what they like to read. The focus of my research was on what type of students like to read, looking at their gender, age and their own perceived ability to read. Then I examined my data to find out why students like to read or don’t like to read based on their own explanations and reasons. Finally, for application in my classroom, I wanted to discover what students like to read so that perhaps I could implement the students own preferences in my future classroom.

Data Collection and Instrument

This study was achieved by creating a Research Questionnaire (Document A) which the students were asked to fill out during one of their class periods. It contained both short answer and multiple choice questions that asked them about their preferences toward reading as well as their reading practices. Once the questionnaires were complete, the data was entered into a table and the findings synthesized for study.

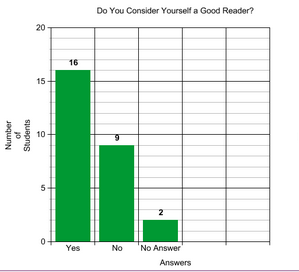


Table 1: Shows the number of students who considers themselves to be good readers.

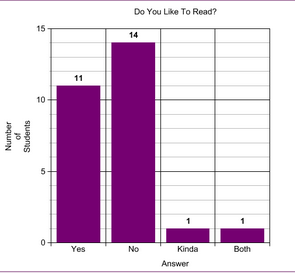


Table 2: Shows the number of students who like to read.

When looking at what type of students that like to read, 59.3% of students believed they were good readers and 33.3 % believed they were not good readers, with two students not answering the question (Table 1). This percentage was nearly equal for both males and females.

Correlation between Ability to Read and Like of Reading

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Males | Females |
| Yes🡪Yes | 41.6% | 26.6% |
| Yes🡪No | 16.6% | 26.6% |
| No🡪 Yes | 0% | 13.3% |
| No🡪 No | 33.3% | 13.3% |

Table 3: The correlations between students who are good readers and if they like to read. 1 male and 3 females did not supply enough information for correlation to be seen.

Approximately 40.7% of all students liked to read and 51.9% of students did not like to read. Two students were unsure at 7.4% (Table B). Once again the numbers were nearly the same. 40% of the females like to read and 46% did not, with 13.3% unsure. 41.6% of males like to read and 58.3% did not.

What is different between the female and male students is the relationship between good/bad readers and whether the students actually like to read (Table 3). For males, there was a direct correlation between their ability to read and whether they liked to read with 74.9% of male students either were good readers and liked to read or were not good readers and did not like to read. For girls, there is no clear correlation.

Based by age, there does tend to be higher ratio of students who consider themselves to be good readers than those that consider themselves not to be good readers (Table 4). In addition, there tends to be higher numbers of students who do not like to read than students who like to read. For example, 27.3% of fifteen year olds like to read as compared with the 72.7% who do not like to read and 42.9% of sixteen year olds like to read as compared with the 57.1% who do not like to read. However, for fourteen year olds 60% like to read and only 40% are unsure.

Percentage of Students who Consider Themselves to be Good Readers Based on Age

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Age | Yes | No |
| 14 | 60% | 40% |
| 15 | 45.5% | 36.4% |
| 16 | 71.4% | 28.6% |
| 17 | 50% | 50% |
| 18 | 100% | 0% |

Table 4: This table shows the percent of students who consider themselves to be good or not good readers. Keep in mind, only two students were seventeen and only one student was eighteen which affects the percentages.

Furthermore, there does not appear to be any correlation, based on age, between students who consider themselves to be good readers and like to read or students who do not consider themselves to be good readers and dislike to read.

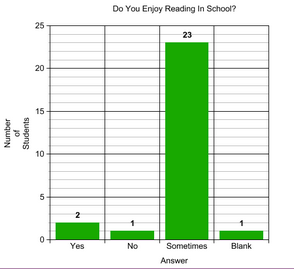


Table 5: This table shows the number of students who enjoy reading in school.

When looking at why students liked to read, I wanted to focus more closely on the relationships between reading at school and reading at home. Only 7.4% of students admitted to enjoy reading at school, 3.7% claimed to not like reading at school and 85.2% claimed to enjoy reading at school only sometimes (Table 5). Some of the most common reasons why students only like to read in school sometimes is due to the subject matter. In the short answer area on the questionnaire there were nine different mentions of “it depends on the book” or reading material. There were also five mentions of the reading material being boring and one mention of it not being fun enough. Four students also mentioned that they enjoy reading independently and not as a group. The only reason a student enjoyed reading in class was because it was “not as boring as doing nothing”. Also, the only student who does not like to read at all in class claimed that reading was “not worth it”.

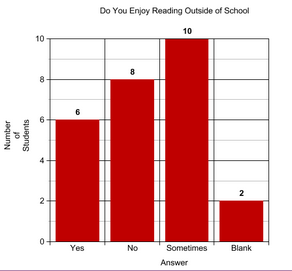


Table 6: This table shows the number of students who enjoy reading outside of the school classroom.

Furthermore, 22.2% of students enjoyed reading outside of school, 29.6% of students do not enjoy reading outside of school and 37% of students sometimes enjoy reading outside of school, with 7.4% of students leaving this question blank (Table 6). The explanations for their answers as to why they enjoyed or did not enjoy reading outside of the classroom were less clear. Some students enjoyed reading outside of the classroom because they get to “choose what to read”. Three students who enjoyed reading outside of the classroom and two students who sometimes enjoyed reading outside of the classroom claimed to read because they were bored. Two sometimes students found reading at home difficult do to distractions like the television. Surprisingly, three students who do not like to read outside of the classroom stated it was because they had no time. Two students claimed they just don’t like to read, two claimed reading was boring, and two claimed reading was a waste of time. Only one student claimed a physical discomfort as a reason they did not like to read outside the classroom.

Literature and References

One of the big aspects I was testing through this research project was to see if gender affected the student’s ability to or enjoyment of reading. I found that in my class, gender does not affect the student’s perceived ability to read. This means that being male or female does not change how you view your own personal ability to read. Also gender does not affect whether the students like to read. Initially, this was one aspect about my students that I was curious about because the study done on the GATE students was performed only on girls. However, I found that with my students, there were nearly equal numbers of boys and girls who either liked or did not like to read.

Another aspect I tested was to see if a students perceived ability to read affected their enjoyment of reading. I did find some evidence that would suggest that perhaps there is a correlation between male students who believe they are good readers and liking to read. This finding would indicate that perhaps when male students are confident in their reading abilities they will enjoy reading more. This means that we need to encourage reading abilities during school, especially when males are concerned. As teachers we need to reinforce that each student is a good reader so that they feel confident enough to actually read on their own. However, the same was not true for female students. Perhaps this is due to the differences between males and females or this could be due to their different stages of development.

A third aspect I was testing to see if their ability to or enjoyment of reading was based on their age. When categorized by age, there did tend to be higher ratios of students who considered themselves to be good readers. However, this was fairly evenly spaced between all ages so that means that for my students, age does not affect a students perceived ability to read. As for the effect of age on reading enjoyment, I found that most ages had higher numbers of dislike for reading than like for like of reading. This was contrary to what I was hoping to find. I was hoping that I would either find and increase or decrease in enjoyment of reading as students get older. Instead, my findings support the idea that students do not change from one age to the other but remain fixed over time.

Furthermore, I wanted to discover the reasons why students either like to read, sometimes like to read or do not like to read within the school. The vast majority of students commented that they sometimes like to read at school. This is very important because by selecting sometimes the students indicated that there are moments in school that they enjoy what they read and moments when they do not. Many students explained why they only enjoyed reading in school sometimes by saying that it depended on the book or reading material. This choice indicates that there is something within the school zone that is interesting to the students. As teachers we need to be aware of what interests our students and what does not interest our students so that we can increase engagement. According to some studies, it is suggested that students who are more interested in a topic will have a greater ability to comprehend the text (Anderson, 1985, p.326). In addition, one study found that students generally show interest in the same types of novels and dislike the same types of novels (Anderson, 1985, p.327). Although this does not mean that every student enjoys reading exactly what every other student enjoys reading, it does mean that as a teacher, I should be able to find a novel or reading material that would interest the vast majority of students. Many other students reported that what they read in class is either boring or not fun. These answers reiterate that as teachers, we need to be choosing material that not only is interesting to the students but what is relative to their lives. Another common answer is that many students enjoy independent reading more than group reading. Because of limited school resources many teachers are forced to have students read in groups in the classroom. If we could supply all the needed resources and provide students the opportunity to work in groups or on their own, we could possibly help students enjoy reading while in school. It is important to increase student enjoyment while reading because it helps raise student moral and it helps engage them in the material better. If a student is interested and invested in a topic, they are going to put in more effort and usually achieve greater success. Furthermore, there was a recent study that found that there is a “significant relationship” between the reading ability of students and their success in other fields of study (Churchwell, 2009, p. viii). Although this study was focusing more on reading scores, such as those on a standardized test, and scores in the other subject areas, the findings are still applicable. Reading is one of the few skills that is necessary for achievement in every subject area. Based on these results, if students enjoy reading and continue to improve their reading ability, they will also succeed in other subjects.

Additionally, I wanted to know if students enjoyed reading outside of school or not. There were equal numbers of students who enjoyed reading outside of the class and those who did not enjoy reading outside of the class. There was also a large number of students who chose sometimes as their answer. For the most part students enjoyed reading outside of the classroom because they got to choose what they wanted to read. This information is important to me as a future teacher because it indicates to me that perhaps I could stimulate more student interest and activity if I allow students to work with me in designing curriculum. Some students also claimed to enjoy reading outside of school because it was seen as an alternative to boredom. For students who only like to read sometimes their most common answers were that it was because reading was difficult for them, especially in a distracting environment, such as their home. Students who do not like to read outside of school claimed that it was mostly because they had no time. What all this information suggests to me is that perhaps reading in school is going to be the only time that students are truly able to read. Perhaps outside of the classroom they have a difficult home life or they have other responsibilities such as a job or a sport. As a teacher, I need to be aware that students may not always be able to read outside of the classroom and provide them the opportunity to read in my own classroom. I need to create a stimulating environment that allows the students to focus on reading.

When I asked students overall, why they liked to read, some of the students who responded yes claimed that it was because they were able to escape this world and take refuge in another one. This paralleled a vast amount of the comments made by the GATE students about their imaginational experiences. The gifted GATE girls claimed that when they read they experienced an “[i]maginational intensity” that allowed them to visit the worlds created through the words on the page (Stutler, 2011, p.30). In a sense, “the girls saw, heard, smelled, and even tasted through the pages and words in a book” (Stutler, 2011, p.30). From my own personal experience, I know that I often used to describe my reading experiences as an escape from reality because I would get so caught up in what I was reading and imagining that the real world would vanish. It would reappear sometime later, almost abruptly, as I realized I was just reading. This aspect of reading is critically important because it allows the student a safe place in which to experience the world around them. They are able to learn by the characters actions and mistakes and grow personally, applying what they learned on the pages to real life. I also think that reading allows the students to expand their imaginations that is vital to the present day world. We need intelligent, imaginative young people in order to innovate and improve our world.

Overview

This study allowed me to get an in-depth understanding of my students at my internship high school. A lot of what I have learned will allow me to alter my teaching strategies not only in my current classroom but also in my future ones as well. Some of the biggest aspects that I will take away from this project is the importance of engaging the students in reading. Personally, I plan to allow the students to help me design the curriculum so that they can have some say and some interest in what we actually read. If students are invested in the reading material then they will be more engaged in class and this will help them to succeed in school overall. I also want to create a reading friendly environment for students where they can feel comfortable reading. The classroom may be the only opportunity these students will have the chance to read. Finally, I have discovered that good readers and people who like reading cannot simply be defined by categories of age and gender.

One aspect about my study that I wish I had changed was the number of students who I questioned. Because I only looked at my classrooms, I had a much more limited view of the students. If I ever perform a study like this again, I would hope to include more than just twenty-seven students so that I get a much broader, more comprehensive understanding of student readers. I know that this would mean a lot more information to synthesize and understand but I think reading is important enough to warrant such a thorough study. In addition, I would also change the questionnaire so that it was anonymous. When I originally gave out the questionnaire I intended to use student reading scores to compare with their answers. It was only after I gave the questionnaire that I realized I would not have access to any sort of reading scores. I believe that if I gave out an anonymous questionnaire perhaps students would feel more freedom to respond honestly. That is one drawback to the questionnaire. You cannot be sure if the students who are answering these questions are answering them truthfully or seriously.

Overall, I feel as though I have a better understanding of my students and their reading preferences. This knowledge will help me increase reading engagement and comprehension.

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