

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AWAKENING DORMANT READERS

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SPRING 2020

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Secondary Education
with honors in Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

This teacher inquiry explores how classroom practice impacts the reading experiences of students. By implementing three instructional strategies (choice, sharing, and teacher modeling), I consider how I can develop a reading community in my classroom. This research is relevant to teachers of English Language Arts as they design reading instruction in their own classes. As I incorporated these strategies, I recorded my experiences and collected data relevant to this study. Afterwards, I systematically analyzed this data and discovered that students' reading experiences are complex, diverse, and dependent on a range of factors.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Michelle Knotts for supporting me throughout this inquiry. She has been an integral part of this process from idea generation to submission. Thank you for providing me with resources, feedback, and encouragement throughout my teaching journey. I am so grateful for the immense patience and positivity you offered this “human becoming.” Dr. Whitney was also an instrumental part of this inquiry. Thank you for consistently answering my panicked emails with reassurance and support. I would also like to thank Karen Morris and Kelsey Jones for guiding me through the steps of inquiry. You both developed my understanding of teacher inquiry in ways that were fun, engaging, and calming.

I would also like to thank Dana Zuhlke, my mentor teacher at State College Area High School, for providing me with the freedom and resources to complete this inquiry in her classroom. From jotting down notes to talking through classroom challenges, Dana has been there with kindness, encouragement, and understanding. The community cultivated in this inquiry is in part a product of her presence in our shared classes from the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

To my fellow interns, thank you for your positivity and feedback throughout this process. I am eternally grateful for the support and friendship I was always sure to find in the intern office.

Lastly, I would like to thank my students, especially those who participated in my case study. Each of them has given me so much to reflect upon throughout this inquiry. I am so grateful for your willingness to explore these ideas in our classroom.

Chapter 1

Introduction

My research was catalyzed by my interactions with students and observations of their reading behaviors in the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year. In this section, I describe the key events that led me to conduct this inquiry. I also provide background information about my instructional context and outline the questions that guided by research.

Learning about My Readers

When I began my teaching internship at State College High School for the 2019-2020 school year, I was eager to discuss my favorite books with my students. One of the very first assignments the students received was to read *The Feeling of Power*, a short story by Isaac Asimov, and answer a few questions about what they'd read. As we passed out copies of the text, my mentor teacher and I were met with a rumble of groans and whispered complaints from the class. This negative response surprised me, but, as the school year went on, I learned that this was typical.

My Student teaching internship is through Penn State's Professional Development School. The Professional Development School (PDS) is a student teaching field placement that allows me to work alongside my mentor teacher for the entire 2019-20 school year. Through this program, I am working in a 10th grade classroom at State College Area High School. Because of this, I have gained insight regarding my students' attitudes towards reading from the moment they entered the classroom.

After students read *The Feeling of Power*, I was still eager to begin dissecting literature with my classes, but I was met with more challenges each time that reading arose in class. While I noticed that I had a few students who were avid readers, most were indifferent at best. When we assigned reading to be completed outside of class, there were many who did not actually do so. I felt I needed to assess this situation more deeply. At the very least, I didn't want to make the situation any worse. All of this left me wondering if and how I could understand more about students' negative perceptions of reading and how I might have a positive impact or even change these views.

In trying to spark my students' interest in reading, I looked deeper into what made reading so burdensome by speaking to students. Their responses were varied. For example, in my English 10 class, I had many students tell me they were bad at reading. I became interested in what made them feel this way and how that mindset impacted their reading. On the other end of the spectrum, I had students who were completing all of the required reading in addition to a variety of independent texts. I wondered why these students were approaching reading with such contrasting attitudes. What created this dissimilarity?

At the same time, I sought out various methods for reading instruction. My mentor teacher already implemented choice books, but I wondered about other ways that student choices could impact their reading experiences. I wanted to bring these texts into the classroom more often and theorized that, if students heard about one another's texts, they might I started to consider other factors such as the questions we asked about books, the way we framed reading, students' knowledge about how to read effectively, and their control and choice in what and how to read. In short, I thought about how my instruction, student learning experiences with reading, or something else hidden deeper that I hadn't considered yet might impact students' perceptions

of reading. All of this led me to pursue a variety of interventions that, hopefully, would encourage my students to read not only because they had to, but to read because they want to.

Context of Inquiry and Research Questions

This study took place during the 2019-20 school year at State College Area High School; the bulk of the data was collected for 10 weeks in an English 10 course. In tenth grade, there are two levels: Advanced and English 10. English 10 is a college-prep course with a range of students in each class. It meets every other day for ninety minutes. I taught two sections of English 10. My research takes the form of a case study, in which I examine the reading experiences of three English 10 students who've revealed negative perceptions of reading. This method of research "provides a context through which to deepen understanding of specific practices and the opportunity to explore practices differently" (Miles, 2015, p.313). This description aligns with my purposes in conducting research, as I aim to improve my instruction through inquiry.

To address these students' reading experiences through my teaching, I designed an inquiry that explored the following question:

- How can choice, sharing, and modeling encourage dormant readers in English 10 to become part of a community of readers (Miller, 2010, p. 28)?

The inquiry also focused on two additional sub-questions:

- What are the roles of choice, sharing, and modeling in creating a reading community?
- What is the impact of a reading community on dormant readers' perceptions and behaviors regarding reading?

This inquiry seeks to explore how classroom practices impact the reading habits of my students. I review literature pertinent to these ideas and analyze data collected during the implementation of three instructional strategies promoted in these sources. I use field notes, reflective journaling, and student work to collect findings and analyze these to consider their impact. Finally, I consider future avenues for research and potential implications for instruction.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

As you can see above, I encountered challenges in my classroom that I needed to investigate further. In order to explore students' reading attitudes and behaviors more deeply, I reviewed literature pertinent to these issues. The research reported below helped me to identify the three strategies I implemented in my inquiry: choice, sharing, and teacher modeling. In this section, I provide a research-based rationale for my inquiry, elaborate on the strategies I selected, and explain my reasons for choosing them.

Rationale for Study

Before encouraging my dormant readers to become part of a community of readers, I needed to understand why the end goal was so important. I knew reading was valuable, but why? To address this point, numerous studies (Cantrell et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2018; Wolters et al., 2014) support the belief that reading is vital for all students. Through reading, students gain insight into "self-identification, self-construction, and self-awareness, all of which aid them in the transition from childhood to adulthood" (Howard, 2011, p. 53). Conversely, when students devalue the importance of reading in their lives, "the decisions they make that shape their emerging identities will be negatively affected" (Cantrell et al, 2018, p. 425). In my classes, I noticed students diminishing the importance and value of reading, something that can significantly impact how students view themselves and the world around them.

Not only could my students explore identity through reading, but they also could develop skills that transfer to their real lives. Books can serve as “rehearsals for the real world” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 50) in which students prepare for and learn more about the situations they are bound to encounter beyond high school. As Beers & Probst (2017) beautifully describe, “the ultimate goal of reading is to become more than we are at the moment; to become better than we are now; to become what we did not even know we wanted to become” (p. 59). While my students viewed reading as vastly separate from their lives, I wanted them to see the ways in which reading could shape and support them.

Beyond personal benefits, reading is also vital in order for students to continue their education. Throughout adolescence, “reading becomes a basis for performance across a range of other academic subjects” (Wolters et al., 2014, p. 504). Students who read regularly become better readers, as “reading is a powerful means of developing reading comprehension ability, writing style, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling” (Krashen, 2004, p. 37 as cited by NCTE 2019).” Thus, reading consistently helps students develop skills necessary for success across content areas. To put it simply, if students do not learn to struggle through difficult texts in English class, they “will not be prepared for all the tough texts each of us will undoubtedly face from time to time” (Beers & Probst, 2017, p. 8). My efforts to support students’ reading habits in English class transfer to other classes, higher education, and career opportunities. These impacts underscore the importance of supporting dormant readers, as reading skills become a requirement for their future success.

While there are many benefits to be experienced from reading regularly, students can often find themselves in a negative cycle that deprives them of reading’s advantages and exacerbates the difficulty of engaging in consistent reading habits. This concept is exemplified

through Kelly Gallagher's "Reader's Death Spiral," (2009) in which "kids aren't reading and then are worse at reading because they aren't reading, and then they read less because it is hard and worse, and then they see themselves as non-readers" (p. 85). This process replicates much of what I was observing in my own classes. It is important that I intervened in some way, because, when students perform poorly over time, they are "less likely to engage in a domain, persist in the face of setbacks, and choose to engage when they are free not to do so" (Wolters et al., 2014, p. 524). I had already seen these behaviors in my students' reading habits, as they stopped reading at the first obstacle and avoided reading whenever possible. However, the reverse is also true, as, through consistent practice, "Reading gets easier, which, in turn, invites more reading" (Gallagher, 2015, p. 57). I needed to explore ways in which I could end the negative cycle my students were experiencing and instead invite them to read more often.

My students needed to read more, but I needed to be intentional in designing instruction that provided this opportunity. Readicide, as coined by Kelly Gallagher (2009), is "the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (p. 2). If we believe that schools and classroom practices can discourage students from becoming avid readers, then we cannot place all of the blame on poverty, parental influence, second language issues, overabundant extracurricular activities, and alternative entertainment options as the only source of students' disinterest in reading. Readicide points to school as one of the most pivotal influences in a students' reading experiences because school is where books are discussed and students have the time and place to read them. While there is potential for school to encourage and cultivate lifelong readership, school often "creates instruction that values the trivial at the expense of the meaningful" and, in turn, "spills over and damages our students' chances of developing recreational reading habits" (Gallagher, 2009, p.

60). In my efforts to inspire dormant readers, I had to recognize the impact of my teaching practices. While students may begin school with some interest in reading, by the time students enter high school “years of traditional reading instruction focused on comprehension worksheets, book reports, and whole-class novel units made the experience of reading boring and painful.” (Miller, 2010, p. 33). I needed to find alternatives, and research led me to identify three strategies (choice, sharing, and teacher modeling) that can positively impact dormant readers. In order to explore their potential, I systematically implemented these in my classroom.

The strategies I select to revitalize reading in my classroom aim to make reading relevant and valuable for my students. As Donalyn Miller (2010) writes, “Reading must be an endeavor that: has personal value to students...students see themselves as capable of doing...is free from anxiety...is modeled by someone they like, respect, trust, and want to emulate.” (Miller, 2010, p. 36). While instruction can diminish students’ interest in reading, it is possible for teachers to reframe and revitalize reading in their classrooms. In order to cultivate lifelong readership in my classroom, I implement choice, sharing, and teacher modeling, all of which aim to invite dormant readers into a community of readers.

Dormant Readers to Community of Readers

When looking more closely at my students, I had to consider how I would refer to those who are averse to reading. I align myself with Donalyn Miller (2010), who argues that terms such as “struggling readers” and “reluctant readers” are negative and limiting because they leave no hope for growth (Miller, 2010, p. 24). In choosing students to focus on for my case study, it was especially important to me that I respect them as individuals and not view them from a

deficit perspective. This starts with choosing terminology that honors where students are coming from and offers room for growth. Miller proposes “developing readers” to signify those who experience difficulty in understanding what they read and “dormant readers” to denote those who are unmotivated and uninterested in reading. These terms suggest that students have the potential to become avid readers in the future (Miller, 2010, p. 28). For the purposes of my case study, I refer to my students as “dormant readers,” as I, like Miller, appreciate the inherent reader within all students.

While my students may begin as dormant readers, I want them to develop the positive attitudes and skills that can make them successful readers. One way that I thought about accomplishing this was through community. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)’s Position Statement on Independent Reading (2019) states “Effective independent reading practices include...support within a reading community that includes teachers and students” (NCTE 2019). In my inquiry, this community is not only made up of students but also includes myself as a teacher and fellow reader. This type of community can support both the development of reading skills and one’s identity, potentially sustaining reading habits into the future. Avid, adolescent readers “see being an active member of a community of readers as an important part of their identity” (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 184). Young people must be part of a community that values reading in order for lifelong readership to occur (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 189). I wanted my students’ reading habits to extend beyond my classroom and sustain them into the future. In order for my students to read regularly, our classroom environment needed to be one in which students find a reading community.

To encourage readership in my own classroom, then, I needed to implement community-building practices. There are myriad ways to approach this issue, but, for the purposes of my

inquiry, I selected three that fit best in the context of my classes: Independent, choice reading, sharing, and teacher modeling. Each can establish a community of readers and has the potential to awaken dormant readers.

Independent, Choice Reading

To create a reading community in my classroom, I intentionally implemented choice reading. As Donalyn Miller (2010) writes, “embracing their inner reader starts with students selecting their own books to read” (p. 23). I wanted my students to identify as readers and saw potential in choice. Much of the research in this area (Beers & Probst, 2017; Gallagher, 2009; Miller, 2010) suggests that one of the most significant factors in cultivating lifelong readership among students is choice. In order for students to become avid readers and improve their skills they must read regularly. For this to happen, “much, perhaps most, of what they read must be what they choose to read” (Beers & Probst, 2017, p. 124). This may be because students themselves report “that their favorite books and the ones they are most likely to finish are the ones they pick out themselves” (Beers & Probst, 2017, p. 140). Because I observed that my students did not complete much of the assigned reading, I wondered how giving students the opportunity to choose texts might encourage them to sustain their reading.

Choice can be beneficial to students for many reasons. Choice “motivates, engages, and reaches a wide variety of readers” (NCTE, 2019). When students are able to self-select texts, it “strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, and promotes a positive attitude toward reading by valuing the reader and giving him or her control” (Miller, 2010, p. 23). In my inquiry, I wondered how these benefits of choice might be felt among my students. By

empowering my students through choice, I might also find positive impacts on their motivation, while “readers without power to make their own choices are unmotivated” (Miller, 2010, p. 23).

With control comes improved performance on reading tasks. Students who are able to take control over their ability to do well on reading tasks “exhibited superior reading comprehension than their peers who felt less control over these outcomes” (Wolters et al., 2014, p. 526).

Students have been shown to “demonstrate more reading and higher levels of reading motivation in schools and classrooms which provide extended time for independent reading, free choice of texts, and, perhaps most importantly, texts to which students can personally relate.” (Troyer, 2017, p. 6) As I sought to encourage reading among students, I considered how they might respond to these factors in our classroom.

At the same time, I had to be cognizant of some potential challenges in implementing choice reading. As Gilson et al. note, struggling readers may tend to choose books they perceive as easier. While it is important that students choose books they are able to read independently, Gilson et al.’s findings suggest that teachers must also be mindful of what students are choosing to read and support them in finding grade-level texts (Gilson et al, 2018, p. 519). In my inquiry, I explore some of the decision-making processes behind my students’ self-selected texts and consider how these align or not with grade-level standards. While I agree that grade-level texts are important, I also wonder if students need to first find a book that interests them, even if it isn’t on grade-level.

While thinking about the impact and potential challenges regarding choice, I also found that the time and place of choice reading play significant roles in the strategy’s effectiveness. Kelly Gallagher (2009) describes three key ingredients to building a reader, in which they “must have interesting books to read, must have time to read books inside of school, must have a place

to read” (p. 84). In allowing my students to self-select texts, I was providing them access to books that interested them, but I also had to incorporate time during the class period for choice reading. NCTE (2019) advises that English Language Arts teachers “provide protected opportunities within our classrooms that allow students to increase their volume of reading through independent reading of self-selected texts.” This is addressed in my inquiry through sustained silent reading (SSR). This practice is often placed at the beginning of the class period, but the amount of time allotted for SSR varies. Donalyn Miller (2010) provides her students with independent reading time for the first fifteen minutes of class (p. 50), but other research (Webster, 2017, p. 69) advises teachers to start by adding 20 minutes of SSR to their classes. In my inquiry, I allow my students 10-15 minutes, depending on the lesson planned for that day. For my classes, this time for choice reading within the class period ensured that they were able to read the books they’d selected, as my students previously noted difficulties in completing homework due to extracurriculars, family needs, and other factors beyond school.

Sharing

In addition to choice reading, sharing is another strategy I use to encourage my students to read. After placing students in choice book clubs, Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle (2018) note, “Exposing them to good books and giving them time to read them were not enough to awaken them from dormancy. Having to meet with their peers each week motivated them to get going” (p. 53). I wondered how my students might respond if I incorporated more opportunities for social interaction with their peers based on choice reading. While reading may typically be considered a solitary activity, Hebb and Axiotis (2000) advise teachers and students to

“understand that reading is a social act that takes place in a socially-constructed context” (p. 23).

My students had remarked that they found reading boring, and I observed their engagement and motivation increase during active, social activities. I wondered if their perception of reading might change if they could view reading as something active and social, as opposed to passive and solitary.

In addition to my students’ active and social dispositions, sharing could also serve as a form of accountability for students’ reading. Accountability can be difficult to balance; “if the teacher infuses the recreational reading experience with too much accountability - chapter questions, worksheets, double-entry journals, - then the experience ceases to be recreational. However, if students are never held to any accountability, many of them will not start reading.” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 82). As I noted previously, the schoolwork that accompanies reading instruction can exacerbate students’ negative perceptions of reading, but teachers must have some way of monitoring progress. This issue in accountability stems from “the invisibility of reading,” forcing teachers to “find ways to peek inside the minds of our students” (Roberts, 2018, p. 109). In my inquiry, I use sharing as a way to ensure that my students are completing their choice books in an informal, social manner. I consider how my students’ reading habits and perceptions shift when their assignments encourage them to interact with each other, rather than submit worksheets and other written materials to the teacher.

Lastly, sharing may also prove beneficial due to the power of peer influence. Alongside parents and teachers, “peers may provide an increasingly salient and notable influence on adolescents’ academic functioning” (Wolters et al., 2014, p. 526). I attempt to utilize these effects with regard to reading. To do so, my students would need to engage socially with peers who also value reading. Peer interaction may be “key to developing the perception of oneself as

a reader,” as students “learn, through social interaction with other readers, that reading is entertaining and stimulating” (Strommen and Mates, 2004, p. 189). In my inquiry, I consider what happens when my students learn more about each other’s reading habits. If they find that their peers are engaging with their self-selected texts, my students might become more motivated to read their own. As Wolters et al. (2014) reports, struggling readers have expressed that “being a good reader would help them better fit in with their peers” (p. 526). While I do not believe that our aim should be for students to “fit in” with one another, I do consider how the drive to identify with each other could motivate students to replicate positive behaviors found in their peers. These relationships have been shown to motivate students to “obtain and read books,” especially “narrative and informational books” (Gilson et al., 2018, p. 516). I wondered how sharing as an intentional practice in my inquiry might garner similar results. Miller writes that in order for reading instruction to be successful for students, it must be “modeled by someone they like, respect, trust, and want to emulate” (Miller, 2010, p. 36). Students may view their peers in this positive light and create consistent reading habits based on these relationships.

Alternatively, as I note later in the description of t my third instructional strategy, the teacher is another individual students can turn to as a model for their reading. To make reading a social activity in my classroom, I implement various forms of sharing in my inquiry. These opportunities to share reading experiences model the practices of avid, adolescent readers, who have reported that they “regularly interact around books with other members of their social circle who love to read” (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 183). For these students, “being an active member of a community of readers [is] an important part of their identity” (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 184). I sought to create this community of readers in my own classroom through various modes of sharing.

One form of sharing I use is adapted from Wilhelm's (2008) "literary letters." In *You Gotta Be The Book*, Wilhelm describes this practice in which students write and exchange letters to their classmates about the book they are reading. After receiving a letter, students are encouraged to respond to one another. This practice provides students with an authentic audience for their writing, exposes them to peers' texts, and holds them accountable for their reading through social interaction (p. 62). I adapt this method in my own practice and explore its effects in my inquiry.

Along with writing, I also use verbal discussion as a tool for this strategy. Teachers must "realize that reading is a socially constructed activity and plan opportunities for students to talk about the books they are reading in a variety of ways" (McKool and Gespass, 2009, p. 271). In my inquiry, I provide these opportunities after SSR. During this time, "teachers should follow up with discussion -- a natural, after-reading activity for most lifelong readers" (Duncan, 2010, p. 92). My post-reading discussion is typically informal and focused on a particular prompt. This discussion should allow students to "share insights from their own personal reading" (McKool and Gespass, 2009, p. 271). My discussion prompts (see Appendix A) ask students to share these personal reading experiences, both positive and negative. Coupled with written interactions, these conversations allow me to investigate how sharing impacts my students.

Teacher Modeling

In addition to choice reading and sharing, I also implement teacher modeling in my inquiry. While my other strategies are focused on what students' actions, teacher modeling places greater responsibility on teachers and their classroom behaviors. Literature in this area

(Duncan, 2010; Gilson et al., 2018; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Strommen & Mates, 2004) contends that teachers play a significant role in affecting students' reading habits. Duncan (2010) puts it simply, "Teachers can't expect students to be excited for reading if they themselves are not personally engaged in reading for pleasure" (pp. 91-2). In my inquiry, I consider my own reading habits more deeply and incorporate these practices in the classroom with my students.

Teachers' reading habits have been shown to influence instructional practices. As McKool and Gespass found, teachers who read more than 30 minutes per day show greater use of instructional practices associated with best practice when compared to their peers who read less than 10 minutes per day. These teachers "hold guided reading lessons, use literature circles, hold oral comprehension discussions, let students participate in periods of sustained silent reading, share insights from their own personal reading, and recommend books to students" (McKool and Gespass, 2009, p. 271). I incorporate some of these practices, such as sustained silent reading and sharing reading experiences with students, in my inquiry. As I looked more deeply at my own habits, I incorporated independent choice reading and sharing into my classroom. McKool and Gespass (2009) suggest that "not only do teachers who value reading the most let students read self-selected materials for extended periods of time more often, but they also allow, encourage, and plan time for students to talk about the books that they are reading" (pp. 271-2). The strategies I use in my inquiry allow students to self-select texts, read them in class, and discuss these books with one another.

As I implemented sharing and choice reading, I wondered how teacher modeling might increase the effectiveness of these other strategies. A potential drawback of sustained silent reading is that students may not use this time effectively to read their books, but teachers can mediate this by reading alongside students. When teachers "adopt an enthusiastic attitude

toward reading and openly discuss their personal reading lives with students,” they may find that students read more diligently during SSR (Duncan, 2010, pp. 91-2). I was interested in finding if similar results could be garnered from reading with my students. To enhance the effectiveness of SSR in my inquiry, I model choice reading with my students during this time.

Beyond SSR, teacher modeling can also supplement sharing, another strategy implemented in my inquiry. To do so, teachers might share book recommendations or simply mention a recent, positive reading experience, something that can potentially change “the perspectives and beliefs of nonreaders” (Duncan, 2010, pp. 91-2). One way I accomplish this is by sharing my recent reading experiences or responses to the post-reading questions after SSR. This follows Duncan’s (2010) recommendation that teachers “openly discuss their personal reading lives with students” (p. 92). By doing so, I also position myself as a fellow reader in the hopes that this will encourage students to join me in this practice. Talking with students about books and providing recommendations can “help build relationships with students around reading and influence their reading motivation” (Gilson et al., 2018, p. 519). If students are to develop interest in reading, it is important that teachers serve as “reading advisors” who assist students in choosing books for both in-school and out-of-school reading (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015, p. 3). In my inquiry, I sought to position myself as a resource and fellow reader. Through modeling, I aimed to cultivate a stronger relationship with my students while encouraging them to develop consistent reading habits.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study is aligned with the frameworks of teacher inquiry. Dana and Yendel-Hoppey (2014) describe this type of research as a process that includes: “posing questions or ‘wonderings,’ collecting data to gain insights into their wonderings, analyzing the data along with reading relevant literature, making changes in practice based on new understandings developed during inquiry, and sharing findings with others” (p. 12). Teacher inquiry is conducted by classroom teachers and allows educators to learn with and from their students. As a representation of this method, my research follows teacher inquiry guidelines and seeks to inform my own practice through what I am experiencing in the classroom. This inquiry focuses on the following question:

- How can choice, sharing, and modeling encourage dormant readers in English 10 to become part of a community of readers (Miller, 2009, p. 28)?

The inquiry also explores two additional sub-questions:

- What are the roles of choice, sharing, and modeling in creating a reading community?
- What is the impact of a reading community on dormant readers’ perceptions and behaviors regarding reading?

This inquiry seeks to improve my own teaching practice by using case studies to explore the impact of specific practices geared towards students’ reading experiences. I draw from the case study framework as outlined in prior research (Miles, 2015; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014; Harling 2002) by focusing on a few selected cases to better understand my classroom context. This method is especially well-suited to my research, as it aims to “learn about a unique phenomenon,” that is, students avoiding and resisting reading in my classroom (Harling 2002).

Additionally, case studies “explore, contextualise and theorise practice” (Miles, 2015), and my inquiry is particularly focused on the practices I implement in my classroom. This type of research follows a bonded unit in a local community and explores “interactions, communications, relationships and practices between the case and the wider world and vice versa” (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014, p. 8). Similarly, my inquiry implements specific practices and considers how these strategies affect specific students in two sections of a course in a particular context, State High College Area High School. While this inquiry is bound by the specifics of case study, I also consider some implications of these findings for other teachers and myself in future classes.

In my inquiry, I implement three instructional strategies (choice, sharing, and teacher modeling) and engage in a systematic inquiry to explore how these affect the reading behaviors of three of my students. I chose these students based on classroom observations and interactions throughout the 2019/2020 school year. Finally, I collect data using field notes, reflective journaling, and student work and analyze these artifacts both formatively and summatively.

Context

This data was collected during the 2019-20 school year at State College Area High School (State High). The school is located in a college town in the center of Pennsylvania. State College, Pennsylvania can be described as a blend of small city/town and rural. The district is well-funded by the community and its tax base, with only 16.5% of the district’s students are described as “economically disadvantaged” and 10.5% receive special education services. The district has minimal racial diversity; 80.75% of its students are White, 2.4% are African

American, 3.49% are Hispanic, 5.08% are Multi-racial, and 8.02% are Asian (State College Area School District, 2020).

I came to State College High School as a teacher intern through Penn State's Professional Development School (PDS). This program is based in teacher-inquiry that provides pre-service English teachers with a full school year internship, working with their students and mentor teachers over the course of an academic year.

I co-taught two sections of English 10, one with 20 students and one with 24 students. The former had three students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), two for learning disabilities and one for an emotional disability, and the latter had seven students with IEPs, five for learning disabilities and two for emotional disabilities. Other classroom variables were similar to district statistics. Each of my students filled out a permission form that allowed me to use their work in my inquiry. I saw these students every other day for 90 minutes according to State College High School's A-B Block schedule. Of the 44 students described, I selected three participants based on their identities as dormant readers, not other demographics outlined above.

Participants

While there is research (Wolters et al., 2014; De Naeghel et al., 2014; Troyer, 2017) to suggest that racial, socio-economic and other demographics of students play a part in their reading experience, those were not factors that I considered in my selection of these students. Many students in my 10th grade English classes voiced negative perceptions of reading, and I chose three of those students to focus on specifically for my inquiry. These students were selected based on interactions I'd had with them in the first few weeks of school and ongoing

conversations and experiences with them related to reading. I chose a female student and two male students in English 10. For the purposes of my inquiry, I selected students based on my observations and interactions with them during the 2019/2020 school year. I selected a female student from one section and two male students who were in the same section. These students, in particular, clearly expressed negative attitudes towards reading, an area in which I wanted further insight. In order to maintain the privacy of these students, I am using pseudonyms for each of them.

Emily (a pseudonym) was one of the first students to voice a negative attitude towards reading. In the first week of school, she commented that she “hated reading.” As the year went on, Emily repeated these sentiments, sometimes saying that she couldn’t read at all. However, she does not have any diagnosed reading disabilities, and it was clear from Emily’s work that, when she completed the reading, she was capable of thoughtful responses. She was able to read aloud in class when asked and completed in-class reading assignments at or above the level of other students in her section. I wondered, then, why she was so convinced not only that she hated reading but that she couldn’t do it. During a pre-reading activity before our class reading of *Monster*, Emily handed in a poem she wrote about her distaste for reading. While Emily always completed her work, she continued to voice complaints about reading, becoming one of my most vocal dormant readers.

Jason (pseudonym) seemed to avoid reading as much as possible. He receives IEP accommodations for a specific learning disability in math and writing. According to his IEP, Jason’s reading performance is commensurate with his peers and has improved his reading comprehension over the years. While Jason’s IEP accommodations are not directed towards his reading ability, I was mindful of these factors in my inquiry. During in-class reading, I noticed

Jason consistently taking the bathroom pass, talking to his neighbors, and staring blankly at the book. At the same time, Jason volunteered to read aloud when given the opportunity to do so during class. From my preliminary observations, it seemed that Jason was averse to silent reading in particular. As a result, his grades suffered whenever reading was a requirement. In order to improve his performance in class, I wanted to explore how Jason might be impacted by the practices that I explored as part of my inquiry.

Alex (pseudonym), too, shared a strong distaste for reading. Early in the year, Alex told me he never reads. When reading in class, Alex shared his abhorrence for the activity through audible sighs and complaints to his neighbors. I asked him about these behaviors, and he replied that he simply “hated reading.” Like Emily, Alex showed strong ability when he completed the reading. He was a leader in small group work and displayed comprehension and fluency when asked to read a passage in class. However, he was honest in telling me that he had not read our first whole-class text, *Persepolis*, for homework. Because of the discrepancy between Alex’s reading ability and behaviors, I was especially interested in how these interventions might impact him.

Instructional Strategies

To encourage reading among my students, I explored various strategies that have been shown to have positive effects in prior research (Gallagher, 2009; Beers & Probst, 2017; Gilson et al, 2018). As I considered these possibilities, I wanted to choose interventions that resonated best with my students and classroom context. This led me to select and implement the following three strategies: choice, modeling, and sharing.

Choice

First, I prioritized independent, choice reading. When I entered the English 10 classroom, students were tasked with reading one choice text per marking period. However, there was no time allotted for reading during the block, students did not discuss their texts with one another, and there was little guidance in selecting a text. At the end of the marking period, students were asked to submit a Google Form response that asked a few open-ended questions about the text they selected.

In order to look more closely at the impact of choice as part of this inquiry, I expanded this to include sustained silent reading (SSR) at the beginning of the block, a visit to the library to find choice texts, and in-class opportunities for students to respond to the reading. I wanted students to both have a voice in what they were reading, while also being held accountable by these in-class structures. Our work with choice texts also supported the other interventions: modeling and sharing. I implemented choice reading to explore how self-selecting texts and reading them among peers could influence students' reading habits and experiences.

Modeling

In addition to choice, I also modeled my own independent reading for my students. I posted what I would be reading next, had just finished, and was currently reading on a bulletin board in the classroom space. I updated this each time I finished a book, typically occurring each week. Additionally, I read along with my students during independent reading time. In the literature I reviewed as well as my own beliefs about teaching, I have found that engaging in

activities alongside students can be especially powerful. Since the goal was for students to read, I felt it best that I, too, publicly engage in these behaviors. I wanted to build a community of readers, and that community's strength depended largely on my own participation in it.

I also shared what I was reading informally through conversation with students. I took advantage of each opportunity to share my own reading experiences with students. After independent reading, students were frequently invited to share what was happening in their books. I, too, shared what I was reading at this time. During our library visit, I also showed students books that I thought they might be interested in and pointed out texts I especially enjoyed reading. Through these strategies, I did my best to emphasize my honest belief in reading and position myself as a fellow reader in the classroom. By modeling my personal reading behaviors for students, I wanted to explore the impact of teacher influence in developing a reading community and encouraging students to identify as fellow readers.

Sharing

Lastly, I attempted to cultivate a reading community by inviting students to share their independent reading with one another. I noticed that peer influence and social interaction were especially impactful for my students. By developing opportunities for students to share their reading with one another, I hoped to create community and capitalize on positive peer influence as a resource.

This intervention strategy took multiple forms. After independent reading at the beginning of class, students were invited to share what they were reading with the class. At this time, I would offer possible questions for students to answer either with those seated near them

or in a whip around, inviting all students to briefly share consecutively one after another.

Sometimes, these questions asked students to simply share what was happening in their book and their thoughts on it, while other questions encouraged students to connect their text to their personal lives and background knowledge. See Appendix A for a complete list of questions used for this strategy. This form of sharing was intended to be an informal, low-pressure way of discussing choice books in class while also holding students accountable for their self-selected texts.

Additionally, students were asked to write two “literary letters” about their choice books (Wilhelm, 2008, p. 62). This concept comes from Wilhelm’s *You Gotta Be The Book* but is adapted to meet the needs of my students. These were brief letters that allowed students to personally describe what they were reading to another student. For the first letter, students were invited to share: the book they chose to read, why they chose it, any predictions they had about the book, and their favorite book they had ever read. This took the form of a hand-written letter distributed to a classmate. After being given a letter from a peer, students were able to respond and keep the correspondence going. The second letter took the form of an online discussion through Canvas, our class online teaching platform. Students wrote about their own book and commented on one other student’s post. This time, students were invited to sell their book to the class. They were invited to imagine themselves as booksellers and introduce the book with the aim of encouraging classmates to “buy” the book. Then, students commented on each other’s posts to ask questions, voice interest in the book, or explain why their book is a better choice. See Appendix B for more details about these assignments. My goal in implementing “literary letters” was to incorporate varied modes of sharing and explore how these influenced students’ reading habits and relationships.

Lastly, I created a strategy that I called “Choice Book Bingo.” This activity tasked students with filling out a bingo card by checking off peers’ books that fit the categories. For example, students had to find a peer’s book that was in a different genre than their own. As per typical bingo rules, students won when they had five squares checked off in a row. See Appendix C for a copy of the Bingo Card activity that I created. By framing sharing as a game, I provided students with an opportunity to interact and discuss books in an informal way. This activity encouraged students to move around the classroom while discussing books. As noted previously, my English 10 students work best when they can be active and social. For this reason, I thought framing these interactions about books as a game might improve engagement for students who would not normally be interested in learning about books. Each of the forms of sharing in my inquiry are meant to allow students a variety of opportunities to interact with one another about books. In this way, students could feel part of a larger community of readers.

Data Collection

The interventions described above provided one large source of data. In order to collect and explore each of these interventions and their effects, I utilized three sources of data collection: field notes, teacher reflective journal, and documents (student work). These were chosen because they aligned best with my classroom interventions, allowing me to collect data without disrupting our class time. Additionally, these forms of data collection each provide insights for exploring my inquiry questions.

Student Work

Throughout my inquiry, I compiled and analyzed coursework from the three students in the case study. In particular, I examined all work related to independent, choice reading. This included materials from the Choice Book Bingo activity and students' Literary Letters. I also compiled any work that reflected students' perceptions of reading and themselves as readers from the beginning of the year. These materials include Sadie's poem referenced earlier. These methods were implemented with the intent of collecting data in a non-disruptive and authentic manner. I have found that these work best for my students and allowed me to look more closely at the impact of my practice. Throughout this process, students submitted work and were evaluated as is typical for our class.

Field Notes

Each time my students engaged in one of the above intervention strategies, I paid special attention to my selected students and took note of what they were doing. For example, to evaluate in-class choice reading, I created a chart which outlined each minute of SSR. Then, my mentor teacher wrote what each of the selected students were doing during each minute. This included turning pages, looking at the clock, whispering to a neighbor, eating, and other behaviors. This allowed me to consider how students were using in-class SSR and the effectiveness of this strategy.

I also took field notes as possible during Choice Book Bingo and post-SSR sharing. These notes outline how my participants engaged with their peers across different opportunities.

Through these notes, I was able to gauge whether or not these strategies were working with my students and how I might modify these to improve their impact.

Teacher Reflective Journal

Along the way, I wrote in my teacher journal about my experiences and what I was noticing about these students. After class, I noted my own perceptions of class that day and what I noticed about my students. This journal served as a way to compile my own reactions and observe how these evolved over the course of the inquiry. As this inquiry relates to my teaching practice, the teacher journal created space for me to reflect on reading pedagogy and evaluate my interventions as they were implemented.

Data Analysis

I primarily analyzed my data using a combination of coding and memoing, as described by Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014). Coding is a systematic approach to break large compilations of data down into manageable segments. Specifically, I used codes related to participants and instructional strategies to analyze the data. For example, I charted the instances in which each student arises in my journal and field notes. Then, I noted patterns, questions, and possible findings in the margins. Similarly, I used codes to analyze student work and to make sense of participants' responses to the interventions.

I incorporated memoing by expanding on these notes in more detail and interpreting the patterns that emerged. I also used memoing to analyze my field notes, journals, and student work across participants and my English 10 students overall. In the next chapter, I present more details

about my summative analysis methods and share findings by looking at each instructional intervention and exploring how the strategy impacted each of my participants.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis Findings

This inquiry explores the impact of instruction on dormant readers' behaviors and attitudes surrounding reading. As noted in the methods section, I utilized field notes and student work to analyze my students reading behaviors and identify emerging patterns during this intervention. In addition, I reflected in my journal to investigate my understanding of these students and consider what I was experiencing in class. This chapter explores some of the findings discovered through systematic formative and summative data analysis methods.

Choice Reading

To record findings from choice reading, I created an organizer to note what each participant was doing for each minute of SSR. Because I was reading along with the class during this time, my mentor teacher sat behind students to chart these notes. Afterwards, I reviewed the notes and considered the effectiveness of this strategy. I used memoing to elaborate on what these notes and other findings revealed to me. Additionally, my journal also functioned as a data collection method for this strategy, as I used my journal to reflect on my personal experiences with choice reading after class. My analysis of the field notes and memos about choice readings led to some surprising discoveries about timing and choice.

The Importance of Time and Timing

Choice reading took place for 10-15 minutes at the start of our class period. I initiated choice reading by taking out a timer and asking students to take out their books. The visual timer was meant to ensure that I gave students the full amount of time to read their texts. Once I saw that the majority of students had books and were ready to begin, I set the timer and took my place reading at the front of the classroom. Meanwhile, my mentor took field notes on choice reading in the back of the room. Analyzing these notes provided some insights about how effectively this time was used.

For all of my participants, the first few minutes of choice reading could be characterized as a settling-in period, especially in the beginning of my inquiry. My early field notes revealed to me that little choice reading took place during this time. The table below shares field notes from the first three minutes of a typical, in-class choice reading period:

Table 1: Choice Reading Field Notes from Minutes 1-3

Minute of choice reading	Emily	Alex	Jason
1	No book out, then got it out while talking with neighbor	Licking ice cream cone	Out of classroom, returned with food
2	Still talking, drinking, phone in front of book, then put it away when she saw me [mentor teacher] looking at her	Looks down at book (his arm is blocking my view from the pages), Appears to be reading	Taking out book, reading, responding to neighboring student, opening muffin
3	Reading, looking at neighboring student, reading	Moves his hand, which was in the center of the book	Reading and eating, not sure how much actual reading is happening

As the table shows, the first 1-3 minutes in this instance did not include much reading for my participants. On this particular day, Jason had come into class late, missing the first few minutes. While this was not habitual, I realized in reviewing these notes that, if students did come in late, they missed this important period of our class and potentially distracted other students in their reading.

A large portion of these notes show Jason and Alex eating while they read, something they are allowed to do during our class. I considered that this could potentially distract some of their reading. Conversely, eating while reading may benefit their reading experience by helping them relax and feel more motivated to read. If my students view the choice reading time as a relaxing, informal period, they may be more motivated to read. Because students are still reading as they eat, I interpret these notes as showing that they can concurrently read and eat, but these findings also raise questions about whether or not students read slower or lose some of the time devoted to choice reading. Still, the slow transition from socializing to reading does indicate that these minutes of choice reading may not always be used effectively. Emily and Jason, especially, were slow to take out books and transition from socializing to reading on this particular day. For all three students, choice reading does not actually begin until minute three.

After the first three minutes, my field notes show that students did begin reading more steadily. The table below depicts my notes from minutes 3-10 of choice reading.

Table 2: Choice Reading Field Notes from Minutes 4-10

Time	Emily	Alex	Jason
4	Reading	Appears to still be on the same page	More reading seems to be happening, still eating (pulling pieces off muffin)
5	Reading	His head is still down; it's not clear whether or not he's changed pages	Reading (head is moving across graphics in novel), page turned
6	Turns page, still reading	Holds up his book to read; attention is on the right side as it has been; not sure if it's still the same page Folds book over, appears to finish page and turn it over - yes, he's on the left side now	Reading and eating
7	Reading	Still looking at book	Reading and eating, glanced around the room
8	Turns page, reading	Still looking at book	Reading and eating, page turned
9	Reading	Briefly looks at neighboring student, Seems to go back to reading	Reading
10	Reading	Reading	Drinking and reading

As the table above shows, my students spent minutes 3-10 reading more steadily. While there are brief instances when students glance at neighbors and eat during this time, students are almost completely engaged in reading by the end of the 10 minutes.

My analysis of these field notes led me to reevaluate the timing and introduction of choice reading. I note in my journal that by the time students are fully engaged in the reading, they are asked to stop, as choice reading only takes place for 10-15 minutes. I began to wonder if 10 minutes of choice reading at the beginning of the class period might be too little time for my students to truly engage with their texts. This led me to consider expanding choice reading beyond 10 minutes. I also wondered how I might improve engagement in the beginning of choice reading and shorten the 1-3 minutes of transitioning revealed in my notes. While placing choice reading at the start of class was meant to ensure that we would have time for this activity, this time period may have been negatively impacted by students' transition into the English classroom. If students came in late or were eager to talk to friends, it was difficult to transition into silent reading at the start of the period. I wondered how I could introduce choice reading in a way that mitigated some of these issues.

While I could not always expand the time devoted to choice reading, I began giving students 15 minutes rather than 10 whenever possible. If I saw students especially engaged in their books, I added 3-5 minutes onto the timer, depending on the lesson scheduled for that day . In order to mitigate the transition period before choice reading, I began introducing choice reading with greater enthusiasm. Rather than asking students to take out their books, I asked them to wave them in the air. Once a student did this, I would thank them by name. Sometimes, I would acknowledge that a student had a new book or a text I was familiar with. As this practice became a routine, my students began to respond. I noted that, as I added this in more often, students began asking for me to acknowledge their book. If I didn't see their book at first, they sought to be recognized by calling for my attention or holding their book higher above their heads. While there were still occasions in which students whispered to neighbors or forgot to

bring books to class, the transition period from not reading to reading was lessened from 3 minutes to less than 2 minutes, and I imagine some of that can be attributed to this motivational and grounding practice.

While these field notes and other observations show that students did not always use the in-class reading time effectively, I also journaled about instances in which students shared their appreciation of reading during the class period. Alex especially wanted to read more often during the class period. I wrote about this in my journal, saying, “Today we read choice books for 15 minutes. As I was setting the timer, Alex asked if we could read for 20.” I was shocked to hear this. My early observations of Alex show him complaining about reading assignments and avoiding them as much as possible. This interaction marked a change in how he approached in-class reading. A few days later, I noted, “Alex is ahead with his work, so he asked if he could read his choice book instead of working further ahead of the class. I was shocked. He said he wouldn’t read at home and he knows he’ll actually read in class, so he wanted to use class time to read.” I found this interaction especially profound because it revealed the importance of giving my students a time and place to read. While Alex still was not eager to read outside of school, he came to value our time to read in class. Furthermore, this interaction also reveals that Alex could be building reading stamina. My inquiry began with choice reading for 10 minutes, but, eventually, Alex wanted to expand that to 20 minutes and return to it later in the class period. What once incited moans and groans was now welcomed and even invited.

Jason shared a similar stance during a conversation I had with him about choice reading. Talking about his choice book, he said, “I only read this at school. I won’t read at home. I have better things to do.” While Jason’s comments reveal that his attitude towards reading is still primarily negative, he does point towards the value of providing a time and place to read in

school. My students entered this inquiry not wanting to read outside of school, and Jason and Alex shared that this was still happening. Jason, while not eager to read, needed the time in school to devote to his book. By prioritizing choice reading in class, I began to see a shift in how my students approached in-class reading.

The Illusion and Constraints of Choice

I began my inquiry excited to see what happens when my students self-select texts that interest them. However, my findings revealed the limitations of implementing choice texts in school. I noticed this especially when I accompanied a group of students to renew their choice books at the school library. On the way, I talked to some of my students about their choice books and thoughts on choice reading. During this conversation, Alex shared, “You call them choice books, but I didn’t choose to read it.” This statement was blunt but accurate. I wasn’t sure how to respond. No matter how much I want to implement choice in my classroom, I am still assigning students something to do. They can choose what to read, but that is where their choice ends due to the parameters of school. I continue to reflect on this interaction often and still wonder how to navigate the illusion of choice Alex is pointing out.

My students self-selected texts in intriguing ways. I found that my students didn’t always choose books they were interested in, but instead chose texts that they perceived as “easy.” Alex revealed that this was exactly how he was choosing his books during a visit to the school library. In my field notes for that day, I wrote,

“Alex picked up the first and smallest book he saw (*Burger Wuss* by Matthew Tobin Anderson). I asked why he chose it and he said because it’s short. I asked if he’ll read it

and he said yes. I suggested additional books, but eventually he said, ‘Ms. Weaver I don’t like to read.’ I shared with him my own trip to the library that weekend and how excited I was to read my books. I said I wanted him to experience the same. He said he would never feel that way and that’s crazy that I would. ‘Not everyone is into reading,’ he said.”

In a later class period, Alex expressed dissatisfaction with his choice book. In my field notes, I noted,

“After the rhetoric test in block 4 today, students were asked to read their choice books. I saw that Alex was not reading and reminded him of this. His response: ‘Ms. Weaver I hate reading. I don’t want to read *Burger Wuss*.’ I told him that he was welcome to change books if he wanted to, but he refused.”

These interactions intrigued me because they highlighted an issue in offering students choice texts. Because Alex knows he has to read a book no matter what, he chose a book that would make this task as easy as possible. However, choosing a book based on its perceived difficulty does not make it more interesting or engaging. Believing that no book would ever interest him, Alex did not think it necessary to try a potentially more challenging text. In observing Alex’s reading practices, I discovered a negative feedback loop preventing him from enjoying reading. In this cycle, he has no history of finding books interesting, leading him to avoid reading as much as possible. These pre-existing negative attitudes make him less likely to put effort into finding an interesting book, instead choosing “easier” or shorter books to continue avoiding reading as much as possible. These “easier” texts continue the cycle, as they do not hold his interest. I realize in reviewing these notes that I would need to intervene and disrupt this cycle. For students who approach reading like Alex, choice alone is not enough.

Jason's approach to choice was also intriguing. During a transition between activities, I was able to ask Jason a few questions about his choice book. He shared that the only books he liked were the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books because they had pictures. His choice book was also a comic book. In order for my dormant readers to find motivation to read, I felt it necessary that they read whatever it is that interests them. At the same time, I wasn't sure if Jason's choice in books was partially influenced by what he perceived as easier to read. In a tenth-grade class, these books might not be considered grade-appropriate. However, my goal was for Jason to read something that interested him. Jason's choice book led me to think more deeply about whether to prioritize rigor or interest when implementing choice texts.

At the same time, Emily seemed to utilize her opportunity to self-select a text differently than Jason or Alex. She started by reading a nonfiction text about using medicinal plants but later changed books to one that she found more interesting. This second text, a novel about the Holocaust, kept her attention and invigorated her motivation to read. Emily updated me regularly on her reading experiences and steady progress in this book. For Emily, the opportunity to choose meant changing books when she realized her initial choice would not keep her attention. Then, she was able to find a book that she could be excited about. In seeing how each of my students approached their ability to self-select texts, I found that I needed to support students differently. Students like Alex might need additional help choosing a text so that they do not select the perceived "easy" option. Jason might need to work towards more grade-appropriate texts that still maintain his interest. For those like Emily, it's important that they know they can change books if they want to and have the support to find the book that most interests them.

Teacher Modeling

To collect data on teacher modeling, I primarily used my teacher reflective journal and recordings from field notes. My journal allowed me to reflect on my own reading behaviors and what I was personally experiencing in class. My field notes contain interactions with students that reflect my positioning as a fellow reader. Careful analysis of these documented experiences and reflections revealed two key findings about how students respond when they see me as reading *with* them.

Students Respond When I Live My Beliefs

Each time my students read, I read along with them. Similarly, I shared my reading experiences and responses to the sharing questions (see Appendix A) with my students. Through interactions with students, I began to realize that they were noticing my habits. I wrote about one such incident in my journal:

“Students in Block 4 noticed today that I had a different choice book than last class. They asked why I always had a different book, and I said it was because I finished my last one. They were shocked to find that I read outside of school. Alex whispered about this to his neighbor for a few seconds before starting their choice reading.”

This was one of the first instances in which students told me they noticed my reading habits. It revealed to me that students were observing me as much as I was observing them in this inquiry. At the same time, this interaction also highlighted my students’ disbelief that anyone, even English teachers, would read outside of school. What does it mean for students to think

their own English teachers are not reading in their personal lives? I wonder how that impacts the validity of English teachers assigning reading, as students may consider these assignments less worthwhile or genuine when teachers are not readers themselves. This interaction also reveals the ways students view reading. By sharing their disbelief at teachers reading outside of school, my students are also showing me how they see reading as an in-school, academic activity, rather than a lifelong, personal practice. I began to wonder how much of their approach to reading was influenced by this narrow perspective.

Once my students began to notice my reading habits, I found that they started initiating conversations with me about reading. I reflected in my journal about a particular class period in which Emily came into the room eager to inform me about the status of her choice book. I wrote,

“Emily changed choice books because she didn’t like her last one. Today she called me over to her and told me how great the book she is reading is. She said she has cried twice while reading her book (it’s about the Holocaust). It was recommended by a friend (outside of our class) and she had it lying on her shelves for a while before finally reading it. Now, she can’t put it down. This is the same student who “hates reading” and “can’t read.” (her words) She told me it’s rare that she finds a book she likes, but she recommends I read this one because she loves it.”

This interaction was a significant turning point for Emily and her reading. As she continued reading her choice book, she shared more positive reading experiences with me. When she entered the class, she frequently updated me on where she was in her book.

I especially appreciated getting to hear from Emily about her reading experiences, however, I did not receive the same kind of feedback from Jason and Alex. They shared their

reading experiences when prompted but did not ask specifically for recommendations. In my conversations with these students, I often referred to my own reading in the hopes that my enthusiasm might encourage them. A common response was “Not everyone likes reading.” Each time this occurred, I was unsure how to respond. While seeing me live my beliefs may make me a more credible source for assigning reading, that alone did not encourage students to become avid readers.

Students Reveal Secret Reading Lives

In my efforts to share my reading experiences with students, I engaged in a variety of conversations about books and reading outside of school. One of the most enlightening of those was with Emily on a trip to the school library to select choice books. I anticipated that students would not already have selected texts, so I was surprised to find that she had already found one. In my journal, I wrote,

“Emily already had a book from the AAUW book sale (a local book sale in State College). She told me she volunteers there. I was surprised and asked her why she doesn’t read if she volunteers at a book sale. She said, “It’s for charity, Ms. Weaver.” She likes to help and pick up a few books. I’m wondering what this means for her not liking reading. I asked if she’ll read all of the books and she said yes. I’m wondering how to bridge this secret reading life with the classroom. Is her disinterest in books related to instruction? What we are reading? Disinterest in school in general?”

Because my early observations of Emily included so many negative remarks about reading, this interaction was especially surprising. I wondered why these reading experiences

hadn't come up earlier. By putting more effort into learning about my students' reading habits and attitudes, I had discovered that Emily was secretly enjoying reading outside of school. As my inquiry continued and Emily came to me more often with updates on her choice reading, I found that she may not have been as much of a dormant reader as I previously thought. Rather, it seemed her remarks in school were separate from the reading she engaged in during her free time. I continued to consider how I might bring more of this into the classroom. My third strategy, sharing, could potentially accomplish this.

Sharing

I largely collected data on sharing from field notes and student work, although, as with all of these strategies, my journal was a place of reflection after engaging in these activities. As I reviewed and analyzed my data, I noted some emerging patterns regarding text-to-self connections, community development, and the complexities of sharing.

Wonderings about Text-to-Self Sharing

Many of my whip-around questions invited students to share ways in which their book did or did not relate to their personal lives. Each time I incorporated these prompts, I noticed that students struggled to draw these connections. In my journal, I note:

“During the choice book whip around, Emily shared for her elbow pair. She shared that the book she is reading doesn't fit with her life because it takes place during the holocaust. Many students (all of them that chose that question to answer, actually) said

their book did not relate to their life. They attributed this to the far-fetched plots in their books. A student reading about World War II, for example, said ‘this book takes place in a war zone and I am not in war so that doesn’t relate to my life.’ I’m wondering how to help them see that even books where much of the action takes place in a world unlike your own, you can still relate to something in the book.”

These responses highlight how my students approach text-to-self prompts. When I entered this inquiry, I thought that my students would be able to find connections between themselves and their books in some way, even if the setting or plot does not exactly resemble their own life experiences. However, these responses reveal that I may need to rethink this assumption. I began to wonder if my students might find more enjoyment in reading if they could draw more connections between their lives and the books they were reading. In my own responses to these questions, I tried to model this. For example, I shared a connection I made between someone struggling to sleep in my book and my recent bouts of insomnia. Still, I did not see any significant changes in my students’ ability to draw text-to-self connections during my inquiry.

Sharing for a Community of Readers

As I sought to position myself as a fellow reader, I used trips to the school library as a valuable time to discuss books and reading with students. On these occasions, I discovered that my students found community in their relationships with peers who also do not enjoy reading. This occurred most often for Jason and Alex. As they looked for choice books with their peers, they seemed to bond over their distaste for reading. I suggested different books and asked them

about prior reading experiences, but a common response was “I hate reading.” I was especially surprised to find that Jason and Alex’s friends who typically approached reading more positively agreed with these negative reactions to reading. I listened as they continued to discuss their mutual distaste for books. Their conversation was filled with laughter and smiles. I began my inquiry hoping that these would be the conversations my students might have over books. However, I found that my students were building community based on their negative reading experiences. I wondered if these conversations could lead to more positive ones later as students become more accustomed to discussing their reading experiences together. While this interaction felt far from my desired results, it could also be that this is how my students begin to become part of a community of readers.

Other forms of sharing seemed to yield more positive results. While I implemented sharing primarily as a means of encouraging reading among my students, my data points to positive changes in the classroom community as well. By sharing post-reading reflections and engaging in interactive reading experiences, my students and I were able to bond over the books we were reading. This may have been most obvious during Choice Book Bingo. Students moved freely throughout the room and prizes were awarded to those who finished the game. I wrote in my field notes that day:

“I felt that this lesson went well because students engaged with each other’s books and were able to explore what they might read in the future. Everyone was moving around and asking each other what they found from each other’s books. Some things I heard in class today ‘What genre is your book? Who wrote it? When/where does it take place?’ In order to win they had to stay focused on their books, which I especially appreciated.”

The game was especially active, as everyone was out of their seats. In order to win, they had to ask questions about each other's books, but the game-like manner made this feel more fun and interactive. These questions were not in-depth, and the game would not be effective if the goal is to deeply analyze literature. However, it did achieve its goal for students to share and learn about each other's reading experiences in an informal, active way.

For my case study participants, I took special note of their interactions and engagement with the activity. In my field notes, I wrote, "Emily is kneeling at other students' desks and actively trying to fill out her card." Alex had a similar response, quickly winning bingo and actively helping his peers fill out their cards afterwards. Jason, too, won bingo, although he admitted to be that he had not finished reading his book. In response, I told him to do his best with what he had read and see if he liked any of his peers' books for the following marking period. The nature of the activity allowed Jason to participate without having fully finished his book, as he knew enough about it to share responses and was able to ask his peers about their own texts.

Post-reading whip arounds yielded similar results. I framed post-SSR sharing as an informal space. Students were invited to respond to the whip around questions, but the sharing was meant to mimic our normal classroom sharing, in which students can freely discuss what they choose without any grade or academic pressures. Because of this, some of the responses I received drifted away from the texts students were reading. This was most evident for the third question in Appendix A: "If your book were made into a movie, who would you want to play the main character?" Many students responded by naming a fellow classmate. These answers were humorous and light-hearted in nature, typically being met with laughter and smiles from their fellow classmates. I followed up by asking students why they chose these individuals, which did

reveal more insight on how they were understanding their chosen texts. Jason, like many of his peers, answered this whip around question with the name of a fellow classmate. I asked why he chose this student, just as I had for other students who responded in the same way. However, Jason did not provide a reason, instead saying that he felt this student “would just be good in a movie.” As I note earlier, these whip arounds were meant to be a low-pressure, informal way of sharing their reading experiences with one another. That being the case, I do not place any value judgements on this response, but I do wonder about it. As my students responded to the questions in ways that acknowledged their classmates and sparked laughter, I considered how sharing might not necessarily encourage more reading but does encourage community development. My students were using the whip arounds in a social, light-hearted manner, making the task even less academic than originally intended.

Complexities of Sharing

Despite the benefits sharing yielded to our classroom community, sharing was more beneficial for extroverted students. My shy or introverted students expressed hesitation and discomfort when asked to share their experiences with peers. During Choice Book Bingo, I wrote in my field notes: “As I circulated, Emily passed me and joked about forcing them to socialize. She would have preferred not to have done so.” While Emily did engage with her peers throughout the activity, her remark made me consider how interactive, social activities might affect students who are not extroverted. For those who are not as outgoing or comfortable among their classmates, this can be especially daunting.

This was especially evident when I implemented literary letters. As I described earlier, these letters invited students to write about their reading experiences to a peer. Students also responded to the letters they received. When I announced the first literary letter, I was not anticipating negative responses from students. However, I did have several students who were hesitant to share their letters with others. A common question I received from them was, “why do I have to share it with someone else?” I responded that this way they could see what each other was reading and write for a more authentic audience than just myself and my mentor teacher. Eventually, these students agreed to write their letters, although it was clear from their initial response that they were not fond of this activity. For other students, however, writing a letter to a peer was fun. These students devised creative salutations and decorated their letters. Despite these findings, many students asked if they “had to” respond or “had to” write a certain amount. I wanted students to be able to express themselves creatively in these letters, so my directions were mostly open-ended (see Appendix B for Literary Letter directions). My students, however, approached the assignment as a formal, academic assignment rather than an opportunity to interact with their peers through writing.

The second literary letter received a similar response. This time, I changed the format of the assignment to an online discussion forum. This time, students had to sell their books to a peer, as this letter coincided with the end of our rhetoric unit. Students had to reply to at least one other student, but they were invited to respond to more and “like” each other’s responses. More detailed directions for this activity can be found in Appendix B. Looking at these letters holistically, I found that the comments students’ left on each other’s posts felt somewhat disingenuous and forced. While my directions offered a variety of suggestions for students’ comments, many of them left brief, vague comments, such as “Wow, that sounds interesting”

and “Sounds like a great read!” I wondered what prompted these responses. One potential reason could be the public format, in which all students in the class could see one another’s posts and replies. They might also have felt that this assignment resembled other graded discussion forums from previous classes. Because students recognized that the discussion was created by their teacher and took place on Canvas, the online platform where they also access grades and other assignments, students might not have approached this task as a social, interactive opportunity.

At the same time, some of the initial posts did seem more genuine. Jason wrote,

“My book is about 3 characters who go on an adventure with magic and goblins. It has a lot of cussing in it but that makes it more intriguing. The first couple of chapters are kind of boring but pick up when they start killing and using magic. I recommend this book because it is funny and teaches about teamwork.”

Jason honestly reveals that the beginning of the book is boring, while “cussing,” killing, and magic make it more interesting later on. By talking about “cussing” in his response, Jason seems to be acknowledging that the writing he is doing here is informal and differs from more academic writing. Similarly, Emily communicated her avid interest in her book by writing,

“My book is a riveting story about a Jewish family in WWII and their experienced. The detail and emotion in the book create beautiful and sometimes horrifying pictures but the idea of family and love that is maintained through the story line is amazing.”

Her post replicates much of what she shared with me about her book during class. Her comment on a peer’s post is nearly identical to one of the whip-around questions posed in an earlier class period: “If you had to pick who would play the main character in the movie who would it be?” It’s interesting to note that she transferred this classroom whip around to the online

format. This might have been because she especially liked this question, or she could have just been unsure of how to respond, leading her to refer to prior conversations we'd had in class.

The responses I received from different modes of sharing lead me to consider how students approach their work. The data I collected suggests that students are more engaged in activities that they perceive as less academic and formal. Conversely, their participation in the literary letters leads me to wonder if sharing in more academic formats is forced and disingenuous. The sharing enacted through Choice Book Bingo and whip around questions was more fruitful and honest.

Across my three strategies (choice reading, teacher modeling, and sharing), I was able to see how my three participants responded in unique and complex ways. In reviewing my findings, I considered how I might adapt instruction to encourage more reading and better serve my students. I also discovered some new wonderings along the way.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As noted above, I was able to identify some key findings in my data and draw some conclusions about student learning and reading experiences. In this section, I reiterate those points and connect these findings to my practice and research. I also acknowledge some of the unforeseen circumstances that shifted the end of my inquiry. Lastly, I will provide some recommendations for teachers and future research in this area.

Reflection

My inquiry began with the following question:

- How can choice, sharing, and modeling encourage dormant readers in English 10 to become part of a community of readers (Miller, 2010, p. 28)?

The inquiry also focused on two additional sub-questions:

- What are the roles of choice, sharing, and modeling in creating a reading community?
- What is the impact of a reading community on dormant readers' perceptions and behaviors regarding reading?

Throughout this iterative inquiry process, I learned about my students, my teaching, reading, and the overall school context. My inquiry revealed that encouraging lifelong readership in dormant readers is complex and unique. In implementing choice reading, sharing, and teacher modeling, I found that each strategy can yield different results for each student. Because much of

my data came from classroom observations and field notes, my inquiry examined interactions with students and placed significant weight on the remarks students make about their experiences in the classroom. Students' comments, both positive and negative, guided me towards a deeper understanding of the strategies I implemented and my pedagogy as a whole. As I described in the previous chapter, there were a few key interactions with students that I returned to often as I analyzed my data. I continue to return to those moments and reflect as I develop lessons and move forward beyond my student-teaching internship.

One of the most important lessons I learned through this inquiry was the importance of being authentic with students. This includes being genuine in my interactions, as well as developing instruction that reflects my beliefs. I believe that reading along with students and sharing my experiences with them helped make me a credible resource for students and improved the quality of my instruction. As McKool and Gespass (2009) note, teachers who value reading in their personal lives “realize that reading is a socially constructed activity and plan opportunities for students to talk about the books they are reading in a variety of ways”(271). Similarly, I found that as I read with my students there were more opportunities for us to discuss what we were reading and build relationships based on those texts. While my students may not have always wanted to read, they did see that I was creating assignments that I, too, was willing to participate in.

I also learned that choice is complex and unique for each student. My experiences with Alex, who chose a text based on its perceived difficulty, reminded me of Gilson et al.'s findings (2018) that “students may have gravitated toward easier texts during independent reading time because those texts matched their actual or perceived reading levels” (519). One possible interpretation of Alex's reading habits may be that he selected texts based on his perceived

ability, but my observations pointed to another possibility. I saw Alex in a negative feedback loop in which he has no positive prior reading experiences and has learned ways to avoid engaging with new texts. In this cycle, he chooses shorter texts in order to meet the requirements of the choice reading assignment rather than to appeal to his own interests. Because of this, these texts do not hold his attention and discourage him from reading further. For Alex, I needed to do more work to guide him in selecting texts. If I were to return to this inquiry again, I might give him a choice between certain texts that I know align with some of his interests. My observations of Alex revealed that it may not be enough to simply offer students choice without some gentle guidance and deliberate parameters.

At the same time, my inquiry led me to think more deeply about the nature of choice in school. When my students remarked that they hadn't really chosen to read the books in the first place, I had to admit that they were right. However, I wasn't sure what I could do to mitigate this. As I continue in my teaching, I still want to prioritize choice. I think choice can be motivating and beneficial to students. Yet, I have to acknowledge that the choice they have is really an illusion. I am still considering what this means for my teaching. While choice is an illusion in school, I believe that an amount of choice is better than none at all and, when possible, I will allow that for my students.

I learned that sharing, too, is complex. While I began this inquiry hoping that sharing could be a way to hold students accountable for their reading, the data I collected did not only show students' reading behaviors. Instead, their sharing primarily became a form of community development. My goals in their sharing shifted as I discovered the benefits of these social interactions in the classroom. At the same time, my introverted students highlighted another side of sharing and a broader implication for schooling: what works for some does not always work

for all. These students resisted sharing openly with classmates and participated in these activities primarily to satisfy academic requirements. Their reading, it seemed, was not necessarily boosted by these forms of sharing. In the future, I might consider ways to differentiate during sharing, so that all students are able to participate and benefit. As with choice, it is not enough to simply offer this opportunity. Instead, teachers must develop multiple ways for students to access and benefit from instruction.

All students' reading behaviors suggested that their engagement and motivation are most enhanced by activities that are informal and non-academic. The responses I received from the literary letters highlighted this the most, as students did not seem to engage in authentic ways during this activity. However, Choice Book Bingo did garner genuine social interaction through the context of books. These findings suggest that students may read most readily if they are in a non-academic context. During in-class choice reading, students ate snacks, potentially lessening the formality of the activity. This is an area I'd like to explore more deeply in the future, as I consider how to balance the academic requirements of school and the potential benefits of informal assignments.

While my findings are significant to my future teaching, I also must reflect on the limitations of my inquiry. By focusing on three students, I was able to examine their specific experiences and interactions more closely. At the same time, my findings may have differed if I were to include a wider range of students. Similarly, this inquiry took place over the course of ten weeks. If I continued my research beyond this period, I may have had more data regarding my students' in-class reading, self-selecting of texts, and sharing. My time with students was unexpectedly lessened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed schools and shifted our

curriculum to remote learning. In the following section, I provide more details about how my ongoing inquiry adapted to these unforeseen circumstances.

COVID-19 Remote Choice Reading

In early March, State College High School left for spring break. By the time we were scheduled to return to school, the COVID-19 pandemic had forced schools to close their buildings and shift to remote coursework. During this time, my interactions with students moved to optional Zoom meetings, a video call service. In my first Zooms with students, I checked in on their well-being during this time. I was happily surprised to hear that my students were reading.

Emily shared that she had been reading along to the audiobook version of *Night* by Elie Weisel with her mother. She said she didn't want anyone to know she actually liked reading but was looking for book recommendations during the quarantine. Knowing that she enjoys reading about the holocaust, I recommended *The Book Thief* and *The Boy in The Striped Pajamas*, two other books set in this time period. It is interesting to note that she still does not want the reputation of an avid reader. I am now wondering how much of a barrier this is for other students to develop consistent reading habits. As I noted in my previous chapter, students can become grounded in their identities as non-readers and build camaraderie in this area with their peers. As a result, it becomes harder for them to allow themselves to enjoy reading. At the same time, Emily is reading and asking her classmates and me for recommendations, something that may have stemmed from the sharing and modeling incorporated in our class.

Jason, too, revealed that he was reading during quarantine. He had found a series of books about the attacks on Pearl Harbor that sustained his interest. During my in-school inquiry,

I had felt that Jason was the least impacted by my interventions, making his reading practices outside of school all the more surprising and intriguing. There may be many reasons to account for his renewed interest in reading during this time, but my data analysis findings reported earlier suggest that there is a distinction between academic assignments and informal work, which could have had an impact. Jason's reading behaviors during the pandemic may reflect a preference for personal reading, unaffiliated with the ELA classroom.

Other students reached out to ask what would happen with their choice reading while school was closed. In response, I decided to create an optional choice reading module in Canvas, our online learning platform. This module included a Google Form for students to recommend books to one another, a list of resources to find reading material online, weekly updates from my own reading experiences, and Choice Reading Challenges for them to participate in each week. My weekly updates included what I was reading during this time and featured short stories and poems for students to peruse if they're interested. The Choice Reading Challenges included a variety of simple activities for students to post in a discussion forum for each other to see. I, too, took part in these challenges, continuing in my role as a fellow reader and learner alongside my students.

As the pandemic is ongoing, I am continuing to update this choice reading module. My goal has now expanded from simply encouraging reading among my students to creating resources and supports for students' socioemotional health during this time. In this way, my inquiry has evolved to circumstances very different from those in which it began.

Moving Forward

As I move beyond my internship role, I plan to use what I learned from this inquiry in my future teaching. Choice reading, teacher modeling, and sharing will all be part of my classroom. I intend to implement these strategies with my inquiry's findings in mind. For example, my use of choice reading will also need to include further parameters to assist students in finding books that interest and challenge them. Sharing will need to take into account the needs of introverted students, who do not always benefit from socially oriented lessons. I also hope to incorporate more teacher modeling in activities beyond reading, especially in their writing. I'm interested in exploring what might happen if I write with my students. How might that impact their engagement with the activity and relationship with me as their teacher? This is an area I am eager to explore further in the future.

For now the systematic phase of my inquiry ends in a very different place than it began, as my work with students continues to take place online. I am pleased to note that choice reading, sharing, and modeling are still occurring and have shifted to take these new circumstances into account. Not only are these practices ongoing, but they have led to new wonderings about how they might benefit students' socioemotional well-being, especially during times of stress and upheaval. When I do return to the in-person classroom, I am eager to explore these ideas further and design instruction with the findings of this inquiry in mind. This classroom research has confirmed my commitments to choice, sharing, and modeling, and I will live those commitments as I encounter my next community of readers.

Appendix A

Whip-around and Sharing Questions

1. What is the name of the book you are reading? Who wrote it?
2. What is happening so far in your book? Do you like it? Why/why not? (elbow partner)
3. If your book were made into a movie, who would you want to play the main character?
4. If you could insert yourself as a character in your book, what would you do?
5. Does your book remind you of your own life? Why or why not?
6. What are some connections you see between this text and the real world (current events, history, etc)?
7. When and where does your story take place? How would it be different if it took place somewhere else?
8. Has a book ever made you laugh? Cry? Gasp? Yell? If so, what book was it? What happened?
9. Describe the main character of your book. Is this someone you would want to be friends with? Why/why not?
10. Is there a part of the book you had difficulty understanding or connecting with? Why?
11. Describe your book or the section you just read in one word. Don't explain; just say the word.
12. What is your favorite book you've ever read? Why is it your favorite?
13. On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the best), what rating would you give this story and why? Would you recommend it to classmates or friends? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Literary Letters

Literary Letter One Directions:

On a blank sheet of paper, write a brief letter about your choice book. It will be going to someone in this class.

Include:

- Title and author of book you are reading
- Why you chose to read this book
- What you have read so far/what you predict will happen
- Connections to other books, movies, current events, your personal life
- Your favorite book of all time

Literary Letter Two Directions:

Your goal is to sell your book to the class. Write a brief (4-5 sentences) advertisement that will encourage the rest of the class to “buy” your book. Post in the Canvas Discussion when you are finished. Then, comment on someone else’s post. You can:

- Ask a question about their book
- Tell them why your book is the better choice
- Let them know you are “buying” their book and why

Appendix C Choice Book Bingo Card

Directions: In the card, mark the name of the person whose book matches the description. You can only use each name 3 times. When you get 5 in a row, call out “bingo!”

A book that is in a different genre than yours _____	A book that is in the same genre as yours _____	A book you would like to read _____	A book longer than yours _____	A book published before 2010 _____
A book about something that really happened _____	A book that takes place in the future _____	A book that takes place in the past _____	A book that takes place outside the U.S. _____	A book with magic or fantasy elements in it _____
A book you have already read _____	A book you have heard of before _____	Free space :) _____	A book from the school library _____	A book by an author you've heard of before _____
A book shorter than yours _____	A book published after 2010 _____	A book over 400 pages _____	A book you have never heard of before _____	A book that reminds you of something you've already read _____
A book you are curious about _____	A book that is about high school _____	A book that you have already read previously _____	A book that is also a tv show or movie _____	A book you are not interested in reading _____

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ACADEMIC VITA

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State College Area High School Professional Development School
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- Designed and instructed lessons in English 10 and Advanced English 10 classes
- Differentiated and designed a rhetoric unit
- Collaborated with English faculty and other district staff in in-service days, Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to ensure student growth and success.
- Assisted students in an English as a Second Language course

State College, PA
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Upward Bound Programs Summer Academy

Instructional Design Developer

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Upward Bound Programs

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Professional Development

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- Presented “Transforming Your Classroom with Translanguaging” at Future is Now Roundtable

Diversity in Education Conference: Attendee, January 2020

Activities and Awards

Local Organizing Committee for Black Lives Matter at School Week

Committee Member

- Assisted in the planning and facilitation of a community Activism event for Black Lives Matter at School Week

State College, PA
February 2020

Penn State Alternative Breaks

Site Leader

- Planned and led service trips to Baltimore City Public Schools & Camphill Village
- Facilitated post-service reflections for trip participants

State College, PA
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