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## Effects of Student Choice on Student Motivation and Engagement within an Elementary Classroom

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Effects of Student Choice on Student Motivation and Engagement within an Elementary Classroom

A Quantitative Research Methods Proposal

A Project Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Sarah Theesfeld

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of  
Masters of Science in Curriculum and Instruction

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to determine the effects of allowing student choice on student motivation and engagement in an elementary classroom. Specifically, the study will focus on student engagement during reading instruction and motivation to participate when they are offered choice in reading materials versus when they are not offered choice in reading materials. Students will provide information about their thoughts on lessons; when they are able to choose their reading materials versus when they are chosen for them. This study aims to determine best teaching practices for student engagement and motivation during reading instruction. Student feedback and researcher observations were used to help determine the effects of student choice on engagement and motivation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

2020 brought about some major changes in education, due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. One major change that teachers have had to implement is in their classroom set up, as well as how the space functions in order to be compliant with safety regulations. This research was focused on the classroom environment - specifically, student choice within the classroom and how it affects students' growth. There have always been students who have struggled with the traditionally run classroom – listening to the teacher teach, completing a worksheet, sitting in rows of desks, etc. With classrooms becoming more restrictive due to the pandemic, students' learning styles and needs are becoming harder to meet. It was my goal, as the researcher, to explore the effect of the classroom environment, as well as various types of student choice on students' growth and engagement in elementary education.

Across a variety of the literature reviewed, a common theme was that choice matters. Research from preschool through college level was clear that when students were offered choice – in assignments, seating, assessments, etc. – they were more engaged and motivated to participate and complete their work. According to Curtis & Kosky (2008), “offering students choice and mobility in classroom activities was a great way to get students involved in the learning process” (p. 25). When students are able to choose what or how they are learning, they become more invested in their own education. When students are invested, they become more engaged in the learning process and more motivated to succeed. Evanshen & Faulk (2019) found “engaged learners are more focused and can more readily internalize concepts they are exploring” (p. 16). Another factor of my research concluded that the classroom environment,

both physical and emotional, also plays a big role in student engagement and motivation. “In addition to creating a comfortable and stimulating physical environment”, Blair & Johnson (2003) have also determined that “classroom teachers must attempt to promote a positive mental environment as well” (p. 189). In a study conducted by Dravenstadt (2018), the researcher found that a “positive culture eradicated off-task behavior...this fluid, rather than rigid, environment contributed to student motivation” (p. 12). Teaching styles are significant environmental and social factors in satisfying the need of belongingness in the classroom, which consequently influences motivation and performance. When conducting the research, I was sure to emphasize my focus on the type of student choice offered, as well as the physical and emotional supports provided by the teacher, and how these related to student engagement and motivation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research focused specifically on the effects of student choice, as well as the physical and emotional environment of the classroom on students’ growth in engagement and motivation to learn. My focus on student choice was on the type of choice offered to students, how it was offered (within daily work, assessments, environment, etc.), and how often it was offered. My focus on classroom environment was on the physical classroom set up and how the space was being used, as well as the emotional environment that was created and sustained by the teacher. The research focused specifically on how these things were implemented in the midst of the pandemic and limitations currently placed on schools and teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

I have chosen to focus my research on classroom environment and student choice because I feel that we as teachers, but especially our students, have lost a lot of the freedoms we were once afforded within our classrooms. While taking these safety precautions is necessary to



keep staff and students safe and healthy, there is a negative effect as well. Research has shown that implementing student choice within a positive classroom environment has boosted student engagement and motivation. I believe that now, more than ever, it is imperative that we take a critical look at how student choice and classroom environment affect our students' growth within our classrooms.

### **Research Question(s)**

How does student choice affect students' motivation and engagement within an elementary classroom?

### **Definition of Variables.**

**Independent Variables:** The independent variables in this study were the type of choices offered to students, as well as the classroom environment created by the teacher. Students completed a short survey to discuss how the choice offered and classroom environment made them feel and whether they liked it or not.

**Dependent Variables:** The dependent variables in this study were the students' levels of engagement and motivation. Students completed a short survey to discuss how engaged they were in the lesson, as well as their motivation to participate in the lesson.

### **Significance of the Study**

In the research, Dredger (2008) focuses her readers' thoughts on Alfie Kohn's reminder that "students do better when they are given choice" (p. 30) because "being able to make choices positively affects the educational development of children" (Blair & Johnson, 2003, p. 184). The most important goal for any educator is to help our students become successful. Creating a learning environment that offers choice and fosters student engagement and motivation is how

we can help our students become successful learners. When students are motivated to succeed, they are not the only ones who will benefit. Our students take what they gain from their education and bring it into the real world. They can carry the motivation they received from their teachers over into their own work environments, motivating even more people to want to succeed.

### **Research Ethics**

**Permission and IRB Approval.** In order to conduct this study, I had sought MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study was sought from the school district where the research project took place (See Appendix X and X).

**Informed Consent.** Protection of human subjects participating in research was assured. Participant minors were informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix X) that the researcher read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants were aware that this study was conducted as part of the researcher's Master Degree Program and that it would benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined both, verbally and in writing.

### **Limitations.**

There was one major limitation that could have affected the research and that was the status of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time of this research, the school where the research was

conducted was in a hybrid model of teaching – while the students were in school all day, five days a week, there was a possibility that could have changed very quickly. My class had already fluctuated in modes of teaching a few times. At the time of the research, I had no students who had chosen to distance learn, or who had to distance learn due to needing to quarantine. There was also the possibility that I would need to quarantine due to a direct exposure and would not be able to teach for an extended amount of time, but this ended up not impacting the research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

As an elementary teacher, I have oftentimes found our standards and curriculum to be restrictive and less than exciting to teach. If I have difficulty finding motivation in some of our standards, how can I expect my students to be motivated? In this literature review, I have found research that supports the benefits of offering student choice and fostering a positive and non-restrictive classroom environment can motivate and engage our learners. Some of the themes that I recognized are: choice matters, student engagement and motivation, and physical and emotional learning spaces.

#### **Choice Matters.**

The importance of choice was a resounding theme amongst a number of studies that were reviewed. Many articles which were reviewed about choice made it clear that offering students options only produced positive results and that it served to motivate and engage students more deeply in the curriculum. Choice can be offered in a variety of ways, across all types of instruction. Common et al. (2015) claim that instructional choice is a low-intensity strategy that requires little preparation, is easy to implement, and supports content instruction in the classroom (p. 473). Choice in seating, task completion, books, or activities when finished with work are just a few of the ways choice can be implemented within a classroom. Choice allows students to become active participants in their own learning (Curtis & Kosky, 2008, p. 25). Dredger (2008) focuses our thoughts on Alfie Kohn's reminder that "students do better when they are given choice" (p. 30) because "being able to make choices positively affects the educational development of children" (Blair & Johnson, 2003, p. 184).

The most common view on instructional choice was through reading instruction (Barry et al., 2019; Bauserman & Edmunds, 2006; Blair & Johnson, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Miller, 2012; and Servilio, 2009). Allowing students to choose what they are reading was a main point across all of the articles. Teachers can sometimes feel that restricting a student's choice to their particular reading level is necessary, so they do not choose books that are too difficult for them. But, allowing students to choose any book they want can be beneficial because “readers at all ages are more capable when the subject appeals to them” (Dredger, 2008, p. 32).

According to Fisher and Frey (2018), “students who have opportunities to choose their own books develop elaborate strategies for selecting books and are more likely to become intrinsically motivated readers” (p.91). “Intrinsic motivation - which includes choice, interest, and self-efficacy - has been found to influence individuals’ decisions to read, how long they read, how much effort they put into reading, how much they engage with reading, and how much they enjoy it” (Barry et al., 2019, p. 148).

By offering students a voice in their learning, we are increasing “student “buy-in”, meaning students take more ownership over self-selected assignments and tend to be more engaged, more likely to finish tasks, and have less opportunities to behave inappropriately” (Cantwell et al., 2017, p. 90). When students are interested in the subject of their book or assignment, they are more likely to complete their tasks, resulting in a better understanding of the material. By using student choice to pique student interest, we are also increasing student engagement and motivation within our classes.

### **Student Engagement & Motivation.**

Research has shown that offering instructional choice yields higher levels of task engagement and lower levels of disruption (Common et al., 2015). According to Evanshen and Faulk (2019), we can “define engagement in terms of the levels of attention and on-task behaviors of the children in the classroom” (p. 14), along with the concept of productivity. In other words, engagement is the level to which the children actively participate in classroom activities, including their focus and level of enthusiasm. “Engaged learners are more focused and can more readily internalize concepts they are exploring” (Evanshen & Faulk, 2019, p. 16).

Student engagement and motivation ties directly back to allowing students choice in their daily routines, most prevalent in the research is in their reading routines. In many classrooms, teachers offer more choice to students who are more progressed in their reading abilities versus students who are confined to a lower reading level. Barry, et al. (2019) argues that “students on the lower end of the performance continuum are more motivated to read when they feel they have a greater degree of choice - even within a limited set of leveled options - than with a one-size-fits-all instructional approach with a single decodable text” (p. 150).

There are many ways that teachers can continue to foster students’ engagement and motivation in reading, other than allowing them to read the book of their choice. Teachers can allow discussions, rather than book reports (Fisher & Frey, 2018), give recommendations (Miller, 2012), ask for student’s opinions or suggestions or simply allow time to read in class. According to Bauserman and Edmunds (2006), it is recommended “that teachers not only give children the opportunity to choose books they would like to read but also allot time during the school day to read them” (p. 420).

### **Physical & Emotional Learning Spaces.**

When sifting through the research, the researcher found it necessary to include both physical and emotional learning space in the themes, because a healthy classroom environment is heavily reliant on both. “One of the most significant needs in a classroom encouraging student self-selection of literature is an appropriate physical environment” (Blair & Johnson, 2003, p. 188). Flexible seating is an option many teachers have adopted that creates a calm and comfortable learning environment, while also providing students with more choice. “In addition to creating a comfortable and stimulating physical environment,” Blair & Johnson (2003) have also determined that “classroom teachers must attempt to promote a positive mental environment as well” (p. 189). “Buddy reading is an activity that builds a community of readers and encourages supported risk-taking” (Blair & Johnson, 2003, p. 189). In a study conducted by Dravenstadt (2018), the researcher found that a “positive culture eradicated off-task behavior...this fluid, rather than rigid, environment contributed to student motivation” (p. 12).

Teachers’ pedagogy is another factor in the classroom environment. According to Ali and Inayat (2020), “teaching styles are significant environmental and social factors in satisfying the need of belongingness in classroom, which consequently influences motivation and performance” (p. 88) and “the student’s ability to compete and flourish depends on the classroom structure set up by the teacher” (p. 89). It can sometimes be hard for teachers to relinquish control in their classroom, but research shows that students tend to succeed when they have room to explore and take charge of their own learning.

Flexible seating is an easy way for teachers to give a little control to their students, by simply allowing them to choose their seat. Jones (2020) describes a school where, “instead of desks...use varied seating (floor cushions, modular movable tables, high tables and stools,

window nooks) to invite a differentiated experience for each student and a different day-to-day experience for the entire class” (p. 58). Another easy way for teachers to allow students more control is to provide spaces for learning that contain organized materials and that are easily accessible (Evanshen & Faulk, 2019). The most important thing with flexible seating and open learning spaces is that teachers have to be open minded to the opportunities it will present to students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This action research on student choice and classroom environment is supported by Alfie Kohn’s Student Directed Learning Theory (2006). Kohn (2006) emphasizes students learning at their own pace, being intrinsically motivated versus extrinsically motivated, and focusing on the learning process itself. Students are taking charge of their own learning and motivating themselves through choice, interest, and engagement. Robert Marzano agrees that choice is important to student learning. According to Marzano, when given choice by teachers, students perceive classroom activities as more important. Choice in the classroom has also been linked to increases in student effort, task performance, and subsequent learning.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the research on student choice in the classroom, as well as the effect of the classroom environment on student learning. Student engagement and motivation are major factors in student success. The research shows that student engagement and motivation are tied directly to student choice. When students are able to choose something that interests them, they are more motivated to learn about it. By providing choice and a positive classroom environment, our students are more likely to be active participants in their learning. The following chapter will focus on the research methods of this study.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

There are many things that educators cannot control. The most prominent at this time being the restrictions on our teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic. But, in order to make sure that our students are reaching their full potential, we need to focus on what we can control. Because of this, I chose to conduct my research on choice within my elementary classroom. Offering students choice allows them to become more engaged in their learning, while allowing the teacher to meet multiple learning styles as well. In this chapter, I explored my students' thoughts and feelings when choice is offered vs. when it is not.

#### **Research Question(s)**

How does student choice affect students' motivation and engagement within an elementary classroom?

#### **Research Design**

According to Fraenkel et al. (2019), the most suitable design for this action research was an ethnographic research design. Ethnographic research uses observations and interviews to document the experiences of individuals. Elementary students were assigned a book to read and a quiz to take, before completing a survey with questions pertaining to how the students felt about the assignment and their thoughts on the book their teacher selected for them. The next week, students were introduced to a selection of books and were asked to choose the one that appealed to them the most, before completing an assignment of their choice to demonstrate their understanding of what they read. Students were then given the same survey, asking for their thoughts and feelings on the choice in this assignment.

**Setting**

This study took place at a rural elementary school in the southwest corner of Minnesota. The town the elementary school is located in has a population of 3,299 and its most prominent industry is agriculture. The district in which this elementary school is located has a student population of 1,181. The percentages of student ethnicities are as follows: White (87.2%), Hispanic or Latino (5.0%), Black or African American (2.2%), Asian (1.7%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.1%), and two or more races (3.8%). 18.6% of these students have an individualized education plan (IEP) and 35.5% of students in the district receive free or reduced-priced lunch.

**Participants**

The participants of this study were my 16 second grade students. Of these students, ten were male and six were female and all students were between the ages of seven and eight. The number of different student ethnicities for the class are as follows: White (11 of 16), Asian (2 of 16), Black or African American (1 of 16), Hispanic or Latino (1 of 16), and two or more races (1 of 16). One student in the class has an individualized education plan (IEP) and one student has a limited English proficient plan (LEP). Seven students in the class receive free or reduced-priced lunch, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, lunch and breakfast is free for all students.

**Sampling.** Convenience sampling was used for this action research. The sampling was a convenience sample because the students who participated in the research were all a part of my own second grade class. By choosing students from my own classroom, I was hoping to gain pertinent knowledge about my students.

**Instrumentation**

The instrument that was used for data collection for this research was a survey. The survey consists of five questions, each asking students to explain their thoughts and feelings

about a book and assessment assigned to the class. The survey was assigned on our classroom SeeSaw app. SeeSaw is a student-driven online portfolio the students use on their iPads. I can send assignments and messages through this app, as well as check student work and participation. The students were very familiar with the SeeSaw app and each had it previously downloaded on their school iPads, as devices are one-to-one in the classroom. The SeeSaw app allowed me to create the survey and assign it to the students. It also allowed the students to answer the questions by typing, writing, drawing, or recording a voice memo.

**Data Collection.** The survey was given to students twice - once after students completed the assignment when choice was not offered and once after students completed the assignment when choice was offered. The same survey was used in both cases. Students were encouraged to be as honest as possible in their answers.

**Data Analysis.** After each survey was assigned, I charted student answers and compiled data in my research notes. I also noted when similar responses were given by multiple students, making sure to mark them in my research notes. Student answers are stored within the SeeSaw app for me to refer back to.

## **Procedures**

This study took place over a one-week period. To begin, I introduced the students to the Kids A-Z app for the Reading A-Z program. The Reading A-Z program allows the classroom teacher to assess student reading levels, assign students specific books, quizzes, and comprehension quizzes. The app for Reading A-Z, Kids A-Z, allows the students to receive the assignments, record themselves reading, and earn points to build an avatar. The students needed to become familiar with this app, so they were best equipped to complete the assignments I used to measure student engagement when choice was present vs. when choice was not present.

After students were familiar with the Kids A-Z app, I assigned every student a book and corresponding comprehension quiz on their Kids A-Z accounts. The assignment was one book at their personal reading level that they were instructed to listen to and take the corresponding quiz on comprehension before submitting all of their work to me through the Kids A-Z app. All of the books I assigned had a matching theme of 'school'. Students were offered no choice in the book that they were assigned and had to complete the quiz that came with the book. Some quizzes are five questions, while others are ten questions, depending on the reading level of the book. All quizzes are multiple choice. After all students had completed the assignment, I assigned a survey through the students' SeeSaw class app.

The survey consisted of five questions, each one asking the students to either draw or type their answer before using the microphone feature on SeeSaw to record themselves explaining their answer. The questions on the survey are as follows: Question 1 - What would you rate this book?, Question 2 - How did you feel about this assignment?, Question 3 - What are the things you liked about this assignment?, Question 4 - What are the things you did not like about this assignment? Question 5 - What are some suggestions you have to make this assignment better? A visual of these questions is provided in Appendix A-E.

At a later time, within the next week, I repeated the process. This time, when assignments were given, I included five options of books, as well as three options for showing comprehension. The five book options were a fable/folktale, realistic fiction, humor, fantasy, or adventure/mystery. Students were encouraged to click on each book and page through it for more information before choosing the one they wanted to read. The students were also given a choice of how they wanted to show their comprehension of the book they chose. The three options for comprehension were as follows: option 1) draw a picture which includes the characters during a

big scene from the book, include a voiceover to explain your drawing, option 2) fill in a graphic organizer with the characters, setting, and plot of the story, with the option to include a voiceover to explain your answers, option 3) the multiple choice quiz that accompanies the book on the Kids A-Z app. After students had chosen their book and assessment and completed the assignment, they completed the same survey they had completed before. Students were encouraged to be as honest as possible each time they completed the survey.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to this study being conducted, permission was received from the school district, as well as the participants and the parents/guardians of the participants. Participants and parents/guardians of participants were given specific information about the study, including any potential risks. Names were not included in the data to protect confidentiality of participants taking part in the study and participants and their parents/guardians were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any given time.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **Description of Data**

The purpose of my research was to determine the effects that offering student choice had on student motivation and engagement within an elementary school classroom. For this study, I assigned the same type of assignment twice, the first time without offering choice and the second time with choice. Sixteen students participated in this study. After each assignment was completed, using our classroom Kids A-Z app, each student completed a five-question survey on our class SeeSaw app. There were two sets of data – one after the assignment where choice was not offered and another after the assignment where choice was offered. The study took place over a one-week period of time.

The data collected was gained through a survey where students shared their thoughts and feelings about each assignment using our class SeeSaw app. The app allows students to either draw, type, or record their answers. Students were encouraged to be as honest as possible with their survey answers. Due to the young age of the students, between 7 and 8 years old, the answers given were, at times, unclear. While some students were able to provide details with their answers, others offered very little explanation.

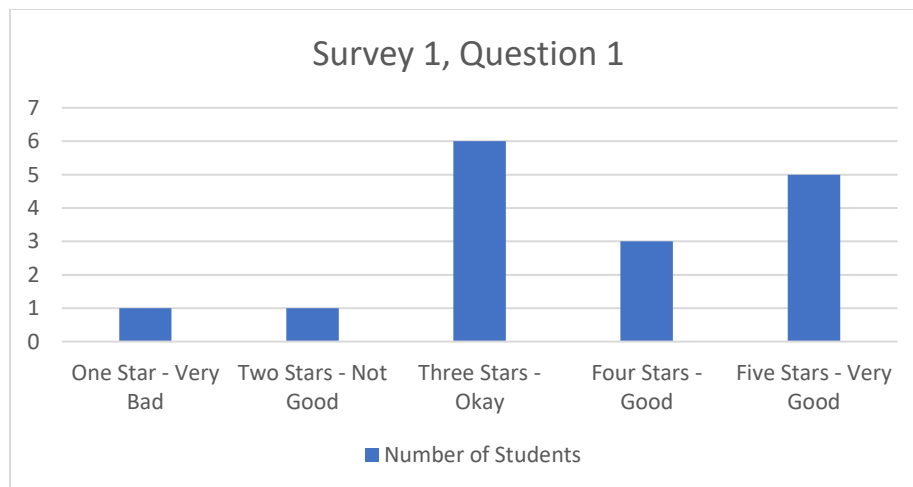
#### **Results**

##### **No Choice Offered**

For our first assignment, students were given one book, with a theme of ‘school’, with its corresponding quiz to show comprehension. Both were assigned through our classroom Kids A-Z app. Students read the book on their iPads, before completing the subsequent comprehension quiz. When students were finished with their assignment and had shown me their

quiz score, they were asked to complete the assignment survey on our class SeeSaw app. Question one asked students to rate the book they had read out of five stars. One star meant very bad. Two stars meant not good. Three stars meant okay. Four stars meant good. Five stars meant very good. As shown below in chart 1, one student rated their book very bad, one student rated their book not good, six students rated their book okay, three students rated their book good, and five students rated their book very good. Students were also encouraged to leave voice comments, explaining their answers. Comments on question one included "I liked it", "there were a lot of words that I didn't understand and it was really hard", "it was good because the character found his way to school", and "the book was very long".

Figure 1:

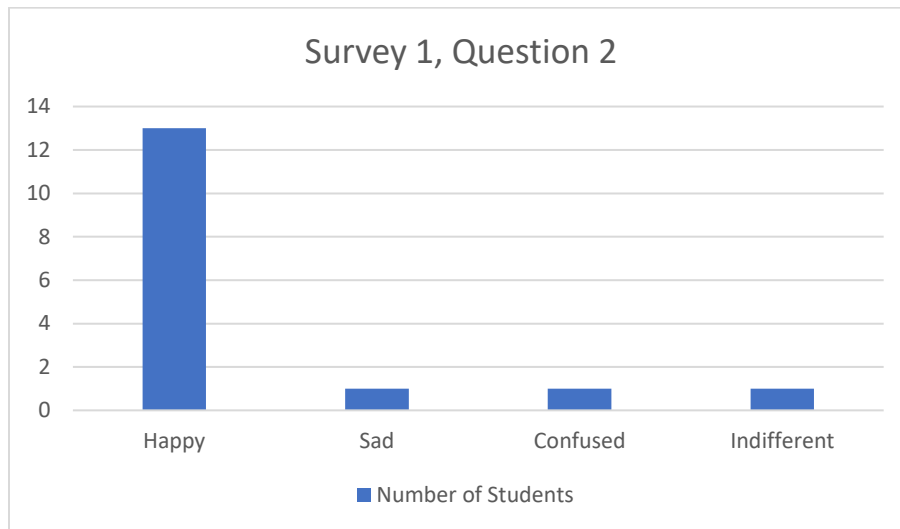


*Note.* Figure 1 displays student answers for question 1 of survey 1.

Question two asked students how they felt about the assignment. Students were instructed to draw their feelings on a blank smiley face. Again, students were encouraged to leave a voice comment explaining their drawing. As shown in chart 2, the emotions the students felt about their books ranged from happy to sad to confused to indifferent. The overall majority

of the students chose some form of happy, leaving comments like “I liked the book because it was about outer space” and “makes me feel happy”, while one student drew a confused face, leaving a comment that said “lots of words I didn’t know”. One student drew a sad face, while one other student drew a straight line, telling me they were indifferent about their book.

Figure 2:

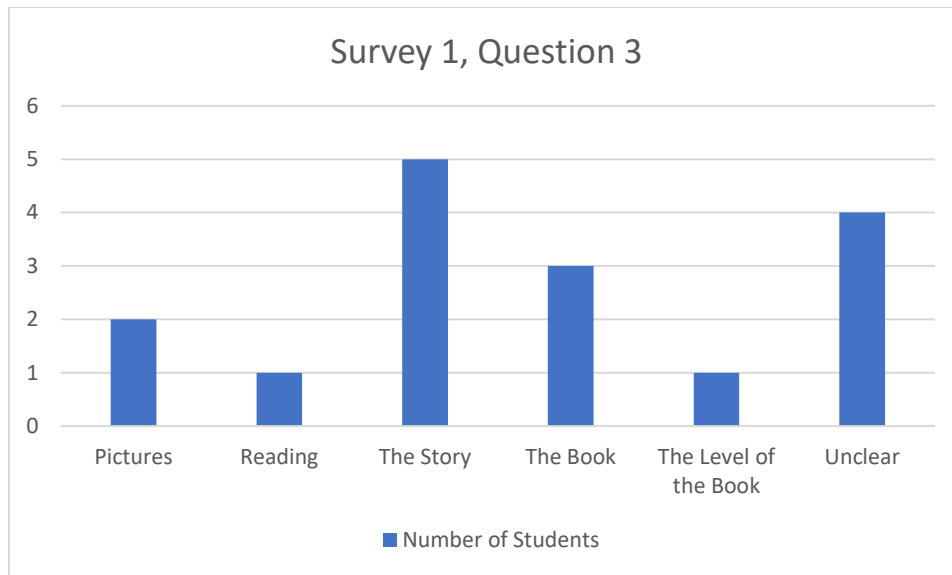


*Note.* Figure 2 displays student answers for question 2 of survey 1.

Question three asked students what they liked about the assignment. Students were to type, write, or record their answers in a space provided for them. As shown below in chart 3, the students gave a variety of answers. Two students said they liked the pictures in the book the best. One student said that reading the book was what they liked the most. Five students answered that the thing they like the most was a certain part of the story they read. Three students answered that the book itself was what they liked the most. One student answered that they liked that “I can read it”, while four students’ answers were unclear.



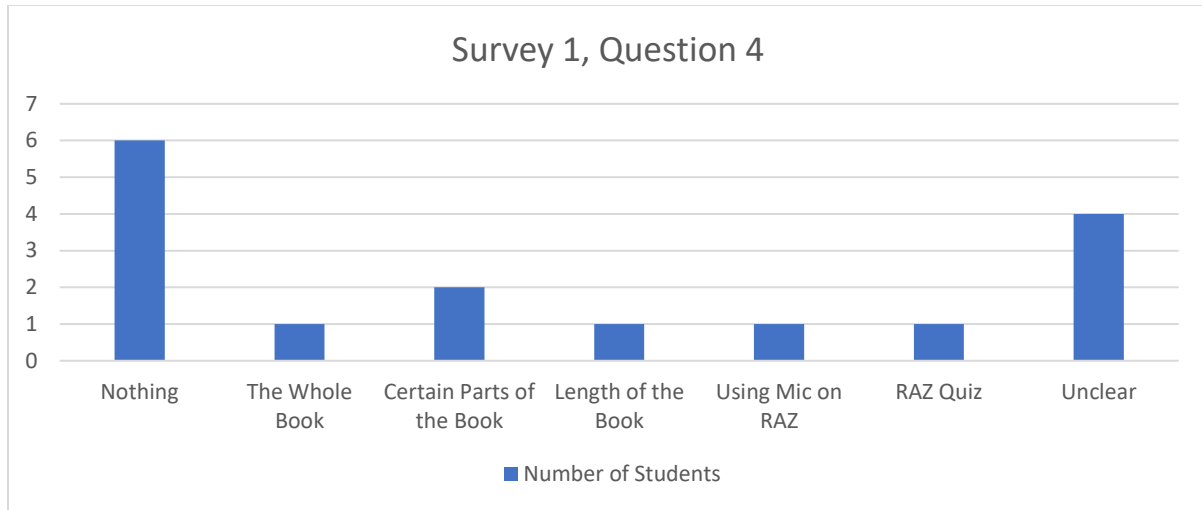
Figure 3:



*Note.* Figure 3 displays student answers for question 3 of survey 1.

Question four was the opposite of question three, asking the students what they disliked about the assignment. As shown in chart 4, six students said there was nothing they disliked about the assignment. One student disliked the book as a whole, while two students only disliked certain parts of the book. One student disliked how long the book was. One student disliked using the microphone to share their answers on the survey. One student disliked the RAZ quiz, while four students' answers were unclear.

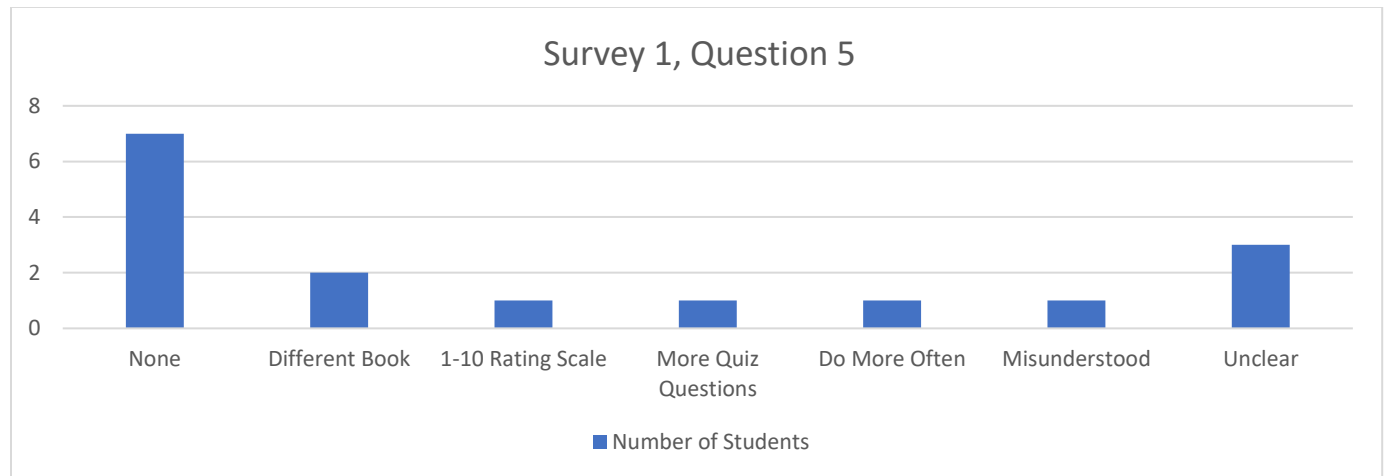
Figure 4:



*Note.* Figure 4 displays student answers for question 4 of survey 1.

The final question on the survey asked students to share any suggestions they may have had to make the assignment better. While many of the suggestions the students gave were different, a large portion answered that they had no suggestions. As shown in chart 5, seven students had no suggestion. Two students suggested using a different book. One student suggested a 1-10 rating scale for question one. One student suggested adding more quiz questions. One student suggested we do the assignment more often. One student misunderstood the question and gave a suggestion to the character of the book, instead of on the assignment, and three students' answers were unclear.

Figure 5:



*Note.* Figure 5 displays student answers for question 5 of survey 1.

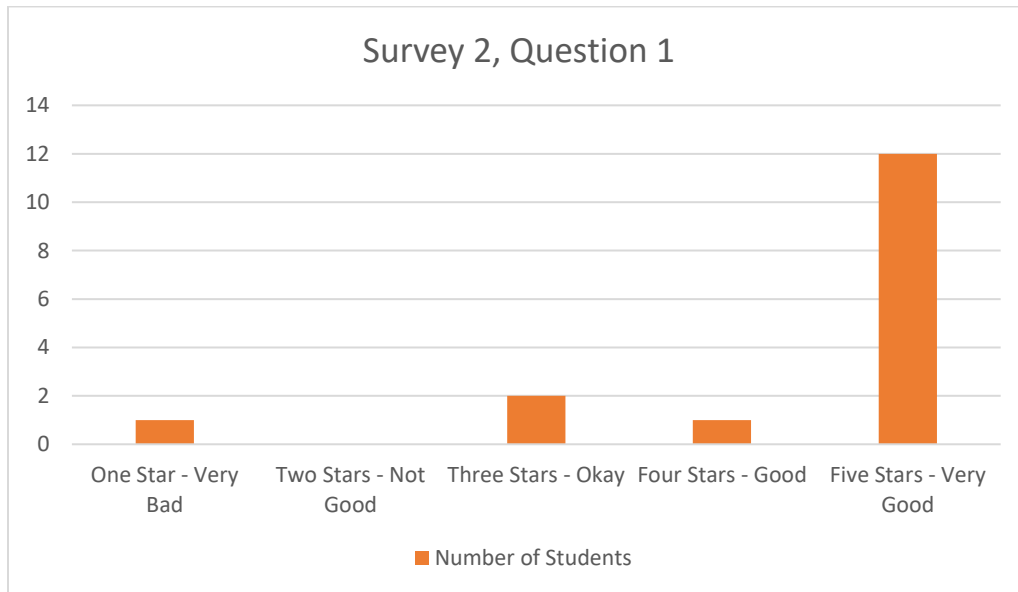
### Choice Offered

For our second assignment, students were given five book options – a fable/folktale, realistic fiction, humor, fantasy, and adventure/mystery. Students were given time to explore each book, before deciding which one they wanted to read for our assignment. Two students choose the fable/folktale. Five students chose the realistic fiction option. Six students chose the humorous option. Three students chose the fantasy option and none of the students chose the adventure/mystery option. Students were also given a choice for how they wanted to show comprehension of the book they chose. Their choices for comprehension were through a drawing, a graphic organizer, or the RAZ quiz that accompanied the book they selected. Thirteen students chose to complete the RAZ quiz. Three students chose to draw a picture and submit it on SeeSaw with a voice memo. No students chose to fill out the graphic organizer.

The results for question one, which asked students to rate the book they chose, are shown below in chart 6. One student rated their book very bad. No students rated their book not good.

Two students rated their book okay. One student rated their book good, and twelve students rated their book very good. Student comments included, “loved it” and “very good and interesting”.

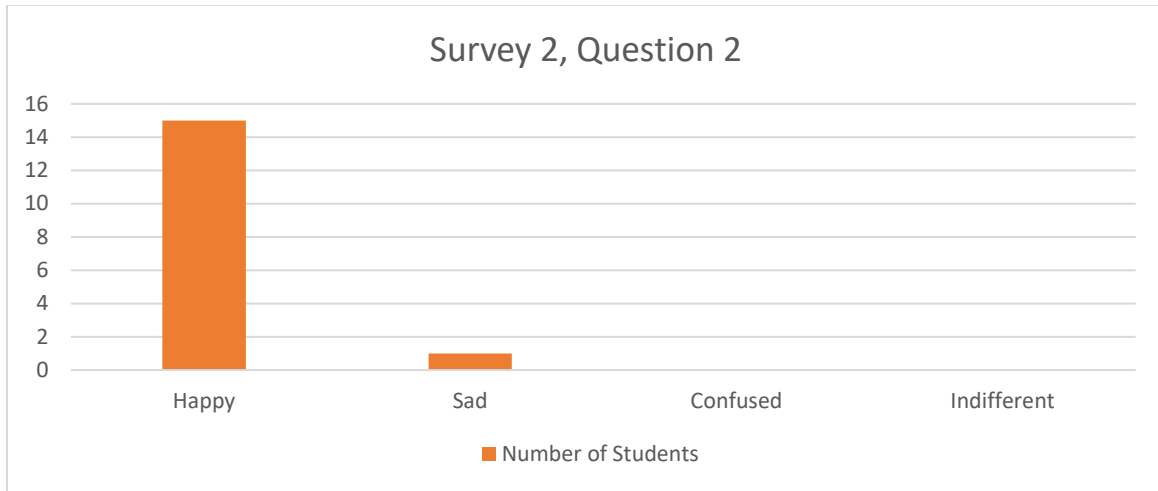
Figure 6:



*Note.* Figure 6 displays student answers for question 1 of survey 2.

Question number two asked students to draw how they felt about the assignment, using a blank smiley face. As shown below in chart 7, all but one of the students drew a happy face to describe how they felt about the assignment. The one student who did not draw a happy face, drew a sad face.

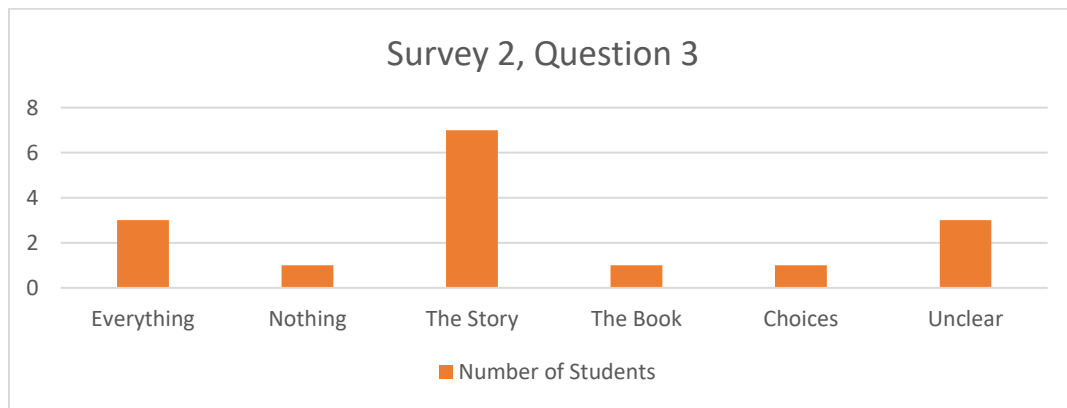
Figure 7:



Note. Figure 7 displays student answers for question 2 of survey 2.

Question three focused on what students liked about the assignment. As shown in chart 8, three students said they liked everything about the assignment. One student said they liked nothing about the assignment. Seven students said they liked the story, while one student said they liked the book. One student said they liked that there were choices, and three students' answers were unclear.

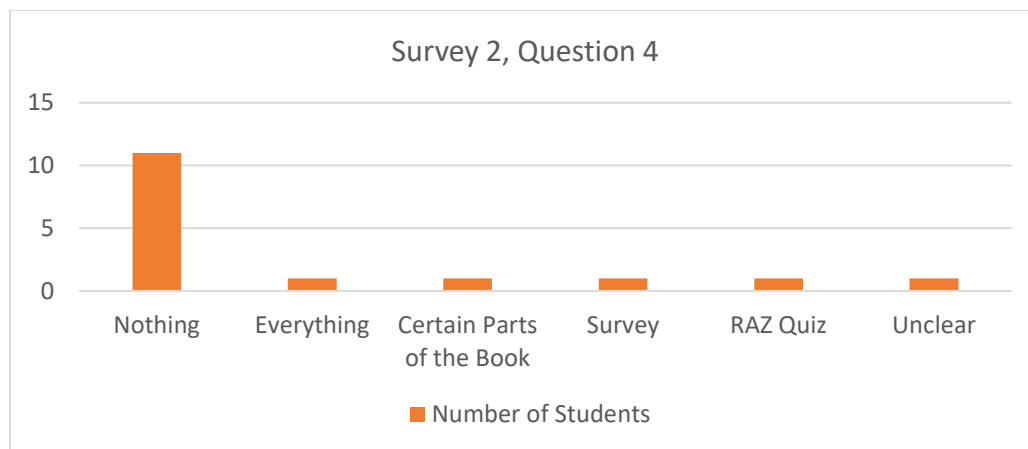
Figure 8:



Note. Figure 8 displays student answers for question 3 of survey 2.

Again, question four asks the opposite of question three. The students could type, write, or record their answers for what they disliked about the assignment. As shown in chart 9, eleven students answered that there was nothing they disliked about the assignment. One student answered that they dislike everything. One student disliked certain parts of the book they had chosen. One student disliked the RAZ quiz they had chosen and one student's answer was unclear.

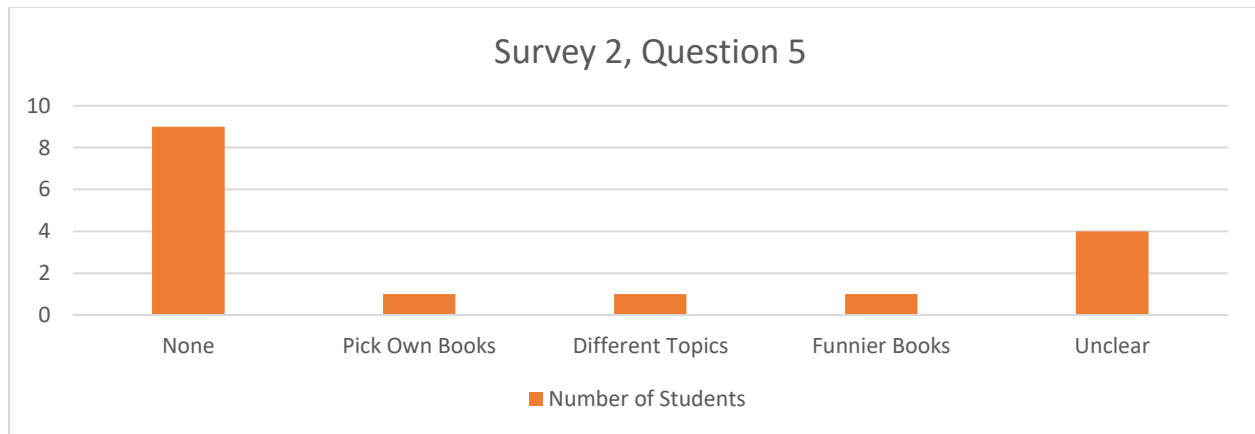
Figure 9:



*Note.* Figure 9 displays student answers for question 4 of survey 2.

The final question, again, asked students to share suggestions they had to make the assignment better. Their answers are shown below in chart 10. Nine students had no suggestions to make the assignment better. One student suggested they pick from their own books, while one suggested adding different topics for their book choices. One student suggested I add more funny books to their choices, and four students' answers were unclear.

Figure 10:



*Note.* Figure 10 displays student answers for question 5 of survey 2.

### Interpretation of Data

In analyzing the data from above, I have found that the majority of my students had a more positive experience with our second assignment, where choice was offered. I found it most beneficial to compare each of the survey questions, looking at the data received when students were offered choice versus the data received when students were not offered choice. I did find an outlier in my data for each question. I also found that my own experiences with these students and my observations during each of these assignments allowed me to gather more qualitative data.

For example, in the quantitative data received from survey 2, the assignment where choice was offered, I found that every question had one student who seemed to have a negative experience with choice. For question one this student rated their book very bad. For question two, they drew a sad face. For questions three and four, what they liked and disliked, they answered that they liked nothing and disliked everything. Through my observations and a conversation with this student during our second assignment, I was able to determine that they

were upset there were not choices of books with topics they enjoyed. For question five, they suggested that I include books about dinosaurs and Pokémon.

For question one, 50% of the students rated their book good or very good when choice was not offered. When choice was offered, 81% of students rated their book good or very good. For question two, 81% of students were happy with the assignment that did not offer choice. After completing the second assignment, where choice was offered, that percentage changed to 94% of students. For question three, many of the things students answered that they liked were the similar for both surveys. However, one student did explicitly answer they liked that there were options for their second assignment. For question four, 38% of students said they disliked nothing when choice was not offered. That percentage changed to 69% of students saying they disliked nothing when choice was offered. For question five, when students were asked for suggestions, the majority of the students answered that they had no suggestions on both surveys. During the assignments, many students expressed that they didn't know what to write for suggestions.

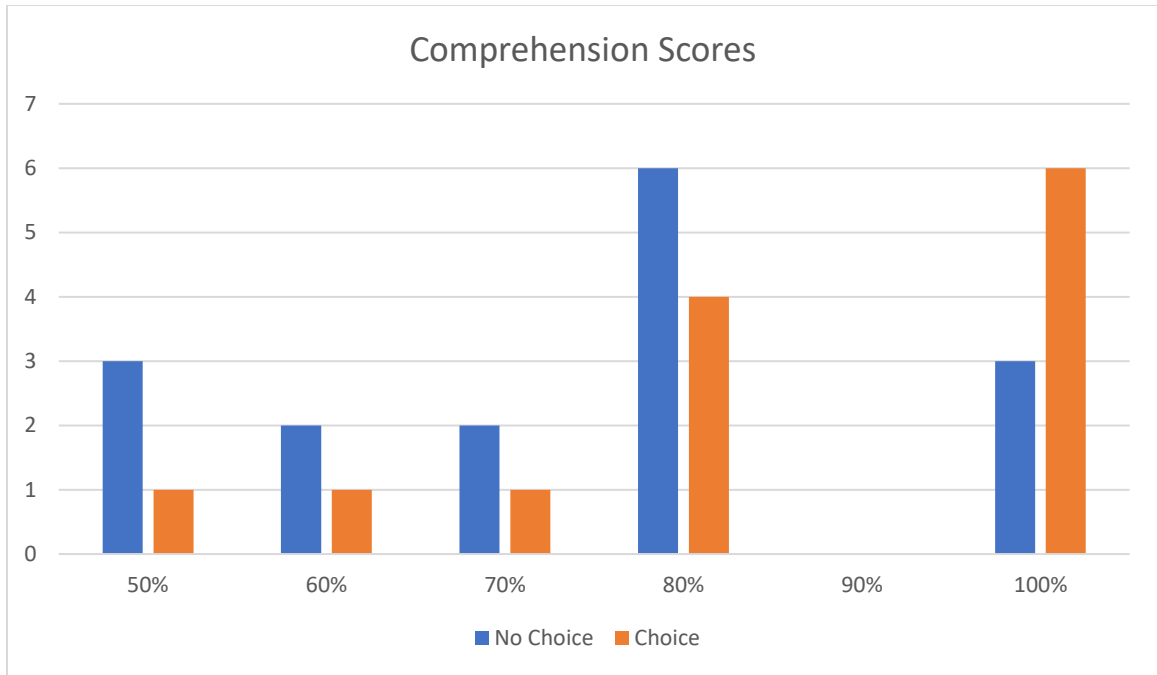
Along with all of the data, I also took notes, many of which I feel will better help us to understand the data. One of the things that I noticed as the students were completing these assignments was that, while I encouraged students to be as honest as possible in their survey answers, many were quite passive with their answers. I attribute this to the fact that they knew I would be reading their answers. I believe that while many of them were honest and had many thoughts and feelings to express, there were quite a few students who gave "nice" answers. Perhaps these students were afraid of hurting my feelings, but I felt as if they were answering what they thought I wanted to hear, instead of how they actually felt about the assignments.



Other than the survey questions, there were two other aspects of the data that I felt it was important to focus on. Those aspects have to do with the students' comprehension for the books they read, whether they chose the book or it was chosen for them. For our first assignment, the students did not get to choose how they showed their comprehension, all of the students completed the RAZ quiz that accompanied the book I selected for them. For our second assignment, the students had a choice of three options – draw a picture, fill out a graphic organizer, or complete the RAZ quiz. An overwhelming majority of the students chose to complete the RAZ quiz, which was quite shocking to me. While thirteen students chose the RAZ quiz, there were three students who chose to draw a picture. None of the students chose to fill out the graphic organizer. Through observations during the second assignment, I gathered that many of the students who chose the RAZ quiz felt like it would be the fastest option. There were some students who were confused and did not realize that they didn't have to complete the quiz. By the time they had finished the quiz, they did not want to pick a different option. The three students who chose to draw the picture put a lot of effort and details into their choice and seemed to be excited about the opportunity.

Because so many students chose to complete the quiz during the second assignment, I was able to focus specifically on how well they did on their quiz when I chose their book versus when they chose their own book. As shown below in chart 11, the overall comprehension scores went up when students were able to choose their own books.

Figure 11:



*Note.* Figure 11 displays students' comprehension scores for when choice was offered, as well as when choice was not offered.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ACTION PLAN AND PLAN FOR SHARING**

#### **Plan for Taking Action**

After observing my students during these two differing assignments and evaluating the data gained from their responses on the two surveys, I plan to implement more assignments based through choice. I found that most, of my students were more engaged in the assignment when they were able to make decisions about their learning. Offering them choice seemed to motivate them to want to learn and to put more effort into their learning. I would like to try these assignments again and implement the suggestions that my students gave me through these first two. I think following through and using their suggestions is an important step in creating a positive classroom environment to further foster their engagement and motivation to succeed. It is important that our students know we are listening to them.

I also plan to look for further ways to implement choice into our daily classroom routine. I would like to implement more choice within my core math and reading times. I feel that adding options for how they practice their math skill or spelling words, for example, would be an easy way to help my students become more excited about learning. I feel that building excitement is a natural part of allowing more choice in a classroom. I also feel like adding options during centers for math or reading would allow more opportunities for me to try new activities. I also felt that it was important to hear how my students felt about these choices. I plan to implement more check ins with my students. I feel that their opinions will be a great opportunity for me to reflect on what is and what is not working within my classroom.

**Plan for Sharing**

With the knowledge I have gained through the research I have conducted, I feel that the next natural step would be to share it with my colleagues. My second grade team and I often have opportunities to share information and strategies we have learned with each other, as well as our building principal and other members of our administrative team during our professional learning community meetings (PLCs). I have found that this would be valuable information to share with them and would encourage them to implement it within their own classrooms. Through sharing this information, I am looking forward to starting conversations with my colleagues about their thoughts or experiences with offering students choice.

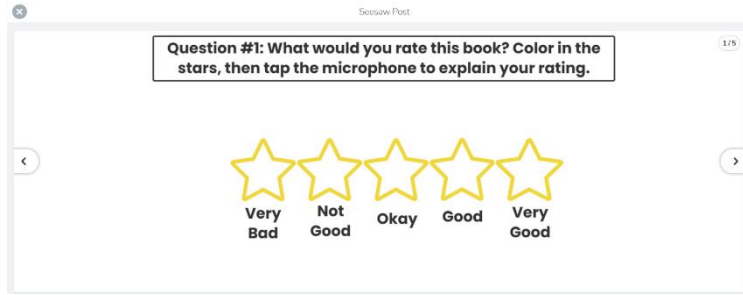
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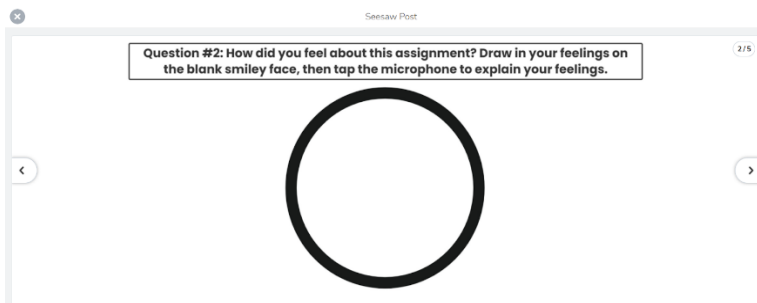
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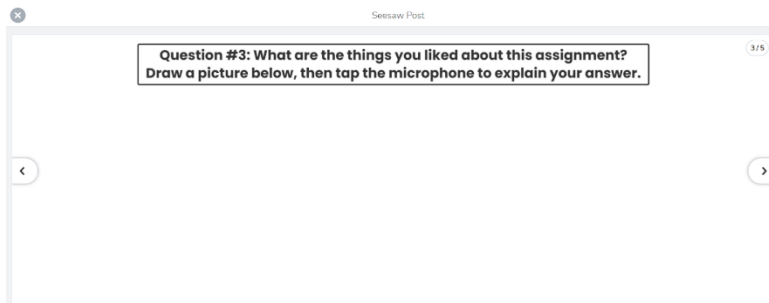
### APPENDIX A



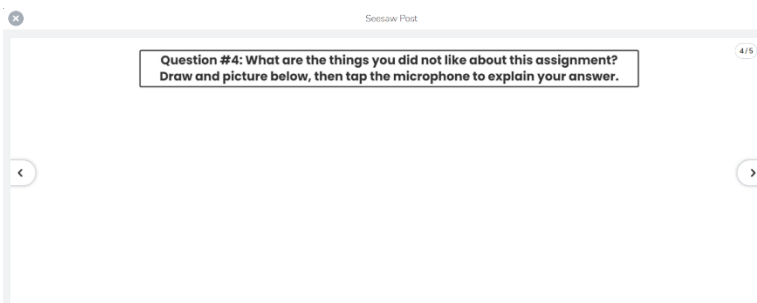
### APPENDIX B



### APPENDIX C

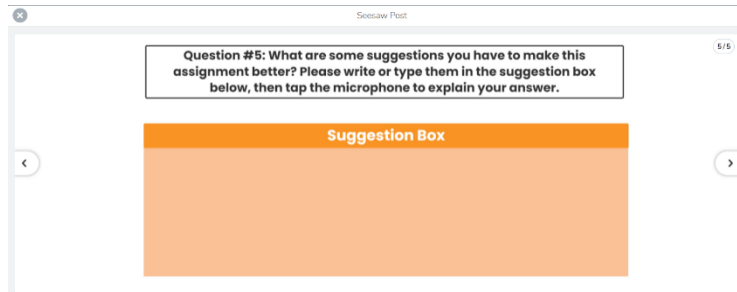


### APPENDIX D





### APPENDIX E



### APPENDIX F

October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020

820 Park Street  
 Jackson, MN 56143

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This letter is to inform you that your child has been invited to participate in a study to determine how student choice and classroom environment influence student growth and learning.

Your child was selected to be a participant because he/she is in my regular education classroom. If you choose to allow your child to participate, please know that your child will be asked to do the following:

1. Your child would participate in classroom lessons and activities where choice is presented, as well as lessons and activities where choice is not presented.
2. Your child's behavior and engagement would be observed during these lessons and activities.
3. Your child would be asked to share their thoughts and feelings around these different types of lessons and activities.

The information gained from this study will be used to help me complete my master's degree at Minnesota State University Moorhead. Although Riverside Elementary Principal, Kim Meyer, has granted me permission to conduct this study, I still need parental consent to use this information in my final paper, which is a requirement for my degree. By signing this form, you are giving me consent to use the information that I gather. All information will be confidential and no names will be used in my research paper. Please also note, that you may choose to not have your child participate at any point.

Please feel free to contact me with any question or concerns you may have regarding this study. The best way to contact me is through email at [sarah.theesfeld@jccschools.com](mailto:sarah.theesfeld@jccschools.com). You may also contact my advisor at Minnesota State University Moorhead, (insert advisor name here), at (insert advisor contact information here).

A copy of this form will be provided to you, if you would like one. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and are choosing to participate in the study. You may choose to withdraw from this study at any point, without consequence. Thank you for your consideration.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date