

(Example of Section III –Procedures from a Student Proposal)

Procedures

This action research study will take place over a six-week period during the spring semester of 2011. The study will be presented to students in the form of a writing workshop unit on *graphica*. Prior to the study, students will have had limited experience with the writing workshop model. As a weekly volunteer in the classroom throughout the year, the researcher expects to lead several exercises in holistic writing aimed at familiarizing students with components of the writing workshop model. For example, prior to the study, students will receive writing notebooks, and they will practice writing for increasingly sustained amounts of time on topics of their choice. In addition, the researcher will encourage student discussion and reflection about their writing through one-on-one teacher conferences, peer conferences, and small group (three to four students) discussions. Immediately prior to the study, the researcher additionally intends to teach the primary classroom teacher and two aides about the components of the writing workshop (see Appendix C).

Over the course of six weeks, students will be immersed in *graphica*. Books from the researcher's personal collection and from the school and public library will be loaned to the classroom library for student use both inside and outside of class. Students will also participate in a class read-aloud of at least one full-length graphic novel (*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney) over the course of the study. Students will have a minimum of 45 minutes three times per week for independent writing time, in addition to time for mini-lessons and writing conferences. The researcher intends to devote five to seven hours each of the six weeks to presence and instruction in the sample classroom.

Beginning in week one and continuing throughout the study, students will write comic drafts on topics of their choosing. During week one the class will also examine graphica and create a class list of graphica terminology to be posted in the classroom throughout the unit. Throughout the study, the researcher will present mini-lessons on key aspects of graphica, including visual elements (e.g., symbols, props, panel size), word choice, and mechanics, to teach students when and how to incorporate such aspects into their own graphic stories. The intent of mini-lessons is also to help students understand how to revise their work. Students will also rely on teacher and peer conferences to revise their stories. At the end of the unit, each student will be expected to have taken at least one story draft and turned it into a final draft with which they are personally satisfied. Students will have the option of submitting their work for sale at the Cartoon Art Museum in downtown San Francisco, which sells the work of local San Francisco comics at no cost to the seller.

Prior to the beginning of the unit, all students will be assessed using both the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) and the Writer's Self-Perception Scale (WSPS). These will be re-administered after the completion of the unit.

Population and Sample

The sample will consist of seven to 10 fourth and fifth grade boys in a self-contained SPED classroom at a K-5 school in the Sunset neighborhood of San Francisco. In the 2008-2009 school year, the school enrolled 379 students, of which 56% were male, 44% were female, 22.7% were eligible for free or reduced lunch, 20.6% were English language learners (ELL), and 10.6% SPED designated. The parent-reported ethnic make-up of the school during the same year was: 31.1% Chinese, 30.1% White, 6.3% Latino, 6.1% Japanese, 5% Filipino, 4.2% African

American, 1.3% Korean, 0.5% American Indian, and 9% other non-white (6.3% declined to state).

The demographic data of the sample is not parallel to the school's make-up. During the majority of the 2009-2010, the SPED class consisted of eight boys (six fourth graders and two fifth graders). Five (62.5%) of the eight students were African American, two (25%) were Latino, and one (12.5%) was half White and half Chinese. One student spoke a language other than English at home and seven (87.5%) were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The six fourth graders are expected to return to the class as fifth graders during the upcoming school year, and a currently undetermined number of entering fourth grade students will also join the class.

Instrumentation

Student academic motivation and writing self-concept will be assessed at the beginning and end of the study using two quantitative instruments, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) and the Writer's Self-Perception Scale (WSPS). The MSLQ has been widely tested and is considered valid and reliable measure of motivation in educational contexts by multiple researchers (e.g., Duncan & McKeachie, 2005; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993; Schunk, et al., 2008). The MSLQ consists of 15 scales measuring various factors of motivational beliefs and learning strategies using a 7-point Likert scale (from 1, "not at all true of me," to 7, "very true of me"); statements from the 15 scales are mixed together on the survey and separated only for scoring. The original instrument was developed for college students and contained 81 items, but previous studies have reduced the number of and adapted the questions for elementary populations without reducing reliability or validity (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005). This study will use 10 of the 15 scales: Intrinsic Goal Orientation (4 questions), Extrinsic Goal Orientation (4 questions), Task Value (6 questions), Control of

Learning Beliefs (4 questions), Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance (8 questions), Test Anxiety (5 questions), Time and Study Environment Management (8 questions), Effort Regulation (4 questions), Peer Learning (3 questions), and Help Seeking (4 questions), a total of 50 statements. Most statements are written in a positive format, but several are written in a negative format, and scoring is adjusted accordingly.

The WSPS (Bottomly, et al., 1997/1998) consists of 38 statements about writing and measures five factors, General Progress, Specific Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States, using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Of the 38 questions, one is general (“I think I am a good writer”) and the other 37 statements are divided between the five categories. All items are stated in a positive format.

Using two instruments is ideal to ensure the reliability of results, and is particularly useful in this study because the MSLQ measures general academic motivation and the WSPS, which does directly examine writing, has not been widely tested, though it has been “normed nationally” according to Pollington, Wilcox, and Morrison (2001, p. 258). To ensure reading ability does not impede student understanding, both instruments will be given orally, with the response choices printed in words and graphics for students to refer to while responding to the oral statements.

Teacher and researcher observations will be used to assess student motivation and engagement. During mini-lessons, the researcher will either record the lesson using a digital video camera (and later transcribed) or will ask one of the other teachers present to take a written record of the lesson. These transcripts will later be coded to determine student levels of motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy. In addition, the researcher will observe and record

data on each student participant for a minimum of 15 minutes once per week, and both the researcher, the regular classroom teacher, and aides will use a conferring worksheet (see Appendices A and B) to record their observations. Various researchers (e.g. Bitz, 2004; Fu & Shelton, 2007; Norton, 2003; Voss, 2003) have used qualitative observations to describe student motivation and engagement.

Validity

In addition to the use of multiple instruments to measure motivation and engagement to ensure instrument validity, steps will be taken to ensure internal and external validity. There are several anticipated threats to the internal validity of the proposed study. The primary threat is mortality. The sample size of the study will be small (approximately 10), and thus the loss of a student due to leaving the school or being mainstreamed to a non-SPED classroom, or a lack of data on individual students due to repeated absences is a possibility that would significantly reduce the amount of data. A second possible threat to the internal validity of the study is instrumentation bias while recording qualitative data. To control for bias, the researcher intends to keep a reflective journal to be used both during and outside of the classroom. In addition, the researcher will videotape mini-lessons when possible, and will record conversations among peer groups, as students may feel more comfortable sharing different insights with each other. A third threat to the internal validity of the study is implementation. The researcher will be one of four adults in the classroom, each of which will be interacting with the sample throughout the study's implementation, but none of which have a background in literacy equal to that of the researcher. To control for implementation validity, the other classroom teachers will be provided with information about the purpose of and reasoning behind the study, as well as training on the principles and practices of the writing workshop model (see Appendix C). Student-teacher

interaction can strongly impact student motivation and self-concept (Schunk, et al., 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Voss, 2003), thus it is necessary that the teachers working closely with the students in this study on writing understand and have training in how to effectively conference with students.

Although this is an action research study, and thus external validity is not a major concern, it is the researcher's hope that the findings of this study will have theoretical generalizability to populations similar to the sample used in this study. Specifically, the researcher hopes the study will provide her with supported interventions to use with other unmotivated writers in her future classrooms. To improve the transferability of the study, the researcher will provide thorough descriptive details of the participants, with the hope that others may be able to generalize the results of the study. Finally, because the sample will consist only of students with learning differences, the results will be most generalizable to LD writers; however, it is generally accepted in the teaching profession that methods that support LD students also support the learning of non-LD students.

Projected Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data.

To score the MSLQ, scale scores are constructed by taking the mean of the items within that scale. For example, Extrinsic Goal Orientation consists of four items; summing the four items and taking the average would compute an individual's score for Extrinsic Goal Orientation. Any negatively worded items and the ratings are reversed before an individual's score is computed. Scores for the MSLQ will be represented in a categorical crossbreak table displaying score range, mean, and standard deviation of the 10 categorical variables listed under "Instrumentation."

To score the WSPS, a mean score and standard deviation for each of the five scales (General Progress, Specific Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States) are calculated. Results for the WSPS will be represented in a categorical crossbreak table displaying score range, mean, and standard deviation of the five categorical variables. For both the MSLQ and the WSPS, pre-test and post-test means will be compared and tested for significance.

Qualitative data.

Transcripts from mini-lessons, conferences, and general observations will be coded into three primary categories using coding schemes. First, *behavioral engagement* will include quantity of student participation. Second, *emotional/motivational engagement* will include student tone of voice and body language. Third, *cognitive engagement/self-efficacy* will include student willingness to exert effort and challenge themselves, asking for help, checking for understanding, and re-trying after failing. These qualitative data will be analyzed for changes in degree and quantity over the course of the six weeks and will be compared to quantitative data to look for repeating or correlative trends.