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Work Conferences and Student Engagement

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An Action Research Report
By Hannah Ebner

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of individual, weekly work conferences on students' levels of intrinsic motivation, work engagement, and enthusiasm for learning. The study was conducted with 28 fourth through sixth graders in a mixed-age, public Montessori classroom. Data was collected as notes during teacher observations, conversations with students, and during the work conferences themselves. Accountability and relational support increased through student-teacher dialogue about work. These two factors improved the overall student productivity, enthusiasm, and organization, as well as the work culture of the classroom. The conferences helped the students become more conscious of the nature of their learning, and they helped the teacher obtain a deeper understanding of students. This benefitted lesson planning and teacher engagement in classroom processes. Further research could be conducted to investigate, with more depth, the impact of work conferences on student self-efficacy beliefs, the use of written self-evaluation tools, and the use of portfolios to catalogue and present work.

Keywords: intrinsic motivation, work conferences, joyful learning

One of the most sacred goals in a Montessori classroom is to spark students' joy in learning. We use beautiful, hands-on materials to inspire self-direction and tactile exploration. We speak kindly and respectfully so we don't make students feel afraid. We give lessons individually and in small groups in order to closely observe our students and to foster a meaningful relationship that builds over the course of a three-year age cycle. All of these facets of Montessori pedagogy align perfectly with the research that has been conducted about student motivation in the classroom.

However, even in a Montessori classroom, where motivation is addressed thoroughly in pedagogy and practice, there can be blind spots and breakdowns in student engagement. There are students whose academic work is driven by a guiding inner force, and there are other students who would sit and draw comics all day if went unnoticed. In a classroom of 28 fourth through sixth graders, many of them began the year working hard, creatively, and with rich intrinsic motivation. There were others, however, who were not fully engaged in the learning process, which was detrimental to their skill-building, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The unmotivated students set an unfocused tone in the classroom that affected other, more engaged students. This research sought to examine whether or not work conferences could be an effective, multi-faceted intervention to increase student motivation. By increasing one on one teacher-student interaction, there could be more opportunity to influence student self-efficacy beliefs, provide challenging work according to individual abilities, and offer encouragement, support, and even some direct instruction. This action research project explored the effects of holding weekly individual work conferences with all 28 students in a fourth through sixth grade classroom. The conferences included teacher-student dialogue about

completed work, work in progress, joint lesson planning, and sometimes mini-lessons. The goal was to empower students in their own learning process, to deepen the teacher-student relationship, and to clarify work tasks tailored to individual student ability. The question that spurred this research was: Will a consistent work conference schedule and structure in an Upper Elementary classroom increase student engagement, joy, enthusiasm, and pride in work?

Review of Literature

Cszikzentmihalyi (2014) has become well known for his extensive research into the subject of "flow" or "optimal experience." Flow can be defined as: "…an intrinsically motivated, task-focused state characterized by full concentration, a change in the awareness of time (e.g., time passing quickly), feelings of clarity and control, a merging of action and awareness, and a lack of self-consciousness," (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 2005, p. 346). When related to classroom learning, flow is the state that teachers hope to see their students experiencing. It is the teacher's job to provide an environment which challenges and supports students in the proper balance in order to achieve engagement and flow (Shernoff, 2013; Csiksentmihalyi & Rathunde, 2005). Flow relates to the classroom in three important ways: the examination of flow is not only a study of the individual experience, but of the relationship between the individual and the context. Additionally, flow is a developmental growth experience—it is achieved, sought after, and repeated through the pursuit of increasing challenge and increasing skill. Moreover, the definition of flow includes intrinsic motivation for the task, which other researchers have connected to more meaningful learning. Bassi and

Delle Fave (2012) wrote about the positive effects of autonomy in the learning environment as well as intrinsic motivation on learning and general wellbeing (p. 426).

Duffy and Duffy (2012) wrote a book relating Montessori pedagogy to current research on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. They described the four C's of intrinsic motivation: choice, challenge, content, and collaboration. This is slightly different from the three C's that Kohn (1999) describes—he didn't include *challenge.* Some authors, such as Shernoff (2013), are of the opinion that challenge is a specific and necessary ingredient in the experience of flow. His description of a motivational environment included what he called "environmental complexity," or a balance between challenging work and a supportive atmosphere (p. 137). Shernoff wrote that: "the challenge dimension typically features clear prescriptions for meaningful and goal-directed action by presenting a task to be completed or challenge to be mastered," (p.137).

Another major contributing factor to motivation is a student's self-efficacy beliefs, or their perception of their own ability to complete a task well. Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) explained the possible sources of self-efficacy beliefs, as well as offered suggestions for how to improve them through classroom intervention and teacher interaction approach. The importance of positive self-efficacy in student success cannot be underestimated. They reported that,

> Much empirical evidence now supports Bandura's contention that self-efficacy beliefs touch virtually every aspect of people's lives: whether they think productively, self-debilitatingly, pessimistically or optimistically; how well they motivate themselves and persevere in the face of adversities; their vulnerability to stress and depression; and the life choices they make. (p. 105)

Self-efficacy is an important facet of motivation, and one to be heavily considered in the use of interventions to improve motivation and flow.

Vitto (2003) discusses the importance of the student-teacher relationship and its impact on student behavior, learning, and motivation. Among other ideas, he brings up the importance of student agency in the classroom, student choice, their need to feel successful, using different strategies to meet students' differing needs, setting specific, individualized goals, and the impact of specific, timely feedback about work. He makes a clear statement about motivation and the student-teacher relationship:

> Motivation to learn is enhanced when there is a strong and personal relationship between teacher and student (Mendler, 2000). When students perceive that the teacher likes them and that the teacher cares about their needs, their level of involvement and motivation increases. (p. 110)

Vitto also discusses attribution theory, which is the same concept as student self-efficacy—it highlights the impact of student perception of their learning and engagement. If a student believes that they are being affected by uncontrollable factors, such as bad luck or a lack of intelligence, they will be less likely to make an effort. If they believe, on the other hand, that they are capable of creating change through effort, or that the cause for failure was transient, they will be more likely to try to rise above adversity. Vitto (2003) writes:

> Teachers can assist students in developing more effective attributions by encouraging students to view failures as temporary and changeable… Teachers can model these types of attributions by acknowledging and discussing teacher mistakes and attributing them to temporary and controllable factors. (p. 111)

Vitto highlights the impact that teachers can have on students' inner beliefs, motivation, and experience of the classroom and the world.

There are many possible impediments to intrinsic motivation. One very common impediment is so prevalent one can easily take it for granted: grades. Kohn (1999) states: "[Grades] reduce a student's sense of control over his own fate and can induce a blind conformity to others' wishes—sometimes to the point that students are alienated from their own preferences and don't even know who they are" (p. 204). Grades are a common example of an extrinsic motivator that can disengage students from the direct purpose of a task, for example practicing a math skill *to get better at that skill,* as opposed to practicing for a test for a grade. Another prevalent detractor from motivation is discouragement. Van Bockern, Wenger, and Ashworth (2004) explored the extremely adverse effects of getting caught in a "cycle of discouragement." Their description of motivation includes "expectations, value, and a safe climate" (p. 149). They correlate the experience of discouragement with the student-teacher relationship, and describe the negative spiral into which a discouraged student can fall. Conversely they offer a framework for how to engage and encourage a discouraged student in order to break the cycle of discouragement. They call this the "Pathway to Courage" and it relies on adult perceptiveness, wisdom, and compassion regardless of student behavior (p. 150). Relating back to Duffy and Duffy's four C's of motivation, Gray (2010) offered insight into the negative outcomes of a child in an environment without choice. He described the increase in depression and anxiety in the population of children, and he posited that it is a direct result of reduced free time in student schedules.

Several studies and books have been written to highlight the many positive interventions that can be made to increase intrinsic motivation and student engagement. Berger (2003) dives into the collaboration piece of motivation and provides examples and a framework for a peer critique process. He discussed the benefits of including two components in teacher-guided classroom work culture: making work public to one's peer group, and promoting the value of each person completing work to the best of their ability. This idea of "the best of their ability" provides differentiation, and allows each individual student to strive for whatever goal fits their skills and needs the best. Gillet, Vallerand, and LaFrenière (2011) researched autonomy-support. The study itself was somewhat limited, but the authors contended that increased autonomy-support positively impacts intrinsic motivation. Shernoff (2014) commented on the relational aspect of the classroom environment. He wrote, "Studies have shown that students who maintain caring and supportive relationships have more positive academic attitudes and mastery-oriented goals, higher levels of interest and self-efficacy, and are more satisfied with school" (p. 153). Pajares, Johnson and Usher (2007) describe interventions that can improve student self-efficacy beliefs. Attention to the student's subjective experience in academic outcomes can help mediate self-perception. This involves a high level of teacher-student interaction, and the study suggested that teachers should provide feedback about student growth rather than deficit in order to encourage perseverance. Also, encouraging students' frequent self-assessment and the use of portfolios encourages self-awareness that can result in increased confidence (Berger, 2003). In addition to fulfilling the parameters of all four C's of motivation—choice, content, challenge, and collaboration in the classroom (Duffy & Duffy, 2012)—it seems that interventions in the

student-teacher relationship could help improve student motivation from several different angles. Teachers can help mediate students' self-efficacy beliefs, provide feedback on growth, clarify tasks, guide student self-reflection, and offer more challenging work with the support to make success possible.

Methods

The study was conducted over an eight-week period starting in mid-January and going into March. Four different data tools were used to collect information on the effects of individual, weekly work conferences on student engagement and motivation. As a baseline to the study, observations were made about the work in students' portfolios using a designated form (Appendix A). Notes were taken to answer questions about the quality of the work present, the subjects with the most work displayed, and the creativity the students showed in their work. Overall, the observation notes sought to determine the level of joy and engagement the students experienced through their assignments in the classroom. In addition to this qualitative baseline information, initial conversations took place in which each student was asked for his or her perspective on each of the components of his/her own learning, relating to the four Cs of motivation—choice, collaboration, content, and challenge (Appendix B). These conversations included direct notes on the students' responses, as well as an added layer of observation regarding their affect, body language, facial expression, and energy as they spoke about their perception of their experience in the classroom.

The main intervention of this research, individual student work conferences, included direct recording of information on the students' work throughout the six-week period. These notes were recorded in a binder with a tab for each student using a form

that had two columns, one for completed work, and another for work in progress. The back of the form had lines for general notes (Appendix C). I made a weekly schedule of work conferences that included a fifteen-minute time-slot for all of the 28 students in my class and posted it clearly in the room for all of the students to see. As much as was possible with all of the irregularities each week, I kept to the schedule. Student absences, vacation days, a snow day, and random other in-school events prevented perfect adherence to the schedule. As the only lead teacher in the classroom, it was occasionally necessary to make the choice to give lessons instead of holding work conferences in order to maintain classroom order and flow. As a result, I met with some students every other week. This felt frequent enough to stay in touch with their work and their experience, in addition to interacting during lessons and community time.

The work conferences themselves were casual dialogues during which the student was able to show me, according to their order of preference, any and all work they had completed or were working on in the time since their last conference. We looked at math problems, cultural assignments, written work, art, work journals, and anything else they were excited to show me. I assessed their need for different kinds of feedback according to the four Cs of motivation—I suggested work with certain peers (collaboration), more time working in a certain subject area (content), asked them what they were interested in working on more (choice), and invited them to do more challenging work (challenge) with the encouragement that, according to my assessment, they were ready for something harder. In accordance with the research, I made intuitive and analytical decisions about encouragement and constructive criticism, as well as helped them to clarify their tasks by either breaking things down, giving smaller chunks to work on, suggesting priority order,

and making to-do lists in their work journals. I role-modeled enthusiasm for learning and listened reflectively to their needs and desires in order to reinforce the supportive relationship with each student. The conferences included a balance between assessment of work, social-emotional discussion, and co-planning future lessons to be given. I sometimes included brief direct instruction as well, for example, solving a math problem together, teaching paraphrasing skills, editing, or teaching cursive. Overall, the work conferences were flexible to the student's needs at the time of the meeting.

Additionally, I conducted a brief, whole-class observation almost every day throughout the study. This was done using a form that had a scale of student engagement ranging from completely disengaged to completely focused on work, and a box with every students' initials (Appendix D). Notes were taken about what each student was doing and with what level of engagement. An overall sense of classroom energy, focus, productivity, joy, and activity was observed and recorded qualitatively.

To conclude the study, I spoke with students again using the same format as the baseline conversation at the beginning. This was meant to unearth any improvements, changes, differences, and similarities in their self-efficacy beliefs and perceptions of their work in the classroom. Notes were recorded in another column on the original form to compare answers from the beginning and end of the study. A similar post-analysis of student portfolios was conducted using a second column on the original form. Any changes or similarities in quality of work, quantity of work, and type of work were noted. Other anecdotal observations were recorded based on the study, such as student comments relating to motivation and engagement, or specific instances of student

inspiration and joy in learning relevant to the research. This filled in the gaps of a gestalt of the students' investment in their work when combined with all of the other data tools.

All data sheets were kept in a binder and organized by individual student, with a tab for the whole class observations in the front. This binder became an anchor for my teaching practice in terms of deeply knowing my students, planning lessons, recording assessments, and keeping track of the flow of work in the classroom.

Results

The observations and data collected in this study indicated an increase in student focus and productivity over the course of the intervention.

Data source one was a form used to analyze student portfolios before and after the intervention (Appendix A). This data source was flawed for a few different reasons. As a class we spent minimal time first semester focusing on portfolios or training the students to use them in any particular way. The older students did some coaching of the younger students, so there were a few who learned to use their portfolios well. Another issue with the portfolios was that they were flat, large binders, which made it difficult to showcase work completed in notebooks or three-dimensional projects, which was oftentimes the work that students were the most proud of. There has been discussion amongst teachers of changing the portfolio system to a digital, photography format where the student could take photographs of any of their completed works and store them in a digital file on a thumb drive. Nevertheless, the portfolios gave a baseline idea of student engagement, as our most motivated 4th graders were the ones who made a point of creating a portfolio even with minimal teacher guidance. After six weeks of work conferences the portfolios were reanalyzed and the teacher recorded new observations

about quantity, quality, and content focus of the work displayed. The results of this data source showed that some students began to use their portfolios as a result of the work conferences, some students remained disengaged from the use of their portfolios, and others continued to organize and use their portfolios with dedication and enthusiasm. Notes were taken during the work conferences that reflected discussion of "portfolio quality" work during teacher student dialogue. This individualized emphasis on portfolios as a container for high-quality work was more effective with some students than with others.

The second data source was documents used during the work conferences themselves. These included observational notes written by the teacher as well as direct information about the works the students completed between conferences. There were irregularities in this data set due to student absences, days off of school, in-school events, and the need to give lessons instead of holding conferences. Some students received more work conferences than others, although the general improvement in the classroom culture of work affected all students' understanding of expectations and industrious behavior.

The data gathered during the work conferences was analyzed according to a few different measures. These included looking at the number of works completed or in progress at each conference, a breakdown of work by subject (culture, math, and language), as well as data about the level of difficulty of the work chosen (challenging or simple). The determination of challenging or simple work was subjective according to the student, although generally "challenging" work included more writing, or took longer to complete. Individually, long division may have been deemed challenging for one

student and simple for another. The choices students made in content areas were significant relative to individual students but not as significant relative to the whole group. For example a student who avoided math may have shown improvement in choosing more math follow up work over the course of the study. However, this data was skewed according to the number of lessons given in a week in a certain discipline. For example one week there were several language lessons given so everyone showed an increase in language work being completed, although this wasn't an isolation of their motivation and focus, but rather a communal response to their environment. Number and kind of works completed and in progress were similarly interesting according to individual students. For example one student who had trouble finishing work but who often started many projects showed improvement in the completion of more work over the course of the study. The most significant data was the changes in challenging (designated so according to the individual) work over time, and the general increase in productivity over time in the classroom as a whole.

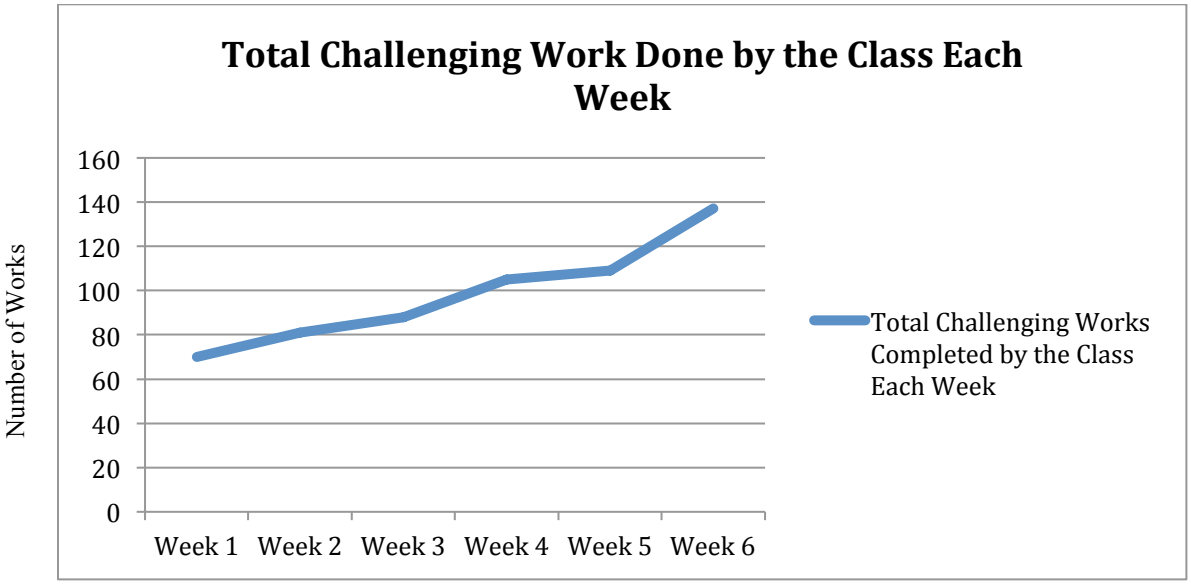

Figure 1. Total Challenging Works Done by the Class Each Week

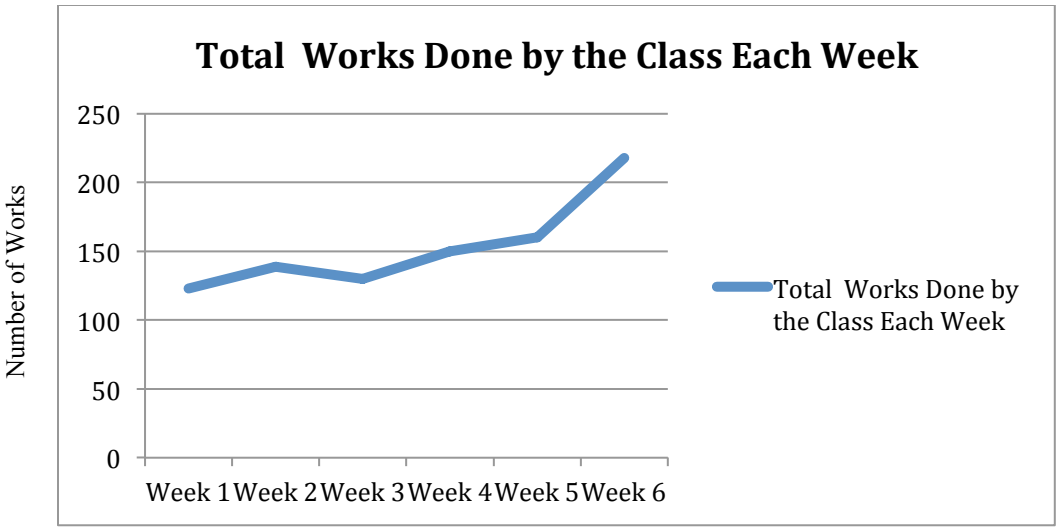

Figure 2: Total Works Done by the Class Each Week

It is evident in these figures that the overall amount of work being done in the classroom increased over the course of the study. This was accompanied by more pride and ownership on the part of the students as well, which affected their self-efficacy beliefs, and their work ethic. Seventy-eight percent of the class showed an increase in the selection of challenging work. They were propelled forward by their own successes.

The third data source (Appendix D) was an observation document to be used by the teacher for recording levels of individual student engagement during the work cycle for ten minutes each day at different times of day and according to a scale of 0-3 as follows:

0 – Completely disengaged and aimless

1 – Sitting with work in front of him/her

2 – Appear to be thinking and focused on work

3 – Completely in flow

The data collected from these observations could have been rich and interesting, although this data tool was not used well. It would have been more relevant to do two to

four quick observations at pre-planned times everyday rather than one observation sporadically at different times. The variation in time of day relative to the stage of the work cycle confounded the data. Setting a scheduled time or times to observe every day would have helped with the consistency of implementation as well as the relevancy of the data through isolation of the time variable.

The observational data revealed several important ideas about learning and focus for the students. First, the way learning unfolded in the classroom was much messier and even more individualized than previously imagined. At any given time, every single student was doing something very different from everyone else—even those working together with the same material. There was less consistency than I had thought between individual students as well. There were a few who were more focused more often than others; however even the most focused, productive, accomplished, and normalized students took frequent breaks, were very social, and chose a balance of easy and challenging work. Moments of flow for individuals were temporary, and were punctuated by conversation with friends, snack breaks, and distraction until they corralled themselves back into concentration. The kinds of activities that prompted flow were also varied—sometimes a student would become engrossed in a material or follow-up work, and sometimes the student would focus deeply on a simple drawing, on making a cup of tea, or on sharpening their pencil.

One of the major observed benefits of the work conferences was the clarification of tasks, which seemed to lower the experience of feeling overwhelmed and encouraged students towards bigger cultural work and more straight-forward, more-often-completed follow up work. One student sat down at a work conference during week five and said,

"I feel really proud of myself. I've been organized and I'm getting a lot done." She proceeded to show me several works that she had completed and was in the middle of a work at a much higher level of achievement than in previous weeks. Another student was overheard telling her friend about her plan for getting work done that day: "First I'm going to do my math practice, and then I'll work on the Timeline of Poetry. Then I'll do a Reading Comprehension and then we have P. E." This kind of pride and positive self-talk improved student capability and productivity.

The fourth data tool was a document for recording information gathered in conversations with students before and after the study (see Figure 3). The conversations were meant to investigate student self-efficacy beliefs and pride in their work, which could also be a reflection of the joy they experienced while doing it. These conversations included reflection on the previous semester, and students recalling their favorite work and the most challenging work they did. Interestingly, students' favorite work and their most challenging work were often one and the same. This relates to the idea of flow being a sweet spot between challenge and capacity—when a student was challenged and then able to complete the work, perhaps they experienced some flow along the way. This may have fostered intrinsic motivation, which was memorable and joyful to experience. Through the work conferences I was able to have dialogue with students about what kind of work they enjoyed and what challenging lessons they wanted to have next. This helped us to narrow in on the intersections between challenge and capacity so that students could achieve more focus, more of the time.

My overall observations included a pervasive sense that students had a clearer picture of what they were capable of and how to show it through their work. Two sixth

grade boys who have struggled for years to be organized about getting work done and who systematically avoided completing work have, in the last couple weeks, turned in all of the work expected of them and kept track of their time in the classroom. They have expressed enthusiasm for math lessons that would have previously made them groan, perhaps out of a sense of newfound capability. A fifth grade girl who had avoided teacher contact and turned in only the sloppiest work was taking her cursive more seriously after a few weeks of work conferences. I was able to guide her in her conferences to re-write an assignment until it was beautiful, and she said she felt good about it. Her overall work ethic improved dramatically. One student was completely different in his "Before" conversation than in his "After" conversation. Initially his body language was hunched and closed, and his responses were minimal and discouraged. After six weeks of work conferences, he was cheerful, happy to talk, and described his enjoyment of some of the work he had done. He said he "felt like he could have done better, but that [his work] is going well." This showed a huge change. Most students in the class made some kind of gains, either in quantity of work completed, quality of work completed, or investment in the work itself. After examining the data from all of the data tools, the themes and observations have been synthesized in Figure 3. Students were categorized in one of four groups before and then after the intervention—Rare Engagement, Occasional Engagement, Consistent Engagement, and Enthusiastic Engagement. There was an especially sharp movement from occasional to consistent involvement, as well as a general increase in engagement overall.

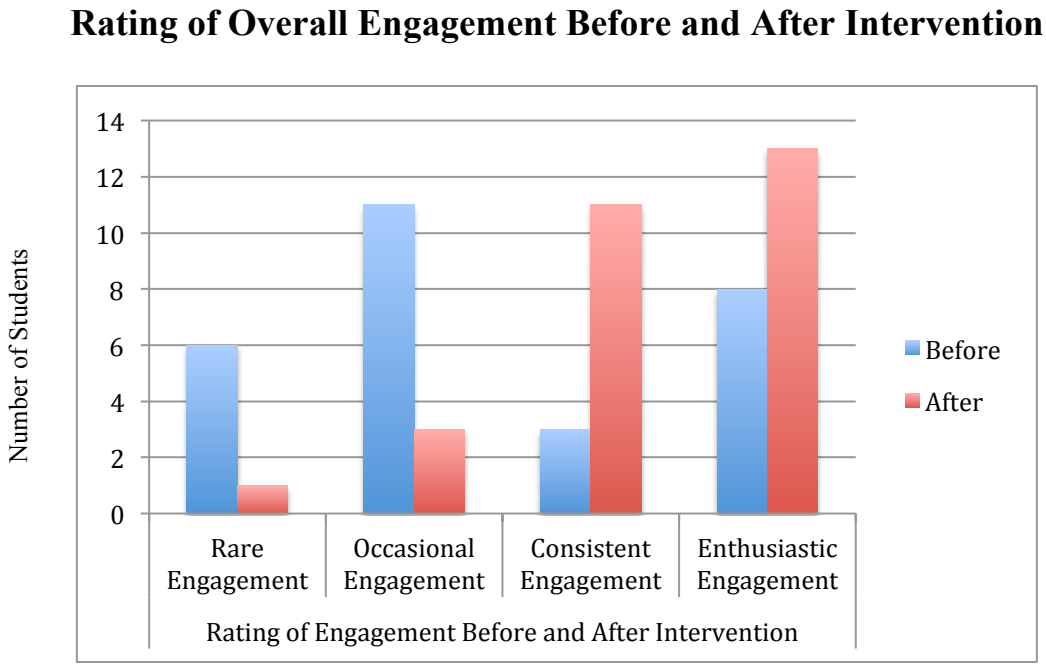

Figure 3. Rating of Overall Engagement Before and After Intervention

After the intervention I observed improvements in classroom work habits that had not changed in response to other attempted strategies. These observations included: an increase in student productivity, increased pride in work, higher quality of work, an improvement in time management, students choosing more challenging work, and an increase in positive self-efficacy beliefs. Before the study students were not showing improvement in these qualities or behaviors. After the implementation of the intervention I noticed that most of the students improved in one or more of these categories and were working more towards their potential.

Action Plan

Implications for further research include the impact of consistent routine on student engagement, the impact of work conferences on student self-efficacy beliefs, the use of written self-evaluation tools, and the use of portfolios to catalogue and present

work. Another interesting study could be in co-teaching model classrooms, as there is double the capacity for one-on-one student-teacher time.

As for replicating this study and diving deeper into the topic of motivation and student engagement, I recommend a few changes to the data tools and their usage. The portfolio-focused data tool (Appendix A) would be most effective in a classroom that has an established and thorough use of portfolios to document student work. If there are other systems in place for storing or celebrating student work a new data tool could be developed. The Observation Document (Appendix D) could be used more consistently and in better isolation if used daily at the same time or times. Additionally, the 0-3 scale to measure flow didn't actually fit the students very well. The observation tool might track degree of focus on a 0-3 scale, or have more space for anecdotal information about flow. The document seems to presuppose a goal that as many students as possible would be in a flow state at any given time, when in reality this is rarely the case, even in the classroom's most studious states. A more open-ended document to track student occupation, concentration, or normalization might be more interesting. Another avenue worth exploring would be to connect the topic of student engagement to Maria Montessori's construct of the uninterrupted work cycle. Appendix E shows Maria Montessori's (1918) "Whole Class at Work" diagram from The Advanced Montessori Method I (p. 77). Perhaps a new observation document could be drafted that would track student engagement in relation to the work cycle, with or without weekly work conferences to enhance the teacher-student relationship. This research shows that significantly more attention needs to be given to the exploration of the student-teacher relationship and its impact on every other facet of the school ecosystem and efficacy.

Having had only six weeks of conferences so far, I anticipate continued growth and refinement in student engagement as the conferences continue into the semester and in years to come. I plan to continue implementing this strategy.

Conclusion

This research has had implications for students, teachers, parents and administrators. For the students, work conferences helped raise their consciousness around their work habits, quality, skill levels, and interests. There was a general increase in productivity, organization, and pride in work over the course of the study. The students' increased awareness contributed to more self-directed skill-building, selection of challenging work, and creative engagement with follow-up work after lessons. Part of the work of the guide was to reflect the students' selves back to them in a constructive way in order to counteract their own negative self-image, or to encourage them further along their path of self-actualization. This contributed to a meaningful, intimate relationship with each student towards a common purpose—working, learning, and growing together.

As the teacher I felt a huge shift in my own practice as a result of this work. Making the time for regular, formalized, one-on-one interaction and adhering to the schedule provided worlds of insight into the students' experiences personally and academically. Externalizing dialogue about work habits, motivation, and skill-building made for better, easier lesson planning, as well as simple, supportive commentary and occasional direct instruction that benefited student and teacher both. The sometimes-frantic quality of the work cycle (I need to give more lessons! I need to do more record keeping!) was quieted by the schedule of the conferences, and the record keeping and

lesson planning that happened during them proved more productive than the sporadic planning and recording that I had been doing before. I was better able to hold the grounded, studious space in which my students could learn.

I received some informal feedback from parents that they appreciated the one-on-one time I was spending with their students, and that their students were talking at home about their work conferences. As parents educate themselves about pedagogy, child development, choosing schools, and voting for local officials, this research may inform best practices in teaching. This impacts the structuring of the school day at administrative and even government levels: if there is greater evidence that one-on-one teacher-student interaction is valuable, then the powerful forces in education can prioritize this pedagogically. This system would be easier if I had a full-time assistant, for example, or it would be harder for teachers whose students are frequently "pulled-out" of the classroom for specials or testing. As parents have the capability to advocate for the needs of students and teachers in the face of rules, regulations, and bureaucracy, it is important to include them in the dialogue of action and best practice moving forward.

Administrators can use this research to better understand the moment-to-moment work of teaching and being a student. The model of education that many of us grew up with—a teacher in front of a room of thirty people impersonally delivering information—is such a far cry from what we are trying to accomplish in Montessori schools. The thought of spending seven hours a week of instructional time in singular conversation with students may seem radical or utterly ridiculous in the face of all of the pressure of test scores, measurability, and data. However, the depth of connection and accountability

that was achieved in these meetings now feels vital to my teaching practice and the general success of the whole Montessori teaching endeavor.

Administrators are our advocates, mentors, and leaders and it is so important for them to be able to defend and create the systems and structures within a school to allow us to teach and learn to the best of our abilities. Making time and allowing the freedom of seven hours a week with individual students is important and beneficial, as evidenced by this action research project.

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Appendix A

Portfolio Assessment Before/After Intervention

Name:_____

Before Date:_____ After Date:_____

Which subject contains the most work?

What is the aesthetic quality of the work?

How much care does the work show?

Are the works evidently challenging or easy?

Did they work alone or with others?

Was the work assigned? How much choice was involved?

Appendix B

Conversation with Student Before/After Intervention:

Student Perception of Engagement

Name:_____

Before Date:_____ After Date:_____

Overall assessment of degree of pride/lack of pride in work:

What is your favorite piece of work in your portfolio? Why is it your favorite?

Which thing did you have to work the hardest on? How do you feel about it now?

Are there works in your portfolio that you were excited to work on?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about your portfolio?

Appendix C

Work Conference Notes

Name:____________________________________Date:__________________

Work Completed	Work in Progress/Need Lessons

Notes on overall evidence of engagement:

Appendix D

Observation Document

AB 0 1 2 3	ABF 0 1 2 3	CC 0 1 2 3	GG 0 1 2 3	SL 0 1 2 3
QL 0 1 2 3	JM 0 1 2 3	MO 0 1 2 3	RW 0 1 2 3	
AB 0 1 2 3	ME 0 1 2 3	MG 0 1 2 3	GK 0 1 2 3	AL 0 1 2 3
MM 0 1 2 3	RR 0 1 2 3	RT 0 1 2 3	JW 0 1 2 3	MY 0 1 2 3
KC 0 1 2 3	ED 0 1 2 3	HE 0 1 2 3	CL 0 1 2 3	DL 0 1 2 3
WM 0 1 2 3	MS 0 1 2 3	RW 0 1 2 3	CW 0 1 2 3	

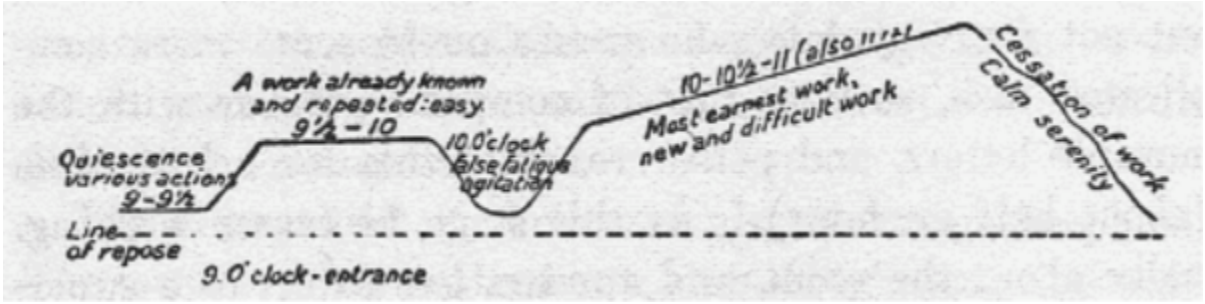
0 – Completely disengaged and aimless

1 – Sitting with work in front of him/her

2 – Appear to be thinking and focused on work

3 – Completely in flow

Appendix E



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