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Final Research Paper

“Power Hour”: Using Multiple Tools, Data, and Student Choice to Differentiate and Reenforce English Language Arts Instruction

Questions and sub-questions:

What happens to student learning when I focus on independent skill-building assignments with my sixth-grade students?

→What happens to student motivation and stamina when independent skill-building is a part of each day?

→What happens to student ownership of data when they review data frequently?

→What happens when teacher feedback helps to influence students’ choice of learning activities?

→What happens to students’ perception of themselves as learners?

Rationale

I am a veteran middle school English Language Arts teacher. During the course of my teaching career, the expectations of what effective language arts instruction looks like have shifted dramatically. There are a number of reasons for this. Several years ago, Illinois adopted the Common Core state standards that were much more rigorous than the Illinois Learning Standards that they replaced. The program of testing that the Chicago Public Schools adopted to track learning outcomes changed from just testing student mastery of grade level standards to measuring both academic growth and attainment. When I first started teaching, there wasn’t a

major emphasis placed on teaching beyond the scope of the standards that were to be addressed within that grade level. Common Core and the testing program that came as a result of the change in standards represent a major shift that veteran teachers like me are still grappling with and addressing in our instructional approach.

I started my career teaching in an environment in which many students were several years below grade level, and the goal of differentiation was to build bridges for the eighth graders that I was teaching at the time to be able to access the eighth grade learning standards. My classes were always orderly, students seemed engaged, and the majority demonstrated success when it came time for testing with ISAT. According to the metrics used to determine teacher ratings, that was “superior” teaching. What was “superior” teaching then would certainly not be considered “distinguished” teaching now. Over time, I have had to change a number of teaching practices in order to ensure that the instruction that I have been providing students is putting them on a pathway to demonstrate success according to all of the metrics by which their performance is judged.

One product of the myriad number of changes is that amount of data that inundates the decision-making that goes into instructional planning. A new metric has been added to rate school effectiveness this year that distills data even further; CPS elementary schools will be judged in part by the number of students that are considered to be on track. In order to be considered on track, a student has to demonstrate good attendance, passing grades in core content areas, achievement on academic testing, and have no discipline referrals. This has been data that we have been tracking since the start of the school year, paying close attention to the metrics that have put students in the position of being off track. This move represents a major shift in how

teachers and schools view student performance. Data is now being drilled down to the individual child. With this shift, I began to think about how I could better align my classroom practice with this new focus on individual student performance.

By participating in ARLI this year, my primary goal has been to think about what differentiation at the middle school level could be like given the tools that I have within my classroom. Rather than looking broadly at student performance, my initial goal was to support individual student attainment through a focus on independent reading. This goal shifted as the year progressed and students articulated their learning needs to me as a teacher. What I ended up with was the concept of Power Hour. During Power Hour, students would track their individual learning using the tools that have been provided in order to reflect on what they know and do not know. Power Hour helped me to bring order, organization and discussions of data to help my students select activities that would sustain their efforts to grow and thrive in my English Language Arts classroom.

School Context

For the last five years, I have taught sixth grade in a very different environment than I started my career. My teaching journey brought me to Mark Twain Elementary, a preK-8 public school on the Southwest Side of Chicago. The student population can be generally categorized as middle class, although the free and reduced lunch percentage is roughly 79%. With that noted, it is evident that there are some segments of the school's student population that demonstrate especially diverse needs. These diverse needs include bilingual education supports, mental health supports, and special education supports ranging from resource to inclusion.

Roughly 87% of the student population is Latino. The remaining demographics include a mixture of Polish, African American, and other groups. Mark Twain has a large bilingual program that supports student acquisition of English and provides native language instruction for new arrivals from Poland and Spanish-speaking countries. The school community is organized into grade level teams and committees that meet regularly to engage in planning; teachers defer to our administration in most areas that require meaningful decision-making. The staff is filled with many veteran teachers.

Teachers generally work with their respective grade level team and can be unaware of many of the larger issues facing school. The school environment is generally conversative and traditional. Most instruction is teacher-centered and textbook-based, although there have been some efforts to embrace small group instruction and student led conversations over the last few years. Technology has been integrated over the last two years. As of last year, all classrooms have Promethean boards and Chromebooks or iPads. We also have access to a program called Edgenuity that we are encouraged to use with students that is aligned to student MAP scores from the national online assessment called NWEA that students take multiple times each year. Most instructional decision-making is based off of data generated from the MAP test and classroom formative assessments.

This school year, there were four sixth grade classes that had roughly 35 students in each class. I taught two sixth grade Reading, Writing and Social Studies blocks. There is another teacher that taught the other two sixth grade Reading, Writing and Social Studies blocks. We are fortunate to work well together and meet to plan and reflect on practice daily. It has been good to have another ELA teacher's input in planning. As a departmental ELA teacher, I haven't had the

opportunity to engage in planning with other teachers until my principal listened to my suggestion to hire someone and combine ELA and SS into a longer instructional block a couple of years ago. I was glad my principal supported the idea and hired someone with similar work habits.

In my instructional block, my colleague and I worked to develop units that make the best use of the time we have and the content that we need to address according to ELA and SS standards. We look for opportunities to achieve multiple instructional aims across the different subject areas. For example, we will often incorporate authentic nonfiction reading into our Social Studies instruction or pick historical case studies as a basis for instruction for our ELA units. We are very intentional about crafting instruction that meets multiple needs. We use the two hours that we have in each block to create three or four activities that keep students engaged and address both content standards for ELA and SS.

In the two sections that I taught this year, my first section of students had anywhere from 27 to 32 students given various times that students were pulled out or pushed into the classroom. The students that were pulled out were not with me for Reading and Writing, but needed to be in the general education room for Social Studies. In the first section, there were 27 regular education students that were with me for a combined Reading, Writing and Social Studies block. There were three students that were with me for ESL/SS support. There was one student who comes in for SS in Spanish for one hour. Finally, there was a student who came in for SS but only speaks Ukrainian. With him, I relied on Google translate to communicate back-and-forth and worked to create assignments that helped him build skills in English. The 27 regular education students varied in interest and ability, but they were extremely hard working and

well-behaved. There were four groups of girls that seem fairly tight-knit, but they didn't work well together because they would rather socialize than work when placed together. The boys were more flexible and seemed to like one another and became friends rather easily.

My second section was a bit more difficult for me to manage until we moved a few students around to better balance the classes. The boys in this group were expressive and outgoing; it was not uncommon to see them dominate classroom discussions and leave little space for others to participate. There was also a divide in ability in this classroom. Roughly two-thirds of the students could be considered high-achieving and were in a higher tracked math group. The other one-third of the class could be considered low-achieving. This division was caused by our school's tracking student ability in math. This presented a challenge at times to adapt instructional activities that would meet everyone's needs. This tracking was one reason that I had to rethink independent reading strategies and differentiation at the individual student level. This group made it apparent early on in the school year that I needed to develop something that all students could work on and was differentiated by interest and ability.

Given the diversity of learner profiles within each of my classes, it was especially important that I work to create systems so that all students, regardless of demonstrated ability and proficiency, can thrive. This was at the heart of my thinking and planning as I put the pieces in place for what I called Power Hour. When managing two large and diverse classes, I needed procedures that were flexible, adaptable to both high and low achieving students, organized so that I could track progress and learning outcomes, and impactful in developing my student's capacity to work in thoughtful and specific ways. In that respect, I believe Power Hour represents a positive step forward in my differentiation in my teaching practice.

Literature Review

Moving towards Balanced Literacy

A couple of years ago, my administrative team organized an end of year professional development session that was focused on taking a balanced literacy approach towards English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. It was almost the perfect timing. The data that was generated by my students was demonstrating that they were not making significant gains in performance, and I was feeling frustrated and stuck in my practice. I knew that if I didn't make significant changes in my instructional approach that there wouldn't be improved outcomes for my students. At that point, I had two rough classes and years in a row, and I wasn't sure what was next. I wasn't finding the job rewarding, and I was considering a change. I came into the professional development session with an open mind and willing to rethink elements of my practice to ensure that all of my students were growing. From that session, I read more and deeper about balanced literacy to reflect on what was missing in my instruction. It turned out that there was a lot missing in my instruction and that I wasn't incorporating many of the key parts of balanced literacy that are known to drive student achievement. I asked my administrative team to reconfigure my grade level's departmental rotation, encouraging them to hire someone who I could work with to implement a balanced literacy/blended humanities approach. Rather than just being the Reading and Writing teacher, I would teach two classes of Reading, Writing and Social Studies over a two hour block of time. My colleague teaches the other two classes. His perspective as a new teacher, as well as his knowledge of technology, helped to push my teaching in new ways. Our first year working together was very successful; students demonstrated significant growth. It felt so rewarding to get on the right track

In the book *Reading without Limits*, the author Witter (2013) outlines what balanced literacy looks like in action. The key components of balanced literacy are shared reading, guided reading, and choice reading (p. 70). In shared reading, students analyze a difficult text with the teacher. They work from understanding the text at a literal level to doing more inferential interpretation. Witter (2013) suggests that this should be a block in a teacher's schedule and that the texts should be either at or beyond student reading level (p. 63). In this block, the teacher is the expert reader that teaches and encourages students to apply literacy strategies in order to unpack meaning. The text that is taught in a shared literacy block is complex, so this is where teachers can begin to address the demands put forth by Common Core to read and unpack complex text with students. Teachers select the text that is to be explored in great detail during the shared reading. It should also include a variety of genres, including healthy amounts of nonfiction reading. This component of balanced literacy I felt very comfortable with; I had several units that I had already developed that make excellent shared reads. It felt close to my normal approach, and I had to change only small things to make the units that I developed work as a shared read. Classroom discussions and close reading are key elements of shared reading; if students are all reading the same text, they should be looking at and discussing key passages as they work through the text.

Another element of balanced literacy that Witter explores is guided reading. This element took me some thinking about in order to implement. My understanding was again what I heard secondhand and thought I knew, not a technical and deep understanding. Guided reading is part of the balanced literacy block that seeks to address some of the gaps that students have as each reader has their own specific needs that cannot be addressed in a whole group. Witter (2003)

notes that students with similar abilities or who need to acquire similar skills are placed in groups of eight or fewer. The work that they are to do is a bit beyond where they are as readers, but it is not so far as to cause frustration (p. 72). Witter (2003) characterizes it as “the stepping-stone between choice and shared reading” because the goal is to explicitly teach students strategies that will allow them to tackle more challenging reading independently (p.74). In guided reading groups, students read text and gain skills that put them on track to meet and exceed grade level expectations. With the help of my colleague, I figured out the activities and skills that were needed in order to deepen their understanding of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. It was a major effort to develop the activities last year; now we refine them and think deeply about the groupings we create with each new cycle of guiding reading groups.

The place where I have not been fully implementing balanced literacy is choice/independent reading. This is problematic because I had not been implementing balanced literacy in full. It is not because of a lack of effort; I have tried different activities that promote choice/independent reading, but I have not found one that I think is highly effective. While I see the impact that refining and implementing shared and guided reading has had on my students, I have not been able to create a similar successful experience for students with independent reading. I envision a classroom that is excited about discussing literature, that is excited about discussing a favorite author’s new book, that is excited to share a book that they are reading with a friend. It is important that I refined this component in a way that works for my students. In comparing students that read 15 minutes versus students that read for 40 minutes, students who read longer make significantly more gains in reading achievement (Witter, 2003, p.12). It is no secret that the correlation is strong between independent reading and achievement, yet I was not

having my students read or work independently nearly enough. Beyond not fostering the love of reading that I am hoping for, I was depriving my students of an opportunity to support their literacy development in a meaningful way.

Reading Stamina Matters

The push to put students on track to be college and career ready has permeated schools throughout Chicago Public Schools and the United States. It is not uncommon for school hallways to be decorated with posters from universities in order to create a mindset of the college and future planning. It is an admirable and important goal to graduate students that can be productive in a university setting or in the workforce, but I am concerned that middle and high school English Language Arts classrooms are not putting students on track to meet the demands of being college and career ready. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed and adopted in a majority of states in part to spell out the skills that students need to hone in elementary and high school in order to be prepared for the next stages of their life. In fact, the CCSS have specific “College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards” that undergird the ELA/literacy standards and provide grade-specific standards to specify what should be accomplished in each grade level (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019).

Two standards that I frequently attach to many lesson plans are RL/RI 6.10 “By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range,” and “By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range” (Common

Core State Standards Initiative, 2019). While I do address these standards in my instruction, after all a lot of the reading that we do is complex and scaffolded, the work that I have done with my students doesn't mirror the spirit with which these standards were written, which is that students should be doing a lot of reading to build independence and proficiency. We have done a lot of complex reading as a class together, but something was missing. As a teacher, if I am working to build student capacity as learners, then it is critical that students get independent practice as readers to sustain the practices that I fostered through my instruction. To put it simply, students need to be reading more.

Reading stamina matters. The term stamina refers to teaching children to read on their own for periods of time each day. Stamina and engagement go hand-in-hand; students that are actively engaged in reading must have "stamina" to read independently. In English classes from middle school until high school, most students will read and study between 40-50 novels (Lemov, 2016, p. 39). These 40 to 50 books may not even be read with the level of fidelity that teachers expect; when trying to address the text complexity that the CCSS call for, many students reach a "bidirectional relationship between will and skill" (Kittle, 2013, p. 27). When a student doesn't have the skill to read a text, they lose the will to continue. As a result, many students compensate for a lack of reading by either using Sparknotes or relying on class discussion to demonstrate knowledge of a text. In thinking about teaching practice, one was to wonder if the roughly eight books or less per school year during middle school and high school provides students with enough practice to not only develop stamina, but also to be prepared for the rigorous reading load that is expected in college.

If the goal is to prepare students to be literate and successful in college, teachers need to reconsider their approach in the English Language Arts classroom. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy's *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (2007) concludes "that for every 100 9th grade students, 68 graduate on time, of those, 40 enroll directly in college, of those 27 are still enrolled the following year, of those, 18 earn an associates degree within three years or a B.A. within six years (Kittle, 2013, p. 28). The current system is not improving the outcomes of producing students that are college and career ready. While those numbers may be influenced by economic factors and other life events, preparation must certainly play a role in whether or not a student is successful. Kittle (2013) notes in her research that the expected volume of reading that a college student should expect per week ranges between 200-600 pages. Hiebert (2014) sums it up succinctly when he writes the following:

It is absurd to think that we can become proficient without participating extensively in the activity. When it comes to teaching students to read, however, attention typically focuses on the nature of instruction, rather than on the quality or quantity of deliberate practice time for students. (p. 12)

It is time to be deliberate and ensure that instructional time is devoted to independent reading. By not having students engaging in independent reading, it is possible that teachers are not putting students on track to meet the rigors of college reading.

Reluctant Readers in Middle School

In order to put students on track to be successful in college and beyond, the paradigm shift needs to start with an honest assessment of many English Language Arts classrooms. It is

not just my classroom in which many students are reluctant readers. One reason why students become reluctant readers is that they are not simply given enough time to practice. There is a long body of research that shows the amount of time that students spend in class reading on their own hasn't changed since the 1980's, despite massive changes in literacy practices with the advent of CCSS and other approaches to literacy instruction. Research indicates that the average elementary school student spends roughly 15% of the time allocated to reading instruction engaged in independent reading (Taylor, et al 1990, p.10). When time isn't invested in a practice, that practice cannot thrive. The type of independent reading that would support the practice of students becoming purposeful and habitual readers is simply not happening in many classrooms.

Research indicates that the best way to begin addressing reluctant readers is to have students start small in developing new reading habits. A gradual build up of stamina can be achieved by reading self-selected books in five-minute intervals--then ten minutes, and so on, until they reach one hour. Witter (2003) compares it to someone who starts going to the gym and begins to weight train (p. 19). This analogy got me thinking deeply. Someone in that situation would not instantly begin to lift weight that is significantly too heavy at the start. The same is true for beginning to develop reading stamina. Both require regular practice to increase energy and concentration. The analogy between engaging reluctant readers and new gym routines is important in thinking about addressing the problem of engaging middle school readers.

The Power Hour

There are a lot of people who start each year with resolutions related to getting fit and fall off the bandwagon. They are intent on going to the gym, eating right and working to be healthy.

As individuals attempt to uphold these resolutions, they are often sidetracked when they are too busy, going to the gym becomes boring or inconvenient, or no one holds them accountable or reminds them of their goals. It is with this in mind that I crafted “Power Hour.” It is not meant to be a silver bullet literacy solution or an academic fad diet. I wish I could just tell my students to take out a book that they like and read, but I know my students and know that for too many this would be a waste of time. A spectrum of literacy fitness exists within my classroom. As a result, I had to provide students a range of possibilities for reading growth that is tailored to their needs and interests, hoping to nudge students towards sustained independent reading as our work unfolded. During “Power Hour” students worked in self-selected literacy activities in order to address areas of weakness from our most recent administration of the MAP test. They selected the areas that they were going to address in their work, mapped out the activities that they planned on doing to address their target areas, and kept artifacts that showed their work towards improving in their target areas. In my eyes, the “Power Hour” was the academic equivalent of a good session at the gym. It was a good analogy to help me explain the work that I needed my students to do; Power Hour became a short period each day-roughly 15 minutes, adding up to about an hour a week, that students worked to flex their English Language Arts learning muscles to work independently and grow in areas of need.

In the gym, there are a variety of people with different skill levels doing a lot of different activities that are in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in order to improve. In considering Vygotsky and his educational work on ZPD, it has been argued that he was calling for “a radical reorientation of learning” that positions literacy as a “heterogeneous phenomenon;” Kozulin argues that Vygotsky views align with a “distributed literacy, in which a number of

participants contribute to different aspects of one literacy action” (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003, p. 13, 15). The role of the teacher is to create logical and meaningful structures and routines that allow students to work in different ways to achieve the same goal literacy growth. As with all changes in instructional approaches, there are a multitude of different ways to achieve independent reading as a component in the English Language Arts classroom so that it is purposeful. For students that are reluctant readers, it is important to be mindful of students’ past experiences in developing appropriate reading habits. Hiebert (2014) suggests the “consistency of carefully structured programs” (p. 2). This may mean using programs like Accelerated Reader or other online platforms that can engage students in content that is curated and appropriate to their reading ability. In developing “Power Hour,” I have watched the work habits of my students to allow for different practices that will feel comfortable for my students but will put them on a pathway for continued growth and reading independence.

In the gym, repeated practice with increased rigor matters. Setting and tracking goals matters in order to not backslide. In the gym, an individual might see a gym goer recording what he or she benched and how many repetitions of a movement were done in order to track growth and development. Individuals in the gym are trying to avoid a plateau, and the same should be expected of students and their growth. During “Power Hour,” this occurs as well. Students each have a folder that is used to guide their practice and milestones that will be checked frequently by their teacher. This sort of accountability is important for student success. Hiebert (2014) notes, “on the 1998 NAEP fourth graders were asked to report the number of pages that they read daily in school. Even though a measure of self-reported reading is a rather simple tool (and not necessarily the most accurate), this measure predicted students’ performances on the NAEP” (p.

3). Beyond that, this is the opportunity for the teacher to build bonds and cheer a student on as they progress and demonstrate growth. Research indicates the following about middle school students: “perceptions of positive teacher regard at seventh grade have been shown to predict improved academic competence, mental health, and higher academic values in eighth grade (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 4). In the course of regular classroom instruction, it can be difficult to carve out a time in which individual achievements can be celebrated. In order to “Power Hour” to be supportive, frequent teacher touchstones and celebrations will be necessary. In fact, our brains are wired for this type of work. Meidl, Lau, & Dowell (2019) note that we are being influenced by something called mirror neurons; these neurons cause teachers who are joyful in their teaching to have student neurons mimic that joy (p. 17). It is a good practice for teachers to plan for opportunities to celebrate student achievement.

In the gym, some people are coming terribly out of shape while some could be body-builders. It is important to create activities that respect the current capacity of the individual and put them on a pathway towards their desired outcome. In the gym, this might mean better health or improved figure. During the “Power Hour,” this means allowing students some genuine autonomy to make decisions using the resources that we have in order to produce their best learning outcome. Morrow and Gambrell (2011) characterize student autonomy as allowing “student choices, respect[ing] their agendas, and provid[ing] learning activities that are relevant to personal goals and interests; there is empirical verification to support the importance of student autonomy (Guthrie, Rueda, Gambrell & Morrison, 2009, p. 5). If research suggests that autonomy improves student engagement and learning outcomes, it should work to support and sustain literacy growth for my students.

In the gym, most individuals are on their own. Some bring a friend for support or to make the work less tedious. Sometimes people need the support of a trainer to learn the ropes.

Research indicates that teachers should take full instructional advantage of “affiliative needs to engage students” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 22). If a teacher observes that two or more students work well together, it is appropriate and beneficial to have those students work together. Research indicates that when the opportunity exists for a learning situation to be cooperative, it creates student engagement, promotes friendship, encourages on task behavior, and increases the time spent focused on completing the task (Gillies, Ashman, & Terwel, 2011, p. 5). It is easy to structure activities that are teacher-led or done independently because teachers may not feel comfortable with the classroom environment that is created when students are talking with one another and not working together as one unit. The teacher may also appear to not be actively teaching to an outsider that may enter the room. It is worthwhile to have students engage in this type of work if they choose to, as research suggests it has merit.

In the gym, you can't excel at working out then gorge on pizzas the rest of the time. The rest of core literacy instruction still needs to be standards-aligned and differentiated to support learners across a wide spectrum of achievement levels. Research suggests that the use of thematic units that explore particular themes for several weeks with “texts for whole-class instruction, individual guided reading, and individual books for group projects... [should] be selected to be relevant to the theme” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 6). In other words, it is critical that activities like Power Hour are not the substitute for strong core instruction that is

designed in a way that allows for all students to learn about big themes but also allows for differentiation within the context of regular instruction.

Summary of Data Collection Methods:

Artifacts/Student Work:

→I conducted data conferences with each of my students right after students took the middle of the year MAP test. These conversations were ongoing for about two months from the time of testing until the remote learning period started and were tracked in each student's "Power Hour" folder. Students reflected on this conversation, selected growth activities that made sense for them given their scores and interests, and have kept track of their work in their folder.

→I checked student folders twice and gave written feedback on their work to get a sense of what they worked on. I had plans on continuing this practice for the duration of the year, but remote learning made this impossible. While in place, students saw my feedback on their activities. This made them reflect on their choices in order to ensure that they were maximising their time with the right activities. In this respect, the practice had the feeling of an ongoing data conversation.

Pictures:

→As students worked, I took pictures of them working on their activities. This helped me to get a sense of my classroom environment while children are working in order to reflect on the impact of Power Hour. It will also be helpful for students next year to see what Power Hour looks like in practise when I share expectations with them next year.

→I have taken pictures of select student folders, including examples of students that seem to really embrace the Power Hour process from the beginning while others that have not fully embraced it and needed additional coaching and encouragement. These photos helped me to think about which learners in my classes benefit most from the practice. They will also serve as models for future years when I go to implement Power Hour.

Surveys:

→I gave a survey at the beginning of the year just to better understand what students found to be most beneficial in terms of their reading growth and achievement. The data from that survey, along with administrative feedback and research, changed the scope of the project towards the concept of Power Hour. Rather than just focus on independent reading, that survey suggested that students favored a mixed approach that gives them some autonomy to work in ways that they find engaging.

→I gave a Google forms survey the first week after I had data conferences with students in order to see if students understood the purpose of Power Hour and again on an ongoing basis to check in with students to ensure that they are benefiting from the process.

Journals/Folders:

→I wrote to record my observations of my classroom environment and student habits and actions during Power Hour work, as well as details from my interactions with students during Power Hour. From the time that students started their folder work, I provided written feedback in these

folders with a check-in grade twice. Had the year not been shortened by remote learning, I would have continued this practice longer.

Quantitative Measures:

→I have tracked survey responses to get a sense of the sentiment of my classes and compared the grades of the students on the folders vs. their total quarter grade to track the impact that the folder had on their overall grades.

Data and Interpretation:

How did I arrive at Power Hour?

I think it is important to briefly discuss how I arrived at the concept of Power Hour. Early on in the ARLI process, I wanted the focus of the work that students were doing to be on independent reading. I wasn't sure what form it should take exactly, but I wanted it to be more organized than having students just taking out a book and reading. I had tried that before in other years, and it would result in a lot of what I call fake reading. Students would be quiet and pretend to read. If you were paying close attention, you would see kids not making progress in the books that they were reading. They would have the book open, but they would look away or have their eyes glaze over. It wasn't productive, and I didn't want it to happen with this group.

I started the very first week of school. This was the first data point that would suggest something that I probably should have known from my experience, but I have never quantified with actual data to have a clearer picture. In an opening survey that I gave my students, it showed

that my students preferred a variety of literacy experiences. There was not one specific way or type of the reading that they preferred. They liked having options and a variety of experiences.

Questions	Possible Answers	AM-Class Results	PM-Class Results
<p>Question 5 What kinds of things would you like to do this school year in reading? Circle all that you want to do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Read novels (b) Read many books by the same author (c) Read plays (d) Read poetry (e) Be in a literature circle (f) Read from the basal reading book 	Any of the letters	A-14 B-11 C-9 D-11 E-1 F-1	A-13 B-13 C-11 D-13 E-1 F-1

While I was reading and figuring out what form my project should take, two things happened. I surveyed students in Google forms to get a better sense of what students thought about some of the activities that we had done to kick off the school year at the end of the first quarter. It turned out that different students like doing different things and find certain activities more beneficial than others. In thinking about preferred classroom routines, only 16% preferred full-group novel work. I also found it interesting that only one person in each class wanted to be either in literature circles or read from our textbook. In many of the earlier grades, both of these activities comprise a bulk of the ELA instruction. It showed me that kids were looking forward to something that they haven't done before and were not interested in business-as-usual in

Reading class. Their feedback helped to shape and shift my thinking towards the benefits of focusing on independent work.

We have done reading novels a couple of different ways. What have you enjoyed the most?
50 responses



After reflecting on the feedback from these questions, I had to go back to my students with an idea that I had. I thought, fine, we don't have to do things one way, I can understand and appreciate that different students have different preferences for activities and I must figure out a way to make it work to honor their choices.

When I first started in ARLI, my goal was to get students to do more independent reading by using books. I had these grand dreams of teaching students annotation systems for both fiction and nonfiction texts, and students were going to read and annotate, and I was going to see massive growth because students had a clear system for independent reading that I could track and measure for accountability. I spent much of October-December teaching students the annotations from Notice and Note just for this purpose. They became great at annotating, but that was a type of reading that they did not want to do independently.

Here is a sample anchor chart that students used to annotate fiction text:

Reading Signposts for Fiction

Signpost	Question	Academic Language
Contrasts and Contradictions CC	Why would the character act this way?	Character motivation Plot
Aha Moment !	How might this change things?	Plot
Tough Questions ?	What does this tell me about the conflict?	Conflict (especially internal conflict)
Words of the Wiser WW	What is the life lesson?	Theme
Again and Again AA	Why might the author bring this up again and again?	Symbols Theme Character motivation
Memory Moment MM	Why might this memory be important?	Character motivation

Annotations to make as you read:

- Parts of plot: is this part of the book the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, or resolution? Explain how you know.
- Characters: list a character trait that describes the character. Describe the protagonist or antagonist.
- Setting: where and when does the story take place? How does that affect the plot?
- Conflict: is the character having an internal or external conflict? Explain your answer.
- Symbolism: is there something that has a deeper meaning? What do you think it means?

I wanted to get a sense of their feelings about annotating. They made several claims that I had to listen and respect. In one of the survey questions, they did a good job of oversharing and giving me good insight to their thinking.

Here was the survey question:

What do you think about the annotations? Would you prefer to do a reading response journal to reflect on reading instead? How could I improve the system?

Some student responses:

Positive Responses	Neutral Responses	Negative Responses
<p>“I think it would be better by typing responses on the Chromebook. And the questions would be a review of what we did in the past.”</p> <p>“Reading instead because you can give us a quiz to know if we are reading the book.”</p> <p>“I like to annotate in our own reading books.”</p>	<p>“I think the annotations are a little boring but fine. No. I don't think any improvements are needed.”</p> <p>“I don't have any thoughts i like how it is right now.</p> <p>“The students can pick which one they prefer annotations or a reading response journal.”</p>	<p>“I really don't care.”</p> <p>“I don't know.”</p>

These responses are representative of my students thoughts at this point. They were still setting into my class and had a variety of thoughts about how we should proceed. There were a lot of different thoughts that students had, many of which didn't directly correlate with the question that I was asking. Among these claims were that annotating text slowed down reading in longer texts, it made sense when we were studying as a class but not independently, and that they would rather use the Chromebooks to read than annotate because technology is more engaging. The mixed bag of responses helped to further refine my thinking.

I pressed on and put another idea forward to the class based on the feedback that I received. Their feedback made me suggest a mixed approach. From the start of the year, I noticed that many students settled into a groove using their Chromebooks and some of the online tools that our school had purchased when our school became a one-to-one device school late last school year. Rather than just offer open reading with novels, I saw an opportunity to mix in some of the tools that we had been using during class as other options for students who found that to be more beneficial.

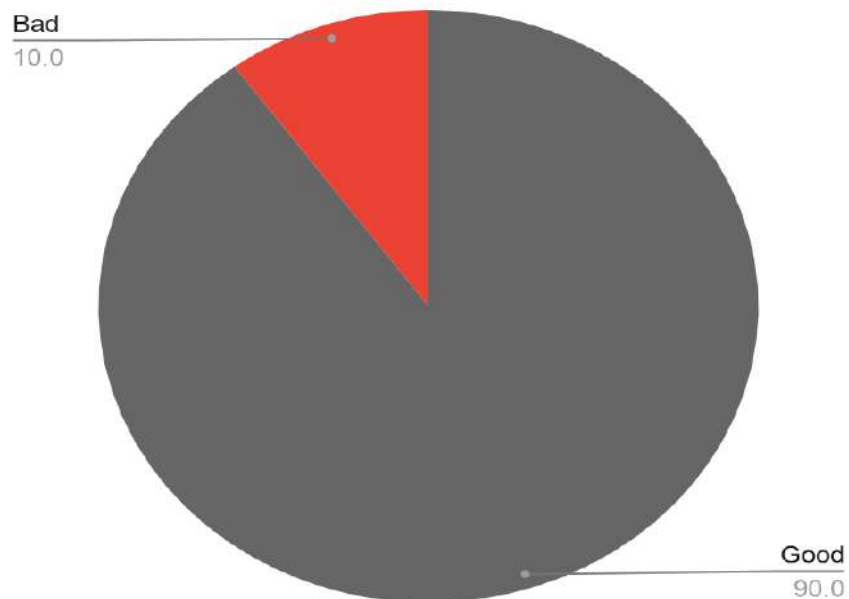
In explaining the concept of open reading, I tried to accommodate as many different modalities and interests as I could given the variety of interests that students demonstrated. I put a survey question out to students and finally reached the consensus that I had been looking for since the start of the year.

Survey Question:

For kids that like listening to a book on tape, I would make that an option. For kids that prefer Edgenuity (an online tool that aligns MAP data with ELA and Math skills aligned to their

RiT scores) and not reading a book, I would make that an option. Students would have to note what they have been learning as they go along by taking notes on what they have learned as they work. For kids that like to read their own novels, I would make that an option. I am thinking of calling it open reading. If you were reading or listening to a book on tape, you have to annotate on Post-its. What do you think of this idea? Is there something else I should consider?

Thoughts on Open Reading



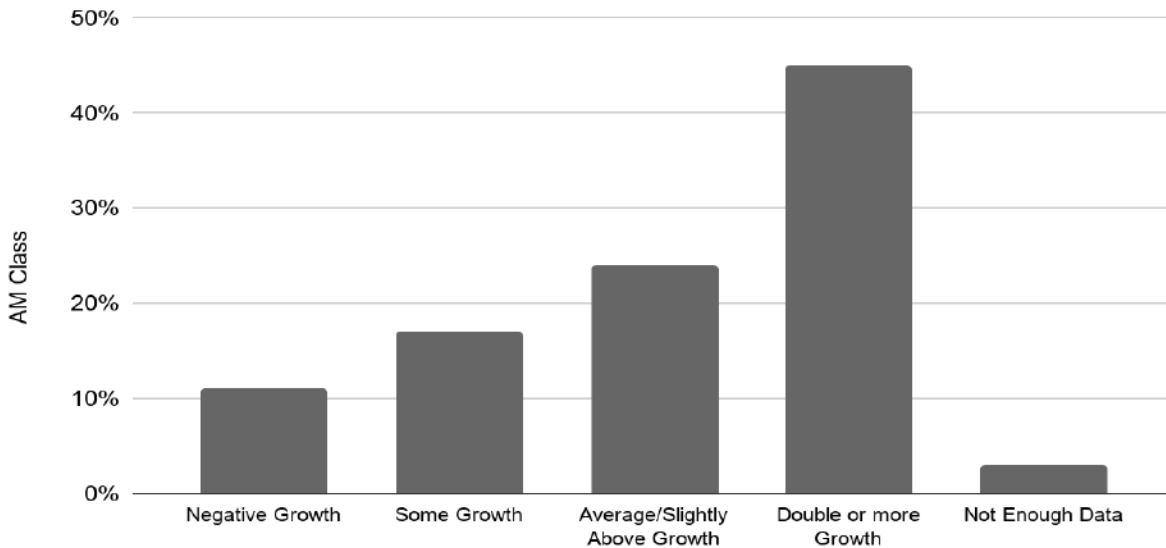
All of my students took the survey, so it represented 62 students' viewpoints. The ten percent of students, six students selected that it was a bad idea because they thought that it represented more work when I asked them to explain their answer in a follow-up question. While that was true, what they failed to understand was that if they weren't going to do this that I would have thought of something else to take its place. A couple of students said they would rather do whole class activities because they liked reading and discussing materials as a class rather than working independently. I assured those couple of kids that this was only a short period of the day

and the majority of the work that we would do would be done together as a class. I also offered them to read books in a book club, but they did not take me up on my offer. This survey started to put me on a track towards Power Hour; it got me thinking about all of the resources that I have at my disposal now that my school has invested so heavily in having one-to-one devices. As I was fleshing out the idea of open reading, then students took their MOY (middle-of-year) MAP test.

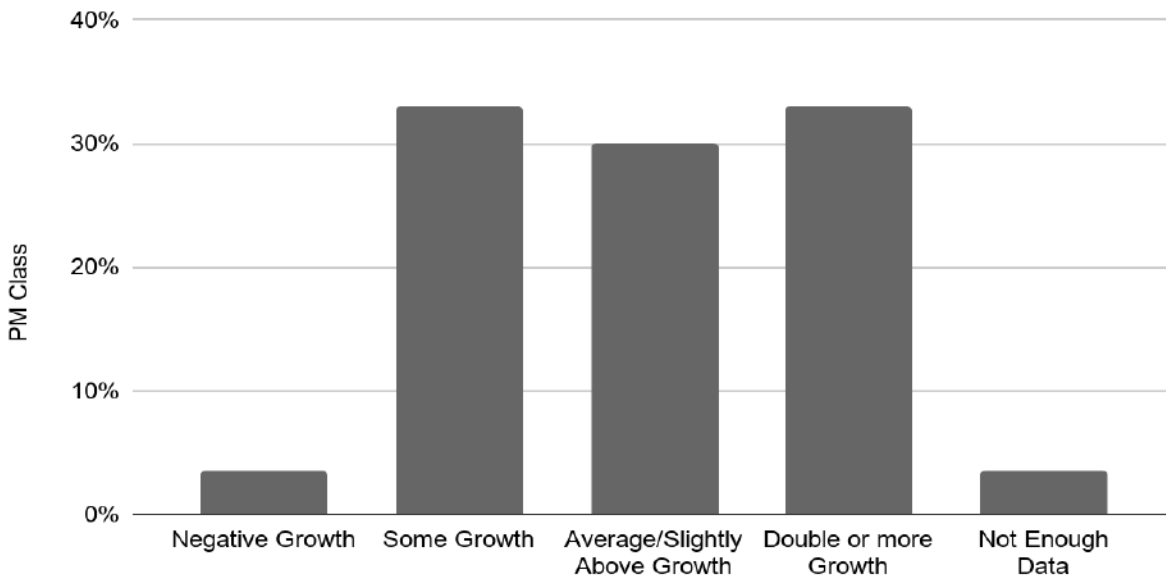
Many students made growth, but not all students made growth. This data showed that nearly all demonstrated growth and that roughly 70% percent would have hit a year's worth of growth or more if it was determined from winter of last year versus winter of this year. I thought that for a touchstone, this was fairly encouraging given two lost weeks of instruction due to the work stoppage and an earlier testing date than I have had in previous years. It reflected that my instruction was having the intended impact and that students were generally growing at reasonable rates, but I am not content unless I see that all of my students are growing consistently. In general, most students grew the expected five-or-so points from the middle of fifth grade to the middle of sixth grade. A student taking the Reading test in fifth grade would be at the 50th percentile with a score of 209.8. In order to remain at the 50th percentile in sixth grade, that child would need to score 214.2 (2015 Normative Data, NWEA). In reflecting on this with my administrative team, I decided that this concept of open reading needed to be tied to student data in order to ensure that the tools that students were using were supporting each child's growth trajectory.

MOY MAP Reading Scores December 2018 vs. MOY December 2019

AM Class



PM Class



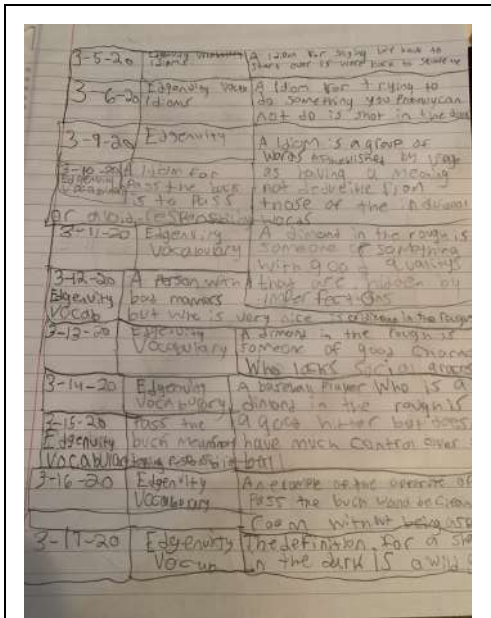
In looking at the data above, I characterized any student that had a negative score between the two years as being negative growth. I characterized any students that grew up to four points as “some growth.” I characterized students that grew between 5 and 9 points to “average or slightly above average growth.” Finally, I characterized students that grew ten or

more points as “double or more growth.” Keep in mind that each student has his or her own growth target, but looking at the data helps to create an overall picture of the performance of my classes through the halfway point of the year.

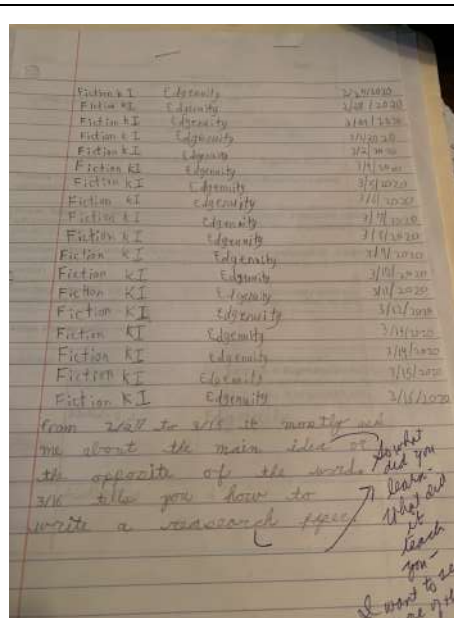
In looking at the performance of the two classes, it is evident that my morning class was having a very successful year in terms of growth. The distribution of the bar graph is exactly what a teacher would hope for in terms of student performance. This shows me that a lot of groundwork that ultimately led to Power Hour was important and valuable to student growth in its own right. The cycle of feedback between my students and I during ARLI was much more involved than it would have normally have been. In a typical year, I get student feedback on class activities or routines maybe two or three times a year. By the time that school transitioned to remote learning, I had asked for feedback from students nine times regarding instructional planning. I believe that this ongoing feedback loop made students feel involved and empowered in my classroom.

My morning class consists mostly of my homeroom, so we spend more time together. The routines of my homeroom are strong, and I actively remind them of my expectations as they work on their folders. My afternoon class is not my homeroom. They have to do the majority of Power Hour work under the supervision of another teacher, so it can be tough for kids to be motivated and organized enough to do work without explicit reminders. Having a folder that was graded with due dates helped to keep the process organized and the kids accountable. It also kept me accountable. When I assigned a due date, I knew I would have to collect the folders to see what kids were working on and provide feedback. The second check went much better than the first check for my afternoon class. This will be reflected in a graph later on in this paper.

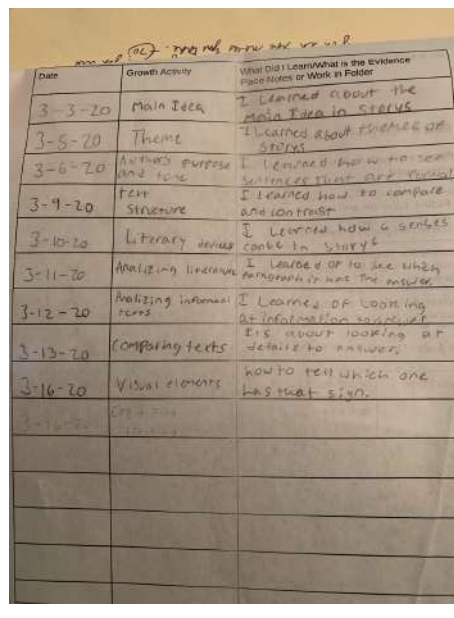
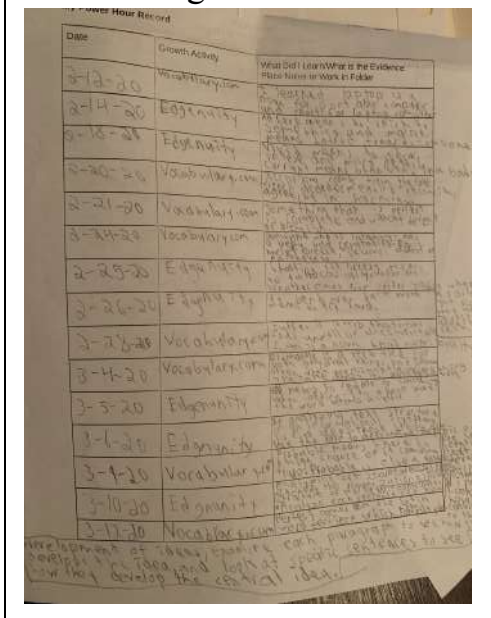
In thinking specifically about Power Hour and its potential impact, it may be helpful to think not so much about the entire group. However, there were specific students that stand out. In the morning class, that would be low-growth students like the students on the right vs. high-growth students like the two students on the left according to the MAP test.



High Growth



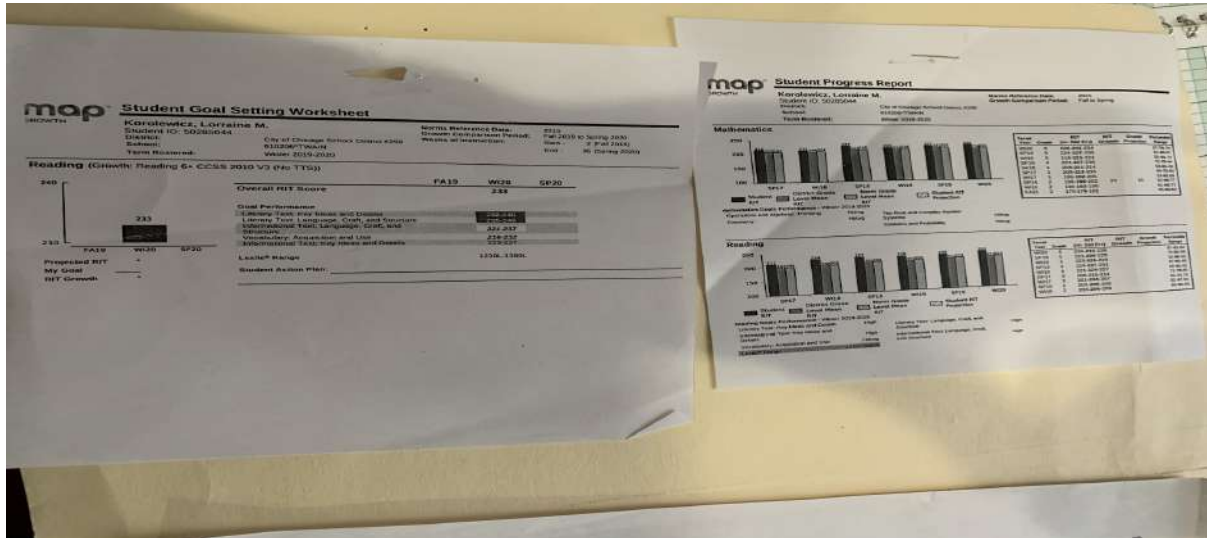
Low Growth



I hope that you notice based on a casual look that students across a wide spectrum of abilities are working hard in logging and tracking their work. With students like the ones on the left, they are very much able to not only track their work but also articulate what they are learning explicitly and succinctly. The student's work on the right shows me equal effort in terms of grit and focus, but it also shows me that I need to check in with them to ensure they are understanding what they are doing because they aren't able to work as independently as their peers. The student on the top right liked to use Edgenuity as her preferred learning platform in order to improve her fiction scores. When I checked the teacher dashboard of Edgenuity, I was able to track that she was not only doing what she said she was, but she completed many more activities than I expected because they are differentiated to her level. For the student on the bottom right, he needed additional academic support in general, but once he got into the routine, he thrived in Edgenuity and got into the habit of recording his learning.

In order to get this level of effort, I needed to push students with a good reason to support sustained effort and attention. Many times, students take the MAP test, get a score, and they don't have a clear vision or plan on how to improve their score. They rely on what happens in regular classroom instruction to be enough to help them achieve their growth target. For many students, that might be true. Regular classroom instruction will be enough for them to hit their growth target. In fact, according to the data, that was true about roughly 70% of my students. For the remaining 30%, they need something additional and specific. Students need to understand their needs and have a path forward. As a result, I decided to be very direct with students in communicating their progress on the test and fronted what became Power Hour with data. I made data folders with data that highlighted areas of strength and weaknesses. These data folders

would be the source of information from which we would discuss trends in data, including areas of strength and weakness, growth targets, and next steps.



This is the data that each student and I reviewed. We not only looked at this year’s data, but we also looked at their progress over time. On the left were this year’s scores and subscores for each area, on the right were each student’s historical scores. This was helpful to see how they have grown over time, going all the way back to second grade.

Name: _____ Room: _____

**Power Hour
Action Plan for EOY MAP Test**

My MAP Scores in Reading: Fiction/Literature KI: 205-220
 Fiction/Literature L,C,S: 212-228
 Nonfiction/Informational Text KI: 209-224
 Nonfiction/Informational Text L,C,S: 206-221
 Vocabulary: 217-223

Areas of Focus (two lowest areas): Fiction/Literature KI and Nonfiction/Informational Text L,C,S

Possible Growth Activities for Power Hour (one has to be independent reading w/signposts)

Fiction: Edgenuity activities, Commonlit Fiction Reading w/questions, independent reading with signposts, http://www.prepdog.org/ (7th-9th grade proficient tests), https://www.ixl.com (7th and 8th grade literary activities)
Nonfiction: Edgenuity activities, Commonlit Informational Reading w/questions, independent reading with signposts, https://www.ixl.com (7th-9th grade informational text/text structures activities)
Vocabulary: Edgenuity, https://www.ixl.com (7th and 8th grade vocabulary activities), vocabulary.com (sign-in with Google password), quizlet.com (Login with Barr, Student)

My Action Plan for Power Hour

Area of Focus	Growth Activities (pick at least one to practice for each area of focus)	How will I track my success? (with signposts, in Edgenuity/Commonlit with Quizzes, written out definitions and examples from Prepdog/IXL to be placed in folder)
1. Fiction/Literature KI	IXL	I will write down definitions on looseleaf and put them in my folder.
2. Nonfiction/Informational Text L,C,S	Edgenuity Activities	I will look at the portfolio to see what I've done.

This is the action planning tool that I made for students. As you can see, students looked over the data by themselves, determined their areas of focus, and made a plan before we held one-on-one data conversations. At the bottom, students wrote their two areas of focus, selected their growth activities after reviewing all of the choices, and made a note about what learning artifact I should see when I check their folder where it says, “How will I track my success?” This was informative for me so I knew what to look for when checking their folders. I made it clear that I wanted students to select activities that they felt were the most impactful in helping them to grow.

Almost directly after the data discussion with my school's administration, the literature review was due for ARLI. I was reading a lot about reading stamina, reluctant readers and the development of new reading habits, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), and all of a sudden it seemed a whole lot like going to the gym to me. While putting together my research and reflecting, I came up with the concept of Power Hour. Here is the anchor chart that was displayed in my classroom explaining the purpose and procedures for Power Hour:

What is Power Hour?

- It is the academic equivalent of a good session at the gym.
- Students engage in self-selected literacy activities in order to address areas of weakness according to MAP test data after a discussion with Mr. Barr
- Students plan out their approach, work on it each morning and two times a week during Reading class.
- Like lifters in the gym, students keep track of their progress in their Power Hour folder. This folder's work will be checked throughout the third quarter and count as an assessment grade at the end of the quarter.
- It is your responsibility to add a brief daily note as well as examples and work samples in your Power Hour folder.
- You need to have independent reading of either a fiction or nonfiction text as part of your plan, whichever is lower.

Why do we have Power Hour?

- Like the gym, developing new habits require practice and building strength and endurance. At the gym you would run for five minutes, ten minutes, and gradually build further.
- Like the gym, you can make choices. You can decide to work by yourself or with an accountability partner for support. You are getting to the age in which you need to know what data means, make your choices based on your needs and interests, and work and keep track of your progress. Your progress will be checked on by me and will be reflected on in surveys on Google Classroom.
- I will also be using your folders in a presentation for other teachers at the end of the year.

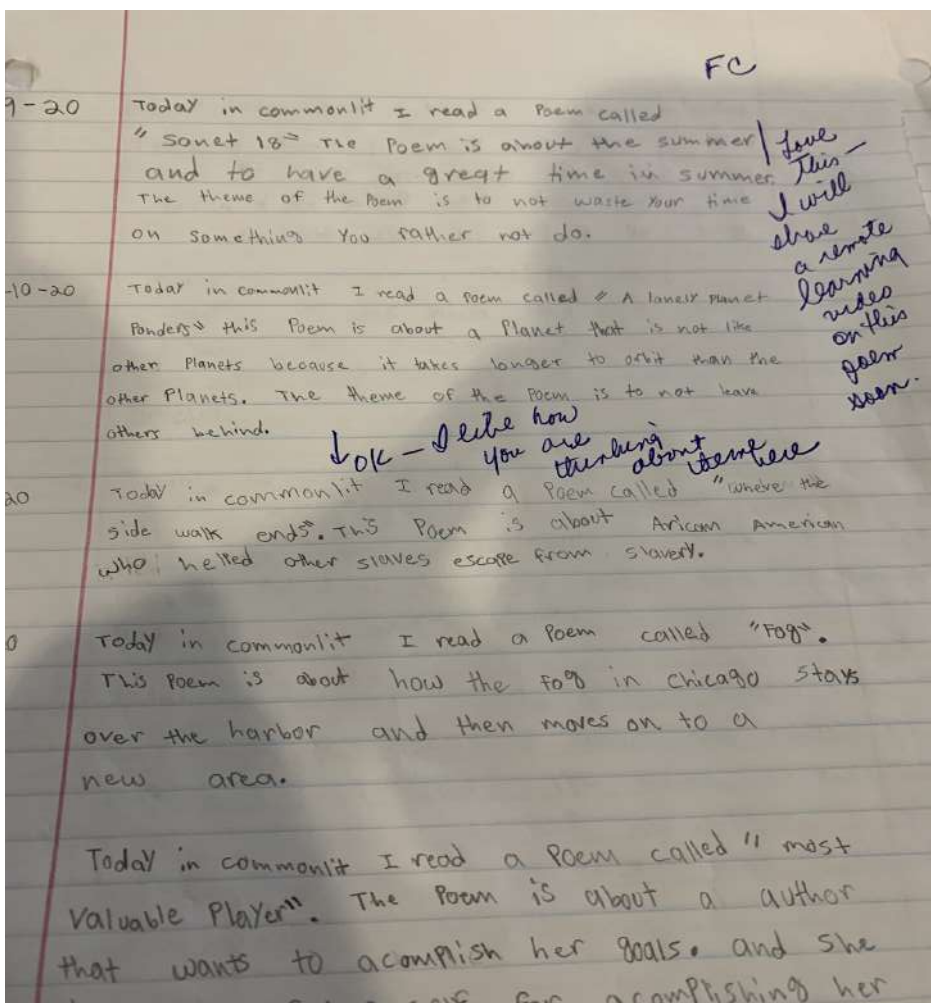
This comparison made sense for a lot of reasons. In the gym, there are a variety of people with different skill levels doing a lot of different activities that are in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) in order to improve. In the gym, repeated practice with increased rigor

matters. Setting and tracking goals matters in order to not backslide. In the gym, some people are coming terribly out of shape while some could be body-builders. It is important to create activities that respect the current capacity of the individual. In the gym, most individuals are on their own. In the gym, you can't excel at working out then gorge on pizzas the rest of the time. I felt like this was the missing piece in my instruction. I feel very comfortable with my whole group instruction; I also conduct guided reading with students within various RiT bands, but I had not reached the level of differentiation down to the individual student. Power Hour, with the thought that sustained and focused effort in a few areas over the course of weeks could make a significant impact, was born. My role would be like a trainer at the gym; I would inform kids about their data, provide constant encouragement, and hold them accountable for the plans they make to grow.

So, I rolled out the concept of Power Hour. Then, we got down to work at the start of the 3rd Quarter of the school year. There is a short period at the very start of our school day after attendance and before we switch classes in our departmental setting. It runs from roughly 8:45-9:00. This fifteen minutes was the time that students used to complete and track their work for Power Hour. These fifteen minutes add up to one hour during a week. One day a week another teacher would come into my classroom to do a math talk with students, so I only had four fifteen minute chunks of time each week, or one hour of time to devote to this. Many teachers have similar chunks of time in their schedules that are not conducive to a full lesson; a version of Power Hour might work for these awkward gaps in time.

During Power Hour, a casual observer will see students working very independently while I am taking attendance and the lunch count. They come into the classroom at 8:45, get their Chromebook or independent reading book, and get started working. By around 8:50, I am finished taking attendance and doing other morning activities a teacher may do like collect forms or absence notes. I always do at least one walk around the room to check on what students are doing and just check in with them.

Some kids with stamina or organization were steadfast right from the start in tracking their growth activities and took detailed notes that made their learning transparent for me as their teacher.



For instance, I noticed that this student, who happens to be one of my lower achieving students according to the MAP test, who completely missed the mark on the theme of "Sonnet 18" by Shakespeare. That sort of detail was really helpful for me as we transitioned to remote

learning. His error turned into a great teaching opportunity to review in remote learning, so I made a YouTube read aloud of the poem in which I explain how to read a sonnet, break down some of the language that I think may have caused this student to get off track in their understanding of the poem, and ask follow up questions to check for understanding. His miscue led to me thinking about what my whole class may or may not understand or may need me to review. With remote learning in full swing, having these folders in my possession has given me a plethora of ideas for lessons that work really well in a remote learning environment.

Reflections on Research Questions

Related to Sub question 1:

→What happens to student motivation and stamina when independent skill-building is a part of each day?

The comparison to going to the gym is a meaningful one. While most of my students have probably never been in a gym, they understand the struggle to stay motivated and committed in order to make gains when it is compared to someone that goes to the gym daily that is trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In this context, they understand the need for varying activities to sustain engagement, that it is important to put in and sustain a daily effort, that not all students are in the same place just as a bodybuilder is not in the same place as someone who has just lifted weights. By using this metaphor, they recognize the importance of stamina and sticking with tasks that might otherwise be tedious in order to demonstrate achievement. This

was evident to me early on in the process, as I surveyed students related to the purpose of Power Hour on 2/14/20:

What is the purpose of Power Hour?

49 responses

the purpose is that we practice to get a higher score and get better at some things were having in.

To work on the areas that I need help mostly on, and for MrBarr to see what im learning.

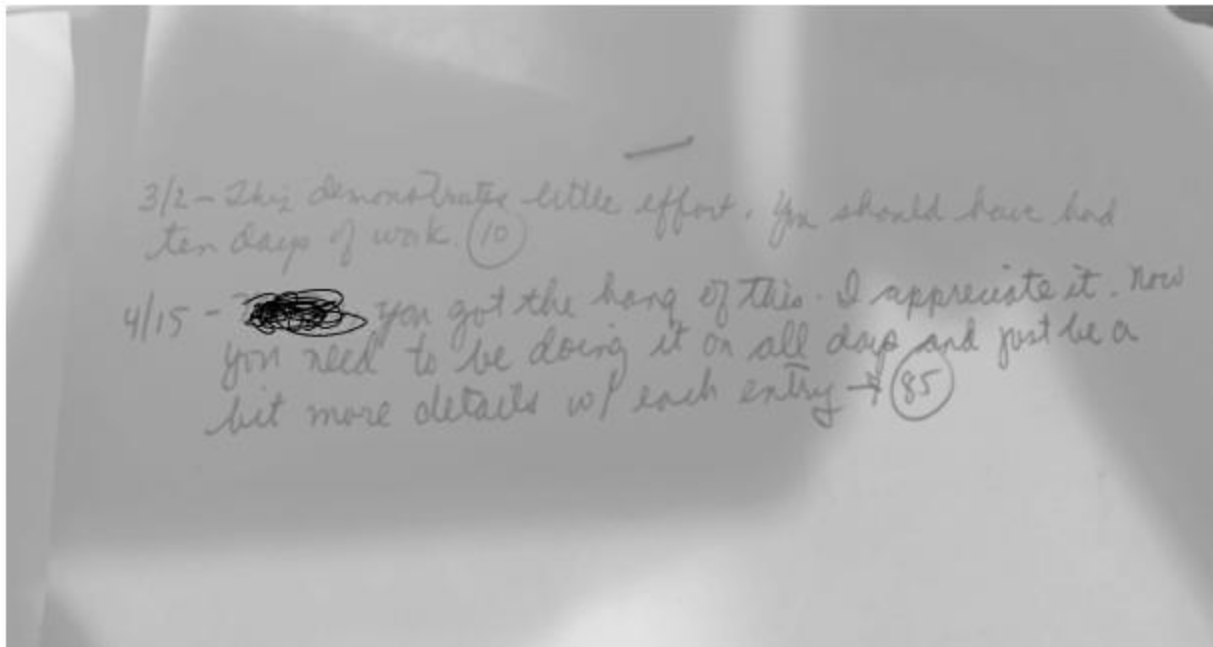
To get us to understand things that we are having trouble with.

to make you better at what your struggling at

to get better at your two lowest areas

The purpose is to help us on the areas we need help with.

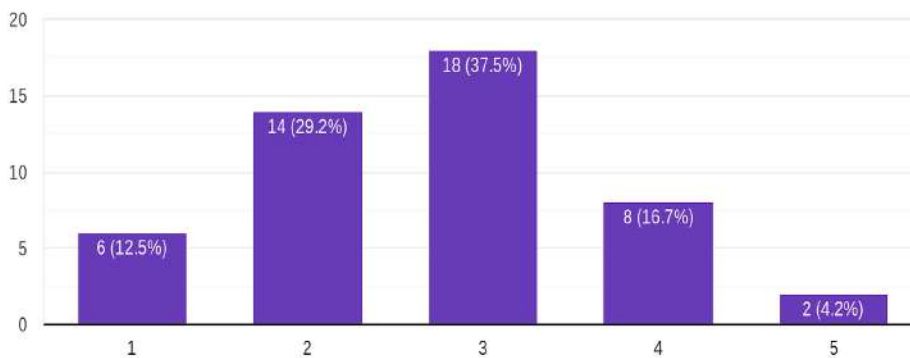
While recognizing that it isn't always going to be the most fun activity that we will do in class, over 80% of the students in my two classes understood the purpose of Power Hour and were motivated to do the work because they knew they would get credit for the work they have done as long as they invested themselves and could prove that they put in effort and made the best use of time as possible.



The work started off slowly. In the picture, you can see that students needed to see that I was invested enough in the process myself in order for them to take it. This student's increase in completion correlated with check-ins and that suggests that my feedback provided accountability that encouraged him to change his habits.

How motivated are you to grow in your weakest areas? Rank your feelings right now.

48 responses



After several weeks, students were still motivated to work in their two areas that they needed to

demonstrate growth. In the bar graph from survey feedback on 3/1, one signified being extremely motivated, three as having average motivation, and five as being not motivated. Considering this is work that is intended to help students prepare for testing and build stamina, this was extremely encouraging that after several weeks that they have maintained average to above average motivation.

In a lot of ways, I think that my students were being very modest here. The sustained effort that I saw in many of their folders suggests that while many students scored themselves as a 3 after the first round of Power Hour folder checks, that many of the students should have probably rated their motivation as one or two more than actually did in this survey. My students know that I have high expectations for them and their performance, so I believe they were being modest in their evaluation.

I gave a reflection on Google Forms after the first check-in February and before the second check-in in March. Some of the comments are very metacognitive in nature and reveal a lot about motivation and stamina when engaged in independent skill-building work.

How has Power Hour changed how you view yourself as a learner?

Power Hour has helped me realize that I need to start focusing on studying instead of focusing on my friends and my phone because those things will get me nowhere and if I want to pass sixth grade I need to do all my work and study so I can grow and score high on the MAP test and go to seventh grade.

1 response

Power Hour changed of how i learned new things by doing my lessons and reviewing what I did during the power hour and it helped me understand more about what I did not learn or knew about and writing down information about what lessons I am doing.

1 response

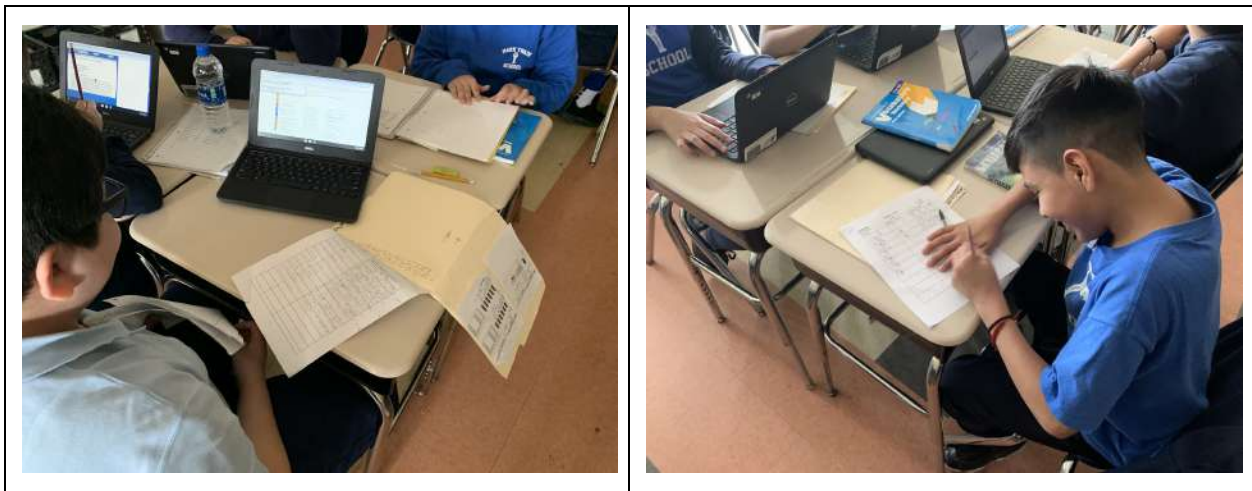
Power Hour has not changed a lot of how I view myself as a learner, but I have realized my attention span for things I like, and don't like. Anyways, I think Power Hour will make me more confident in my learning skills in the future.

I like how expressive a lot of the answers were to this question when I gave the survey. They reveal that when students are provided time to work independently as I expected them to during Power Hour, they start to think about themselves as learners. In the first response, the student realized that there were serious distractions that made it difficult to focus like friends and her phone. In the second response, the student realized that they recall information better when it is written down instead of simply participating in the activity. The last response was very honest; it hasn't changed how the student views himself, but it made the student aware that he has a short attention span and benefited from having the folder to focus when his attention started to wander.

Where We Left Off

By the second time that I scored their Power Hour folders, most looked like the photos further below. Roughly two-thirds of my students were in attendance for the last day of school. I collected folders from these students. The folders had detailed notes tracking learning and understanding as students worked through the activities that they felt were most beneficial.

Students developed a strong routine from the work that they were completing in class. This folder helped to make that short period to start the morning productive and organized. If you walked into my class at any given point between 8:45-9:00, you would see kids working productively and independently until I could do a quick check-in with them. As a teacher, developing student autonomy during this part of the day is so helpful; they give me a few moments to organize myself to hit the ground running before the start of class. The few minutes in which they are occupied and working, I can do so much to keep my classroom organized and moving forward.

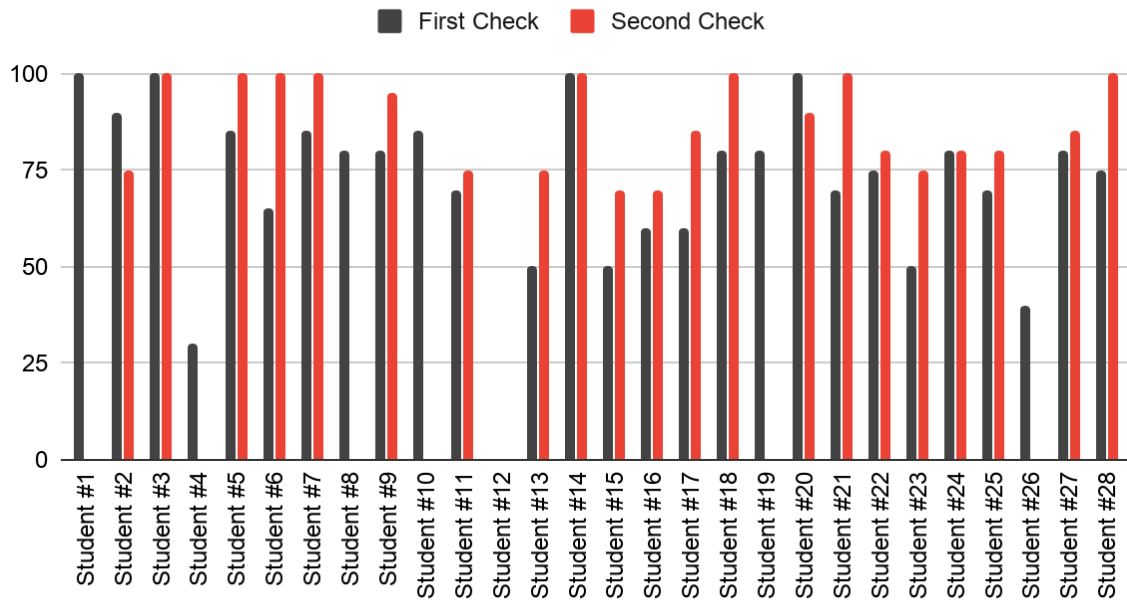




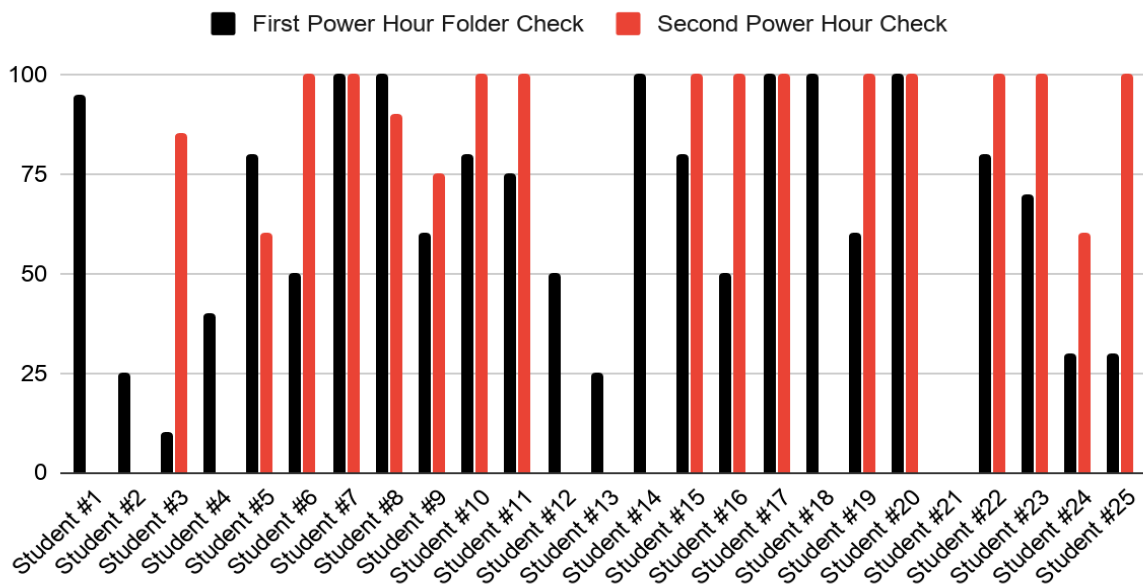
From my perspective as a teacher, Power Hour is an important time for me to touch base with my students. I look forward to the twenty minutes that are used to focus on students. Before I am done with my attendance, students have their activities up and ready, they have out their folders, and they get down to business working and taking notes. This gives a chance as a teacher to watch what they are working on, have brief conferences, and look for students that need encouragement. This daily time is my chance as a teacher to be mindful of where my students are and be present and in tune with their needs. I see connections that students make, like the one that this student made to other learning that we have done during the year. Look at his entry dated 3/12.

frequency to produce the gains that both they and I expected to see. I also reiterated that effort produces gains, and that I haven't seen their best effort yet. This feedback put them on track to develop stamina with the process. You can see the improvement with the number of red bars at 100 for the second check in both classes:

First Check and Second Check



First Check and Second Check



In the morning class, they are mostly my homeroom students. In the afternoon class, they are not in my homeroom, so they do not have the same oversight that my homeroom students have to start the day. It was good to see the number of kids in this room who are able to work independently in the way that I expect with my reminders and oversight grow over time. When looking at the data, you will see that while several students got 100 percent right away the first time I checked their Power Hour folder, there was a dramatic increase in the number of perfect scores with the second check. I am firmly convinced this was because of the feedback that was provided after the first check.

Related to Sub question 2:

→What happens to student ownership of data when they review data frequently?

Most teachers seem to have one discussion with students about data, but then students do not revisit the conversation. Power Hour represents a commitment of class time each week to continue revisiting data and working towards growing in areas that are specific to student needs. This commitment is equally important to the students as well as me as a teacher. If students have areas in which they have to grow, they need to know what those areas are and have options for addressing those areas of growth.

Students need time, guidance and structure from me as a teacher in order to work in those areas. Creating and committing to Power Hour allows me to support a variety of different types of learners with feedback that is specific and timely. This has been an important form of differentiation that has been added to my instruction, so I am interested in how this could have impacted student EOY data. Based on my observations thus far, my expectations are that it will

have a positive impact on student achievement in future years. Some of the early feedback that students provided when I asked about Power Hour's rollout demonstrates that Power Hour work has been a helpful addition to the school day:

- "I feel comfortable and confident about my understanding [of how to use data]. How i can continue to grow academically is by really listening and paying attention to what they are talking about [selected growth activities] and to not get distracted by other people."
- "I understand it [my data] pretty well and I love doing quizlet and I really want to do quizlet and I want to keep doing it."
- "i can learn more and faster if i pay attention"
- "Power hour has changed my view of learning because it showed me to really try hard."
- "I feel amazing that I understand the MAP data because it shows me that I know what I'm doing and what I have to do to get a good grade on the MAP test."
- "I feel like i am not really doing a good job with my reading score so I feel good about working on my low areas. I can keep on working on power hour so i keep growing."

Based on some of the quotes from above, I see students that now not only understand where they are functioning as dictated by the tests, but also know that their scores do not happen by chance. I am amazed by the repeated number of times that I see the word, "I." I went back and coded student responses to the following survey question: After looking at the data closely and beginning to work in areas to address that you can grow, how do you feel about your understanding of MAP data and what you can do to continue to grow academically?

"I" was used 152 times in the 49 responses. This averages to 3.1 "I's" in each response. There was only one response that suggested someone else could be a support: "What I think I

can do is go over words or tell someone in my family to quiz me with definitions and I guess the word or quiz me with the words and I guess the definition.” Even with involving family, this response shows a high level of ownership of the student’s MAP data.

Students know that as a teacher, I will always be there to help them solve problems, supply resources, and encourage profusely, but a personal responsibility for progress is an important part of learning. I can only take students so far in my instruction; the quotes above indicate to me that this process has increased student understanding and ownership of data. They feel personally invested in seeing their own growth and development and have chosen tools that they feel will put them on track to demonstrate tremendous growth.

When I look at some of the quotes from students above, it reminds me of how much my role has evolved in the classroom. I have been teaching for 14 years. Fourteen years ago, there wasn’t such a heavy emphasis on differentiation; there weren’t any growth measures, and there certainly weren’t any web tools to use. In my first years teaching, students did not have access to the internet and almost everything was done by paper and pencil. Growth measures and growth mindset didn’t exist. A lot has changed in student learning over the years, and the student quotes have gotten me to reflect deeply on how different my responsibilities are now as a teacher compared with when I first started teaching.

Related to Sub question 3:

→What happens when teacher feedback helps to influence students' choice of learning activities?

Part of the difficulty in getting kids to make a choice is that they are not accustomed to getting the opportunity to make many choices in what and how they learn. Students were presented with a number of different options for growth activities, ranging from some of the web-based programs that my school has invested in such as Edgenuity and Commonlit to other activities like independent reading or listening to books on tape. As time progresses, students are like people who go to the gym and get sick of their regular routine or notice that their routine isn't working for them and they need to change things up in order to continue growing. Even before we transitioned to remote learning, I saw some feedback from students in which they would have needed to reconsider in order to make Power Hour work; if the year had continued in person, I would have had a conversation with the following students in order to recalibrate their plans:

- “Power Hour changed me because it made myself look really lazy because I saw how much others did and I just thought to myself that I'm really lazy.”
- “I have not done a lot so I have not gotten better a lot.”
- “No not really, i am "learning" things i already know.”

Working with students to develop new plans and discuss what is working and what is not is helpful in getting students to think in a metacognitive way about their learning. When I see

feedback like the feedback above, it is a cue for me to be responsive to the student's needs in order to keep them engaged in meaningful learning.

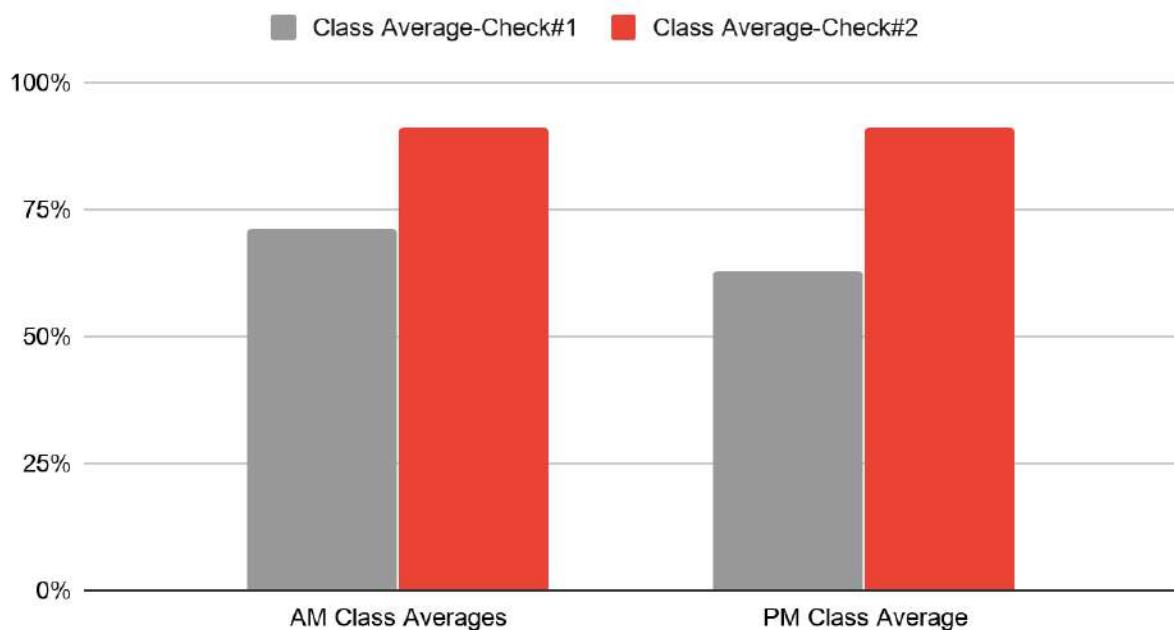
After I checked the folders the first time, I had a conversation with my students. I reiterated the purpose of Power Hour and the purpose of the folder. I talked about some of the survey responses that I read and shared some of the initial thoughts and feelings that students had from the Google Form that students completed. I gave students a few minutes to read the feedback that I wrote in each folder after the first check.

As a teacher, my goal in this was two-fold. First, since I have committed myself and significant instructional time to this, I have high expectations for student performance. I want them to be invested in the work they are doing and to look for new information. Second, I have watched my students carefully this year and reflected on what sustains their focus and attention. Many of the growth activities that they have selected require use of learning platforms that my school has invested in when we secured one-to-one devices for students. With this access to new technology, the question is how to incorporate it in thoughtful and impactful ways. When I see students on devices for an extended period of time, I often see them disengage or distract themselves much in the same way that teachers would during an extended faculty meeting. Students flip between pages, don't plug in their earphones if they are listening to a lecture, and drift to their emails or to check their grades. That is why I want them to take notes as they work to help them process the information that they are learning.

I revisited my expectations. I went back to the anchor chart for Power Hour. I told them that they need to make the choices and be invested enough in the work that will help them to continue to grow. By the end of my talk, students seemed to understand the importance of

forming good habits, working hard, and striving to improve. They were more willing to give the process a shot. Starting the next morning, I saw students take out their folders right away. I found myself having to remind them less to take out the folders. I also did not have to need me to prompt them as much about what they should be documenting and how they should be documenting it. The difference in grades between the first check and second checking was fairly astounding:

Comparing the First and Second Folder Checks



A month later, right before the closure of the school district in response to the pandemic, I collected the Power Hour folders once again. You should notice the significant difference between the gray bar and the red bar. I had many more kids do much better in both classes on their second check. It was particularly evident in my afternoon class that had a lower overall average than my first period class. My afternoon class doesn't have the same oversight during Power Hour that my morning class has with me in the room. By the second check, there was

little difference in quality of the work that students were producing in their folder between the classes. Closing this gap was important because the more detailed that students are, the more informative the learning artifacts are for me as a teacher. By reviewing and providing feedback on student folders, I can begin to determine trends that are helpful in planning future instruction for the entire group. If the year had continued normally, I have no doubt that students would have continued to sustain or even improve the grades that they earned on their second folder check.

Related to Sub question 4:

→What happens to student's perception of themselves as learners when encouraging independent skill-building work?

I think that it has affirmed in the mind of a number of my students that they are ultimately in control of their learning. I believe that is a powerful idea. They are the ones that have to put the legwork into making sure they are working in areas that they do not understand, that they are being productive with the limited time that they have, and that they are documenting things carefully with detail. The work of Power Hour slows them down; this is especially true of students that have selected growth activities that make use of technology. Rather than just zone out while listening to a computer lesson, it is my expectation that students are taking notes and supplying artifacts of their learning in their folder as part of their grade. By what they place in the folder, I should get a clear sense of the work they are doing and what they do not know. Again, this is helpful qualitative data that is informative for classroom instruction, so it is important that students are detailed. Writing down what they are learning positions students as being active participants in their learning. They need to listen or read closely in order to take good notes.

Student Quotes:**Most Impacted by Power Hour**

“I think Power Hour has changed for me because before I wouldn't really think much of it but now I since i have thought about it better i think it would really benefit me more to much better in the areas that I don't do good in.”

“I think Power Hour has changed for me because before I wouldn't really think much of it but now I since i have thought about it better i think it would really benefit me more to much better in the areas that I don't do good in.”

“It changed my view of vocabulary and I know a lot about root words, suffixes and prefixes. I think I am getting better at vocab already.”

“It helped change how I see myself as a learner because I learned so much about the Greek and Latin roots and the different types of structures. It helped with what I can do better when the big test comes up.”

Somewhat Impacted by Power Hour

“Yes I have gone into reading for a while so I don't have to be on electronics.”

“Power Hour has not changed a lot of how I view myself as a learner, but I have realized my attention span for things I like, and don't like. Anyways, I think Power Hour will make me more confident in my learning skills in the future.”

Not Impacted by Power Hour

“I have not done a lot so I have not gotten better a lot.”

My student's quotes in response to this survey question were honest and candid. Their responses range from I haven't done for it to benefit me to very meta answers like the quote in which the student is reflecting on his own process for learning when he remarked, “I realized my attention span for things I like.” Another student wrote how they had to change up their activities so they aren't on electronics; he recognized that he needed a break from the computer in order to

be most productive. Their insights were so powerful, I decided it would valuable to code their quotes to look deeper at the patterns that were evident:

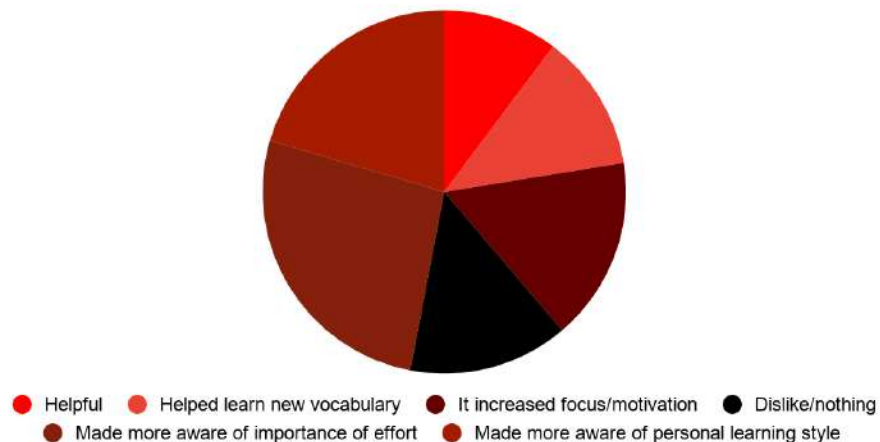
3/3 Survey Data from 49 responses-

How has Power Hour changed how you view yourself as a learner?

Found it helpful	Learning new vocabulary	Increased focus/motivation
5	6	8
dislike/nothing	Awareness of importance of effort	Awareness of learning style
7	13	10

I took their responses and looked for broad categories that described the substance of their response. The categories were: the process was helpful, they learned vocabulary better, it increased motivation or focus, they disliked it or it didn't change their view of themselves as learners, it made them more aware of the importance of effort, or it made them more aware of the personal learning style.

How has Power Hour changed how your view yourself as a learner?



For students in sixth grade to learn more about how they best function as learners is powerful and will benefit them for the rest of their lives as learners. Given the nature of teaching and learning today, very little time is devoted to getting kids to work independently, track goals, and reflect on their learning. Looking at the chart above, about 86% (indicated in shades of red) of my students indicated that the practice had a beneficial impact on their learning. Over 50% of students indicated that Power Hour helped them become more aware of effort and their learning preferences, which was not something that I was expecting until I carefully coded student responses. In addition to their positive feedback, this process has forced me as a teacher to be more observant of my students, more intentional with providing specific and individual student feedback, and more choice than I ever have given.

I have a firm belief that hard work matters, and that all students are capable of achieving if they recognize the value of hard work and invest themselves in the work they are doing. The framework and parameters that I have put around Power Hour sets a student up for success if they are willing to put in the work. If they are detailed and specific with their notes and revisit their folders frequently, they will be successful. In this respect, they are developing good learning habits that will serve them going forward.

Conclusions

There are a couple of important conclusions that I have drawn from the experience of participating in ARLI and working through my project. The conclusions mainly address four different areas: the importance of organization, the importance of using tech tools to support traditional English Language Arts instruction, the importance of cycles of getting and giving

feedback to students, and the importance of having data conversations in establishing growth mindset in the classroom. All of these areas helped me to learn more about my students and how they perceive themselves as learners in my classroom.

I consider myself to be a fairly organized person and teacher, but participating in ARLI this year required me to be even more organized than I normally am when it comes to tracking quotes, giving surveys, and putting together and carefully reviewing the student power hour folders. By working through the process of ARLI, I was able to arrive at a useful system that I will be able to use with my students going forward in future years. I have a clear vision for how to set up the folders, what data was purposeful to include, and how I will expect students to interact with the folder once students take their first test to gather baseline data. I also have exemplar student models to show students what I expect from the start. I didn't start out thinking I would have folders on each individual student, that I would need to track their activities in the way that I did. It grew out of necessity in order to have a landing spot for student data, work and my feedback. The folders that I have from this year will help students to visualize how I expect them to document their learning in the folder and the type of effort that I expect next year. This will ensure the fifteen minutes that we have each morning is purposeful and productive work, and I will be able to hit the ground running with a system that worked for my students.

Another conclusion that I draw from the experience relates to the use of tech tools in schooling. Remote learning has been a major paradigm shift in education. The pandemic has rapidly accelerated student engagement with online tools. Self-directed online learning comprises the bulk of learning that is happening to close the 2019-2020 school year, and it may continue in future years given the uncertainty of what school may look going forward. With that

noted, it is important for teachers to think critically and reflectively about the tech tools that they are using with students so that they can navigate those tools well enough on their own without direct teacher or parent supervision. Not all tech tools work for all students. By the point that I had to leave the process off when remote learning started, there were still 14% of my students that did not find the right tools to support their learning. I believe that I would have been able to plan and work with the students further if the school year had ended differently to find better fits in what they were working on during this time. I believe that teachers should strive for students to have options in the tools that they use and have students reflect on their effectiveness. This requires teachers to engage with the tools themselves and see what the tool looks like from the student's perspective. Students should be learning new information as they are working; they should be able to document this learning as a form of reflection. It requires partnership in planning between the student and the teacher. The folder worked well for monitoring this ongoing partnership.

In considering web tools further, they are key for the individual level of differentiation that students need to sustain literacy growth. Too many reading levels exist within my classroom to reach them all effectively if I am doing whole group or even guided reading instruction. The power hour process has put me on the best track of reaching all of the students in my classroom with activities that are appropriate, engaging and meaningful for them. When students were updating their folders, they were working in different areas but in an organized and systematic way. This a form of differentiation that was missing in my instructional approach and was manageable, which I think is the major challenge in differentiating instruction to each student. In terms of balanced literacy, I have made tremendous progress over the last few years in my shared

and guided reading approach, but I was falling short in independent reading work. The Power Hour process helped to address that gap.

Another conclusion that became evident to me was the importance of getting feedback from students throughout the year and acting on it with an open mind. It is easy to fall into a trap of thinking you know-it-all as a veteran teacher, that you know what is best for students and that all they need to do is follow directions and they will learn what they need to learn. If a veteran teacher wants to continue to grow and evolve as a teacher, it is important to get student feedback on processes and procedures and take their feedback into consideration. Arriving at the concepts of Power Hour, the folder, evaluating web tools and making plans, and data conversations happened very organically based on student feedback. I have always gathered student feedback, but it tended to be only at the end of the school year in order for me to reflect and plan for the next school year. This year was different. There were a couple of points that I struggled to think about what is the next logical step. Student feedback was the deciding factor in shaping my thinking.

Besides getting feedback, another key takeaway is that it is important to give feedback as a teacher as well. Many teachers associate grading with feedback. Grading is a type of feedback, but really propelled this process forward was the feedback that was provided students between the first and second folder check. Increased detail and effort was evident after students saw that I was checking the folders carefully, reading what they wrote, and providing ideas for new activities and areas to focus on while working. As it happened between the first and second check of the folders, the quality of the feedback and improvement in grades go hand-in-hand. When students are working on this in the morning, I need them to be independent in order to

complete daily opening activities. Even though this is an independent activity, it doesn't mean that students will not need support and guidance. Having the folder allowed me to give that guidance and feedback at a convenient time that kept students moving forward in their learning.

Another conclusion that I think is important to share is the importance of data conversation. For a number of years, I tried data conversations. They were more like a data hostage situation. Picture me: "This is what you got, this is what you need to get, you need to do X, Y, and Z to get it. Got it?" By being deliberate this year, my students were not data hostages. They had something to bring to the conversation, and I let them do the majority of the talking when we were reviewing data. In their folders, I put all of their data from the year and from previous years. I taught the entire class how to read the data, and what areas to focus on in order to continue growing as learners. Then students made a plan around the tools and shared their plan with me. Most of the data conversations centered on this part of the page:

My Action Plan for Power Hour		
Area of Focus	Growth Activities (pick at least one to practice for each area of focus)	How will I track my success? (with signposts, in Edgenuity/Commonlit with Quizzes, written out definitions and examples from Prepdog/IXL to be placed in folder)
1. Fiction/ Literature K1	IXL	I will write down definitions on looseleaf and put them in my folder.
2. Nonfiction/ Informational Text L,C,S	Edgenuity Activities	I will look at the portfolio to see what I've done.

Most of the time, their plans were spot on, and I didn't have to say very much or persuade them to go in a different direction. I wished I would have recorded their comments, but I didn't think to do it at the time. If you could picture it, I would ask students to identify their areas of focus, the growth activities they thought would be most beneficial and their method for tracking daily

work. That way I knew what to look for in their folder. The conversations were fast and relied on this table. By having this conversation with each student, I knew exactly what to look for in folder when I went to check them. Tracking their learning daily in the folder helped to keep them accountable, and it made it so that I could really focus on shared reading and guided reading literacy instruction that are more dependent on my performance and preparation as the leader of those activities.

Another conclusion that I wasn't looking for but became apparent was the impact of growth mindset. Carol Dweck defines a growth mindset as: "In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point" (Westby, 2020, pg. 1). This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Demonstrating grit, determination and effort matters just as much as achievement. Power Hour is an opportunity for students to demonstrate these traits. The quality of student work got better over time as students began to see that their effort mattered. I look for ways to build a growth mindset in my classroom; this practice was supportive in a way that I wasn't planning at the start.

The biggest and most important conclusion that I was able to draw related to student perceptions of themselves as learners. By coding student responses to the question: How has Power Hour changed how you view yourself as a learner, I learned that over 50% of students indicated that Power Hour helped them become more aware of effort and their learning preferences. This caused me to do more research; I wanted to learn more about why this might have happened. What I stumbled upon in my research was metacognition. The more I read about metacognition and learning, the more that I realized that the process that ultimately became

Power Hour aligns well with metacognitive teaching. Anderson (quoted in Nosratinia, Ghavidel, & Zaker, 2015) outlines a metacognitive learning process suggesting that it can be divided into a five step process: preparing and planning for learning (data conversations), selecting and using learning strategies (data conversations), monitoring strategy use (collecting and checking student folder updates), orchestrating various strategies (student daily work with growth activities), and evaluating strategy use and learning (collecting and checking student folder updates). As you can see, the process that Anderson suggests for metacognitive strategy with students is aligned with what I ultimately developed with my students that I added in parenthesis. This surprise finding was extremely satisfying for me as a teacher and made all of the work worthwhile. I appreciated understanding why a practice that I developed with my students worked according to research.

Policy Recommendations

As a Nation

We need to invest as a nation to ensure that all students in the United States have access to technology. This includes:

- Closing the digital divide that exists within many cities and states
- A working computer with internet access
- Appropriate web tools that are engaging, relevant and align with relevant content standards
- Teacher autonomy and discretion to select tools that are appropriate for the students they teach

- Professional development time for teachers to review tools with colleagues and select the tools that will work best within distinct populations of students
- Thinking of ways that parents and teachers can work together to support students using tech tools

As a District

In the Chicago Public Schools, there are a couple of key recommendations:

- Use the purchasing power of being a large district to provide tech tools to schools throughout the district, especially as the district is moving towards a universal curriculum
- Gather teacher teams to evaluate the tools before making purchases
- Invest in technology, including cutting edge personalized learning platforms that could simulate the folder completely online
- Bring together schools into professional learning communities to share learning and insights related to tech tools, this could be done by making their annual tech talk conference a quarterly event

As a School

Mark Twain Elementary should consider the following:

- Don't purchase tech tools without teacher input first
- Provide teachers autonomy over which tools they put before students by supporting individual teacher's preferred tech tools

- Provide teachers with self-directed professional development time with colleagues to think carefully about the content they teach and narrow down to two-to-three web tools that they think would be most useful for their students
- Improve the usability of the school's website so that teachers have their place on the school website to support both students and parents
- Within the building, continue to share best practices about using and discussing test data with students

Limitations

This year has provided a number of limitations that have made engaging in action research challenging. It has significantly reduced the amount of contact time that I would normally have with students. Between the work stoppage that cost nearly two weeks of instruction, a week of testing in the winter, and the closure related to the pandemic, it must be acknowledged that time was an incredible enemy in engaging in sustained research. As I indicate in a couple places in my journal, it felt as if the year had a couple of starts and stops and that momentum was halted a couple of times due to forces beyond the control of the classroom teacher.

The biggest limitation that is disappointing to me in the process was that I wasn't able to see the impact of the work on standardized test scores. Based on my observations over the start of the third quarter, I believe that students were on track to make significant gains. I saw the quality of the metacognition improve as students reflected on what they did and did not know. I saw students take ownership of their work that they did in their folder. This, in addition to the

other instructional methods that I have used, leads me to believe that students were on track to demonstrate tremendous growth. It would have been helpful to have the final data point of the end of the year MAP test to look at trends and reflect on the process further.

A final point that I would like to make about this process is that it was organic and in tune with the thoughts and insights of my students. I started the school year with an idea in mind. I wanted kids to read more. I tried some different ways of having them read. They read in groups; they listened to books on tape, they learned to read and annotate using signposts, they used different programs that we have access to in order to read and respond on different platforms. All of the choices that I made this year were based on their feedback, and I think that is an important limitation.

Every teacher has to make a number of choices in planning and executing instruction. I arrived at the Power Hour folder process to organize the work students are doing and keep their individual efforts tied to assessment data. I only arrived at this process because of their feedback. After reading their feedback, everything seemed like a logical next step. This process may be a logical option or next step for another teacher, but I think that really depends on the needs and input of your students. Power Hour was the culmination of me trying to listen to the needs of my students and provide the time and space for them to work on what they needed to work on in order to continue to grow. This may work or may not work for your students, but I think it underscores the point to listen to needs and feedback and make instructional decisions that support the needs of your students.

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