

# **INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY: LESSONS LEARNED ON PRACTITIONER RESEARCH, THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM, AND ASSESSING CHANGES IN STUDENT MOTIVATION**

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## **Introduction**

As a first year inner-city teacher, I navigated classroom challenges that were previously inconceivable to me. Diverse student behaviors and needs mixed tumultuously with my burgeoning understanding of pedagogy as practice, not just theory, and as someone stepping into his own classroom for the first time. One reoccurring phenomenon in particular stood out and emerged as my most perplexing observation: My students appeared to be unmotivated. Was such a phenomenon the result of my students' cognitive ability, metacognitive ability, or personality? Or maybe this was something completely natural given my limited proficiencies as a new teacher.

Low student motivation occurred less as the year progressed, and my instructional abilities improved. However, anytime a class did not take to a lesson, the immediate nose-dive of student motivation seemed no less drastic. Even after several consecutive days of meaningful, challenging, and engaging instruction, when I would botch a lesson, my students would immediately return to a hostile and unruly disposition for the remainder of class, a state that had dominated my classroom in the early months of my first year teaching. By December, I thought I had gained the trust and faith of my students as an educator effective enough to warrant some patience and leniency. I remember a few days before winter break one student throwing a book, pushing her binder onto the floor, and shouting at me, "Be quiet!" as I fumbled through explaining a convoluted writing assignment. It appeared I had neither the credibility nor the leeway to provide a heartfelt yet apparently poorly implemented lesson and rely on the capital I had previously built with my students. Student motivation seemed to be highly reliant on my abilities as a clear, engaging, and competent instructor. When my abilities fell short, so too did student motivation.

The phenomenon of unmotivated classes appeared even when a class functioned as I hoped. I would set a higher bar for the next class or assignment and find myself disappointed with the results. Was student motivation a legitimate problem in my classroom, or did my passion for the zeitgeist of rigor compel me to ask too much of my students while unfairly placing the onus on them to demonstrate more grit?

Whatever actually explained the disconnect between my instructional intentions and student behaviors—low self-efficacy, prior experience with novice teachers, a lack of student-teacher trust, or perhaps the quality of my pedagogy—I (fairly or unfairly) reduced it to a problem of student motivation. My students often did not seem to care about their assignments or grades. I wanted to know why.

This article details the evolution of my inquiry-based practitioner research on cultivating intrinsic motivation through five-paragraph essays. Motivation refers to the impetus to act. Psychologists designate both level of motivation (low to high) and orientation (type) of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Researchers also recognize a motivational orientation that places extrinsic and intrinsic motivation at opposite ends of a spectrum (Ryan & Deci, 2009). The use of external rewards or punishments that compel action characterizes extrinsic motivation; the inherent joy and satisfaction from a task that invite autonomous action characterize intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). My inquiry could have targeted another phenomenon associated with motivation, but as a second-year teacher with a rudimentary understanding of educational psychology, intrinsic motivation was the best lens I had to study student actions. Without the instruments psychologists use to assess intrinsic motivation (reaction time in laboratory controlled settings, student self-reporting measures, or others) (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012), my inquiry examined the relationship between my actions as a teacher and a variety of ever-changing data on my students, such as choices in essay topic and the presence of student voice in writing assignments. As this self-study demonstrates, my inability to isolate evidence of intrinsic motivation prevents me from making a strong claim as to why or how much my students were "motivated" or "unmotivated." This paradox—that an educator with the ability to influence student motivation cannot conclusively explain the impact of his instructional methods or actions—is a central theme in this inquiry.

Intrinsic motivation for writing has been linked to greater levels of student self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-scaffolding among some age groups (Lipstein & Renninger, 2006). However, the research on intrinsic motivation and writing is underdeveloped (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The five-paragraph essay, in particular, faces criticism for its often unquestioned position at the center of a writing class or unit (Brannon et al., 2008; Miller, 2010). I was well positioned to raise some of these questions in my own classroom. The greening of the teacher workforce over the last thirty years has meant that first-year teachers have become the most common educator (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Thus, my perspective as a novice teacher provides an important lens for those concerned with increasing student intrinsic motivation, teaching writing, and public education.

Practitioner research harnesses a teacher's unique perspective as someone situated "inside" a classroom who tries to navigate, understand, and negotiate the phenomena and factors that impact learning, motivation, and student development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). While teachers may not be able to scientifically evaluate educational and classroom-related phenomena, the ability to generate local knowledge about practices that best support student needs could very well help illuminate problems and directions for such research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). S. Ravitch (2014) extolled the virtues of practitioner-research in the most recent issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education*:

Such systematic examination is designed to increase awareness of the contexts that shape professional actions, decisions, and judgments, enabling practitioners to see our practices anew, to recognize and articulate the complexities of our work, and the values and choices at the core of professional practice. (p. 6)

This article hopes to offer such an examination by detailing my experiences as a practitioner negotiating factors that impact student motivation and crafting my professional decisions accordingly. Kaplan, Katz, and Flum (2012) offer similar sentiments to S. Ravitch's when they evaluate the current state of motivation research:

Motivation theory and research of the past decades have contributed tremendously to scientific knowledge concerning mechanisms and processes of human motivation and engagement. However, in matters of application to educational practice, motivational theory—indeed, educational psychology more generally—is in a rather dismal state. (p. 168)

Due to the dominance, and limitations, of the control-experimental psychological paradigm in educational psychology, Kaplan, Katz, and Flum (2012) advocate for motivational phenomena to be studied in educational practice and context. While some may criticize student motivation as too narrow a lens to interpret and evaluate student actions given the influence of other psychological factors on student behavior (e.g., interest development, self-efficacy, and self-regulation), student motivation represents a construct that incorporates and often welcomes these other phenomena when describing student behaviors (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Silvia, 2006).

Struck by my students' often hostile and apathetic responses to assignments and instruction and hoping to contribute to the knowledge of motivation, I began to take an inquiry stance on my own practice. I studied my practice on three fronts with the help of an off-site teacher research group: (a) how my inquiry question changes as a developing urban educator who attempts to incorporate findings and suggestions from motivational psychology without being a student in the academy, (b) the effectiveness of classroom strategies to increase student motivation as a second year teacher, and (c) the student outcomes I observed. Each of these fronts influences the others and my practice as the school year continues. I report on these influences throughout the academic year and conclude this article by discussing the implications of my narrative for practitioner research, the assessment of student motivation, the role of academic research on student motivation for educators, and the potential contributions of novice educators' voices in education. This article does not attempt to offer definitive or proven strategies to improve student motivation or a more detailed account of the psychology of motivation; it represents a teacher's efforts to synthesize academic research and pedagogical strategies with a developing competence as an educator for impoverished, under-motivated, and academically behind students.

### **The backdrop to my inquiry: The end of my first year of teaching**

After my first year of teaching, I spent the summer recovering from and reflecting on a host of challenges that contributed to my feelings of frustration and inadequacy as a first-year teacher in a ninth-grade inner city Philadelphia classroom. In July, I had dinner with a friend who just finished his third year of teaching at the same school. We discussed the discomfort of watching the majority of our students remain reluctant to study, go above and beyond on assignments, and pursue academic interests outside of school walls. Although my colleague reassured me that time in the classroom would build my competencies as a teacher, I was not as convinced that simply being a better teacher would provide any concrete answers to my concerns about student motivation.

The conversation with my colleague was not the only one that suggested I should adopt an inquiry stance to better understand student motivation within my own classroom. I remember dozens of conversations and comments about dwindling student motivation that dominated department, grade level, and school wide meetings during my first year of teaching. Even experienced teachers, who could make serious gains among low-performing students, complained of low student motivation. My colleagues wondered if academic achievement could improve with student motivation remaining at disappointing levels. Or, perhaps the problem was that teachers continued to set the bar higher and higher and became frustrated when they capable students did not meet them.

Several studies support my colleagues' concerns about student effort. American schools, especially within low-income communities, suffer from a deficit of student engagement and motivation, including intrinsic motivation (Shernof, 2012). The 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement reports that nationally 20% of students considered dropping out of high school in 2006, increasing to 26% in 2009. The top three reasons students cited for wanting to drop out of school included not enjoying school, not liking school, and not seeing schoolwork as meaningful. Twenty-six percent of students reported they were bored because the material was too difficult, 42% found the material irrelevant to their life, and 66% were bored every day in school (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Over 30% of ninth graders fail to graduate high school across the nation (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009), and in urban areas the figure is closer to 50%. In Philadelphia, the percentage of dropouts is 55% (Toppo, 2010). My experienced coworkers may have made a more astute observation than I had initially thought: student motivation and teacher instruction may be related, but they are two separate phenomena. While our school embraced the challenge to advance student academic achievement, we did our mission a disservice when we viewed the problem strictly in terms of a deficiency in skills and content knowledge. Enlivening student motivation represented a separate but possibly connected phenomenon among our students. How much of which could be influenced by a teacher or school remained a question in my mind. Perhaps bolstering student motivation and engagement represents a prerequisite to closing the achievement gap, and other variables (e.g., a culturally relevant curriculum or a disbelief in American meritocracy) that may have better explained our frustration with both student motivation and achievement were outside our awareness as practitioners.

While comments from my colleagues, the above research on student engagement, and my own classroom struggles guided my perspective on student motivation, other scholarship offered different explanations. Research on resiliency and unstable communities led me to question whether I may be placing an extra and thus unfair burden on students in low-income and violent communities to discard the milieu of their struggling communities when they enter school. Is it fair for me, a college graduate raised to value education in a community full of educated role models, to expect my students to manifest the same priorities? Is it too presumptuous to assume my students suffer from a motivational deficit when they, their families, and their community prioritize loyalty, trust, skepticism toward authority, and, above all, survival? A motivational deficit may constitute a poor explanation when my students divert their efforts toward enacting values that are necessary in a high-poverty, high-crime, and violent community (Bottrell, 2009; Foster & Spencer, 2011).

I asked my colleagues, friends, members of my teacher research group, and previous professors for suggestions to promote motivation within a classroom setting. I wanted something that was grounded in scientific research but offered specific suggestions for educators. I was quickly introduced to self-determination theory. According to Ryan and Deci (2000, 2009), motivation exists on a spectrum where a person can fall at or between extrinsic motivation on one end and intrinsic motivation on the other. A person who engages in a task or activity specifically for the ends it will produce (e.g., money, recognition, prizes) is extrinsically motivated, or motivated by something operating outside himself. However, someone motivated specifically by a sense of joy that an activity elicits is considered to be motivated by something within or "intrinsic." Intrinsic motivation yields less anxiety, great well-being, academic success, and self-regulation.

Given my limited experience navigating the complex academic literature on self-determination theory and other achievement motivation theories, I needed to take a step back and familiarize myself with the literature for more general audiences. Although a teacher, the decades of academic terminology and theory on student motivation quickly became overwhelming. A professor recommended Kohn's (1993) *Punished by Rewards*. Kohn, a lecturer and author, synthesized psychological research on how the use of rewards and punishments (extrinsic motivation) would unavoidably and necessarily decrease the person's interest and enjoyment in a task (intrinsic motivation). Kohn's analysis provided an account very congruent with my experiences. Some of my students seemed highly motivated to engage with the content of a class's lesson while other students would only entertain school work with the accompaniment of baked goods and positive phone calls to parents or threats of detention and failing grades.

Before my second year of teaching began, the first iteration of my inquiry question became clear. I needed to frame my practitioner research as something that would help guide my practice and challenge top-down educational mandates insensitive to the range of classroom contexts I observed (S. Ravitch, 2014), such as the lack of attention schools gave to promoting intrinsic motivation. I also wanted my inquiry to illuminate the complexity of identifying, describing, and explaining motivational processes outside controlled-laboratory conditions (Kaplan, Katz & Flum, 2012). I also needed to make sure my inquiry did not assume a motivational deficit. Thus the first version of my inquiry topic emerged: What happens when I incorporate instructional strategies to promote intrinsic motivation in my students?

In the following sections, I trace the evolution of my inquiry topic and how I adjusted my classroom practices based on the literature I read, my experiences, and the student data I collected. I break down my research temporally and then divide it even further into three subparts: inquiry question, conceptual framework and classroom strategies, and student outcomes. I group conceptual framework and classroom strategies into one section because of the natural and almost necessary need to allow new experiences and theories to guide and influence interventions (Maxwell, 2013).

## **The Beginning of My Practitioner Research: September-October**

### **Inquiry Question**

Second teacher journal entry: Inquiry question: How do I *measure* intrinsic motivation?" [emphasis added]

When I initially framed my inquiry question, it began with "What happens when," which I reasoned would be better changed to "How do I measure." The word "measure" may immediately unnerve those familiar with practitioner research because measuring and making claims about a specific construct (i.e., intrinsic motivation) falls in the realm of basic research rather than the highly localized and action-guided domain of practitioner-research (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Although I wanted to cultivate intrinsic motivation within my students, I felt the best way to do so was parsing, identifying, and then measuring variant behaviors and thought processes within my students. My undergraduate background in the social sciences often required me to measure relationships, and that was the only framework I had to approach my study. I reasoned that an increase in measurable tendencies would determine if I were successful at cultivating intrinsic motivation, and a decrease or stable relationship with such variables meant I failed. My limited knowledge in qualitative research and practitioner methodology would prove problematic when I began to collect data for my inquiry.

### **Conceptual Framework and Classroom Strategies**

Research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation found the former to be a much better predictor of high school achievement than the latter (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009). With my nascent understanding of student motivation at the time (Kohn, 1993, 2006), I developed the following four strategies for fostering intrinsic motivation in my classroom for the upcoming year:

1. no class competitions;
2. no individual student rewards;
3. a behavior management system that focuses on the importance of maintained effort, diligence, and cooperation in the classroom, rather than a fear of punishment; and
4. explicit instruction in the phenomenon and importance of intrinsic motivation.

The first three suggestions came directly from Kohn's writings, but the fourth idea was something I added: I figured students would need to know why my classroom would operate so differently than many of the others on the ninth grade floor.

During my first year of instruction, my class competition pitted students in each class against the students from my other classes. Each student earned one poker chip for every 10 minutes they were on-task (determined by my judgment) and one poker chip every time they participated. Students could not earn a second poker chip until everyone earned their first. Chips were totaled at the end of each class. Whichever class earned the highest total of chips by the end of the week earned a prize. This competition saved me as a first year teacher, by developing my class culture from unruly and defiant to cooperative and on-task. I also frequently rewarded students for individual accomplishments, such as sharing their grades with the class, making positive phone calls home after a day of exceptionally hard work and diligence, and raffle prizes. Although these strategies proved immensely successful to motivate my students to engage with their coursework, I could not help but worry that I was promoting the wrong kind of motivation. All of Kohn's (1996) predictions had come true: I had to keep increasing the rewards for the competition to have appeal, students often became hostile and untrusting if they lost the competition or did not find their work praised in front of the class, and any day I tried to suspend the class competition or other incentives, my classroom immediately reverted back to the fractious culture that dominated the first few months of year.

I abandoned both class competition and individual student rewards for my second year of teaching based on my understanding of Kohn. He asserts that motivation is not singular. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations represent two very different forces with different long-term effects on students. Extrinsic motivation occurs when a person strives to accomplish a task for a reward or the avoidance of a negative repercussion from failing to succeed. Intrinsic motivation occurs when a person strives to accomplish a task because of the enjoyment and pleasure of engaging in the task itself. Kohn also showed that motivation is not additive; using reinforcements to encourage or discourage particular behaviors in students decreases curiosity, academic risk-

taking, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. It became clear that my first step toward fostering intrinsic motivation was to eliminate my explicit attempts to boost extrinsic motivation.

I also planned to reform my behavior management system. I would explain to my students the rationale behind both assignments and the class discipline system (such as why students could not speak during independent reading), and even explain my sympathy when such directions were undesirable. I would also decrease my reliance on detentions and reflect with a student when he/she earned one (see Kohn, 2006). At this time, I was only a weekend away from students entering my classroom for the first day of my second school year as a teacher. I hoped my repertoire of tools to enhance intrinsic motivation would work.

## Student Outcomes

Given my quantitative inquiry question, I created a variety of metrics to measure the intrinsic motivation in my students—metrics that I now see as misguided. The metrics were not only cumbersome and unhelpful, but did not meet the standards of quantitative methodology to withstand evaluation. My metrics are outlined below:

1. I recorded any time I attempted to motivate a student, whether through extrinsic or intrinsic means. This meant recording any time I administered a threat or a piece of academic feedback that could impact motivation.
2. After several lessons on how to annotate a text, I administered a rather dull short story during the fifth week of school and told the students:

This assignment is completely optional. Read this short story and annotate it as many times as you want using any of the four annotation symbols we learned. If you do not do it or finish early, I have crossword puzzles for you. If you don't finish early, put an X next to where you stopped reading.

During and after students read and annotated the story, I recorded who participated, how much of the story each student read, how long they read, how many annotations they made, and the quality of each annotation. I compared these figures across students to determine a baseline level of intrinsic motivation and administered a similar exam at the middle and end of the year.

Administering both metrics was challenging. For the first metric, besides the sheer difficulty of recording what I communicated to each student over the course of a class, I could not easily distinguish between what might constitute a prompt for intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. If I said, "It looks like you are enjoying this assignment. Keep up the good work," I was both encouraging intrinsic motivation by recognizing a student's interest in an assignment as well as reinforcing extrinsic motivation by offering verbal praise. Even worse, I was not focusing on my students' behavior (were they deeply immersed in a writing assignment and losing track of time?) but instead focusing on quantifying what I, the teacher, was doing. Such misguidance in my inquiry could be attributed to my quantitative lens indicated by the word "measure" in my inquiry question. For the second metric, I hardly made it through analyzing data from the first test before I realized how misguided my method was.

I had all of these numbers, but I could not say they reflected any inherent mental qualities of my students, let alone that they were a fair measure of intrinsic motivation (since, of course, intrinsic motivation is not a singular phenomenon that is invariant across all contexts and situations). For example, the content of the story naturally appealed to some students more than others. Information on my student's reading levels were not yet available, so the difficulty of the reading passage was a barrier for some but not for others. Even the very idea of thinking I could teach annotation and use it as a proxy for such a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon as intrinsic motivation became an obvious error in my framework: Could the frequency and quality of a student's annotations, even if a base-rate were established (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) say anything about a student's motivation while literacy, previous exposure to annotation strategies, and a host of other factors influenced such data? . I designed my inquiry stance to embrace S. Ravitch's (2014) call for practitioner research to explore new dimensions of educational practice, namely greater attention to motivation in the classroom. I also wanted to respond to Kaplan, Katz, and Flum's (2012) call for a better bridge between academic research on achievement motivation and classroom practices. My inquiry was doing neither.

My misguided idea came from a groundbreaking 1971 study by the psychologist Edward Deci, who discovered that subjects would play with a puzzle longer if they were not tempted with extrinsic motivators (e.g., monetary compensation). Iterations of this experiment with different variables (e.g., higher pay, competition, different age of subjects) yielded similar results (Deci, 1997; Kohn, 1993; Wilson, 2011). Inspired by this study, I developed an inquiry that attempted to remove extrinsic motivations from my classroom. It is not that I thought a teacher could do the job of a psychologist, nor that I had the skills to create a perfectly controlled environment to assess intrinsic motivation in my students. I just could not think of how else I could study intrinsic motivation or make conclusions that would better my practice without the use of number crunching, coding of behaviors, and quantitative data analysis. Psychologists, not teachers or administrators, discovered the importance of intrinsic motivation, I

reasoned. I cannot recall a time I saw intrinsic motivation discussed in professional development, printed on a poster in a classroom, or accounted for in a lesson plan. So I did the only thing I thought I could. I did as the psychologists did and quantified.

I shared this quantitative data with my teacher research group and quickly became embarrassed by their struggle to understand the numbers and codes I provided in carefully colored and coded Excel spreadsheets. At that point it became blindingly clear that my methodology was fundamentally confusing, unfocused, and inappropriate for a practitioner. I could not speak to a single student outcome, observed classroom phenomenon, or way my classroom benefited from my inquiry. My inquiry was failing at every level. The study struggled to provide an account of classroom dynamics justified by a teacher's unique and quasi-anthropological perspective being an observer and agent "inside" a classroom (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). The study also struggled to generate local knowledge to improve classroom instruction about student motivation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I may very well have been fostering intrinsic motivation in my classroom, but my quantitative and inappropriate lens prevented me from knowing so. I needed to readjust my inquiry question.

## **November – January**

### **Inquiry Question**

A needed development in my inquiry came from the teacher research group when one of the facilitators commented: "Why not get rid of the word 'measure,' from your inquiry question and return to the first form of your inquiry question that begins with, 'What happens when...?'" This was the direction I needed. I was back to my initial inquiry question: What happens when I incorporate instructional strategies to promote intrinsic motivation in my students? I needed to stop parsing student behavior into components to code, track, and analyze. Instead, I needed to embrace my unique perspective and role as a teacher, develop the best strategies I thought appropriate to improve my instruction given my inquiry, and take an approach from within my classroom to observe and record any classroom occurrences relevant to my inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992).

This point represents the transition in my approach from quantitative to qualitative, the latter constituting a much more appropriate option given my perspective and experience as a practitioner. Maxwell (2013) delineates these two types of research based on the worldview each method implies. Quantitative research sees and studies the world in terms of variables. Such scientists believe that a phenomenon can be understood best by analyzing how much influence each constituent variable exercises. For example, if I wanted to understand the phenomenon of my immune system, I would go to a doctor to anatomize this entity into a white blood cell count, vitamin levels, and my history of illnesses. Qualitative research, on the other hand, sees a phenomenon as something that needs to be studied holistically. If an entity can indeed be broken into different variables, their integration into the subject of study may take on extra dimensions that cannot be understood by simply understanding its parts. With my change to a qualitative approach came a shift in priorities. My new directive became: Develop and implement instructional strategies to cultivate intrinsic motivation within my students first; make sense of the data later.

### **Conceptual Framework and Classroom Strategies**

At this point, several months into the school year, I developed and implemented strategies to foster intrinsic motivation in my students. I offered more choice in assignments and how I presented information to the class (Cordova & Lepper, 1996); provided more academic feedback to promote self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2008); differentiated reading, writing, and other curricular assignments based on student interests (Guthrie & Coddinton, 2009; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Schiefele, 2009); and I allowed students time to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and set goals accordingly (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2009).

Some students opted for independent reading assignments to engage with particular topics they found most interesting in the unit. Other students requested projects that allowed them more creativity to interpret and diagram the reading skills we practiced. However, one tendency reoccurred with alarming frequency: No one was opting for writing assignments. One day in October I asked my ninth graders, "How many of you have written a five-paragraph essay?" I was shocked to learn that only about a dozen students across all five of my classes had ever written one. Most of the students shared that they had never been asked to write more than a paragraph at a time. Although five-paragraph essays have been criticized as overly formulaic by prioritizing structure over content (Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003), they were the only tool I was aware of that could bridge the gap between paragraph writing and longer analytic writing assignments.

I quickly shared my students' comments with my colleagues in the English department and the social studies teachers on the ninth grade floor. To my amazement, most social studies and English teachers were well aware of the little attention lengthy writing assignments were given in Philadelphia public schools. Perhaps more alarming, my school's English and social studies

curricula included few writing assignments that required more than a page. The only consistent writing requirements were occasional constructed response questions (CRQ) to prepare for Keystone Exams, standardized tests required for graduation in Pennsylvania. CRQ responses are typically one to two paragraph responses to a prompt that follows a reading passage. According to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (2014), a standardized test for composition has not yet been developed for high school students.

Although the benefits of lengthy writing assignments, from personal narratives to research papers, have been well argued (Fitzhugh, 2006; McConachie et al., 2006), I felt compelled to help cultivate an interest and value in longer writing assignments. Philadelphia has some of the highest poverty rates of all major US cities (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013), with 4th and 8th grade scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) well below the national average (Mezzacappa, 2013). With school funding tied to performance on state standardized tests, and lengthy writing assignments not covered on any of them, a lack of attention to writing is certainly understandable.

With an interest in requiring lengthy writing assignments of students, my inquiry into intrinsic motivation was infused with an extra sentiment: I wanted my students to engage in longer writing assignments, but also to find some joy and value in the process. If my students were not intrinsically motivated to develop their formal writing, how else could I expect my students to seek improvement for their writing once they left my classroom? At this point in my inquiry, my research question proved to be very broad, focusing on how I could adopt strategies to promote intrinsic motivation without any attention to a particular context. Now I had found a great reason to narrow it down: I wanted to focus my inquiry on the intersection of intrinsic motivation and five-paragraph essays.

## **February**

### **Inquiry Question**

S. Ravitch (2014) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) position teacher research as something that not only has the ability to generate local knowledge and advocate for new directions in research, but also to criticize top-down educational best practices. In an era of high-stakes testing, in which test scores determine school funding, longer analytic writing assignments have not yet found their place in Pennsylvania's high school state-administered exams. Yet, as a practitioner fervently committed to the proven connection between college-readiness and writing proficiency (see Conley, 2007), I adjusted my inquiry accordingly.

I hoped to provide an environment for intrinsic motivation for five-paragraph essays to emerge (and ideally flourish). Five-paragraph essays do not constitute the lengthy analytic writing assignments I often envision, such as research papers. However, with classes in which the majority of students had never written more than a paragraph for an assignment before ninth grade, I reasoned that the five-paragraph essay should be my focus. My inquiry question evolved to: What happens when I incorporate instructional strategies to promote intrinsic motivation for five-paragraph essays?

### **Conceptual Framework and Classroom Strategies**

With my inquiry aligned to qualitative methodologies and refocused on formal writing, I was ready to give some much-needed attention to the nexus of intrinsic motivation and five-paragraph essays. I wanted my students to be able to write a research paper by the end of the year, and I would use five-paragraph essay assignments to prepare my students for that assignment. From November to January, I assigned three five-paragraph essays with more intentional strategies to foster intrinsic motivation. Conflicts naturally arise when educators negotiate classroom structure and consistency while also promoting autonomy and choice to further intrinsic motivation (Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992; Deci & Faste, 1995; Reeve, 2009). However, research has shown that specific strategies can facilitate intrinsic motivation within a structured classroom (Urdu & Turner, 2005). Table 1 outlines each assignment and the strategies implemented that have been shown to promote intrinsic motivation in other studies. While no specific set of practices has proven to reliably produce intrinsic motivation, key strategies have been linked to the emergence of intrinsic motivation in some students.

Table 1

*Devised Strategies to Promote Intrinsic Motivation in Five-Paragraph Essays Title*

Five-Paragraph Essay Assignment Date	Essay Question	Prerequisites for Essay Assignment	Intrinsic Motivation Strategies	Academic Origins of Intrinsic Motivation Strategies
October	How is the novel <i>The Hunger Games</i> similar to the real world?	<p>Completion of out-loud and independent reading assignments, culminating in the completion of the novel</p> <p>Completion of all nonfiction articles and class exercises detailing current and past historical events similar to <i>The Hunger Games</i></p> <p>Knowledge of grammar and writing skills (attention-grabbing line, thesis statement, etc.) that would be applied to the five-paragraph essay</p>	<p>1. Complete freedom in choice of thesis statement</p> <p>2. Some choice in supporting evidence (students could choose three nonfiction articles from the six we read in class to argue if the real world and <i>The Hunger Games</i> were similar)</p> <p>3. Teacher explanations, class activities, and class discussions about the importance of strong writing skills for high school, college, and professional success</p> <p>4. Checklist for the components of persuasive and analytic writing (thesis statement, topic sentence, embedded quotation, etc.) to provide both self-regulation and structure</p>	<p>1&amp;2. Provide students choices in assignments and content to promote student autonomy and interest development (Kohn 1993, 2006; Deci, 1997; Hidi &amp; Renninger, 2006; Reese, 2009)</p> <p>3. Sympathize with students when they express apathy or hostility toward an assignment and explain the importance of the task for college, jobs, and applications outside the classroom (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2009)</p> <p>4. Provide structure to encourage self-regulation (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2000; Zimmermann &amp; Schunk, 2008; Zimmermann, &amp; Cleary, 2009;)</p>
November	What is the cause of violence?	<p>Completion of reading and writing assignments on theories of violence</p> <p>Mastery of all writing and grammar skills that would be applied to the five-paragraph essay</p>	<p>1. Class-generated essay topic (violence)</p> <p>2. Choice in thesis statement</p> <p>3. Choice in supporting evidence (Students could choose any of the nonfiction articles we read in class)</p> <p>4. Teacher explanations, class activities, and class discussions about the importance of strong writing skills for high school, college, and professional success</p> <p>5. Checklist for the components of persuasive and analytic writing</p> <p>6. Class brainstorming activities for essay topics</p> <p>7. Personal discussions with each student about their growth in formal writing to promote a sense of competence</p>	<p>1-3. Provide students choice in content and assignments to promote autonomy and interest development</p> <p>3. Provide choice in student reading materials so students can find the reading material personally meaningful (Guthrie &amp; Coddington, 2009)</p> <p>4. Sympathize and explain the importance of unappealing tasks</p> <p>5. Provide structure to encourage self-regulation</p> <p>6. Allow students to generate topics for assignments with class discussions (Kohn, 2006)</p> <p>7. A student's sense of competence strongly correlates with intrinsic motivation (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2000)</p>



<p>January</p>	<p>Should Mr. Smith teach this short story next year?</p>	<p>Complete reading for at least one of the three short stories</p> <p>Mastery of all literary terms (tone, theme, symbolism, etc.), writing and grammar skills that would be applied to the five-paragraph essay</p>	<p>1. Choice in thesis statement</p> <p>2. Choice in supporting evidence (Students could provide a literary analysis of the story based on any of the 7 literary terms learned in class.)</p> <p>3. Choice in short story to write about (three story options)</p> <p>4. Ability to change short story if desired</p> <p>5. Teacher explanations, class activities, and class discussions about the importance of strong writing skills for high school, college, and professional success</p> <p>6. Students can use peers for advice, editing, and suggestions when gathering evidence and constructing outlines and rough drafts</p>	<p>1&amp;2. Provide students choice in content and assignments to promote autonomy and interest development</p> <p>3. Provide choice in reading materials to increase the likelihood a student will find the text meaningful (Guthrie &amp; Coddington, 2009)</p> <p>4. Provide students with the opportunity and supports for academic risk-taking (Ryan &amp; Deci, 2009)</p> <p>5. Sympathize and explain the importance of unappealing tasks</p> <p>6. Collaborating with classmates fosters "relatedness," the ability to feel valued, safe, and connected in a community, a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2000)</p>
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Note. The number assigned to the Intrinsic Motivation Strategies category corresponds to the number for the Academic Origins of Intrinsic Motivation Strategies category.

## Student Outcomes

Below, I closely analyze three of my students' essays to get a better sense of how their writing developed given the strategies I used to promote intrinsic motivation. An artifact analysis of the three five-paragraph essays written by my students did demonstrate a deeper understanding of the material, more passion and interest in both the writing topic and writing itself, and more time and effort committed to the activity. It may be too bold to argue that such strategies increased students' intrinsic motivation in a semi-autonomous classroom, but certain characteristics in each student's essays suggest greater competency, interest, and effort, all of which are necessary conditions for intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1995; Deci & Ryan 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

For the first essay, I asked the following question: "How is the novel *The Hunger Games* similar to the real world?" Students were required to have a central thesis, and the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion were graded on criteria taught in the previous weeks. *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) describes Katniss, an impoverished citizen in a futuristic dystopian world who is forced to battle other "tributes" to the death as entertainment for the country's population. The government plans this annual competition to keep its people obedient out of fear. For the second essay, I asked, "What is the cause of violence?" and in the third essay, I asked, "Should Mr. Smith teach this short story next year?" The details of each assignment are listed in Table 1. Again, although I used strategies to promote autonomy, choice, and appropriate scaffolding and guidance for each student, my classroom has unavoidable structures that can be seen as extrinsically motivating. Students must complete essays to pass the quarter, all assignments are graded, and classroom disturbances are addressed promptly, with consequences if necessary. However, as stated earlier, classroom structures do not preclude the use of certain strategies to promote intrinsic motivation (Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992).

## Student A

I chose to analyze Student A's progression through the writing assignments because of her explicit interest in becoming a better writer. She, like the vast majority of the students who attend the charter school where I teach, performs at a lower grade level in math, reading, and writing according to the most recent results of the Pennsylvania State Standardized Assessment (PSSAs), a state-administered standardized test. Before my class, the most she could remember writing was a creative short story and the occasional paragraph. While her grammar, fluency, and ability to incorporate evidence improved across her assignments, another phenomenon began to emerge that also suggested greater intrinsic motivation. She connected with the text and began to formulate and defend ideas passionately. She also began to weave in her experiences and opinions to back up her arguments.

### Excerpt from Student A's five-paragraph essay #1.

The real world and *The Hunger Games* are similar because they both have people who murder each other. For example, in *The Hunger Games* people murder each other in the arena to stay alive in order to be the person who wins and goes home to their beloved home. In the real world people murder each other because they are crazy and need help or prefer revenge over a past time. Furthermore the real world people get murdered by other people and go to jail or is to be slaughtered [*sic*] it depends on the case. In *The Hunger Games* they kill tributes in the arena for entertainment. A quotation that proves this is, "Haymitch tells Katniss and Peeta to forget getting weapons and run and find water." [1] This quotation proves that running and getting a weapon will get you killed easily and it's better to run and find water than to risk your life for the weapons and food that is out there for the tributes to fight over. This is how *The Hunger Games* and real world are similar.

### Excerpt from Student A's five-paragraph essay #2.

Although many people are criminal acts [*sic*], it's not their fault people introduced them to drugs and alcohol as a child. This makes them do more serious crimes. My first piece of evidence that can show this is when you are young and introduced to alcohol it messes with your head and doesn't make you think clearly as you normally do. Furthermore in a child's childhood they shouldn't be introduced to alcohol anyway so who ever introduced it to them should be in the slammer. My second piece of evidence is drugs shouldn't be introduced to kids in young stage of life. That will simply damage a lot of body parts in a young person. Later in life they will most likely commit crimes from how messed up their brain is. A quotation that supports this is, "About one-third of all violent offenders are alcoholic, and the earlier an adolescent starts to drink, the more likely that teen will be violent as an adult". This quotation clearly explains being introduced to alcohol is very bad and makes the person capable of being more violent. In conclusion, all drugs and alcohol is bad for a child and also when their [*sic*] older it makes them want to be

more violent. Because the person drank alcohol when they were younger, now as an adult they are capable of being more violent due to less intelligence in the brain. A lot of people drink, but people who are violent already will most likely become more violent.

Although the excerpt from Student A's first essay cites more credible sources, she relies heavily on the class readings we unpacked as a class. In the second essay, she relies much more on her own opinions and experiences. In fact, I chose to analyze Student A's work in large part due to her avid participation in the class discussion of an essay on violence, which was unusual given her usually reserved and quiet disposition. Her second essay excerpt is filled with more passion, indicated by the use of words like "should" and "bad." She makes more evaluative statements, with comments like "not their fault" and "this quotation *clearly* explains being introduced to alcohol is very bad and makes the person capable of being more violent" [emphasis added]. Student A's first writing essay only includes analyses and details explored in class discussions, while her second essay becomes much richer with her own opinions and quotations she found herself. Perhaps these data suggest an increase in her competence and interest in argumentative writing, two prerequisites for intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

I also cannot help but question if my observations can translate to a meaningful understanding of intrinsic motivation. Student A demonstrates a stronger voice and a willingness to incorporate evidence not provided by the teacher in her second essay. But statements like "My first piece of evidence" and "My second piece of evidence" speak to the artificial audience created by the instruction I provided. Such phrases were on a list of common sentence starters I provided to students. Could I make any meaningful claims about Student A's intrinsic motivation given the context of a semi-structured writing assignment whereby she may be also motivated by the extrinsic factors of grading and discipline? Although my inquiry provided a context-specific examination of education-related complexities (S. Ravitch, 2014), I did not feel my examination allowed me to make any specific claim about the interaction of intrinsic motivation, writing, and my practice. I felt stumped anytime I tried to articulate any thought specifically about a change in Student A's motivation or the worthwhileness of my instructional strategies.

### **Excerpt from Student A's five-paragraph essay #3.**

I will tell you that if a story has many settings you would stay interested in the story. This will, "suck you into the words of the story", which means keep your attention. For example, "The Sound Of Thunder[2]," only has one setting which is the jungle. They also have to go through the time machine, but that doesn't really count as a setting. Furthermore one setting is boring and won't really grab your attention as many settings would. Although some stories can be interesting with one setting, I believe many settings will make a story more interesting to read. Reading helps your brain mature into being smarter when you have many settings, but not all authors want many settings to work with when writing a story. That is understandable. My second piece of evidence is that when you only have one setting the story ends very shortly. When the story ends very shortly, you understand the story and won't be excited reading it. The quotation that supports this is, "TIME SAFARI, INC., SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST." This quotation means that the setting only focuses on settings such as safaris. In conclusion, that's why we need more settings and why Mr. X shouldn't teach this next year.

Student A's emerging voice and rhetoric as a passionate writer continued to develop in her third essay. She offers a more challenging and bold premise for this body paragraph. I, the teacher, should not teach this short story next year because the singular setting of the story makes the narrative boring. She routinely elaborates on her ideas. Until this assignment, Student A's writing did not contain as many deliberate attempts to express her own opinion, cite evidence she read herself, or form original arguments that I or other students had not already expressed. Student A may be an example of a student taking greater academic risks. Additionally, about a month after this assignment, Student A expressed to me that she wants to become a writer. Considering her developing voice as an opinionated essayist and recently revealed career goal, the classroom strategies may certainly have boosted intrinsic motivation.

### **Student B**

While I studied Student A's essays for evidence of greater intrinsic motivation because of her explicit desire to improve as a writer and argumentative essayist, I approached Student B's essays with a different lens. Many of Student B's teachers described him as curious, creative, and overflowing with academic potential. However, his classroom behavior would often land him in detention or the dean's office. Student B and I (luckily) had a strong relationship. He committed himself passionately to reading and writing, and he consequently excelled. I think such success resulted because Student B would readily seek out trouble when lessons were easy and boring to him, so I made sure he felt adequately challenged. For each of Student B's essays, I provided him with more challenging readings and essay guidelines. I also required him to explain his essay outline to me in greater detail than his classmates so that I could give him feedback solely on how to enhance the rigor and scholarship of his work. Below are excerpts from three of his five-paragraph essays.

### **Excerpt from Student B's five-paragraph essay #1.**

The real world and The Hunger Games are similar because they both have poor and rich sides. The poor people don't have medicine and food. The same for the real world. Furthermore the rich people they have everything. They don't understand how people are suffering on the poor sides. "In [West] Berlin there is happiness. There are good jobs, plentiful amounts of food, and the streets are clean". The poor don't have that but they should. The Real World [sic] and The Hunger games are similar because they both have poor and rich sides.

### **Excerpt from Student B's five-paragraph essay #2.**

While beatings from parents create violent teenagers, they still have the choice of doing it or not. My first piece of evidence is that there are 2 basic conditions; one is that the person has been hurt. Therefore, that is why they do violent things. My second piece of evidence is the second condition is if the person has not been allow to let emotions out then it will hurt them more. A quotation that explains this is "be the victim of violence creates violence in the child only when the emotions out [sic] are blocked or repressed." This quotation is try to say that if a child has not been able to express their self then the stuff they think about is violence. So that means everybody should have someone to talk to. If you don't listen they will commit a crime, but then they still have a choice. Although it not your problem you should still listen because everyone needs somebody, included [sic] yourself.

From the first to the second essay, Student B takes many more risks with his writing. In his first writing assignment he tries to select appropriate pieces of evidence to compare the disparity in wealth between East and West Berlin, Germany to the communities or "districts" in *The Hunger Games*. His argument stems from a class reading and discussion comparing the income and resource disparity in the city of Panem in *The Hunger Games* to East and West Berlin, Germany. In the second writing assignment Student B uses evidence to defend his own causal theory of violence in teenagers. He makes intentional efforts to heighten his diction and how he explains the nexus between his opinion and his evidence. Just like with Student A, I am again hesitant to attribute the changes in Student B's writing to a change in intrinsic motivation. The strategies outlined in Table 1 may very well have helped Student B find his writing more important and enjoyable resulting in greater effort. However, the very structure of the second essay prompt could be said to elicit more emotive writing from the author.

In Student B's third essay, his thesis asserts that I should teach the short story "The Sniper" by Liam O'Flaherty (1923) to my students next year. "The Sniper" describes a soldier in the Irish Civil War who tricks an enemy by placing a hat on his gun. Once his hat is fired upon, the soldier pretends to die. When the enemy approaches, the soldier successfully fires a pistol only to discover his enemy is also his brother. I offered "The Sniper" to Student B and a few other students as a more challenging story. Although the following excerpt demonstrates atypically confusing writing from Student B, he attempts to unpack the symbolism present in the story. Student B refused help with his analysis. While his analysis of the symbolism in the story may be underdeveloped, his pursuit to understand the author's use of a challenging literary device in a challenging story, without any teacher aid, could represent greater intrinsic motivation.

### **Excerpt from Jamal's five-paragraph essay #3.**

The symbolism is good, and it stands out in the story. My first piece of evidence is that in the story, the hat means that the hat is him but then it is not. Therefore that why [sic] he got to kill his enemy. My second piece of evidence is that the smoke means where the guy is. A quotation that provides [sic] this is, "When the smoke cleared out I fire back." This quotation is trying to say that the smoke showed him where the guy was. There is a lot of symbolism in the story. Since the story is so good, then teach it next year. He kills his brother, but he did not know it was him. A boy, in war, killed his brother.

Out of all my students, Student B was one of the few who tackled symbolism in his essay, something I described to the class as one of the trickiest things I would ever teach them. I find myself struggling to negotiate two very opposing observations. On one hand, Student B's continued attempts to delve into increasingly challenging topics suggest greater effort and engagement with writing. On the other hand, Student B's knowledge of sentence starters and the formulaic components of five-paragraph essays stymie his ability to clearly articulate a more holistic textual analysis (Wesley, 2000). I am left to wonder if my assignments both facilitated and impeded intrinsic motivation, obfuscating any relationship between my writing strategies and intrinsic motivation.

### **Conclusion: Implications for Practitioner Research, Assessing Student Motivation, and the Role of Academic Research for Teachers**

Research has continuously demonstrated a strong relationship between intrinsic motivation and student achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2009). In low-income schools, struggling students need to work especially hard to graduate high school and college, perform at competitive levels in the work force, and excel wherever their academic interests and pursuits take them given the

additional risk-factors that poverty begets (Bottrell, 2009). Yet, a huge problem remains. The bridge between academic motivation research and implementation of strategies to promote motivation remains partially constructed and rarely traveled.

This article detailed my attempt to help build this bridge. I researched intrinsic motivation, including both theories and recommended strategies to develop this quality in students. I implemented and altered the suggested practices based on both the context of my school and my continued study of existing research. Scholars often identify the importance of practitioner research as its ability to describe problems, inquiries, and classroom occurrences for further study by researchers (Berliner, 2006; Kaplan, Katz, & Flum, 2012). I can only hope this article does this in some small way. In more specific terms, this article raises several important considerations:

1. A paradox in **practitioner research**. As D. Ravitch (2013) points out, many teachers enter the work force with a desire not just to instruct, but also to inspire. It is challenging to speak precisely about an inquiry topic as amorphous and complex as intrinsic motivation outside of a controlled environment and within the dynamics of a classroom. Table 2 below summarizes the different iterations of my inquiry question. Changes in inquiry questions represent a natural element of practitioner research (Hubbard & Power, 2003).

Table 2

*The Evolution of Inquiry Question over the Academic Year*

Month	Research Question
August	What happens when I incorporate instructional strategies to promote intrinsic motivation in my students?
October	How do I measure intrinsic motivation?
November	What happens when I incorporate instructional strategies to promote intrinsic motivation in my students?
February	What happens when I incorporate instructional strategies to promote intrinsic motivation for five-paragraph essays?

The challenges of this inquiry speak not only to the difficulties of a practitioner contributing to the academic literature on psychological phenomena, but also to the greater challenge of accurately commenting on such topics within a classroom setting. Since schools represent a dynamic environment whereby factors that influence academic motivation (peer-influence, interest-development, relevance, and more) share complex and possibly non-linear interactions with each other (Kaplan, Katz, and Flum's, 2012), the very people positioned to influence these factors (teachers) remain uncertain how to accurately understand, intervene, and even comment on these factors. This challenge is worth recognizing. Although researchers have the tools and skills to generate general knowledge on such phenomena like motivation, practitioners have the local knowledge of navigating and responding to such phenomena alongside students, even if they are not aware of precisely how they are doing it. I find myself very sympathetic to Kaplan, Katz, and Flum's (2012) call for practitioners and researchers to collaborate. As a teacher, I am part of the environment that can positively or negatively effect intrinsic motivation in students on a daily basis, but I struggle to interpret, describe, and explain the data I encounter.

1. **The role of academic research in the classroom** Educators' ability to effectively incorporate strategies to cultivate

intrinsic motivation is an additional challenge. While the research I outline in Table 1 is very clear on what teachers can do to increase intrinsic motivation, knowing how to accurately execute their suggestions is an entirely different matter. Many researchers advocate providing students with choices (Deci, 1997; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Kohn 1993, 2006; Reese, 2009). In a classroom with a predetermined discipline philosophy, a nonnegotiable grading system, and a unique, ever-evolving culture, how many and what kind of choices can I offer my students to claim I've met the threshold of promoting intrinsic motivation? Researchers also advocate for opportunities for students to practice self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Zimmermann & Schunk, 2008; Zimmermann & Cleary, 2009). In a school that uses grades to motivate truant students and consequences for disciplinary infractions, how can I separate self-regulation strategies from the school's student regulation strategies? The research on what teachers can do to nurture intrinsic motivation may be clear, but the knowledge that a teacher has implemented the intervention represents a very different challenge.

2. **Assessing student motivation in a complex environment.** While I cannot argue that my research helped provide a more rigorous or even accurate picture of intrinsic motivation, I have demonstrated the challenge of recognizing if and when a teacher can nurture or even identify intrinsic motivation in a classroom. Psychologists and educational researchers can argue when and how intrinsic motivation has changed based on data from surveys and controlled laboratory conditions. As a teacher inside a classroom, I struggle to make any such claim without training in a research methodology that accounts for both a specific context and student motivational forces. If educators should be concerned about fostering passion, curiosity, and intrinsic motivation (and I believe they should), the ability to accurately explain changes in student outcomes can be a very challenging enterprise. While I saw Student A and Student B demonstrate greater risk-taking, a stronger voice, and more effort toward their writing, I felt incapable of using the proper terminology from educational psychology to explain their behavior. I could not see the world through the lens of a psychologist. Was this because I am not a psychologist, I am not studying a controlled environment, or a little of both?
3. **A likely common narrative across early educators.** According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2010), teachers with less than five years of experience have continued to comprise a greater proportion of the teacher workforce over the last 20 years. Additionally, the most common teachers in American public schools are in their first year of teaching (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). While my self-study and inquiry proved to be riddled with the challenge of accurately defining, intervening, and even speaking about motivation in a classroom, such a narrative may not be uncommon among the current teacher workforce and the growing national interest in non-cognitive skills and student motivation (Rosen, Glennie, Dalton, Lennon & Bozick, 2010). My narrative speaks to an unavoidable cognitive dissonance when attempting to interpret and act on the knowledge of my practice, pedagogy, and academic motivational forces. Perhaps this voice represents a common one across the nation.

S. Ravitch (2014) argues:

Practitioner research enables practitioners to engage in structured inquiries that are directed towards knowledge generation; it helps practitioners to gain formative insights into what concerns or confuses us, what aspects of practice are most challenging and rewarding, about our roles as supporters, advocates, collaborators and change agents, about the parameters, possibilities, and constraints of our work settings. (p. 6)

In this article I have explored the evolution of my inquiry into cultivating intrinsic motivation for five-paragraph essays. Responding to S. Ravitch's (2014) invitation to gain insight into a matter that concerns, confuses, challenges, and rewards me, I attempted to generate knowledge about the results of a teacher adopting strategies to promote intrinsic motivation in five-paragraph essay instruction. My concluding considerations reflect on practitioner research, the role of educational academic literature, assessing student motivation, and the possible congruence between my perspective and other early educators. I may not speak to a successful increase in intrinsic motivation, but the narrative of my shifting inquiry question, framework, and data collection offers challenges and insights for others trying to understand and promote student motivation within the classroom.

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[1] This is not actually a quote from *The Hunger Games*. Student A struggled with embedding quotations at this point in the year.

[2] "The Sound of Thunder" by Ray Bradbury (1952)

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