Graduate Literacy Students’ Reading Completion

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Abstract

Course reading completion enhances student learning and helps deepen students’ thinking about concepts and ideas presented in class. To better understand the students’ reading completion and the factors which impact course reading completion, the researchers engaged in a study with 434 students enrolled in six graduate level literacy courses, or 28 classes, over nine years from 2009 through 2017. The researchers share the results and discuss recommendations to improve reading completion rates.

Keywords: teacher education, reading completion, instructional techniques to increase reading completion

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Faculty often have wondered how they could encourage students to critically engage in course readings (Abbott, 2013; MacMillan, 2014; MacMillan & MacKenzie, 2012), especially as many lament a drop in the number of course readings students complete during the semester. This decrease in course reading completion may have a negative impact on students’ intellectual development and their ability to master course content. Indeed, researchers like Berry et al. (2011) assert “Students spend significantly less time reading and studying than they did 20 years ago” (p. 31). While we have heard our colleagues mention their observations of this downward trend of reading completion, it seems few researchers have actually quantified students’ reading completion. Although quantification is sparse, Berry et al. (2011) reported low levels of reading completion for class compared with higher levels of reading completion in preparation for assessments, and concluded that “Overall for psychology courses students read on average 27.46% of the assigned readings before class and 69.8% before an exam” (p. 32), suggesting that reading completion may be influenced by whether or not students will be held accountable for that reading. Similarly, Kerr and Frese (2017) report that only 20% to 30% of undergraduate students complete required course readings. While quantitative data on course reading completion is limited, researchers have qualitatively assessed students’ engagement and willingness to critically interact with assigned texts, with some questioning current students’ abilities to read and understand higher-level texts (Wiles et al., 2016).

When Researcher 1 started teaching as an adjunct professor of Literacy at the research site in 2001, she felt that her graduate students were more invested in reading, and this was demonstrated in their rich class discussions. As time went on, Researcher One became concerned with some of her students’ struggles to complete readings. She began to investigate what other professors were doing to increase reading completion. She also started to collect anonymous data from students regarding the amount of readings they completed during the semester in an effort to learn more about students’ reading completion and its impact factors in order to use the data collected to inform instruction in her future courses.

While this formal research study is retrospective, Researcher 1 collected data and made instructional decisions in the spirit of action research to reflect the evolution of Researcher 1’s instructional techniques used to encourage higher levels of reading completion. The longitudinal data collection took place in 28 sections across six Literacy graduate courses within 9 years from 2009 to 2017. Three Education faculty joined Researcher 1 to analyze the plethora of data collected from students enrolled in 28 classes over 9 years. Our goal in this paper is not to achieve generalizability; instead, we seek to add to our current understanding of the factors or circumstances that impacted reading completion as reported by Literacy students, as there is a dearth of longitudinal studies addressing this area. We posed the following research questions: What percentage of readings did Literacy students complete? What factors influenced students’ reading completion?
Literature Review

Why Many Students Don’t Read: Examining Motivation

Like many other faculty members, we often have wondered why students may not complete assigned readings or interact more fully and deeply with the course readings in preparation for class. Research on reading completion demonstrates a number of reasons for lack of reading motivation and engagement. First, Wiles et al. (2016) suggest some students start with negative attitudes toward reading—especially the technical nature of journal articles that may be assigned in graduate coursework. Additionally, research on teacher candidates’ reading attitudes and habits (e.g., Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Applegate et al., 2014; Benevides & Peterson, 2010) has indicated that about half of all teacher candidates are not engaged and enthusiastic readers, and do not often read for enjoyment. Conversely, Hoeft (2012) concluded that students who are interested in the subject or course tend to be more motivated readers, and that instructors who try to get students interested in the readings may have more success in raising students’ reading completion rates. Indeed, interest in the course is not the only factor to increase motivation; students can be motivated by other factors such as grades, which may encourage them to complete more readings (Hoeft, 2012; Kerr & Frese, 2017).

Another factor that impacts reading completion is the number of readings assigned (Cassuto, 2013). Cassuto (2013) suggests that if too much reading material is required for course assignments, it may have an adverse effect on motivation and reading completion. Indeed, Kerr and Frese (2017) indicated that many college students are “overwhelmed with responsibilities and may lack time” (p. 28) to complete extensive readings. In addition to lack of time, another factor to consider is reading difficulty. Wiles et al. (2016) have suggested that some students do not seem prepared to engage in critical reading of complex texts similar to those used in many graduate education courses—and this may be a factor resulting in lack of motivation. Here, Wiles et al. rely upon the work of Nagy and Townsend (2012) who argued the communicative purposes of academic language are different than those of ordinary conversation, thus academic readings offer significant challenges to many students—as has often been reported in the literature (Abbott, 2013; MacMillan, 2014). Next, we examine reading transactional theory and the benefits of students’ transactions with course readings.

Theoretical Framework: Reading Transactional Theory

Seminal work by literacy theorist Louise Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that as we read, we transact or reciprocally interact with the text. Rosenblatt emphasizes it is not just the text itself that gives meaning; readers bring their own meaning to the text based on their prior experiences, and also in the process of transacting with the text. It is perhaps these personal transactions that make readings so powerful, as readers develop intellectually by synthesizing new information and connecting it to their prior knowledge through the process of reading.
As course instructors, we have emphasized to students the positive benefits of course reading completion. It is through students’ transactions with the readings that they will develop a deeper understanding of course materials and also increase their preparedness to engage in thoughtful conversations in class. Indeed, research in a variety of fields supports the benefits of reading completion. For example, Hilton et al.’s (2010) study of several sections of a philosophy/religion course demonstrates that students perceive that course reading leads to greater course learning—which impacts their intellectual development. In another study with Pharmacy students, Coulter and Smith (2012) demonstrate that completion of pre-class readings has a positive effect on achievement: Students with higher reading completion tended to have increased examination scores. The researchers also concluded that pre-class reading completion has a positive effect on lectures, as lectures become more interactive and discussion-based when students completed readings prior to class meetings. Yu (2011) established similar findings regarding the academic benefits of course reading completion, among other factors, among Accounting students; those who did more readings ahead of class achieved increased performance in their program. Through this study, we hoped to learn more about Literacy students’ reading completion. Below, we provide our rationale for a retrospective analysis.

Rationale for Retrospective Research

While we have a range of reasons why students may not read with the depth and breadth with which instructors would like them to, nor understand why reading completion is important, in this study we sought to determine what factors impacted our graduate Literacy students and learn from their voices to inform future instruction for students at the research site. Throughout the study, Researcher 1 used an action research stance and reflected on student feedback and anecdotal information they provided on their index cards. Nolen and Vander Putten (2007) described action research as a practical yet systematic approach to investigate their own teaching and their students’ learning in and outside the classroom. The student feedback inspired Researcher 1 (the course instructor) to develop activities using various instructional techniques to encourage higher levels of reading completion and active class discussions, as research indicates that students benefit from additional reading incentives such as grades, quizzes, or assignments based on the textbook to finish assigned readings (Marchant, 2002; Ryan, 2006). While Researcher 1 used feedback to inform instruction each semester, the longitudinal data collected in 28 sections across six Literacy graduate courses over 9 years were analyzed retrospectively. As Salkind (2010) suggests, retrospective studies have been used by researchers to “formulate hypotheses about possible associations” (p. 1282), and thus 9 years of data provided the researchers with a rich source of information worthy of review and analyses.
Methods
The researchers used mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate participants' reading behaviours and the impact factors to answer the research questions.

Participants and Setting
This study was completed at a mid-size college located in Western New York State. Participants were Literacy graduate students enrolled in six different courses taught by Researcher 1 as part of the college’s B–12 Literacy Master’s Degree program. Students were in-service teachers or substitute teachers, and comprised more female students than male students—reflective of the demographics of the teaching profession. The courses included: (1) Literacy Materials and Methods B–6, (2) Teaching Reading to Students With Diverse Needs, (3) Literacy Assessment, (4) Critical Multiliteracies B–6, (5) Clinical Diagnosis of Reading/Writing Difficulties B–6, and (6) Adolescent Literacy Internship.

Data Collection
This is a retrospective analysis study, in which data were originally used to inform Researcher 1’s instruction. Researcher 1 collected the students’ feedback on completion of reading assignments on index cards, and encouraged students to write open-ended feedback in addition to reporting the completion percentage. The reading assignments were readings, including text and online materials, and connected activities such as videos, discussion, and projects. A total of 462 students’ feedback were collected from six Literacy graduate courses within 28 sections. This occurred in the spring and summer semesters from 2009 to 2017. At the end of the last class of each semester, students were given a 3” by 5” index card and asked to provide anonymous and voluntary-participatory feedback following instructor guidelines. The following consistent verbal directions were given for the students to complete the feedback cards:

1. Write down the percentage of assigned readings (for this course) that you completed every week (e.g., I always read 80% of the text and 20% of articles assigned on the computer [through online platforms used by the college on Angel or Blackboard] or 100% except for 1 week when I was sick).
2. Be honest. If you feel you cannot be honest, turn in a blank index card.
3. Completing this survey will not affect your grade because the cards will be mailed to me by a student volunteer after the grades are submitted. The feedback cards are without names.

The directions were given orally as described above in the first years of collecting data in 2009 and 2010. Starting in 2011, the directions were given orally and also presented visually as a
PowerPoint slide for the duration of the class. Researcher 1 left the room and cards were collected by a designated student and placed in a self-addressed envelope and mailed to her after the final grades for the course were posted. Three Education faculty joined Researcher 1 afterwards to analyze this plethora of data.

Among all the students who took the courses ($N = 462$), 434 students (93.9%) participated in the survey by completing the index cards. It is likely that the high level of student participation resulted from the feedback being collected during class time—with the ease of quick response on an index card. Students were given the option to opt out of participation. Students may have been absent for the last class or chose not to participate ($n = 28$, 6.1%).

**Quantitative Analysis**

We applied descriptive statistics, calculating the mean, range of the participants’ self-reported total quantity read, self-reported text and online readings to answer research question 1: What percentage of readings did Literacy students complete? One-way ANOVAs were conducted to investigate if there was a significant difference among the means of the total quantity read, text and online readings between spring and summer semesters or across those six Literacy courses. The results were used to answer research question 2: What factors influenced students’ reading completion? The interrater reliability across all quantitative data between Researcher 3 and Researcher 1 was 96.6%.

**Findings and Results**

**Descriptive Analysis Results**

Of the 434 participants who responded to the survey, 386 students (88.9%) reported a mean of 81.2% of the total quantity read (TQR) for the class which included both the assigned texts and online articles, ranging from 3% to 100%. The online articles were from professional journals and were posted on the college’s Learning Management System to support or expand on the course content. A number of 229 students (52.8%) reported a mean of 82.4% of the assigned text readings completion, ranging from 5% to 100%; while 198 students (45.6%) reported a mean of 65.6% of the assigned online article readings completion, ranging from 0 to 100%. Several students commented that they had trouble reading on the computer, which might be one of the reasons why fewer students reported to online readings and the mean of this category was lower. Table 1 contains the means of the TQR, text and online readings, the ranges of the assigned reading completed, and the number and percentage of students who answered questions in these three categories. These descriptive data answered the first research question: What percentage of course readings do graduate students complete over a semester?
Table 1

Descriptive Analyses of Total Quantity Read (TQR), Text vs. Online Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean of TQR</th>
<th>Minimum of TQR</th>
<th>Maximum of TQR</th>
<th>Participants n</th>
<th>Participants %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TQR</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text readings</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online readings</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Inferential Analysis Results

Among all six Literacy courses taught by Researcher 1 from 2009 through 2017 in this study, 14 classes were during the regular spring semesters and another 14 in summer. The results of one–way ANOVA analyses indicate that, compared to the students enrolled in the regular spring semesters, more students in the summer semesters reported the assigned text readings ($F(1, 26) = 13.63, p = .001$) as well as online readings ($F(1, 26) = 7.04, p = .013$). The difference may be due to the fact that many graduate students were not involved in full-time teaching during the summer. The spring classes met 1 day per week over the 14–week semester while the summer semester classes met 4 days per week over a 5–week period. It appears that the daily interaction among students and between students and the instructor promotes a positive feeling/tone in class and a better rapport between the students and the instructor. This premise might be examined in future research studies.

The results of one–way ANOVAs also indicate that there was a significant difference in the mean scores of the total quantity read, text and online readings across the six Literacy courses ($F(5, 22) = 3.12, p = .028$). For the two most frequently offered courses, students consistently indicated strong positive comments about the text for one course and more negative comments about the text for the other course. This may have influenced the amount of text readings across different courses. It also may indicate that students read more if they find the material more stimulating. The results of the one–way ANOVA answered research question 2: What factors influenced students’ reading completion? The different semester when the students took the course and which Literacy course they took influenced their reading completion.

Qualitative Analysis

Researcher 2 carried out the initial open coding—reading and re-reading student feedback (which included longer statements about students’ feelings) and refining codes and creating categories (Saldaña, 2009). Researcher 2 relied upon in vivo coding which utilizes participants’
words and phrases to amplify participants’ voices during qualitative data analysis (Clark & Creswell, 2015). These codes were meant to capture the essence of students’ responses. Following the initial coding, Researcher 2 and Researcher 1 met and reviewed the analysis. Researcher 1 checked for trustworthiness to strengthen the integrity of the findings (DeCarlo, 2019).

**Qualitative Findings**

Students indicated several factors that impacted the amount of reading completed for their literacy courses. Factors, or circumstances that impacted reading completion, as reported by Literacy students, include: (a) whether an assignment was given with the reading; (b) the amount of reading assigned; (c) the content of the readings; (d) the text format (whether the assignment was a hard copy text or a digital reading on the computer); (e) time in general and specific time of the semester; as well as (f) personal problems that impacted ability to complete readings.

*I Read More When There Was a Project Assigned: Accountability as a Factor in Reading Completion*

Assignments that gave students accountability had an impact on the amount of reading completed, according to students. These post-reading assignments yielded powerful but varying effects on students’ readings. For example, students wrote about JiTTs—the Just-in-Time–Teaching reading quizzes used by Researcher 1 (and explained in Table 2). One student reflected, “The JiTTs encouraged me to read more thoroughly for the first few weeks, until I got good at skimming for answers. Once we stopped doing JiTTs, I stopped reading altogether.” Another student reflected: “JiTTs made me read more intensely.” However, some students reported that the JiTTs reading assessments had a negative impact: “JiTTs made reading more stressful” and “JiTTs made me purely read for answers.” The Mini-Projects also had an impact on readings; one student reflected, “I completed 100% of the reading when there was a mini-project assigned. Once we had no formal assignment, I read 50%.” Thus, as other researchers (Berry et al., 2011) have concluded, accountability for reading matters, influencing the rate of students’ reading completion.

*Sometimes Reading Is Excessive: Reading Quantity as a Factor in Reading Completion*

Another factor in Literacy students’ reading completion was the amount of assigned readings. Students commented that when there was less reading, they were able to be more focused and the reading was more meaningful; lighter reading loads were reported by some to increase the likelihood of reading completion. As one student pointed out, “sometimes reading is excessive” because graduate students “have many other responsibilities.” These other responsibilities (like working full time as teachers) may have impacted the research finding that Literacy students
reported reading less during the school year (the time when many may have been working as new P–12 teachers) than during the summer. Quantity of readings seemed to have an influence on reading completion for these Literacy graduate students, however more research is needed to see if this is a factor for undergraduate students as well.

*It Was Useful to My Career Goals:* Reading Content as a Factor in Reading Completion

According to our Literacy students, reading content matters. Some students reported reading less when the materials were deemed not interesting, not meaningful, or “too complex” for them. However, when practical teacher–friendly materials were assigned, some students responded positively. For example, one student shared, “I did 100% of the reading for class ... the readings directly related to my job.” Literacy students’ interest in course topics confirm Hoeft’s (2012) findings regarding the impact of student interest which leads to increases in reading completion. Interestingly, the reading completion of this study surpassed that of some previous studies (e.g., Berry et al., 2011). The positive results might be explained by the instructor’s choice of reading materials. Assigned readings included professional books used by in–service teachers rather than traditional textbooks. Many of these books have direct application to classroom practice and are written by actual practitioners in the area of education. Professional journal articles were posted on accessible websites for students. Online educational videos were used to supplement or replace some journal articles. Students were encouraged to use a variety of online resources and websites. These resources appear to provide a higher level of interest for student participation than more traditional materials.

*I Was Swamped With Grading:* Time as a Factor in Reading Completion

Lack of time was a significant factor reported by many students, similar to Hoeft’s (2012) study of college freshmen. However, a large quantity of Hoeft’s students cited their social life in addition to work as a factor impeding reading completion—which was not evident in this study. As previously noted, Literacy graduate students may have had responsibilities like working and caring for families, which competed for time available to complete readings. Some Literacy students offered specific reasons for not having the time to complete the readings. One student reflected “[I completed] 50% of the assigned readings because I was juggling subbing every day and working evenings at another job,” while another student wrote, “[I read] 100%, except for one week when I was swamped with grading.” It seems lack of time, perhaps due to graduate students’ expanded responsibilities, was a factor in reading completion.

*Stress and Family Emergencies:* Personal Problems as a Factor in Reading Completion

Personal problems and stressful life situations were less common, yet still important factors influencing reading completion. These obstacles hindered full participation in course readings. For example, one student reflected that “stress and an underlying depression issue has made it
difficult to focus on all of the required readings this semester," while another student wrote about negotiating personal issues “that were out of [her] control." Family emergencies and personal illness were also factors reported by students.

To sum up, the results of the qualitative analysis of factors influencing reading completion indicated six main factors discussed by participants, including: (a) whether an assignment was given with the readings; (b) the amount of reading assigned; (c) the content of the readings; (d) the text format (whether the assignment was a hard copy text or a digital reading on the computer); (e) time in general and specific time of the semester; and (f) personal problems that impacted ability to complete readings.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the rates of student reading completion, as well as to investigate the factors impacting reading completion. This longitudinal retrospective study, conducted in the spirit of action research, reflects the evolution of Researcher 1’s instructional techniques used to encourage higher levels of reading completion in 28 sections across six Literacy graduate courses within 9 years from 2009 to 2017.

College instructors choose reading assignments to prepare, complement, and extend course content with the expectation that students will demonstrate 100% completion or near it. Simpson and Nist (2002) suggested that instructors are actually adamant about the importance of text readings and feel that students should understand and remember textbook material without their guidance. In an effort to guide students to succeed, apply course concepts, and encourage them to be lifelong learners, better results might be achieved by making reading engagement a shared responsibility with students. As instructors, numerous techniques encourage not only completion but also active thinking and the use of higher-level reading strategies. The term technique was used to describe the teaching methods below based on Pat Johnson’s (2006) definition of it as teaching ideas and tools. Throughout the 9 years of the study, Researcher 1 incorporated a variety of instructional techniques into her courses in efforts to improve reading completion with her graduate Literacy students. As indicated by this action research, improving reading completion was guided by ongoing observations, feedback from students, and reflection to improve instructional practices. The researchers suggest that the qualitative findings of this study demonstrated that students read more when an assignment was given. When the instructor analyzed and modified the assignments, students’ motivation to comply to complete assignments increased and enhanced higher level learning. Table 2 explains this as it relates to the techniques of: Just-in-Time Teaching; Mini–Projects; Traditional Approach to Reading Response Journals; Collaborative Discussion Board; and Use of Short Video to Replace Some Text Readings. As instructors as well as researchers, it is our hope that the techniques presented in Table 2 will be valuable to stimulate the reader’s thinking to embark on a similar journey of their own.
## Table 2

**Techniques to Encourage Reading Completion Through Collaboration and Motivation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Relationship to action research</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT)</td>
<td>Students respond electronically to a carefully constructed web-based assignments ... and the instructor reads the students submissions <em>just-in-time</em> to adjust the classroom lesson to suit students' needs. Thus, the heart of JiTT is the feedback loop formed by the students' outside-of-classroom preparation that fundamentally affects what happens during the subsequent in-class time together (Novak et al., 1999).</td>
<td>The technique was implemented to encourage students to read their assignments in-depth. Multiple-choice questions were developed based on assigned reading material. A small percentage of the weekly JiTT grades were used to calculate the final course grade.</td>
<td>Useful feedback was provided to the instructor to adjust the use of class time and how material was presented in class. JiTT feedback matched observations of student knowledge during class discussions, it appeared that it was an accurate assessment and provided concrete documentation of reading completion that was visible to both students and the instructor.</td>
<td>Quality multiple choice questions took an enormous amount of time to develop and might restrict student thinking by their limited number of responses. Open-ended questions may be more user friendly. A few very vocal students disliked the technique. After reviewing the research results, many students felt JiTT helped them with their reading assignments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Mini Projects</td>
<td>Consist of a short-term project that a student or small group of students performed after completion of a weekly reading assignment. They were designed to extend the meaning of the reading, promote deeper comprehension, and encourage reading completion. A few examples include finding an additional article that correlates to the reading assignment, making a 2 to 4-minute video to illustrate the chapter's concepts, or create a short skit.</td>
<td>This technique was meant to stimulate the students' thinking during class discussion. The instructor graded some. Others were considered “hurdle” assignments, which mean if completed, full credit would be given and if not completed, no credit would be given (Serafini, 2010, p. 84). Others were read and responded to in a positive way by a colleague in the class.</td>
<td>Student feedback revealed that the projects were extremely successful because they learned a great deal about the concepts as well as really enjoyed the projects. Learning was further expanded as they shared and discussed their ideas and products in small groups or with the rest of the class.</td>
<td>Creativity was demonstrated as students were encouraged to use a variety of media such as drawing, graphing, writing, or a combination. Mini-Projects provide for great flexibility and often students' questions or actions can lead to the development of a new project. It is best to keep them simple and use materials already available such as appendices and other similar items.</td>
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Table 2 (cont’d)

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<td>3. Traditional Approach to Reading Response Journals</td>
<td>Students were asked to respond to their weekly reading assignments by writing a summary and reflection on how they can apply the material.</td>
<td>The purpose was to hold students responsible for completing reading assignments. It was done independently without any collaboration. The instructor did not read and respond to them until the end of the semester.</td>
<td>This technique did not allow for any feedback or reflection for students or the instructor throughout the semester.</td>
<td>This was done for only one semester as the data did not support continuation.</td>
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<td>4. Collaborative Discussion Board</td>
<td>Working at home in small groups, students responded to weekly reading assignments on Blackboard. Prior to class on a rotating basis, each student got an opportunity to be the leader of the group. The role of the leader was to make connections among all the assigned reading and videos. The role of the other students was to react to the leader by elaborating on the information.</td>
<td>Trudeau (2005) tells us that in its simplest form, Discussion Forum assignments harness the communicative power of the internet to improve the quality of student preparation for discussion class meetings. The instructor placed the students into small groups which allowed for less proficient students to see a model of more proficient work.</td>
<td>This technique provided amazing feedback about what the students were understanding and what concepts confused them. By using this information, adjustments to class activities could be made accordingly. This happens when student input becomes a major factor in in-class preparation assuming students become conscious of the process during the semester (Trudeau, 2005).</td>
<td>Students developed connections with other people in class they may not have interacted with on their own. Class discussion improved and students’ thinking was extended as they considered other perspectives developed by their partners. By engaging in our own, collaborators’ processes, we learned about our own thinking and processes (Ens et al., 2011). It is clear that social interactions or discussion can further encourage higher mental function such as critical thinking (Nyikos &amp; Hashimoto, 1997).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Use of Short Videos to Replace Some Text Readings</td>
<td>At the beginning of the semester, students watch a good-quality video at home about a complex concept that replaces an intricate reading assignment article on the topic. The same video is watched again at the end of the semester.</td>
<td>Students write and share with their group their reaction to the video on the Discussion Board that includes main concepts explained in the video. They explain why these concepts are important to this course. At the end of the semester, they watch the same video again. On Discussion Board they share with their group how concepts learned from this class and the course text support ideas from the video. Then they read their partners’ reactions and then write a summary of how their thinking has developed and expanded citing specifics from the video and course.</td>
<td>Students related outstanding conclusions of complex concepts compared to prior semesters in which text only materials were used.</td>
<td>Students were highly motivated by complex material presented in this format. It helped them relate it to other print materials at higher levels of thinking. Revisiting it again in writing collaboratively helped them broaden their own perceptive to levels of understanding not previously observed.</td>
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Limitations, Implications, and Conclusion

Limitations

First, the goal for this study was not generalizability; instead, Researcher 1 used student feedback cards primarily to make informed decisions about her instruction from semester to semester. A limitation of this work includes the retrospective facet of the study. While Researcher 1 used student feedback cards primarily to make informed decisions, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were completed from this extant data set.

The other limitations of this study are that all participants were the students enrolled in the graduate literacy courses taught by one instructor, who is also Researcher 1 of this study, and they self-reported their reading completion. The students’ self-reported reading activities took place on the last day of the semester, and thus subjective to errors of recall/memory. Furthermore, data collection only occurred in the spring and summer semesters due to the course schedules.

Implications for Faculty

Based on the results of this study, here are some implications for faculty who are teaching literacy courses:

1. Reading completion is a shared responsibility between the student and the instructor—thus instructors must explore ways to learn about their students’ needs and preferences. As Kerr and Frese (2017) suggest, survey students—at the beginning of the course and also during the semester—to learn more about students themselves and also to learn about any confusion or challenges with course readings and content.

2. Connect reading assignments to instructional techniques and assignments such as mini-projects and collaborative discussion boards to encourage improved outcomes; instructors should consider which techniques and incentives might be most relevant to their content area to improve reading completion (Marchant, 2002; Ryan, 2006).

3. Instructors need to clearly state students’ responsibilities in the syllabus with emphasis on hours spent productively outside of class to be successful. Students may not read the syllabus, so reviewing the syllabus in an interactive way during class to clarify the direct connection between readings, course learning, and grades will be helpful (Kerr & Frese, 2017). This should be reinforced throughout the semester and reinforced by college advisors.

4. Instructors need to evaluate the amount of required readings (and their content) to make sure the readings are essential, reasonable, meaningful, and applicable to the students’ lives and careers as teachers, and to ensure readings are written in a user-friendly tone.

5. Instructors should consider encouraging students to use their college printing budgets or purchase hard copies of online readings as students noted greater rates of completion.
with printed-out articles. Students may benefit from highlighting and annotating the hard copy readings in addition to having them readily available.

6. Front-load reading assignments in the beginning of the semester so students do not miss relevant content at the end of the semester when they are busier is suggested to increase reading completion.

Conclusion

Initially, Researcher 1 sought answers from other colleagues concerning a lack of reading completion on the part of some students. Although this was helpful, it was discovered that it was more valuable to observe students, reflect on instructional practices, and continually create and revise assignments. This study was an honest reflection of this journey to improve completion. Not all techniques were equally successful but that is part of the learning process for the Literacy instructor, or Researcher 1, to continually reflect and modify. It was gratifying to learn that compared to other studies (e.g., Berry et al., 2011), students in this study demonstrated higher levels of reading completion. This may be due to the constant improvement of instructional practices and assignments. The instructor became a partner with the graduate students by developing these motivational techniques.

We shared this process as a model in hopes that other Literacy instructors would embark on their own unique journey. Some techniques explained in this paper may work but may need to be modified for specific situations or new ones developed. We do not have to accept mediocre results. The journey, even with bumps in the road, is as important as the destination.

References

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