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Motivating Students Through Practical and Creative Writing Assignments

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Research Question

What new kinds of writing assignments can you incorporate as a teacher to foster student motivation?

The Problem

High school English class content in the United States is most often geared toward responding to literary texts and passing standardized tests, and because of this lack of variety and purpose in the curriculum, students are not motivated to write (Daisey, 2009). Giving students freedom of choice in their assignments and providing assignments that have future relevance can help students find enjoyment in writing.

Methodology

I analyzed teacher-action research studies to find ways of effectively incorporating creative and practical writing in the classroom to increase motivation and self-efficacy in students.

“The point of writing is to have something to say and to make a difference saying it. Rarely, however, is impact the focus in writing instruction in English class, where the process is formulaic rather than purposeful.” –Grant Wiggins

General Findings

When Writing is Assigned	When Writing is Taught
Students write on teacher assigned topics.	Students create their own topics that matter to them.
Teachers create assignments with no specified audience or purpose.	Students can see and are motivated by real-world application in papers with a distinct audience and purpose.
Students are not shown how they have improved as writers.	Students reflect on growth (or lack of it) for specific writing skills.
Students are simply given the assignment, without prewriting exercises.	Students are asked to brainstorm, prewrite, discuss, and free write before assignments.
Students and teachers are bored by writing assignments.	Students and teachers are excited about what students write and make efforts to publish or display it.
Students are asked to analyze, compare, narrate, review, and summarize without the strategies to successfully complete these tasks.	Students are given writing models, assignments, and strategies to guide each of their writing tasks. (Nagin, 2003)

Findings & Conclusions

- ◆ After a communications project working with a local non-profit, students felt excited about the writing process and more comfortable “writing in new situations and advocating for themselves and others through writing” (Cox, 2009).
- ◆ Expressive writing such as slam poetry was found to be a powerful means of self-representation for youth and “empowered those students to examine issues in U.S. society” (Camangian, 2008).
- ◆ Student motivation increased when they had the freedom of choice over what they wrote about, which made students feel that their writing was meaningful and bringing new knowledge into readers’ lives (Falkner, 2011).
- ◆ The product of student publication inspires students’ investment in the entire process of writing (Gordon, 2007).