

Bridging Motivation: Improving L2 writing motivation via review-based bridging activities

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Abstract

Motivation is essential for second language learning but is not always forthcoming in the context of Danish high school teaching of L2 English. The present study assesses the possibility of improving high school students' L2 writing motivation through the use of a "review assignment," i.e. a writing assignment wherein students review a self-selected piece of media. This assignment is constructed based on the "bridging activities" framework formulated by Steven L. Thorne and Jonathon Reinhardt (2008). By incorporating students' extramural interests through student-selected texts, such an assignment is conducive to student autonomy, task relevance, and authenticity, all of which are beneficial to writing motivation. A mixed methods study of a Danish high school class was conducted, comprising two questionnaires and student interviews. It is concluded that the review writing assignment had a positive effect on the students' L2 writing motivation through increased autonomy and relevance to the students' extramural interests. Additionally, the study suggests that the main hindrance to the effectiveness of motivation-enhancing bridging activities is the performance culture prevalent in Danish high schools.

Keywords: *L2 motivation, bridging activities, extramural English, writing assignments.*

1. Introduction

Motivation is tremendously important for any learning endeavour and especially so for the arduous process of learning a second language, as motivation is one of the strongest predictors of language learning success (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 349). However, within the high school classroom, motivation is often lacking. The English L2 motivation of young Danish learners declines over time and there is a general gap between the students' experiences with English in and outside of school. To improve high school students' motivation, this gap should be bridged (Lund et al., 2023, p. 263). Unlike most school subjects, English teaching faces serious competition from outside the classroom, as young people engage with large quantities of anglophone media outside school. However, this competition may be turned into an advantage. Since most students are primarily motivated by pre-existing interests (Katznelson & Louw, 2020, p. 91), we may outsource the motivational heavy lifting to the students themselves and their extramural¹ interests.

This article assesses the possibility of improving students' L2 writing motivation by incorporating their extramural interests into a review writing assignment based on Thorne and Reinhardt's (2008) bridging activities framework. A study of a Danish high school class was conducted, seeking to answer the following research question:

Can students' L2 writing motivation be improved via a writing assignment consisting of a review of a self-selected text?

Section 2 establishes the motivational affordances of a review-based bridging activity, section 3 describes the methodology employed, section 4 presents the results of the study, and section 5 discusses the implications of the findings. This article is an abridged version of my master's thesis (Kortsen, 2023) and relays its main findings.

2. Theory

In this section, I will give an overview of Thorne and Reinhardt's (2008) bridging activities framework, its conductivity to motivation through student autonomy and task relevance, and the motivational advantages of a review-based bridging activity.

2.1 Bridging extra- & intramural English

Extramural English activities (e.g. consumption of English-language media) are conducive to implicit learning and greatly beneficial to L2 development (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016; Sundqvist, 2019) and young learners are very aware of this. When they reach high school, many Danish learners find English teaching largely irrelevant and unmotivating. Several students express having learnt more English outside school. There is a considerable divide between extramural English and classroom English teaching, with students favouring the former at the expense of the latter. (Lund et al., 2023, pp. 36, 128, 131, 263). A large study of Swedish secondary school English teaching and student beliefs found similar tendencies. The teaching was largely inauthentic and unmotivating; the extramural interests and identities of the students were rarely, if ever, relevant within intramural teaching; and classroom activities were too artificial and disconnected from how students engage with English in their own lives (Henry, 2014, pp. 5-17). These and other studies (e.g. Riayuningsih et al., 2022) suggest that the disconnect between intramural teaching and extramural experiences is a problem shared by similar "expanding circle" countries in which the distinction between foreign and second language has become obsolete (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 23). Conventional teaching fails to provide the identity-confirming experiences and opportunities for self-fulfilment that extramural English does. Therefore, English teachers should give students "possibilities to engage in personally meaningful activities where they can express their identities" and develop "practices which bridge between the worlds in and outside the classroom" (Henry, 2014, pp. 6, 7).

One way of bridging the worlds of intramural teaching and extramural experiences is through the aptly named "bridging activities" framework formulated by Steven L. Thorne and Jonathon Reinhardt (2008). The framework was developed to incorporate technologically mediated communication and new media literacies into L2 teaching but can be appropriated for motivation-enhancing purposes. As the name implies, bridging activities *bridge* intramural teaching and the extramural L2 practices of students. Young learners of L2 English engage with a wide variety of extramural English-language media, and bridging activities aim to incorporate such authentic media through student-selected texts (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, pp. 559-562). According to Thorne and Reinhardt, part of the purpose of bridging activities is to "bridge toward relevance to students' communicative lives outside of the classroom; and ... to increase student agency in relation to the choice, content and stylistic specifics of the texts contributing to the language learning process" (p. 566). Thus, student autonomy, task relevance, and authenticity are integral to bridging activities.

To my knowledge, no studies have specifically investigated the motivation-enhancing affordances of utilising extramural English in an intramural context. Instead, the focus has been on literacy, proficiency, and/or creativity (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008; Lee, 2019; Sauro & Sundmark, 2016).

However, the above-mentioned factors of autonomy, relevance, and authenticity central to bridging activities are also conducive to L2 motivation and may alleviate the inauthenticity of high school English teaching.

2.2 Autonomy, relevance, & authenticity

The most effective long-term motivation is internalised and self-determined. According to Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000), extrinsic motivation – stemming from regulators not inherent to the learning process itself – can be internalised, becoming increasingly self-determined and propagating feelings of autonomy. Such autonomous forms of motivation have been shown to correlate with greater learner engagement, effort, performance, and learning quality (Ryan & Deci, 2000, pp. 71-73). Similarly, Ema Ushioda (2013) emphasises the importance of autonomous learning: “learning needs to be driven by learners’ own personal needs, goals, and interests. This entails involving learners in making informed choices and decisions about their learning” (p. 27). Internalised motivation moves asymptotically towards intrinsic motivation, which, *ceteris paribus*, is more effective than extrinsic motivation (Ushioda, 2013, p. 21). Thus, to promote effective, internalised motivation, language teachers should facilitate autonomous learning that allows students to influence and personally identify with their own learning.

One way of making students identify with their learning is to make it relevant to their extramural experiences and identities. It is important to give students the opportunity to enact their transportable, personal identities and provide a sense of continuity between their extramural and intramural identities (Henry et al., 2018, pp. 265-266). Facilitating creativity and personal expression is one way of allowing students’ transportable identities to enter the classroom, and creative writing centred around extramural media has been shown to enhance writing motivation (Sauro & Sundmark, 2016; Lee, 2019). As part of his process-oriented model of L2 motivation in intramural contexts, Zoltán Dörnyei (2001) suggests using personalised assignments (p. 77), which may allow students to express their personal identities. Students’ pre-existing hobbies and personal interests can be used to assign L2 learning intrinsic value and, therefore, Dörnyei recommends explicitly ascertaining students’ interests to actively incorporate them into teaching (2001, pp. 53, 65).

Using authentic popular culture materials can increase relevance to students’ extramural interests and has been found to benefit student motivation (Henry et al., 2018, pp. 256, 264). Drawing on Katalin Wargo (2019), I define authentic texts as texts of the type that students (are likely to) consume and/or produce in their free time; the pop songs they listen to on their way to school or the chat messages they covertly send each other during class. Texts can be more or less authentic depending on the degree to which they resemble the everyday communicative and textual experiences of the students. Wargo highlights the need for combining academic and everyday genres, as authentic writing not only improves writing proficiency and motivation, but also gives students a sense of agency, as their writing serves a tangible, real-world purpose (Wargo, 2019, p. 540). Dörnyei (2001), too, recommends using authentic cultural products (p. 55) and stresses the motivational benefits of increasing student autonomy and involvement, e.g. by letting students choose teaching materials (pp. 77, 104). Thus, student autonomy, task relevance, and authenticity are interconnected and may all be increased via bridging activities.

2.3 Why a review?

The specific bridging activity conceived for this study takes the form of a review of a student-selected piece of media (see 3.4), since the genre of media review – I will argue – is particularly well-suited for a motivation-enhancing bridging activity. Firstly, the review assignment loosely follows the three-

phase structure of the bridging activities framework, primarily the collection and creation phases. Thorne and Reinhardt themselves suggest a review as part of the second exploration phase (2008, p. 566). In addition to the ones already covered, the review assignment incorporates other aspects of the process-oriented model. For instance, the review assignment is a novelty to students, both in terms of form and content, and varies the task focus of usual assignments by allowing students to choose topics and materials themselves (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 73-76). The active use of the students' extramural interests and experiences is a common thread that runs through both the bridging activities framework and the process-oriented model. Consequently, student-selected texts form the core element of the review assignment, as this is the method through which the bridging of intramural teaching and extramural experiences occurs.

Secondly, by employing student-selected texts, the review assignment not only facilitates greater student autonomy and involvement but also, in turn, task relevance and authenticity. The students are encouraged to review texts that are relevant to their personal interests and experiences, thus increasing task relevance. Such texts are authentic and writing about media that they engage with extramurally ideally harnesses the students' intrinsic motivation. Authenticity is a spectrum, and while the student-selected texts being reviewed are truly authentic, the form of the review itself is, admittedly, only latently authentic (Wargo, 2019, p. 541). Students are unlikely to write reviews in their spare time but have probably conversationally engaged in informal reviews. At any rate, the review genre is more authentic and relevant to the students' extramural experiences than e.g. literary essays and analyses. Additionally, media review is a largely subjective genre that facilitates personal expression and creative rather than formal writing. Unlike Thorne and Reinhardt's bridging activities, the aim of the review assignment is not to teach new literacies or formal genres, but to improve student's L2 writing motivation and enjoyment.

Lastly, a review assignment is preferable to the multimodal activities originally proposed by Thorne and Reinhardt due primarily to its comparative simplicity and accessibility. Unlike the review assignment, multimodal writing is quite different from conventional writing assignments and requires the teacher to attain new knowledge and expertise pertaining to multimodal media and new media literacies. The time and effort required of the teacher to effectively utilise multimodal media, and the technical problems likely to arise from its implementation, makes multimodal writing a costly affair (Henry et al., 2018, p. 265; Darrington & Dousay, 2015, p. 32-33). Additionally, some students may find multimodal writing overwhelming or otherwise demotivating, and it is important to accommodate these students as well (Darrington & Dousay, 2015, p. 33; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 33). The review assignment can incorporate multimodal media depending on the students' choices of texts but is not burdened by the pedagogical and technical challenges of intramural multimodal writing.

3. Methodology

In this section, I will present the methods and materials used during the intervention study and explain some of my methodological deliberations. The following research question formed the basis of the intervention study: *Can students' L2 writing motivation be improved via a writing assignment consisting of a review of a self-selected text?*

The study comprised three central elements – the review assignment, two questionnaires, and student interviews – the use and construction of which will be briefly described. Finally, the validity and generalisability of the study and its findings will be commented on.

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted with a Danish second-year STX² class which consisted of 27 students. The participating class was part of a language-focused line of study and, thus, were to receive English teaching for all three years (A-level) of high school. Since the intervention study consisted of several elements and took place over the course of several weeks, participation was inconstant. All 27 students handed in the review assignment, 25 responded to the initial pre-survey, and 15 responded to the post-survey.

3.2 Ethics

The participants of this study have been treated with the respect and careful consideration for individual integrity requisite when dealing with human subjects. All students have given their informed consent to participate in the intervention study and having said study relayed in this article. All responses and data have been handled with confidentiality. Apart from the interviewees – who consented to participating in a face-to-face interview and, thus, waived their anonymity towards the interviewer – the anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the study. The interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

3.3 Procedure

The intervention study spanned roughly three weeks and commenced with a 90-minute introductory session during which I presented myself and the study, the students answered the pre-survey, and consent forms were distributed. Thereafter, the students were introduced to the review assignment and were given the remaining majority of the session to brainstorm and start writing the assignment. The session was conducted in English. After handing in the assignment two weeks later, the students answered the post-survey and five students were subsequently chosen to participate in group interviews.

3.4 Assignment

The centrepiece around which the rest of the study revolves is the review assignment. An assignment description was formulated (see Appendix A), instructing the students to write a review of a self-selected piece of media and providing a list of five common review genre features along with links to examples of reviews. The genre features were not strict requirements but rather guidelines for the students to consult if needed. These loose guidelines and example reviews were a compromise between student autonomy and the importance of concrete success criteria and model answers as emphasised by Dörnyei (2001, p. 58). The students were told to pick any kind of text (book, tv-show, videogame etc.) as long as they felt passionately about it and wanted to either recommend it or dissuade others from consuming it. The purpose of the assignment was not to create a well-written review but simply to produce written English-language output. I made sure to repeatedly emphasise this point to the students. Also to this end, the students were allowed to review non-English-language texts, so as to not alienate and restrict the autonomy of students who may not engage in extramural English media consumption, as advised by Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016, p. 33). The writing process, hand-in, and feedback followed the same procedures as the students' usual assignments. This was done to ensure that the formal circumstances of the review assignment resembled those of the students' usual assignments as much as possible.

3.5 Questionnaires

To gauge the motivational impact of the review assignment, the students answered a questionnaire prior to (pre-survey) and after (post-survey) writing the assignment. Motivation is a multifaceted and subjective psychological concept that can neither be directly observed nor objectively measured (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 197). No single framework can provide a comprehensive measure of motivation in its complexity but can endeavour to grasp certain aspects of it. The multicomponent measure of writing motivation constructed by Charles MacArthur et al. (2016) is employed in the present study as the basis of the questionnaires. The measure was created to gauge the writing motivation of “low-achieving” college students³ and consists of four components: self-efficacy, goal-orientations, beliefs about writing, and affect (MacArthur et al., 2016, pp. 31-32). The first section of the questionnaire pertained to the students’ self-efficacy; the second their attitudes, i.e. their affect, beliefs about writing, and general attitudes towards English; and the third their goal-orientations. In addition to the multi-component measure, a fourth section of the questionnaire addressed the students’ opinions on and perceptions of their usual English writing assignments, e.g. in terms of relevance and autonomy. The fifth section of the questionnaire concerned the students’ consumption of extramural English media. Together, the sections on self-efficacy, attitudes, and assignments give a useful indication of the students’ L2 writing motivation suitable for cross-survey comparison.

The questionnaires were constructed in Danish and administered through Google Analyse. The bulk of the questionnaires consists of Likert scale items asking respondents to indicate their agreement with a given statement on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” While the questionnaire items are categorised into sections pertaining to the same target concepts, these sections may be too conceptually wide to be considered proper multi-item scales. In the construction of the questionnaire, comprehensiveness and conceptual depth was sacrificed for the sake of brevity and conceptual width. Not burdening the high school students with excessively long and detailed questionnaires was of high priority. The post-survey was virtually identical to the pre-survey and was reworded to address the review assignment specifically and omit items relating to general, not assignment specific, attitudes. Both questionnaires can be found in Appendix B. The obtained data was subsequently analysed using descriptive statistics (see section 4).

3.6 Interviews

To supplement the quantitative data, student interviews (or “group talks”) were conducted. Five students were selected based on their pre-survey responses. To achieve a varied and, hopefully, more representative sample, both students with high self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards writing assignments and students with low self-efficacy and negative attitudes were selected. An equal gender distribution was strived towards, resulting in three female and two male interviewees. The students were interviewed in two groups of mixed efficacy and attitudes, rather than individually, to facilitate a safer, comfortable environment and promote discussion (Codó, 2008, p. 163). The group talks were structured interviews inquiring into the students’ motivation, opinions, and attitudes towards the review assignment, writing assignments in general, and English as a language and school subject. The interviews were conducted in Danish and audio-recorded but only select quotes were transcribed. The students’ testimony will be drawn upon in the discussion.

3.7 Validity & generalisability

Although the questionnaires employed in the present study were not tested or validated beforehand, the vast majority of the items were directly adapted from the multicomponent measure already developed and validated by MacArthur et al. (2016). In turn, the measure itself synthesises previous studies and validated test batteries (2016, pp. 34-36). The validity and reliability of the study and its findings are strengthened by supplementing the quantitative results of the questionnaires with

qualitative data from the group interviews. In terms of generalisability, tentative inferences pertaining to similar contexts can be drawn from the present findings in conjunction with previous studies and existing literature. It is reasonable to assume that the present findings are likely to apply in similar expanding circle SLL environments in, for instance, the other Nordic countries. The participating students study English at A-level, which means that they are likely more proficient and/or interested in English than the average Danish high school student. Thus, in theory, the participants would have less of a need for and benefit from bridging activities than other students. If this participating class benefits from the review assignment, it is reasonable to assume that other, less linguistically inclined classes will as well. The data obtained from a second participating class not included here supports these assumptions (Kortsen, 2023).

4. Results

In this section, the results of the pre- and post-survey will be presented. The sections on goal-orientation and media consumption have been omitted in this article for the sake of brevity, as the obtained data did not provide any insight not already supplied by other data. To facilitate quantitative analysis, the questionnaire data was first standardised. Each answer option on the Likert scale was assigned a numerical value ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The mean value (M) of the responses to each category were calculated for both questionnaires, allowing for a quick overview and cross-survey comparison (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Means by item category.

	Pre	Post	ΔM
1. Self-efficacy	3.25	3.37	0.12
2. Attitude	3.58	3.58	0
3. Assignments	2.88	3.92	1.05
Total	3.16	3.63	0.48

As evident from the difference in mean values (ΔM) shown in Table 1, the post-survey received more positive responses than the pre-survey. The post-survey saw an average increase of 0.48 in mean value from the pre-survey which constitutes an improvement of 15.1%. A T-test comparing the mean values of each individual item across the two questionnaires revealed the difference to be statistically significant. Thus, judging from this preliminary overview of the questionnaire results, the review assignment did have a positive effect on the students' L2 writing motivation.

4.1 Self-efficacy & attitude

The first section of the questionnaires pertaining to the students' self-efficacy saw an average increase in mean value of 0.12. Especially items a. and h. received considerably more positive responses in the post-survey compared to the pre-survey. Firstly, in the pre-survey, item a. ("Writing English assignments is easy") received somewhat positive responses with a combined 44% expressing some form of agreement (see Table 2 below). The corresponding item in the post-survey received predominantly positive responses with a combined 94% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Secondly, item h. ("I can focus on my writing for an extended period of time without getting distracted") saw an increase in agreement from 20% in the pre-survey to a combined 74% in the post-survey.

Table 2. Responses to section 1: "Self-efficacy."

Pre-survey		1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
a.	Writing English assignments is easy.	4%	16%	36%	40%	4%	3.24	0.91
b.	I can write articulate and grammatically correct English.	0%	8%	32%	40%	20%	3.72	0.87
c.	I can make a clear outline/plan of my ideas before I start writing.	4%	28%	36%	28%	4%	3.00	0.94
d.	I can always find the right words to express my thoughts.	0%	24%	36%	28%	12%	3.28	0.96
e.	I can proofread and revise my assignment to improve it.	0%	8%	24%	60%	8%	3.68	0.73
f.	I can write well-structured paragraphs.	4%	16%	52%	28%	0%	3.04	0.77
g.	I can write an interesting introduction and a persuasive conclusion.	8%	8%	16%	56%	12%	3.56	1.06
h.	I can focus on my writing for an extended period of time without getting distracted.	16%	20%	44%	20%	0%	2.68	0.97
i.	I can set and/or follow deadlines so that I don't write the assignment at the last minute.	16%	16%	24%	36%	8%	3.04	1.22
Post-survey								
a.	Writing this assignment was easy.	0%	0%	7%	87%	7%	4.00	0.37
b.	I wrote articulate and grammatically correct English.	0%	0%	47%	33%	20%	3.73	0.77
c.	I made a clear outline/plan of my ideas before I started writing.	0%	47%	33%	13%	7%	2.80	0.91
d.	I always found the right words to express my thoughts.	0%	27%	7%	53%	13%	3.53	1.02
e.	I proofread and revised my assignment to improve it.	0%	27%	20%	40%	13%	3.40	1.02
f.	I wrote well-structured paragraphs.	7%	27%	27%	40%	0%	3.00	0.97
g.	I wrote an interesting introduction and a persuasive conclusion.	0%	20%	40%	40%	0%	3.20	0.75
h.	I focused on my writing for an extended period of time without getting distracted.	20%	0%	7%	67%	7%	3.40	1.25
i.	I set and/or followed deadlines so that I didn't write the assignment at the last minute.	27%	0%	13%	40%	20%	3.27	1.48

In section 2: "Attitude," the students indicated greater enjoyment when writing the review assignment compared to their usual assignments, as signified by a combined 87% agreement and 44% agreement respectively with the statement in item a. (see Table 3 below). Additionally, 73% found the review assignment satisfying to write, compared to 40% for the usual assignments. Thus, the data suggests that the students found the review assignment easier, more enjoyable, and more satisfying to write than their usual assignments.

Table 3. Responses to section 2: "Attitude."

Pre-survey		1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
a.	I enjoy writing English assignments.	0%	12%	44%	36%	8%	3.40	0.80
b.	I enjoy writing English outside of school (e.g. on social media).	0%	24%	24%	24%	28%	3.56	1.13
c.	The process of writing English assignments is satisfying.	0%	16%	44%	40%	0%	3.24	0.71
d.	It's alright for an assignment to be difficult as long as it's interesting.	0%	12%	16%	48%	24%	3.84	0.92
e.	I learn new things by writing.	0%	4%	24%	56%	16%	3.84	0.73
f.	Writing is a great way of clarifying my thoughts and ideas.	0%	8%	24%	44%	24%	3.84	0.88
g.	I think the English language itself is very interesting.	0%	0%	20%	68%	12%	3.92	0.56
h.	I think the cultures of English-speaking countries is very interesting.	4%	0%	24%	60%	12%	3.76	0.81
i.	I enjoy (or would like to) communicate with people from English-speaking countries.	0%	4%	16%	32%	48%	4.24	0.86
Post-survey								
a.	I enjoyed writing this assignment.	0%	0%	13%	47%	40%	4.27	0.68
c.	The process of writing this assignment was satisfying.	0%	0%	27%	60%	13%	3.87	0.62
e.	I have learnt new things by writing.	0%	40%	27%	33%	0%	2.93	0.85
f.	Writing was a great way of clarifying my thoughts and ideas.	0%	20%	40%	33%	7%	3.27	0.85

4.2 Assignments

The "Assignments" section of the questionnaire holds the most important and insightful findings and the greatest statistically significant increase in mean value ($\Delta M=1.05$). Firstly, item a. asked students to pick 2-4 words to describe their usual assignments in the pre-survey and the review assignment in the post-survey. The predefined answer options were coded as either negative, neutral, or positive and were assigned numerical values (one, three, and five respectively) corresponding to those of the Likert scale answer options to allow for calculation of means. Table 4 below shows the number (n) of students who picked each option.

Table 4. Distribution of answers to item 4.a.

4.a	Pre-survey		Post-survey	
	n	%	n	%
+ Interesting	13	52%	11	73%
– Boring	6	24%	0	0%
+ Motivating	2	8%	9	60%
+ Fun	3	12%	9	60%
+ Educational	12	48%	1	7%
– Frustrating	3	12%	1	7%
– Superfluous	3	12%	1	7%
+ Relevant	13	52%	4	27%
– Confusing	8	32%	1	7%
– Difficult	8	32%	0	0%
± Easy	2	8%	1	7%
± Mixed topics*	1	4%	-	-
– Surface-level*	1	4%	-	-
M	3.37		4.63	

*: Added by respondents; + = positive; – = negative; ± = neutral.

The responses to item 4.a suggest that the students were much more positively disposed towards the review assignment compared to the usual assignments, as evidenced by an increase in mean value of 37.4%. The most remarkable change is that the pick rate of “motivating” and “fun” increased from 8% and 12% respectively to 60% each. Similarly, 73% of the post-survey respondents picked “interesting,” while 50% did so in the pre-survey.

The most remarkable result of the assignment section of the questionnaire is the responses to item e. and b. (see Table 5 below). According to the questionnaire data, *none* of the respondents found their usual assignments to be relevant to their extramural identities. Conversely, a combined 40% either agreed or strongly agreed that the review assignment was relevant to their identities. Similarly, 87% found the review assignment relevant to their personal interests compared to just 8% in the pre-survey. These results solidify relevance to student interests and identity as a main strength of the review assignment.

Table 5. Responses to section 4: "Assignments."

Pre-survey		1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
b.	The assignments I usually write are relevant to my own interests.	4%	32%	56%	8%	0%	2.68	0.68
c.	... give me knowledge and competences that I can use outside classroom teaching in my spare time.	0%	20%	44%	36%	0%	3.16	0.73
d.	... give me knowledge and competences that I can use after high school (e.g. further education and jobs).	8%	16%	24%	48%	4%	3.24	1.03
e.	... are relevant to my identity outside of school.	8%	72%	20%	0%	0%	2.12	0.52
f.	... reflect texts and/or situations in the 'real word' outside classroom teaching.	0%	12%	44%	44%	0%	3.32	0.68
g.	... allow me to choose genre, topic, or text.	20%	44%	36%	0%	0%	2.16	0.73
h.	... give me opportunities to be sufficiently personal.	4%	28%	56%	12%	0%	2.76	0.71
i.	... give me opportunities to be creative.	4%	24%	36%	32%	4%	3.08	0.93
Post-survey								
b.	The review assignment was relevant to my own interests.	0%	0%	13%	40%	47%	4.33	0.70
c.	... gave me knowledge and competences that I can use outside classroom teaching in my spare time.	0%	27%	40%	27%	7%	3.13	0.88
d.	... gave me knowledge and competences that I can use after high school (e.g. further education and jobs).	0%	40%	40%	20%	0%	2.80	0.75
e.	... was relevant to my identity outside of school.	0%	27%	33%	27%	13%	3.27	1.00
f.	... reflected texts and/or situations in the 'real word' outside classroom teaching.	0%	0%	40%	47%	13%	3.73	0.68
g.	... allowed me to choose genre, topic, or text.	0%	0%	0%	7%	93%	4.93	0.25
h.	... gave me opportunities to be sufficiently personal.	0%	0%	0%	67%	33%	4.33	0.47
i.	... gave me opportunities to be creative.	0%	0%	20%	47%	33%	4.13	0.72

In summary, the results of the questionnaires show that the review assignment had a positive effect on the students' L2 writing motivation. The data suggests that the students held more positive attitudes towards the review assignment and found it to be easier, more accessible, and more relevant to their personal interests and extramural identities than their usual assignments.

5. Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the motivational impact of the review assignment and the implications of the present findings for the use of review assignments and bridging activities in general in Danish high school English teaching. The discussion will be based on the qualitative data obtained through the student interviews in addition to the quantitative results presented in the previous section. Finally, I will briefly touch upon some of the limitations of the intervention study.

5.1 Motivational impact

As established in the preceding section, the review assignment had a positive impact on the students' L2 writing motivation. In theory, personal relevance is a main strength of the review assignment. This is supported by the results (table 5 above), as 87% and 40% of the students found the review assignment to be relevant to their personal interests and identities respectively. Conversely, compared to their usual assignments, the students found the review assignment to be less relevant for the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The review genre is not part of the English curriculum or examination, and the more informal style of the genre makes it seem irrelevant to the students in terms of developing their academic writing skills. However, informal writing may very well improve L2 writing proficiency and fluency, according to Matsuda and Nouri (2020, pp. 78-80) who write that “the value of informal writing situations is that the focus is not on learning to write (development) or writing well (performance) but on engaging with ideas and people” (p. 79). Thus, the students perceiving the review assignment as non-educational may be an advantage and contributes to the aim of motivating writing for the sake of writing. The interviews support this claim, as students who were unconcerned with development and performance expressed greater motivation and appreciation for the review assignment.

The testimony of the interviewed students corroborates the overall survey results as well. All interviewees had found the review assignment easier and more accessible and generally more motivating to write than their usual assignments. They unanimously expressed appreciation for the degree of autonomy afforded by the review assignment. The freedom to write about virtually any text made the writing process greatly relevant to the students' personal interests and identities and more reflective of their everyday extramural English language use and consumption (i.e. more authentic), according to the interviewees. Furthermore, the review assignment also provided affordances for personal expression. Two students emphasised subjectivity as a positive aspect of the review assignment and a welcome change from the objectivity that is usually expected when writing assignments. Rather than focusing on constraints and genre requirements, the students were allowed and encouraged to focus on simply writing English and – as one interviewee put it – do “what's right for oneself.”

However, while all interviewees appreciated the autonomy as a positive change of pace, some, nevertheless, requested more guidelines and clearer communication of teacher expectations. Firstly, selecting a text to review when given completely free rein was difficult for some. One student, Ezra, recounted how he had begun writing and subsequently started over twice before finally deciding on his final text of choice. Stricter guidelines would help alleviate such instances of choice overload. Secondly, and more severely, a lack of constraints and requirements makes the writing process confusing or intimidating to some:

Jade: *You know the teacher has an idea of how it should be. And then you're in doubt about how to [meet those expectations] in your own assignment. ... There was no such pressure with this assignment.*

Cassy: *But that can be a challenge as well. I assume you had some kind of picture of what the review should end up looking like. And if there are no clear constraints, it's easier ... to miss the mark on the idea you have.*

While Jade found comfort in the lack of requirements and expectations from the teacher, Cassy found uncertainty. Ezra voiced a similar opinion to Cassy's: “If there are guidelines and requirements, ... it's clearer what the teacher is looking for. ... You do the assignment to get a good grade. ... You want to make your teacher happy and that's easier if there are clear guidelines.” Both Cassy and Ezra are clearly preoccupied with meeting the teacher's expectations and writing a “good” assignment but feel

aimless when these expectations are not explicitly stated. While this attitude is not in itself undesirable, it attests to an unfortunate and common tendency among Danish high school students, namely a strategic education orientation (Katznelson & Louw, 2020) (which is discussed later).

5.2 Implications

To accommodate and appeal to as many students as possible, the review assignment evidently ought to provide more guidelines and explicit requirements than the list of genre features already given. But simply adding more constraints will not suffice. As more is required and expected of the students, they must be guided and prepared to meet these new requirements. Therefore, I suggest incorporating the review assignment into English teaching by first instructing the students to collect, read, and analyse media reviews with the aim of constructing a list of review genre features. This can be done in groups, with the teacher subsequently coalescing the groups' suggestions into a definitive list for the class to follow. By reading and analysing reviews, the students not only formulate their own list of requirements, they also simultaneously gain an understanding of how these genre features are used and how to incorporate them in their own writing.

The procedure proposed above follows the three phases of the bridging activities framework – collection, analysis, and creation – and requires more time to facilitate. This iteration of the review assignment focuses on the review as a genre at the expense of some autonomy, which will be of detriment to some classes and students who would derive greater benefit from the unrestrained freedom afforded by the assignment as it was conceived during the present study. However, it is important to stress that the review assignment is very flexible and can be adapted to fit different topics and themes and accommodate the needs of different students by adjusting e.g. the type, number, or rigidity of constraints. As long as the core element of student-selected texts is preserved, the review assignment will maintain its motivational potential, which is the heart of the matter.

The implementation of the review assignment and other motivation-enhancing endeavours into Danish high school teaching faces a considerable obstacle. Several of the interviewees expressed the sentiment that there is an almost irreconcilable dichotomy between school and motivation. Especially writing assignments seems to be in direct and inherent opposition to the motivation of most students. This demotivating aura, if you will, of writing assignments may even blight otherwise enjoyable and motivating things. Ezra explained that “As soon as I am told I have to do something, I don't want to do it. ... Some of the things [I like doing] are actually the things we are asked to do in assignments.” Thus, bridging activities may end up having the inverse effect of what is intended, making extramural English media and activities as (un)motivating as intramural instruction.

The school-motivation dichotomy is not merely a matter of youthful disinterest and unwillingness to do schoolwork. The cause of the dichotomy is likely the widespread performance culture that characterises the experiences of many high school students:

Cassy: *The motivation to learn is there but then there are elements of being assessed which subtract from the motivation. ... [Y]ou [write the assignment] because you have to, and because you know you will need the grade, which removes the motivation from the fact that you actually want to learn.*

Jade: *I think [the perfectionist culture] is a hindrance... You don't just jump in and really start practicing ... because, I think, you're always like ... "I want to do it perfectly" ... I really think it can hit the brakes on one's language development, because maybe you don't always give it your all and let it be wrong.*

The prevalent fixation on performance and the omnipresent prospect of being quantitatively evaluated leads many students to adopt what Noemi Katznelson and Arnt Louw (2020) call a “strategic performance-oriented education orientation” (p. 90, my translation). Genuine learning and development are deprioritised in favour of meeting the teacher’s expectations and demonstrating one’s (superficial) knowledge in the hopes of getting a “good” grade. Saying the “right” thing to achieve a favourable assessment is more important than improving one’s understanding of the material and topics at hand. Thus, performance-oriented students seek to demonstrate what they already know, neglecting the areas in which they can and should improve their knowledge and competences (Katznelson & Louw, 2020, pp. 90-92).

The performance culture and the strategic education orientation it fosters run contrary to the purpose of the review assignment. Firstly, by virtue of its focus on student autonomy, the review assignment does not allow for strategic approaches. There are no concrete teacher expectations, no right thing to say. Secondly, the review assignment is not designed for summative assessment, but rather formative feedback. The purpose of the assignment is not to gauge the students’ genre knowledge or writing skills, but rather to enhance the students’ writing motivation and encourage them to write for the sake of practice and even enjoyment. Consequently, the review assignment is incongruent with the prevailing approach to and culture surrounding writing assignments in Danish high schools. Despite this, the review assignment may, as shown, benefit students’ L2 writing motivation. Especially interviewees, like Jade, who did not worry about performance derived greater enjoyment and motivation from the assignment by embracing its unique affordance for autonomous and personally relevant writing.

It should be noted that I do not wish to imply that high school teachers of L2 English are hopelessly outdated and out of touch in their teaching methods. Most, if not all, teachers strive to make their students’ learning experiences autonomous, relevant, and motivating. However, as highlighted by Lund et al. (2023), there is a continued need for bridging the gap between students’ intra- and extramural experiences. The focus on allowing the students themselves to incorporate their own extramural interests and the degree of freedom afforded in the writing process is, in my view, what sets the review assignment apart.

5.3 Limitations

This article is an abridged version of my master’s thesis and, as such, is subject to a few unfortunate methodological limitations. The time constraints imposed by the thesis writing process made the proper planning and preparations befitting of an intervention study infeasible. No pilot study was conducted and, consequently, mistakes were discovered and corrected as the study progressed. Parts of the methodology and procedure were not finalised until after the study had commenced. The very small sample size and lack of control group also hampers the representativeness and generalisability of the present findings (see also 3.5). The pre-survey, which provides the basis for assessing the effectiveness of the review assignment, asked the students to evaluate an undefined mass of “usual assignments.” To ensure a sounder comparison, a specific assignment or number of assignments could have been defined as a concrete point of comparison for the review assignment. In summary, the main limitations are ones of time and scope, which can be rectified through further research into the motivational potential of bridging activities.

6. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that a writing assignment consisting of a review of student-selected extramural media benefits students' L2 writing motivation through increased autonomy and relevance to extramural interests and identities. The main hindrance to the assignment appears to be the students' preconceived notions of writing assignments and the prevalent performance culture from which they stem. Nevertheless, the assignment was successful in improving students' writing motivation. Despite its limitations, I believe this study provides useful insights for teaching and avenues for further research by focusing uniquely on the motivational potential of bridging activities and providing a flexible assignment template.

Endnotes

1 The term *extramural* describes media, activities, experiences etc. that take place outside the context of institutional teaching (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 6). Similarly, I use the term *intramural* to denote the inverse: taking place within the context of or being related to institutional teaching.

2 Higher General Examination Programme.

3 Although MacArthur et al. are concerned with college students of L1 English, the underlying motivational principles also apply to high school students of L2 English.

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Appendix A

Assignment Description

Writing assignment: REVIEW



Write a review of a text/piece of media of your choice, for example a book, film, videogame, tv-show, music, comic, podcast etc. Your review must be at least 500 words long. The deadline is March 20th at 22:00.

Don't feel obligated to pick a classic text but choose something you are passionate about. You can think of something you really enjoyed and would like to recommend to others, or something you found disappointing and would like to caution others against.

The purpose of a review is to present a subjective value judgement/evaluation of a text supported by textual examples. Your audience is people your own age who are unfamiliar with your text. Imagine you are writing a review for the student magazine.

Reviews usually include the following elements:

1. A presentation of the text (incl. brief summary of the plot if it has one)
2. Your evaluation (judgement, opinion) of the text.
3. Reasons for your evaluation supported by examples from the text.
4. Consideration of both positive and negative aspects.
5. A conclusion summing up your evaluation.

Examples of reviews:

- [Stray \(videogame\) on Screen Rant](#)
- [“Andor” \(tv-show\) in The Guardian](#)
- [Encanto \(film\) in The New York Times](#)
- [“Sense8” \(tv-show\) in The Hollywood Reporter](#)

Appendix B

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were constructed and administered in Danish but are translated into English here.

Pre-survey

1. Self-efficacy

- a. Writing English assignments is easy.
Strongly disagree – Disagree – Neither agree nor disagree – Agree – Strongly agree
- b. I can write articulate and grammatically correct English.
- c. I can make a clear outline/plan of my ideas before I start writing.
- d. I can always find the right words to express my thoughts.
- e. I can proofread and revise my assignment to improve it.
- f. I can write well-structured paragraphs.
- g. I can write an interesting introduction and a persuasive conclusion.
- h. I can focus on my writing for an extended period of time without getting distracted.
- i. I can set and/or follow deadlines so that I don't write the assignment at the last minute.

2. Attitude (affect & beliefs)

- a. I enjoy writing English assignments.

- b. I enjoy writing English outside of school (e.g. on social media).
- c. The process of writing English assignments is satisfying.
- d. It's alright for an assignment to be difficult as long as it's interesting.
- e. I learn new things by writing.
- f. Writing is a great way of clarifying my thoughts and ideas.
- g. I think the English language itself is very interesting.
- h. I think the cultures of English-speaking countries is very interesting.
- i. I enjoy (or would like to) communicate with people from English-speaking countries.

3. Goal orientation

- a. When I write assignments, I focus on avoiding making mistakes.
- b. I focus on getting it over with as quickly as possible.
- c. I focus on how difficult it is.
- d. I focus on getting a good grade.
- e. I focus on handing in the assignment on time.
- f. I focus on passing the course/subject.
- g. I focus on improving my understanding of the topic.
- h. I focus on improving my writing proficiency.
- i. I focus on improving the way I organise and express my thoughts and ideas.

4. Assignments

- a. Choose 2-4 words from the list below to describe the assignments you usually write in English.
 - Interesting
 - Boring
 - Motivating
 - Fun
 - Educational
 - Frustrating
 - Superfluous
 - Relevant
 - Confusing
 - Difficult
 - Easy
 - Other (write your own)
- b. The assignments I usually write are relevant to my own interests.
- c. The assignments I usually write give me knowledge and competences that I can use outside classroom teaching in my spare time.
- d. The assignments I usually write give me knowledge and competences that I can use after high school (e.g. further education and jobs).
- e. The assignments I usually write are relevant to my identity outside of school.
- f. The assignments I usually write reflect texts and/or situations in the 'real world' outside classroom teaching.
- g. The assignments I usually write allow me to choose genre, topic, or text.
- h. The assignments I usually write give me opportunities to be sufficiently personal.
- i. The assignments I usually write give me opportunities to be creative.

5. Extramural media

- a. How often do you read English-language books?
Never – Rarely – Sometimes – Often – Every day
- b. How often do you listen to English-language music?
- c. How often do you watch English-language films?
- d. How often do you watch English-language TV or streaming shows?
- e. How often do you play English-language videogames?

- f. How often do you listen to English-language podcasts?
- g. How often do you watch English-language content on YouTube, Twitch, TikTok etc.?

6. Personal

- a. Type your student number (your anonymity will be maintained, since I don't know your student numbers).
- b. Pick your gender.
 - Woman
 - Man
 - Non-binary/other
 - Do not wish to disclose
- c. If you have any comments or anything you want to elaborate on, you can write it below.

Post-survey

1. Self-efficacy

- a. Writing this assignment was easy.
Strongly disagree – Disagree – Neither agree nor disagree – Agree – Strongly agree
- b. I wrote articulate and grammatically correct English.
- c. I made a clear outline/plan of my ideas before I started writing.
- d. I always found the right words to express my thoughts.
- e. I proofread and revised my assignment to improve it.
- f. I wrote well-structured paragraphs.
- g. I wrote an interesting introduction and a persuasive conclusion.
- h. I focused on my writing for an extended period of time without getting distracted.
- i. I set and/or followed deadlines so that I didn't write the assignment at the last minute.

2. Attitude (affect & beliefs)

- a. I enjoyed writing this assignment.
- b. (c) The process of writing this assignment was satisfying.
- c. (e) I have learnt new things by writing.
- d. (f) Writing was a great way of clarifying my thoughts and ideas.

3. Goal orientation

- a. While writing this assignment, I focused on avoiding making mistakes.
- b. I focused on getting it over with as quickly as possible.
- c. I focused on how difficult it was.
- d. I focused on getting a good grade.
- e. I focus on handing in the assignment on time.
- f. I focused on passing the course/subject.
- g. I focused on improving my understanding of the topic.
- h. I focused on improving my writing proficiency.
- i. I focused on improving the way I organise and express my thoughts and ideas.

4. Assignments

- a. Choose 2-4 words from the list below to describe the review assignment.
 - Interesting
 - Boring
 - Motivating
 - Fun
 - Educational
 - Frustrating
 - Superfluous
 - Relevant

- Confusing
 - Difficult
 - Easy
 - Other (write your own)
- b. The review assignment was relevant to my own interests.
- c. The review assignment gave me knowledge and competences that I can use outside classroom teaching in my spare time.
- d. The review assignment gave me knowledge and competences that I can use after high school (e.g. further education and jobs).
- e. The review assignment was relevant to my identity outside of school.
- f. The review assignment reflected texts and/or situations in the ‘real world’ outside classroom teaching.
- g. The review assignment allowed me to choose genre, topic, or text.
- h. The review assignment gave me opportunities to be sufficiently personal.
- i. The review assignment gave me opportunities to be creative.
- j. What type of text did you review?
- Book
 - Film
 - TV or streaming series
 - Videogame
 - Music
 - Podcast
 - Other

5. Personal

- d. Type your student number (your anonymity will be maintained, since I don’t know your student numbers).
- e. Pick your gender.
- Woman
 - Man
 - Non-binary/other
 - Do not wish to disclose
- f. If you have any comments or anything you want to elaborate on, you can write it below.