

Studies in Teaching 2021 Research Digest

*Action Research Projects
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Studies in Teaching – 2021 Research Digest
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Using Modern Events to Teach United States History

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Too often today, social studies, and history in particular, is viewed as a ‘boring’ subject. This is reflected in popular culture in movies like Ferris Bueller’s Day Off (Hughes et al., 1986) or the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 1998); in both, history is mind numbingly boring. This research will focus on changing this perception in the class, and engaging students in lessons every day. Everyone has heard ‘history repeats itself,’ a concept that will be very important in this research; by connecting modern events to history, can perceptions of and interest in the subject be changed? By bringing history into today, this research aims to increase engagement by answering the following question; how does connecting modern events with historical events impact student interest and learning in a high school United States’ history classroom?

By looking for the answer to this question, the action research project aims to connect history with student’s lives today. One of the most important pieces of this question is the use of the term modern events instead of current events. This project will focus on the concept of history repeating itself and consider how historic events connect to what is occurring in more present times. This can be seen through technology, cultural events, movements, activist groups, elections, and a myriad of other events. The purpose is not to simultaneously teach a class on history and what the news is saying, but rather to use events that students can relate to in order to deepen their understanding of history.

Literature Review

Interest

It is vital to understand the connection between student perception of the subject and their interest in the subject. Students who feel a personal connection to their lessons are more likely to participate and engage in lessons (Grever et al., 2011; Julien et al., 2018). Grever, Pelzer, and Hayden (2011) found that high school students connect best to material that is taught on history that impacts their daily lives; students connected to history about their country, migrants

connected to histories about other migrant families, and histories of the same language of the student all increased interest in student's lessons. Swalwell and Schweber (2014) found that students can engage in local action that furthers lessons; when students put their history lessons into practice and engaged in civic discourse, the study found students to be more interested in what they were learning.

The first main goal is to increase interest in students, moving history from boring (Engle, 1986) to engaging and interesting. Hansen (2009) found that fostering personal connection to U.S. History caused the history to "come alive" (p. 597). Using modern events, this research aims to encourage similar environments in which personal connection increases interest and makes history come alive. By putting history in context for students (Endacott, 2011), connection to history can reverse the trope of a boring classroom and increase interest in the subject.

Learning

As well as increasing interest, it is important to this research to increase learning. This is highlighted by Vinovskis (2015) and Pescatore (2007), which show that learning and interest go hand in hand. Increased interest leads to increased learning. Additionally, as students connect to their lessons, they have better learning outcomes (Swalwell and Schweber, 2016; Epstein and Lipschultz, 2012). Also important to highlight is the research conducted by Burkholder (2010), a study which found that the research method students use is vital to how much they learn from the research. Making connections based on personal experiences, Burkholder found, increased student interest and subsequently the quality of the work completed.

In specific case studies, research has found that connecting events to today increased learning as well. Henning, Snow-Gerono, Reed, and Warner (2006) found that research on Christopher Columbus conducted by students produced better results when the project was tied to current perceptions of Columbus. Using current implications of these perceptions, the students increased their connection to the subject matter, which was found to increase critical thinking on the topic. Milson (2014) found similar outcomes in a study of map use in the classroom; comparing how map technology overtime, students were able to connect with the material by seeing how the maps they use today got to be where they are today. Again, a connection with the material and how it fits into student's lives was found to increase learning.

Current Events and Media

The teaching of current events has been shown to help increase the connection to events. In their study on teaching about the Confederate flag, Alarcón, Marhatt, and Price (2017) found that students had better understanding of the history of the flag when put in context with current perceptions of the flag and what it symbolizes. This helped students connect to their learning through a current event, in this case the removal of the flag from the South Carolina statehouse grounds. Additionally, the study found that students were better able to understand the sentiments of those in history by seeing how those sentiments have both changed and stayed the same in different people today. Manfra and Saylor (2016) had similar findings in their research on teaching about the use of women on currency. The connection made between history and current events is invaluable in this case; the students had to connect their lessons on important women in history and apply it to a modern event, choosing who would be on the currency. This case study found that using this method increased student interest and students more effectively used inquiry, helping them to learn better.

Interest and Learning

For this research question, the main goal of the research is to find the impacts of using modern events on student's interest and learning in a United States History classroom. The study of history can be viewed negatively; many studies have shown the perception that history is boring and that the teaching of history is often viewed similarly (Engle, 1986; Vinovskis, 2015). The goal of this research is to combat the stereotype that history is boring by connecting the lessons to the student's lives; this notion is supported by Hansen (2009) and Epstein and Lipschultz (2012). By giving students personal connection to their material, these studies found that students were both more engaged and achieved better in the class. By incorporating modern events into the history classroom, research indicates that student interest and learning can be greatly impacted.

Methodology

This study took place in a 12th grade United States History course in the southeastern United States. Of the 25 students in the class, 7 gave the appropriate permissions to be included in this study.

Interest

Interest was measured using surveys, journals, and field notes/observations. The survey was made up of five questions that asked students to indicate their perceptions of history, using a

Likert scale of 1-5 to determine student perceptions. The surveys were given three times; once at the beginning of the unit, once halfway through, and once at the end of the unit. The purpose of the surveys was to assess students' perceived interest in the class and asked questions that aim to show their perceptions on history and learning history. Students were also assigned a journal entry to be done in class every Monday. The purpose of this was to again document student perceptions of the unit; students were prompted to write their thoughts on the lessons and include any feelings they had about the lessons. This provided additional data points as to what the students' interest level was. Finally, field notes were used track how students participated in class, and to see if their participation and interest in the lessons was impacted. This was especially important in tracking participation, number of assignments turned in, and monitoring class discussions as a way of displaying interest in students' willingness to participate. Spradley's (1980) field notes observation guide was used for this.

Learning

To measure learning, three data collection techniques were used; testing, exit slip activities, and an activity that asked students to make connections between a past event and a modern event. Students were given a pre and posttest to assess their knowledge on the unit and measure what was learned throughout. The test was made up of three open ended questions that asked students to connect historical events with modern events. For exit slip activities, students completed three exit slip activities. These slips took a 3-2-1 format, where students wrote three things they learned, two questions they may have still had, and one way the past could be connected to the present based on that day's lesson and were used to formatively assess learning. Finally, there was an activity at the end of the unit that allowed students to connect a modern event that we discussed in class to the past. Using the history we learned in class, students were given three modern events and were asked to choose one that best fit their interest, relating it to a topic we covered in the unit. This project provided an overall view of what the student took from the unit, serving as a summative assessment that made clear student abilities to make connections between past and present, and the overall achievement, or 'learning,' of each student.

Both goals (interest and learning) had three testing methods attached in an attempt to triangulate the data as well as it can be, which was done to attempt to ensure valid results.

Results

Interest

To measure student interest indicated by the surveys, each student was given a score from 5-25; if students gave an answer of 1 for all questions, their score would be 5. If they gave 5 for all answers, their score would be 25. These data display the interest and perceived value of history to each student, with low total values displaying low interest and high total values displaying high interest. Throughout the unit, the surveys indicate that interest levels remained relatively constant from the beginning of the study to the end, with the seven students showing little change over the three surveys.

The journal entries reinforced the data displayed by the surveys; students that indicated on their surveys that they already found history interesting (high survey totals) were likely to make connections and express interest in their journal entries. Furthermore, the field notes from the research show similar findings, reporting participation primarily from students already interested in history as indicated by the survey data, and little participation from students showing low interest. The study showed interest levels remaining constant; high interest stayed high, low interest stayed low.

Learning

Student learning was promoted throughout the study. Pre and posttest data shows that on average students scored 5.5 points better on the posttest than the pretest. Additionally, the exit slip activities showed consistent learning throughout the study; used as a formative assessment, student progress was tracked and showed that students consistently understood lessons, with an average score of 4.24/5 (85%) on the assessments. Finally, the summative assessment that asked students to connect a historical event to a modern event again displayed learning; the average score of the students who submitted the final assessment was an 86%.

Conclusions

After considering the results of this study, it can be concluded that teaching high school United States history using modern events did not increase interest among students, and though it is impossible to know if the learning gains could have also been achieved through other methods, teaching using modern events does promote learning among students. These facts are evident when the data are closely examined; as discussed above, interest during this study remained, in general, constant for students throughout this study. If a student was predisposed to enjoy history, they tended to answer questions with more enthusiasm and receive higher total scores on the interest surveys. With the exception of one student, all participants started and ended the

study +/- one interest point of the first survey, often indicating, if anything, a loss in interest over the unit. This may be caused by a variety of factors, but what it makes abundantly clear is that teaching history using modern events to connect to the lessons does not increase student interest.

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“We Are All ESL Teachers”: Culturally and Linguistically Relevant Vocabulary Instruction for Spanish Speaking Elementary School Students

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Research shows that the two largest contributors to the existence of the Hispanic-white achievement gap are the facts that Hispanic students are disproportionately likely to come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and to have limited English proficiency. While these factors are largely outside of the control of the classroom teacher, teachers still have the power to implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices that support the academic needs of culturally diverse and emerging bilingual students. One area of curriculum where it is possible to implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices is teaching English language and literacy skills such as language morphology. This research aims to address the question “How does using a culturally and linguistically relevant approach to teaching language morphology influence linguistically diverse 4th grade students’ English word decoding abilities, and their feelings towards linguistic diversity?”

Review of Literature

Comprehensive evidence of a consistent Hispanic-white achievement gap in the United States stretches back to at least the early 1990’s, when the United States Department of Education first began including Hispanic as a demographic category on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)(Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). The three most frequently cited reasons for the existence of the achievement gap are: 1) family background and socioeconomic status, 2) English proficiency, and 3) school quality (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Findings from Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006), and Reardon and Galindo

(2009) suggest that the achievement gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students can be explained primarily by socioeconomic differences, and, in the early years, by language differences.

Given that the Hispanic-White achievement gap is primarily tied to socioeconomic and linguistic factors, teachers who want to help close the achievement gaps in their own classrooms should focus on teaching strategies shown to be effective for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and for ELL students. One teaching framework believed to be effective for supporting the needs of students from marginalized communities is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (Ladson Billings, 1995). Because Hispanic identity is intimately tied to the Spanish language, when implementing CRT with Hispanic students, many scholars advocate for the addition of an additional dimension, linguistic relevance (for examples see: de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lin, 2015; Rolón-Dow & Chen, 2014; Zhang Wu 2017). Linguistically relevant instruction has primarily been studied in relation to supporting English development, and a number of scholars have identified a focus on linguistic transfer as a possible way to improve vocabulary and English comprehension for Spanish speaking students (Goodwin et al. 2013; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2008; Zhang & Shulley, 2017).

Methodology

Participants in this study were 4th grade students at a majority Hispanic public school in a large urban school district where the researcher completed a field placement as a part of a teacher education program. Nine students participated in the research. Eight of the nine students were Hispanic and primarily or exclusively speak in Spanish at home. The intervention consisted of a series of three 45-minute-long lessons. In order to triangulate the data, this research drew on a number of data collection strategies, including a pre and post survey with a section on students'

decoding abilities and a section on student attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the classroom, three focus group interviews with students of various linguistic backgrounds, and field notes. Qualitative data was coded using the program *Atlas.ti* in order to identify emerging themes through a constant comparative framework. Quantitative data from the pre and post assessments, as well as closed response opinion survey questions were explored using basic descriptive statistics.

Results & Discussion

Results showed that participation in the intervention had some effect on students' attitudes towards linguistic diversity and word meaning inferencing ability. On the pre and post surveys, students were asked three questions intended to reveal the effectiveness of instruction on language decoding strategies. The first of these questions, which was identical on the pre and post surveys, asked students, given a series of context clues and related words in both English and Spanish, to choose between four possible meanings of the English word contradict. On the pre survey, four students got the question correct, and five students got the question incorrect. On the post survey six students got the question correct, and three got it incorrect, suggesting that the learning segment may have led to an improvement in students' decoding skills. The second and third decoding questions differed between the pre and post surveys. On the pre-survey seven students got the question correct and two got the question incorrect. On the post-survey six students got the question correct and three students got the question incorrect. Due to the small sample size, the efficacy of integrating Spanish into root word and decoding instruction is hard to determine. However, while it is hard to draw conclusive evidence from the survey data, focus group interviews as well as field notes reveal that students enjoyed the culturally and linguistically relevant approach to language morphology. Several students stated that they

enjoyed that the lessons were different from what they usually do in ELA, and interviews and observations reveal that they especially enjoyed interactive activities.

The main findings of this research were around how students feel about the use of culturally and linguistically affirming practices in the classroom. On both the pre and post survey students were asked to answer the open-ended question, “Do you think teachers who teach in schools where lots of students speak Spanish should include Spanish vocabulary when they teach? Why or why not? On both the pre and post surveys, most students wrote answers that showed a positive attitude towards the use of Spanish in their general education classroom. One student wrote that they liked using Spanish in the classroom because, “that way people who don't understand English can understand a bit more.” The one non-Hispanic student participant answered “Yes, because the kids that are English can learn Spanish,” which, in conjunction with his answers and comments in the focus group interviews shows his interest in learning about the language and culture of his peers. While the majority of answers were positive, on both the pre and post surveys the same three students answered that they thought teachers should not include Spanish, with their reasoning being related to the fact that they did not feel like they needed to learn Spanish in the classroom because they already know it, with one student writing, “No because we already have ESL so we don't need more Spanish”. While these three students showed less interest in including Spanish in the classroom, their answers were not negative, but instead just showed that they did not find including Spanish to be important.

In the post survey, students were asked how learning about Spanish in the classroom had made them feel. Seven out of nine students shared highly positive responses, such as one student who wrote “it made me feel comfortable and smarter”. The student in the class who does not write in English wrote, “me hace sentir bien y no me da miedo,” which translates to “It makes

me feel good and doesn't make me afraid,” Interestingly one of the three students who was against integrating Spanish answered the question about how the lessons made them feel by saying they made him feel “good because Spanish and English is fun together,” showing that he enjoyed the lessons that included both languages, even if he did not think including Spanish was important.

In the focus group interviews, discussions showed that while a few students felt integrating Spanish into the curriculum is not important because they already speak Spanish, many found the integration to be culturally affirming. The interviews also revealed that many students see speaking Spanish and being Hispanic as a source of pride and an important part of their identities. Several students explicitly referenced how Spanish connects them with their families. One student described how the integration made her feel by saying, “It was very fun because mostly my family is Spanish... and at the house I speak Spanish and I liked the Spanish and English lessons because it gives me like a vibe that it seemed like my family was there.” As this quote shows, for students who speak Spanish at home, integrating Spanish in school was affirming because it reminded them of their homes and made students feel more comfortable and supported.

Conclusion

This research supports the belief that culturally and linguistically responsive teaching can have a positive impact on the experiences of Hispanic ELL students in general education settings in the United States. For most Spanish-speaking students the experience was positive and affirming. Furthermore, the few student participants who did not think teaching Spanish in the classroom was worthwhile, still did not have negative reactions to it, they just found the instruction to be redundant in addition to their ESL classes. While the evidence around the

specific application of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching to vocabulary decoding instruction is less robust, this research points towards culturally and linguistically responsive teaching as a promising practice. While this intervention only lasted three days, teachers should not see culturally and linguistically responsive instruction as a one-time integration like is modeled in this research, but instead see integrating culturally and linguistically relevant practices as an important thread to weave throughout the entire school year. By doing this, teachers who do not know Spanish themselves can affirm the value of Spanish speaking students' culture and heritage and create more positive learning environments for their students.

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The Effects of Ability-Based Peer Partners on Student Achievement in Elementary Mathematics

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Many elementary aged students often associate negative attitudes and feelings towards the subject of mathematics from an early age, during their first few years of school. Mathematics, in comparison to other core subjects, often requires the least amount of partner and group work between students during class instruction. It is important for students to view mathematics as a collaborative and interesting subject, one they can share with and participate in with their peers. The inclusion of partner work and group work within mathematics instruction has been considered to be effective in an elementary school classroom setting (Murphy et al., 2017), and allows students to see mathematics as a more inclusive and collaborative subject. Group work in a classroom setting has been seen to be successful, and often can alleviate student's apprehension and negative attitudes towards the given subject (Linchevski & Kutscher, 2020). Assignments and worksheets often result in higher overall grades or scores when given to a group than an individual student, due to many factors, including the fact that there are multiple ideas and strategies involved when a group completes said worksheets or assignments, rather than one individual. Within the subject of elementary level mathematics, grouping specifically based on academic ability has been shown to be effective. Ability grouping entails students in a given classroom being strategically placed in specific groups or partners based on their academic ability, usually assessed by state sanctioned standardized testing. Ability grouping is used in all subjects, and has been proven to be useful in the subject of mathematics (DuPloy, 2019). Partner work has also been proven to be effective, specifically within mathematics instruction. Partner work allows for students to share their strategies and thoughts with one another in a smaller group setting, and allows for collaboration. Partner work requires fewer students than a group, which allows students to build rapport with one another as well. It is often a starting point before assigning students to work in larger groups, to ensure students are able to successfully share ideas and thoughts with one another in a productive setting (Simhara, 1998). Within partner

work, educators often use homogenous partners and heterogeneous partners, based on academic ability.

Literature Review

Group Work. Group work, specifically in the classroom, is a way for students to collaborate with one another in order to share ideas and work towards a common goal. Shimhara (1998) conducted a study that used group work in an elementary school classroom to better understand the positive benefits of having students work in groups to complete a project or solve a problem. The study was conducted in a 4th grade classroom, located in the Southern United States region. During the study, half of the students were placed into groups, while the other half worked on the same assignment individually. Shimhara found, at the end of the research period, that the groups produced a higher quality assignment than those who worked alone, and concluded that the sharing of ideas, methods, and strategies in order to create an end product benefited the outcome significantly.

Ability Grouping. The concept of ability grouping, which is when students are sorted into levels and groups based on their ability or achievement in the classroom, has become more popular in elementary school classrooms over the last few decades. Murphy et al. (2017) conducted a study in an elementary school that looked at possible ways that the experiences of low-ability students differ across types of grouping, as well as how they differ from their high-ability peers. Students' oral reading fluency scores were collected at the beginning of the year and were used to determine grouping assignments (i.e., homogeneous groups of students with similar ability levels *or* heterogeneous groups of students with wider variations in ability levels). Each student was assigned a number using the random number generator in Excel, and the student with the lower number of each pair was assigned to a heterogeneous group and the other student assigned to a homogeneous group, making the ability based groups random within the selected pool of underperforming and higher achieving students. Over the course of one week, the researchers assigned the different groups different assignments and projects, as well as pre and posttests, and compared the products at the end of the given research period. The results showed that low

ability students in heterogeneous groups performed better on the individual posttest and were more motivated to learn compared to their low-ability peers in homogeneous groups.

Partner Work. Partner work, which is defined as two groups or individuals coming together to work towards a common goal, has been used in classroom settings for a long time, and the benefits of such pairings has been studied. Carter et al. (2003) conducted research about high-achieving fifth grade students' achievement and cognitive gains that occurred as a result of their interactions with a high-achieving or low-achieving laboratory partner. The research study was conducted over a 4-week period with five classes of fifth grade students. Results showed no significant differences for achievement of high-achieving students regardless of the partner's achievement level and only slight differences in conceptual reorganization. The results, however, did show that students, regardless of their achievement level, benefited academically from working with partners.

Heterogeneous Partners. Due to the increased use of partner work in classrooms, specifically in elementary grades, the concept of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping has been studied, although much more research on the former has been conducted. Homogeneous partners are defined as the distribution of students who function at similar academic, social, and emotional levels, being placed in the same cooperative learning group or pair together. In DuPloy's (2019) study, they focused on homogeneous partners, and were interested to study what the manifestations of the practice of within-class homogeneous ability grouping based partners were, and how it accounted for learner achievement levels in Grade 1 classrooms. DuPloy (2019) argues that by placing the students in groups based on their perceived ability results, the students will gain a differential learner experience and ultimately obtain differential learner achievement levels (DuPloy, 2019). He suggests that after analyzing his data in terms of homogeneous partners, he believes that the implementation of heterogeneous partners may be beneficial to students' academic growth. If the purpose of such pairings is to benefit both the lower performing and higher performing students, then the research question is whether certain ability-based peer pairings are beneficial at an elementary school age?

Methodology

Participants. This action research study was conducted in a 4th grade classroom in a school district in the southeast, during the spring of 2021. The study took place in a public school, in a class of 15 students.

Intervention. During the lessons, students participated in mathematics instruction for one hour each day of the week. On the first day of the designated research, there was a pretest about the chosen mathematics topic (measuring using different forms of metric units). On the last day of research, students were given the same post-test on the mathematics material, after which the results were compared based on the lower performing students as well as the higher performing students from each partner pair. Additionally, students were interviewed one on one, after completing the post-test, to verbally gauge how they felt about the partners and what their thoughts and feelings were about their performances in their partners groups during the research sessions.

Outcomes. Data on the outcomes of the effectiveness of heterogeneous partners was collected through thorough researcher field notes, as well as researcher- initiated verbal interviews with the participants at the conclusion of the research period. Additionally, data on achievement was collected through pre and post tests that assessed the growth of students' mathematical ability and understanding of the concept being taught during the given time of research, metric units.

Data Analysis. Data includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, which was collected through methods including note taking, visual observations, oral interviews, and pre and post test results.

Results

During the research intervention, 15 students participated in the overall period. These students were observed, analyzed, tested, and interviewed orally. Once the extensive field notes, pre and post tests, and oral interview results were taken and analyzed, the results showed a few

key findings. First, based on the field notes taken, the students were used to working in partners, and felt comfortable and confident doing so on a regular basis. Prior to the designated research, students in this class were either assigned partners randomly or based on physical proximity, without the aspect of ability based grouping being incorporated. Additionally, the pre and post tests showed two major trends. The first trend was focused on academic performance, and the increased number of questions that students got correct between the pre and post tests. There was a clear increase in mathematical accuracy of all 6 questions between the pre and the post tests. This shows that students felt more confident in their mathematical skills after the designated time working with their partners. Additionally, each of the oral questions asked the students to describe, in some form, their experience working with their partner, and each partner pairing had a higher rate of mathematical accuracy, on the post test, rather than the pre-test, before they worked with their homogenous partners. Overall, results and themes from the qualitative analysis show that students were both confident and comfortable working within their designated partners, and showed that there was a clear increase in academic performance between the beginning of the research period and the end.

Conclusions & Implications

Both the qualitative and quantitative results from this research show that there was an academic benefit to students working with an ability-based, heterogeneous partner. Additionally, both researcher field notes and oral interview results show a high level of overall comfort and confidence within students in regards to working in partners. The implementation of such partners may have not had much of an effect on the social and emotional levels of the students, due to the fact that they often already participated in partner work with a broad range of partners, not only in math, but in all subjects. However, between the pre and the post tests, and within the designated research period, there was a clear increase in academic performance, which is supported by the positive work relationships shown by the oral interview results.

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The Effect of Online Presentations on Reading Comprehension and Attitudes

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Introduction

Reading and Language Arts are an important aspect to foundational learning in elementary school students. Many students love to read by the time they start school, but for others it is difficult to grasp the concept of reading and adapt to the teaching methods of the classroom. It is important that teachers are able to reach all types of students with teaching methods and variety in their instruction. Teachers are now incorporating a variety of resources and instructional methods to work with students on reading comprehension and attitudes.

In recent years, the use of technology in a classroom has increased, as well as the incorporation of student presentations to show learning. Both teaching methods and the use of activities within each mode can be very positive in a classroom on their own, so incorporating both together in a classroom could have a positive impact on student learning and attitudes for reading instruction. Tying both methods together, the incorporation of multimedia instruction for reading has shown to have positive effects on students' abilities with independent reading (Reinking & Watkins, 1996). Due to previous positive outcomes from incorporating both technology and literature circle/ presentation in the classroom, incorporating both should have positive effects on students. The incorporation of both multimedia instruction and presentation could potentially improve reading comprehension and attitudes in younger elementary school students. Evaluating the effects of integrating technology with book reviews in lower elementary school students should have a positive effect on students' reading comprehension and reading attitudes.

Literature Review

Within the realm of reading comprehension and reading attitudes, there is extensive literature and research on aspects of both. Before looking specifically at reading comprehension

strategies, and what affects student attitudes, it is important to understand student motivation within reading.

Though each study looked at different engagement factors in classrooms, or different methods to improve or study attitudes, each study shows important aspects of researching these topics. Guthrie (1995) built upon prior engagement research to inform classroom contexts that promote engaged reading. Guthrie looked at the research of Turner and Paris (1995) on motivation as part of his review of prior literature. This study focused on ways to create an engaged classroom and how students become motivated to read through engaging practices, like real-world scenarios, creating learning goals, using student interests to guide texts, and other engaging practices. On the contrary, Kush and Watkins (1999) focused their research more on learning about students' attitudes through interest surveys. Their study found that both educational and recreational reading interest and engagement declined as students got older. Overall, these studies on engagement and attitudes were very different, but found methods to survey interest, and that providing engaging material or something/someone to positively influence students about reading, would increase engagement and attitudes of students.

The study conducted by Galipault (2008) used Likert surveys to reveal a relationship between reading being important and reading achievement scores. The study mainly focused on the correlation of reading attitudes to reading comprehension and achievement. Leger and Merga's (2018) study is like Galipault with the use of surveys to determine reading attitudes, but also found that reading interest and attitudes can grow over time, and that using read-alouds can increase engagement in the literacy classroom. Guthrie (2001) mainly focused on instructional methods, and the positive impact that engaging material has on long-term reading comprehension and attitudes. The results of Guthrie's study showed that the number of stimulating tasks did not increase reading comprehension, but instead that their underlying motivation from these engaging activities, helped to promote a higher level of reading comprehension. Gambrell (2011), like Guthrie, found that the incorporation of authentic/engaging tasks in the classroom promoted a higher level of reading comprehension and better engagement from students. Overall, most of these studies showed positive results by incorporating authentic tasks within reading instruction, and that the more engaging the material, the better attitudes and higher reading comprehension was among the students.

In recent years, the use of technology in a classroom has increased, as well as the

incorporation of student presentations to show learning. Tying both methods together, the incorporation of multimedia instruction for reading has shown to have positive effects on students' abilities with independent reading (Reinking & Watkins, 1996).

Using presentation in the classroom is known to keep students engaged and help them feel an ownership over their learning while also checking for their understanding and comfort level with the material they are presenting on. According to Collaborative Classroom, the incorporation of good-fit books, and small group reading instruction has shown positive correlation to student comprehension (King, 2020). Also, incorporating whole group, small group, and partner shares can promote higher student ownership. Presentations in the classroom, either in front of the class, as part of a group, or in an online setting, help students stay engaged with their material, and help students improve their comprehension and ownership over their work.

Due to previous positive outcomes from incorporating both technology and literature circle/ presentation in the classroom, incorporating both should have positive effects on students. The incorporation of both multimedia instruction and presentation could potentially improve reading comprehension and attitudes in younger elementary school students. The research question of this study is, what are the effects of integrating technology with book reviews in lower elementary school students' reading comprehension and reading attitudes?

Methodology

This action research study was conducted in the spring of 2020 in a school district in the southeast. Data was gathered from a first-grade class at an elementary school. The majority of students in the researcher's field placement participated in the study.

The intervention of recorded online book reviews and presentations to the class was integrated into the individual reading portion of reading instruction. The students were asked to record book reviews that were shown to their classmates on books they chose to read. The integration of recorded book reviews engaged students with technology and presentation within their traditional reading instruction to determine the effect of these interventions on reading comprehension and attitudes.

During reading instruction within the classroom, students chose books that they would like to read during their independent reading time, and worked to complete these books. Before intervention, students were interviewed by the researcher with a researcher-created survey to

determine their opinions on reading activities, and attitudes on reading in general. Students read their choice books, then were asked to record a book review on Flipgrid to be shown in front of the class. Students created these videos to display their reading comprehension of their choice books and used to determine if incorporating presentation into reading instruction positively or negatively affected comprehension and attitudes.

Data analysis included a qualitative analysis of open response question on pre-and post-attitude surveys. Pre-and post-surveys were also analyzed quantitatively. Artifacts, like the written and recorded book reviews, were gathered to check for student understanding and were used as examples of class work. Student work samples and field notes were used to analyze the incorporation of interventions to determine impact and attitudes during the intervention, rather than only using student responses before and after.

Results

The intervention of recording book reviews and incorporating technological aspects into reading instruction began by having the students complete an individual interview about their reading attitudes and comfort level with technology. Based on these interviews, students were unfamiliar with the term “presentation” but when it was explained as similar to show-and-tell but about a book or school topic, all of them understood and were curious about them. Students were also enthusiastic about technology and the idea of incorporating technology into reading instruction.

At the beginning of the interventions, it was clear that some students were much more comfortable with reading in general, and on a higher reading and writing level than others. Based on this observation, the choice books for each student ranged from beginning 1st grade reading books, to extensive chapter books for the higher readers. The researcher took into account the range of reading and writing abilities when interacting with students and when discussing their books to ensure understanding about the intervention and their books. Out of the 14 students, 12 needed an explanation what a presentation was but again, once students understood the concept of a book review and recommendation, students felt more comfortable writing about their choice books. During the formation of their written book reviews, a few students needed assistance, but others completed it without help.

Once tasked with recording the book reviews, students were enthusiastic and generally comfortable with the process of recording due to their recent familiarity with Flipgrid. Though

the students had not done this activity before, they adapted well and took their prior knowledge of the software to assist them with the intervention. Some participating students still felt the embarrassment that comes with normal presentations, but seemed to like recording it beforehand even though they still had to watch it with the class. Some felt indifferent about the recording compared to normal presentations, some liked the idea of an independent activity within reading instruction, no matter the method of presentation. Overall, based on their reactions in class and their answers in their post-interviews, students did feel more comfortable and like the recorded presentation better than a normal presentation in front of the class.

Conclusions

Based on the data collected during the incorporation of the recorded book reviews, and both the pre- and post-interviews, the conclusion that this intervention had a positive effect on students' attitudes and comprehension within the subject of reading has been reached. According to the ratings in the students' interviews of their feelings about reading, the students' interest grew from the time they began with the intervention to the time it ended. Students also showed growth and more comfort with choosing good fit books for themselves and being able to read and understand them independently.

The general data gathered for this research was qualitative. The participants interviews, both pre- and post-, the written book reviews, as well as the recorded book reviews were all collected and analyzed to find trends across the time spent completing the intervention, as well as across different students. Having all qualitative data, and collected materials is valuable to see the sentiments and changes within each student and their responses.

Overall the students saw a positive change after completing the research intervention and expressed their desire to do it again with other books, either recommended from their peers, or other books they had read before and were passionate about. This activity would have a positive impact on students, if incorporated on a regular basis. Generally there was positive feedback after and a growth in interest in independent reading, and students felt better about their reading comprehension and understanding of their books, as well as being more comfortable with technology in the classroom, and as a part of their reading instruction.

Implications

This research implies that there is more space for technology integration in reading instruction and possibly other subjects. By using technology as a tool to extend an already

familiar concept, like book reviews, in reading, this project showed positive change in attitudes and comprehension with the integration of technology.

Previously, there was limited research on the combined aspects that were evaluated in this study, so this research provides a new perspective on reading activities to promote comprehension and positive attitudes, the incorporation of technology, and the use of Flipgrid.

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The Impact of Mindfulness Education on Students' Mental Wellbeing and Engagement

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts have adapted various protocols to limit the spread of this virus. A common change has been the transition to online learning. While online learning has become a popular option among all levels of education, it has come with many challenges to students, teachers, and parents working from home. Arguably, one of the greatest challenges for teachers during the pandemic has been facilitating social emotional learning without face to face interaction.

The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes social and emotional learning as, “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning, 2020, para. 1). One research-tested method that can promote students’ mental wellbeing is integrating class-wide or school-wide mindfulness education. Mindfulness education is a specific branch of SEL that can be defined as: “the purposeful inclusion of mindfulness and mindful meditation principles, theories, and practices into education” (Ackerman, 2020, para. 6). Based on the current condition of students’ social and emotional learning, there is a need to better understand the ways that mindfulness education can be used to promote positive in-school outcomes for students.

Literature Review

The basis for social emotional learning (SEL) comes from the educational reformation movement that is supported by the whole-child approach to education. Based off of the findings from a study that investigated outcomes of a school-wide social-emotional learning intervention, conducted by Yang et al. (2018), results indicate that the relationships students hold play a

significant role in the emotional engagement and cognitive-behavioral engagement of students. Namely, the relationship students had with their classroom teacher, gauged by a student perception survey, was one of the key predictors of engagement outcomes, in addition to the presence of school-wide SEL approach (Yang et al. 2018). A positive teacher-student relationships can be described as “the degree to which students feel respected, supported, and valued by their teachers” (Doll et al., 2004, as cited in Suldo et al., 2009, p. 68).

The educational strategies that are part of a school-wide SEL program, and seek to prevent behavioral problems and promote mental health, have also been shown to support students’ engagement (Yang et al., 2018). When teachers consider students’ perspectives and develop trusting relationships through SEL, classroom management routines are also more easily developed and more effectively maintained (Torrente et al., 2015). Students’ emotional and academic engagement are also critical factors to an effective online learning platform because peers who are connected with one another are likely to be more successful learning in an online setting (Katzman & Stanton, 2020). In addition to the way SEL has been shown to improve students’ engagement, incorporating SEL into online education curricula is essential because it supports students’ mental wellbeing during a time when social distancing guidelines makes connecting with those outside their familial unit or close friends increasingly rare.

One particularly effective branch of SEL is mindfulness education. A beneficial impact from incorporating mindfulness interventions that focus on increasing positive psychology in students is the increase in students’ mental wellbeing (Suldo et al., 2013). Mindfulness interventions have also been shown to improve students’ in-school behavior (Martinez & Zhao, 2018). In terms of how online mindfulness education can impact students’ mental wellbeing, the results from the study performed by Messer et al. (2015) suggest that students’ reduced stress levels resulted in meaningful change across stress levels, suggesting that mindfulness education is a useful tool for healthy students as well as those under stress (Messer et al., 2015). Considering the adaptability of mindfulness education, as a vessel for SEL, educators can promote activities that practice self-awareness, empathy, techniques to calm and focus the mind, and mindful communication using either online learning format or in-person learning.

Methods

This action research study was conducted in the spring of 2021, in a school district located in the southeast United States. Data was collected from 21 students in a fifth-grade class at a public school with 820 students. Data was gathered over eight days, and lessons on each of the eight days were conducted for 15 minutes after lunch recess. All students in the researcher's field placement were invited to participate in the study. During the lessons, students practiced mindfulness strategies by engaging in teacher-guided activities that incorporated relaxation, focus, and reflection.

To begin each lesson, students spent the first few minutes sharing how they were feeling with a partner and then they had a chance to communicate these feelings with the whole class. Afterwards, the teacher introduced the mindfulness activity that students practiced for the day. In total, there were four different mindfulness activities that were repeated twice over the 8-day intervention timeframe. The first lesson had students practice mindfulness through a smell and tell exercise; the second activity had students use their auditory sense perception in a bell listening exercise; the third activity was a guided breathing exercise led by a scripted set of cues spoken by the teacher; and finally, the fourth activity was a "body scan" exercise that followed cues similar to the breathing exercise.

At the end of each lesson, students had an opportunity to debrief the activity by discussing their feelings with the entire class and expressing thoughts about how the activity went. Before starting the intervention, the teacher introduced the purpose of the mindfulness intervention to students and administered a pre-survey to students on their mental wellbeing and self-perceived engagement. Following the 8-day intervention, students completed the survey again as a post-assessment on their wellbeing and engagement. Data on student mental wellbeing and engagement was collected through video-recorded observations of the lessons, researcher-adapted pre/post surveys (with items based on a Likert scale), and focus group student interviews following the action research intervention.

Results

By analyzing the data from the Likert-style surveys used in this study, several outcomes regarding the impact of the intervention on students' engagement and mental wellbeing, were noticeable. The students who did not turn in one or both of their surveys were still able to participate in the intervention activities, but their answers were not counted in the dataset. In

total, 21 out of 24 students were included in the dataset. The pre-survey was administered before the mindfulness education intervention and the post-survey was administered once the 2-week intervention was complete.

Overall, the data collected in these surveys gives insight into how students in this study were thinking about their own cognitive and psychological engagement, along with their mental wellbeing. Although there was no clear trend in how students' self-perceived psychological engagement changed, the measurements for cognitive engagement and mental wellbeing showed a noticeable increase from the pre-survey to the post-survey results.

Focus group interviews were also led by the student-researcher at the end of the study. When asked to describe their feelings and thoughts about the mindfulness activities, themes of stress release and a sense of calm were repeated by students in each of the focus groups. For example, when referring to the mindfulness activities, Student 1 said, "They make me feel calm, like not stress out that much." Also, given that the mindfulness interventions took place after lunch recess, Student 2 stated, "It calmed me down after recess," in one of the later focus group interviews. In addition to these statements from the focus group interviews, adjectives which were used to describe how the activities made students feel were: calm, relaxed, hungry, and empty.

Students participating in the focus group interviews also noted that they found the time to discuss their feelings, before and after the mindfulness activities, beneficial. Student 4 mentioned that, "I am not someone who talks about their feelings very often, and I keep them inside, so sharing helped a lot." On another note, Student 5 pointed out the difficulty of sharing with peers in a virtual setting, saying, "Online I could barely hear anything, and it was relieving to be able to share how I was doing with everyone else [once they rejoined class in-person]."

When students were asked if they would recommend the mindfulness activities to others in their school, most students seemed to agree that the rest of the school could benefit from them. Student 3 responded by saying, "Yes, I think it will calm them down. Especially the 4th and 5th graders because they have a lot of tests." Also, in reference to the safety mask protocols in place because of COVID-19 precautions, Student 7 mentioned that, "It is a nice way to connect with the class and the teacher when everyone has to wear a mask."

Overall, the focus group interviews revealed several positive impacts of the mindfulness intervention that were not covered in the pre- and post- surveys. Students had many positive

things to say about completing the mindfulness lessons as a class. Specifically, students felt that these activities helped them feel more relaxed- releasing lingering anxiety, and they enjoyed having structured opportunities to share their feelings with one another.

Conclusions

Ultimately, it seems that the two-week mindfulness intervention slightly increased students' cognitive engagement and mental wellbeing. Based on the Likert-style surveys and students' reflections in the focus group interviews, it seems that students recognized the ways that the mindfulness activities helped them achieve a calmer, more focused, state of mind after completing the exercises. In future reiterations of this study, it would be interesting to consider the impacts of a mindfulness intervention on students with lower reported baseline scores in the pre-survey questions.

The short duration of this mindfulness intervention is certainly a limitation to the efficacy of this study as well. In order to promote students' social and emotional wellbeing and classroom engagement, it is important for teachers to make community-building and mindfulness practices a regular part of their routine. With only two weeks to discuss and practice mindful behaviors with this class, the impact of this intervention was limited by time. In addition to the timing of this intervention, the learning platform utilized for the first week of the action-research project likely affected the effectiveness of the mindfulness activities on students' engagement and mental wellbeing as well. For the first week of the intervention, half of the class was online, in a synchronous hybrid learning model-so it was difficult for those online to communicate with their peers and have the same experience as those in the classroom.

Given the circumstances, and COVID-19 safety protocols, students from the study class have been asked to learn away from the school building for the greater part of this school year. The pivot to remote learning has been difficult on students' mental wellbeing for many reasons. A common theme that students brought up in focus group interviews was that the activities left them feeling calm and relaxed, and others even mentioned how it helped relieve their anxiety. While this action research study did not specifically target anxiety as an outcome marker, the effects of mindfulness education on students' anxiety levels would be another interesting strand for future research. Aside from the anxiety that students face from sources like test-taking or negotiating peer dynamics, this past year has brought on unique student-concerns related to health and safety that teachers must be prepared to meet.

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Science Outdoors!

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Introduction: Students nowadays are spending more time inside sitting at a desk or using technology and less and less time outdoors interacting with their natural environment. However, *Locate, Plan, Develop, Use An Outdoor Classroom* (US Department of Agriculture, 1975) emphasizes the importance of fostering the interrelationship between students and their natural environment by encouraging students to learn outside. In this study, the “outdoors” does not have to necessarily be a wilderness environment or an extreme, unmanicured ecosystem. It simply refers to outdoor settings, specifically a school courtyard or field. One does not necessarily need extreme environments for students to feel close to nature. As *Locate, Plan, Develop, Use An Outdoor Classroom* (US Department of Agriculture, 1975) explains, outdoor learning only needs real and authentic soil, water, birds, and plants for a student to gain firsthand knowledge of the natural environment. Students need engagement through experiential learning, learning within the context of nature rather than about nature. As Cahyono et al. (2016) explain, students should use nature to shape the way they think about school, rather than using school to shape the way they think about nature. Learning by interacting with the outdoors could also boost achievement, which in this study, is directly correlated with engagement. Abbatiello (2014) explains that with the novelty of going outside during classroom instruction time, students are so interested and engaged that they learn more and gain a more practical knowledge that is therefore applicable to the world around them. Höper & Köller (2018) explain that

subjects are given the chance to mend the disconnect between what is learned in the classroom and what is true about the world. Experiencing knowledge outdoors in its natural environment forces students to see the misconceptions they had made when they were learning in the classroom, connecting theoretical concepts with the practical world.

Most research to date only focuses on early elementary students in the context of outdoor play, reserving discussion of curriculum outdoors for the older grades. Because of this gap in the research and the need to balance following standards and engaging students in new, fun ways, this study focused on the following research question: To what extent is outdoor instruction an effective method in which kindergarten students can practically learn and engage with science content information in its natural environment?

Methodology: One kindergarten class was asked to participate in the study, and its goal was to see the effects of teaching science class outdoors on student engagement and achievement.

Following the North Carolina Science Essential Standards, the lesson segment focused on forces and motion, and students manipulated, observed, and recorded how different objects and organisms move in the natural environment.

The researcher observed the students' level of engagement and excitement from getting to go outdoors and experience science in its natural environment. During the activity, students completed worksheets that depicted the movement of different objects and organisms that they observed outside. These artifacts were used to analyze student understanding of the movements. The students were asked to participate in a focus group after the intervention was completed to help the researcher understand their responses to the activity: whether they liked the activity, what they learned from going outside, if they would want to go outside again, if they felt like they could pay attention sufficiently, etc. All of the information gathered was then assessed qualitatively, combining the data from field notes and observation, student artifacts, and focus

group interviews to determine whether holding class outdoors in the natural environment increased student engagement and achievement during science instruction.

Results and Conclusions: The study took place over four consecutive outdoor science classes. For each class, there were roughly 15 students present. During the first lesson, the students observed objects that can or cannot move on their own and how they moved. In the second lesson, they tried to see what would happen when they pushed objects, and the third and fourth lessons both involved manipulating gravity and dropping objects outside.

Observations and fieldnotes revealed that students remained engaged and on-task for the entirety of the time spent outside. They spent the entire time observing and manipulating what they were instructed to do, rather than getting off topic or playing around freely. Students definitely had a great variety of stimuli to observe and manipulate, as many students came up to the teacher with different ideas and objects. They loved to share the variety of their discoveries, particularly when they were given an opportunity to share and present their findings at the end of the activity once they returned indoors. They genuinely seemed to enjoy themselves outdoors—smiling constantly and talking to different classmates than their usual partners from stationary and socially distanced desk group activities. Many students opted to work in teams and acted interested in each others' thoughts and findings, showing that they were developing socially as an added bonus to the academic benefits. After the first science lesson outdoors, students so looked forward to going outside for class that it was even used as an incentive, encouraging the students to work hard and focus throughout the day leading up to the science activity because they knew they would get a little more fun, fresh air, and freedom when the time allotted for science came. Science quickly became the favorite subject that everyone looked forward to in the class, even the students who often need a little more redirection or discipline. These often

behaviorally problematic students looked forward to science and expressed their interest in going outside more than anyone, which was great because these students often ended up helping their classmates, socializing positively, showing off their discoveries, and working harder than they would have if they had been indoors.

The student artifacts showed that most students were effectively engaged throughout the lesson outdoors, as most students completed the worksheets that they were given on their clipboards during the properly allotted time given in each lesson. The objects and movements of these objects that the students were asked to draw and depict were also accurate, drawing arrows downward to show gravity. The students also drew swirls to show how the helicopter leaves fell and zig-zags for how something like a leaf or a paper fell. They also circled the predictions of how an object would move accurately, like whether something would fall fast or slow or recording whether they were able to move an object when they pushed. Even after completing these worksheets, most students continued to manipulate objects and record extra findings, several students recording up to six manipulatives rather than the required two or three. Other more advanced students helped their peers who were not yet finished. This teamwork demonstrated how the students started forming new bonds and friendships that they had not established before in a socially distanced classroom. The struggling learners who often do not complete their work were helped and encouraged by students who usually finish their work quickly or who slack off because something appears too easy.

The focus groups made it abundantly clear that the students enjoyed going outdoors for science and learned a lot in the process. Every student in each group expressed that they enjoyed going outside for science and would want to do it again. They also unanimously said that they learned a lot when they went outside, which was confirmed by their answers to the questions in

the focus group interview. All of the students could name objects that could or could not move on their own. They even named objects that we had not talked about in class but that they could predict could or could not move, like waves in water, a rat, a chair, the floor, and a dog. When asked if a brick or a ball would be harder to push, they knew the brick would be more difficult to push because it is “hard, heavy, strong, and a ball can roll.” They knew what would happen to a ball once it was dropped, “go down, bounce, roll”, and that this was caused by gravity, and they were able to describe how a piece of paper and a book would fall and why they fell differently, explaining that “the book would fall first because it has more weight” and “because it’s hard, and it’s heavy”. These focus groups supported the idea that teaching science outdoors is both engaging and entertaining for students, while providing an interactive space for them to truly learn in such a way that is exciting and memorable. When asked what students thought when they went outside and what they learned, many responded that they loved dropping the spinning helicopter leaves, and some even extended the question to how it made school in general more fun: “It’s always super good to learn. I learned so much stuff and liked it all!”, “It feels like it’s playing outside! Like recess!”, “The spinning thing! I love this school”. This really shows that not only does having class outdoors boost student achievement, but it also boosts student morale and engagement in class.

This study aimed to discover the extent to which outdoor instruction is an effective method in which kindergarten students can practically learn and engage with science content information in its natural environment. Through field notes and observations, student artifacts, and focus groups, there was evidence that the students’ science engagement and achievement both increased because of the time spent outdoors during class. Observations showed that students appeared to be entertained, smiling, socializing, and engaged throughout the time

allotted, they completed all of the work given to them on the student artifacts, and they expressed a significant amount of information in the focus groups that they had learned, as well as commenting on how much they enjoyed going outdoors, which impacted their general attitude toward school as a whole. In a world where students are glued to screens for most of the day, teaching science outdoors allowed for more experiential learning and memorable lessons. Students were then able to apply what they learned about to what they saw in their everyday environments, and they appreciated learning and nature in a whole new light.

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Dialogic Reading Practices

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Introduction

Emerging readers are drawn in to reading when they find books that excite or interest them. One method of initiating interest in reading that is done by both parents and teachers is reading aloud. It is widely believed and stated that the read-aloud experience increases students' vocabulary development and comprehension growth (Morrison & Włodarczyk, 2009). Dialogic reading is a method that incorporates strategic questioning and responding to children while reading a book. Dialogic reading can initiate an engagement with reading that keeps students interested. Engaging with a book or text requires active thinking and reflecting, which improves comprehension (Morrison & Włodarczyk, 2009).

These studies make it clear that reading books aloud to emerging readers is capable of having a positive effect on vocabulary and language development as well as understanding. There is less research, however, on how impactful specific methods can be on reading comprehension and engagement. Therefore this study is important as it will examine these particular methods and consider the importance of prompting and engaging students throughout readings.

Literature Review

Read-aloud and Vocabulary

It has been widely found that reading aloud to young students is beneficial for their vocabulary development as well as other critical skills. Zucker et. al. (2013) studied 178 preschool students and found that the frequency of read-alouds were positively and significantly related to children's vocabulary growth, as was the inclusion of extratextual conversations around the text. The act of reading aloud to children exposes them to new words and phrases, but

discussing the story afterwards gives the students even more of an opportunity to interact with the new words.

Dialogic Reading Activities and Programs

Dialogic reading and its effects have been tested through different programs and methods. Ergül et al. (2016) implemented an Adapted Dialogic Reading program (ADR) to see the effects it had on language, print awareness, and phonological awareness. The results of this study revealed that ADR was effective in promoting the language and early literacy skills of kindergarteners in treatment conditions including home based intervention.

Questioning

There are multiple practices that are a part of dialogic reading including asking questions, making predictions, and creating connections. Rouech (2013) studied the types of questions that teachers asked while reading aloud, the responses students give, and the change in responses due to how the questions were worded. The findings of the study support the importance and need for specific training for educators in formulating questions for discussions in order to give students more responsibility for the thinking in classroom talks (Rouech, 2013). Critical thinking and deeper understanding is fostered through questions that are more than just yes or no and require a thought-out response.

Engagement and Attitude

Incorporating dialogic reading practices allows students the opportunity to interact with the book in multiple ways. Prompting students with questions, connections, asking for predictions, etc. requires students to be engaged with the text. LaCour et al. (2013) studied the impact parents incorporating dialogic reading methods in their at-home reading would have on the child's attitude and interest in reading. Through the analysis of the comments from pre and post surveys, parents indicated an improvement in attitude toward reading and interest in storybook reading at home when dialogic reading techniques were used (LaCour et al., 2013). The more enjoyable these dialogic reading practices are, the more engaged the students will be, which makes them more likely to reach a higher level of comprehension.

The present study aims to look for new connections between dialogic reading practices and reading comprehension and engagement during the read-alouds. The research question being studied is: What effect do different dialogic reading strategies such as asking questions, making

connections and making predictions have on first graders reading comprehension and engagement?

Methodology

Participants

This action research study was conducted in the spring of 2021 in a school district in the southeast. Data was gathered from a first grade class at a school with 637 students. All students in the researcher's field placement class participated in the study.

Intervention

The intervention in this study was dialogic reading practices that involved the students throughout read-alouds on each of the five lesson days. During the readings, the researcher asked specific questions and asked the students to make predictions at different points throughout the story. The students were then asked to complete some sort of comprehension task.

Outcomes

The outcomes to be studied are student engagement and reading comprehension. Data on engagement for this study was collected through video recorded lessons and researcher-created post attitude surveys. Similarly, data on comprehension was collected through regular class post-read-aloud comprehension questions, activities, student work products, and researcher field notes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included a quantitative analysis of Likert style survey questions on post engagement surveys. Quantitative analysis was done on the comprehension questions and worksheets. Teacher notes as well as video recordings were used to analyze class discussions, informal formative assessments and student quotes. These were analyzed qualitatively to assess the engagement level of students during the read-alouds.

Results

Reading Comprehension

This research was conducted over five weeks and each week a book was read with dialogic reading practices and worksheets centered around one of the five tasks were given for

the students to complete independently. The worksheets were then collected and analyzed. The data is represented below.

After reading “Katy No-Pocket” by Emmy Payne, 14% of students were able to only correctly write what the problem was in the story, 7% only identified the solution correctly, and 79% answered both parts correctly.

After reading “Miss Mingo and the Fire Drill” by Jamie Harper, 100% of the students correctly identified both the characters and the setting.

After reading “Wise Up, Silly Owl” by Steve Metzger, 10% of the students correctly identified one out of three parts (beginning, middle, and end) of the story, 10% identified two out of three parts, and 80% identified all three parts correctly.

After listening to “Sylvester and the Magic Pebble” by William Steig, 85% of students correctly answered if their prediction made in the middle of reading was right or not once the story was over.

After reading “The Little Red Hen Makes a Pizza” by Philemon Sturges, 45% of students mistakenly switched two pictures in the sequence of events of the story, while the rest completed the entire sequence correctly.

Engagement

Engagement was also assessed through a survey completed by a focus group of five students. This survey consisted of Likert style questions which asked the students to share their thoughts and attitude towards the read-alouds and comprehension tasks they completed. The data is displayed below.

The first part of the survey asked students to answer yes or no after being given a question about their feelings towards reading and comprehension. Most of the responses were positive, as will be discussed in the conclusion.

The second part of the survey asked the students to circle the face which accurately represented their feelings towards reading. To the question, “What are your feelings about reading?”, 3 students circled the smiley face, 1 the “middle” face, and 1 the frowny face. To the question, “What are your feelings about the books we have read together each week in class?”, 2 circled the smiley face and 3 circled the “middle” face.

In the videos that were recorded of each lesson, it can be seen that the students respond well, meaning they are looking at the book and multiple students are raising their hands to

participate to certain prompts. These prompts were all related to prediction. The students also caught on well to patterns that emerged and were able to predict what characters would say or do next if repetition was utilized in the story.

There were also instances of students losing focus. When the read-aloud continued for a stretch of multiple pages without stopping for a prediction or connection, the videos demonstrate that the students began to fidget and look away from the book.

Conclusions

Reading Comprehension

Through assessing the worksheets completed by the students after each read-aloud, it can be concluded that the students had strong reading comprehension when exposed to dialogic reading practices. With the first four books and tasks, 79% or more of the students completed each worksheet entirely correctly. The only activity/task that differed from these results was the “Sequencing” worksheet. Almost half of the students had two of the pictures switched, but the other pictures were in the correct order.

Overall, the students performed very well on their comprehension tasks which indicates that they had paid attention and were engaged throughout the read-alouds. Questions asked such as, “What do you think will happen next?” and “What happened in the beginning?” seemed to have a positive impact on the students’ comprehension and ability to correctly answer the questions given to them. It is evident that incorporating dialogic practices resulted in high performance on reading comprehension tasks.

Engagement

In terms of engagement, the focus group of students responded positively, for the most part, on their engagement survey. All five students answered yes to these questions: “Did you like the books that I read to you each week?”, “Did the questions I asked while we were reading help you do the worksheets?”, and “Did the questions while we were reading help you to listen closely?”. Considering these were all “yes’s”, it is reasonable to conclude that the students enjoyed the books that were read to them and felt that the method of reading aloud helped them to complete their comprehension questions. This is slightly conflicted by the last question on the survey which asked the students, “What are your feelings about the books we have read together each week in class?” and prompts them to circle the face that most demonstrates their feelings.

The response was two smiley faces and three “middle” faces. Even with this, is evident that mostly the students enjoyed the stories, as well as the way they were read. A positive attitude towards reading and enjoyment of listening to the books leads to stronger engagement.

Through examining the video recordings of the read-alouds, it is reasonable to conclude that incorporating dialogic reading practices during read-alouds increases engagement in first grade students.

Implications

This research presents an opportunity to further appreciate the importance of read-alouds in younger elementary classrooms. It has been demonstrated that dialogic reading practices can increase engagement as well as result in strong comprehension. There are many implications for further research based off of these results. It would be useful to examine how tone, movement, etc. of the teacher while reading impacts students’ engagement as well as comprehension. There is so much that goes into an engaging read-aloud and many more aspects of it can and should be researched to improve teachers’ methods.

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The Influence of Kinesthetic Revision Strategies on Students' Metacognitive Awareness of the Revision Process

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Historically, writing has been taught as a linear process in the secondary English classroom as students pre-write using a graphic organizer, draft their writing, and revise after receiving end comments from the teacher. While writing is traditionally linear in approach, revision is commonly devalued in the high school classroom and may be traditionally overlooked in the writing process (Milner et al., 2017). Another potentially overlooked component of the writing process is students' metacognitive awareness, which is instrumental in their development as writers and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Raphael et al. (1989) expand upon metacognition as a process that impacts a student's ability to generalize content and transfer this content across disciplines. Raphael et al. further clarify that there is a link between skilled writers and those who think metacognitively about the writing process. This positive relationship between metacognitive awareness and skilled writers suggests that metacognitive awareness is instrumental in developing students as critical thinkers, active learners, and skilled writers. However, it is not clear how much instructional time is spent on learning activities that disrupt the linear writing process and provide students with the skills to build up their meta-awareness of themselves as writers and learners. This research project sought to disrupt this traditional linear approach to writing and explore the following question: How does recursive, kinesthetic learning activities influence students' metacognitive awareness in the revision process?

Literature Review

Borkowski et al. (1990) found a link between self-efficacy and students' metacognitive awareness; students with a high level of self-esteem showed more meta-awareness than those with a low level of self-esteem. These characteristics of skilled writers and learners suggest that metacognitive awareness and academic success and growth are inextricably linked. Therefore, a learner with a strong metacognitive awareness of writing may be more empowered and more skillful in their writing than a learner who lacks that awareness.

Writing practices and classroom instruction directly contrast this theoretical understanding of writing as a recursive process as historical scholarship suggests that almost all revision is completed after the writing is done. For instance, Applebee's (1981) empirical, seminal, and oft-cited report on the state of writing in the classroom found,

Most writing instruction takes place before students begin to write, or retrospectively after the writing is complete. There are few techniques, however, that teachers can use to provide instructional support during the writing task itself, either by segmenting the task or simply being available as a resource when the student needs help. (p. 80)

Applebee's findings suggest that most revision practices or writing instruction precedes or follows the writing process; revision and instruction are not completed intermittently during writing. The practice of revising at the conclusion of a writing assignment confirms this approach as a linear activity and suggests outdated views that writing is a product, not a process.

Applebee's (1981) research contrasts the pragmatic state of revision; while revising is of paramount importance to the writing process, it is unclear how much revising actually occurs in secondary education. In fact, Applebee's work is challenged by more contemporary scholarship that finds almost no revision occurs at the secondary level. Yancey (2009) argues that it is a challenge to bring revision into the secondary classroom, but it is of the utmost importance to do so. Scherff and Piazza (2005) surveyed 2,000 high schoolers in Florida and found that the pre-writing and drafting portion of the writing process were emphasized, while time to revise was often omitted from the writing process. These scholars suggest that product-centered writing is emphasized in high schools, and students may have minimal time to engage in peer review. Collectively, these findings confirm that revision is an important part of the writing process, but dedicated time to revise is often missing in students' learning experiences.

It is widely accepted that different modes of learning engage students and can make learning authentic and meaningful; however, this dichotomy between theory and practice persists as instruction seems to value one learning style over another. Historically, the English classroom has valued linguistic, verbal, and auditory intelligence through solitary writing assignments, class discussions, and lectures. However, Milner et al. (2017) highlight the importance of three other prominent styles of learning: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. These authors suggest that auditory learning involves learning through listening, visual learning involves learning through seeing, and kinesthetic (tactile) learning involves learning through exploring. While all of these

approaches seem to be worthwhile, kinesthetic learning can provide students the opportunities to engage with their writing through doing, not only reading, seeing, or listening. Writing is often completed in solitude in the classroom, and kinesthetic revision strategies have the potential to make writing come alive in or out the classroom environment.

The definition of kinesthetic learning as learning through exploring (Milner et al., 2017) is expanded by Barnes and Jaqua (2011), who define kinesthetic learning as the “language of motion” (p. 97). This definition is also expounded upon by Simeone (1995) who argues that kinesthetic learning is the “learning of doing” (p. 60). Simeone takes the definition one step further as she explicates that kinesthetic learning values active learning, not passive learning. These three definitions are all rooted in the concept of active learning, or learning through doing. Therefore, this shared definition provides valuable insight into the nature of kinesthetic learning in the classroom and offers new possibilities for teaching writing.

Methods

This study took place in a suburban high school in the southeastern United States. The school operates on a two-semester block schedule with students taking four classes per semester; each class period was 90 minutes long. This 10th grade Honors English class met synchronously every day for 90 minutes, and the class was conducted during the second semester after a semester of full virtual, remote learning. Furthermore, this class was operating on a hybrid schedule at the time of the research; about 60% of the class remained at home, while 40% of the class opted to come back to school in person. For the purposes of this research, students completed the learning activity synchronously and completed the revision journals and writing revisions asynchronously.

This research focused on writing instruction and revision techniques of two long-form writing assignments, including two literary analysis papers. The teaching strategies in this unit began with the introduction of the first long-form writing assignment, the literary analysis paper, and continued throughout the final draft of the second long-form writing assignment, a comparative literary analysis. All students worked through four proposed mini-lessons, described in the paragraphs below, for both long-form writing assignments; however, the order of mini-lessons changed between the two long-form essays due to unexpected logistical concerns. Despite the change in order, the mini-lessons began with a focus on development of ideas and concluded with revising for grammar and mechanics.

This research consisted of a series of four proposed mini-lessons with a focus on kinesthetic revision techniques: (1) Play-Doh and Peer Review, (2) Color-Coded Revision, (3) Walking Out An Argument, and (4) Syntax, Punctuation, & Movement. These proposed mini-lessons were implemented intermittently throughout the research and writing process as opposed to the conclusion of students' writing assignments. Furthermore, these proposed mini-lessons focused on students' development of claims and their overall form in writing as opposed to the grammar, syntax, and mechanics of writing. The researcher designed these mini-lessons purposefully so that form and content precede mechanics in writing.

Data were collected through pre-, mid-, and post-questionnaires, student writing portfolios, student reflection journals following revision mini-lessons, and student reflections at the conclusion of the writing process. The questionnaires were two-fold: (1) questions about students' personal beliefs and attitudes toward writing and revision and (2) questions about students' understanding of their own metacognitive awareness. These questionnaires were administered prior to the mini-lessons, at the conclusion of the first long-form essay, and at the conclusion of the second long-form writing assignment. The data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis via open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to look for relevant themes. The use of multiple data collection methods not only helped to triangulate data from the study but also allowed for a deeper and more enriching understanding of the connection between revision, kinesthetic learning, and students' metacognitive awareness.

Results

Several themes emerged from the collected data: revision, learner profiles, and metacognition. Essentially, this research project concluded that the processes of revising and writing are linked, visual learning was more impactful than kinesthetic revision, and recursive revision transforms fixed mindsets into growth mindsets.

Essentially, students' narrative descriptions of the major takeaways from writing suggest that students felt more positively influenced by revision done recursively. Student J wrote on the mid-point questionnaire: "I like revising... I think it makes my writing better and has more structure. I don't know how much better my writing can be until I compare my last revision to my first one." Student G's reflections from the revision activities echo those of Student J: "That your writing is not perfect the first time. It takes a lot of revising and editing to get it to where it needs to be." Student H, similarly, reflects on the writing process: "A rough draft is important

when writing a paper so you can go back and see what you can improve after revising and it will help you learn and be a stronger writer.” Similarly, Student L also reflects on the revision process: “Rewrite essay many times to make it your best.” While the responses are unique to each student, the unifying element is that the timing of revising is particularly impactful.

Students’ narrative reflections on the impact of the writing and revising mini-lessons suggest that visual revision activities are much more effective and impactful than kinesthetic activities as students can see what they have done well and what they are missing, which are important components to help them to revise their writing. In the same vein, students’ reflection journals and mid-questionnaires suggest that understanding oneself as a learner is important and can influence students’ metacognitive awareness. When coding student responses, it became apparent that visual learning more positively impacted outcomes than kinesthetic learning. Overwhelmingly, students’ responses suggested that color-coded revision, for example, was more beneficial for improving students’ writing in meaningful and productive ways.

At the end of the study, Student B described herself as a “growing” writer. Similarly, Student D reflected on their attitude toward writing at the conclusion of the research: “I feel good but I know its [*sic*] not perfect.” Overwhelmingly, while students were not so much more polarized in their feelings toward writing, they were more united in that they realized that their writing is imperfect. Through continuing to revise and draft subsequent writing assignments students can continue to learn about themselves as writers. Essentially, students recognize that writing is a process and through continued practice, they can continue to develop whether they feel confident or not in their abilities; at all levels, students can recognize their ability to grow.

Discussion

This research process sought to examine the influence of recursive, kinesthetic revision on students’ metacognitive awareness of the revision process. Findings suggest that providing students with the space and opportunity to return to their own writing can have a positive influence not only on their meta-awareness but also on their understanding of themselves as learners. While the activities in this study were focused primarily on kinesthetic learning, this research bore important conclusions regarding learning preferences as well.

This research suggests that teaching writing should be approached through inquiry. Essentially, students can engage in activities that allow them to learn more about themselves as learners. For example, the kinesthetic elements of the learning activities were less influential

overall on students' meta-awareness than the auditory and visual learning activities. However, without exposing students to those kinesthetic activities, students might not have had the opportunity to consider their writing identities. This unintended finding suggests that classrooms should be spaces where students can explore their identities as novice, not expert, writers. Furthermore, this research suggests that reflection is an integral part of the English classroom and that as students explore new ways of learning, they need to have space to reflect on their experiences and to learn more about themselves as readers *and* writers.

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Second Grade Students' Perspective on Influences over Wellbeing and Attitude Toward School

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Strong student-teacher relationships, high student wellbeing, and positive student attitudes toward school—also called school connectedness—are all factors that predict student academic achievement and success throughout their future endeavors (Evans-Whipp et al., 2017; Roorda et al., 2011; Stracuzzi & Mills, 2010). It is crucial to understand what students see as the most positive indicators of wellbeing and connectedness, as there is not much research from the student perspective. In order to fully understand the way students distinguish influences over their school connectedness and wellbeing, research must be conducted to analyze their point of view regarding student-teacher relationships, student attitude toward school, and wellbeing.

Student wellbeing is greatly influenced by external factors, especially physical environments and social relationships (Evans-Whipp et al., 2017). Students who receive high levels of support from both peers and teachers are more likely to have strong wellbeing and happiness, while those who feel isolated or lonely are far less likely (Stewart & Sun, 2004). The better a students' wellbeing is, the greater their future success will be—both academically and, ultimately, occupationally (Roorda et al., 2011). Student-teacher relationships (STRs) have a strong influence over the student's wellbeing as well, regardless of other factors present in the students' lives (Roorda et al., 2011; Sointu et al., 2017). STRs also heavily influence students' academic success, as well as their behavioral and emotional adjustment in school, their joy of learning, and their engagement in the classroom. (Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Roorda et al., 2011; Sointu et al., 2017). These factors, along with students' present academic success, influence students' attitudes toward school.

Review of Literature

Several studies have been conducted surrounding the influence of student-teacher relationships, school connectedness, and student wellbeing. These factors function together, with constant overlap and influence abounding from one to the next. In reviewing the related

literature, it is important to keep the intricate nature of these variables in mind, as many of the indicators repeat from variable to variable.

Literature indicates the many influences Student-Teacher Relationships (STRs) have over student engagement, wellbeing, academic achievement, and future academic career success (Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Roorda et al., 2011; Sointu et al., 2017; Stewart & Sun, 2004). There are strong associations between positive STRs with increased student engagement and achievement, while negative STRs are associated with plateaued or decreased student engagement and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011; Sointu et al., 2017). In addition, Stewart and Sun (2004) found that positive STRs were related to higher levels of general health and wellbeing in students. Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al. (2018) noted the influence of STRs over student joy of learning and positive learning conditions in the classroom. Sointu et al. (2017) highlighted the long-lasting influence a negative STR can have upon student success; these researchers found that negative STRs are associated with semi-permanent problematic behavior, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance.

One study highlights school connectedness as an incredibly important factor in building student socio-emotional wellbeing and positive youth development, and has been observed as a predictor of student success and future school completion (Stracuzzi & Mills, 2010). These researchers surveyed 657 high school students in New Hampshire and found that students who feel connected to their school report higher self-esteem, fewer depressive feelings, and fewer aggressive behaviors. However, it is important to note that much of the research conducted regarding school connectedness involves secondary students rather than elementary students. This is likely because school connectedness is such a strong predictor of student school completion; students who feel more connected to their school are more likely to graduate.

Student wellbeing is defined as a “broad and multi-faceted concept describing an aspiration for students to live a happy and fulfilling life. It includes a student’s subjective experience and their capabilities (psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning)” (Evans-Whipp et al., 2017, p. 6). Bowen (2011) surveyed 1,251 3rd-5th graders in 13 elementary schools across 4 districts and found that there are many domains of general wellbeing, but strong student wellbeing can be categorized by good physical health, positive feelings about self, good adjustment, and knowledge of where to find support. However, with regards to wellbeing in elementary age students, adjustment and physical health are not as crucial to investigate as

feelings about self and support. Student wellbeing is important in many ways, as it influences academic achievement, engagement, social connection, socio-emotional intelligence, and student aspirations (Evans-Whipp et al., 2017; Stewart & Sun, 2004).

Methods

This case study was conducted in a second-grade classroom at a public elementary school in the southeastern United States. All students were sent online assent forms to electronically sign, and all guardians were sent online informed consent forms to electronically sign. Nine students agreed to participate.

The class was observed for several days, with field notes taken by the researcher regarding classroom layout, student-teacher interactions, classroom management, and classroom environment details. The students participated in focus groups of 2-3 students discussing feelings regarding school, teachers, classmates, academics, family, and other factors related to wellbeing and connectedness. Post focus groups, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with all participants based on the conversations from focus groups.

Data on attitude and wellbeing for this study was collected through researcher field notes, audio recordings of focus groups, and audio recordings of interviews with students. Data was used to categorize indicators of positive or negative school connectedness and wellbeing.

The data was analyzed to discover second-graders' perception of influences over their wellbeing and attitudes toward school. The most common sources of positive or negative feelings were grouped. These were coded as positive indicators and negative indicators. These indicators were used to identify what students perceive as beneficial and detrimental in their classroom; this data analysis described student perceptions of influences on their attitudes toward school and wellbeing.

Results

The results of this research provide insight regarding the perception second graders have about indicators of positive or negative wellbeing and attitude toward school. The positive indicators are categorized into five themes: Academics, Teacher, Social Life, Independence, and Other. Specific influences are categorized within each the five themes according to responses provided by the participants. The Academics theme includes Specials and Joy of Learning; Joy of Learning was identified by 78% of participants as a positive influence over their wellbeing and connection to school. It refers to the enjoyment of the process of being introduced to,

understanding, and eventually mastering new information that occurs in classrooms across the globe. The Teacher theme includes Helpful Teacher, Kind Teacher, “Make Learning Fun” Teacher, and Multiple Adults. Helpful Teacher was identified by 67% of participants as a positive influence over their wellbeing and school connectedness; it refers to a teacher who makes themselves available to students as an aid, support, or accessible resource when students are struggling, confused, or lost. The Social Life theme includes Friends, Social Interaction, Recess, and Family Support. Friends was identified by 100% of participants as a positive influence over their wellbeing and attitude toward school; one participant shared in a focus group, “if there were no friends at school, I would never go!” The Independence theme includes Personal Space and Riding the Bus. Only 22% of participants identified Personal Space as a positive influence over their wellbeing and attitude toward school, but these participants noted that access to personal space impacted their happiness, work ethic, enjoyment of school immensely. The Other theme includes Field Trips and Outside Time. Outside Time was identified by 44% of participants as a positive influence on their wellbeing and connectedness; this influence is described as opportunities given to students to spend time outside at school. According to these results, Joy of Learning, Helpful Teacher, and Friends are the most-identified positive influences over second grade students’ wellbeing and attitude toward school.

The negative indicators are categorized into five themes: Academics, Teacher, Social Life, COVID-19, and Other. Specific influences are categorized within each the five themes according to responses provided by the participants. The Academics theme includes Anxiety and Content; Content was identified by 22% of participants as a negative influence over their wellbeing and connection to school. It refers to the curriculum taught in the classroom— participants who identified this influence felt the content they were learning was too easy. The Teacher theme includes Discipline. Discipline was identified by 44% of participants as a negative influence over their wellbeing and school connectedness; it refers to the reaction of a teacher when a student is off-task, misbehaving, or otherwise not doing what is expected of them. This was noted both by students who experienced discipline firsthand, and students who observed discipline occur at school. The Social Life theme includes Missing Family, Lack of Personal Space at Home, Limited Social interaction, and Lack of Independence. Missing Family was identified by 44% of participants as a negative influence over their wellbeing and attitude toward school; the feelings of sadness participants experience during the school day when they

are apart from their parents, siblings, or caretakers adversely impacted their attitudes and wellbeing. The COVID-19 theme includes Online Learning, Hybrid Learning, and COVID Protocols. 55% of participants identified COVID Protocols as a negative influence over their wellbeing and connection to school, noting frustration with wearing masks, social distancing, and shield-use during lunch as detrimental to their experience at school. The Other theme solely includes Length of School Day. This was identified by 55% of participants as a negative influence over their wellbeing and school connectedness; this influence is described as the amount of time students spend at school from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave. Most participants wished school began later, while one wished school ended earlier; all five wished to spend about 45 less minutes at school each day. According to these results, COVID Protocols, Length of School Day, Missing Family, and Discipline are the most-identified negative influences over second grade students' wellbeing and attitude toward school.

Conclusions

The themes found in this research allow teachers to understand common indicators of positive or negative wellbeing and attitudes toward school, as shared by these second-grade students. Friends, Joy of Learning, and Helpful Teacher are the most prevalent indicators of positive wellbeing and school connectedness, according to the results of this research. This information can allow teachers to implement practices that promote availability of these indicators in their classrooms. A teacher can work to become more available as a resource for support and aid, or they can strive to instill a passion for learning in their students. Teachers can also organize their classroom in a social way, incorporating student interaction in the learning process to promote friendships among classmates. COVID Protocols, Length of School Day, Missing Family, and Discipline are the most prevalent indicators of negative wellbeing and school connectedness, according to the results of this research. This information can allow school systems to revisit the structure of the school day, and potentially initiate a conversation about student attendance of school and involvement of family in the academic careers of students. It can also push for a release from COVID-19 protocols—hopefully these rules will soon no longer be necessary in elementary schools, as their negative impact is exhibited in the results of this case study. Finally, the negative influence discipline has upon students—whether they are the ones in trouble or merely observing a peer—is something teachers should consider when implementing classroom management strategies and interacting with off-task students.

Future Studies

The results of this case study provide information for teachers to utilize in their classrooms in order to support their students' wellbeing and attitudes toward school, as well as information for entire school systems to consider foundational elements of schooling. The results gathered allow for the student perspective to be understood and for teachers to implement classroom practices to influence positive wellbeing and school connectedness. However, this case study is far from all-encompassing—only nine students participated in the focus groups and interviews, and all nine were in the same class, at the same school, in the same location. The size of this study undoubtedly limits its application to various classrooms. This study could be expanded upon by teachers across the country; conducting focus groups and interviews with similar prompts involving students from all over would immensely improve the validity of these results, and provide a greater understanding of elementary student perceptions of positive and negative influences over their wellbeing and attitude toward school.

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Visual Arts Integration, Student Engagement, and Reader Response Journals

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When considering visual arts integration into the study of literature, the question educators must ask is not *if*, but *when* and *how*. Research surrounding the integration of visual arts in the English language arts (ELA) classroom suggests that visual art can serve as a powerful tool to invite students to both affectively and cognitively engage with higher-order thinking as they explore, analyze, and interpret a text (Eisenkraft, 1999; Holdren, 2012; Thomsen, 2018; Van Duinen & Sherwood, 2019). Because of the flexibility and complexity of visual art, literature, and pedagogy, there are many appropriate and effective answers to the *when* and *how* of visual arts-integration. One answer is in the context of reader response journals. A practical pedagogical application of Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory, reader response journals have been shown to provide students with regular opportunities to process verbally their ongoing, active relationships with literary texts (Berger, 1996; Fracareta & Phillips, 2000; Probst, 1994). This study adds an additional layer by seeking to explore the potential benefit to incorporating visual art into these journals, thus attempting to answer the question: How does visual-arts integration influence students' engagement with reader response journaling?

Literature Review

Reader response theory was established by renowned educational theorist Louise Rosenblatt in her 1978 book, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. In this piece, now widely regarded as the foundation for responsive teaching practices, Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that meaning is created when the reader consciously draws upon their intellectual and emotional responses to their perception of the features visible in the text. One tool that has become widely employed in the classroom because of its connection to reader response theory and the opportunities it presents in deepening reading and writing is the reader response journal. Reader response journals can house a multitude of types of entries—student reflections on class texts, thoughts on their independent reading, or answers to discussion questions (Berger, 1996; Fracareta & Phillips, 2000; Probst, 1994). The overarching principles that govern successful implementation

of these journals include (1) freedom from high-stakes grading, (2) carefully crafted open-ended questions to activate students' intellectual and emotional responses, (3) specific, substantive feedback from teachers, and (4) opportunities to share their writing with peers (Berger, 1996; Fracareta & Phillips, 2000; Probst, 1994). Overall, because of their strong potential for increasing students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement (Fredericks et al., 2011), reader response journals have become a staple in ELA classrooms (Milner et al., 2017).

Traditionally, ELA has maintained a literature and writing-based approach to literacy, yet recent pushes for a more expansive definition of literacy has encouraged educators to re-think their relationship to other forms of text (National Council of Teachers of English, 2005). As a form of communication and expression, visual art can be approached as a kind of "text," similar to how ELA approaches language arts. Both mediums require the audience to consciously observe the text itself as well as any internal responses to the work. In the classroom, utilizing visual art as a text has many pedagogical benefits. It allows students another entry point into meaning-making that accounts for multiple-intelligences (Gardner, 2011), provides opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking even for resistant or struggling readers (Eisenkraft, 1999), and encourages the use of metalanguage and builds metalinguistic skills (Callow, 2008). Holdren (2012) found that visual art provided opportunities for students with different working styles as well as collaborative problem-solving interests. Additionally, Thomsen (2018) found that her students exhibited increased confidence in visual and verbal literacy as well as strengthened student connection to identity and foster classroom community.

Methods

With extensive research supporting the pedagogical benefits of both reader response journals and visual arts-integrated practices for student engagement within the ELA context, this action research study seeks to understand the question: How does visual arts-integration influence student engagement with reader response journals? This study explores how students' engagement changes by prompting student creations of visual art to guide their response to current course texts, which included the works of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and other accompanying poets. Research was conducted during the spring of 2021 at a large public high school in a suburban school district in the southeastern United States and data were gathered during two sections of Honors English 10 in which the researcher student taught. Tenth grade students could self-select to participate in the research study. Thirty-six students were invited to

participate, but, after the researcher received parent/guardian consent and minor assent forms, the total number of students who chose to participate included twenty-five students.

The researcher implemented the two phases of reader response journals for the purpose of this study's inquiry into the potential influence of visual art-integration on students' engagement with reader response journals. The first two reader response journals were completed only through writing (hereafter referred to as written-only reader response journals). Then, the researcher assigned a second pair of reader response journals, which included a visual art element. While they continued to ask students to explore their responses to specific poems discussed in class, these reader response journals prompted students to create a visual art piece that captured their response to the poem, accompanied by a brief paragraph explaining their artistic choices. In each reader response journal, students were allowed to select from given prompts and, for the visual art reader response journals, students could choose the medium for their visual art piece. At the very end of the poetry unit, after students had completed all reader response journals, the researcher invited students to participate in a gallery walk of the class's visual art reader responses.

Data for this study were collected through pre-, mid-, and post-questionnaires, student-produced artifacts in the form of Google Documents containing written-only reader response paragraphs as well as visual art pieces and accompanying written explanation, and observational field notes. The pre-questionnaire was administered prior to assigning the first two written-only reader response journals; the mid-questionnaire was administered in-between completion of the two written-only and the two visual-arts integrated reader response journals; and the post-questionnaire was administered after students had completed all reader response journals. All questionnaires comprised ten statements for which students responded to Likert scale statements; however, in the post-questionnaire, students were asked an additional open-ended question: "Has incorporating visual art into reader response journals influenced your interest, or engagement, level? If so, how?" The researcher triangulated evidence from questionnaires, student artifacts, and observational notes during data analysis, specifically targeting the post questionnaire's open-ended question responses.

Results

Through constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), three themes emerged from the data: pathways to understanding, creativity and expression, and interest in modality. Of

the twenty-five students participating in the study, thirteen, or 52%, responded to the post-questionnaire's open-ended question by mentioning their ability to comprehend poetry, their ability to make meaning from the poems, or their ability to think about poetry in different ways. Students' post-questionnaire responses often linked the visual nature of visual arts-integrated reader response journals to their ability to explore layers of meaning within the text, and students' visual arts-integrated reader response journals demonstrated their ability to take their growing skills in identifying and analyzing poetic devices and transfer them to their artistic choices within their compositions. Furthermore, students also remarked that visual arts-integrated reader response journals opened new ways of thinking about poetry, with Student 20 saying, "I definitely felt more involved in reading. It helped find more meaning within each text. I was able to use my brain a little differently. I felt more confident in answering questions to the text. Art helped me understand other ways to think about the poem, to visualize it."

Out of twenty-five students, nine, or 36%, referred to their own creativity or self-expression when responding to the post-questionnaire. Students spoke about enjoying the flexibility of visual art to convey meaning in multiple ways, noted visual art's ability to create and enhance visual experiences, and touched on the power of these opportunities for meaningful, creative self-expression to invigorate willingness to spend time and energy learning. While participants' visual arts-integrated reader response journals varied in exploration of materials, thoughtfulness in composition, and level of personal intimacy, many students' visual art pieces visibly took time to brainstorm, envision, and create. However, not all students saw creativity and self-expression as positive elements associated with visual art; Student 25 expressed frustration with what he described as a gap between coming up with creative ideas, but not possessing the skill to represent them well through the medium of visual art. This perspective may have been shared by others in the classroom even though they did not explicitly give voice to it during the study.

Eight out of twenty-five students, or 32%, included language that focused on their level of engagement with visual art as a modality. For many students, their level of interest in visual art was a critical component in their assessment of their engagement levels during the reader response journal assignments. Several students expressed the fact that their interest in creating visual art was a significant factor in their enjoyment of the visual arts-integrated reader response journals. Student 3 captured this sentiment in her response, saying, "I am a creative person and

enjoy making art and things like this give me an excuse to do so.” However, other students voiced their disinterest in visual art, describing it as a barrier to engaging with reader response journals. These statements coincide with two Likert scale questions asked on the pre-, mid-, and post-questionnaires: Question 5, “I am interested in creating visual art,” and Question 10, “I am a creative person.” From pre- to post-questionnaire, the number of students who marked that Question 5 was “very true” of them decreased from fourteen to ten out of twenty-five, while the number of those who marked “somewhat true” of them increased from five to nine out of twenty-five. In contrast, the number of “very true” and “somewhat true” responses to Question 10 remained almost identical from pre- to post-assessment. These data draw a distinction between students’ interest in the modality of visual art and their self-identification as creative.

Discussion

Out of twenty-five students, thirteen, or 52%, responded to the post-questionnaire’s open-ended question by expressing that visual arts-integration to reader response journals influenced their abilities to comprehend, make meaning from, or think about poetry in different ways. This supports the findings of Berger (1996), whose research reported that consistent use of reader response journals, combined with carefully-crafted open-ended prompts, yielded a significant increase in the depth of students’ articulation of meaning within course texts. Students’ emphasis on new and intriguing ways of approaching texts supports the work of Holdren (2012), whose research found that visual art offers invaluable opportunities for differentiation and honoring of students’ diverse strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Nine out of twenty-five students, or 36%, emphasized the significance of creativity and self-expression in their engagement level with the reader response journal assignments. Students’ use of the emotionality of visual art as a means to critical thinking supports Eisenkraft’s (1999) study that found visual art to be a valuable entry point to making meaning in literature because it accounts for Gardner’s (2011) theory of multiple intelligences and encourages all students, not just those proficient in the literacy of written language, to participate in higher-order thinking. Eight out of twenty-five students, or 32%, pointed to their interest level in the modality of visual art as a key factor in their engagement in reader response journals. This emphasis on the importance of modality supports NCTE’s (2005) statement on multimodal literacies, which includes the claim that ‘multiple ways of knowing’ ... should not be considered curricular luxuries.”

With the integration of visual art to the reader response journals, data from the study suggests that students' engagement with reader response journals was, on average, positively influenced by the visual art component. Because of the considerable limitations with time constraints that inhibited the researcher's ability to provide feedback on students' reader response journals, future research may investigate the potential influence of teacher feedback on student engagement with reader response journals, isolating other variables to provide insight on the extent of the significance of teacher feedback in this area. Additionally, students' overwhelmingly negative connotation with poetry as course text raises the opportunity for future researchers to examine whether the genre of text being studied has an effect on student engagement with reader response journals.

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Whispering and Thundering Witness: Studying the Effects of Textual Primary Sources on Affective Historical Empathy

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Historical empathy and primary sources are at the heart of much research and practice in social studies education. The National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS] writes, “Historical inquiry is based on materials from the past that can be studied and analyzed” (C3 Framework, 2013, p. 48). The C3 Framework (2013) categorizes these materials as primary sources. Historical empathy research studies have been driven by research questions as diverse as: how a particular history teacher might encourage or discourage objective and subjective elements of historical empathy (Brooks, 2011); a focus on understanding the process, as opposed to simply the outcomes, of historical empathy in students (Endacott, 2014); the intent to study the impact of an electronic application and mobile devices on student engagement with primary sources and historical empathy (Friedman & Garcia, 2013); and whether or not students’ social identities, including such factors as race, gender, and ethnicity, affect student engagement in historical empathy (Perrotta, 2018). It seems that to be in alignment with the NCSS C3 Framework (n.d.) and current research regarding social studies education where primary sources are often considered a cornerstone of historical inquiry, historical empathy must be understood as an essential lens through which we analyze, study, and interpret that cornerstone. Though it appears historical empathy is an important ingredient in understanding primary sources, this study attempts to understand if and how primary sources are an effective means for increasing student historical empathy. Specifically, this study attempts to understand if and how text-based primary sources are an effective means for increasing student affective historical empathy.

Literature Review

The Library of Congress (n.d.) asserts:

Primary sources are the raw materials of history – original documents and objects that were created at the time under study. They are different from secondary sources, accounts

that retell, analyze, or interpret events, usually at a distance of time or place (Getting Started with Primary Sources, para. 1).

Moreover, the C3 Framework (2013) makes it clear that primary sources come in a multitude of forms and presents primary sources as sources that must be understood within a complex web of the source itself, intended audience, maker, and purpose. Inference is also something that may be necessary in dealing with many of the levels of this web of understanding.

Concerning the use of primary sources in social studies education, Veccia (2004) contends, “Nearly every state in the nation requires the use of primary resources [sources] at some level in K-12 instruction” (p. 1). Though Veccia (2004) argues that it was difficult to locate “appropriate primary sources” (p. 2) until the mid-1990s, she shows their greatly increased accessibility for teachers by detailing several primary-source collections.

Moving to historical empathy, we must note that it is a complicated topic. Barton and Levstik (2008) introduce the topic succinctly, stating, “Perhaps no feature of history education has inspired as much discussion, debate, criticism, and avoidance as the concept of empathy” (p. 206). Barton and Levstik (2008) provide a very influential understanding of historical empathy for modern scholarship on the subject, thus we will start with their definition. They divide historical empathy into two categories: perspective recognition and care. While perspective recognition is largely emphasized in cognitive terms and revolves around “explaining historical actions in terms of the attitudes, beliefs, and intentions of people in the past” (p. 223), care is emphasized in emotional terms and revolves around individuals’ emotional and personal relations, thoughts, and feelings regarding the past as it relates to the past, present, and future.

Furthermore, not only the C3 Framework (2013), but the Library of Congress (n.d.), the work of Furay and Salevouris (2009), and Wineburg (1991), all point to the necessity of historical empathy in historical source analysis as described by Barton and Levstik (2008), specifically in its elements of perspective recognition. Moreover, although the complex web of primary sources would be greatly aided by the use of perspective recognition skills and tools, Barton and Levstik’s (2008) equal emphasis on the elements of care are much less prominent as a whole surrounding scholarship on primary sources. Thus, as the questions and conclusions surrounding historical empathy often focus fairly heavily on the affective elements of historical empathy, such as care, perhaps it is time that our understanding of primary sources, their

analysis, and the web of complexity that surrounds them, be seen to extend still further beyond a complex cognitive understanding to a complex cognitive and affective engagement.

As such, there are three layers to the research question, from most broad to most specific. The first broad question which must be answered in this study is: what lessons can be learned regarding the overlap of affective historical empathy and historical sources, that is primary and secondary sources, in the social studies classroom? For the second question, which seeks to take one step backward from a frequent assumption in the related research, I ask, “Are primary source documents an effective means for increasing student affective historical empathy?” Finally, for the third and most specific research question, I take one step forward by asking about a specific type of primary source which appears to me to be reasonably called into question by the work of Perrotta (2018) and which has been associated with cognitive historical empathy more than affective historical empathy. As such, the particular research question of this study is, “Are textual primary source documents an effective means for increasing student affective historical empathy?” This ultimately is the specific question of the study, but without at least grappling with and making some observations regarding the two broader questions explained above, I think it would be difficult to make a reasonable conclusion regarding this specific question.

Methodology

This study took place during the spring semester of 2021 at an urban high school in North Carolina. The study included two American History II classes, which focus on Reconstruction to the present, one of which had 17 students and the other had 11 students. Of those students, seven students agreed to participate in this study, but only five actively participated during the days in which the study was carried out.

The data sources of the study consisted of a pre-test and post-test, participant observation and field notes taken as a participant observer, and classroom artifacts in the form of journals. Students took a pre-test before the researcher-initiated study began at the start of a new historical unit of study, specifically a unit on World War II. This action research study, and the related historical unit of study, were divided roughly in two in which the first half consisted of historical study done largely through student engagement with secondary sources and related information and activities and the second half of the unit of study was done largely through student engagement with primary sources and related information and activities. As such, student data revolve extensively around student answers about and engagement with historical focus sources,

several of which were chosen to be engaged each day of the study. At the end of the study, students took a post-test. The pre- and post-test contained the same Likert scale and short-response questions and were oriented around the same historical information.

Results

Throughout the study, seven themes or trends became prominent and central as ways in which historical sources, both primary and secondary as well as textual and visual, were more likely to lead students toward engagement with affective historical empathy.

Though none of the themes listed below guaranteed that students would engage more in affective historical empathy, these were reoccurring themes throughout the study. One, when students engaged with an historical source, if the source helped the student engage in elements of cognitive historical empathy, such as perspective recognition and historical contextualization, they were more likely to also be inspired to engage in affective historical empathy. Two, students were often more likely to engage in any one dimension of affective historical empathy because of an historical source if that historical source inspired engagement in several dimensions of affective historical empathy, as described by Barton and Levstik (2008), such as caring about a topic and caring for an oppressed group. Three, when an historical source engaged students in the work of imagining, specifically historically-rooted and contextualized imagining, they were bolstered in their affective historical empathy. Four, few themes, if any, emerged as strongly from the data as how powerful a source could be that discussed innocent people being harmed or oppressed, especially if they were being oppressed for simply being who they were, and especially if they were being oppressed by a governmental or overwhelming power. Five, students who were moved to affective historical empathy because of a source occasionally cited perceived emotion within a source, particularly emotion on the part of the author or creator of the source, as reasoning for their affective historical empathy. Six, if students had an interest in a topic, sources about that topic appeared to have a higher likelihood in engaging them in affective historical empathy related to that topic. Seven, when students engaged, and we reviewed, a source together in class, students were much more likely to engage in affective historical empathy because of that source than when they engaged sources alone outside of class time.

Discussion

Text-based primary sources, as they are at the heart of the study, will be the first focus of the Discussion. On their own, they may help students engage in affective historical empathy or

they may not. The same can be said about primary and secondary as well as text or visual-based sources broadly. What this seems to tell me, at least with these students in this instance, is that what really matters are factors that engage students, such as those seven themes discussed above.

The *Diary of Anne Frank* excerpts, a focus source from this unit of study, engaged students more in affective historical empathy than any other focus source throughout the study. After reviewing the data, it seems most reasonable to conclude that that source was so successful in engaging students in affective historical empathy, not because it was a text-based source or a primary source, but because it engaged students in many of, if not all of, the themes that are likely to increase affective historical empathy illuminated in the Results above. And sources of various types can be chosen that relate to those themes.

That appears to be the lesson at the bottom of the study, answering the most specific element of the research question: “Are textual primary sources an effective means for increasing student affective historical empathy?” Yes they are, if they engage students in important themes related to historical sources and affective historical empathy as explained above. If text-based primary sources do not do this, it appears, they are unlikely to be effective in this way, as was shown by student engagement with the text-based primary sources other than the *Diary of Anne Frank* in the study. And I would imagine that reality is true of any type of historical source.

Furthermore, Perotta’s (2018) observations regarding historical empathy and social identities, particularly surrounding the connection they note between White students, cognitive historical empathy, and textual primary sources and assignments on the one hand, and a connection between minoritized students, affective historical empathy, personal connections, and verbal assignments on that other hand are not necessarily affirmed or rebutted in this study. I did not focus on textual versus verbal sources. But I can assert that the students in this study and this school represented a largely diverse and minoritized population and that a textual primary source substantially engaged students in affective historical empathy in this study. As such, work needs to be done to analyze these interconnections more fully in a greater diversity of situations.

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Do Cultural Children’s Literary Materials Affect Attitudes in Elementary School Students?

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Introduction

Educators face many challenges. These challenges are even greater as societal changes occur. One such change is the ever-increasing diversity in the American society. One problem teachers often face is finding ways to effectively motivate students to read. The use of cultural literature appears to contribute to the development of elementary students’ motivation and interest in reading based on research. Multicultural children’s books can be utilized to motivate students to enhance their reading ability and comprehension skills. Multicultural literature includes marginalized peoples from diverse cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds (Salas, Lucido, & Canales, 2002).

Giving students the opportunity to connect to culturally driven literature may give them a sense of freedom and purpose and may create a passion for reading. Cultural children’s books can help students make connections to their everyday life experiences while building a sense of identity, inclusion, and self-worth. Students need to read authentic books that are a direct reflection of their life. For students to connect appropriately to multicultural literature, cultural authenticity needs to be present. According to Short, Day, and Schroeder (2016), cultural authenticity reflects the worldview of beliefs and values, and depicts the accurate details of everyday life and language of a specific cultural group.

Literature Review

Multicultural literature is an important component of education that may increase a child’s growth in reading. There are several areas of the literature to examine in studying multicultural literature in an elementary classroom. These include cultural relevance,

children's literary materials, and their attitude towards reading. Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally relevant pedagogy as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 382). Social justice learning requires teachers to help students recognize injustices by examining personal biases in the society that surrounds them. Teachers incorporate social justice learning in their classrooms to allow students to recognize and discuss societal issues and how to effectively bring about change. There has always been a strong need for diverse children's literary materials on all levels, but particularly at the elementary level. Holmes et. al. (2007), conducted a correlational study that examined whether students would display increased interest and attention if the race of characters in the books matched their own racial background. In this study, thirty-two elementary students from two third grade classrooms were given pre-selected and labeled books that were mixed into two identical piles. Each pile consisted of comparable book covers with displays of color and graphics, sets of books with Caucasian characters and African American characters, and books that were one year below grade level to decrease the students' frustration level (Holmes et al., 2007). The researchers found that African American and White students did not differentiate by race in their preference for books. White male students were drawn to books with African American characters and lingered over them for longer periods. Holmes et al. (2007) concluded that African American and White students read books with characters of the opposite race whenever they were given the opportunity.

Singleton's (1997) research found that both African American and Hispanic American students enjoyed reading stories connected to family subjects. It is important to include cultural family structures in reading literature to improve reading attitudes in young learners. Kush and Watkins (1996), conducted a study to determine the long-term stability of children's attitudes toward reading. They found that there was an increase in students' attitude towards reading. Mosley (2017) analyzed the ways literacy events foster a community and connect students to real-world experiences. Mosley (2017) believed there is not enough authority over books students select due to teachers and school media specialists pre-selecting materials. Overall, the reviewed literature examined the areas of cultural relevance, children's literary materials, and attitudes toward reading. Multicultural literature is an important component in elementary school education. The research articles assessed minority students and the

practices for implementation of multicultural literature into a school curriculum. The purpose of this research was to examine ways multicultural literature can affect minority students' attitudes toward reading in elementary settings while empowering them to become intellectually and socially prepared for life. The research question is, "Do Cultural Children's Literary Materials Affect Attitudes Toward Reading in Elementary School Students?"

Methodology

This action research study was conducted virtually in the spring of 2021 (due to COVID-19) in a local school district in the southeastern part of the United States. The data was gathered from a fourth-grade classroom in a public Title 1 school with between 700 to 750 students. Data was collected over a five-week period where pre- and post-questionnaires were given before and after the lessons were completed. The focus group interview was given on the last day of the research study. During the intervention period, the researcher read five grade level appropriate multicultural children's books. The researcher performed a read-aloud that lasted approximately 50-55 minutes for three days during the five week intervention. Students were asked text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world questions to activate their schema. A K-W-L Chart was used to organize information gathered from each student. This engaged students to actively participate during the lessons by giving personal feedback on the stories.

Books chosen for the unit included: (1) *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatiuh; (2) *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull; (3) *Can I Touch Your Hair?: Poems of Race, Mistakes, and Friendship* by Irene Latham & Charles Waters; (4) *Thunder Boy Jr.* by Sherman Alexie & Yuyi Morales; and (5) *Trombone Shorty* by Troy Andrews. Students completed a pre and post-questionnaire on a laptop or desktop computer. The pre questionnaire consisted of 10 statements with emoji's that asked participants to click on the face (smiling, frowning, and neutral) that summarized their attitude toward each statement about classroom reading (e.g., "I am determined to read on my own."; "I read to learn new information about topics that interest me."). The post-questionnaire was the same as the pre-questionnaire with the addition of two open-ended questions. In addition to the pre and post questionnaires, the data included focus group interviews, student work samples (K-W-L chart worksheet, and personal narrative assignments), and the researcher's observational notes from the audio

recordings. The questionnaires were examined to quantitatively identify increase or decrease in attitudes toward reading. The other data was analyzed qualitatively to identify themes related to attitudes toward reading.

Results

Educational research strongly suggests that exposure to culturally diverse literary materials positively impacts minority students. The pre- and post-questionnaires were used to determine whether cultural children's literary materials affected elementary students' attitudes. The data revealed that the participants enjoyed reading books that included: action, mystery, fiction, fantasy, adventure, and graphic novels. None of the participants appeared to dislike the selected readings for the research study. After examining the data, the researcher found that students were determined to read on their own before the study began. A total of eight students strongly agreed and agreed that they like to read independently. One of the statements was: "I like to read books that represent my culture." Before the lesson, five of eleven students stated that they liked to read books that represented their culture. This number increased by one when students completed the post-test.

Eight of eleven students' attitudes were positive that their culture is important to them. The post results showed that there was a slight decline to seven students who believed their culture was important to them. Another statement was: "I like to read books that are familiar to my family. Again, seven students showed positive attitudes toward reading books that are familiar to their family and this number increased after the study was completed by one. Statement eight said, "I enjoy reading books about people in different cultures." Four students declared that they enjoyed reading books about people in different cultures. The number of students who enjoyed reading about people in different cultures increased to six after the lessons were completed. The overall results revealed that the students' attitudes were mixed toward reading.

The eleven student participants were placed in three groups of three and one group of two for the focus studies. Some of the participants were nervous about speaking, so the researcher called on student participants randomly to get their answers. It was a challenge to get student participants to engage in the discussion. The virtual platform may have caused students not to engage initially. One of the questions from the focus group interview was:

“What was a cultural experience in any of the books we read that sparked your imagination?” One of the participants stated that he connected to the *Trombone Shorty* reading because his family lived near New Orleans, Louisiana. This subject connected to the ethnic foods, gumbo, and seafood.

Another question was: “What do you all love the most about your culture?” A student mentioned her love for music, sports, and food which she related to the stories. All students loved the traditional garments made by the elders in their families and the stories; and others liked celebrating holidays that were relevant to their cultures. These were *Cinco de Mayo* and Christmas. One student mentioned that he liked the food and the landscape because his family lived in Ecuador. He loved eating Ecuadorian Flan, a soup, and observing pictures of beautiful mountains in Ecuador. A fourth question was: “Are there any characters that represent who you are as a person? Please explain why?” One student participant stated that she felt *Trombone Shorty* represented who she was because of her love for music. It appears that some students are more interested and connected to learning about other cultures other than their own. The rich heritage and culture of New Orleans’ food, music, and family made the greatest impact on this group of student participants.

Conclusions

The research indicated that culturally responsive teaching practices and culturally driven literary materials increased positive attitudes. Elementary students became responsive learners to cultural differences and made an effort to read more independently. Making students feel validated and welcomed is an essential part of their overall development and will create attentive learners in the future. The pre-and post-questionnaire provided balanced feedback on students’ interests and attitudes toward culturally relevant material. In addition, the questionnaires provided specific input on representations of culture, reading motivation, and inclusive cultural environments.

Additionally, the research showed that culturally responsive teaching practices made students feel important and helped them to center on their learning experiences. The study also showed how students of all races were positively impacted by cultural literary materials and made gains when provided with the appropriate platform. The student work samples offered examples from K-W-L Charts and Jamboard activities. The focus group

interview was in-depth and allowed students freedom to engage in a relevant and personal discussion. Student participants were willing to utilize their voices to be heard, which does not happen very often. There are many elementary school students who may feel their thoughts and opinions are not valued or acknowledged. The study allowed students to open up about negative depictions of race they have seen in the media and conversations on racial injustices in the United States. The cultural perspectives articulated by this group of students made the study more impactful and meaningful.

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Media Use in the Secondary Social Studies Classroom and its Impact on Student Engagement and Achievement

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In recent years, the availability of technology within schools has become more widespread (Swan, 2007), media is more accessible, user friendly, and widespread than ever before. By bringing technology, more specifically media, to the classroom we are providing students with a mode of learning history with which they are very comfortable with, interested in, and providing the opportunity for students to hone in their technological skills that will help them thrive in the 21st century. One of the most interesting facts about history is that there are multiple perspectives to every narrative, each one having some sense of validity to the person who is telling it. Because of this, there is not one true narrative of history, rather we must examine multiple perspectives in order to gain understanding of the context in which these events unfolded.

By showing multiple perspectives of historical narratives, we are causing students to think critically and ask questions about history, becoming investigators of history rather than just consumers of the knowledge teachers give them. Giving students a critical thinking, investigative, role in history will allow them to become involved inside the classroom by giving them the opportunity to be analytical and formulate a perspective that they can identify with. The use of media such as film, video, music and images to examine historical narratives, has the hopes and the potential to facilitate critical thinking and positively influence student engagement and achievement in the social studies classroom.

Literature Review

The use of outside primary and secondary sources provide evidence to what is written in history textbooks and lecture materials and give students a perspective directly from the past. The systematic approach of using sources in history classrooms is to provoke students positively so that they become engaged with historical inquiry and interpretation (Drake & Brown, 2003). Through historical inquiry, students develop essential knowledge, skills, and habits that are

necessary for being active, informed, participating citizens in democratic society (Van Hover et al, 2016). Historical inquiry serves as a tool for students to make sense of the past as well as the present but, in order to be effective, students must have the knowledge necessary to use the tool.

Increased access to technology within schools is changing the ways in which classrooms are operated and how content is shared to students. Integrating technology such as photographs, videos and audio recordings can initiate questions about content, production and reception, historical representation, evidence of social/cultural history, and history of media as an industry (Paris, 1997).

It is important to make internet and technology use in the social studies active learning by constructing knowledge and teaching how to question, research, evaluate, critically discuss, and interpret meaning (Fairey et al, 2000). Teachers must decide when and how to use technology within their classroom with a concise plan of action rather than using technology at random or because it is the easiest and simplest way to share information with students.

To improve digital media and learning in schools through technological innovation, educators must consider the context of innovation and make a commitment to shift classroom culture (Herro, 2015). New multimedia sources enable students and teachers to explore alternate ways of composing, presenting and contesting historical knowledge rather than traditional textual sources (Fehn, 2007). Websites, archives, libraries, universities, and the government have allowed teachers to access and download documents free of charge, which allows students to explore history through technology and engage with construction and interpretation of history (Swan & Locascio, 2008). The wide variety of resources allows teachers to find different and unique materials that may benefit their own personal classroom and the students in it.

Using technology as an instructional tool and method is one possibility for increasing student value to the content and motivation to learn within social studies (Heafner, 2004). Further, the internet and technology is an abundant source of information and used by most people every day. Overall, technology allows social studies teachers to extend beyond a traditional social studies education and prepare students to become active, informed citizens in a participatory democracy (Friedman, 2006).

Methodology

I began the study by performing pre-surveys regarding the use of technology and media within the classroom with my students. There was a follow-up survey around the middle point of

the study and at the end of the study, I provided a post-survey asking students how they felt technology and media use in social studies helped their historical understanding and increased their engagement/motivation.

I also administered a summative assessment to my students on the unit that I used media to teach them. This assessment provided data on how well media supplemented student learning in social studies.

The research project took place in an American History II classroom at a rural school in North Carolina. There were 20 students in the class with 11 being in person and 9 taking the class remotely. The topics covered during the Action Research project include the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and the New Deal. The types of media that were used during the action research include video clips, audio recordings and images.

Results

The following action research study consisted of three high school students in rural North Carolina. The following is an in-depth student profile of each of the three students who participated in the study.

The first participant in this action research study is Gloria. Gloria is a junior in high school who participates in all regular classes as opposed to honors or AP courses. She regularly attends school and is active in the school by participating in athletics and various clubs. Gloria was typically a B student who regularly completed assignments and turned them in on time.

The second participant in this action research study is Beverly. Beverly is a junior in high school that participates in a mixture of regular classes and honors classes. She regularly attends school and is very active in the school by participating and holding leadership positions in athletics and clubs. Beverly was typically an A student who consistently completes assignments and has them turned in on time.

The third participant in this action research study is Julie. Julie is a junior in high school that participates in all regular classes. On average she had good attendance but would occasionally miss school once a week. Julie was not active in the school in terms of athletics or clubs because she worked a part-time job while in school that took up much of her time. Julie was typically a B/C student who struggled to complete assignments and turn them in on time.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The purpose of the pre-survey was to find out how much experience my students had used media in previous classes to engage in course content. The three focus students had used media at some point in their previous classes and overall enjoyed its use represented by a score of four or better on the Likert scale.

The mid-point survey was given to students to gauge student engagement with the sources I had used in class. All three of the focus students overall enjoyed the media that I had shown them represented by a four or better on the Likert scale. Gloria and Beverly each gave the media sources the max rating of five while Julie only gave the rating of four.

The purpose of the post-survey was to find out how much the students had engaged and/or enjoyed the media sources as well as how they felt it helped them achieve in the class. Gloria and Beverly each indicated with a max rating of five that they both greatly enjoyed using the various media sources. Gloria and Beverly also indicated with a maximum rating of five they would greatly enjoy using media sources in future classes.

The summative assessment covered topics including the Roaring 20's, the Great Depression, and the New Deal. Both Gloria and Beverly achieved perfect scores of 100 on the assessment while Julie achieved almost a perfect score with a 95. Together, these scores average to a 98.3, which using a ten-point grading scale is equivalent to the grade of A on the assessment.

Qualitative Data Analysis

For the following action research study there were four sources of qualitative data used to examine the impacts of media use on engagement and achievement in the social studies classroom. These sources include short answer questions from the pre-survey, mid-point survey, and post-survey as well as classroom observations.

The short response questions on the pre-survey were to identify if any of my students had used media in class before, what the purpose of its use was, and which types of media were their favorite to use in the classroom. I found that all three of the focus students had used media sources for some purpose in their previous classes. From similar word coding, I found that Gloria and Beverly had used media to learn important information and facts concerning the topics of their previous classes. Julie had used media in her previous classes mainly as review before an assessment. All three participants identified that they enjoyed using video clips as a media source in class and Gloria and Beverly both identified that they enjoyed using all three types of media.

The mid-point survey short response questions were the second qualitative data set that I analyzed. The first question analyzed from the mid-point survey specifically dealt with the types of media that are the student's favorite to use. The students had a music video, four live action movie clips, and two documentaries that they had watched in class to choose from for this question. Two of the focus students, Gloria and Beverly, identified Alabama's "Song of the South" music video, a song and video depicting the Great Depression and New Deal programs, as their favorite media source. Julie selected a clip from the movie *The Great Gatsby* (2013) that depicted the Roaring 20s. The three focus students used words like "fun" and "entertaining" to describe why the media they selected was their favorite.

The last question from the mid-point survey asked students how the content of the media sources reflected course content they had seen from notes, presentations, and textbooks. In their responses, both Gloria and Beverly stated that the media provided them with a "visual representation". In addition, Beverly and Julie used words such as "reinforcement" and "adds" to describe how media enhances course content they have learned in notes, presentations, or textbooks because it is "entertaining" or "interesting".

The post-survey was given to students following the conclusion of the action research study. Gloria stated that, "using media keeps our focus and makes it easier to learn" while Beverly stated that, "it gave alot [sic] of connection points to compare talk to pictures and media". Both of the focus students indicated "yes" if the media improved their understanding and followed with an explanation. Gloria's explanation reflected on the "visual" aspect of media being a crucial factor that impacts her understanding of content. Beverly's explanation described how the media gave her "something to think back and compare to" whenever she answered questions in class or on the summative assessment.

The second observation is when the class watched a music video of a song that discussed the Great Depression and New Deal programs. I instructed the class to pay attention to the words of the song to see if they could identify the topics that are sung about. Once I began playing "Song of the South" by Alabama, Beverly jumped out of her chair and exclaimed, "omg this is my favorite song ever!" while Julie said, "I listen to this song all the time."

Discussion

The quantitative data from the summative assessment scores of the three focus students show that media has a positive impact on student achievement. The qualitative data that were

collected from the three focus students on the three surveys show that media has a positive impact on student achievement. The findings from the results show that media has the ability to provide students with visual representations of information they had learned through readings, presentations, and discussions. The results also show that media has the ability to reinforce or enhance course content from notes, presentations, and textbooks.

This study showed the positive impacts that media has on student engagement and achievement in the social studies classroom. One such impact is that if students are more engaged with learning content there is a good probability that they will have a higher level of achievement. This can be compared to a study done by Heafner (2004), which found using technology as an instructional tool was a possibility for increasing student value to content and motivation to learn. The results of this study showed me that media does have a rightful place in the social studies classroom and has a positive impact on student achievement and engagement.

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Turning Practice into Theory: Identifying a Theoretical Framework Through Which to Understand and Replicate the Success of the University of Southern California’s Neighborhood Academic Initiative Program

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Since the early 1990s, there have been few college access programs so successful and acclaimed as the University of Southern California’s (USC) Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI). Founded to increase student body representation from the communities immediately surrounding USC (predominantly low SES and Latinx), NAI has produced 98.5% college matriculation and 72% baccalaureate completion over the past twenty-five years (USC, n.d.b). The program’s leaders attribute these exceptional results to the commensurate level of longitudinal supports employed by their model. NAI students attend “Saturday Academy” (an extra day of school on the campus of USC) 21 weeks a year from 6th to 12th grade, and receive personalized afterschool tutoring if their grades are slipping. This academic rigor is accompanied by a full family wraparound program, in which families receive the support they need to push their students to success. In addition, NAI students are provided with summer programming to close achievement gaps, counseling and psychological care, and a consistent integration of college and career vision curriculum. Students that graduate from this program and meet the minimum requirement to attend USC are able to do so fully free of charge (USC, n.d.b). USC’s NAI has garnered the attention of national media and the patronage of celebrities and high-profile institutions (Bruni, 2017), while the university’s leadership has advocated for the emulation of the model in other communities (USC, n.d.a). Ultimately, that call would be answered by a mid-sized city in North Carolina, the existence of which many of those living in Los Angeles are likely unaware.

Winston-Salem’s unlikely status as the first city to replicate USC’s NAI model arose at the nexus of a uniquely valuable asset and a uniquely terrible problem. The asset—Winston-Salem, with a relatively modest estimated population of 246,328 (Forsyth Futures, 2020), is distinguished by its eleven institutions of higher education, including Wake Forest University,

UNC School of the Arts, and the oldest continually operating women's college in the United States, Salem College (CountyOffice.org, n.d.; Salem College, n.d.). The city's problem—Winston-Salem constitutes the major population center of Forsyth County, a county which (according to a widely cited 2015 Harvard Study by Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren) has the lowest rates of economic mobility for children born into households belonging to the bottom quartile of the income distribution as compared to anywhere else in the United States (with the exception of only four Indian Reservations). In other words, with few exceptions, those born into low-income families in Forsyth County, North Carolina, have the least chance of escaping that low-income status as compared to anywhere else in the nation. Understanding these factors, the opportunity USC's model represented for Winston-Salem becomes self-evident. NAI, a program so effectively leveraging higher education in the origination of new prosperity, was ideally suited for a college town whose poor faced some of America's longest odds.

My interactions with NAI date back to 2017, when in response to the previously referenced study by Chetty and Hendren (2015), I began working to establish a multi-college prototype of the model for low SES students in Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools. Having established a collaborative relationship with USC and formal partnerships with most higher education institutions in Winston-Salem over the course of a three-year pilot, the project was taken on as a special initiative of Forsyth Technical Community College in July 2020. Having been buttressed by the support of its own institution of higher education (IHE), the program is set to expand throughout the community, with Forsyth Tech's leadership citing it as an emerging model for community colleges across North Carolina.

Literature Review

While USC's NAI is frequently referenced in journals and other academic writing, there is a relative paucity of full-length treatments of the model itself. The literature that does exist is characterized by analysis of various components of NAI's programming paired with observations of the beneficial outcomes participation in such programs produces within students (specifically heightened self-efficacy and academic motivation; see Zarate, 2013; Jones, 2004; Hagedorn, 2015). While this current body of research on NAI adequately facilitates evaluation of the program's efficacy within its own milieu (i.e. South Central Los Angeles, USC, predominantly Latinx constituents, etc.) it does not instrumentally lend itself to the pursuit of adapting the model to an alternate context. This lack of utility arises from the absence of an

established theoretical framework through which to understand the pronounced success of the model. Though Zarate (2013) helpfully discusses the general alignment of NAI's intervention set with practices demonstrated most effective when deployed by other U.S. college access programs, this observation was not intended to serve as the basis for a theoretical framework, and as such lacks the requisite specificity, depth, and structure of a functional theory. Furthermore, while Hagedorn (2015) attributes NAI's success to its consistent heightening of student self-efficacy and academic drive, she identifies these phenomena themselves as internal student outcomes, and explicitly avoids causal assertions as to the efficacy of the model. While this previous scholarship certainly represents a valuable contribution to our understanding of NAI in its present form, it does not offer a fundamental conceptual rationale for the program's success. The full integration of USC's model into Forsyth Tech cannot be successfully realized through a process of merely emulating NAI, but must rather be predicated on a considered adaptation of programming through a transferable theoretical model (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). A theory is required that enables systematic understanding of the indispensable factors underpinning NAI's success (Kilbourn, 2006), and as Eisner (1993, p. vii) submitted, "can be used to help us anticipate, if not control, the future" (cited in Anfara & Mertz, 2015).

Scope and Purpose

The aim of this paper is to provide a concise overview of Ecological Systems Theory through an explication of Bronfenbrenner's four primary ecological systems, and to argue the utility of this theory as a mechanism for understanding and replicating the success of USC's NAI model. A few practical takeaways Ecological Systems Theory may imply for the attempt to replicate NAI in Winston-Salem, North Carolina will be identified, along with suggestions for further inquiry. The scope of this paper is limited; given the absence of theoretical writing on NAI (discussed above) it does not seek to contrast Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory with other possible frameworks which may be utilized to understand the success of the NAI model. Without presuming to make authoritative pronouncements designating "one best theory" as an entry point for discussions around NAI, this paper will attempt to initiate a systemic approach to reflections on the success of NAI utilizing a well-established and broadly accepted theoretical framework in Ecological Systems Theory. Furthermore, this paper will anchor its discussion of Ecological Systems Theory within the text of *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (1979), Bronfenbrenner's introductory exposition of his

theory. Despite a proliferation of literature building upon various aspects of Bronfenbrenner's thought, his 1979 work still constitutes the most important statement on Ecological Systems Theory (Darling, 2007), and provides sufficient grounding for the scope of the present discussion.

Discussion

While Bronfenbrenner was not the only academic of his era articulating the importance of an ecological perspective, in *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (1979), Bronfenbrenner contributes a framework of five "ecological systems" through which to conceptualize and analyze the full context of a developing person's environment. They are: **1)** The "Microsystem," which can generally be conceptualized as anything a developing individual personally encounters within a given setting, such as those present, the relationships between those present, roles and authority structures, activities, and so on (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). **2)** The "Mesosystem," which may simply be defined as the interactions and connections between the microsystems in which a developing person is involved (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). **3)** The "Exosystem," which Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes as a series of factors that, while external to the developing person's direct environment(s), have the potential to exert significant influence over the dynamics of their immediate context (e.g. a parent's job, a sibling's friend group, local education policies, etc.). **4)** The "Macrosystem," here formally defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as referring to "consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (p. 26). **5)** "The Chronosystem," a way in which Bronfenbrenner (1979) represents the passage of time through the other ecological systems. This paper concludes that NAI's unique success is attributable to the influence it exerts as a ubiquitous macrosystem level force in the lives of its students. NAI stands apart in that it has become a fully adopted subculture of the students and families it serves, integrating itself into nearly every aspect of their lives throughout their seven-year experience with the program (and even beyond).

Conclusion

Though an exhaustive accounting of the implications Ecological Systems Theory represents for the present effort to adapt the NAI model at Forsyth Technical Community College far exceeds the scope of this paper, three broad observations are shared. **1)** It's not (all)

about academics: While the program’s academic supports are certainly an indispensable part of its success, these supports are only successful to the extent that a community—indeed a macrosystem—is scaffolding them in the lives of students. **2)** Continuity is essential: While logistically challenging, aspects of NAI designed to create continuity for students (e.g. cohorting in home schools, crossover between home school teachers and Saturday Academy teachers) are non-negotiables for any attempt at replicating the model. **3)** It may be possible to improve upon the NAI model while adapting it: If informed by a theoretical framework from the outset, the present attempt at adapting NAI’s model may represent an opportunity to facilitate adjustments and additions Ecological Systems Theory would suggest as beneficial. Programs designed to multiply mesosystem interconnectivity (e.g. initiatives to increase parent involvement in students’ home schools) or foster beneficial exosystem dynamics (e.g. initiatives designed to foster enhanced connectivity among the families of students outside of programming) could become a new frontier in efforts to enhance the model. Indeed, this effort itself would only be in keeping with the example set by NAI in its custom of continuous evaluation and improvement.

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Influence of Reading and Writing Activist Poetry on Students' Attitude Toward Poetry

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Poetry invites students to enjoy language, think critically, and understand themselves and others (Milner et al., 2017). And yet, the Common Core State Standards have marginalized poetry by emphasizing non-fiction and omitting poetry from the writing standards (Curran, 2013). The word “poetry” is mentioned only once in North Carolina’s English Language Arts Standard Course of Study (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017) for grades 9-12. When poetry is taught in schools, emphasis is commonly placed on formal analysis instead of personal reader response and creativity. As a result, students may often experience negative feelings toward poetry (Milner et al., 2017). Students may also rarely be invited to compose their own poetry. Simmons (2014) argues that this is due to “an education landscape that dramatically deemphasizes creative expression in favor of expository writing” (para. 5). Students need positive encounters with poetry that feel relevant to their lives so that they can reap its full benefits. Today, many young people are at the forefront of calls for change (e.g., School Strike for Climate, Black Lives Matter, and immigrant rights movements). Activism is a point of entry for students who may feel poetry is irrelevant or outdated. Activist poetry is poetry that advocates for a cause or raises awareness for a social issue. This study asks the question: How does reading and writing activist poetry influence students’ attitude toward poetry?

Literature Review

Incorporating real-world social issues and inviting students to become activists for a cause is one way to highlight and embrace students’ unique experiences in the English classroom (Burr, 2017; Chapman et al., 2011; Ciardiello, 2010; Malo-Juvera & Spears-Bunton, 2015). Ciardiello (2010) describes how a social justice approach can lead to increased engagement due to the fact that students “have a natural interest in issues involving matters of fairness and social justice” (p. 465). Scholars have argued that a social justice approach is not only beneficial to students but also to democratic society as a whole (Ciardiello, 2010; Malo-Juvera & Spears-

Bunton, 2015). Malo-Juvera and Spears-Bunton (2015) describe the ultimate goal of English instruction as “informed, positive social action and change” (p. 15). Damico and Carpenter (2005) found that it is possible to change students’ attitude toward poetry. They describe boys in a fifth grade class evolving from perceiving poetry to be about “sappy feelings” (p. 138) to something powerful and transformative by reading the works of Langston Hughes, Sherman Alexie, and Adrienne Rich. Camangian (2008) explored how a unit that invited students to write performance poetry -- which dealt with issues of social justice relevant to the students’ lives -- could engage students in literacy, and impact their critical thinking, literacy skills, and voice. Despite the quantity of existing research on the subject of social justice poetry, gaps remain. One gap exists in narrowing social justice poetry to focus on activist poetry and inviting students to choose a cause to write about. Few prior studies have analyzed students’ responses to writing activist poetry that is this open-ended and not tied to a specific mentor text. Another gap exists in analyzing how reading *and* writing activist poetry influences students’ attitudes about poetry and its relevance to them.

Methods

This study explored how students’ attitudes did or did not evolve before and after the implementation of an activist poetry unit. It was conducted in two semester-long Honors 9th grade English classes at a large, urban, arts magnet high school in the southeastern United States. The classes met daily during the spring semester and included 70 students total. Fifteen students completed the entire consent/assent process, submitted the questionnaires and assignments, and were included in this study. During the first week of the three-week unit, students were introduced to a variety of activist poems and were invited to respond from a reader response perspective. Poems included “The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman (PBS Newshour, 2021), “Pledge Allegiance” by Natalie Scenters-Zapico (2020), “A Small Needful Fact” by Ross Gay (2015), “Need” by Peter Cook and Kenny Lerner (2008), and “Becoming American” by Khalilah Joseph (from the book “Rhythm and Resistance” by Christensen and Watson, 2015). Students shared emotions they felt, questions they had, and words and phrases that stood out to them in the poems. Students picked a topic of interest to briefly research and then created found poetry (selecting words and phrases from an article and arranging them into a poem). In the second week, students analyzed the same poems, asking how the poets created a particular effect. The researcher also introduced the song “We Are” by Jon Batiste (2021), and the slam poem, “Times

I've Been Mistaken for a Girl" by Alex Dang (Button Poetry, 2013). Students analyzed repetition and tone, and applied these strategies as they began working on their own activist poems. Students were then prompted to write their own poems on a subject of their choice. Students could choose any topic as long as their poem advocated for an issue or cause. In the third week, students engaged in peer conferences. They also worked on either "presenting" or "publishing" their poems. Due to the nature of activist poetry, the researcher stressed the importance of sending these poems out into the world. Students could either present the poem to their classmates in a musical or slam poetry style, or "publish" by formatting it on the page of a newspaper, magazine, or social media website.

All data collected from this research study came from pre-and post-questionnaires, interest inventories, and student artifacts including the final activist poems and the visual or verbal presentations. The researcher created profiles for each student consisting of responses to these measures and the final poem. She assigned point values to the questions: "How do you feel about reading poetry?", "How do you feel about writing poetry?", "Do you consider yourself a poet?", and "In general, how relevant do you think poetry is to your life?" The researcher calculated change values for each student based on how they moved in a positive or negative direction in their responses to each question, or stayed the same. The researcher totalled the values for all four questions to establish a change value for each student. She divided students into four categories: "negative change" (-1), "no change" (0), "slight change" (+1 - +2), and "significant change" (+3 - +4). The researcher analyzed trends in each category.

Results

Within each group, patterns and themes emerged that inform how this unit influenced students' attitudes. The "slight positive change" group was the largest, with seven students. These students responded one or two degrees in a positive direction from the pre-questionnaire to the post-questionnaire. These students expressed moderately positive feelings about poetry to begin with. Three of these students changed the way they felt about reading and/or writing poetry in their post-questionnaires. By the end of the unit, Student D wrote that poetry "has true meaning behind it and some poems are very cool." Student L wrote in his pre-questionnaire, "I don't feel as confident writing it [as I do reading it]." By the end of the unit, he said he loved writing poetry. Four students changed their responses from "no" to "yes" in response to the question, "Do you consider yourself a poet?" After the unit, Student M wrote that poetry was

“extremely” relevant to her life, writing: “Personally for me, my poetry has a little piece of my story in it... It is something that [I] enjoy doing and something that is very special to me.” These students’ before and after responses to the question “In a few sentences, what does the word ‘activism’ mean to you?” changed drastically. Students’ responses expanded in scope and deepened in nuance. This group of students also wrote tremendously impactful and meaningful poems. Student O wrote a blistering criticism of the United States as a self-described “Mexican and black female” in her poem “Dear, America.” She wrote, “Why make it harder by telling us/We live in the ‘land of the free.’/Why make it harder by saying ‘justice for all’ when you know you[re] just lying/Why make it harder by mocking and bashing people of color, but then use our culture just to profit from it.”

The “significant positive change” group was the second-largest, with four students who began with less positive outlooks than the “slight positive change” group. None of the students started out “loving” reading or writing poetry. Student G twice wrote “I don’t really like poetry.” Student H expressed frustration, writing “it’s always hard for me to understand poetry.” Student F wrote, “I don’t think that I am very good at expressing the emotions required to write a good poem.” These students’ attitudes transformed dramatically after the activist poetry unit, with all of them “loving” or “liking” reading and writing poetry by the end of the unit. These students also expanded their views of what poems are “about.” Student F went from thinking most poems are about “deep emotions” to the more expansive view of “anything the author deems worthy.” Their poems were also incredibly powerful. Student F wrote a sophisticated indictment of social media. She interspersed quotes from her social media feeds, including “perfect body 2 weeks to rock hard abs, wanna lose that muffin top?” with devastating statistics about teens who had died from depression and eating disorders.

The next smallest group of students was the “no change” group, with three students. They had a range of views toward poetry. Two said they “liked” reading poetry both before and after the unit, while Student I felt that reading poetry was “ok” both times. Student C wrote that writing poetry was “ok” before the unit and saw positive movement in his post-questionnaire, writing that he “liked” writing poetry (this student was included in the “no change” category because his positive movement was cancelled out by negative movement in response to the question asking how relevant he considered poetry to be to his life). Student I was one of the few students who chose “Don’t make me” in response to the question asking how she felt about

writing poetry (only three students total chose this response on the pre-questionnaire). After the unit, she was the only one of the three to still feel this way about writing poetry. These students wrote powerful poems about race, class, and the refugee experience. Student K's moving poem from the perspective of a refugee began with the lines, "Waking up everyday/Hoping that this day would be better than yesterday/Tears of children/Running down their faces/Worrisome and anger of parents/When will we ever feel free?"

Only one student fell into the category of "negative change," Student B. He moved one degree in a negative direction, writing that he "loved" writing poetry before the unit, and that he "liked" it on his post-questionnaire. Overall, this student had a largely positive attitude about poetry. In the post-questionnaire, he wrote: "I enjoy using metaphors and emphasis to express my point." This student considered himself a poet before the unit, one of only two students who thought of themselves that way on the pre-questionnaire. He also considered himself a poet after the unit. He was one of the only students to write that he had previously read something he would consider "activist poetry," and he was the only student who cited an example: "Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou (1983). Student B wrote a fascinating poem titled "The Difference" that explored the question of why humans fear the unknown. He closed his poem with a call to action, writing, "If only we could slow down for one moment, we would see how little the Difference has to stand on./We would see that there is no space between us...We can make a change/We can make a difference/That is what makes us the Same."

Discussion

The study found that a unit on activist poetry positively influenced students' attitudes toward reading and writing poetry. Overall, students expressed more positive feelings toward reading and writing poetry after the unit than they did before the unit. More students also considered themselves poets by the time the unit ended, even after writing just one poem. By the end of the unit, more students also felt that poetry was somewhat or extremely relevant to their lives. Teenagers are at a pivotal age in which they begin to notice flaws in the world around them and feel the urge to make change. Incorporating activism into poetry can be a powerful way to harness this passion and improve students' attitudes toward reading and writing poetry in the process. Studying activist poetry makes students feel like their work in the classroom is connected to the community and the world at large. Some of the most powerful effects of this

unit included students building their confidence, exploring their own identities, changing their conceptions of poetry, and claiming their own democratic agency.

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The Effect of Analytical Writing through a Study of Sports Analysis

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Common Core Standards have placed an increased emphasis on writing in schools, albeit writing that focuses solely on preparing students for tests may feel uninteresting and unengaging. Teaching to a standardized test may have short-term payoffs, but “the longer-term results are not encouraging when the tests change or students move on to new contexts, they don't have the wide repertoire of knowledge and skills to continue to do well” (Applebee, 2013, p. 31). Analytical writing is the genre often required on standardized tests, but it is also one that students will read and write for the rest of their professional lives. This difficult genre has often been minimized to five-paragraph essays, which is unauthentic and boring to write. Mentor texts are commonly viewed as an effective alternative to educate students on the practice of writing, including as part of the genre of analytical writing. Sports have also been found to be effective tools for engaging students in secondary schools (Brown & Rodesiler, 2016). However, scholarship around sports often focuses on its literary value in engaging reluctant readers, not necessarily adolescent writers. This research attempts to bridge the gap between these strategies to explore how sports articles might be used to support student writing. Specifically, this study asks the question, how do sports-based mentor texts influence students' analytical writing?

Literature Review

In their book, *Beyond Literary Analysis*, Marchetti and O'Dell (2018) define analysis in very simple terms as “a piece of writing that explores a text” (p. 13), and a text is “anything that has a beginning, middle, and end that can be broken down into smaller pieces and studied” (13). Even though written analysis can be about almost any subject, teachers rarely push their students to write about non-school topics (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Langer, 2013; Marchetti & O'Dell, 2018). Because writing is focused on tests, students often do not recognize that writing is a skill they need outside of school. Students then become uninterested and unmotivated in writing. Research has found that when students are unmotivated then they perform poorly (Alexander,

1997; Graham et al., 2017; Zumbrunn et al., 2016). Motivation and performance are intricately connected. For students to perform well they need to understand why the task is important and be motivated to complete the task well.

Mentor texts, or “any text, print or digital, that you can read with a writer’s eye” (Culham, 2014, p. 31), are tools to model good writing in the classroom and help students understand writing effectiveness. Students have the opportunity to learn from and imitate writing by close analysis of rhetoric and literary strategies utilized by the author (Dean, 2017). This allows students to enter the world of a writer and explore the endless possibilities available through writing (Gallagher, 2011). Gallagher (2011) argues that models are the best way to teach students to write well. In his career, the author says he has never seen a strategy work better than mentor texts. Almost any genre can be appropriate to study as a mentor text. Most importantly students need an opportunity to study published, real-world examples of writing.

Sports pedagogy has been a tool to motivate and engage students. Whether sports are loved or hated, it is impossible to escape their influence. This means that every student has an opinion on sports that can be utilized to help them write passionately about a topic (Brown & Rodesiler, 2016). As the dominating culture of sports extends its influence, sports literature has been found to be an effective tool to engage reluctant and struggling readers (Coombs, 2016). Despite the considerable research suggesting that both sports-based writing and mentor texts are effective tools in the classroom, there is little research bridging the gap between these two pedagogical practices. The vast benefits of student engagement and developing individual writer-competency suggest that combining these tools has the potential to create writers who are engaged, interested, and independent in the classroom.

Methods

This research took place in the spring semester at a public high school in a suburban school district in the southeastern United States. The research was set in an AP Language class with twenty-three eleventh grade students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research took place virtually via Zoom. This class was selected because of the consistent analytical writing required for AP Language. The analytical aspect of this course made this action research project a natural addition to the curriculum. Of the twenty-three students in the course, twenty students completed the assent/consent process in order to participate in the study, and nine students

completed every assignment. The nine students who completed everything are the sample for the data analyzed in this project.

This research was conducted in addition to the regular curriculum being taught by the cooperating teacher as part of the AP Language course. During the five-week period the research was conducted, students read a separate text, submitted multiple writing assignments, and completed question sets to prepare for the AP exam. The researcher taught 15-20-minute lessons once or twice per week for five weeks. Students were asked to read various sports analysis articles before class. During class, students completed worksheets that asked them to analyze what elements analysis must have (all analysis pieces contained) and could have (some analysis pieces contained) as well as a Six Writing Traits + 1 inventory that invited students to make observations about content, organization, voice, sentence fluency, word choice, ideas, and attention to audience. The researcher was cognizant to choose articles that discussed athletes across the gender spectrum and athletes from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The final project for this research was a 1-2 page written response to the 2016 AP Language question #3 (College Board, 2016), which completed outside of class.

Data were analyzed through thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Students responded to pre- and post-questionnaires, drafted writing samples, and completed writer's logs. A pre- and post-writing sample was graded with the same rubric evaluating thesis, inclusion of evidence, organization of ideas, and use of authorial voice. Students were given a 1, 2, or 3, with 3 being the best score, in each category, then an average was calculated. Students' pre- and post-writing averages were compared.

Results

A thematic analysis of the data produced three major themes: students' application of writing traits, confidence, and engagement in the writing process. Students' responses to post-questionnaires and writing journals indicate that they were able to recognize writing traits—or parts of writing that an author uses to create tone, persuasive arguments, or genre conventions—within sports analysis and conceptualize how to transfer the traits they observe to other genres. In the post-questionnaire, 78.8% of students chose a more positive response to the statement “I know strategies to use when writing a genre I have never written before.” With a rubric that evaluated students on making a direct claim, using genre-appropriate voice, citing evidence, and

organizing their ideas, 77% of students improved their score from the first writing sample to the last. Students commented that they realized analytical writing “doesn’t have to be so complex or sophisticated” to be persuasive, “short and simple sentences” can still get a point across, and writing should be “concise and clear.” Katie, for example, showed her ability to be concise and persuasive by writing: “Rebellion and disobedience have played a crucial role in all the advancements and social reforms throughout history.” The language in this sentence is concise and clearly showcases her opinion, but her writing also demonstrates that concise writing did not lower the quality of her writing. Students also indicated an awareness of including strong evidence. In her writer’s journal, Emily noticed that she needed to include “appropriate evidence to back up [her] claims” because doing so would “strengthen [her] argument.” Mary recognized the need for including “multiple sources.” Mary excelled in her use of evidence in her final essay. In that essay Mary included evidence about the colonists and the Revolutionary War, the Civil Rights movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement. These different pieces of evidence show her effort to apply what she observed from the mentor texts used.

Student responses to short answer questions and Likert scale questions suggest that after studying sports analysis students gained confidence in their ability to write analysis. In their post-questionnaire, eight students commented that they felt confident in their ability to analyze. Emily included in her writer’s journal, “I feel like I have gotten better at writing.” Jack wrote in his post-questionnaire, “I feel that I am definitely more confident in my ability to analyze.” Jack showed his confidence as a writer by taking a clear stance on how disobedience affects society. He wrote:

These rebellious values that were present in the birth of America have survived up until the present day and have directly resulted in the social progress that Wilde speaks of, whether it be the fight for gender equality, the civil rights movement, labor movements, or many others, all of which shaping the country today and the modern world.

He is bold in his assertion that disobedience is necessary for progress. His list shows that he believes in what he states, and he is persuasive and firm.

Despite a 78.8% increase from students’ pre-writing sample to their post-writing sample, the majority of students had a low interest in sports. On the post-questionnaire, students were asked to rate their interest in sports on a scale from 1-10, only one student rated their interest above a 5. The median interest was 3.66% of students marked either “strongly disagree” or

“disagree” to the statement “I think sports should be a curricular topic in an English class,” with 44.4% of students selecting a more negative response in the post-questionnaire. This group of students were overwhelmingly uninterested in sports. There is no apparent correlation between interest in sports and ability to apply the writing techniques from sports analysis. Eli, who increased his score from a 1.25 to a 2.75, commented that he found the articles confusing since he is not interested in sports and said, “I did not necessarily love it, but I could see why it was necessary or a strategy.” Despite students being uninterested in sports and sports pedagogy, students did show an increase in their engagement with analytical writing. 66.7% of students marked a more positive response in the post-questionnaire to the statement “I feel motivated to write analysis so others can read my opinions.” 55.5% of students marked that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” with that statement.

Discussion

Even though sports analysis is not typically considered academic writing, students can still apply what they learn to more traditional academic pursuits. These findings also suggest that sports analysis can help prepare students for standardized tests that assess a student’s ability to write a thesis and support it with evidence. This study supports much of the previous scholarship about the use of mentor texts. Specifically, it supports Dorfman’s (2013) claim that mentor texts can help students make improvements in their writing. The increase in students’ confidence as writers as well as the increase in their writing scores suggests that as students grow more confident their writing improves. This result also supports findings from Alexander (1997) and Graham et al. (2017) that as students gain confidence in their ability and more knowledge about a subject then they are more motivated to write. As students began to believe they had the ability to generate analytical ideas, they generated better ideas.

Despite students overwhelmingly being uninterested in sports, they still became better writers. Marchetti and O’Dell (2018) argue that sports are a high interest subject and that is the reason to include sports pedagogy, but, for this group of students, sports were not a high interest subject. Regardless, their understanding of the possibilities within analysis did seem to interest them. Perhaps as students began to understand that analytical writing can be creative, contain humor, and use evidence that they find interesting they became more engaged with writing. These findings are important for scholarship about sports pedagogy because it adds another element to the conversation: sports analysis should be considered in English classes because it is

easy to consume and can provide an excellent example of writing. Whether or not students are interested in sports, sports analysis can help students become better writers.

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Visual Arts Pedagogy and Student Engagement with Poetry

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Poetry can be a daunting subject when brought up in an English class. Many experts (Bugeja, 1992; Milner et al., 2017; Stein 2010) highlight that the teachers may be part of the problem, teaching students that there is only one way a poem can be explicated, resulting in students feeling discouraged and embarrassed if they do not read the poem correctly. Stein (2010) describes how instructors teach poetry almost like a game of pin the tail on the donkey; “blindfolded students are at the mercy of their teacher, the only one with ‘vision’ to judge the results” (p. 195). This type of instruction can scar students, making them feel unintelligent, naïve, and insecure. For students to value poetry, there may need to be a new level of engagement, focusing more on enjoyment and learning rather than explication. In order to increase student engagement with poetry, teachers should consider applying new stimuli so students can stay interested. While there is scholarship that discusses the importance of arts integration, there seems to be a gap in the literature about using visual arts pedagogy to engage students in reading and writing poetry. For this reason, the teacher researcher asks the following research question: How does visual arts pedagogy influence students’ engagement with poetry?

Literature Review

Visual arts education is viewed as a progressive form of education that calls on students to use their creative abilities and experiences to make meaning in the classroom. Visual arts education reinforces hands-on experience as a way to conceptualize learning and critical thinking (Grierson, 2017; Jones & Risku, 2015). Duma and Silverstein (2014) describe arts integration as “an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both” (p. 4). When teachers are able to integrate art into their lessons, students are simultaneously learning content through an art form as well as a content area, demonstrating their understanding of the material through the art (Carpenter &

Gandara, 2018). Art integration can be seen as a powerful way to improve learning and reach students who may not be as engaged or motivated in the classroom. Carpenter and Gandara (2018) have found that arts integration can “excite students, deepen their understandings, and even help with classroom management issues” (p. 9).

The intersection of art and the English language arts classroom can happen naturally, especially in the realm of poetry. Blackout and found poetry function as ways to interpret and analyze themes found in texts, including newspapers, poems, and novels, through the means of reconstruction and creation from the reader’s perspective (Howard, 2018). Howard (2018) explains how they used found poetry in their creative writing class in order to boost their students’ engagement toward poetry, including describing blackout and found poetry as “the practice of taking a text and erasing the majority of the words, while preserving the original spacing (with either blacked out text or white space) or even the original text (written over or crossed through)” (p. 229). Howard (2018) calls this process “an exercise that implicates both the poet and the reader as active agents in exploration of hidden meaning” (p. 229). Blackout poetry encourages students to find their own themes within a text and elaborate on the meaning that they find through their own creative process.

Methods

The focus of this study is to examine if and how visual arts influences students’ engagement with poetry in the English language arts classroom. This study took place during the teacher researcher’s spring 2021 student teaching placement. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the students participated in class online using Zoom and Canvas as primary technology and learning tools. This class was an elective creative writing class that consisted of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. This study consisted of six participants who submitted all necessary consent/assent forms and completed the required assignments.

Participants completed the intervention over a period of four weeks working with several forms of poetry, specifically focusing on blackout poetry and found poetry. At the beginning of the study, the teacher researcher utilized group discussion and general questions about poetry to gauge the participants’ overall perception and engagement with poetry. The research project was designed to teach the students about blackout poetry and art integration, model how these poems can be created and used, host class discussions related to art and poetry, and prepare students for

a summative assessment in which they were asked to create their own blackout poetry projects that incorporated visual art components.

The final project asked participants to pick their own poem to function as the anchor poem. Once the participants selected a poem to function as their anchor poem, their job was to create a blackout poem that focused on identifying a theme found within the anchor poem they chose. The goal of their newly created poem was to focus on a theme they found in the anchor poem and enhance that theme through a visual art form called blackout poetry. The teacher researcher then encouraged students to pair their poem alongside a piece of artwork such as a picture, drawing, or image that shared the same theme in their poem.

To triangulate data, the researcher collected pre- and post-questionnaires, student-created artifacts, and observational notes in order to evaluate student engagement with poetry. The researcher used constant comparative analysis, involving open, axial, and selective coding in order to establish categories to track across the data, looking for patterns and themes prominent to the question (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data were coded and analyzed in order to compare how students' attitudes toward and engagement with poetry was influenced during the study.

Results

The findings in this study respond to how the teacher researcher's use of visual arts paired with poetry influenced the way students engaged with poetry. The questionnaires focused on students' attitudes toward reading and writing poetry, their attitudes toward thinking about a poem's meaning, and their level of interest and engagement with poetry. In addition, the pre-questionnaire asked students to explain the greatest reasons for why they like and dislike poetry in an open-ended response question. The teacher researcher coded those responses and found three themes for why students liked poetry and three themes for why students disliked poetry. The three positive themes expressed are that students enjoy poetry because it serves as an expressive form of writing, poetry can be a fun and creative exercise, and poetry can have multiple meanings to explore. When asked why they dislike poetry, students responded that poetry can often be too boring, poetry can be too vague or difficult to understand, and students do not like the writing and creative processes of poetry.

Student E showed an appreciation and moderate engagement with poetry from the beginning, expressing their perspective on poetry, explaining "sometimes poems can be too vague or short and then they just make my brain bored" when asked what they dislike about

poetry. After visual arts were added into the lesson and used to work with poetry, Student E highlighted how incorporating artwork alongside poetry made the project more fun and enjoyable, saying “I liked having artwork to bounce off of, it made it a lot easier to write the poem.” Visual arts in this lesson allowed Student E to visually experience a poem, which increased their engagement with the poem and their overall understanding of the poem.

Student C did not enjoy poetry coming into class, their responses on the pre-questionnaire indicated that they had less enjoyment in comparison to their classmates. Additionally, Student C explained in their pre- and post-questionnaire that the reasons they dislike poetry is rooted in the frustration of not understanding a poem or their inability to interpret a poem: “I don’t like that is hard to understand and interpret and even harder to write.” The student was also vocal about their lack of interest with poetry throughout class discussions. At the completion of the project, however, the student explained how this type of poetry was much more enjoyable and engaging to create because it required less writing and more artistic opportunities, and it increased their capacity for understanding poetry.

At the beginning of the study, Student D had the most negative feelings toward poetry, answering most of the pre-questionnaire statements with “Somewhat Agree” or worse. Student D’s attitude toward poetry was highly dependent on their ability to understand the poem they were reading. With the help of the visual arts stimulus from the study, Student D showed a positive attitude toward poetry because they said that the art helped them understand the poem. Student D shared that “visual art lessons have helped remind me to create a mental image of the scene being painted by a poet” and that visual arts have “naturally created a bridge between the two art forms.” Although Student D does not love poetry, their responses showed greater engagement and more enjoyment with blackout poetry in comparison to traditional poetry.

Student A showed a strong engagement with poetry from the beginning and was engaged with poetry lessons throughout the study. Student A’s final poem and artwork showed that the visual arts and blackout poem engaged them more than just reading or writing a typical poem. When asked how this project impacted their engagement with the poem they chose, Student A responded, “As you can tell I had a lot more fun with the drawing than the poem. It was more of an afterthought compared to the time I spent on the drawing.” This student felt that creating art to accompany the picture enhanced their poem writing and project engagement.

At the beginning of the study, Student B explained if poetry is too experimental then it “loses the original message that it was trying to get across.” Student B showed growth across this project by trying a new form of poetry, arguably an experimental technique. The final project created by Student B showed that they were engaged and willing to work more closely with experimental poetry, showing a positive attitude toward poetry. Student B explained that they felt more connected with their poem because of the art involved and could better understand poetry because of art.

Student F liked writing traditional poetry and expressed that from the beginning. As the study progressed, Student F had a more open mind about adding the art and shared in their responses that the lesson was engaging. At the end of the study, Student F explained that they wanted to continue writing traditional poetry as they did before. In their final open-ended response, they said “it didn’t do it for me personally, as it wasn’t a poem.” This response indicates that they did not believe the blackout poem they created was actually a poem and would have preferred to write their own poetry in the traditional sense.

Discussion

This study was able to show that all six students who used using visual arts with poetry felt more engaged with poetry, with the exception of Student F. The students explained that having the ability to draw and create their own artwork to enhance the material increased their engagement. This is a similar result to what Schmeck et al. (2014) found in their science classroom, that students were more engaged when they created drawings of the material.

The students felt more engaged and connected with the poems when they used visual arts, similar to the findings of several educators (Moorman, 2006; Reilly & Goen, 2015) who expressed that using visual art alongside literature can enhance the engagement of students’ emotions, allowing them to feel more connected with the subject matter. This study also showed that students were more engaged because they made personal connections through the art and poetry. This is reminiscent of Moorman (2006), who revealed that when visual art is paired alongside a literature text, students are encouraged to make personal connections to the text and express themselves using the visual arts.

Another benefit of this study was the increased capacity for identifying and analyzing themes within a poem. Bugeja (1992) and Stein (2010) found that students’ enjoyment of poetry are influenced when they understand the meaning of a poem. Several students indicated that the

visual art component helped to increase their understanding of their own poems and was an engaging way to explore the theme in their poem. Milner et al. (2017) suggest that “the more multisensory stimuli, the more likely you are to capture and activate the mind’s attention” (p. 206). This assertion proved true within this study as the use of visual arts kept the students’ attention. It was clear from the open-ended responses that the student engagement was impacted by adding visual arts to their poetry. As a result, teachers may want to consider building visual arts into their curriculum in order to promote engagement with the curriculum.

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Identifying Bias and Perspective in News Related Tweets

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The study of history is not merely the study of names, dates, and events. It is the development of thinking skills including the ability to navigate complex webs of causes and effects and carefully trace changes and consistencies over time. These skills, though important, would not be much use to students if they were only ever applied to events of the past. The real benefit of studying history is the improved ability to understand and act in the present. There are few activities as well suited to letting students practice applying their historical thinking skills to the present day than the intentional, structured study of current events.

Though current events have been a staple in social studies classrooms for decades (Clarke & Zelinski, 1992; Rhoades, 1994), the way that current events are taught in school has not caught up with how most people, including students, get their news. More people, especially young people, are getting their news online than ever before (American Press Institute, 2016; Madden, Lenhart, & Fontaine, 2017). For current events instruction to be meaningful and relevant to students, it must teach students how to navigate the increasingly complex online news environment. This ability falls into the category of media literacy, the capacity to access, analyze, and produce various kinds of media messages, whether found in print, on video, on the internet or elsewhere. If current events are going to be taught in school, then media literacy needs to be taught as well. This action research study explores the effects of a media literacy lesson on students' ability to identify perspective and bias in news-related tweets, posts on the popular social media platform Twitter.

Literature Review

Consumer habits and attitudes towards news have changed rapidly in recent years. The internet is becoming a more and more popular source for news information while trust in traditional media, such as newspapers, is steadily declining (American Press Institute, 2016). Young people in particular report getting much of their news from social media (Madden et al., 2017). While social media and other online sources are often more up-to-date and convenient to

access, they have numerous drawbacks. There are ideological echo chambers, an almost complete lack of editorial standards on many social media sites, and a preference for spectacle over reliable reporting of the facts (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Teenagers are aware of these pitfalls, but often lack concrete strategies for managing them as they rely on social media to provide them much of their news information. There is a clear need for media literacy instruction to address this lack.

Different researchers have identified different ways to approach teaching media literacy for a digital environment. Hodgin and Kahne (2018) suggest that teachers should primarily aim to help students learn how to verify whether information is accurate and how their own biases may be influencing how they interpret a claim. Mihailidis and Viotty (2017) argue that, rather than combating misinformation, we should instead focus on teaching students how to intentionally develop positive norms and habits for online discourse. Middaugh (2018) claims that teachers also need to instruct students how to appropriately search for and share information online; students need to participate in discourse, not just dissect it. Teachers and students can also work together to analyze social media networks on a meta-level; for instance, they might research how algorithms privilege certain kinds of content and shape the discourse around an issue (Krutka & Carpenter, 2017). Fortunately for teachers, students are already employing their own literacy strategies and recognizing the need to verify what they see online (Madden et al., 2017). To best develop students' media literacy skills, teachers will need to connect these native strategies to even more deliberate and analytical approaches.

Less than 50% of Americans express even a moderate amount of trust in traditional mass media (Brenan, 2019). More students than ever before are using social and online media to stay up to date on current events (Madden et al., 2017). This clearly demonstrates the urgent necessity of updating our instructional approaches to current events and media literacy so that students are prepared to engage with the news safely and deliberately, an essential skill for participating in a modern democratic society (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013a).

Method

This project took place in a large public high school in a suburb of a mid-size city in the American Southeast. Each of the 40 student participants was enrolled in one of three sections of a Civics and Economics course taught by the researcher under the supervision of a cooperating teacher.

The following procedures took place during a unit dealing with influence in politics. As part of students' asynchronous work, they completed a pre-survey with questions asking them to describe their news consumption attitudes and habits, especially related to social media. Most questions were on a 1 – 5 Likert style scale. such as how important they think it is to carefully consider news information they see on social media. Almost all of the questions asked students to respond on a 1 – 5 Likert style scale, e.g. “On a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important), how important do you think it is to carefully analyze the current events and news information you encounter on social media?”.

The next day in class, students participated in a discussion about how they stay up to date on current events and how they interpret current events information they see on social media. As the facilitator for these discussions, I used follow-up questions to get students to explain their thinking. I recorded general observations after each class. After each discussion, I presented a PowerPoint introducing and explaining a strategy for analyzing current events on social media by assessing critical aspects of a news-related post: the author, the message, and the overall topic. These assessments are then used to arrive at a conclusion about the post's overall bias. I modeled the strategy for students by analyzing a tweet from President Biden's official Twitter account (included in the PowerPoint), explaining each step of the process in detail as I went.

Next, the class practiced applying the strategy by analyzing tweets from Vice President Harris, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Rep. Mondaire Jones. Students shared their assessments with the class as we went, and I provided feedback and asked follow-up questions if students seemed unsure how to apply the strategy. Throughout these activities, I recorded my observations about how well students applied the strategy.

I assigned students three additional tweets to analyze as asynchronous work. All three tweets—from Sen. Thom Tillis, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Rep. Vicente Gonzalez—were on the topic of immigration to the US. For each tweet, students had to fill out a chart with sections for each portion of their analysis, including a final assessment of the tweet's bias. I graded each submission and qualitatively analyzed the students' collective responses. Students also completed a post-survey that again asked students to describe their attitudes towards news and social media. Most of the questions were identical to those on the pre-survey.

Results

The pre-survey showed that social media is an overwhelming popular source of news information for my students; 90% of students said they use it to follow the news. Almost half of all students further identified social media as their primary method of learning about the news. Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter were the most used platforms. Despite this popularity, most students did not report having or using strategies to analyze the news on these sites. The attitude questions on the pre-survey and student comments in the discussion reveal that students are generally skeptical of news information on social media. The participants demonstrated knowledge of strategies for managing the risks inherent to online news but apply them inconsistently, if at all, because interacting with news posts is secondary to their main aims of using social media, such as staying connected with friends and family.

Several themes emerged from the practice analyses in class. Students were adept at identifying the intended message behind each tweet, but often focused more on the author than the tweet itself mostly because each tweet is from a politician. A major point of disagreement was over the relationship between a tweet's bias and usefulness with some students believing that bias renders a tweet useless and other arguing that tweets can be useful for understanding a topic despite bias. Finally, students who knew more about the topic of the tweet produced better analyses; students who had studied Supreme Court expansion—the subject of McConnell's and Jones's tweets—were able to draw on additional details to support their conclusions.

On the independent analysis assignment, there was a clear divide between students who used the strategy from class and those who did not. There was also considerable variation in response length and detail. The longer, more detail responses usually had stronger, more compelling conclusions. The author section had the most variability, depending largely on students' knowledge of the authors and their political affiliations. As in the practice analyses, students excelled in the message section. The main differentiating factor here was whether students identified the tweets as fact or opinion. Also of note is that no students made substantive appeals to the links and images attached to each tweet. The topic section was consistently the least developed; students made very little effort to relate the tweets to one another or situate them within the larger conversation.

The students that had the most detail in the author, message, and topic sections produced the best overall analyses of a tweet's bias. Two trends from the discussion and practice analyses

reemerged in these conclusions. First, students continued to be divided over how a tweet's bias impacted its usefulness for learning about the topic of immigration. Second, students generally found all three tweets highly biased simply because they were posted by politicians; students again zeroed in on the author and did not devote enough attention to the other categories when presenting their conclusions about the tweets' bias.

The post-survey did not indicate that the media literacy lesson made a significant change in student attitudes towards social media news. Students still regarded social media news with skepticism but did not report any meaningful intention to change the way they use social media nor any desire to continue to learn about social media news. However, there was a marked increase in the number of students who claimed they know a strategy for analyzing social media news, and 85% of students expressed a high degree of comfort applying the strategy we learned in class.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the study reveal major themes about how high school aged students understand social media and suggest important directions that schools and teachers can take to improve how students consume the news and other information on various social media platforms.

Student responses to the pre-survey demonstrate the clear need for improved media literacy instruction. As Madden et al.'s (2017) study would suggest, my students use social media constantly, including to stay informed about news and current events. And despite knowing about the issues with how news is covered on social media, students either didn't know or didn't regularly apply a strategy for carefully analyzing the news posts they encounter. Students are going to continue to come into contact with news information on social media, so they need to know how to do so safely and carefully.

The observations from the discussion can help explain the apparent disconnect between students' confidence in their ability to accurately analyze news posts and the infrequency with which they choose to do so. Students aren't venturing onto social media with the specific intent of learning about current events; developing analysis strategies and closely examining individual posts would distract from what students are attempting to gain from using social media. They know that it's important to think carefully about the news, but it simply isn't a priority for them.

This reveals the most important conclusion from my study: media literacy instruction needs to align with how students are already using a particular media source. Despite their comfort with the strategy we learned, students had very little interest in changing their behavior or learning more about carefully analyzing social media posts. To do so would require them to change established habits and runs counter to their very purpose for using social media at all.

In addition to being more relevant to existing student practices, media literacy also needs to be a more frequent and consistent part of the school curriculum. Continued discussions on how students interact with media and additional exposure to media literacy concepts would greatly increase the likelihood that students would internalize basic media literacy practices. This would have a profound positive impact on their ability to stay informed and would allow teachers to productively include current events in the course curriculum.

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