Learner Motivation and Engagement in High School Social Studies Classrooms

by Chelsea Plante

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of hands-on and cooperative learning strategies would increase the engagement of students enrolled in United States History. The measurement tools were created by the researcher and were based on the National Survey of Student Engagement. The study used a counterbalanced design with a pretest/posttest to compare each student's level of engagement before and after the intervention. There was no statistically significant increase in student engagement, although there was a significant correlation between student understanding of a lesson and student engagement in lessons using traditional strategies and those using engagement-targeted strategies. Research of engagement in secondary schools, especially in social studies, is limited and should therefore be continued in order to determine the best strategies for increasing learner engagement.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Engagement is crucial for student learning in the classroom. Anderman, Andrejewski, and Allen (2011) suggest that maintaining a classroom environment that continuously supports student motivation and learning is one of the most important tasks of effective teaching. When classroom tasks are engaging, otherwise uninterested students may develop a degree of enthusiasm for the content. If students are not engaged by what is happening in the classroom they will be less motivated to try their best on classroom tasks. Low student engagement results in students not fully learning key content that is presented to them. Duffield, Wageman, and Hodge (2013) cite research that has indicated a direct relationship between student engagement and achievement. Teachers can help students meet ever-increasing expectations by providing classroom instruction that actively engages students with the content and motivates them to work hard.

Overview

Many students appear to limit their scholastic efforts to what is required to receive a specific grade and do not appear to have additional motivation to participate in classroom activities. Such students likely do not strive for full understanding of the course content. Rather, they appear to limit their engagement to what is sufficient to get them the grade they seek. Minimal engagement with course material, makes it unlikely that information will be retained over the long term. A lack of deeper understanding renders students less ready to begin college or a career after high school.

Researchers such as Johnson (2008), as cited in Duffield et al. (2013), Anderman et al. (2011), and Manfra and Lee (2012) have concluded that connecting what is taught in high school to both college and career opportunities as well as to specific interests expressed by students may be an effective way to engage students with academic course content. Findings of such research suggest that many students question the applicability of what they are learning, and are unsure how it will be useful to them "in the

real world." When educators can help students acquire a purpose for their learning and make the content relevant to students, it may be more likely that students will be motivated and actively engaged in the classroom.

This researcher became interested in this particular issue after being in classrooms, both as a student and as an educator, and observing students who appeared disengaged from instruction. Duffield et al. (2013) suggest that fewer than half of all students may be engaged authentically in school, though some of the disengaged students may not be seen as such because their grades are acceptable. If students' minds are not engaged in lessons, it is not possible for them to fully understand the content or appreciate its value - even if they are earning passing grades. Increasing students' engagement with the material appears to be an important strategy to enhance students' learning and their motivation for learning.

Statement of Problem

A wide variety of instructional strategies can be used to present course content to students. With so many choices available, educators simply may select strategies with which they are the most comfortable instead of considering alternate strategies which may be more effective for their students. Research such as that reported by Summers (2008) suggests that strategies that incorporate autonomy, variation of tasks, and specific feedback are more effective in engaging students with classroom tasks than instructional strategies that do not incorporate these elements. Such research suggests that the consistent and frequent use of these types of strategies should lead to an overall increase in student engagement and motivation in the classroom.

Research such as that cited above suggests the need for additional studies to identify strategies that increase students' motivation and engagement within the classroom setting. Responding to this need, the purpose of this study was to determine whether hands-on or cooperative learning strategies were effective in increasing the engagement of high school students in social studies classrooms.

Hypotheses

This researcher hypothesized that the engagement of high school students in a social studies class would increase when teaching strategies included hands-on and cooperative learning. The null hypotheses compared the levels of engagement and understanding of two groups of students who alternately participated in two four-day blocks of social studies instruction using engagement-targeted strategies and two blocks of social studies instruction of the same length using traditional strategies.

h_{01}: the change in overall engagement in social studies (post-pre SSES section 1 score) of the participants = 0

(after all students receive lessons using engagement-targeted and traditional instructional strategies)

h_{02}: engagement in lessons with engagement-targeted instructional strategies = engagement in lessons without engagement-targeted instructional strategies

(mean SES scores on items 1-3 from blocks with engagement-targeted instruction and traditional instruction)

h_{03}: $r_{(understanding\ of\ lessons,\ engagement\ in\ lessons)} = 0$ for lessons with engagement targeted instructional strategies

(mean SES scores on items 4-5 after lessons using engagement-targeted instructional strategies)

h_{04}: $r_{(understanding\ of\ lessons,\ engagement\ in\ lessons)} = 0$ for traditional lessons

(mean SES scores on items 4-5 after lessons using traditional instructional strategies)

Operational Definitions

Engagement was defined as students' self-ratings of their interest, attention, and participation in lessons. Ratings were collected using the pre and post intervention Survey of Student Engagement in Social Studies (SSESS) rating scale and the Student Engagement Survey (SES) which was administered

after each block of lessons with or without engagement-targeted strategies. Copies of these instruments are in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Understanding was defined by students' ratings of the degree to which they understood the lessons and the clarity of the teacher's instructions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review examines issues related to learner motivation and engagement in high school social studies classrooms. Part one discusses why the engagement and motivation of students in the classroom is important. Goal Orientation Theory is the focus of part two. Part three explores instructional strategies that may be effective in increasing students' learning motivation and engagement in social studies classrooms.

The Importance of Learner Engagement and Motivation

Learner engagement and motivation are two factors that affect how much students actually learn during any given lesson. There are many factors that affect both engagement and motivation, which can make it difficult to determine what practices actually increase the engagement and motivation of students in the classroom. However, it is important to have high levels of student engagement and motivation during classroom instruction because both engagement and motivation are linked to student achievement (Duffield et al., 2013). One of the difficulties in examining motivation, is that the "literature is meant to be descriptive rather than prescriptive" (Summers, 2008, p. I-113). If the current literature is not intended to provide suggestions for better classroom practices it becomes more difficult for teachers to find and implement classroom practices that have been effective in increasing students' motivation. With cognitive approaches to motivation in particular, most of the available research is correlational. Therefore, results from this research can be useful in describing what happened in the research setting but not when making recommendations for new motivational strategies that are effective for all or even a majority of students (Summers, 2008).

Anderman et al. (2011) argue that the most important part of good teaching may be creating a classroom environment that supports motivation and learning for students. Johnson (2008) states that "low student engagement is not a student problem but is instead a teacher problem" (as cited in Duffield,

et al., 2013, p. 87). Classroom motivation may be especially challenging for social studies teachers

because so many students appear to struggle to identify its relevance to their own lives, both currently and

in the future. Teachers in any discipline frequently have students ask how the content of the course is

relevant to them and when they will use it "in the real world." Because these types of questions appear to

be especially evident in social studies classes research related to engagement and motivation strategies in

social studies classrooms is timely and important.

In recent years, social studies classes often have been given diminished importance due to the

focus schools have placed on subjects that are assessed by high-stakes tests such as reading and

mathematics. This situation may be contributing to the conclusion that, as Anderman et al. (2011) noted,

social studies "as a curriculum area in general" has been incredibly under researched, including "a lack of

attention to students' motivation and learning in those classes" (p. 977) Students learn more effectively

when classes are of interest to them, so it is important that teachers find ways in which students can

become engaged with the content and also motivated to be an active participant in the classroom.

While caution is appropriate when using motivation and engagement literature to suggest new

instructional practices, the current literature does describe strategies that may be useful to educators in

high school social studies classrooms. Anderman et al. (2011) noted that "several of the practices that

were common to all the teachers in [their] study have been associated with supportive motivational

learning contexts in earlier studies with younger age groups" (p. 994). Although there is not yet a large

body of research supporting the use of these practices with older students, they are appropriate to consider

because they have been associated with higher levels of engagement and motivation in younger students.

Many of the strategies used to increase motivation and engagement are similar due to their

interrelatedness and, in the literature, were associated with higher levels of engagement and motivation in

students. The strategies included a focus on the classroom environment, use of videos and other types of

technology, allowing students to take ownership of their learning, and giving the content purpose and

meaning for students. Many of these strategies have a foundation in research on goal orientation theory such as that reported by Summers (2008) and Anderman et al. (2011).

Goal Orientation Theory

Students may become disengaged in any class if the classroom environment, including its management, is not conducive to a productive learning atmosphere for all students. Much research regarding general strategies for improving learner engagement and motivation has centered on goal structures. Types of goal structures evident in the literature are mastery goal structures and performance goal structures. Positive student results have been associated with classrooms that have mastery goal structures. This means that the structure of the classroom environment and the lessons planned for students are designed to promote full understanding of the content by all students, rather than an emphasis on memorizing information for a test, as would be evident in performance goal structures. Although inconsistent student outcomes have been noted in correlational studies involving both goal structures, some research has indicated that a combination of mastery and performance goal structures may yield the best outcomes for students, namely higher levels of achievement and help-seeking (Summers 2008). Anderman et al. (2011) found similar results in the literature examined for their study of motivation, noting that research of goal-orientation theory has indicated that mastery goal structures within a classroom make the "supportive motivational context" available to all students (p. 972).

Summers (2008) and Anderman et al. (2011) describe the acronym TARGET to outline strategies that teachers can use to make their classroom structures more mastery goal oriented than performance goal oriented. The letters in the acronym stand for task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, and time. Specifically, to promote a mastery goal orientation Summers (2008) suggests that teachers

> allow task variation; help students see the relevance of tasks, and keep tasks at a challenging level; offer students the opportunity to take leadership roles in their own learning; recognize and offer specific feedback on student effort, progress, and accomplishments; use small-group work to help students assume more responsibility for learning; keep evaluation practices private to avoid social comparison and focus on

individual improvement; and adjust the time required for completing work depending on the nature of the task (p. I-118-119).

In addition to promoting mastery goal orientation among students, some of these strategies appear to provide opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning and opportunities for teachers to make the content more relevant, both of which will be discussed below.

Anderman et al. (2011) completed a study regarding how teachers support students' motivation and learning in which students were surveyed about strategies used by their teachers in the classroom. Results from the study indicated that teachers identified by students as having high-mastery goal structures also promoted peer interactions in classroom tasks, "positive teacher-student relationships, coupled with high expectations for students' learning" (p. 974). In addition, teachers who gave students more support in regard to instruction and motivation also were reported by students to focus more on building understanding. Students reported that these teachers explained that learning has to include a degree of uncertainty, and mistakes, along with asking for help. All of these characteristics are part of the zone of proximal development where real learning can take place.

When Anderman and his associates observed four teachers named by students in their survey responses, the authors noted an "interdependence of the academic, interpersonal, and motivational dimensions of classrooms" (2011, p. 976). The strategies for improving one of these dimensions also tended to have positive effects on at least one of the other areas as well. The interrelated nature of these dimensions is beneficial for teachers who may need to address one or more dimensions to improve the mastery goal structure and, as research indicates, the student engagement in their classroom. More specifically, it was found that if teachers successfully supported understanding, managed the classroom, and built and maintained rapport, students were engaged in classroom activities (Ibid.). According to Anderman, highly effective classroom management is one instructional strategy teachers in the study used that is not generally discussed in student-motivation literature (Ibid., p. 995).

Anderman and his associates (2011) noted that research by others in this field has suggested that the social climate of a classroom can affect the degree to which mastery goal structure is achieved. One

way to foster a positive, productive social climate in the classroom is through student participation. The teachers in the study by Anderman et al. used a minimum of two participation structures in all of the classes that were observed. Providing multiple means for students to participate helps ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in a way that is comfortable for them. The social climate in a classroom also can be fostered through collaborative learning (Duffield et al., 2013), which gives students many opportunities for active participation. Duffield et al. stated that "engagement is identified by enthusiastic participation, reflecting active involvement" and added "commitment to this definition and state that involvement is both behavioral and psychological" (p. 86). Students can be engaged without always actively participating. Similarly students must be mentally involved and committed; they cannot simply engage in over behaviors of engagement. Teachers can foster behavioral and psychological involvement in addition to commitment by giving students tasks that are meaningful and interesting (Ibid.). If classroom activities are not meaningful and interesting for students, there will be very little incentive for them to engage in learning. Giving such tasks is a learner-centered practice, which Duffield et al. stated "elicit higher student engagement than…teacher-centered practices" (p. 87).

While Anderman et al. (2011) observed that all of the teachers in their study drew on considerable content knowledge in their classroom instruction, Duffield et al. (2013) found in their study that increasing teachers' content knowledge through professional development did not lead to "a significant difference in student performance" (p. 95) compared to the performance of students whose teachers did not participate in the professional development. However, they did report that "the treatment group reported higher levels of authentic engagement" (Ibid.).

<div align="center">**Instructional Strategies**</div>

As discussed above, Anderman et al. (2011) identified strategies or practices that were related to increasing student motivation and engagement with younger students. These strategies included a focus on the classroom environment, use of videos and other types of technology, allowing students to take ownership of their learning, and giving the content purpose and meaning for students. The importance of

the classroom environment was discussed in the section on goal orientation theory. The other strategies are explored below.

Films can be an effective instructional tool in any content area, but they can be particularly useful in social studies classrooms because they can be used in so many different ways and are appropriate for a wide variety of topics. As with any lesson, it is important to identify a clear objective when using film during instruction. Stoddard and Marcus (2010) stated that "having a specific reason for selecting a particular film and specific goals for showing it are the most important keys to successful pedagogy with film" (p. 88). If there is no real reason for showing a film and there are no goals for including it in instruction, students will have no reason to engage with it. Rosenstone (1995, 2006) contends that film can be used to "engage students in larger questions about history and especially questions related to justice and power in the past may be the most powerful and effective role for films in the history classroom" (as cited in Stoddard & Marcus, 2010, p. 86). Essential questions, also a tool to engage students, can be introduced in social studies classrooms and then discussed through viewing films from different eras and different countries. Especially when comparing films, students have the opportunity to use and build on their critical thinking skills. As Stoddard and Marcus noted, incorporating film into instruction can "engage students in critical thinking and deliberation of important questions about the past and present" (p. 86-87). Some of the essential questions presented in social studies classrooms involve topics that may be difficult or sensitive to discuss and may not be included adequately, or at all, in the textbook. Showing a film is a means by which students can be introduced to such a topic and then can analyze and discuss the topic through discussion of the film. One concern related to using films in social studies classrooms is a potential lack of historical accuracy. Stoddard and Marcus argue that perhaps this does not mean such films should be avoided. Addressing historical inaccuracies with students could "be used effectively in the classroom as a way to challenge students' views of the past through the questions

or issues they raise and not necessarily the history they 'show'" (p. 85). The depiction of an event in a film can be historically inaccurate while still accurately representing an overall social or political climate.

Online Discussion Forums & Educational Blogs

Students increasingly use the internet and technology and this trend very likely will continue. With students' extensive connection to the internet through computers, smart phones, and other devices, technology may appear to be a hindrance to classroom tasks. However, because students have grown increasingly comfortable with technology, there are a myriad of opportunities to use it to enhance education. Two such opportunities are online discussion forums and educational blogs (Blankenship 2009; Manfra & Lee 2012).

Many students currently spend a substantial amount of time online, so giving an educational task in a form readily familiar to them may increase their interest in the task. Blankenship (2009) has suggested that "students who are already engaged in online activities may become more intrinsically motivated when their preferred medium of communication and research is utilized within the classroom" (p. 127). Using technology such as online discussion forums and educational blogs in the social studies classroom has a more specific set of benefits. Blankenship cited other research that has supported the use of these technologies in "increasing citizenship skills, supporting historical inquiry, and enhancing classroom discussion. … [as well as] increased levels of student engagement, enhanced communication skills, and increased participation in discussion" (p. 127). Manfra and Lee (2012) noted in their research that the use of educational blogs in history classrooms can provide ready access to historical resources for students in addition to a facilitated arena for discussion of these materials. There is an ever-increasing number of historical sources and resources available in digital formats; for students to navigate these alone would be a daunting challenge. For example, with an educational blog, a classroom teacher can provide the primary sources or other resources for students, allowing them to spend more time analyzing the sources instead of trying to find them. As Manfra and Lee note, "digital technologies have been found

to be particularly well suited to the purpose of engaging students in the signature pedagogy of 'doing history'" (p. 119).

The creation of such discussion forums and blogs allows students to both "do" history by reading and analyzing historical sources, which builds critical thinking skills, in addition to providing additional opportunities for students to engage with course content. Online discussion forums provide a space for conversations to be carried out over a much longer time than a class period would allow. This extended time allows students greater opportunity to formulate an opinion or thought than they would have during an in-class discussion. Forums also offer the opportunity for multiple discussions to take place simultaneously (Blankenship, 2009). Because all of the students' comments are posted online, showing a train of thought, classroom teachers have "many opportunities…to assist in the development of students' historical inquiry skills" (Ibid., p. 130).

There is no question that students tend to prefer classroom tasks that include opportunities for interaction with peers. Educational blogs and forums give students a different way to interact with classmates in addition to "new ways to interact with text by reading online and the ability for students to direct their own learning" (Manfra & Lee, 2012, p. 127). As will be discussed below, giving students ownership in their learning is another way to promote engagement. Manfra and Lee, in their study of education blog usage in a classroom found that "the blogging activities…encouraged a high level of students engagement" (p. 131) in addition to students commenting that the blog "provided students a safer avenue for participating in class" (p. 127). As with any teaching strategy, if students do not feel safe participating in the task or activity at hand, it is highly unlikely that they will be engaged learners.

Video Games

As with internet tools such as discussion forums and educational blogs, many students are familiar with video games. Watson, Mong, and Harris (2011), and Pagnotti and Russell (2012) reflect on the increasing amount of research and general support suggesting the use of computer and video games

for educational purposes. For example, Watson et al. state that such games are "a promising form of instruction which can both engage students and strengthen skills important in the current information age" (p. 466) and Pagnotti and Russell observe that "gaming can be a very powerful tool with which to engage learners in rich, immersive experiences" (p. 40). Pagnotti and Russell also cite research indicating that the use of video games for learning in history classrooms has a positive impact on the motivation of students. Watson et al. also cited a study in which "the biggest benefit of the game was an increase in student motivation and the way that the games, even though they were behaviorist in nature, seemed to stimulate student-centered learning and classroom discussion" (p. 467).

Using a video game for learning in the classroom requires active participation from the students and, with games like those Watson et al. (2011) and Pagnotti and Russell (2012) discussed, students are constructing their own knowledge as they play the game using critical thinking skills. In both of the studies, teachers included discussion in lessons with the video game. Pagnotti and Russell (2012) observed that "the discussions throughout the implementation were lively, engaging, and captivated students' attention" (p. 43). While students did learn from playing the games, the games alone should not constitute a lesson. As was discussed with the use of films in the classroom, "games in classrooms need to be directed by specific educational goals and guidance to maximize learning" (Watson et al., p. 468).

The authors cited above found evidence that students were more engaged in lessons incorporating video games because of the nature of the video game activities. During focus groups, the students in Watson et al.'s case study commented "that the hands-on aspect of the games was what helped students to be engaged to the material while they learned" (2011, p. 470). Students also reported being more engaged because interaction was built into the lessons and because the activities were "'fun'" and like "'play'" (p. 470). Both the teachers and students who participated in the case study reported by Watson and his associates noted that "students were more likely to learn if they were engaged and attentive" (p. 474). These authors summarized the results of their case study and observations of the video game lessons in the following manner:

From our results, three primary theories arise on the use of video games in the classroom: video games can enhance student engagement, video games can promote a learner-centered learning environment, and teacher facilitation is an important part of effectively using video games in the classroom. … A powerful implication resulting from the observation of the use of this game in Mr. Irvine's classrooms was the transformation of the traditional, teacher-centric classroom where students are largely passive, to a learner-centered classroom where students were actively involved in making decisions and interacting with each other, in addition to Mr. Irvine and the game (p. 473).

Pagnotti and Russell (2012) reached a similar conclusion regarding the use of video games in a social studies classroom, commenting that "students were engaged, were motivated to learn, and demonstrated very few behavioral issues during field-testing" in addition to the fact that the game used (Civilization IV) has "qualities that will motivate students to take ownership of their learning and ensure teachers engage their students with meaningful lessons" (p. 44). As will be discussed in subsequent sections of this review, giving students ownership of their learning and making the content meaningful for students are more general means by which student engagement and motivation in the classroom can be encouraged.

Student Ownership of Learning

It is generally agreed that tasks seems more enjoyable when chosen by the individual who must complete it. There is a certain pride in selecting a task and doing it well. This principle holds true in the classroom. Allowing students to have some authority in determining what they do in the classroom enables them to learn and practice autonomy while also learning the course content. Such practices are likely to create a more positive learning environment for students who resist being told what to do. Anderman et al. (2011) cite research by Meece (1991) indicating that "students were more likely to report a personal mastery orientation when teachers used an active instructional approach that emphasized meaningful learning, supported both student autonomy and collaboration, and emphasized the intrinsic value of learning" (973). Yonezawa, Jones, and Joselowsky (2009) similarly concluded that students need to be encouraged to "make meaning, articulate interests, [and] set agendas" in schools if they are to be engaged (p. 202). It is important for students to have opportunities to choose, or at least have some input in, what and how they will learn and how they will demonstrate their learning.

Lattimer (2008) suggests that one way to offer students opportunities to have input and choices in their learning is through presenting essential questions. "Many history classrooms are led by well-intentioned, knowledgeable teachers who work hard to find and develop engaging activities that connect to the larger concepts of history. But, too often, these teachers are the ones doing all the thinking in the classroom. This dynamic needs to shift – teachers need to be facilitating student thinking" (Ibid., p. 326). Student thinking can be facilitated and "student ownership of historical thinking" can be developed by introducing essential questions that "address the big ideas of history and social studies" (Ibid.). Because there is no single or simple answer to these questions, they can be revisited throughout a unit or perhaps even an entire school year and, as Lattimer suggests, discussions may raise further questions. Additionally, due to the nature of essential questions, students must be able to use different perspectives to examine subject matter and must take "responsibility for grappling with ideas and information through a critical lens, and…decide how to interpret historical data" (Ibid., p. 327). Encouraging students to examine the big picture extensively and to determine how historical sources should be analyzed gives them opportunities to realize how capable they are. Because there are no right or wrong answer to essential questions, discussion of them should allow students to participate in the classroom without fear of rejection. Although Lattimer's study was conducted with a small sample, observing only one class, the results suggest promise. Using essential questions "led to significantly greater student engagement, much more consistent attendance and homework completion, and a 15-point increase in standardized test scores" (p. 329). If students are engaged with classroom activities it is more likely that they will have increased motivation to attend class and higher levels of achievement.

Giving the content purpose

If there does not seem to be a purpose for learning something or if it does not appear to be useful, students have little reason to be engaged in the classroom. Haydn and Harris (2010) found that students do not always understand *why* history classes are useful, even when they think learning history in school is useful. They also conclude that teachers may be spending more time on the content, "at the expense of

explaining to pupils why they are learning about something (p. 256). Similarly, Manfra and Lee (2012) noted that "there is evidence within the social studies that the subject is not particularly compelling or engaging for students, especially for minority students…This may be due to the teacher's inability to make the content relevant to students' cultural experiences and to build on students' prior knowledge" (p. 120). For students to fully understand content, it must have some connection to their prior knowledge. Whether or not students have relevant prior knowledge from other social studies classes, teachers can draw parallels between the new content and present-day events that are familiar to the students.

To encourage students who may not value academic tasks or who have doubts about their ability to succeed in these tasks, Summers (2008) cites research findings suggesting that teachers "offer reasons for schoolwork that include the importance or utility value of the task; model value in the content of the lesson; activate personal interest through opportunities for choice; and praise students for their accomplishments" (p. I-118). Giving students choice offers them some ownership of their learning and including students' personal interests can help students make connections between the content and "real world," thus making the content more relevant. In their observations of classroom teachers, Anderman et al. (2011) noted the participating teachers use similar strategies; they "invested considerable time and energy making their content relevant for students. In particular, teachers discussed everyday applications of the concepts, they connected the curriculum to popular media, and they disclosed how the content was relevant to their own lives" (p. 987). In social studies courses there are many opportunities to engage students and make the content relevant by using sources from the present alongside historical primary sources.

Conclusion

For students to be academically successful in any classroom they must be both engaged and motivated. There are several means of increasing learner engagement and motivation in social studies classrooms, many of which are interrelated. These strategies include creating a mastery goal structure in the classroom; using technology such as films, video games, online discussion forums, and educational

blogs; giving students ownership of their learning; and giving the content purpose for students. Incorporating all of these strategies may be challenging, but including even a few could yield positive results for students.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether hands-on or cooperative learning strategies were effective in increasing the engagement of high school students in social studies classrooms. Increasing students' engagement with the material appears to be an important strategy to enhance students' learning and their motivation for learning.

Design

The purpose of this study was to determine whether hands-on or cooperative learning strategies were effective in increasing the engagement of high school students in social studies classrooms. The study was quasi-experimental with a counterbalanced design. During the study the two classes served as alternating controls for one another. Over the course of four blocks of instruction (each lasting four days), Class A received the first treatment while Class B served as a control, and Class B received the second treatment while Class A served as a control. Instructional strategies were the independent variable while self-ratings of learner engagement comprised the dependent variable. After completing an initial survey about their general engagement level in social studies classes Survey of Student Engagement in Social Studies (SSESS), students took part in lessons with varying instructional strategies for four instructional blocks. After each block with either engagement-targeted strategies or traditional instruction, participants in both conditions completed a short survey regarding their engagement in the lessons and homework completion. The SSESS was re-administered at the end of the study to determine if the students' perception of or engagement in Social Studies had changed.

Participants

Participants were chosen from the United States History courses taught by the researcher at a public high school in a suburb of Baltimore, Maryland. Of the four classes taught by the researcher, two classes were randomly selected by their period number to form a convenience sample. From those

classes, one class was randomly selected to be the first to receive treatment intervention. All students in each class participated in the study. The 62 participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years old. Most students were Caucasian. There were 24 males and 38 females in total; Class A had 17 male and 16 female students while Class B had 17 male and 12 female students.

Instrument

At the beginning of the study, all 62 participants completed a Survey of Student Engagement in Social Studies (SSESS). They also completed the instrument at the end of the study. The SSESS was developed by the researcher but adapted from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE is given to students at four-year colleges and universities and was adapted to make it more appropriate for high school students, and more specific to social studies courses. Analyses have found the original instrument to be valid and reliable (Kuh et al., 2000). The items asked the participants to rate on a five-point scale (with zero meaning never and four meaning very often) how frequently they take part in behaviors reflecting engagement and other engagement-related activities. The second two sections of the SSESS were used to determine if there was a relationship between classwork emphasis (i.e. memorization or evaluation of documents) and three teacher behaviors and the level of a student's engagement as quantified in the first section of the survey. A copy of the SSESS is included in Appendix A.

During the study, students in both groups completed a shorter lesson-specific engagement survey, the SES, after each of four instructional blocks, two of which used the engagement-targeting strategies and two of which used traditional instructional methods. A copy of the SES is found in Appendix B. The SES was created by the researcher and its items asked students to describe how engaged they felt during the unit, how often they had actively participated, and how often they had been distracted. Additionally, students were asked to rate their understanding of the lesson and how clear they found the instructions. Students also completed a Daily Homework Tracker to indicate how often and when they completed their homework. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix C.

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Procedure

All 62 participant students in two eleventh grade United States History courses were given the SSESS before any interventions were implemented. Students were asked to be thoughtful and honest with their responses.

Over the course of the study, students participated in lessons in four four-day blocks which alternately used strategies aimed at increasing their levels of engagement and traditional types of instruction to which they were accustomed. Therefore, each group participated in two blocks of lessons using methods to increase engagement and two blocks of lessons using traditional instruction. The lessons were not necessarily confined to one method for either group, depending on the teacher's scheduling and students' progress. The four strategies intended to affect engagement were implemented one at a time for one day in each block and included hands-on learning through analysis of primary source, viewing films, giving an explicit purpose for learning, and providing autonomy through choice. After each block of instruction, all students in both groups and both conditions completed a copy of the SES regarding their level of engagement during the lessons. At the beginning of each class in all the blocks, students completed a Daily Homework Tracker indicating when and if they completed homework assignments.

Results of the pre and post SSESS and the SES data from the engagement-targeted and traditional units were compared to determine whether the intervention made an impact on students' engagement or work. Results are summarized in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study hypothesized that the engagement of high school students in a social studies class would increase when teaching strategies included hands-on and cooperative learning. Increasing students' engagement with the material appears to be an important strategy to enhance students' learning and their motivation for learning.

Hypotheses Tested

The null hypotheses guiding the study compared the levels of and relationships between engagement and understanding of two groups of students who alternately participated in blocks of social studies instruction using either engagement-targeted strategies or traditional strategies.

The first hypothesis stated that there would not be a significant change in overall engagement in social studies after the intervention. Student engagement was assessed by calculating the gain of change in the SSESS section 1 scores (post-pre SSESS section 1 score) after all students received lessons using engagement-targeted and traditional instructional strategies. To test whether the gains were significant, a t-test was run to compare the gains in SSESS section 1 scores to zero. Descriptive statistics for the changes in SSES section1 scores follow in Table 1 and results of the T-test follow in Table 2.

All cases with missing SSESS data were eliminated for this analysis in order to yield comparable section and gain scores. There were 47 students with complete pre and post intervention SSESS data.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Change in Engagement after 2 units with traditional and 2 with engagement targeted strategies

SSESS Section One Total	N	Mean	Range	Std. Deviation
PRE	47	17.936	6-28	4.887
POST	47	17.617	3-28	4.674
GAIN	47	-.319	-15-7	3.995
Valid N (listwise)	47			

As indicated in Table 1, the mean gains (post-pre differences) in SSES section one totals was -.319. The t-test yielded a t value of -.548 which was not large enough to be determined statistically significant (p<.587). This means that the mean post intervention SSES section one scores, which were obtained after 2 units each of engagement-targeted and regular instruction, were actually lower than the pre SSES scores (.3191 points), although not significantly. Therefore, null hypothesis 1 was retained.

Table 2

Results of T-test comparing gains in engagement ratings (Post-Pre SSESS scores) to Zero

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
gainSSESsection1	-.548	46	.587	-.31915	-1.4922	.8539

Null hypothesis 2 stated that engagement in lessons with engagement-targeted instructional strategies would not differ significantly from engagement in lessons without engagement-targeted instructional strategies. This was calculated by comparing the total SES scores on items 1-3 from the two instructional blocks which used engagement-targeted instruction to those which used traditional instruction.

Descriptive statistics for each condition (traditional or engagement-targeted) and results of a t-test for dependent samples (the same students were taught using both conditions) follow in tables 3 through 5.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for engagement (SES items 1-3) for traditional and engagement-targeted lessons

TOTAL SES Items 1 to 3	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
ENGAGEMENT-TARGETED	103	0-11	6.5340	2.132
TRADITIONAL	110	0-11	6.5818	2.248

As the results show in Table 4, 49 pairs of data (for students who had no missing SES totals) were compared. The range of possible scores per condition was 0- 24, as items were rated from 0 to 4 and there were 3 items on the scale which was administered once for each of two units given using each instructional condition.   Table 4 shows the mean engagement rating in the traditionally taught blocks (which alternated so content was not the issue causing differences) was 12.510. The mean engagement rating in the blocks taught targeting engagement was slightly lower, 11.327.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for ratings of Engagement (SES items 1-3) for lessons taught under both conditions

(Traditional and Engagement-Targeting)

Paired Sample Statistics

TOTAL SES Engagement Score (sum of ratings for items 1-3)		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	TRADITIONAL	12.510	49	5.042	.720
	ENGAGED	11.327	49	5.673	.810

The results of the t-test follow in Table 5. These indicated that the total engagement scores were not significantly different for the traditional versus the engaged conditions (p<.171). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was retained.

Table 5

Results of T-test for dependent samples comparing students total engagement scores (sum of scores on

SES items1-3) on traditional versus engagement-targeted lessons

PAIR	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	d	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
TRADITIONAL - ENGAGED	1.184	5.964	.852	-.529	2.897	1.389	48	.171

Null hypotheses 3 stated there would not be a significant correlation between the understanding of lessons (total SES scores on items 4-5 after lessons using engagement-targeted instructional strategies) and engagement in lessons (mean total for SES items 1-3) for lessons with engagement targeted instructional strategies.

Null hypothesis 4 tested the same correlation to see if it was greater than zero for traditional lessons. The correlations follow in Table 6.

Table 6

Correlations between student ratings of engagement and understanding for lessons using engagement-targeted or traditional instruction

Correlations		Understanding of TRADITIONAL Lessons	Understanding of ENGAGED Lessons	Engagement in TRADTIONAL Lessons	Engagement in ENGAGEMENT-TARGETING Lessons
Understanding of TRADITIONAL Lessons	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	55			
Understanding of ENGAGED Lessons	Pearson Correlation	**.190**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.190			
	N	49	51		
Engagement in TRADTIONAL Lessons	Pearson Correlation	**.583**[**]	**.051**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.729		
	N	55	49	55	
Engagement in ENGAGEMENT-TARGETING Lessons	Pearson Correlation	**.064**	**.719**[**]	**.385**[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.665	.000	.006	
	N	49	51	49	51
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Three correlations were found to be statistically significant (or have p values <.05). These were the correlations between scores reflecting understanding of and engagement in traditional lessons and understanding and engagement in engagement-targeting lessons and the correlation between engagement in both kinds of lessons. Given the significant correlations between understanding and engagement in both conditions, null hypotheses 3 and 4 were rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study hypothesized that the engagement of high school students in a social studies class would increase when teaching strategies included hands-on and cooperative learning. The study tested four null hypotheses. The first two null hypotheses respectively stated that there would be no change in the engagement of participants as measured by post-pre SSESS section 1 scores and that engagement would not differ significantly between lessons with and without engagement-targeted instructional strategies. The third and fourth hypotheses stated that there would be no correlation between understanding of and engagement in engagement-targeted lessons and traditional lessons, respectively. After analyses of the data, hypotheses 1 and 2 were retained while hypotheses 3 and 4 were rejected.

Implications of Results

The results of this study confirmed some of the null hypotheses. While there was no significant difference in the engagement of students after participating in lessons with engagement-targeted strategies or traditional lessons (hypotheses 1 and 2), there were statistically significant correlations between engagement and understanding in both traditional and engagement-targeted lessons. The correlation was significant for engagement-targeted lessons (.719) and traditional lessons (.583) (hypotheses 3 and 4).

These results suggest engagement affects understanding, but that the intervention may not have significantly impacted engagement or consequent understanding as anticipated.

Theoretical Consequences

Several instructional strategies have been suggested by previous research for the purpose of increasing learner engagement in the classroom, including the use of hands-on and collaborative learning. Researchers have noted the connection between students' engagement and their achievement (Duffield et al., 2013). Therefore, ensuring that students are engaged in lessons is a key task for teachers, though finding ways to do so present challenges.

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The results of this study did not coincide with those of studies discussed in Chapter II as was expected. Implementing instructional strategies targeting engagement did not increase the engagement of the participants as other studies have found. However, as seen from the post-test, there was a significant correlation between understanding and engagement in lessons which could lead to increased achievement as some studies cited in Chapter II have suggested.

Threats to Validity

There were multiple threats to the validity of this study. The study used small sample, with only 60 participants. There also were several student absences when engagement-targeting strategies were used, which led to incomplete sets of data for these students. Two students who participated in the studies were seniors who completed school after one week of the study, lowering the number of students who participated in the entire study to 58. The study also used a convenience sample. A larger, randomized sample which was stratified on variables of interest would have increased the validity of the study.

It was evident while tabulating students' survey responses that some students did not honestly respond to the survey items, and even may not have read the items. A few students circled all fours on each SES and on the pre and post SSESS, though a four was not positive on each item. It is likely these students thought they were responding in a way that would please the teacher, or possibly that they simply did not care and just wanted to complete the survey in as little time as possible. The pre and posts tests were identical, which may have led students to skew their responses according to what they believed the teacher wanted. In addition, using a lengthier assessment of engagement might have yielded more variation in responses, making it easier to identify differences between the groups and making the test more reliable.

The instructional strategies used in this study to target engagement included examining primary source documents in collaborative learning groups, which was not a new strategy for students. If the

strategies used to target engagement had not been familiar to students, these strategies may have had a greater effect on students' engagement.

Connections to Literature

Having students work in groups is one of the TARGET strategies outlined by Summers (2008) and Anderman et al. (2011) and was one of the instructional strategies used in the study. According to these researchers, collaborative groups help to hold each student accountable for classroom tasks and encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning. Additionally, the use of collaborative learning can improve the social climate in the classroom. Social climate has been linked to student engagement (Duffield et al. 2013).

According to Watson et al. (2011) and Pagnotti and Russell (2012) hands-on learning also increases the engagement of students in the classroom. Although their studies focused on hands-on learning through technology, this study incorporated hands-on learning through primary source analysis, often in conjunction with collaborative learning. While there were no statistically significant changes in students' engagement over the course of the study, the correlation between student understanding of lessons and their engagement suggests a positive outcome. If students are more engaged, their understanding of lesson content will improve, which ultimately should lead to increased achievement for all students.

Implications for Future Research

Future research related to increasing the classroom engagement of high school students should be conducted with larger samples of students over a longer period of time to increase the validity of results. In order to ensure that all participants experience as many engagement-targeted strategies as possible, it is suggested that research be conducted earlier in the school year at a time when students will not miss classes due to required testing. Conducting the research earlier would also support more intense intervention and increased time for the effects to be observed.

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Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that the instructional strategies used to affect engagement did not appear to change the engagement of the students based on the assessment data used. However, there was a significant correlation between students' engagement and understanding of lessons in which they participated.

Based upon the results from the study, half of the null hypotheses were retained, while the others were rejected. If the suggested improvements to the study were made future research might indicate more clearly the impact of these strategies on learner engagement in high school social studies classrooms. Additionally, results might suggest that the connection between instructional strategies and learner engagement is stronger and may clarify what techniques are most effective with different types of learners and in various subject areas.

Survey of Student Engagement in Social Studies

The term engagement is often used to describe level of participation and interest.

Your responses will remain anonymous and will be used to better understand your needs as a student and provide you with better instruction. Please answer thoughtfully and honestly.

Directions: For each question, please circle the appropriate number on the scale.
0 = never
1 = rarely
2 = sometimes
3 = often
4 = very often
Think about the social studies courses you have taken this school year and the previous school year.

Section 1

In those classes, how often have/did you...

1. Ask questions or contributed to class discussions in other ways

    0   1   2   3   4

2. Feel excited about class

    0   1   2   3   4

3. Come to class without doing your homework

    0   1   2   3   4

4. Put effort into completing class assignments

    0   1   2   3   4

5. Prepare for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students

    0   1   2   3   4

6. Combine ideas from different courses when completing an assignment

    0   1   2   3   4

7. Want to learn about something else because of topics in class

    0   1   2   3   4

8. Find the material or skills useful to you

    0   1   2   3   4

Section 2

In those same classes, how often has your coursework emphasized...

1. Memorizing material

   0   1   2   3   4

2. Analyzing an idea in depth by examining its parts

   0   1   2   3   4

3. Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source

   0   1   2   3   4

4. Forming a new point of view from multiple sources of information

   0   1   2   3   4

Section 3

To what extent have your teachers...

1. Clearly explained the goals and requirements of the class

   0   1   2   3   4

2. Used examples or illustrations to help explain something

   0   1   2   3   4

3. Provided prompt and detailed feedback on a test or other assignment

   0   1   2   3   4

Scoring Key

In the first section, for questions 1, 2, 4-8 the response circled equals the number of points. For question 3, points received is the opposite of the response circled (i.e. a students who circles 0 would receive 4 points).

Student Engagement Survey (completed after each unit by all participants)

Directions: Circle the appropriate number on the scale.

For all questions

0 = never/not at all
1 = rarely
2 = sometimes
3 = often
4 = very often

In the unit you just finished, how often...

1. Did you actively participate (asked a question, contributed to a discussion, etc.)

    0   1   2   3   4

2. Did you feel interested by the topic

    0   1   2   3   4

3. Did you get distracted (by another classmate, your phone, thinking about something else)

    0   1   2   3   4

4. I understood the lesson

    0   1   2   3   4

5. The instructions the teacher gave were clear

    0   1   2   3   4

Scoring Key

For the first section, questions 1 and 2 are scored in the same order as the scale. Question 3 is scored inversely to the response circled. Questions 4 and 5 were used to determine how well students understood the task/activity and if there was a correlation between student understanding and engagement.

APPENDIX C

Daily Homework Tracker

Name: _____

Homework Completion	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
HW Assignment ->				
During school the day it was assigned				
The night it was assigned				
At school before class the day it was due				
I did not complete my homework				

Students will receive 3, 2, 1, or 0 points for each time frame in which homework was completed in the order they are listed (i.e. doing homework during the school day the day it was assigned receives 3 points).

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