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Studies in Teaching – 2014 Research Digest

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**Using Voices to Change Minds:
Oral Performance and Poetry in the English Classroom**

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English teachers have so many options for getting students to engage and explore literature in dynamic and meaningful ways. However, many teachers still defer to older models where identification and classification take precedence, especially with poetry instruction. Even when teachers do attempt to bring in more engaging activities that incorporate visual or auditory exercises, the weight of instruction still falls on visually identifying and labeling elements of poetry. This study explores how reorienting the study of poetry from a visual to an oral medium causes teachers to reevaluate their beliefs on how poetry as an art and poetry as studied text function. By having students listen, emulate, and then create dynamic performances of poetry through music, slam poetry, and other oral performances, students have opportunities to consider their own reactions to poetry and *why* they have these reactions. This study seeks to answer the following research question: How does oral performance in the secondary English classroom affect student perceptions of poetry?

Review of Literature

English language arts curricula rarely acknowledge poetry as a multimodal genre, instead privileging printed word and written analysis over spoken performance and verbal responses (Certo, Apol, Wibbons, & Hawkins, 2012; Gordon, 2004). Some teachers put greater emphasis on finding the meaning of a poem and analyzing its formal elements, often a result of the strict limitations of standardized testing (Gordon, 2004). The preconception that the study of poetry is heavily focused on analysis has been identified by Hughes and Dymoke (2011) and is echoed across several other studies (Pullinger & Whitley, 2013; Weaven & Clark, 2013).

Research on using oral performance in the classroom occurs primarily in the context of spoken word poetry and musical genres. When teachers use oral language in poetry lessons, however, it is often little more than an engaging introduction or a bridge to more canonical texts (Camangian, 2008; Fisher, 2007; Kelly, 2013; Rudd, 2012; Smith, 2010). Another alternative is

for teachers to expose students to oral poetry performances and have them compose and perform their own original poetry in order to give students an opportunity to develop and express their identities (Camangian, 2008; Fischer, 2005; Smith, 2010; Rudd, 2012; Weinstein, 2010).

Already, researchers have observed that performing poetry can help students develop a number of literacy skills (Fisher, 2005, 2007; Rudd, 2012; Smith, 2010; Weinstein, 2010). Poems require audiences to utilize sight and sound in order to access the complex semiotics of poetry (Gordon, 2004). Poetry in the classroom should not only include “individual acts in realms of print” but also “making utterance public, rendering poetry social, a collective act” so that “speaking and listening work in tandem” (Gordon, 2004, p. 99). Listening to and participating in an oral performance provides students with numerous opportunities to explore the oral component of language.

Methodology

This research took place in a suburban high school’s 10th grade honors English classroom located in a midsized city in the southeastern United States. The study began with the administration of a reflective survey designed to reveal students’ initial perceptions of poetry. Students then listened and responded to oral performances of poetry through video and audio media. These poems included both contemporary and canonical texts, and the performances covered multiple performing arts genres including music and spoken word poetry. Students then wrote reflections on the impact of the different performance types and different techniques used in their performances.

Next, students participated in activities where they performed poetry themselves. They also listened to the performances of their peers and wrote observations and responses related to what they performed and what they heard during the performances of others. This study culminated with students creating and staging performances of their own poetic texts using any available means as long as an oral component was involved. Students then reflected on the class’s final performances in writing, focusing on the choices different students made and how their choices affected their performances. Students also reflected on their own role as a performer for their final poem. Finally, at the close of the study, students took one last reflective survey to reveal their perceptions of poetry in light of their recent oral performance experiences. The data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis to discover emerging themes.

Results

Understanding

Between the pre-survey and post-survey, participants experienced a shift in perceptions related to their own personal understandings of poetry. The vast majority of participants identified in their pre-survey that they did not like poetry simply because they found it difficult to understand, reflecting a belief that poems have specific meanings that readers must interpret in order to grasp fully the main idea of the poem. However, in the post-survey, participants' sense of confusion and/or struggle with meaning was mostly eliminated.

The idea of finding the “meaning” of a poem persisted throughout the study as participants reflected on their poetry performances. When asked on their listener reflection sheets about the effectiveness of poetry performances or what a performer did well, participants endorsed a common theme of how well a performer translated meaning to the audience. A consistent indicator of effectiveness for these participants was whether or not a performer demonstrated the meaning of the poem to the audience. For the participants, an effective poetry performance was one that showed listeners the meaning of a poem in a way that reading it silently on the page could not properly achieve.

Distance

Participants indicted in the pre-survey that they viewed poetry as existing in academic spaces—books, libraries, and classrooms—separate from their own existence. Even beyond physical distance, many participants expressed a sense of intellectual and emotional distance from poetry in the pre-survey that was not nearly as prevalent in the post-survey. Participants insisted that the kinds of people who read and write poetry are those who enjoy reading and writing and have high levels of intelligence.

In the post-survey, while physical spaces were brought up, the majority of participants suggested that poetry has a more universal nature and does not just exist on physical pages. By the close of the study, participants had developed a much more democratic view of poetry. Instead of a high academic genre, participants perceived poetry more generally as any kind of expression of human thought and emotion.

Authenticity

In the performer and listener reflections, participants declared regularly that expressing the emotion of a poem indicated effectiveness in the performance. Participants believed that a

poem's emotion had to feel appropriate, and the feelings had to match what participants believed to be the real tone of the poem. However, within the poetry performances, it was not enough for the performer to be emotionally expressive. Participants believed the performer actually needed to find avenues to help the audience experience empathy.

When participants could understand the poem *and* feel its emotional perspective, they tended to describe the performance as particularly effective. Participants also illustrated a developing attention to the performative aspects of poetry. Within all performances, both pre-recorded and in-class student performances, it was not just *what* message the performer got across to the audience but also *how* well the performer reached out to the audience that was important. Participants also became aware of the specific vocal techniques employed by performers. For the participants of this study, when a performer successfully connected the meaning and emotion of a poem with the audience, both poem and performance attained a sense of authenticity for listeners.

Discussion

Past studies have shown that oral performances of poetry have been limited to initial engagement activities or supplements to more formal poetry instruction (Camangian, 2008; Kelly, 2013; Rudd, 2012; Smith, 2010). This study asked participants to look at poetry as an oral genre and the poetry performances as legitimate options for experiencing poetry in order to consider how students' perceptions of poetry might change. Instead of seeing these performances as just words on a page put into action, participants saw that poetry could be an active oral experience.

According to pre-surveys, participants had little desire to read or discuss poetry. Throughout the study, participants gained more confidence in their analyses of poetry performances, which resulted in a greater openness to studying poetry in general. Essentially, oral performance techniques have the power to break down barriers between participants and poetry. By listening to and performing poetry, students must handle poems more intimately. Simply reading silently can be a passive experience for students, especially those who do not enjoy reading. By requiring students to hear and use the words of poetry, students are no longer able to distance themselves from the poems they read.

In this study, participants found that oral performances allowed them easier access to the meaning and emotion of a poem, but they did not take these performances at face value. The

participants also recognized the need for an authentic meeting of meaningful content, genuine emotion, and empathetic expression. The fact that students changed their minds about poetry and poetry performance over the course of two and a half weeks shows that oral performance can influence student thinking and, therefore, can potentially influence student learning.

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Imagining Audiences: The Use of E-Portfolios in Writing

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Researchers have noted the effectiveness of situating collegiate students' writing within portfolios to cultivate personal and professional identities (Graves & Epstein, 2011). Research has also noted expert writers' abilities to write with a sense of audience that renders their writing more effective (Magnifico, 2010; Thompson, 2001). While awareness of a sense of audience is nothing new in terms of writing pedagogy (Elbow, 1987; Kirby, Kirby, & Liner, 2004), the widespread use of Web 2.0 technologies as writing tools has redefined the ways in which a writer can compose for a specific audience. In fact, writers are regularly publishing their writing with Web 2.0 technologies while composing for a live audience (Magnifico, 2010; Williams, 2008). In other words, writers are producing texts that are capable of being read and responded to by audiences immediately upon publication.

Researchers have called for the use of technology in the teaching of writing (Fullan, 2013; Prensky, 2012; Williams, 2008), but few have looked at using Web 2.0 technologies to teach students about audience and how electronic portfolios, also known as e-portfolios, affect student writing. Given the immediacy of contact between writers, the written document, and the reader, it is necessary to teach students to develop a sense of audience as they compose their writing for the immediate consumption by real world audiences.

Review of Literature

The presence of technology and its effect on American educational curricula cannot be understated. As teachers, it is imperative to teach students 21st century skills in order to effectively navigate an increasingly digital world. Technologies now dominate our social, economic, and academic lives, and new curricula have mandated the cultivation of students' digital literacies. Digital literacy is specific to the development of technological skills that increases a student's ability to use and operate 21st century technologies. In order to teach digital literacy effectively, educators have begun to increase the use of Web 2.0 tools in the classroom, often in conjunction with the teaching of writing (Cambridge, 2008; Hicks & Turner, 2013).

Defined by their abilities to promote collaboration and interaction, Web 2.0 tools such as blogs/vlogs, wikis, and social networking sites have all been utilized to help teach digital literacy and 21st century writing skills (Kajder, 2010). The use of Web 2.0 technologies for the teaching of writing has affected writing pedagogy as the digital age has redefined the writing process (Hicks & Turner, 2013). Specifically, the digital age has helped reshape writers' conceptualizations of audience by permitting writers to entertain a *live* audience (Magnifico, 2010). Live audiences, enhanced by the use of Web 2.0 tools, connect students to a variety of readers capable of providing immediate feedback, a possibility that may be mitigated by technology's absence.

Audience has traditionally been defined through one of two lenses: cognitive or sociocultural. The cognitive process privileges the individual writer and his or her writing process and views audience as created by the writer. The sociocultural process views audience as external to the writer and is concerned instead with the practices that exist in and around writing (Magnifico, 2010). Within both lenses, the possibility exists of physical audiences to which students can write. However, physical audiences can limit the readership of student writers if disconnected from larger writing communities made possible by Web 2.0 tools. Magnifico (2010) states that novice writers evidence improvement by being part of a writing community as active members who engage initially as knowledgeable participants and eventually as potential experts.

By implementing a pedagogical framework informed by discourse analysis, educators and students alike develop a lens through which they can better understand the effects of their choices as writers. As such, writing pedagogy informed by discourse analysis could potentially yield increased proficiency in student writing because of its focus on audience awareness. Discourse analysis has been used for the teaching and analyzing of audience in student writing products (Hyland, 2005; Swales, 1990) and processes (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009). As writers begin to operate with greater frequency in specific discourse communities, the more proficient they become in their writing. As such, these theories have shaped writing pedagogy by showing how writer's sense of audience leads to gains in writer effectiveness (Hyland, 2005; Thompson, 2001).

Methodology

This action research study included twenty participants in a 10th grade English classroom in a public high school in the southeastern United States. Participants and their parents/guardians voluntarily signed informed consent and assent letters in order to participate. Data were collected through participants' class and homework assignments. To protect participants' identities, the researcher created pseudonyms for each student who took part in the study.

During the study, participants were asked to complete pre- and post-surveys that generated responses to questions focusing on writing, audience, and the use of technology within classroom instruction. Students began by identifying a self-selected research topic on which they would spend several months writing a research paper. Students were then connected with peer audiences whose self-selected research topics differed in both subject and content. In other words, students were grouped with peers whose research projects connected to academic disciplines different from their own and, by result, were written on topics that varied from their classmates. Students' peer audiences were comprised of students in groups of four who were asked to provide written feedback on each group member's research paper draft. This feedback was delivered initially through hand-written comments and later through typed comments in the e-portfolio, Dropr.

After all student writing was submitted to the e-portfolio, students were asked to conduct a final, cumulative reflection in the form of a post-survey in which they were asked to respond to their previously written reflection from the start of the semester. This self-assessment allowed students the opportunity to evidence changes in their writing processes by selecting specific examples where they saw their writing become more sophisticated or they identified areas in which they still struggled. Completed student writings were also used by students for self-assessment and by the researcher to demonstrate student growth, or lack thereof, as writers.

Prior to data analysis, the research question was reviewed to ensure that all data collection sources remained relevant to the initial research question. Open coding was conducted by reviewing students' academic research writing in conjunction with their responses to pre- and post-surveys. The researcher initially read student responses to the pre- and post- surveys to log student responses and to observe any consistencies that emerged from the data. The researcher then compared the findings from the surveys to the final draft of the research paper.

Next, the researcher conducted a discourse analysis of the linguistic features of specific papers, which were selected based on student responses to surveys. Specifically, student papers were selected for analysis based on evidence that peer revision and the framework for writing informed by discourse analysis proved useful. Within these drafts of student writing, the researcher analyzed the student's research paper to determine if students were using reader-engagement strategies as outlined by Hyland (2005) and Thompson (2001). Students' writing was analyzed through a count of the total number of engagement strategies on final drafts.

Results

The data from participants revealed several common trends. Student responses to pre-survey questions revealed that students wrote most commonly in their English classes, though the responses also noted that a majority of the writing completed in school was conducted with an absence of technology. Throughout the study, students reported mixed outcomes in using e-portfolios and its benefit to their writing. While most responses to the post-surveys suggested that students would not continue to use an e-portfolio, they did support writing practices that enabled them to connect with live audiences. Through this process, students found peer-to-peer interactions to be the most generative and, consequently, that student engagement with the research project was increased during moments of writing and revision reliant on peer feedback. Students corroborated the researcher's observations in their survey responses when they acknowledged that they would continue to use strategies for writing learned in this English class.

A majority of students identified revision as a step within their writing process. Thus, student's identification of peer revision as the writing practice most useful to them as writers came as no surprise. In conjunction, students also acknowledged that peers were the audience to whom they wrote the most. Considering all of these factors, students found peer feedback to be most valuable, and the interaction that peer revision allowed was important for creating a community of peer readers and writers. The researcher also noted that students who did not revise based on peer feedback received lower scores on the final draft of their research paper. As a result, Marzano et al.'s (2001) findings that feedback improves student achievement are reflected by student performances within the researcher's class.

Discussion

By interacting with peers, students are directly responding to an audience and its perception of the written product, thus displaying an awareness of the ways in which the writing

is being read and interpreted. These live audiences in face-to-face settings proved to be valuable as students revised their writings, and the presence of a readership certainly suggests a more developed sense of audience. The lack of findings by the researcher on the effects of live audiences as mediated by a digital space notwithstanding, the benefits of a live audiences' impact on student writing is irrefutably supported by this research project.

With the latest nationwide curricular overhaul, greater emphasis has been placed on 21st century skills that demonstrate students' college and career readiness. Students, in their pre-survey responses, did identify that they regularly use technology outside of school, which suggests a degree of literacy in 21st century skills. As such, the researcher attempted to combine an exciting new technology with research-verified pedagogical practices as a means of accomplishing improved student writing. However, almost all participants reported finding Dropr to be of little use to them because of the inability to connect with peers or submit feedback on writing caused by updates to Dropr. As a result, students perceived that the technology rarely worked and they did not feel the e-portfolio was important to the writing process.

Despite their reported inability to interface with the e-portfolio, most participants in this study should still be considered digitally literate, and Web 2.0 technologies can still have a positive influence on student writing. What these findings do acknowledge is that technologies are continuing to adapt and in doing so are mediating the types of writing students are increasingly prone to creating. As a result, the fusion of teaching writing and digital literacy provides a dynamic, and sometimes problematic, space for advancing student proficiencies in both areas (Prensky, 2012). Hicks and Turner's (2013) perception that digital literacy is not given adequate space in contemporary curricula appears to be corroborated by student survey responses. As such, other studies, such as the one conducted by Cambridge (2008) that provide frameworks for promoting the use of technology and the development of digital literacy, should be conducted to determine how to improve students' digital literacies most effectively. While missing from this collection of data, student-generated feedback mediated through a digital space could have demonstrated whether or not students' use of technology at home might have enriched the peer revision process to evidence greater, and more frequent, audience interaction and awareness. Ultimately, this study suggests that students are using Web 2.0 technologies to communicate digitally and that students find peer feedback to be the most informative revision tool in the writing process. Harnessing these two strengths by combining them would certainly

yield a pedagogical process that would result in creating a more informed dialogue about writing and, as such, educating students to become writers with increased critical awareness.

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“A Picture’s Worth a Thousand Words”: A Study on the Use of Visual Media in the High School History Classroom

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Thomas Edison commented in 1913 that “Books will soon be obsolete in schools...It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture. Our school system will be completely changed in the next ten years” (cited in Reiser, 2001, p. 55). While his prediction clearly did not come true, high school social studies teachers often employ the use of visual media in their classrooms to help students better understand historical topics. Visual media, in this study, will consist of images and videos. Images may include photographs, paintings, and political cartoons, while videos may include political commercials, news clips, and Hollywood reenactments. Felton and Allen (1990) stress the importance of teachers picking “the right painting, engraving, or photograph that is rich in information,” and in this case video clips too (p. 84). A concern of teachers is to select the appropriate media for students to view in order to help students better engage, understand, and empathize with the material at hand. Overall, visual media is important as an instructional tool because of its potential to motivate and enrich student learning. Therefore, this study will examine the impact of the use of visual media on students’ historical thinking abilities in a social studies classroom.

Use of different technologies in the classroom has changed with every new invention, but the use of visual media has been a constant over education’s last century. Before modern educational use of technology, earlier centuries used visual media to supplement their learning (Saettler, 1990). Seventeenth century European science learners began with observations of what they knew and then proceed to more complex or unfamiliar things. In 1910 “the first discernible trend toward a separation of the theatrical and non-theatrical films occurred” (p. 96). Non-theatrical films were the forerunners of educational films which included the newsreel, the travelogue, and the scientific motion picture (p. 96), and schools began to use them for instruction in 1910 as well. The visual instruction movement progressed in city schools in three phases: “the school museum, the organization of slide libraries, and the establishment of

educational film libraries” (p. 135). As more teachers embraced the visual movement, they built it up to be used by all schools in the system (Saettler, 1990). The manner in which teachers have employed these different visual media, however, has changed as teachers continue to strive for the most effective teaching methods.

Allen and Felton (1988; 1990; 1991) conducted multiple studies on the best way for teachers to incorporate visual media—specifically pictures in their studies—appropriately in their lessons to help students in social studies classrooms. Instead of using pictures to give students facts, teachers need to use pictures to help students derive historical meaning; teachers must be able to choose the right pictures in order to achieve the desired outcome (Allen & Felton, 1988). After an appropriate picture is chosen, the teacher guides students through the historical source through a six step Questioning Model. While their questioning model may have many steps, the important components include summary, inference, and research which promote the active participation in history and engage students in the material they view, supplementing the teachers’ lesson by adding more learning objectives than just facts. Visual media use in the history classroom has been employed to change the format of the teacher-centered, lecture history lesson. By utilizing Felton and Allen’s research, teachers can pick the right pictures, but they also need to be able to teach students to engage in critical thinking through lessons designed around visual media. Visual media can help students of all ability levels, especially those students who cannot read well, interpret and analyze historical events (Allen & Felton, 1988). For students to learn as historians, teachers have them identify the source, figure out the author(s) of the source, assess the author(s) and their position(s), and corroborate the source with others from the period (VanSledright, 2004).

Research examines the use of visual media in the classroom to consider how it affects students’ historical thinking. Foster and Yeager (1998) explained that historical thinking included "powerful narrative and imagination, historical imagination, the context and authorship of historical sources, detection of bias, the nature of conflicting accounts and interpretations, and the tentative and ambiguous nature of historical conclusions" (p.1). More narrowly, those pieces of historical thinking are comprised of a few overarching components: empathy, perspective recognition, and affective engagement. Barton & Levstik (2004) determined that empathy is comprised of perspective recognition and affective engagement. Changing public, social, and language meanings affect interpretation of the past; empathy, perspective recognition, and

affective engagement are necessary to bridge the gap between what is known and what is unknown (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Teaching historical thinking ideas of empathy, perspective recognition, and affective engagement will involve designing lessons that include a lot of source examination for the students, as well as teacher persistence and patience (VanSledright, 2004).

All of these components of historical thinking can be implicitly taught with the help of visual media. Friedman & Heafner (2007) found that “it is important not to ignore the motivational benefits of having students engaged with the task as well as content, as the latter is foundational to improving student historical understanding” (p. 1). This study will examine the impact of the use of visual media on students’ historical thinking abilities—empathy, perspective recognition, and affective engagement—in a social studies classroom.

Data were collected to determine if the use of visual media impacts students’ historical thinking skills. The researcher gave this lesson to two honors United States History classes, and about 55 students. 29 students returned their consent and assent forms to the researcher; only their answers to the questions and surveys are used in this analysis. Students varied in the learning abilities and styles, making for a heterogeneous student sample for this research.

First, data were collected to determine student empathy and perspective recognition together. These pieces of historical thinking are related because they involve cognitive processes that students can show through their work. Second, data were collected to determine student’s affective engagement when I using visual media. This data included are from personal observation and analysis of student work. The researcher taught a lesson without visual media and a lesson with visual media in order to collect data on student affective engagement.

To analyze the data, the researcher used the constant comparative method for qualitative data analysis. This method involved comparing incidents of student’s work among each other looking for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Similar incidents are grouped together under a higher-level descriptive which “allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme” (Corbin & Strauss, p. 73, 2008). I compared and contrasted student’s work looking for similar themes and major differences. In order to collect data on student affective engagement, I used student surveys and personal observations to come to my conclusions. To measure this, I reflected on the two different activities and decided how the students interacted during them to form my personal opinion about their affective engagement. Then, I used student

surveys to have student's reflections of the activities using and not using visual media. For the surveys, I had a few Likert scale questions asking if their likes and dislikes about each lesson. However, I mostly utilized open-ended questions to get personal reflections from the students asking them to explain what they learned, how they felt about using visual media versus other learning types, and to explain their thought processes behind any activities. I wrote down the information I observed it happened, and then later used Spradley's (1980) observation matrix to examine what was observed. Surveys and observations gave me a chance to reflect on the classroom atmosphere and personal student reflections; through that I wanted to see if students were more engaged and interested in the activity by using visual media.

For this research study, students studied reform movements present during the United States' Progressive Era. Reforms covered included: women's rights for suffrage and equality; the temperance movement to ban the sale and consumption of alcohol; labor reforms for child labor laws, better working conditions, and higher pay wages; welfare reform to aid the inner-city poor; and government reforms to end political abuse and increase constituent democracy. The research was set up in a two-part lesson that asked students to explore the reform movements in two different ways. Part one of the lesson did not use any visual media and part two of the lesson used only visual media.

For part one, students remained quietly focused as they initially read and took notes, but looked indifferent and bored. Following their independent time, students expressed their dislike towards "book work." Students expressed to me in class their wish to "watch more videos and use more technology in class." On student surveys students thought the activity was boring, uninteresting, and busy work that did not capture their interests or engage them in class material. The general consensus was that students were uninterested and disengaged. When asked how they best thought the lesson could be improved to help them engage and understand the material more, most students revealed that they liked or needed some sort of visual other than the textbook.

Part Two of the research lesson gave students what they asked for. Students worked in groups clustered around a laptop; therefore students had less personal space forcing them to interact with each other in their groups. Interactions between students involved cooperating with each other to see the laptop and discussing with each other about the visuals. The overall atmosphere during this part of the lesson was happier and more interested than in Part One.

Overall, 85% of students rated Part Two more engaging and understandable than Part One—showing that their higher interest in more visual, interactive, and technological activities.

Following each part of the lesson, students answered a writing prompt that required them to think more deeply about the material. After Part One, students answered the question, “Based on what you read EXPLAIN HOW effective you think the reforms were and WHY you think that? What different perspectives did the reformers encounter?” Responses to this question determine that students did gain some understanding from reading the textbook and taking notes in a chart. Part Two, however, asked them to engage in both lower and higher order thinking: “After you have viewed the different media, decide again HOW effective you think the reforms were and WHY. Based on the media, what different perspectives did the reformers encounter? How do the reforms of the Progressive Era continue to affect America today? Finally, which reform would you have supported and why?” Students were asked to think about historical information—the different reform movements of the Progressive Era—and determine effectiveness as well as differing perspectives and their opinions. 86% of students responded to the question in a way that showed some sort of historical thinking process, while 45% of students showed higher levels of historical thinking by replying more thoroughly to the question. Only 14% of students gave disconnected answers.

A common sentiment among students about the activity that used visual media and allowed them to work in groups was that it helped them be more engaged and interested in the material. This type of activity gave the students control over their learning instead of the teacher having control over the learning, which Allen & Felton (1988) believed brought a new perspective to the social studies classroom. To utilize empathy, students need to understand why historical figures acted the way they did through analysis of historical sources (Foster & Yeager, 1998). This study asked students to pick a reform they would have supported and why. In asking this question, I wanted to consider why historical figures made the decisions they and then try to connect that to their selves. Regardless of students personal feelings towards something many of them could understand why the people of that time period would have called for reform. Similarly, as most students empathized with historical figures they were also able to recognize the different perspectives that people held without judgment. Students realized that not all the reforms were effective and understood the reasons why. Unfortunately, there were students who did not show much perspective recognition. Differences in student learning styles

and abilities could contribute to the 17% of students who did not think the activity did not engage them or help them understand. As well as students performed during the research lesson, the implementation and results of the research were not without limitations. Curriculum restraints, time restraints, and class sample are all uncontrollable limitations that affected the research study. Because of the limitations that affected this study, the results may or may not be reproducible.

This study set out to find if the use of visual media helped students think more historically in a social studies classroom. The results demonstrate that a majority of students in an honors level class could provide some evidence of historical thinking after viewing different forms of visual media. Though there were limitations, I think the research study at least engaged and interested the students; this is extremely necessary in a class that most students deem “boring” because of previous ways teaching history has been approached.

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Integrating Authentic Voices in the High School French Class

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An important component of present-day K-12 foreign language programs is to enrich and supplement classroom language learning with the actual, “real-life” language produced by native speakers. It is through these interactions that students are able to experiment and test their developing comprehension and production abilities in a new language, as well as incorporate new language elements into their linguistic repertoire (Rost & Ross, 1991). However, this unscripted, natural speech can be a source of anxiety and frustration for students during the initial encounter and can quickly discourage them from engaging further in the language (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Peacock, 1997). These authentic materials, defined by Galloway (1998) as “written and oral communications produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group,” (p. 133) can provide an enriched, context-based instructional environment; and using a deliberate, scaffolded approach, can provide motivation for students of all proficiency levels. Thus, the importance of integrating these “authentic” voices from the beginning of an articulated course of language study cannot be overstated.

Review of Literature

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines the concept of communication across three distinct modes: interpersonal, presentational and interpretive communication. The interpretive mode of communication consists of the comprehension and assessment of a text (oral, written or visual) that is presented to an audience, whereas the interpersonal mode involves two or more people who negotiate meaning through various modes of communication, through both oral and written means (ACTFL, 1996; ACTFL 2012).

The interpretive mode of communication heavily relies on the integration of authentic materials and on listening comprehension. The listening process itself can be broken down into three parts: pre-listening; where the instructor prepares students by relating the text to their

background knowledge, or “activating their schemata;” while-listening, where students process both individual words (bottom-up processing) and contextual clues (top-down processing); and post-listening, used for comprehension activities (Bernhardt, 1991; Swaffar & Vlatten, 1997). There are numerous strategies to employ when listening to an authentic text, many of which involve the instructor teaching specific listening strategies to the students. Many of these focus on incorporating techniques that more advanced listeners use, and teaching these concepts to novice listeners (Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2011).

Building off of this research to promote these higher-level listening skills, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2011) conducted a study which used a questionnaire focused on improving students’ listening comprehension skills; in particular for students deemed “less skilled.” The results showed that this strategy improved all students’ scores when compared to a control group. Despite such evidence, there is some skepticism of the effectiveness of these kinds of techniques, which can take up precious class time (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Instead, Renandya and Farrell (2011) argue that more time should be spent on “extensive listening,” which emphasizes repeated listening to simple and enjoyable activities.

Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1980) states that the negotiation of meaning through interaction facilitates language acquisition. Thus, frequent conversation should be encouraged in the foreign language classroom to develop the interpersonal mode of communication. It is important that students be taught strategies that prepare them for these interactions, particularly such devices as idioms and routine linguistic formulas, which help form a conversational structure with a native speaker (Yorio, 1980). Students would specifically benefit from how to use gambits, which help the speaker maintain the smooth flow of conversation, frame what a speaker is about to say, express interest in what someone else is saying, and buy time while a speaker searches for a word or phrase (Taylor, 2002).

There has been significant research that indicates the positive and profound impact that the integration of authentic material can have on students’ language development including listening comprehension, confidence in speaking and interacting in the target language, increased vocabulary retention and usage, and heightened motivation (Hernandez, 2006; Peacock, 1997; Ramsay, 1991; Weyers, 1999). However, the incorporation of these authentic materials and voices has to be carefully scaffolded. Otherwise, students risk getting frustrated from a lack of comprehension which can lead to disengagement with the language (Peacock 1997; Elkhafafi

2005). The following action research study examined exactly such an issue, specifically how the use of authentic communication contexts in the interpretive and interpersonal modes help students develop language ability in a high school French class.

Methodology

The study was conducted between April 9 and April 22, 2014, and consisted of 16 French II students in a North Carolina public high school where the researcher was assigned for student teaching. There were three data sets collected during the study. Data Set One consisted of student language products that were the result of instructional strategies aimed at the development of the interpretive and interpersonal modes of communication. This language development progressed from use of the interpretive mode of communication and listening comprehension strategies, to an interview with a native French speaker. Students watched two short television clips, and then listened to a radio excerpt over two class periods. The final task, during the third class period, was a short conversation with a native French speaker. The primary objective was to help students gain experience with authentic French language situations. Before and during the listening activities, students filled out a listening log similar to the one developed by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2011). After the last listening comprehension exercise, students were given instruction on conversational strategies to increase their interpersonal communication capacity, specifically the use of gambits, before participating in a brief conversation with a native French speaker. Data Set Two consisted of the researcher's field notes and video-recorded classes on the instructional procedure. Data Set Three was a student survey which was designed to solicit student opinions about the utility, enjoyment, and motivation towards the instructional strategies.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of how the uses of authentic communication contexts in the interpretive and interpersonal modes help students develop language ability in a high school French class. Data were collected three times during this study, based around in-class activities that progressed from an authentic video clip, to an audio recording, to the final activity of an in-person interaction with a native French speaker. During these three activities, students filled out a listening log ("*Le Carnet de l'écoute*"), which consisted of four sections (a pre-listening question designed to activate prior knowledge, general

comprehension questions, more focused comprehension activities, and a final activity). Students completed the first listening log for two television clips, and the second one for a radio excerpt.

The data for the first two listening logs were globally positive, though difficult to quantify in terms of language ability development. Twelve students (92%) completed the first listening log (three students were absent), and for the second listening log, fourteen students (95%) completed the assignment (one student was absent). These numbers suggest that while students may not have understood the television or radio clips themselves, they did understand the listening log format itself. The culminating activity for the first listening log proved to be too difficult for the students' level. The second listening log culminating activity was a skit scenario in a French pharmacy. As a class, the students averaged ninety-nine percent (99%) on this presentation, and were evaluated on whether or not they used five required linguistic elements (two kinds of verb forms, asking questions, asking for advice, giving a piece of advice, and accepting or rejecting the advice). While it is difficult to draw any direct correlation between improved listening comprehension and the completion of these activities, the results suggest that students were able to largely negotiate meaning across both media forms, and complete the assigned activities.

For the final interaction with a native speaker, students were assessed in six different categories (content of message, comprehensibility of message, quality of interaction, fluency, vocabulary and language control) on a scale of 1-3, using an adapted form of the Fairfax County Public School PALS rubric for interactive tasks. A score of 1 corresponds to minimal use of the required components and language, while a score of 3 corresponds to a rich and varied use of language devices and vocabulary, for a maximum possible score of 18. Students also had to write down the piece of advice that the native speaker gave them. The results from this final listening log confirm that students were able to interact successfully with a native speaker, and were able to remember and record her recommendation. The average score for the fifteen students who were present was 16. Furthermore, thirteen students (87%) successfully identified the correct piece of advice that the native speaker gave them regarding their injury. This confirms that students were able to use the interpretive mode of communication (through listening to the native speaker) and then re-convey the main idea, a key component of novice-mid proficiency (ACTFL, 2012). These results, particularly when compared with the previous listening logs, suggest that students benefitted from the exposure to and practice with the

authentic media. Data Set Two revealed that students appeared engaged with the authentic clips and activities. However, the researcher noticed that while students were able to use words they had previously encountered, they were unable to detect and reuse new words that were presented in a complicated video or radio excerpt, despite the researcher's best efforts during instruction.

Of the fourteen students that completed the survey for Data Set Three, only five students (36%) believed that the activities completed in class improved their listening comprehension of French (i.e. the interpretive mode of communication). Furthermore, eight of the students (50%) were neutral towards the specific instructional strategy of the listening log, meaning that they believed it neither helped nor hurt their listening comprehension capacity. On the other hand, a majority of eight students (57%) felt that the activities improved their speaking ability in French (the interpersonal mode of communication). Even more noticeable is that ten students (71%) felt that practicing conversational strategies and phrases (i.e. the skit activity and the introduction to gambits) helped improve their speaking ability in French.

Conclusions

Overall, the use of authentic contexts of both the interpersonal and interpretive modes of communication helped students in this study develop their language ability. Based upon the criteria students were given for their interaction with the native speaker, students were highly successful in their conversation. The ability of students to maintain a smooth flow of conversation validates the instructional strategies emphasizing interaction.

On the other hand, the findings of this study only partially confirm the research of Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2011), on which it was based. Students did not fulfill the expectations of the teacher-researcher by satisfactorily completing the listening logs, and they did not enjoy the routine of filling out the listening log.

There is an overwhelming amount of data that supports the idea that the incorporation of authentic communication contexts increases student performance and proficiency in a foreign language, especially when compared to using the textbook alternative (Ramsay, 1991; Weyers, 1999). The results from this study support many of these conclusions. Given the results of the first two listening logs and students' general frustration with the authentic media, students performed admirably when interacting with the native speaker. Clearly, using these materials in class benefitted students with this culminating activity. Yet, the results leave many unanswered questions and possibilities for future research, chief among them being how to accurately assess

students' listening comprehension of authentic media, and how to adapt both the media and the questions to an appropriate level of difficulty for students.

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When and Where: Teaching World History through a Geographic Lens

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Geography is an important yet often disregarded part of social studies education in the United States. Geography is the way by which we organize and conceptualize the earth, the environment, regions, and humans. When geography is used as a lens to comprehend phenomena, the complex forces that affect events can be organized and explained. Though geography can be broken down into several elements spanning physical, human, and environmental concerns, the importance of geography is in its ability to study where and why phenomena occur.

Geographical concepts and skills “enable students to build spatial, relational, and environmental understanding, and encourage openness and responsiveness to diverse cultures and perspectives” (Heafner, 2009, p. 211). If our students are able to learn these geographic skills, they will stand a greater chance of being successful in other disciplines which can be analyzed through the lens of geography. As such, teaching history through the lens of geography is beneficial because geographical concepts and skills are complementary and interrelated to history. This interdisciplinary approach combines the strengths of each subject and promotes a fuller understanding of content. As students gain an understanding of historic time through history, geography gives them the importance and significance of place. As such, history and geography occupy similar spaces within social studies and the combining of geography into historical education should allow for geography to return to curriculum and for students to glean better understanding of the where and when of human activity.

Literature Review

Geography as a subject has occupied many spaces within curriculum and schools, but it gained vision and direction when it underwent reforms which defined geography and established standards (Bednarz, 1998; Fien & Gerber, 1988; Hicks, 2011; Howarth & Mountain, 2004; Segall & Helfenbein, 2008). Geography education The Geography Education National Implementation Project produced the “Guidelines for Geographic Education” in 1984 which introduced and outlined the five themes of geography: location, place, human & environmental

interaction, movement, and region (Segall & Helfenbein, 2008). A second seminal work in geography education reform was published in 1994 titled *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* (Howarth & Mountain, 2004; Segall & Helfenbein, 2008). This work set out eighteen national standards divided into six broad categories that were based upon the five themes of geography (Boehm & Bednarz, 1994; National Geography Standards Index, 2013). Despite reforms, the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation gave a relative lack of attention to geography; while geography is included as a core academic subject in NCLB, it does not enjoy the most basic provisions afforded other disciplines.

There are many ways in which geography can be incorporated into the curriculum in schools. Geography fits into various curriculum areas and is advantageous as a multidisciplinary subject, but conceivably the best matched discipline with commonalities in curriculum and content is history education. Geography and history are compatible because they share a similar context and they both provide the framework for societal institutions (Backler, 1988; Boehm & Bednarz, 1994; Boehm et al, 2003; East, 1965; Patrick & Stoltman, 1989). For instance, the concepts of place and time are highly reliant upon each other and together form a framework for understanding and are needed to create context (Backler, 1988; Boehm et al, 2003; East, 1965; Patrick & Stoltman, 1989). Teaching history with geography is beneficial because it deepens ones understanding of historical content and material as well as highlights spatial relationships (Backler, 1988; Boehm et al, 2003; Heafner, 2009; Thornton, 2007). Understanding and analyzing the relationships between people, countries, or corporations around the world requires both spatial thinking and knowledge about resources, place, and customs.

Many educators and policy makers have chosen American History as the course for geography to be incorporated into but despite these calls to integrate geography in American History courses for years, there has not been nationwide success (Backler, 1988; Boehm et al, 2003; Patrick & Stoltman, 1989; Thornton, 2007). The relationship between World History and Geography exceeds that with American History. World History curriculum is designed to cover more of the Earth's space and cover a larger proportion of time. Integration of geography into World History can be accomplished through a curriculum framework that aligns historical principles with the geographic themes and standards. Therefore, the research question in this study is: How does the integration of geography into a World History course affect student interest and achievement?

Methodology

This study was completed in three phases; pre-study, study, and post-study. The pre-study phase was used as a control to measure students' interest and achievement without treatment through the use of observations, surveys, and summative assessment. Within the study phase, students underwent a treatment in which geography was integrated into the content and teaching methods. Measurements were taken in the post-study phase of the study to be analyzed and compared to pre-study data.

Prior to the study, students completed a brief survey that gaged their interest in historical content. Likert Scale and open-ended questions covered a range from rating student interest in history, student perception on the difficulty of mastering historical concepts, to the usefulness of geography. Student interest was also measured through teacher observation. Observations were made from the beginning of the semester to the start of the study. Student achievement was measured through summative assessments scores from unit tests from each of the units prior to the treatment unit. This data was used to evaluate student achievement across time and to be compared to the unit test score from the treatment unit.

After participants completed the pre-study survey, the treatment was applied to the successive unit. The treatment consisted of incorporating geographical content, principles, and skills into the curriculum of a World History course. This was accomplished by the application of one of the five themes of geography or one (or more) of the National Geographic standards to each lesson in the unit. Throughout the treatment unit, observations were made to assess student interest. Student achievement was measured during the treatment unit through formative assessments such as bell ringers, journal entries, and homework.

At the conclusion of the treatment unit, students took a summative unit test and completed the post-study survey. The summative unit test was similar to all preceding unit tests in structure and format, and it measured achievement with the treatment. The post-study survey was largely similar to the pre-study survey but included questions that were intended to allow students to incorporate their experience working with both geography and world history content.

Results

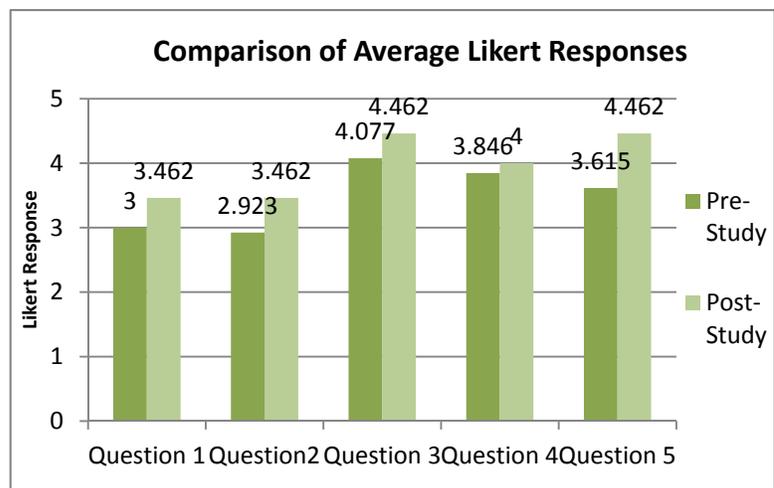
Observations: Before the study, students tended to treat historical events as isolated phenomena. Student participation in activities and voluntary answering of questions revealed that the class had average interest in World History and mild interest in Geography. Though student ability

and interest was above average in history, geographic ability and interest was lacking. Level of participation when covering geographic knowledge and skills was minimal based on observations. However, observations conducted throughout the study unit revealed three key themes: students participated more when interacting with visual media as opposed to text, students showed visible interest while working in groups, tasks and discussions built upon the geographic themes increased student participation and achievement.

Summative Data: At the end of each unit of study, students took a summative test designed to evaluate understanding of the content. In pre-study tests students consistently answered every multiple-choice question but occasionally left map identification and constructed response questions unanswered. On the summative test given after the study unit the majority of students' test score was higher than their summative test average up until the study unit. The class average of the study summative test was 87.769. This means that the average increase in score was 8.756 points after the treatment. These results indicated that achievement was increased when World History was taught through a geographic lens.

Survey Data: The surveys included two sections ranking responses on a Likert Scale, and responding to open-ended questions regarding their understanding and interest. While gains in interest were not statistically significant in all categories there was an overall increase in total interest for each question. Student interest in World History and Geography increased from neutrality toward positive interest. Whereas World History was more interesting before the study, Geography became equally interesting after the study. Question 4 did not experience significant growth in student interest, which suggests that the students' interest in Geography did not increase enough to significantly induce students to be more interested in learning both at once.

However, students' beliefs that learning both subjects in conjuncture increased significantly, as shown in question 5. This indicates that while interest was not significantly increased, beliefs in the method's effectiveness did significantly increase.



The open-ended questions from the pre-study survey revealed that students were equally positive and negative to whether geography was necessary in order to understand history and if studying both disciplines together would increase interest. When asked similar questions on the post-study survey the majority of students reported that geography was necessary for understanding because it has an effect upon the events that occur and because it helped them create authentic meanings of historical events. Furthermore, all students (thirteen of thirteen) responded positively on the post-study survey when asked, “Do you think that learning about the geography of historical events and places helped you understand the material better?” When asked the final question: “Do you think that learning about the geography of historical events and places made you more interested in the material,” four of the thirteen students said that they were not more interested in the material as a result of the study. In total, student responses indicate that they understood the material better and were interested as a result of the treatment.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that teaching World History through a geographic lens could increase student interest in the curriculum while additionally increasing their achievement as measured by summative assessments. As a whole student interest was increased as reported by the pre-study and post-study surveys. I had expected that the students would initially have a stronger interest in World History, but I did not expect that students would have an equal interest in both subjects at the end of the study. The purpose of using Geography was to enrich the historical concepts primarily, but the results show that interdisciplinary learning can increase learning in both subjects. Students showed they were more invested in the content through discussion and by writing longer and more in-depth responses to questions. If the students were not interested in the material they would most likely have not been active participants in discussions nor wrote longer responses on in-class and test questions.

The students’ increased interest complemented results of increased achievement. This is because when students are interested in the material they are more likely to be more engaged and to create authentic understanding. This achievement was evidence in comparing the students’ average summative test scores to their study unit test scores. In giving the students a direction through which to center their discussion and investigation of the material, students were able to focus better and to achieve their learning objectives. This in turn made the lessons more fun for students, increased their interest, and allowed for them to reach higher-level understandings.

The study highlighted the importance of doing interdisciplinary education and incorporating geographical principles into World History classroom. I intend to apply these geographic principles to any other History course that I teach during my career. Moreover, I intend to incorporate other subjects aside from Geography into my World History class in attempts to increase interest and create more in-depth learning experiences. This study has also highlighted the importance of the correlational relationship between interest and achievement. While interest and achievement are important for all students, the inclusion of Geography into World History classes is merely one way to increase both areas and has shown to be a practice that I will continue in my classroom.

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Use of the Interpersonal Mode to Develop Oral Language Ability in the High School Spanish Classroom

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In today's ever shrinking world, interaction between people of all languages and cultures is commonplace, and communication ability in languages other than one's native language is central to our daily life and work. Currently in the United States, the demand for globally competent citizens who are highly proficient in languages other than English is especially great for international firms based in the United States and as US firms expand their presence overseas. As the United States strives to meet the demands of a global society and prepare citizens who can compete in the job market, it is essential to provide all students with language study that begins early and continues in an uninterrupted sequence of study in grades K-12 (Byram, 2008; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010). The opportunity to study languages over a long period of time is critical to the development of proficiency and a deep understanding of the cultures in which the language is spoken. In 1996, *The Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* were created to provide national expectations for students in grades K-12. These standards represent the content knowledge that students should possess upon completion of a program of study in grade 12. The Standards are comprised of five goals, or the Five C's: Communication, Cultures, Communities, Comparisons, and Connections. The Communication goal includes three modes of communication -- interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational -- which focus on oral and written expression as well as listening and reading (ACTFL, 1996). Oral language development occurs through experiences in which students use language for meaningful communication purposes that one encounters in everyday life, also known as authentic communication. In the foreign language classroom, opportunities to practice language for authentic communication needs are essential to students' progress in developing L2 proficiency.

Review of Literature

According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), “proficiency is the ability to use language in real-world situations in a spontaneous interaction and non-rehearsed context and in a manner acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language” (ACTFL, 2012b). In 1986, ACTFL created the Proficiency Guidelines in the areas of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. The Guidelines were updated in 1999, 2001, and 2012 to reflect real-world language use and assessment according to the following levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior with the level of Distinguished added in 2012.

One of the most important aspects of proficiency-oriented instruction is the use of the target language in the classroom both by the teacher and students (ACTFL, 2012c; Collentine, 2004). ACTFL recommends that the language teacher and the students use the target language as much as possible, striving to remain in the target language more than 90% of the time during class (ACTFL, 2012c). When designing proficiency-based instruction, teachers should use best practices for both instruction and assessment that are based on the *National Standards* (ACTFL, 2012b) and the *Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* that are aligned with the *Proficiency Guidelines* (ACTFL, 2012a), and that create authentic contexts students would have in the target culture through the use of the L2 (Byram, 2008). Practice in the language can also extend to real-world communicative contexts outside the classroom in which students communicate with native speakers. By performing real-world tasks, students learn how to use the L2 and adapt it to given situations (Byram, 2008). This practice supports Krashen’s Input Hypothesis that says L2 learners acquire knowledge best when they are presented with input that is one level beyond their current ability level (Krashen, 1981). Language input must be comprehensible to students, so the teacher should provide the appropriate level of input, selecting topics and language that are already familiar to the students and that also provide some unfamiliar language. The teacher should also create real-world tasks that will challenge students while allowing them to use their language skills in an authentic situation.

An effective way to have students use their language in authentic communication is through pair work. This type of language experience promotes oral language development through the interpersonal mode. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning first occurs in a social context before it is internalized. In the context of language learning, oral language development occurs while students interact with each other in meaningful situations; therefore, pair work

provides opportunities for students to practice language in a variety of contexts (Farnsworth, 2012). Also, not everyone has the same knowledge on a topic, so working in pairs allows students to help each other attain information, negotiating meaning to arrive at a common understanding. Negotiation of meaning is the process of seeking information by asking and answering questions to derive understanding (Padilla, Fairchild, & Valadez, 1990). This is a reciprocal exchange of information that allows both students to reach a new level of understanding while completing the task at hand using the interpersonal mode of communication. Pair work can also help to make students more comfortable because they are working with their peers, thus lowering their affective filter. This gives them a situation in which they can practice language usage with less stress than speaking in front of their peers (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Padilla, Fairchild, & Valadez, 1990).

An example of an assessment using pair work is interviews that are used to monitor students' development of interpersonal language ability (Columba, 2001; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010). An interview is a one-on-one conversation between two students. One of the students creates questions to ask the other student, who answers them, and then they trade positions. This allows for students to practice questioning techniques by both asking and answering questions. As an assessment strategy the teacher observes the creation and production of the dialogues and interviews and assesses how well the students understand the topics being covered.

This action research study investigated instructional strategies using the interpersonal mode of communication to help develop students' oral language ability in a high school Spanish classroom.

Methodology

This action research study included 22 students in one class of Level III Honors Spanish in a central North Carolina public high school. The research study was conducted on April 11, 23, 29 and May 5, 2014. Parents and guardians signed informed letters of consent for students under the age of 18; students under the age of 18 signed letters of assent; students over the age of 18 signed letters of consent. Data were collected during regular instructional time as part of in-class activities completed by all students. In order to protect the privacy of the students, a coding system was used for all data collection methods in which each student was assigned a letter from A-AA. For further protection, all students will be referred to in the masculine form throughout

the study. At the end of the study, all of the data materials were stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the researcher's adviser.

This study used three different sets of data. The first data set focused on instructional strategies that scaffolded language to help students gain oral language ability to form questions and answers in Spanish. This data set included three interpersonal activities that the researcher led, each one progressing in difficulty of oral language development and culminating with an interview with a native speaker. The data for all three interpersonal activities were recorded using a language laboratory recording device and were reviewed after the completion of the study. The researcher used an evaluation checklist that she designed and was aligned with the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors* (2012a) to collect data on students' oral language ability in each of the interpersonal activities and noted the linguistic characteristics of the questions and answers that the students gave during the activities. The researcher looked for a progression of language development with students advancing from simple responses to more complex responses.

The second data set was made up of the researcher's field notes taken throughout the instructional process, which included both classroom and video-recorded instruction. The researcher recorded the field notes during instruction and made written notes on the video recordings at a separate time. The researcher analyzed the field notes to learn about the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used in helping students gain oral language ability in Spanish, as well as student engagement during instruction, and student participation in activities. The third data set was made up of student responses to a survey about their oral language development and was completed at the conclusion of the study. The researcher created the survey to learn students' opinions about how the instructional strategies aided their oral language development and their perception of their development of oral language ability.

Results

Sixteen (73%) students completed the first interpersonal activity. The majority of the students (14 of 16; 87%) were unable to stay in the target language for the entire time. More than half of the students (13 of 16; 81%) had correct subject and verb agreement in either their questions or their responses. This may be due to the fact that the questions were provided, so the students asking the questions did not need to create L2. Students were still becoming familiar with questions and how to give responses. The majority of the errors were committed by the

students responding to the questions because they had to create the responses, whereas the questions were given to their partners.

Nineteen students (86%) completed the second interpersonal activity. The first trend that the researcher noticed was that the majority of the students (18 of 19; 95%) accurately formed and responded to the questions. The only error that students made with the formation of questions was in the placement of the subject before the verb as opposed to after it. Compared to the first interpersonal activity, more students (11 of 19; 58%) had difficulty with subject and verb agreement. Students did not seem to understand the difference between the two forms of you: *tú* is used in informal situations, whereas *Ud* is used in formal situations. During this activity, more students (9 of 19; 52%) remained in the target language for its entirety.

The third interpersonal activity with the native speaker had two parts. During the first part, students asked the native speaker questions, and during the second part, they responded to her questions. Ten students (45%) completed each part of the activity, though only seven students (32%) completed both sections. For both portions of this activity, twelve students were absent. Fifteen of the twenty questions and responses (75%) were given entirely in Spanish and seventeen of the questions and responses (85%) had the correct subject and verb agreement. The most frequent errors occurred with ease of use of L2 when the students were responding to the native speaker's questions. Nine of the ten (90%) students seemed uncomfortable with the language they were using and had difficulty forming their responses. Many students hesitated when speaking, and the researcher was required to repeatedly prompt the students before they began to give their responses.

Analysis of the results from the student survey (Data Set Three), revealed some interesting points regarding oral language development. Overall, the survey results show that students felt the activities used in this study helped them develop their ability to ask and answer questions in the interpersonal mode of communication. Students also found the first activity the most helpful when learning how to ask and answer questions because more information was provided for them to use.

Conclusions

The researcher purposefully designed instruction to give students multiple representations of vocabulary and L2 language structures prior to the beginning of the study. The researcher spent time focusing students' attention on these words and linguistic structures so that during the

activities, students would feel more comfortable using the language on their own without support as they gained experience. The findings from this study suggest that there was some connection between the instructional activities and the students' development of oral language ability. During the first interpersonal activity, many students responded in some combination of Spanish and English, but by the third activity, they were able to produce complete sentences in Spanish in response to the questions given. Though students seemed hesitant with producing the language, they continued to use Spanish, and a few reverted to English for the words they could not remember.

As a result of this action research study, the researcher gained insight into the importance of the use of authentic contexts in developing students' oral language ability in Spanish. When language teachers provide students with experiences that allow them to use the L2 for real-world communication purposes, students are better able to retain the material. Also, teachers should carefully design instruction that scaffolds L2 over time, providing multiple representations of material and enough linguistic and contextual support for students to be able to create L2 independently. By doing this, teachers are preparing students to be able to go outside of the classroom and use the L2 that they have learned in the real-world.

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What Were They Thinking? Primary Sources and Perspective Taking in Social Studies Instruction

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Primary sources are used in social studies classrooms to connect students to history. Primary sources are sources including documents, photos, articles, and artifacts that were made in a specific time period (Library of Congress, 2013). Primary sources are seen as being able to stimulate curiosity in history and allow students to have a better understanding of history in a way that lectures and worksheets cannot accomplish (Barton, 2005; Eamon, 2006). Digitization efforts by institutions such as the Library of Congress, has made it easier than ever for teachers and students to access primary sources (Eamon, 2006). Teachers can find notes, diaries, articles, and speeches from practically any time period with a few clicks of a button. Due to the ease of access in which primary sources can be retrieved and their purported ability to help students engage in higher order thinking, it is imperative that primary sources be used in a meaningful way in classrooms.

One way to utilize primary sources is through perspective taking which is a form of historical understanding in which a person attempts to perceive, understand, or empathize with the thoughts, feelings, or actions of another (Ciardiello, 2012; Gehlbach 2004; Gehlbach, 2011). Perspective taking allows students to form a connection and relate to a historical person. This connection allows students to engage in historical material more fully (Gehlbach, 2011). Multiple perspectives allow for students to analyze different and sometimes inconsistent ideas about the same event which is related to higher order thinking (Lemisko, 2010). Perspective taking has been positively linked to historical understanding and social studies achievement (Gehlbach 2004).

Literature Review

The Importance of Primary Sources

Primary sources can benefit students because they engage students, encourage the development of critical thinking skills, and help students to construct knowledge (Library of

Congress, 2013, online). In the 1960s and 1970s, a “New History” movement came about in schools in which traditional instruction was seen as inadequate (Eamon, 2006). The use of textbooks and rote memorization were perceived as not being able to engage students because the events were not seen as connected to their lives (Eamon, 2006). Primary source documents allow students to do more than just memorize facts, people, and events; they allow students to develop their skills as historians (Wineburg, 1991). In addition to helping develop these skills, primary source use “allows students to construct a more complex and nuanced understanding of past life than most textbooks or lectures are likely to do” (Barton, 2005, p. 753). Primary source documents encourage and foster historical thinking which involves higher order thinking about the objects they encounter.

Historical Thinking Using Primary Sources

Historical thinking can be defined as utilizing primary source documents to analyze a historical figure or event (Salinas, Blevins, & Sullivan, 2012). Historians utilize historical thinking when analyzing documents to gain a better understanding of people and events. In particular, historical thinking involves identifying the “subtext” or looking at the hidden meanings in the documents and the context of the situation to better understand how primary sources fit into history (Wineburg, 1991, p. 498). Historical thinking involves using various artifacts and documents to analyze material in methods similar to a historian and is a vital skill needed when analyzing primary sources.

The Role of Perspective Taking

Perspective taking is a form of historical understanding in which a person attempts to perceive, understand, or empathize with the thoughts, feelings, or actions of another (Ciardiello, 2012; Gehlbach 2004; Gehlbach, 2011). Barton notes that primary sources can accomplish this by helping “to provide insight into the thought and experiences of people in the past” (2005, p. 752). When students have this insight, they are able to construct their own knowledge about the people they are understanding and will better understand the perspective of said person. Perspective taking attempts to “humanize history” (Gehlbach, 2011, p. 316). Instead of basic facts and figures that may seem distant to students, perspective taking allows students to empathize with the feelings of historical figures; they form a personal connection to the figure (Gehlbach, 2011). By using primary sources in the classroom, students are able to engage in higher order thinking through perspective taking.

This study focuses on how primary documents can be used in social studies classrooms to facilitate perspective taking and how using these sources will impact student engagement, achievement, and their ability to understand multiple perspectives. The research questions which have guided this qualitative study is in what ways do primary sources which concentrate on perspective taking impact student engagement, achievement, and students' ability to take a perspective different from their own? In addition, to what extent does using primary sources in perspective taking affect student's ability to ascertain whether a source is biased?

Methodology

Research Settings and Participants

The following study took place in two secondary social studies classrooms in a suburban school in the southeastern United States. The school was designated Title I and received money from the federal government. The participants in this study were secondary high school students enrolled in two social studies courses. Both sections of the class were standard level. The demographics of my students were quite diverse; numerous ethnicities and races made up my classroom which included Latino students, African American students, Asian students, and Caucasian students. Several of my students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and had to have modifications in my classroom including extended testing time, separate testing, pre-made notes, etc.

Data Collection

I used multiple forms of data that was collected throughout the study to give more accuracy to my results. The data in this study are composed of five main parts: a pre- and post-survey, a pre-assessment, class activities, and an assessment. Before the students began the unit in which perspective taking was used, they were given pre-surveys where they were asked to consider how they felt about social studies. These questions revolved around measuring student engagement or interest in social studies as well as their experience with primary sources. In order to measure if students are able to detect bias in a primary source before the study begins, I administered a pre-assessment in which students were asked to detect the bias or perspective of an author in a primary source.

In order to measure if students were able to detect bias in primary sources after being exposed to multiple perspectives, I gave them assessments in which students were asked to detect the bias or perspective of the author. Throughout my unit which involved perspective

taking, students were given in-class work which measured their ability to detect bias. After they completed this work, I took up any papers they completed and observed any presentations they gave to gauge their ability. At the end of the unit, I gave a summative assessment which included questions that related to identifying biases in primary sources. In the test, students were given a primary source document and asked to identify the bias of the author. After my unit, students were given a post survey to determine their opinions on how perspective taking affected their experience and outlook in a social studies classroom. I used a coding method to look for common themes among the answers in my students' work.

Results

The pre-survey results found that only a few of my students found social studies interesting and while not many enjoyed reading firsthand accounts, none of my students liked reading textbooks. Additionally, almost all of my students states they enjoyed collaborative work. More than 75% of my students did not know what a primary source document was and believed they had never worked with one, despite using them previously in class. These survey results show that traditional methods of reading textbooks and individual work are not something students enjoy and that students' knowledge of primary sources is little.

The pre-test asked questions about specific primary sources I gave them including two political cartoons. Students were to analyze these documents and answer questions about the perspectives they felt the author of the document had. When asked about one cartoon, 18% were able to correctly state that the political cartoon was against universal suffrage and not for it. These results reveal that the students needed help in analyzing primary source documents.

Throughout the unit, I gave a scaffold assignment in which students looked at a political cartoon and a group activity where students worked together to analyze sources. In the first assignment, students looked at a political cartoon of Theodore Roosevelt and were asked to decipher the perspective of the illustrator. Only 38% of the students were able to correctly analyze aspects of the image. This activity shows that students have a hard time by themselves analyzing primary sources and identifying specific aspects of the picture that illustrate the author's point. In the second exercise, students worked in groups to analyze sources. In this activity, students had better success with over 95% of the students able to analyze the documents.

In the individual assessment as part of their unit test, students were asked to look at a political cartoon about urban life. While I wanted students to comment on the urban living conditions (48% did), an additional 19% of students talked about the racial issues they noticed in the pictures. While this was not the correct answer, I noticed their answers showed a deeper analysis of the picture that even I did not see and I gave them credit. More than half of the students, 67%, compared to 18% in the pretest were able to use historical thinking skills to analyze the deeper meaning of the image even if some did not give me the answers I was originally looking for.

In the post-survey, I asked the questions similar to the pre-survey. When asked whether they knew what a primary source document was, 14 of the 23 (approximately 61%) students were able to accurately answer the question. 10 out of the 23 students (43%) discussed enjoying looking at the primary sources. Additionally, many students talked about enjoying reading first-hand accounts. According to one student, “[I liked] getting a firsthand look on how they felt [sic]”

Discussion

For the most part, the pre- and post-surveys demonstrated little change in students’ interest in social studies. I expected the participants to gain more interest and motivation for social studies by working with original documents from history, but by the end of the study the surveys indicated little change. Despite the continuing lack of interest, the majority of students did increase their abilities to engage in historical thinking when analyzing a primary source, particularly visual images. In the pre-test, when students were asked to look at the author’s bias of a political cartoon, only 18% of students were able to accurately explain the purpose of the document. The remainder of the students either did not respond or gave a shallow analysis of the cartoon which just highlighted the superficial aspects of the image. During the final assessment, 67% of students were able to use historical thinking to look at the deeper meanings of the political cartoon. These findings that primary sources can help students engage in higher order thinking largely support the findings of other studies related to the benefits of primary source documents (Barton, 2005; Eamon, 2006).

This study highlighted the importance of using primary source documents to facilitate higher order thinking in students. Additionally, using these sources rather than reading a textbook allows students to see history as “real” and “alive.” Finally, I discovered that

collaboration among students is an effective tool for students to help one another learn. Despite not all students finding primary sources interesting, this study outlines the ways in which I can begin to effectively use primary sources in the future.

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Effect of Lesson Order on Student Achievement

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Introduction

Interest is a major contributor to motivation and achievement. This paper is only being read because the reader has some level of interest, whether it is personal, professional, or educational. Interest can be defined as preference for an area of study or focusing attention upon a particular situation. High school students often have two kinds of courses: mandatory courses that are required for graduation and elective courses that students choose for themselves. Interest level is especially important in the lessons for mandatory classes. Students are likely to have a higher interest in elective courses because they chose them over other courses. Mandatory courses on the other hand are required for everyone regardless of preexisting interest. Biology is an example of this type of mandatory class, which students may not have taken given the option.

Many high school students think that science is boring or that they do not like science. One potential reason for these feelings is the specific and occasionally verbose terminology used in science. There is also a belief that the material is not relevant to real life. Students often ask how knowing the parts of a cell will help them in the real world. And some students simply are not interested in the course material, which can be the case for any subject. If students enter into a class with such negative preconceptions, then they will put forth less effort compared to a class they truly enjoyed.

Literature Review

There are a wide range of strategies aimed at increasing student interest that teachers have available to them. This ultimately leaves teachers with the issue of how many activities to include in a lesson and how to arrange them to minimize distractions and time wasting between activities. Direct instruction allows the teacher to decide exactly what information the student has available and how they will learn it. However, if the student is thought to be more involved

in the learning process, then inquiry learning would be more favorable (Colburn, 1997). Inquiry learning allows the student to learn the information in their own way and make their own connections. Similar to the concept of inquiry learning is the Problem-Base Learning model (PBL). PBL involves presenting students with a problem and asking them to find the solution while developing their own problem solving method (Gijbels, Dochy, Van den Bossche, & Segers, 2005). Direct instruction can neglect student interest in favor of making sure that all of the material is presented. Inquiry and PBL are time consuming and can result in students coming to incorrect conclusions. This is not to say that these methods are flawed or unusable, but that they are best utilized together throughout the course of a unit (Klahr, 2012). Each of these methods helps cover up the weaknesses of the others, which is where the 5E Lesson Plan Model comes into play.

In an attempt to solve these questions, the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) created an instructional model known as the 5E Instructional Model (Bybee, et al 2006). The 5 “E’s” in the 5E-Lesson Plan are engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. Some modifications of this plan add more E’s but all of these planning styles begin with the engage activity. It is clear that the creators and implementers of the 5E-Lesson Plan believe that student engagement and interest are very important in subsequent teaching actions. This model presented a suggested order of lesson activities designed to engage the students’ interest first, and then proceed through the other parts of the lesson. The 5E model is a major basis for this action research which is based around engaging interest and hopefully increasing student achievement. The 5E lesson plan allows for direct instruction, inquiry, and PBL to be used within the same lesson, among other learning types (Bybee et al., 2006, He & Wang, 2008). In a study performed at Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Burke led a science class (2006). She performed an experiment early in the unit with her 5th year class after only a brief introduction to the subject material. Results showed that students were more engaged and reported that they understood the material better than other units. While the overall quantitative data was the same for grade average, she found that this inverted order of class was especially effective for average students.

Methodology

Design

This study sought to determine the effect of lesson order regarding lecture versus lab on student engagement and achievement. Student engagement was determined by post-unit surveys, while achievement was determined by pre- and post-test scores. Data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Participants

Participants in this study were students of two standard level biology classes at a public high school in central North Carolina. Each class performed the same activities and the same lessons, just in a different order. The participants were 44 students in grades 9-12. Consent forms were sent home to parents and assent forms were given to students. Students abstaining performed the same work and turned it in for a grade but their surveys were not used in data analysis.

Procedures

In order to determine the effect that lesson order has on student achievement and engagement, two classes were compared using two different lesson types. In one lesson type (which will be called style A), the activity came first in the lesson followed by the lecture, and in the other lesson type (which will be called style B), the lecture came first and the activity second. All lessons began with a short activity intended to focus the students' attention called the "Engage activity." This ordering of the lesson was based on two parts: the overall weekly unit and the daily lesson. In the activity first method (style A), the main activity of the day was performed during the first part of the lesson. During the rest of that week, the activities came early in the class with the lecture beginning after the midway point of the period. In the lecture first lesson (style B), the lecture began immediately after the engage activity and the main activity of the class came at the end of the lesson. In week one, the two classes were taught using opposite methods, one using style A and one using style B. After that week was over, the classes switched from A to B and vice versa.

This was a mixed method study with data being gathered from qualitative and quantitative methods. Students completed short surveys after the completion of the two week

period asking them to evaluate which method they preferred and led to more learning, in their opinion. The survey was composed of Likert scale questions and an option for additional comments. The teacher/researcher also conducted observations of the class making particular note of any students that seem particularly excited or happy or frustrated or confused. Pre- and post-tests were given to assess the students' knowledge. Statistical analyses were performed after the conclusion of the two lessons comparing each class against their own test scores from the two units, the other class per method, and their pre- and post-test scores using two-tailed T-tests and a p-value of <0.05 as the threshold for significance.

Pre- and Post-test

Post-tests were a standard written examination for a class grade consisting of 20-30 questions about the unit. The pre-tests were derived from the post-test, taking between 5-7 questions paraphrased from the post-test, focusing on major points that were covered in the lesson.

Results

After completion of the two units, two-tailed T tests were performed comparing the Punnett square unit against the mitosis unit within the same class and each unit against itself between classes. All units showed significant improvement from the pre-test to the post- test. Fourth period showed significantly higher scores on the lecture first Punnett square unit than the lecture later mitosis unit $t(38)=2.435, p=0.020$ (Table 1).

Table 1. Average Test Scores Per Unit (%)

| | Mean | SD | t | p-value |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Mitosis | | | | |
| Lecture first | 71.79 | 17.20 | 2.435 | 0.020 |
| Activity first | 58.48 | 17.32 | | |
| Punnett | | | | |
| Lecture First | 71.81 | 23.39 | 0.568 | 0.573 |
| Activity First | 68.14 | 18.88 | | |

Lecture order did not have a significant impact on test scores for second period $t(41)=0.568, p=.573$, although test scores were marginally higher on the lecture first mitosis unit. For both units, the lecture first unit was the higher score, although only fourth period showed significant differences. Survey results showed that students from both classes found Punnett squares more interesting and felt they learned more than mitosis, regardless of lesson order.

Discussion

With only one comparison of lesson order showing significant differences based on differences between lecture first vs. lecture last post-test scores, it can be concluded that over the course of this study, lesson order had little relationship to achievement. Fourth period did perform significantly better on the post-test during the lecture first lessons and they also showed higher interest in the material for that unit. However, both classes showed higher interest in the Punnett square unit regardless of lesson order. Survey averages were higher for questions regarding enjoyment of the unit, how much students learned, and how interesting the unit was for them. For each question, both classes found Punnett squares more enjoyable, interesting, and felt they learned more.

The order flipping model between 2nd and 4th period was used to mitigate any difference between students' intrinsic favor toward one particular unit over another. If one unit was viewed as more fun, then student engagement would be expected to be higher regardless of lesson order. With the two classes performing the same units in the same order with only the lesson order changed, the inherent advantage of one unit over another was accounted for.

While quantitative data was the driving force of this research, qualitative observations were also taken. Students seemed to view mitosis and meiosis as a purely academic exercise. Students often asked when they would use mitosis and meiosis information in the "real world." Even though students often had a difficult time distinguishing which type of inheritance to use in Punnett squares, they saw the intrinsic value in the material and found it more interesting. This confirms what was put forth by Trowbridge, Bybee & Powell (2004). Students do not find much science to be engaging which can result in a lack of interest. When students are engaged however, they not only perform better, but have a better attitude as well.

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**Approaching Narrative Text with a Film Director’s Mindset:
Producing Real and Imagined Scenes in the Secondary English Classroom**

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While film has been widely used in the English classroom and heavily acknowledged in professional literature, research using the language of film to approach and comprehend narrative text is sparse. The purpose of this study has been to engage students in the study of film so that a formal cinematic understanding could be applied to written narrative text to reveal the effects of a “film director’s mindset.” Film contains its own language and formal conventions; these elements can be applied to in-class, textual readings, allowing students the creative freedom to visualize and “hear” the scenes they read according to established film conventions.

Thus the researcher aimed to assess how a general understanding of film and its conventions can be harnessed by students as they read narrative text. Whereas traditional use of film in the classroom involves reading a text and subsequently watching a film to reinforce what was read, this study sought to evaluate the results of reversing that traditional process so that film came first and informed readings of text later. The central question addressed in the study was: “How does adopting a film director’s mindset influence how students read narrative text?”

Literature Review

Milner, Milner, and Mitchell (2012) outline four stages of reading literature: reader response, interpretive community, formal analysis, and critical synthesis. These stages mark an ideal progression of reading narrative text, moving from a basic personal understanding to theoretical consideration, although said stages often overlap and become recursive among readers of varying levels. Overlapping and backtracking is particularly prevalent in the approach to formal analysis, where difficulties in student comprehension present an obstacle to genuine textual appreciation (Golden, 2007). The stage of reading literature that precedes formal analysis, interpretive community, aims to solidify student comprehension by creating a forum for the sharing and discussion of various student ideas generated during the initial reader response. This

communal dialogue offers valuable and diverse insight to each student, but in no way guarantees independent comprehension given its communal, piecemeal structure.

Consequently, comprehension is, and has been, a perennial concern for English teachers. A visual approach to increasing students' text comprehension can be effective. Langer (1995) asserts that students must pictorially envision an author's story as they read a text. Similarly, Wilhelm (2011) suggests that struggling readers, who are prone to scan across lines of text without comprehending what is read, must form a mental image of the narrative staging and action. In this line of reasoning, film has long been used as an audio-visual supplement to written text in English classrooms, yet is worthy of further study and acknowledgement for its own specific educational possibilities (Vetrie, 2004).

Film is vital in 21st century narratives as well as the transmission of literary ideas. Kress (2000) argues that "it is now no longer possible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all modes of communication that are copresent in any [media format]" (p. 337). In accordance with Kress's insight, visual literacy and textual literacy are often included in the more general category of media literacy. Among the various media formats in existence today, film is a particularly significant medium that holds a special relationship to narrative text, not as a subordinate supplement, but as a valuable complement. Howells (2003) explains that both film and narrative text position the audience as reader/spectator while escaping the real-world limitations of time and space in their storytelling. This special connection between film and textual narrative compels an interest in how the intrinsically engaging aspects of film can be harnessed and utilized to motivate students in the notoriously difficult third stage of reading literature, formal analysis.

Methodology

Research took place at a large public high school in the southeastern United States, and the study subjects were 12th grade students in an English IV Honors class. In order to develop a film director's mindset, students first needed to understand the language and conventions of film through lessons, discussion, and readings. Once they had a basic literacy in film, students were able to turn this mindset toward written text through a process of visualizing and hearing narrative scenes. To assess this progression of learning and development during the course of research, a pre/post reading test was used to gauge comfort with text analysis and identification of five key formal elements in literature, including characterization, point of view, setting,

imagery, and mood; the brief first chapter of J.K. Rowling's novel *The Casual Vacancy* served as the object of discussion for this test. A pre/post film test was also used to gauge comfort with film analysis; the introductory segment of the film *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932) served as the object of discussion for this test. Both sets of pre/post-tests contained identical questions and were designed in tandem to collect data revealing students' formal appreciation of text and film. Additionally, students engaged in other regular class activities and completed worksheets with guided questions to evoke detailed responses about formal understanding of film/text and creative visualization of text using the director's mindset. All written work was collected for artifact analysis.

After students demonstrated basic film literacy, they became actual film directors and put their film knowledge to direct use; this stage of the study relied on student access to smartphones, which permitted free access to the app Instagram. This app was chosen for the study because of its ease of use, its simple editing features, its relatively high quality of outputted film product, and its prevalence in modern social media culture. The app was utilized by students in groups to craft short film clips with creative and clear literary merit, and these film clips were created in conjunction with a written assignment gauging students' understanding of literary details paralleling both film and text. This final project served as a summative assessment before students offered their own written evaluations of the director's mindset tool. The data in this study were analyzed using constant comparative analysis in order to discern and isolate prominent themes.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from this study demonstrated to the researcher that students were able to (1) recognize formal elements in narrative, (2) visualize narratives, and (3) emotionally understand narratives by using the director's mindset. These three themes of student development were achieved not only in the reading of narrative text but also in the "reading" of film. Based on the study's design, students' improvements in "reading" film were prerequisite to their improvements in reading narrative text; since the director's mindset encompasses an attendant and prior knowledge of film language, terminology, and conventions that can be applied to narrative text, students first needed to understand film at a basic academic level before applying this knowledge to the text.

Once students applied their film knowledge to text via the director’s mindset, significant improvements were made in visually describing and justifying formal textual elements, particularly characterization and mood. Figure 1, below, graphs the degree of visualization attributed to each of the five key formal elements of narrative by participants at the beginning of the unit (on the pre-test) and at the end (on the post-test).

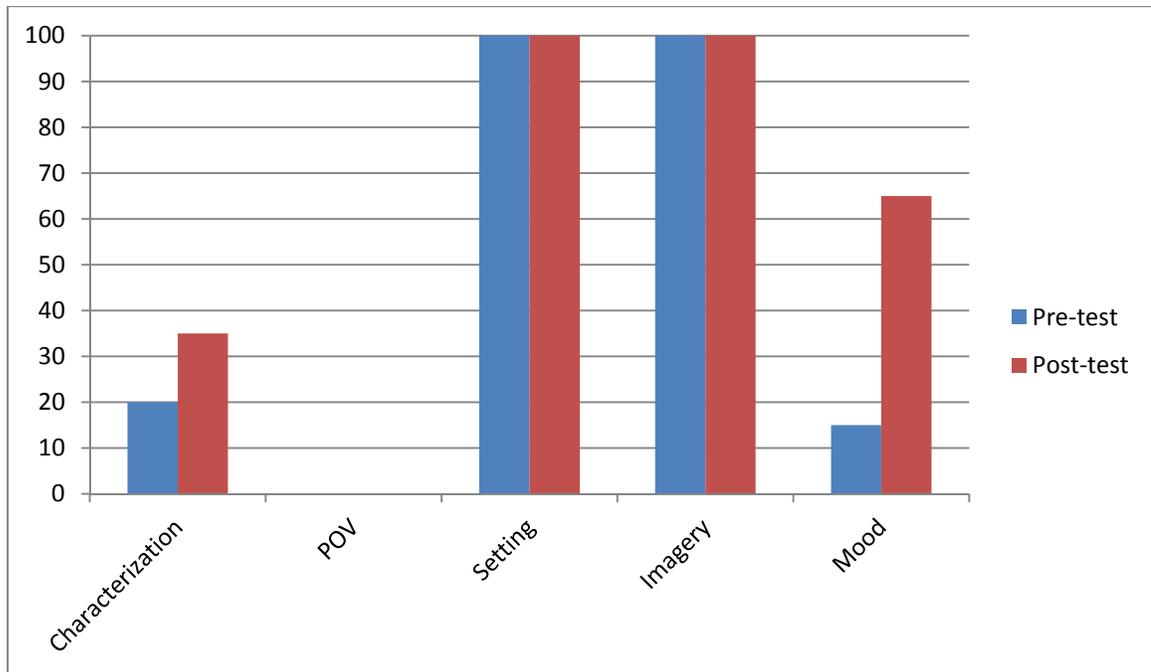


Figure 1. Percentage of participants who visually justified the five key elements of narrative on pre-test and post-test.

On the text post-test, students showed an increase in their attention to images and visuals with regard to characterization and mood. While setting and imagery naturally demand attention to visuals in text, point of view does not, and characterization and mood can be examined with or without attention to visuals. That being said, visual evidences for characterization and mood offered increased support and insight in student responses, and a significant number of students provided these additional details on the post-test.

Student improvement in gleaning details of characterization and mood from visual elements of the text were accompanied by a deepened emotional understanding of the text, which arose mainly from a heightened level of engagement fostered by visualization. In evaluating the director’s mindset, one student stated, “Visualizing is how one truly feels what they are reading. Without using a ‘director’s mindset,’ a text is dead. It would have no power to make the reader

feel [emotion].” This quotation points toward the mutually supportive relationship between visualization and emotional understanding. Holman (1980) says, “The *image* is one of the distinctive elements of the ‘language of art,’ the means by which experience in its richness and emotional complexity is communicated” (p. 223). Images and visualization derived from a film understanding were at the crux of student engagement and emotional connection with the text, and this power of the image explains why film is such a ubiquitous, popular, and influential medium in today’s society.

Student improvements in engagement and visualization represented a move toward maturation in Milner et al.’s (2012) four stages of reading literature: reader response, interpretive community, formal analysis, and critical synthesis. In attaching visual justification and emotional weight to characters and narrative moods, students showed not only mastery of formal analysis in literature but also a move toward critical synthesis in which literary themes and “big ideas” were assessed in relation to a given narrative.

In addition to analyzing literary works, students created their own: the use of Instagram in the classroom was educational, practical, expressive, and entertaining for students, and the overall project also yielded significant and rich filmic data for the researcher. Aside from demonstrating literary understanding and the capacity for applied visualization through the creation of their own clips, students shared their works and validated the literary potency of each other’s products with comments such as, “This feels like a Gatorade commercial!” Instagram worked smoothly and efficiently during the study, it was freely accessible to students with a smartphone in their possession, and it represented an occasion in which technology could liberate rather than confound classroom practices.

In accord with the claims of Sholle and Denski (1994), students must be critics and consumers of cultural media—roles traditionally designated in the English Language Arts classroom—as well as producers of such media. The modern world demands that students understand not only how to “read” media but also how to craft and manipulate it for the purpose of communicating their ideas (Cabat, 2009; Shamburg & Craighead, 2009). Production is a mode of knowing and understanding that is not fulfilled by mere consumption, and therefore students in this study were given the opportunity to exploit the common technology of their smartphones for the purpose of demonstrating to themselves and the researcher that they are creative, participatory agents in a world of media influence.

Conclusion

Film study *needs* to have a greater presence in the classroom if students are to understand and have a voice in the media-dominated world operating around them (Cabat, 2009; Holman, 1980; Shamburg & Craighead, 2009). Film literacy has become part of general literacy, and the inclusion of film in the classroom is now essential in preparing students for the “real” world beyond academia. Use of the director’s mindset tool in this study indicates that a film understanding can and does aid students’ visualization process as they read text, and therefore a film understanding can be effectively transferred and linked to a textual understanding. As one student wrote, “This is a good idea and should be taught more in school.” Film should be deemed worthy of academic study in future secondary English classrooms so that students can expand their literary understandings by integrating written text with this other academically relevant media format.

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Algebra Tiles in the High School Mathematics Classroom

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As students solve problems in the mathematics classroom, they often try to remember the procedure they are *supposed* to take to find the correct solution. In mathematics education, there is a shift from the rote memorization of formulas and rules to a focus on conceptual understanding using meaningful learning processes. According to the Standards for Mathematical Practice, “mathematically proficient students start by explaining to themselves the meaning of a problem” (Common Core State Standards, 2011, p. 6). Without physically seeing something or applying it to real-life, students struggle to make sense of mathematics problems. One method to guide students in this sense-making process is mathematical modeling. An example of mathematical modeling is using concrete models, which are tangible objects that aid in the connection between mathematics concepts and abstract symbols. With a hands-on approach in the classroom, students can grasp what the problems actually mean. They see why something is happening, which hopefully gives meaning to the problems and leads to a deeper understanding of the material. Using concrete models is interactive and collaborative, and brings a different, primarily student-based teaching method into the classroom.

Literature Review

One research group has advocated “it is imperative that instructional strategies be identified that facilitate the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of math skills” (Cass, M., Cates, D., Smith, M., & Jackson, C., 2003, p. 112). Along with being more student-based tools, concrete models are used as one of these instructional strategies in the mathematics classroom. Concrete models are mainly used at the elementary level, but certain models such as Algeblocks and Algebra Tiles are often used at the middle/high school levels.

Research finds concrete models have a positive effect on student learning at the primary and secondary education level. Research shows that when used appropriately, concrete models increased student understanding of mathematics, including their achievement, sense-making, and reasoning abilities (Fuson & Briars, 1990; Kribs-Zaleta, 2013; Moyer & Jones, 2004; Rivera,

2010; Stein & Bovalino, 2001). Studies also find students to be more engaged when using models, thinking of them as making math fun and interesting (Cass et al., 2003; Gurbuz, 2010; Moyer, 2001; Moyer & Jones, 2004; Swan & Marshall, 2010; Yun & Flores, 2012).

Cass, et al. (2003) studied the effect of the use of the concrete model, a Geoboard on student learning of perimeter and area problems. The students used the Geoboards and rubber bands to create shapes and concretely count the lengths of the sides of shapes or the area enclosed by the shape. The three students in the study all improved significantly in their understanding of perimeter and area. They were able to apply what they learned on the Geoboard when they did not have the model and then to a real-life situation. The use of concrete manipulatives led to the retention of problem-solving skills in perimeter and area over an extended period of time. One student said that “this was fun and worked for him” (p. 117), and that “the book was flat and that this, the Geoboard, made the problems come alive” (p. 117).

In an action research study in a middle school mathematics classroom, Rivera (2010) used Algeblocks to teach students about factoring polynomials. Using the Algeblocks, the students understood the process of factoring better – “the visual process helped them appreciate the algebraic process and understand the symbols they were manipulating” (p. 47). Even when the teacher took the Algeblocks away the students “replaced the concrete action with a hand gesture” (p. 44). The actions and movements eventually made enough sense to them that they were able to solve problems without the models or hand gestures. The models led to a concrete-to-representational-to-abstract approach similar to the Zoltan Dienes approach (Bart, 1970). The author concluded from his study that the Algeblocks allowed his students to better understand the process behind the algorithms for factoring that traditionally they would have just memorized. The students also enjoyed using the concrete models; one student said “I like factoring and it’s nice to know why it makes sense like that” (Rivera, 2010, p. 42).

Although Cass, et al. (2003) and Rivera (2010) found positive effects on student understanding and engagement, the use of concrete models has been found to have some limitations. Uttal, Scudder, and DeLoache (1997) cite examples and studies of difficulties when using manipulatives in mathematics instruction. The main reasons given for the limitations of concrete models are the lack of teacher training with the models, student frustration because they have not used the models before, and students already knowing how to solve the problems by an algorithm. Uttal, et al. (1997) found that even if the students were able to solve problems using

manipulatives, “they often fail(ed) to link this knowledge to more traditional forms of mathematical expression” (p. 45). They believe that this required the students to do double the work: learn how to solve the problems with the manipulatives and then again with the symbols. However, they state that “it’s possible that the best manipulatives will be objects that are not used for anything else but mathematics instruction” (p. 51). Certain concrete models such as Algeblocks (Rivera (2010)), Geoboards (Cass et al. (2003)) and Algebra Tiles are specifically made for mathematics instruction.

In studies where teachers overcame these limitations, research finds that “they benefit children’s mathematics learning and children enjoy using them” (Swan & Marshall, 2010, p. 16). These conflicting findings demonstrate the need for further research on the effect of concrete models on engagement and understanding. Based on previous research, the implementation process plays a major role in student learning, and the concrete representation of abstract concepts is what mathematics educators deem potentially very influential. The purpose of this action research study was to further explore these findings about concrete models, specifically Algebra Tiles. The research question was: How does the use of Algebra Tiles in a high school mathematics classroom affect student understanding and engagement?

Methodology

The participants in this study were 44 ninth and tenth grade students from the researchers’ Math I classes. As part of their regular instruction, all of the students in this class used Algebra Tiles during five lessons in a unit on quadratic functions from the standard course of study. Algebra Tiles are square and rectangular tiles that represent positive and negative variables or units. Small yellow square tiles represent one unit and rectangular green tiles represent the variable x . To complete the set, blue square tiles represent x^2 . The corresponding negative tiles for one unit, x , and x^2 are red. The Algebra Tiles were first introduced to the students as part of an introduction to the unit on quadratic functions. They learned what each tile represents and then had time to explore the Algebra Tiles, where they had to form different algebraic expressions. Students did not have any prior experience with quadratic functions, so learned via the Algebra Tiles throughout the unit. Through a variety of types of instruction and activities with the Algebra Tiles, students learned to combine like terms, multiply binomials, and factor quadratic expressions. The instruction during this unit followed the concrete, representational, abstract sequence, similar to the theories of instruction of Zoltan Dienes and in previous studies

such as Rivera (2010). This progression was used primarily to scaffold student learning of the concepts of expansion and factoring.

The researcher used an observation protocol to take field notes on student engagement and understanding. During the study, students wrote four reflective journals, where they had to demonstrate a skill learned or answer a question about the use of Algebra Tiles. After the unit the students filled out a six question, four-point Likert scale survey, where they rated their perceived understanding of the mathematics as well as their opinion of the use of Algebra Tiles. Randomly selected students then participated in focus groups, which included five open-ended questions extending their responses to the reflective journals and survey. The Likert results are presented in Table 2. The field notes, reflective journal responses, and focus group discussions were analyzed by the researcher as qualitative data, and themes were identified and described.

Results and Discussion

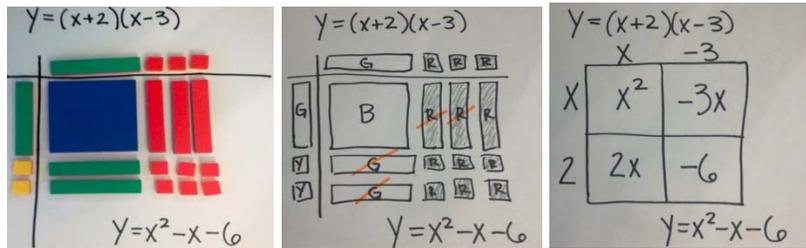
After the second day with the tiles, I had the students respond to the reflective journal question, *what do you like about using Algebra Tiles so far?* Out of 44 responses there were only four negative comments about the tiles. For the majority of students they found the tiles very useful, easy to use, and in general they liked using them. About a third of the students referred to the tiles as “easy” in their reflective journal response. The tactile and visual learners responded very well to the Algebra Tiles and they really helped with their understanding of expansion. Student engagement after the second day with the Algebra Tiles was very high. Table 1 below provides some responses to this reflective journal question.

Table 1

| |
|---|
| “I am more of a visual hands-on learner and these tiles allow me to learn just like that” |
| “I love using them because when I see it, I can learn it faster, and working with them is fun and easy” |
| “I do like the tiles very much. I just don’t want to get stumped if I don’t have them. But it would be easy to just draw them out.” |
| “It makes math easier” |

All of the students learned to expand with the tiles, then represented the tiles by drawing and then applied the tiles to an abstract scenario. 78% of the students revealed an understanding of this concept through their second reflective journal where they needed to demonstrate a skill. Figure 1 provides a students’ example of this concrete-representational-abstract sequence.

Figure 1



When students were writing the equations in standard form they did not realize that by working backwards they were factoring. We did four different problems together where I would give them an equation in standard form and they would need to form a rectangle inside their expansion mat. They knew where the x^2 tiles needed to go and the unit tiles because of prior knowledge with the tiles, but were a little unsure about how to organize the x tiles. After some trial and error they were able to form the rectangle. Once students could do this, filling in the outside of the expansion mat, i.e., factoring, was very easy for the students.

During the five days of instruction I observed the students engagement levels and how well they understood the concepts, but the survey responses expanded on the students' opinions. The results of the responses from the 44 students on the post-treatment survey are shown below.

Table 2: Results from Survey

| | Average Student Rating | Breakdown of Student Ratings (Number of Students) | | | |
|---|------------------------|---|--------------|-----------|--------------------|
| | | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Agree (3) | Strongly Agree (4) |
| I enjoyed using the algebra tiles. | 3.11 | 2 | 6 | 21 | 15 |
| I understood the math concepts better when using the algebra tiles. | 3.20 | 1 | 5 | 22 | 16 |
| The algebra tiles were easy to use. | 3.41 | 0 | 5 | 16 | 23 |
| I know how to expand and factor using algebra tiles. | 3.23 | 1 | 5 | 21 | 17 |
| I know how to expand and factor without algebra tiles. | 3.32 | 0 | 6 | 18 | 20 |
| I want to use the algebra tiles again. | 2.64 | 10 | 8 | 14 | 12 |

The conclusions drawn from the survey results are that 38 of the 44 students feel confident in their understanding of expanding and factoring without needing the tiles. When we further discussed their responses to the survey in focus groups, students said that the positive

aspects of using the tiles were that they were easy to use, fun, helped them understand concepts quicker, and that they were visual. The negative aspects were that there sometimes weren't enough tiles, they were little, they could be distracting, they could not use them on a test, and that they took up too much time. When the students evaluated their own understanding of quadratic equations they said that they tiles helped them understand the basics, organized their thoughts, and they could actually see what they were doing. However, they also said that it slowly became more difficult to use the tiles once we moved on to factoring.

From the results from this study, I conclude that Algebra Tiles have a positive effect on student engagement and understanding when executed correctly. For the lessons on expansion, which were implemented slowly with a developing process, students were confident, engaged, and grasping the concepts very quickly. Student engagement and understanding in mathematics increased. I conclude that student engagement was not as high during the lessons on factoring because the lessons were different or the students could think abstractly and did not need the tiles anymore. In further research I hope to continue to find ways to use Algebra Tiles in the classroom, specifically focusing on how to effectively implement them into my lessons to increase student engagement and understanding of mathematics.

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The Use of Storytelling to Develop Oral Language Ability in a Secondary Spanish Classroom

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The importance of communicating competently in languages other than English with people of different cultures has become an increasingly important consideration for teachers seeking to help students gain the skills they need to be globally competitive in the 21st century (ACTFL, 1996). With this growing need, K-12 world language educators provide opportunities for students to develop communicative abilities within a proficiency-oriented plan of study that focuses on real-life language experiences similar to those found in the target culture. Since culture manifests itself through unique practices, products, and perspectives, using storytelling in a foreign language classroom can provide a meaningful framework for students to experience the language. Authentic stories blend culture and context with language and function, providing engaging topics for learners to explore while they participate in challenging tasks that facilitate the development of higher-order thinking skills (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). The storytelling experience is highly communicative and linguistically honest, which provides students with meaningful input in the target language. This approach gives an opportunity to develop students' listening comprehension through a low-stress experience (Wajnryb, 1986). Storytelling reinforces the use of literary form, which promotes literacy development and also helps to encourage oral language ability. The use of storytelling experiences in the world language classroom offers a wide array of possibilities for communication that supports the development of language proficiency and cultural awareness. With this in mind, the primary purpose of this action research study sought to understand how the use of storytelling techniques can help students develop oral language ability in a secondary Spanish classroom.

Literature Review

In order to design instruction that provides contexts for rich communication experiences, K-12 world language teachers have to consider the process involved in developing language learners (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Rosenbusch, 1991). Children learn their first language (L1) implicitly by listening to meaningful, complete language, so replicating a similar process while

learning a second/foreign language (L2) is a beneficial practice (Krashen, 1982). Students need to be exposed to an abundance of comprehensible input in the target language before they are able to produce the language themselves. Stories are inherently good sources of comprehensible input because their universality translates across cultures and languages (Fisher, 1985). All stories tend to follow episodic organization, regardless of what culture they come from. Thus, students can follow a story in the target language, if it contains mostly familiar vocabulary, because they have a sense of story form in their own language. An important factor to consider when selecting a story to tell, however, is the proficiency level of the audience.

In 1986, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) published the Proficiency Guidelines, revised in 2012, as a description of what individuals can do in a language in the areas of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Reading and listening have domains of proficiency ranging a spectrum of abilities – Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior, while writing and speaking extend the spectrum to include Distinguished.(ACTFL, 2012). World language teachers seeking to improve learners’ communicative ability have an understanding of the domains of proficiency so they can recognize learners’ abilities and design appropriate instructional strategies. For example, Novice Level learners are able to communicate using isolated, typically memorized, words and phrases on familiar and predictable topics (ACTFL, 2012). In addition to understanding these domains, language teachers should master the incorporation of the three modes of communication – interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. These modes encompass the skills necessary to develop language ability. In order to progress in proficiency, language learners must be given ample opportunities to communicate in each of the three modes. This requires K-12 world language teachers to use proficiency-oriented strategies that focus on interpretive listening and reading; interacting orally with other speakers; and presenting information in the target language.

The process of developing proficiency is cyclical in nature. Before language learners can repurpose the language through the presentational mode of communication effectively, they require extensive comprehensible input. Exposure to language just beyond a student’s proficiency level serves as a step in the process of language development (Krashen, 1982). The flexibility of storytelling aligns with the progression of the Proficiency Guidelines. For example, the selection of a highly predictable story with simple phrases and a high number of cognates can serve as meaningful and comprehensible input for Novice Level learners (ACTFL, 2012).

In order for world language teachers to best use storytelling as a pedagogical strategy, they have to understand the characteristics of different story forms and how they will best fit the intended objectives of the lesson. When listening to stories in other languages, students can also develop a sense of how the language sounds. Storytellers employ a natural rate of speech and a varied use of sentence structures, which allow students to be exposed to the target language without necessarily having to construct it themselves (Wright, 1995). Students can then use the skills they have acquired as listeners to enhance their speaking ability in a foreign language. Once exposed to comprehensible input through the storytelling process involving a variety of stories told by the language teacher, students can be guided to develop and present their own stories, therefore using the three modes of communication to increase their oral language ability. Utilizing storytelling in a world language classroom allows teachers to create a duality of benefits: students can grow as listeners when the teacher tells the story and as speakers when they themselves tell the tales.

Methodology

This action research was conducted in a seventh grade Spanish class that consisted of eighteen students at a central North Carolina public school where the teacher-researcher was assigned for her student teaching internship. The study occurred from late April to early May, 2014. Due to inclement weather and subsequent interruptions of the school schedule, the teacher-researcher was forced to shorten certain activities during instruction and these time constraints had an impact on the study. The teacher-researcher sent home letters of informed consent to the parents/guardians of all students. All students were under the age of 18, so all were given letters of assent. The letters explained the purpose of the study, its design, and the students' participation. The letters also informed participants that they could decide whether or not to be video-recorded as part of the study. Data collection occurred during regular class time. Students who did not return letters of informed consent still completed the assignments as a part of normal instruction, but their work was not used for data collection. Twelve students in the class elected to participate in the study. The teacher-researcher used a coding system to keep student identity confidential, randomly assigning each student a separate letter, A-L. All materials for the study were stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the teacher-researcher's advisor after completion of the study.

The study included three data sets about oral language development: The first data set involved the instructional strategies implemented by the teacher-researcher and the resulting student work, which included three storytelling experiences and a final culminating project that required the students to tell an original story to the class. The second data set was the field notes that the teacher-researcher took during the study, which allowed her to reflect on whether or not the objectives of each lesson were met and if the students were able to respond correctly to questions after each storytelling experience. The final data set was a survey which the students filled out upon completion of the study in class that asked questions about their comfort with speaking and listening to Spanish after the storytelling experiences, as well as what impact storytelling had on their oral language ability. The teacher-researcher looked for themes that emerged to determine how the instructional strategies used in storytelling experiences helped students to develop oral language ability in Spanish.

Results

For the first story, nine students (75%) participated in the experience and completed the graphic organizer (three students were absent this day). For the second story, eleven students (92%) participated (one student was absent). All twelve students (100%) participated in the third storytelling, as well as the culminating story presentation. The listening experiences were followed by activities using the interpersonal mode in which students interacted with the researcher to respond to questions about the stories in order to gauge students' comprehension. Each storytelling experience was accompanied by a graphic organizer, which the students filled out as they listened. The graphic organizer asked the students for specific details: the characters, setting, and information about the three parts of the story: the beginning, middle and ending.

After the first story, six students (50%) were able to respond to the questions of the graphic organizer. Eight students (89%) used at least one complete sentence. However, students only used the verbs *ser*, *estar* and *tener* to form their sentences. After the second story, only five students (45%) attempted to respond to all questions following the story. Also, only three students (27%) were able to stay completely in the target language when responding to questions. Two students were able to produce complete sentences and one of those students (Student A) incorrectly used the verb *ser* instead of *estar* to form his sentence. These responses supported the teacher-researcher's supposition that the second story's L2 was too advanced for the students and that they were unable to understand and build upon it. After the third telling,

eight students (67%) were able to respond to all of the questions on the graphic organizer. However, only three students (25%) were able to stay in the target language, and only one student (8%) successfully used a complete sentence in response to a question. When the students created their own stories, all students (100%) used complete sentences and utilized a wider variety of verbs. For example, Student K utilized nine different verbs in his final story, while he had only used *estar* previously.

Students generally showed improvement in their use of complete sentences as well as an increase in the variety of verbs used from the first storytelling to the creation of their original story. For example, Student D simply used “*rubio*”, “*simpático*”, and “*joven*” to describe the main character of the first story. At the end of the storytelling experiences, when presenting his original story, he used complete sentences, such as “*Jane es gorda y perezosa*” (Student D). This exemplifies a common trend found in many students’ work.

The first story was easiest for the learners to understand. The researcher only used information the students had repeatedly gone over in classes preceding the first telling, which supported the importance of building L2 by connecting previous knowledge to new L2 (McCarthy, 1991). In contrast, the two stories that came next introduced new L2 without much preparation and therefore were more difficult for students to comprehend. The students encountered similar problems when creating their original stories; they were able to write in full sentences when prompted by highly scaffolded L2 that focused on familiar questions, and students’ ease of language decreased when prompted by more abstract questions. For example, Student G said, “*Esta en el parque*” in response to “*¿Dónde toma lugar tu cuento?*” (Where does your story take place) but used English in response to “*¿Cómo resuelven el problema?*” (How did they resolve the problem?)

Overall, analysis of the results from the student survey (Data Set Three) highlighted that the students believed the storytelling experiences helped develop their oral language ability in the presentational mode of communication. Eleven of the twelve students (92%) felt that preparing to tell their original story helped them to practice speaking in Spanish, and nine students (75%) felt the experience helped them practice using complete sentences. Six students (50%) felt prepared to tell their original stories, while eight students (67%) said they enjoyed telling them. These responses led the teacher-researcher to conclude that the storytelling experiences were valuable and had positive effects on student learning.

Conclusions

The teacher-researcher found that the incorporation of instructional strategies used in storytelling experiences helped provide contexts for students to improve their language ability in all three modes of communication. The findings from this study suggest that these experiences had some connection between the instructional strategies and the students' development of oral language ability. However, adequate time should be spent in the development of these experiences so there is sufficient time for language preparation, which could aid in student comprehension (the interpretive mode) as well as build the L2 production during the storytelling and afterwards (interpersonal mode). With enough time spent on language preparation, students could have been more successful in the telling of their original stories (presentational mode).

As a result of this action research study, the teacher-researcher developed an understanding of the importance of careful scaffolding of L2 to prepare students adequately to create L2 on their own. One effective strategy for scaffolding L2 for both comprehension and L2 production was the use of graphic organizers. The selection of appropriate stories is also an important consideration when incorporating storytelling experiences in the foreign language classroom. Stories should be interesting to the students as well as include L2 that supports and reinforces the curriculum. If ample time is spent on each component of a storytelling experience and an applicable and interesting story is selected, these instructional strategies can have a positive impact on oral language development.

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Historical Thinking in the High School Classroom

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Recent literature, government standards, and teaching guides demonstrate an increased emphasis on critical thinking skills in the American classroom. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has identified critical thinking as a valuable skill. Further, the NCSS finds that teachers must “guide learners in using such processes of critical historical inquiry to reconstruct and interpret the past” (NCSS 2002, p. 21). The name given for critical thinking skills applied to the discipline of history is ‘historical thinking.’ High school students should use historical thinking to define, analyze and qualify information. In this way, students are not simply memorizing facts, but are learning to interact with and evaluate new information, an essential skill for any stage of life. As a new teacher it is critical to teach these skills, and I want students to understand their value. The purpose of this study is to determine whether pedagogy that stresses historical thinking in an 11th grade US History course affects student engagement with or interest in the material.

Review of Literature

There is no set definition of ‘historical thinking’ tucked neatly away in a dictionary, but based upon the various working definitions researchers have concocted, these are the following five facets of the idea: historical interpretation, addressing bias, perspective taking, historical significance, and creative thinking. Combined, these five notions present an accurate portrayal of historical thinking.

Historical interpretation is perhaps the most sophisticated and strenuous thought exercise of the lot. The most basic principle of historical interpretation is that historical knowledge is never finalized. It constantly shifts as new evidence is uncovered or as the old is reinterpreted (Salinas, Blevins, & Sullivan, 2012; VanSledright, 2002; Wineburg, 2001; Yilmaz, 2009). Historical thinking involves not only a critical reading of primary sources but an understanding of why historians may arrive at divergent conclusions from the same source (O’Reilly, 1983; Templeton, 1972; VanSledright, 2004; Wineburg, 1991; Wineburg & Martin, 2004; Wineburg &

Wilson, 1988). Detecting and compensating for bias in one's reconstruction of the past is an advanced but necessary component of historical thinking. As students learn to read primary sources, they must come to understand that every document is a "social instrument masterfully crafted to achieve a social end" (Wineburg, 1991, p. 502). Students must take those factors into account as they reconstruct a sophisticated view of the past from multiple and conflicting primary sources. Historical perspective taking refers to the process of recognizing and accounting for social, moral, political, and economic factors that have coalesced to create a person who is a product of a particular time and place (Seixas, 1994). But before a student can study a culture or event, he should have ability to justify why that topic should be studied to begin with. This is the idea of historical significance. Historical significance is a concept students can and must be taught as part of historical thinking, for it is significance that justifies the historical thinking that follows. Covertly underscoring the framework of historical thinking is the skill of creative thinking. In order to construct an interpretation of the past consistent with the aforementioned principles, a student must be willing to ask original questions of the primary sources, make inferences, and draw on previous interpretations of an event while not being hemmed in by them. This requires a great deal of creativity and patience.

This is not to say that historical thinking is easy. Rather, it is a difficult skill that is not innate (Wineburg, 2001). Difficult though it is, it can be taught (O'Reilly, 1983; Wineburg, 1991). And it should be taught, for historical thinking may help students become competent citizens of a modern democracy (Templeton, 1972; Wineburg and Martin, 2004). Historical thinking is also a means by which traditional narratives may be challenged by including narratives hitherto marginalized by the mainstream curriculum (Fránquez & Salinas, 2011; Salinas, Blevins, & Sullivan, 2012).

Social studies literature reveals different pedagogical approaches to teaching historical thinking. Debates provide students with a means of analyzing and responding to different viewpoints. They might explore the viewpoints of the historical actors themselves or of divergent interpretations of an event (O'Reilly, 1983; Wineburg & Wilson, 1988). The classic cause-and-effect essay is a similar way for students to learn and demonstrate historical thinking skills, particularly those of interpretation and bias (Wineburg & Martin, 2004). In order to write an effective essay which makes an argument supported by evidence, students must first identify, then read and analyze, that evidence. However the evidence is used, it is given that a student's

ability to read and understand primary sources with a critical eye is paramount (Drake & Brown, 2003; Peck & Seixas, 2008; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005; VanSledright, 2004; Wineburg, 1991; Wineburg & Wilson, 1988). Integrating primary sources into the classroom has become the primary strategy for teaching historical thinking. I therefore incorporated extensive and varied primary sources into my lessons and into this study.

Methods

This action research study included 21 participants in an honors-level US History classroom in a central North Carolina public high school. The study was conducted over a three week period. On Friday of the first week, participants took a unit test; average scores from each section of the test were compared with average scores from the post-test to measure change in student achievement on summative assessment. Students also completed the pre-study survey to assess students' self-reported interest in history and their prior knowledge of historical thinking. All students took and were graded on the unit tests, but only participant grades were included in the study. Although names were included on tests for grading purposes, student names were coded with letters to ensure confidentiality. Surveys did not ask for student names.

During each day of the second week, I conducted an in-class exercise designed to target a different facet of historical thinking, adapted from Gavriš (1995). These exercises were conducted during the unit on Progressivism and Imperialism, and I drew connections between the skills learned and the material during and after the activities. Although distinct separations are difficult to maintain because the five skills are closely related, the first day focused mainly on historical significance, the second on historical interpretation, the third on bias, the fourth on perspective taking, and the fifth on creative thinking. During these exercises, I took freehand field notes. All students participated in these exercises, and all student work was collected. Only participant work was included in the study.

On Monday of the third week, all students completed the post-test. Study participants also completed the post-survey, which asked the same questions about student interest in history as the pre-study survey for purposes of comparison, but also asked students about their knowledge of historical thinking, to rank the in-class activities in their order of preference, and allowed students to write their thoughts about them. Surveys did not ask for student names. The qualitative data were analyzed according to grounded theory, which allows a theory regarding

the data to emerge as the research process unfolds rather than attempting to assess the validity of a preconceived theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Results

The class average on the pre-test was 80%, with scores ranging from 33 to 84. Average scores for each section of the test were: 60% for cause-effect matching, 85% for identification of terms, 90% for political cartoon analysis, and 80% for essay. On the pre-survey, students indicated their like or dislike for history on a Likert scale. More students (37%) circled 3 or “neutral” than any other number. However, nine students (48%) chose numbers indicating they liked history to various degrees (4 and 5) than neutral. More students chose to circle the liking numbers (4 and 5) than the disliking numbers (1 and 2). Many students who chose disliking numbers wrote about their boredom and frustration with memorizing information. They requested more technology and collaborative learning activities, such as debates and “hands-on” projects. Students who chose liking numbers wrote about the influence history holds over the present and future of individuals and nations.

Most students were engaged in each day’s activity and produced demonstrations of their understanding and application of historical thinking concepts. To learn about historical significance, students assumed the persona of one of the unit’s four presidents and tweeted about the most important events during that presidency. The following day, students examined differing textbook accounts of Taft’s presidency, giving them an opportunity to read, discuss, and write about historical interpretation. At the end of class on Wednesday, students each took a quiz about the day’s activities, demonstrating the potential unreliability of eyewitness accounts. Students created their own definition of bias and generated ways to account for bias in eyewitness or other primary accounts. On Thursday, students were divided into two groups to engage in a debate; each side was given photographs of historical figures and asked to find their beliefs on the topic of imperialism. Students assumed the roles of these figures for the debate, allowing them to engage in historical perspective taking. Finally, the last activity asked students to think creatively about a hypothetical situation in which the teacher accuses a student of cheating on a test. Students must use the clues provided to reconstruct a possible solution and identify which of the characters in the scenario the teacher would trust the most. All of these activities targeted a particular facet of historical thinking.

The class average on the post-test was 77%, with scores ranging from 51 to 94. Average scores for each section were: 68% for cause-effect matching, 70% for identification, 90% for political cartoon, and 80% for essay. On the post-survey, more students (40%) chose disliking numbers than chose liking numbers (35%). When asked to rank the in-class activities, the detective activity was most frequently chosen as the favorite, while the textbook activity was most frequently chosen as the least favorite. No students chose the textbook activity as their favorite, while no students chose the survey activity as their least favorite.

Analysis

This study sought to determine whether student knowledge of and interaction with historical thinking concepts would affect either their like for history or their achievement. As measured by the pre-and post-surveys, student like for history showed a decrease. Only seven students reported their like for history on the post-survey Likert scale as compared to nine students on the pre-survey. As measured by the pre-and post-tests, student achievement also decreased.

It is unlikely that the historical thinking activities themselves were the only cause for these decreases; indeed, they may not have been contributory. During the week this research was conducted, there were two days in which a significant number of students (approaching 50%) were absent to either perform in or watch the spring musical. None of these students chose to attend before-or after-school tutoring, though it was offered. This research was conducted over one week only; in that period of time, there is unlikely to be a significant change in student like of a school subject. Many students who expressed their dislike of history on the post-survey were likely frustrated by their inability to catch up on the material they missed due to said absences. Furthermore, adolescent attitudes are subject to unpredictable vicissitudes.

An additional factor that affected student knowledge of and interaction with historical thinking was the structure of the class throughout the semester. Although I waited until conducting the action research to introduce students to the five components of historical thinking and explicitly define them, my cooperating teacher and I both provided students with the tools they needed to develop their critical thinking skills and required them to demonstrate this ability through various assessments. They were therefore already using such concepts as historical interpretation and creative thinking in debates, historical essays, and other activities and

assessments. It is not surprising, therefore, that the data do not indicate a significant increase in student knowledge of historical thinking concepts.

Consistent with the findings of Tally & Goldenberg (2005), the students felt more “invested” in activities that allowed them to interact with and construct knowledge from primary sources (p. 16). They expressed their boredom and displeasure with taking notes; most students were engaged in the activities and discussions. As O’Reilly (1983) found, students were especially responsive to debates. Although there is inconclusive evidence to determine whether these activities affected student like of history or their achievement, more activities of this kind should be used by teachers to stimulate interest. This action research has reinforced my desire to help students develop their critical thinking skills. I will therefore continue to discover and adapt methods by which students may learn and practice these skills in history classes.

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Take a Picture, It'll Last Longer: Looking at Text-Based Versus Image-Based Primary Sources in a U.S. History Classroom

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Perhaps the most apparent use of primary sources is to aid historians in establishing the general attitudes and beliefs of people in the past. This is done through the four specific contributions that primary sources make to the study of history: motivating historical inquiry, supplying evidence for historical accounts, conveying information about the past, and providing insight into the thoughts and experiences of people in the past (Barton, 2005). Due to the advantages that primary sources provide, historians can assemble a foundation of information that helps to decipher what life was like during the times that they study. Such a concept can be accomplished by using these artifacts as evidence to infer previous personal and societal convictions. Another use of primary sources by historians is to reconstruct the past relationships between institutions, between individuals, and between them both. These readings are possible for historians because they are capable of understanding not only what the text says about the subject but also what it does to reconstruct the subject itself. To do so, primary sources must be seen as both rhetorical and human artifacts (Wineburg, 1991). Historians do not only read a source; they analyze the implications that the source may have on the greater meaning of the past.

These objects are approached in a very different manner when used in a history classroom, however. Rather than to be used as the only tools necessary to recreate an image of the past, the role of primary sources in a school setting should be to provide supplemental information to the topics already being instructed on. Unlike professional historical investigators, students are not often extremely knowledgeable about specific events of the past before they are exposed to them in a social studies course. Unfortunately, what previous knowledge they do have often creates an obstacle to learning how to think critically of history, although Barton argues for the academic development of prior historical knowledge before incorporating primary sources into a classroom (Barton, 2005).

After a student becomes aware of the larger context of a primary source, it can be used to create a more engaging history classroom when used effectively. Reading about history through texts written by those who experienced it, or analyzing a photograph taken during an influential period of the past, allows students to better relate to the subject as the ideas that they are learning about are more clearly displayed. Three main teaching strategies have been shown to help students think contextually as they read historical documents: providing background knowledge, asking guiding questions, and explicitly modeling contextualized thinking (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008). Providing students with adequate information about the topics to be discussed in the documents prior to viewing them can promote better comprehension of primary sources in the long run (Barton, 2005). Doing so allows students to interpret unfamiliar words and develop authentic mental images while reading (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008). Alternatively, using image-based primary sources is not only beneficial to those students who struggle reading the difficult language of texts written long ago but also to the visual learners of the classroom. While verbal learners may have no difficulty contextualizing a text-based primary source document with the information presented in a lecture, visual learners may struggle more with such an activity. In order to compensate for this difference, teachers can incorporate the use of image-based primary source documents into their curriculum.

Although the exposure to primary sources themselves works to promote a deeper comprehension of the past among students, this understanding is expanded when they are presented with a variety of different types of these materials (Barton, 2005). This increased understanding can be attributed to students' greater ability to comprehend information based on their experience with multiple sources. While this paper looks at the separate advantages that using text-based and image-based primary source documents present in the classroom, the benefits that a conjunction of the two source types provide to student achievement and retention will also be discussed. Such a conjunctive use creates an analysis that appeals to both of the two major categories of learners: visual and verbal. Past research supports the claim that multiple text and image resources have been shown to peak student interest and engagement (VanSledright, 1995; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2011). Therefore, the research question in this study will be: To what degree do students' levels of comprehension differ when exposed to text-based primary source documents versus image-based primary source documents?

In order to answer the posed question, research was conducted on a group of student participants in a standard United States History classroom in a public school in the southeastern United States. Because the main idea behind the research question looks at the level of student comprehension obtained from text-based versus image-based primary source documents, the study was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, students were exposed to a variety of text-based primary sources. These sources were presented in the format of newspaper articles. Students then completed analysis activities based on these sources. During the second phase, students were exposed to image-based primary sources. Instead of being asked to analyze historical texts, the students were provided with relevant images (political cartoons were used in this study) to supplement the information provided throughout instruction. While the images were not a direct depiction of the information provided in instruction, their purpose was to present students with a visual aid useful in contextualizing the events, individuals, and sentiments present during the time period being studied. Students were asked to interpret these images through activities assigned by the researcher throughout the duration of the second phase.

Rather than to implement phase one of the study on one classroom and phase two of the study on another, the results of each phase were compared against the same participant population within one classroom. This design allowed the researcher to avoid many outside, uncontrollable factors, such as overall higher achievement in a specific classroom, which could have an effect on the data obtained. Such factors can be somewhat controlled when results are compared against the individual participants themselves and not against different classrooms. To provide a generalized response to the research question, the results were analyzed under two categories: student achievement and student engagement. Student achievement was evaluated based on comparing participant performance during activities in which solely text-based primary sources were used versus activities in which image-based primary sources were utilized. The evaluation of these performances was based on researcher observation and the completion of in-class activities. Participant opinion, on the other hand, was the major basis of student engagement evaluation. Because the study's structure and setting did not easily allow time for one-on-one interviews, each participant was asked to complete an open-ended survey to gauge their responses to the study. For example, students were asked if they preferred analyzing texts or images better, whether they felt they learned more from texts or images, and whether or not

they observed a notable difference in their overall learning based on the exposure to texts versus images.

To begin the research study, I had the participants take an online assessment through North Carolina State University in order to determine whether or not they identify as more verbal or visual learners. The results were determined on a scale of one to eleven in either the visual or verbal dimension. Results between one and three in either dimension of the scale correlate to a fairly well-balanced preference between visual and verbal learning. A moderate preference for either verbal or visual learning is designated by results of five to seven. Subsequently, a result between nine and eleven implies a strong preference for either visual or verbal learning. Overall, the results indicated that the majority of participants prefer to learn through visual means. Once the participants claimed to have established a general knowledge of the various subjects, I implemented the core activities of the research study. Initially, the participants were presented with a packet of three different newspaper articles reporting on the explosion of the U.S.S. Maine during the Spanish-American War. Overall, a vast majority of the participants were able to prove adequately that they had a firm understanding of the meaning of “yellow journalism.”

Approximately 78% of the respondents claimed that the term is used to describe a situation in which a journalist exaggerates a story or publishes a lie in order to attract readers. However, only 65% of the participants were able to do the same with the political cartoons. Even though each article was different in its own way, an overwhelming number of the participants were able to synthesize a combined main idea of the three. In fact, 87% of the participants were able to identify that the main message delivered throughout the three articles was that an enemy attack from Spain had possibly been the cause of the explosion of the U.S.S. Maine. Only 63% of them were able to understand that the images provided represented the assumed brutality of Spanish sailors and soldiers, visually exemplifying the yellow journalistic tendencies popular during this era in United States history. Compared to the percentage of those who could define yellow journalism and identify the overall message of the texts, a much smaller number of the participants were able to correctly assume the authors’ intended reaction from their audience. Only 59% of the participants were able to establish that the authors wanted to convince their readers that Spain was the cause of the explosion of the U.S.S. Maine. This number compare to the 27% of the student who were able to hypothesize that the images were produced in an attempt to convince the American public to support the war against Spain. Although the titles of

the articles themselves indicate some sort of bias within the texts, only 51% of the participants were able to correctly recognize this bias and explain its purpose. Overall, only 25% of the participants recognized the biased nature of the images and how that bias skewed the American public's opinion of Spain. As the participants worked on both of these activities, I conducted observations throughout the classroom. In general, the atmosphere in the room was one of confusion and frustration. In their surveys, four of the participants indicated that they liked working with texts the most while eight of the participants claimed to like working with images more than texts, and the majority of the participants claimed that they learn better from working with image-based primary source documents.

One of the largest obstacles associated with the text-based primary source analysis activity was the fact that many of the students had difficulty reading and comprehending texts. When applied to historical documents, this became even more of a challenge. Comparably, they also showed very little of the empathy skills necessary to truly understand the intended purpose and reaction of a primary source. Although the participants certainly struggled because of it, the biggest challenge faced during the activity was not that they could not analyze the texts. Rather, many of the participants did not want to analyze the texts because it was never something they had been asked to do before in other history classes. According to their survey responses, 67% of the participants claimed that they either had little or no experience working with text-based primary source documents prior to this lesson. Many of the same issues that came about during the text-based primary source activity were also present as the participants analyzed the images. These include challenges associated with approaching historical documents as well as evoking historical empathy. A lack of previous exposure to images in other history classes, as with the texts, may be blamed for such obstacles. In fact, a staggering 100% of the participants claimed that they had no previous experience working with image-based primary sources.

A major limitation of this study was the amount of time given to conduct it. Due to outside factors, such as awaiting research board approval and the return of participant consent and assent forms, the results of the research study were collected within one class period. The results may have varied greatly had the participants not been asked to analyze all of the text-based and image-based primary sources in the same lesson, one right after the other. Because of how the analysis activities were implemented, the participants became uninterested in them very quickly, prompting them to rush through the assignments and skewing the results. The activities

should have been presented in a way that was more appealing and engaging to the participants and should have been completed over a period of several lessons. Even though the participants proved to have a difficult time analyzing both the text-based and image-based primary source documents, I think that doing so had a positive effect on their greater understanding of history.

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The Use of Entertainment Media in Secondary Social Studies Classrooms

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“Books,” confidently claimed inventor Thomas Edison in 1913, “will soon be obsolete in the public schools. Scholars will be instructed through the eye. It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture. Our school system will be completely changed inside of ten years.”(*Cleveland Plain Dealer Interview*, 1913) Although Edison’s view into the future may not come to fruition, he may not have been too far off either. With the coming of technology and the tools present to educators and students alike, visual and audio representations of information have become a greater part of high school classrooms across the country (Selwyn, 2011). Social media, YouTube, iTunes, and other applications have made it possible for students to obtain information and knowledge in new, different, and exciting ways. Use of media in the classroom gives teachers the opportunity to use technology and entertainment in their pedagogical practice which enhances a student’s comprehension of given material (Stoddard & Marcus, 2010).

In this study, media refers to any sort of projection or presentation of audio clip, video clip, or still picture. Audio representations of media include spoken word, songs, and podcasts and visual representations include documentaries, motion pictures, clipart, still pictures, and political cartoons. Also, in this definition of the use of media, digital technology is incorporated and used to expose others to ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints. For the purpose of this study, digital technology will be used in the classroom in order to present the class the different forms of media. Web tools such as iTunes, YouTube, and PowerPoint will be forms of digital technologies used in this study. In the classroom, media can be a useful tool to engage students and probe curiosity which may eventually lead to educational success (Spencer, 1996).

For social studies teachers, the use of media can be extremely beneficial to garner interest and participation from students. Historical movies, audio clips of speeches, images, and music can facilitate student engagement and student learning which may lead to higher achievement in social studies classes. Entertainment tools can be used to capture the mood or tone of the author

which may better express the time in which they were produced. Furthermore, and in the case of music and movies, the opinions stated in both may facilitate critical thinking and analysis of the historical context in which they were produced (Brown, 2011).

The use of digital media in the classroom has been the subject of numerous experiments, studies, and inquiries since the turn of the twentieth century. Scholars and educators have been exploring the virtues of the use of digital media in education in an attempt to understand its usefulness in the classroom and ultimately its ability to facilitate learning for young people. Before going any further, media must be defined and understood in order to know how it can be used in the classroom. In the 21st century, media's existence in the classroom has been greatly catapulted by the evolution of technology and its use in the classroom as well. Kirkwood (1996) writes

Digitization has led to the fundamental changes in the production, storage, and dissemination of materials and information. The digital form that was developed to store computer data is now being applied to the full range of media. Text, graphics, speech, sounds, still and moving pictures can all be stored and conveyed using basically the same form (p. 42).

Many teachers use these items in their respective fields to help complement their own teaching styles to enable a higher level of understanding of the material. In the case of history, many of these sources of media come directly from the period in which they were produced, giving the teacher the opportunity to establish a connection between the students and the historical information and context that they are learning.

Methods

In order to appropriately define how the uses of media in a social studies classroom affect student achievement and interest, we separated the two items that are to be measured: student achievement and student interest. By using Corbin and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory approach, I used surveys, observations and different forms of assessment in order to evaluate and possibly consider the relationship between media, student interest, and student achievement. Subjects of the study were high school world history students between the ages 14 to 17 years old.

Student engagement and achievement were measured through a pair of Likert-style surveys that were issued to the students twice during the course of the project. Once halfway through the process and another at the end in order to gauge how the presentation of media

during class time may have triggered or “sparked” a student’s interest as well which form of media may have most impacted student achievement. The scale was numbered 1-5, 1 being that media created a negative impact on student interest or achievement, 3 being that the student was unaffected or impartial to the use of media, and 5 implying that the student was greatly interested by media in social studies or had a great impact on student achievement.

The presentation of media was divided into song, still picture, motion picture or movie clip, and video clip (any film clip that was not a Hollywood motion picture clip). The questions of each survey were organized based on the different types of media used during the study. The purpose of this is to compare how each type of media in a social studies classroom may influence student achievement and engagement. It is also important to point out that before any use of media during class was used, media was often preceded with lecture so the students had a better understanding of the historical context that the media is referring to. The media was used to supplement the new content that is to be introduced during the beginning of class by the instructor.

Results

The results and statistics compiled at the end of the study came from various forms of student work that was issued during the period in which I was the acting teacher in the classroom. All data came from the 6 week period in which much of my pedagogical practices were based on the use of media. As stated, media refers to movie clips, other video clips not related to movies, music, and digital pictures. Observations, test grades, in-class quiz grades, and the two anonymous surveys were used to analyze the effects of media on student engagement and achievement in a social studies high school class setting. Additionally, the student populations were broken up into three classes: 1st period, 3rd period, and 4th period. 1st period was a standard world history class and 3rd and 4th period were both honor classes. The data were organized and separated by period in order to further examine differences in engagement and achievement among different academic levels (standard vs. honors).

In this study, student test grades and in-class quizzes were used to analyze how the use of media may potentially impact student achievement. Three end-of-unit test score and quiz class averages from world history units where media was heavily used was compared to three end-of-unit test score and in-class quiz class averages where there was little to no use of media in delivering and supplementing the delivery of historical content. The data revealed that grades of

tests and quizzes that were derived from units where media was heavily used wielded higher scores for both test and in-class quiz grade averages.

According to the first of the two student surveys, video and movie clips that led to most student engagement contained several qualities. Some students remarked that their favorite video clips used in class were those that used humor and were funny. Student felt that the clips that made student laugh made it easier for the students to focus on the content being delivered. Through using clips that were funny, historical content taught during that period was made more interesting and thus would lead to higher levels of student interest. Other themes relating to movie and video clips were that many of the students enjoyed clips that were both entertaining which related to the content of that lesson well.

The second survey that aimed to gauge student achievement as a result of the use of media, many students noted that the use of movie clips, music, and pictures during class positively impacted their grades. Some students felt that because the media made material presented in class more clear and easier to understand that the media helped students achieve better grades in history class. The use of media helped students think back to different images, songs, or clips and remember content that was taught during a specific lesson that the media was used.

Discussion

The intention of the study was to understand how beneficial the use of media has on teaching strategies and learning outcomes in a history curriculum. After reviewing the results of the data, student test scores, quiz grades, and student surveys, the presentation of media had an overall positive impact on both student engagement and achievement. It seemed that much of the media facilitated an understanding of the subject matter which helped students remember information presented in class. Media not only helped supplement historical content effectively, but also offered an alternative for teachers to diversify instruction. It gives teachers the opportunity to use contemporary pop culture references to help students make connections between the media being used and the historical content in order to develop a higher level of understanding and comprehension.

While using different forms of media to teach world history, I observed that many students reacted most positively to the use of music in the classroom. This could possibly be explained due to the fact that it was seemingly rare for the students to experience and listen to

music as a part of a history curriculum. This notion seemed to excite many of the students which garnered much engagement initially to class discussion after songs were played for the class. Both video and motion picture clips also was generally positively received as most students appeared to be engaged and attentive to the content of the clips and the concepts they were trying to communicate. Despite these observations, many students displayed boredom or disengagement during movie clips, video clips, and pictures usually by putting their head down on their desk or not engaging in discussion after the media was shown. Several possibilities that may explain such a reaction to these medias could be that video and movie clips as well as pictures are more commonplace in the classroom and therefore do not excite them as much as the music did. Additionally, the historical content may simply not appeal to those students as students may have interests that lie elsewhere.

Some negative effects of using media in the classroom which may not lead to positive learning outcomes could be because some forms of media may complicate the information being introduced in class. If the teacher does not clearly connect the media to the material being discussed in class, the material may become trivial or disorganized. Also, the use of technology and media does not appeal to all students. Some students simply prefer other forms of instruction. Teachers must form relationships with their classes and their students in order to understand how their students best learn content. In order for the use of media to be effective in a given class, the teacher must know the learning styles of that class to better their instruction and teaching strategies. Additionally, if media is to be used, the teacher must also understand which sort of media appeals most to their students i.e. genres of music, types of movies, favorite artist or musicians.

It is vital for the teacher to scaffold the historical content of the class and appropriately supplement the forms of media to what is being taught during a given lesson. As pointed out by Stoddard and Marcus (2010), many criticisms of the use of film in the classroom are that it could be misused by the teacher or provide opportunities for both the teacher and students to mentally “check out” becoming further disengaged from the material. The teacher must have a clear message that the media communicates which can enable a connection between the media and the subject matter in order for students to relate the media to what is being learned. Through infusing songs with lyrics, pictures, or music and film clips in history instruction, teachers can help students explore different historical themes and ideas. Through introducing historical concepts,

media can be used to give an audio or visual representation of different events, people, ideas, or themes that exist in a history curriculum.

This study is particularly helpful in developing my instructional styles and strategies as an educator. It provides creative and imaginative ways for introducing history to high school students and also provides ways to make content more memorable. Through understanding and appropriating correct ways to practice the usage of media in the classroom for bettered instruction will enable my continued growth as a teacher. Not only being able to use such media in the classroom, but in ways that engage different students will hopefully encourage others to take this research further to develop even more effective strategies in using technology and media in the classroom to construct fruitful and enlightening student learning environments.

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**Sharing Writing to Create Community:
Exploring Classroom Community Construction through Open-Mics**

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Educators have been known to avoid whole-class discussions and expressive activities because they can lead to a disorganized classroom (Hess, 2004). Similarly, teacher accountability measures, including a focus on standardized tests and timed writings, can hinder the willingness of teachers to engage students in less-structured mediums such as creative writing (Simmons, 2009). As a result, creative writing may be overlooked as a significant means of fostering and developing student writing. However, previous research also suggests that poetry slam activities, where students share their poems verbally in front of a classroom audience, can provide benefits to students, including helping them learn more about their peers (Brown, 2011; Smith, 2010). This study focuses on student open mics, which allow students to verbally share all mediums of writing, and their impact on building classroom community.

Review of Literature

Oral presentations of student writing can create interesting opportunities in the English classroom. Brown (2011) noticed that creative showcases of student penmanship, via poetry slams, yielded increased student attention and listening. Likewise, open mics can create a bridge between performance and audience, writing and oration. Similar to slam poetry events, open mics allow performers to “passionately engage with their feelings, experiences, and perspectives in vibrant and unique ways within a mutually supportive and collaborative context” (Rudd, 2012, p. 684). They provide an alternative literacy practice for students, while still actively engaging and reinforcing literacy skills in the curriculum (Rudd, 2012).

Smith (2010) contends that spoken word events have the potential to engage students from all demographics and settings. In Smith’s (2010) study of poetry performances, students believed oral performances allowed them more opportunities to think about audience while writing. In Brown’s (2011) study, poetry slams provided an opportunity for students to learn about one another and connect via shared experiences. Brown also voiced that poetry slams built

cooperation and respect within the English classroom. The results of increased cooperation and respect are significant since modern educators face the growing challenge of building community among diverse ethnic, linguistic, and social student groups.

A solution to this challenge for increasingly blended classrooms is to build increased solidarity among students. Rorty (1989) stated, “[a] sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as ‘one of us’ as opposed to ‘one of them’” (p. 191). Some researchers in the field of education have thought of solidarity in the classroom “as empathy that includes a shared sense of struggle among people across differences in culture and power” (Sleeter & Soriano, 2012, p. 4). Santora (2003) believed that communities were characterized by shared trust and understanding, which occurs when individuals see themselves in relationship with others. Thus, communities are often defined by inclusion, shared struggle, trust, and understanding, all of which mitigate a sense of otherness.

Enforcing the necessity of understanding in building classroom community, Ennis and McCauley (2002) observed that students desire positive recognition and interactions. In addition, Reyes et al. (2012) found evidence that classrooms with a positive emotional climate were more likely to promote student engagement in learning, which also led to greater academic achievement. Both findings align with Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, which proposed high-order thinking is pre-dependent upon the needs of love and belonging. Research supports the value of building positive relationships in the classroom (Lynch, Lerner, & Leventhall, 2012), and research on slam poetry performances suggests their ability to help build respect and cooperation among students (Brown, 2011). It remains to be seen if open mics, which allow students to share writing orally through various written mediums, can foster a greater sense of classroom community.

Methodology

This action research study investigated how regularly scheduled open mic sessions affected student perceptions of classroom community. The study involved twenty-two students in a 9th grade English classroom at a high school in the southeastern United States. Following an initial free write activity, students were informed that they would have a classroom open mic every Friday for the next six weeks. Students could share any type of writing they chose: comic, play, poem, rap, skit, slam poem, story, etc.

Each week, one-third of the class performed or read an original piece of writing. To foster community and egalitarianism during open mics, all students moved their desks into a circle. While each performer read his or her work, the other students were required to write down the performer's name and at least one positive comment or one suggestion about the performer's writing on a comment sheet provided by the researcher. The researcher encouraged students to make their comments specific and constructive as these responses were intended to address specific literary elements in the writing.

After each performance, the instructor invited students to share comments verbally about the performer's writing. All performers were asked to write down the peer feedback they received. Following two or more student comments, the researcher offered one specific comment that highlighted something the writer did well and one specific suggestion for improvement. After the researcher's final comment, the open mic moved to the next performer and repeated this process. Upon concluding all performances, the instructor collected students' comment sheets and all original pieces of writing for a completion grade. Students then returned the desks to their original locations and completed either a performer exit slip or an audience exit slip. Exit slips asked performers and audience members to reflect on their experiences and suggest what new information they learned about their peers.

Data collection occurred during regular instructional time. All students participated in free write and open mic activities whether or not they were participating in the study. Beyond free writes and the original pieces of writing for open mics, students completed a pre- and post-instruction survey. The survey consisted of open response questions and Likert scale questions that identified each student's past experience with classroom writing, speaking, and listening. The survey also attempted to measure students' levels of comfort and acceptance among their peers in the classroom. The pre-survey and post-survey responses were eventually compared to assess similarities and differences in students' perceptions of classroom community.

After student open mics and observations concluded, transcripts were carefully coded and analyzed for emergent patterns and, eventually, for overarching themes. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze data. Thirteen major codes emerged during the initial open coding across data sets. Axial coding was then used to connect patterns, similarities, and irregularities across data sources. Eventually, categories were collapsed into six overarching themes before selective coding focused the analysis on the five most prominent and pertinent themes.

Results

This study focused on how weekly classroom open mics, in which students share self-created writings, can build community in the classroom. During data analysis, five primary themes emerged: self-expression, learning, listening, connecting, and criticism. On the post-survey, more than half of the students said they felt comfortable sharing their writing. When asked why, students spoke about the enjoyment of being heard, inspiring others, sharing about themselves, and listening to their classmates' stories. For the first two open mics, all performers either agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed sharing their writing with classmates. Simone, who performed in the first open mic, wrote she was able to "share...about a person...that they didn't know." Thus, open mics provided a new opportunity for self-expression.

In addition to self-expression, learning about others appeared to be a major component of students' experience with open mics. On the post-survey, multiple students referenced learning about classmates when describing their overall experience with open mics. As Imani wrote, "[Open mics] helped me learn about people I don't know at all. I've helped people. People helped me. I talked to people I never talk to." Another student wrote "[I] learned more about my classmates and the inside [of who they are] that we'll never know."

In connection with learning about others, two questions on the pre- and post-survey asked students directly about their enjoyment of listening to peers in the classroom. Based on post-survey responses, 100% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed listening to students speak in class. In addition, twenty of the twenty-one students agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed listening to students share personal writings. Students also associated attentive listening with positive open mic experiences. After the first open mic, Xavier commented, "It was positive because we all listened to each other." However this attentive listening did not always occur in later open mics and became a source of frustration for students and the researcher.

Despite the issue of occasional disruptions and inattentiveness, students readily commented on their ability to connect and relate to other students' writings. This was strongly apparent in the early open mics. Cameron wrote, "I loved everyone sharing and relating to each other. It was like we were connected and being respectful." Latisha agreed, "It was like bonding time." Students personally connected with the experiences and emotions of others. As Simone reflected, "I learned that they [my classmates] had feeling [*sic*] just as strong as I do."

A major component of the open mics was having students provide feedback after each performance. Students were encouraged to offer one specific positive comment and/or one specific suggestion. Some students enjoyed receiving feedback while others did not because they feared negative criticism. Judgment and misunderstanding seemed to be a major fear for certain students. Josh said he did not like sharing with others because “I don’t want people judging me.” When asked whether students felt comfortable sharing their writing with others in the class, there was a 14% decrease in comfort from pre- to post-survey. Keisha explained on the post-survey, “The classmates judge each other to [*sic*] much.” Despite these feelings, other students expressed the opposite reaction. As Tiana wrote, “It’s fun listening to others [and] they’re [*sic*] opinions.”

Discussion

During open mics, the major themes of listening and connecting suggested elements of community formation emerged. However, the themes of judgment and inattentive behaviors also suggested challenges to community formation in the classroom. The themes highlight the successes and challenges that open mics present in implementation. As in Brown’s (2011) study, open mics became opportunities for students to learn about one another. Students consistently expressed surprise in learning about their classmates and discovering shared experiences. The discovery of shared experience in the classroom is significant because shared struggle is one of the facets of solidarity described by Sleeter and Soriano (2012).

A key finding in this study was the importance of a non-judgmental environment for students. The idea that community is created when students feel trusted and respected is consistent with Santora (2003). In connection, Rudd (2012) spoke about the need for “a mutually supportive...context” (p. 684) in an open mic setting since authors are sharing personal feelings, perspectives, and experiences. Students in the current study may have desired a more comfortable environment because of inattentive behaviors and critical peer feedback. As Ennis and McCauley (2002) noted, students seek and prefer positive interactions and recognition. Potentially, criticism during peer feedback diminished the extent of positive interaction since students felt judged by some of their classmates. When asked how open mics could be more effective, three students identified disruptive behavior as a problem. A firmer and less lenient response from the instructor regarding poor behavior may be necessary to make the open mic experience more enjoyable for all students in the future.

For educators wishing to draw from this research to improve their pedagogy, open mics can help students express their identities, connect with peers, and build listening skills. All of these benefits should help facilitate community formation and a positive classroom learning environment. This approach could be particularly helpful in a diverse classroom where students come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, and native languages. In addition, open mics can offer other benefits to educators such as allowing students to practice public speaking and to provide and receive constructive feedback. Finally, open mics may provide teachers with new information about students' backgrounds, interests, and writing abilities. This information could be used as an opportunity to connect students with curriculum materials and build student-teacher rapport. The true power of transferring experience, feelings, and ideas between students and teachers remains to be discovered.

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Effects of Student-Created Explanatory Video on Student Learning of Chemistry in the High School Classroom

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Students learn by giving elaborated and thoughtful explanations to their peers (Woolfolk, 2012). In science, a student's explanatory note is not limited to written text but may also include drawings. Diagrams, videos, and images can be more effective than textual descriptions at depicting scientific concepts and procedures (Benedict & Pence, 2012; Gobert & Clement, 1999).

Literature Review

In a study that investigated the effects of writing summaries on reading comprehension, undergraduate groups read a block of 50 paragraphs of text (Wittrock & Alesandrini, 1990). The treatment group also generated summaries of the text. The results showed that the treatment group showed higher comprehension and retention of the content than the control group.

Another study showed that students can gain a greater understanding of a subject in chemistry by writing explanations of that subject (Vazquez et al., 2012). In this study, volunteer undergraduates in an introductory physical chemistry class worked in small groups 2 hours a week to develop supplemental text in quantum mechanics. Two written exam questions were used as an assessment. Students' answers were ranked by content experts based on the overall quality and clarity of explanations. An analysis of the results showed that the treatment groups wrote better explanations than the control group. In addition, a student attitudes survey showed that students felt the writing activity enhanced their learning in quantum mechanics.

In a study with a 10th grade chemistry class, one group of students drew pictures to accompany the text while they were reading it (Leopold & Leutner, 2012). Two other groups used text-based strategies; one group selected main ideas from the text and the other summarized the text. The group that used the drawing strategy showed a higher test performance than the two text-based groups. The authors interpreted their results as being in line with theories of multimedia learning. One of the ideas of the cognitive theory of multimedia learning is the dual-

coding theory (Woolfolk, 2012) of memory, which suggests that students learn better when the information is represented verbally and visually.

Gobert and Clement (1999) found similar results in a study with 5th grade students. In this study, students read a brief expository text about plate tectonics. While they read, one group also drew diagrams, another group wrote textual summaries, and the control group simply read the text. They found that the textual summaries contained more domain-related information than the diagrams. However, the diagram group outperformed both the summary and control groups in the post-test. The authors further suggested that drawing of dynamic processes using arrows to depict movement might be beneficial in creating mental models of the events.

Ross and DiVesta (1976) studied the effects of oral summary as a review strategy for enhancing the recall of textual material. In the study, students read prose material. The researchers asked one group (verbalizers) to present their summaries orally and they asked another group (observers) to listen to the summary. The oral presentation was a one-on-one live reporting, i.e., one verbalizer presented to one observer. The study examined the effects of orally presenting versus listening to the summary on retention of that material. They found that the verbalizer group had higher scores than the observer and control groups in the short-answer (open-response) test. In the multiple-choice test, the verbalizer group still had higher scores than the control group but there were no significant differences between the verbalizer and observer groups. The authors explained that the short-answer test required the learner to retrieve the material (accessibility) and thus involved a deeper level of processing than for the multiple-choice test that relied on information storage in memory. Hence, the oral summary facilitates both storage of information and accessibility on demand.

Methods

The design of the methodology revolved around a central question: In what ways did the group production of instructional video and peer video watching affect student learning? To answer the research questions, this action research used mixed methods to collect data using these instruments: a quiz, a pre-survey, and post-survey. The pre-survey data helped the researcher plan for student grouping, training in video production, and any necessary device acquisition prior to the treatment. The post-survey consisted of Likert-scale and ranking types of questions as well as open-response questions to gather data on student learning and attitudes toward the use of videos in learning chemistry.

Data from the pre-survey, quiz, and the selected-response items on the post-survey were analyzed quantitatively. Students' answers to the open-response items on the post-survey were analyzed qualitatively to determine themes and patterns.

The participants in this study were 47 high school students enrolled in Honors and Standard Chemistry classes. The classroom instructions were regular chemistry lessons on atomic structure and theory. The researcher provided each class with a list of 12 practice problems covering the topics of the unit. Students worked in groups of 3 to 5. Each group randomly picked a problem from the list and explained how to solve the practice problem on video. In addition to the finished video, each group had to turn in a list of the role of each member in making the video. All the groups' videos were available for the students to watch.

Results

Post-Survey Results: Selected Response

Figure 1 shows the data of some of the selected-response questions in the post-survey. Most students agreed that making the video helped them learn the material in their videos (Q.5). The data from Q.5, Q.8-Q11, and Q13 showed that most students had positive attitudes towards making videos for their learning. When asked about their preference of working individually or in groups to create videos, the majority of students indicated that they preferred to work in pairs or groups (Q.12).

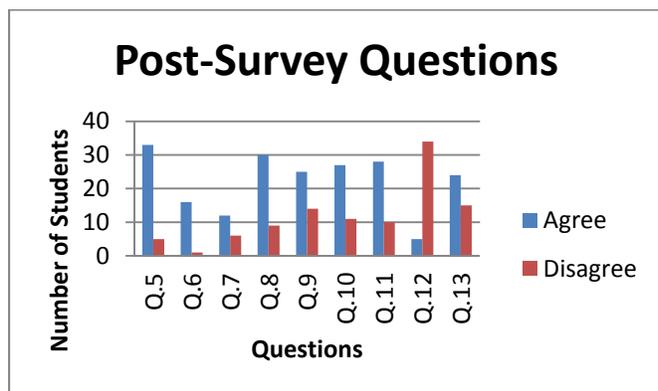


Figure 1. Results of student post-survey.

| | |
|------|---|
| Q.5 | Making the video helped you learn the material in your video. |
| Q.6 | Watching other groups' videos helped you learn the material in their videos. |
| Q.7 | By watching other groups' videos, you learned how to present the material better in your next videos. |
| Q.8 | Sharing your video for all of your classmates to watch motivated (or would motivate) you to put more effort in making your video. |
| Q.9 | You want to continue to create videos in this class to help you study. |
| Q.10 | You want to create videos in other classes to help you study. |
| Q.11 | The video activity has increased your confidence to explain chemistry to others, such as your friends, classmates, and parents. |
| Q.12 | You prefer to work by yourself rather than in pair or group to create the video. |
| Q.13 | You want to teach your friends to create videos similar to what you did in this class. |

Post-Survey Results: Open Response

Students' responses were brief but informative about how they worked in groups to create the video. A consistent theme emerged: in the process of making the video: students started with

figuring out each member's role. To work out the answer to the practice problem, some said they each figured out the answer and then discussed together as a group. Others said they worked out the answer together. Several of them said they sought help from the teacher when they encountered problems. Many of them indicated that the activity was fun and a new experience to them. In addition, many thought that the challenge of making the video was figuring out a way to explain the answer effectively and in a single take. Some indicated that they tried several takes and some mentioned about writing a script to help them explain the answer on video.

Quiz Assessment

The video practice problems matched some of the questions in the quiz and could be categorized into four groups by topics, labeled A, B, C, and D. *Figure 2* compares the average scores from students who were vs. were not assigned with the related practice problems.

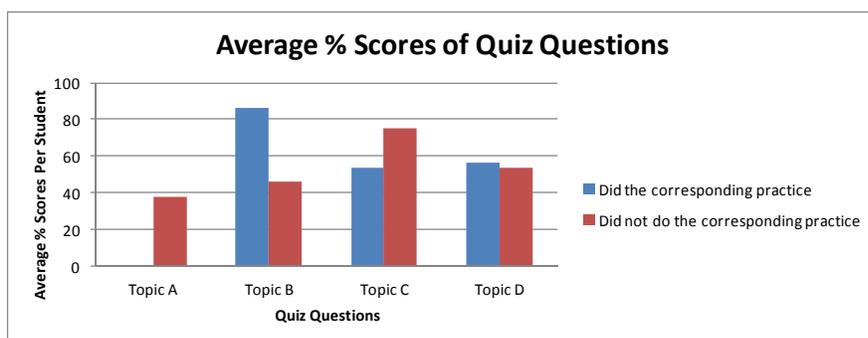


Figure 2. Comparison of average % scores of quiz questions per student.

Discussion

The video activity encouraged creativity and provided students with an opportunity to practice 21st century information, media, and technology skills. Students created videos using computer hardware and software that may be unfamiliar to many of them. This required flexibility and adaptability to embrace unfamiliar technology and deal with unexpected technical problems. In addition, making a video to explain a chemistry practice problem provide students with an opportunity to practice self-directed planning as a group.

How did the process of group video production (collaboration, communication, planning, and scripting) help my students learn and retain chemistry content knowledge?

The activity required students to indicate the role of each member in producing the video. This encouraged them to take initiatives and collaborate by leveraging strengths of each student in a group to accomplish a common goal. It also helped them to think about dividing the task into

parts. In the post-survey, many of them did indicate that they started out figuring out each other's role first.

The quiz assessment results showed that the treatment group had higher average score than the control group in only one question. It was a calculation problem. For the other three groups of quiz questions, however, the treatment group's average scores were lower than or about the same as those of the control group. This is interesting because students often struggled with math problems and that particular calculation was retaught the day after it was first taught. The calculation problem took longer to solve and probably required several rehearsals in order to explain on video. This process might have helped students retain the knowledge.

How did peer instruction help my students learn chemistry by watching their classmates' videos?

Although students were told that the practice problems were very similar to some questions in a take-home test, only about one-third of the students indicated in the post-survey that they had watched other groups' videos. This seemed to be consistent with the pre-survey data about students' experience of instructional videos. The pre-survey data showed that they watched instructional videos less frequently than non-instructional videos.

In what ways did the video production improve my students' self-efficacy to explain chemistry to their peers?

The post-survey results showed that about 70% thought that the video activity increased their confidence to explain chemistry to others.

Future Work

Based on the results of this action research, it is worthwhile to continue the video assignment. In the open-response items of the post-survey, several students considered figuring an effective way to explain the solution as a challenge of the video activity. Thus, it is also worthwhile to assign a series of group video assignments in the future. By doing a series of the video assignment, students will have an opportunity to observe and learn from their peers' presentation. This will also enable the researcher to observe how students' communication skills improve over time.

The post-survey results (Q.8 in *Figure 1*) showed that knowing that their classmates will watch their video would motivate them to put more effort in making the video. However, most of the students did not watch the videos in this study. Although watching online videos may be an

everyday experience to these students, watching instructional videos from their own peers may be too new an experience to them. To get students used to watching each other's videos, students will be required to watch other groups' videos, provide brief comments, and rate their helpfulness as a study aid. During the video activity, the researcher had mentioned to the class about the possibility of inviting teachers in the school to watch and rate their videos. Students were nervous about having their teachers in other periods watch their videos. Thus, inviting teachers to watch and rate the students' videos will very likely motivate students even more in making an accurate and polished presentation on video.

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Breaking Tradition: Bringing the Literature Circle into the 21st Century

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One of the core responsibilities of English teachers is to expose students to rich and varied texts while fostering appreciative, comprehensive, and critical reading skills. However, today's English teachers are at a critical junction between the rigorous curricular demands from the Common Core State Standards and the increasing imperative to use digital tools to foster 21st century skills in student learning (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). As a result, educators must continually search for ways to adapt their own pedagogical strategies to meet the needs of the digital natives in their classrooms.

One strategy for engaging students in responding to fiction and nonfiction texts is the literature circle, essentially a book club through which students are divided into groups based on a common textual interest (Daniels, 2002). Formerly hailed as a best practice in English pedagogy by the National Council of Teachers of English (Daniels, 2002), the literature circle now faces criticism from teachers who find that this format can stilt the natural flow of student conversation (Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Edmondson, 2012; Wolsey, 2004). While past research on the intersection of technology and literature circles has focused primarily on examining the effect that digital forums have on community development and textual engagement (see Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Edmondson 2012), a gap in the research persists about the impact of combining traditional and digital literature circle models on the quality of student discussion. With this gap in mind, the primary research question in this study asks the following: How does engaging students in a digital conversation affect face-to-face literature circle meetings in a secondary English classroom?

Literature Review

In traditional literature circles, student groups are created based on self-selection of a text with the group members acting as agents of responsibility and role-enforcement. This format decentralizes the role of the teacher by privileging student choice, as students select their texts, and student voice, as students accumulate increased responsibility that includes setting a reading

calendar, coming to class prepared, fulfilling requirements of rotating reader roles, and facilitating the discussion with minimal assistance from the teacher (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles are intended to help students build a collaborative community of readers and add to their personal and collective comprehension and analysis of the text (Holt & Bell, 2000).

Small group configurations, such as the literature circle, can benefit students in secondary English classrooms by tapping into their social nature, creating classroom communities, heightening engagement, and increasing learning (Batchelor, 2012; DeCosta, Clifton, & Roen, 2010). Small groups allow students to exemplify Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural constructivist theory because students are exposed to multiple points of view (DeCosta et al., 2010), and these small groups may also serve as a forum for promoting authentic dialogue in the classroom (McCann, Johannessen, Kahn, & Flanagan, 2006). This form of authentic discussion exists when conversations are *dialogic*, resulting in a transactional communication between participants (Nystrand, 1997). Furthermore, these discussions force students to "think divergently" (Brassil et al., 1987, p. 78), refuting a common misconception that there should be one right answer to every question.

While traditional strategies for incorporating literature in the secondary English classroom remain widely used, pedagogical methods for engaging students in literature are being revised to promote digital literacy (Hicks & Turner, 2013). The use of digital media in the English classroom—tools such as Blogster, Weebly, Wordpress, Today's Meet, and Tumblr—offers students and teachers alike the opportunity to connect with members of multiple educational communities, share thoughts about various topics, and provide comments on one another's ideas. These digital technologies can improve students' critical reasoning skills and analytical abilities and can lead to the development of higher-order thinking (Prensky, 2009).

With increasing evidence about the benefits of incorporating digital technologies in schools, an increasing number of educators (e.g., Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Edmondson, 2012; Wolsey, 2004) are attempting to make the traditional literature circle model more appealing to 21st century learners, either by combining traditional and digital methods (e.g., creating character wikis) or by converting the entire literature circle to an online experience. Educators find that weaving digital technology into the traditional literature circle model can increase student engagement with the text as well as interactions among students in the class (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). One relatively unexplored method for digitizing literature circles is the weblog, more

commonly referred to as a blog. Unlike the wikis or online discussion threads used by Edmondson (2012) and Wolsey (2004), blogs differ in that they are created with the intent to be read by an outside audience (Hicks & Turner, 2013). This caveat of connectivity has educators positing that blogs, which encourage students to generate digital conversations, are natural spaces for collaborative and sociocultural learning (Hicks & Turner, 2013; Santos, 2011).

Methodology

This research analyzes online and face-to-face student discussions of literature over the course of two literature circle projects. For the purposes of this study, literature circle projects are defined as the entire process of reading and discussing a novel. The students followed the traditional literature circle model during the first project, meaning that they read their novels at home individually and discussed the novel in their in-class groups. During the second project, the students were grouped and asked to contribute to a *Wordpress* blog where they were responsible for posting about their respective novels and commenting on other group members' posts, before meeting for in-class discussions. The research occurred at a diverse, mid-sized high school in the southeastern United States, in a ninth grade English I Seminar class. The research was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board and the local school system before participants were invited to take part in the study. Only students who returned consent and assent forms were included; ultimately, thirty out of thirty-two students in the class volunteered to participate.

This study utilized mixed methods. Students were administered a Likert scale survey before, during, and after the study. The survey responses were analyzed using quantitative data analysis, specifically percentile comparisons. The three surveys were used to monitor any changes in attitude toward reading, whole-class discussions, small-group discussions, and technology usage during both literature circle projects.

The majority of the data in this study, however, was qualitative in nature and derived primarily from student responses to questionnaires, evaluation forms, exit slips, and blog posts and comments. As such, the data were examined through constant comparative analysis, through the use of open, axial, and selective coding to analyze emerging and recurring themes. This qualitative method of analysis demonstrated the emergent nature of the data, as the themes become clearer and more intense as the analysis continued. Ultimately, this type of analysis was used to garner meaning from different forms of data to help the researcher select emergent themes related to the research question.

Results

Because the research question examined primarily the impact of student engagement in a digital conversation (i.e., student blogging) on in-class literature circles, the analysis of this study examines the major themes that emerged during blogging and face-to-face meetings. The findings from this study suggest that the two literature circle projects and the group blog pushed students to communicate collaboratively and construct deeper understandings of the texts.

Authentic Dialogue

Authentic dialogue refers to discussions that are transactional, meaning that the students talk *with* one another, not at one another, and that the conversations yielded a transfer of ideas from one person to other group members. Students indicated that the literature circles during both projects highlighted the importance of sharing the time available for speaking and listening with group members. By listening to and reacting to the comments and input of other group members, students successfully participated in dialogic, rather than monologic, discussions inside and outside of the classroom. In these dialogic encounters, students demonstrated an acceptance of divergent thinking through their willingness to accept multiple interpretations of texts as presented by their peers.

Community

Students clearly felt a connection to their group members, often expressing an enjoyment of working with one another, an appreciation of the multiple perspectives presented in each group, and a comfort with working in smaller and more cohesive groups. This sense of community was apparent even in the first literature circle project when students did not use the group blog. However, the idea of community emerged more prominently in the second literature circle project, where students took advantage of working as a cohesive group in both the digital and in-person platforms. Data from student responses on the pre- and post-surveys also support the idea that working in small literature circle groups enhanced students' comfort with one another. On the pre-survey, about 46% of students said they felt comfortable speaking during small-group discussions. On the post-survey from the conclusion of both literature circle projects, that percentage jumped to approximately 64%. These results display the strength of the communities developed during this study.

Scaffolding

In this research study, scaffolding has been defined as the various types of support that students use to construct knowledge. These different means of support are essentially the building blocks that students used to get from an initial idea to a more developed idea. Three primary examples of student scaffolding emerged: textual connections, real-world connections, and peer connections. Students used the platforms to continually build on their comprehension of the texts—they cited specific textual evidence to support their thoughts, noticed and highlighted similarities between events in the novels and events outside of the classroom, and used each other's interpretations to probe more deeply into their analyses. Students used these three support systems to construct innovative, multilayered understandings of their novels.

Discussion

Participants in this study demonstrated that when students are organized in small groups they may form interpretive communities that are capable of producing authentic dialogue where deep knowledge is constructed through textual, personal, and peer interaction. Student responses and artifacts suggest that students benefitted from meeting with peer groups on multiple occasions and from working together on the group blog. In this way, the study highlights how providing students with multiple platforms and opportunities to engage their peer groups can promote increased, meaningful interaction with one another and with the text. The student responses affirmed that reading blog posts and discussing questions, both remotely and in person, changed and/or deepened students' understanding of their texts.

Perhaps the most surprising data to surface from the study was the strength of the overwhelmingly positive student response to working in small groups. The students repeatedly mentioned that they perceived their individual performance in small-group discussions to be better than their individual performance in previous whole-class discussions. Student responses pointed to their understanding that more transactional and authentic dialogue was occurring in small-group conversations than in whole-class discussions. This finding supports Wilhelm's (2010) assertion that authentic dialogue in the English classroom increases critical thinking by forcing students to revise their original thoughts in the presence of their peers. Over the course of the study, the students grew to enjoy using the blogs to discuss what they were reading. Additionally, the majority of the students concluded that they learned best from working in small groups. These results suggest that merging literature circles and blogs can create a learning

environment where students are actively engaged with their peers as they build deeper and more critical understandings of texts.

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