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The Use of Mexican Folk Art to Develop Oral and Written Language Ability and Cultural Awareness in the Secondary Spanish Classroom

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The arts, which are part of a culture, is a broad field encompassing vast possibilities for language instruction, and there are particularly relevant connections to K-12 world language classrooms. The study of cultures is closely linked with the study of languages; that is, cultures and languages are interlinked (ACTFL, 2015). The arts that are representative of a culture can provide great insight into that culture to students who are learning the language spoken there, giving authentic contexts for developing their L2 ability. Specifically, through the arts, students can gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives as well as the practices and perspectives of the culture (ACTFL, 2015). The products of a culture reveal understanding about the culture's collective identity, often shaped and influenced to mirror the attitudes and values of the culture (Kuo, & Lai, 2006; ACTFL, 2015). Therefore, by studying the products of a culture, such as the visual arts, students can begin to immerse themselves directly into the target culture and investigate questions such as *how* and *why* cultural products are created (Dema & Moeller, 2012). Studying both languages and cultures through the visual arts can simultaneously give one "... access to information, ideas, and opinions that are embedded in another culture" (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2015, p. 205).

The study of Mexican folk art, an example of visual art, as a means to gain cultural awareness along with oral and written language ability, applies to the Spanish language classroom. Learning about Mexico through Mexican folk art is an authentic way to study town life, celebrations, traditions and customs from the people themselves. Studying authentic Mexican folk art can yield rare opportunities to study Mexico through these artisans' perspectives, which can reveal valuable and relevant information about studying Spanish in the secondary Spanish classroom.

Review of Literature

Implementing visually rich media in the form of Mexican folk art in the Spanish

classroom can enhance students' ability to gain cultural awareness. According to the *The World-Readiness Standards*, which determine students' content knowledge in K-12 foreign language programs, culture is "...generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products – both tangible and intangible– of a society" (ACTFL, 2015, p. 67). The standards that support the Cultures Goal Area show that the products, practices, and perspectives (known as the 3 Ps) of a culture are interrelated. Language instruction that uses cultural experiences as contexts for communication can help students gain cultural awareness as they explore the relationships between the products, practices, and perspectives (ACTFL, 2015). Products are things that are created in a culture. Practices are actions done to create those products. Perspectives are values that these products convey about the target culture. Studying Mexican folk art paintings (a product) can provide valuable experiences for students to reflect on the purposes (practices) behind creating them, as well as to reflect on the values (perspectives) represented through symbols in these paintings. Through the Spanish teacher's intentional scaffolding of language and content, students can heighten their cultural awareness by describing cultural aspects depicted in Mexican folk art and discussing how these represent products, practices, and perspectives, which can reveal the deeper meanings that Mexican folk art has in the Mexican culture.

The following cultural aspects are particularly relevant to learning about Mexico through its art: Cosmology, Conception of Past and Future, Roles in Relationship to Gender and Incentives to Work (Hall, 1976). Studying cultural features such as these can open pathways for students to learn about Mexican people's values and traditions because Mexican artisans produce amate paintings to communicate visual messages through symbols. These authentic visual images also provide a meaningful language context that teachers can use to design instruction that develops students' Spanish language ability. In designing proficiency-based instruction in grades K-12, language teachers should consider the frameworks used by the world language profession to guide language development, which are the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (2012b), the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* (ACTFL, 2012a), and the *World-Readiness Standards* (ACTFL, 2015). These frameworks guide language teachers to provide authentic language and cultural experiences with proficiency outcomes. Ortuño (1994) and Knapp (2012) recommend that language teachers use the following five prompts in designing questions: "who?, what?, when?, how?", and "why?" Knapp (2012) recommends

designing tasks involving specific grammar concepts students can use to describe paintings to support development of their oral and written expression.

Three amate paintings that lend themselves well to language and cultural experience in the Spanish classroom are *Mural de Amate* (Martínez Pedro, n.d), *La Boda* (Martínez, n.d), and *La Boda* (anonymous, 2011). These paintings contain cultural aspects that Edward T. Hall (1976) says are shared by many cultures, including cultural aspects like depictions of time (past and future), roles associated with gender, and incentives to work (ACTFL, 2012b; ACTFL, 2012a; Hall, 1976). The use of Mexican folk art in the Spanish classroom has great potential to develop students' language ability and cultural awareness. The purpose of this study was to study the use of Mexican folk art as a cultural context for the development of students' written and oral language ability and cultural awareness in the secondary Spanish classroom.

Methodology

This research project involved thirty participants in a Level II Spanish class in a public high school in central North Carolina. The study took place over three non-consecutive days on an A-day/B-day schedule, from April 4 to April 8, 2016. Data collection took place during regular instructional hours. The researcher used student work to collect data on their development of language ability and cultural awareness, which included three presentational writing tasks and three interpersonal speaking tasks on the topic of Mexican folk art. The researcher preserved students' anonymity in all records by implementing a coding system comprised of numbering, 1-30.

This research project generated three data sets. The first data set consisted of student products: three different writing samples that included one paragraph of four to six sentences per painting and three oral responses per painting to which students responded. The purpose of collecting data on students' oral and written language development was to study their use of oral description in the imperfect tense in response to the same three oral and written questions. Students orally described cultural aspects depicted in each painting and discussed how these represented products, practices, and perspectives, all in the context of Hispanic celebrations. Students analyzed Painting 1 which was *Mural de Amate* (Martínez Pedro, n.d), Painting 2 which was *La Boda* (Martínez, n.d) and Painting 3, which was *La Boda* (2011). The topic for Painting 1 was Catholic Holy Week, and the topic for Painting 2 and 3 was weddings, different ones.

The researcher used pre-writing discussions and graphic organizer activities to familiarize students with describing messages they believed each painting conveyed to them. The researcher asked oral questions to scaffold students' understanding from simple to complex thinking as they learned to interpret the art and make inferences about the subject of each piece. The researcher then asked students to write one paragraph of four to six sentences per painting. Students wrote each paragraph in the past tense using the imperfect as they discussed what they saw in each painting and identified products, practices, and perspectives. The researcher used the Performance Assessment for Language Students (PALS) Level 2 Writing Tasks Analytic Rubric to note students' L2 written development (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2013b). To examine students' development of written expression in Spanish and cultural awareness, the researcher looked for characteristics of language development including their ability to use the imperfect tense to describe each painting. In students' use of description, the researcher specifically looked at accuracy of language including their use of the imperfect tense. For evidence of their understanding of products, practices, and perspectives, the researcher looked for students to describe each painting using culturally appropriate words and terms related to depiction of time (past and future), roles associated with gender, and incentives to work (ACTFL, 2012b; ACTFL, 2012a; Hall, 1976).

Following completion of each written paragraph, the researcher used a different rubric, the PALS Level 2 Speaking Tasks Analytic Rubric as a criterion to note students' oral L2 development (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2013a). The researcher asked each student three questions orally to describe cultural aspects about each painting and to discuss how these were products, practices, and perspectives. These questions were the same as those asked for the written paragraphs. In students' use of oral description, the researcher looked for their ability to describe each painting using the imperfect tense accurately. For evidence of their understanding of products, practices, and perspectives, the researcher looked for students to describe cultural aspects depicted in each painting and discuss how these represented products, practices, and perspectives, using culturally appropriate words and terms related to depiction of time (past and future), roles associated with gender, and incentives to work (ACTFL, 2012b; ACTFL, 2012a; Hall, 1976). The second data set included the researcher's field notes taken while observing instruction. This data set also included video recordings of instruction to give the researcher ample time to reflect on the teaching strategies more attentively. The researcher specifically

considered the following aspects of instruction when reviewing the video-recorded classes: students' participation, engagement, and use of Spanish. Students who refused to be videotaped could still participate in the study. The third data set was a researcher-created survey completed by students upon conclusion of the study. Students were asked to complete the thirteen-item survey with eight Likert-scale and five open-ended questions to give the instructor feedback on how they believed his instructional strategies influenced their development of oral and written language ability in Spanish and their cultural awareness.

Results and Discussion

Upon analyzing students' three written paragraphs and their oral responses describing each painting, the researcher concluded that the use of Mexican folk art and the pre-writing strategies used in this study positively influenced most students' oral and written ability in Spanish. Most students showed considerable improvement in their written and oral descriptions of the three paintings and their understanding of how each painting contained cultural aspects representing multiple products, practices, and perspectives. Most students' written ability in their description of Paintings 1 to Painting 3 showed improvement as their written expression became fuller and better developed, using more details to support their ideas. Regarding cultural awareness, most students showed richer use of vocabulary, especially regarding how each painting depicted multiple products, practices, and perspectives in each painting. Their choice of vocabulary was more varied and less repetitive, including use of relevant words and terms about depictions of time, roles associated with gender, and incentives to work. The major findings for Data Set Two were that it was difficult to teach students to look at a painting and both describe cultural aspects depicted in the paintings and discuss how these were products, practices, and perspectives. Students struggled to relate personally to the topics from Painting 1, Painting 2 and Painting 3. These topics did not seem to align with students' ages and interests. Students understood products, practices, and perspectives better when explained with relatable analogies. The major findings for Data Set Three were that the use of Mexican folk art paintings to teach Spanish in the secondary Spanish language classroom can facilitate students' oral and written ability and cultural awareness about Mexico. Students consistently showed agreement in their responses to items in the survey, providing further support that students believed that the pre-writing activities provided support in helping them develop Spanish language ability.

Conclusions

This study examined the use of Mexican folk art as a context for the development of students' written and oral language ability and cultural awareness in the secondary Spanish classroom. The researcher found that using Mexican folk art can provide a highly effective context for language and cultural development. In this study, students gained the ability to use the imperfect tense and description more easily over time. The researcher believes students were able to develop Spanish language ability and cultural awareness of Mexico because of the intentionally designed strategies aligned with the *World-Readiness Standards*, the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, and the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors* (ACTFL, 2012b; ACTFL, 2012a). The researcher also believes students were able to develop Spanish language ability naturally through the use of authentic tasks all designed according to these national frameworks, and particularly the Cultures standards. Overall, this project positively influenced students' learning experiences.

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The Effect of Writing on Achievement and Attitudes in Mathematics

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When most people consider important mathematical skills, rarely do they think of communication first. People imagine math as the use of symbols and processes to obtain answers, and while mathematics does involve symbolic language, the ability to interpret and communicate information plays a vital role in meaningful learning. Yet because mathematics education has historically been predominated by direct instruction, math classes have often encouraged imitation without ensuring conceptual understanding. As a result, although a student may be able to find, for example, the solution to a system of equations, s/he may not be able to explain the meaning of the solution, or the way it relates to a graph of the system.

This research sought to examine the effect of writing assignments on student achievement and attitudes in the mathematics classroom. Writing prompts encouraged students to build their conceptual knowledge and their ability to express mathematical ideas. The research was designed with the goal of improving attitudes by increasing students' sense of ownership over their learning.

Literature Review

The work of mathematicians involves persuasively demonstrating the reasoning that leads proofs to conclusions. But this skill is not restricted to math; many professions require people to show or explain their reasoning. Goodman (2005) specifically integrated letter-writing assignments into an undergraduate calculus course for the purpose of developing students' technical writing skills and their ability to explain complex subject matter to a non-expert audience. He concluded that he saw a progression in writing strength in at least some students, and that many students saw benefits in the assignments. Miller (1992) and Kasperek (1996) both note that writing assignments helped teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses.

Van Ingen, MacDonald, and Thompson (2012) claim that Common Core standards “require, implicitly, fluency with the language of mathematics” (p. 402). The metaphor of language is apt; mathematics has a unique vocabulary and syntax, and unique customs for ways of presenting information. Writing about math can not only strengthen students’ conceptual understanding, but can also develop their ability to communicate the meaning of such concepts.

Writing in the math classroom provides three major benefits: the practice (1) gives teachers formative assessment to inform their instruction; (2) encourages students to participate in the conversation of math, improving their attitudes; and (3) improves students’ abilities to express their thoughts and problems in math, leading to better conceptual understanding.

Methods

Location and Participants

The study was conducted at a public school in the southeast United States with an enrollment of approximately 1,300 students. The demographic distribution of the school is approximately 51% Black, 28% Hispanic, 15% White, 4% multiethnic (two or more races), and 2% Asian or Native American. The student body is approximately half male and half female.

The participants for the study were the students of two sections of Math III, one section with twenty-five students and the other with twenty-seven. These classes were composed of sophomores and juniors, as well as a small handful of seniors.

Data

Data was collected over the course of one two-week unit in the spring of 2016. The data included daily written responses to prompts completed throughout the unit. Students also completed surveys written by the researcher before and after the unit. The survey sought to measure student attitudes about mathematics and their self-efficacy. Finally, students completed a summative assessment at the end of the unit, as was normal for the class, to see whether the writing exercises influenced student achievement. The assessment was similar in form to other unit tests the students had taken, so that achievement was not affected by an unfamiliar assessment format.

Written Prompts. Responses to prompts took the form of answers to daily Essential Questions (EQs), and were collected and retained for qualitative analysis. The researcher looked for themes that indicated changes in: (1) quality of student communication, (2) students' conceptual understanding, and (3) students' attitudes about math.

Surveys and Test. The completed surveys and tests were analyzed for changes in the same areas. The open-ended questions on the survey revealed changes in individual students' attitudes and abilities to communicate, while the Likert-scale questions indicated changes in classroom attitudes. At this school the unit tests are created cooperatively by the department, and consist only of multiple choice items. Thus, although test scores would not indicate writing ability, they might demonstrate differences in mastery of the material.

Results and Conclusions

The unit for which the study was conducted concerned parabolas, circles, and inequalities. Data included student surveys administered before and after the unit, written work in the form of responses to daily EQs, and summative unit tests.

Written Work. During the unit, which took two weeks, students wrote answers to EQs almost every day. Almost all students made sincere attempts to articulate responses to the questions. The greatest impediment for most students was simply the English language. Most students' writing reflected serious gaps in knowledge of English grammar and spelling. As a result, many were unable to express their thoughts coherently through writing.

Pre-Surveys. The surveys included three open-ended questions, followed by nine statements to which students could choose Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither/Unsure, Agree, or Strongly Agree. The statements concerned the relevance of writing to mathematics, students' confidence in math, and their enjoyment in the subject.

The results of the survey are summarized in the table below. The pre-survey results indicate that many students lacked confidence about their ability to do math, often disliked the subject, and did not see the relevance of writing to their learning (Items 3, 8, 4). Reluctance to respond to the open-ended part of the pre-survey also seemed to indicate a lack of confidence in writing.

Item Number	Survey Item	Pre-Survey Agreement* %	Post-Survey Agreement %
1	Writing is an important part of mathematics.	75	69.2
2	Memorization is an important part of mathematics.	90	97.4
3	I feel confident about my ability to do math.	55	61.5
4	Writing about math helps me learn.	37.5	64.1
5	Talking about math helps me learn.	72.5	76.9
6	I feel confident about my ability to explain/describe math concepts.	37.5	48.7
7	I have control over my learning of mathematics.	57.5	69.2
8	Learning math is enjoyable for me.	50	51.2
9	Writing about math is enjoyable for me.	20	35.9
	*Agreement includes students who chose either Agree or Strongly Agree on the survey		

Post-Surveys. Post-survey results showed that many more students seemed willing to write longer answers to the open-ended questions. Responses to the Likert-scale items showed generally positive attitude changes. The number of students who said that writing about math was enjoyable nearly doubled (Item 9), while the percentage of students stating that writing helps them learn increased by 26.6% from the beginning to the end of the unit (Item 4). Agreement on the items relating to confidence likewise showed increases. As more class time was spent on writing, more students found it useful and enjoyable. These trends were accompanied by similar increases in students' confidence and sense of control over learning. If writing were implemented consistently in the classroom, these positive trends would hopefully persist and build on themselves.

Limitations

This study was necessarily limited in both size and duration. These data were collected from two Math III classes in a public urban school, and the trends seen in these classrooms do not necessarily extend to other schools and other settings. The magnitude of benefit from writing

may vary significantly for different student populations. Achievement on the unit test was similar to other unit assessments, which could be attributed to the fact that the test was multiple choice, or that a single unit is simply a very short window to see demonstrable changes in achievement.

Higher achieving students seemed to benefit more from the writing than other students, since they usually had stronger English skills and thus felt more comfortable expressing their thoughts. It is likely that all students would benefit more with more experience writing about math and with more modeling of what constitutes logical math discourse.

Although the initial plan for the study involved reading students' writing daily to inform instruction and provide regular feedback, the cost of time both inside and outside the classroom felt too great for a beginning teacher. However, in a classroom that wrote consistently often, daily feedback would likely not be necessary, so long as students received constructive criticism occasionally.

Conclusion

This study's results have a variety of implications for writing in the math classroom. Many students struggled not only with writing about math, but more generally with the act of writing in a confident and coherent way. Even so, many students began to attach more value to writing about math, and quite a few felt more confident about their math learning. Given the positive influence on student attitudes, the long term implementation of writing in the math classroom would likely yield stronger conceptual mastery and generally higher achievement.

One of the most common benefits from the study was that the students had the opportunity to write down certain relationships for themselves. Many students were able to write down at least key statements from class discussions. Such phrases were sometimes merely repetition of what was said in class, but some students tried to put the ideas into their own words.

The implementation of regular writing in the math classroom appeared to have a positive influence both on student attitudes about writing and on student self-efficacy. Writing helped to demystify mathematics and convince students that they are able to articulate their learning. The consistent integration of writing in math has the potential to improve attitudes, self-efficacy, writing skills, and long-term achievement.

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History Teaches Us to Hope: Integrating Hope Theory into Secondary Social Studies

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Hope is a goal-oriented, self-regulatory, and motivational construct for overcoming adversities that operates under the assumption that what is desired can be attained (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009). Hope, as a cognitive and motivational construct, has been demonstrated to be measurable through numerous validated and reliable instruments and has been closely associated with and highly predictive of positive student achievement outcomes (Lopez et al., 2009; Snyder, 2002). Hope has been made operative and able to be cultivated in individual students by utilizing Hope Theory in pedagogical and school administrative practices. Unfortunately, little research has been published on effective methods of directly incorporating Hope Theory into instructional pedagogy. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate and evaluate multiple and varied instructional methods incorporating Hope Theory to determine their effect on students' levels of hopefulness in a secondary social studies classroom.

Literature Review

Integration of Hope Theory in Instructional Practices

Hope Theory consists of three highly interrelated components critical to self-regulation and goal-achievement: clearly conceptualized goals, specified and varied pathways to attain goals, and a sense of personal agency that sustains motivation to attain goals (Lopez et al., 2009; Snyder et al. 1991; Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 2003). While little research has been published on effective methods of directly incorporating Hope Theory into instructional pedagogy, some general suggestions of what a hope-driven pedagogy should consist of have been proposed.

Clearly conceptualized goals. First, in order for goals to be clearly conceptualized they must be both specific and measurable in order for students to self-regulate and monitor progress toward reaching goals (Lopez et al., 2009; Marques & Lopez, 2011; Snyder, 2002). Problem-based learning is one such instructional method that could lend itself for improving student achievement while also effectively integrating Hope Theory into the social studies classroom. Best defined by Barrows (2002), problem-based learning is the student-centered approach of

presenting authentic, ill-structured problems for students to collaboratively work through. Closely related to problem-based learning, project-based learning instruction also lends itself well to increasing student achievement by integrating elements of Hope Theory as students must work at self-regulated paces to complete highly-engaging specified tasks and projects that often involve student ownership of their work.

Pathways thinking. Having students preemptively develop multiple and differing pathways, or strategies, to attain goals in case of unforeseen obstacles is equally important when addressing student achievement and cultivating hopefulness in students (Lopez et al., 2009; Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 2003). This can be done a number of ways, such as directing students to reduce large goals into smaller sub-goals, considering possible challenges to goals, developing alternative and contingency plans, and listing out various resources that can be utilized in the attainment of goals when students initially develop goals. Mental contrasting when coupled with implementation intentions – defined as self-regulatory strategies that involve meaningful cognitive elaboration of desired goals relevant to the challenges of present reality and identifying actions to capitalize on goal-relevant opportunities – in the classroom is an instructional model also known as MCII that has demonstrated considerable success in increasing student achievement and self-regulatory skills that integrates elements of Hope Theory (Duckworth, Grant, Loew, Oettingen, & Gollwitzer, 2011; Duckworth, Kirby, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2013).

Personal agency. Personal agency has been shown to be enhanced in students by encouraging positive self-talk, collaborative teamwork, and setting goals that build off of previous successes to be increasingly challenging and complex (Lopez et al., 2009; Snyder et al. 2003). Perels, Dignath and Schmitz (2009) found that self-agency and positive self-talk can be effectively integrated in regular classroom instruction by having students track their own progress in the form of goal journaling where students self-talk in the form of writing about their progress toward individual goals. In addition to increasing student achievement, collaborative and social goals have also been demonstrated to also have positive outcomes on individual students' personal agency in attaining goals (Cheng & Lem, 2013; Roseth, Johnson, and Johnson, 2008).

Research Question

What is the effect of integrating elements of Hope Theory in secondary social studies classroom instructional methods by the use of problem- and project-based learning, mental contrasting and implementation intentions, goal journaling, and collaborative goals on student's levels of hopefulness?

Methodology

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of high school students enrolled a singular honors section of a 10th grade Civics and Economics course at a mid-sized public high school in the Southeast. A total of 24 students agreed to participate in the study. There were 14 male and 10 female participants in the study, three of whom were minority students.

Treatment

The treatment for this study consisted of implementing seven researcher-constructed learning activities that incorporated the three components of Hope Theory in the delivery of the Civics and Economics course over a period of seven weeks. All participants in this study were administered an identical pre- and post-study survey questionnaire, the Hope Scale, to measure the general disposition and level of hopefulness of individual participants (Snyder et al. 1991; Snyder, 2002). Directly following the completion of each treatment activity, participants were administered the State Hope Scale questionnaire (Snyder et al., 1996; Snyder, 2002) to measure and track their current-state level of hopefulness in their immediate setting and emotional state.

Each of the seven treatment activities were collaborative in nature and rooted in either problem- or project-based learning models. To aid participants in the completion of each treatment activity and facilitate the incorporation of the clearly conceptualized goals and pathways thinking components of Hope Theory in instructional practices, participants were presented with an identical researcher-constructed 'Student Action and Contingency Plan Worksheet' and directed to complete the worksheet prior to beginning work on each treatment learning activity.

Analysis

Score data from the pre-study Hope Scale survey are used as base-line scores for each individual participant and analyzed and compared against their post-study Hope Scale survey results. Individual participant score data from the administering of the State Hope Scale surveys directly following each treatment instructional activity were collected to track participants'

measured hopefulness as situated in their immediate time and psycho-emotional state throughout the duration of the study. Score data from the pre- and post-study Hope Scale surveys were analyzed alongside the tracked State Hope Scale survey scores for any possible correlational relationships between the treatment learning activities and participant's levels of hopefulness. Data collected the researcher-constructed student action and contingency plan worksheets, participant free-response surveys following each treatment instructional activity, and the researcher-constructed goal journaling prompt were coded and analyzed thematically to both gauge participants' favorability of treatment learning activities and determine the presence of any observable trends in these qualitative data sets.

Findings

Quantitative Data

Aggregate participant pre-study base-line Hope Scale survey score data are presented with post-study Hope Scale survey scores and with pre- to post-study Hope Scale survey score differences for comparative data analysis in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Class Aggregate Data Set of Pre- Post-Study Survey Scores (Hope Scale)

	Mean	Score Range
Pre-Study Hope Scale Scores	52.79	42 to 60
Post-Study Hope Scale Scores	55.79	40 to 64
Pre/Post Hope Scale Scores +/- Change	3	-8 to 15

Note: n = 24

Qualitative Data

From thematic analysis, four distinct themes and trends emerged from the study participants' qualitative data sets: (1) Participant favorability of peer debate and discussions during treatment activities; (2) participant favorability of real-world simulation treatment learning activities; (3) participant use of and thoroughness in completing the researcher-constructed student action and contingency plan worksheets and goal journaling prompts; (4) participant favorability of collaborative and small group work in treatment learning activities.

Implications

Analysis of the multiple sets of quantitative study data indicates that, overall, this study appears to have resulted in a net positive impact on participants levels of hopefulness and, on average, resulted in a three point total increase on participant's post-study Hope Scale survey scores. This trend is supported by the net positive impact, or growth, observed on 75% of the study participant's post-study Hope Scale survey scores and overall levels of hopefulness. The

results of this individual study have numerous implications on both future studies and the integration of Hope Theory into social studies instructional methods.

Student action and contingency planning. The possible relationship between the extent to which individual participants thoroughly completed and used the student action and contingency plan worksheets and goal journaling prompts and positive pre- to post-study Hope Scale survey score growth fits distinctly with the overall purpose of the study. Each successive quartile of study participants demonstrating greater pre- to post-study Hope Scale survey score growth demonstrated both an increased thoroughness in detailed completion and use of student action and contingency plan worksheets in this study. Social studies educators seeking to integrate elements of Hope Theory into instructional practices could incorporate regular student goal action and contingency planning so as to provide students structured practice in developing clearly conceptualized goals and pathways thinking.

Peer debate and discussions. Despite the differences in pre- to post-study Hope Scale survey scores utilized to organize participant groupings for quantitative data analysis, the same high level of participant favorability for peer debate and discussions during treatment activities is replicated in each of the four participant quartile groupings in this study. Social studies educators hoping to integrate Hope Theory into instructional practices could incorporate peer debate and discussions in the design of learning activities in order to foster individual students' development of pathways thinking and personal agency skills.

Problem-based learning. Each of the three quartiles of participants demonstrating positive growth on pre- to post-study Hope Scale survey score data also demonstrated strong favorability of these treatment learning activities both as whole groupings and at the individual participant level. Social studies educators attempting to integrate Hope Theory into instructional practices could use problem-based learning models to inform instructional design so as to provide students structured practice in developing clearly conceptualized goals and pathways thinking.

Small group collaboration. Similar to the other observable trends in the study data, each of the successive three quartiles showing positive growth on pre- to post-study Hope Scale survey score data demonstrated increasingly stronger favorability of the small group framework of the treatment activities both as groupings and at the individual participant level in this particular study. Social studies educators hoping to integrate Hope Theory into instructional

practices could make extensive use of collaborative student small groups in the design of learning activities in order to foster individual students' development of pathways thinking and personal agency skills.

Conclusion

The present study suggests that the central elements of Hope Theory can be successfully incorporated into regular social studies instruction through the use of problem-based learning activities, regular student goal action and contingency planning that uses mental contrasting and implementation intentions frameworks, goal journaling, and collaborative small groups. Furthermore, the study's results indicate that when done so in synchronization, these components directly benefit students' individual measured levels of hopefulness. These results should encourage other researchers and practitioners to continue investigating and searching for additional methods to more effectively integrate Hope Theory into instructional practices, which this research indicates will improve student hopefulness.

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Teaching the 2016 Presidential Election Through News Media Literacy and the Liberating Education Model

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Presidential election years are times when we, as citizens, engage in critical self-reflection about the major issues of our country and how we want to move forward. It seems rational that our children should be able to engage in similar discussions in classrooms for they will take the lead as active citizens in the future. While this may seem logical, especially in social studies classes where civic engagement and participation are key components (Journell, 2011), it appears that many teachers are hesitant to talk about controversial issues; they fear retaliation from administrators, backlash from parents, and even threats to their job securities (Dalhgren, 2009; Nelson, 2010). Academic freedom, where teachers and students can freely deliberate on relevant facts and issues, has become severely restricted in the past few decades. Regardless of this development, scholars insist that social studies teachers should continue to exercise academic freedom in classrooms because controversy and the social sciences cannot and should not be separated (Hess, 2010; Nelson 2010). In the 2016 election year, where the political climate is very polarized, controversy is omnipresent. Thus, social studies teachers should be able to effectively address controversial issues in classrooms and engage students in a manner that is civil and informative. In this paper, I set forth a model on how social studies teachers can teach the 2016 presidential election in a Civics & Government class. The strategies I highlight can be expanded to other social studies topics and other subject areas, with modifications and adaptations.

I argue that through the development of news media literacy and use of the liberating education model, social studies teachers can effectively generate, maintain, and capitalize on student interest during election year unit plans. By engaging students in pertinent election issues with consistent incorporation of current events and working as partners with students to develop a mutual understanding of the world through civil dialogue, social studies teachers can boost

civic participation and foster critical thinking skills among students when teaching the 2016 presidential election.

Literature Review

The liberating education model is set forth by Freire (1968) in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In it, students are able to express ideas freely, ask questions, and engage in learning through dialogue as partners with the teacher. Students don't merely absorb information presented by the teacher; instead, they create new, unique knowledge and develop a mutual understanding of the world together with the teacher. To practice the liberating education model in our classrooms, teachers must reject the banking model of education. The banking model states that we, as teachers, possess all knowledge and wisdom, while our students are empty containers to be filled. But through liberating education model, we free ourselves from such ignorance and become humanist educators. We realize that our students are not empty containers, but human beings worthy of the same respect and rights as us. To practice the liberating education model, we must engage our students in dialogue, in which students are encouraged to have meaningful conversations about content-related issues, topics, and facts which makes curriculum relevant to their lives. The students can share their experiences and respectfully engage in discussions, through mediation and mutual understandings. As teachers, we can mediate the discussions of our students, but not impose our own ideologies onto them.

To practice Freire's (1968) model, teachers must have academic freedom. Academic freedom allows teachers to introduce and deliberate on relevant topics, including controversial issues, without backlash and censorship. Controversial issues involve differing viewpoints and strong emotional responses to politics, religion, race, and other important sociopolitical factors (Hess, 2004). Scholars in social studies education have consistently argued that academic freedom is vital and essential for classrooms in a democratic society because it allows students to engage in critical discussions and teachers to expose students to all relevant ideas related to content area, without undue censorship or backlash (Dahlgren, 2009; Nelson, 2010).

News media and current events often involve controversial issues. Research has shown that the use of news media can be an effective method of engaging students and promoting meaningful learning in social studies classrooms. News media literacy, which is defined as students' ability to critically examine news media, can help students develop important

collaborative and analytic skills for the betterment of their education and career goals as well as their roles as active citizens (Jolls & Wilson, 2014). The development of news media literacy can also motivate students to regularly follow current issues and events, enable them to think more critically about class content, and have positive impacts on academic achievement (Ehman, 1991; Leahey, 2004; Pescatore, 2007). Based on the reviewed literature, I strongly advocate the development of news media literacy and use of the liberating education model as pedagogical strategies in teaching presidential election unit plans.

Recommendations for Teaching the 2016 Presidential Election

While social studies teachers have continuously applied strategies to gauge student interest during election unit plans with relevant issues, they have failed to capitalize on that interest and engage students in critical discussions. Even when relevant issues were introduced, they were not discussed in detail and teachers often avoided thoughtful discussion on certain controversial topics due to fears that students may not be able to adequately discuss them, and parents and administrators might react negatively (Journell, 2011; Nelson, 2010). Furthermore, educators often practice the banking model of instruction, where they teach through rote learning techniques rather than engaging students in critical discussion through dialogue (Freire, 1968). I propose that in teaching election unit plans, teachers should consistently and actively engage students in relevant news media and practice the liberating education model. I present a possible unit plan and related strategies to teach the 2016 presidential election.

The overview of this presidential unit plan closely models Greco's (1997) and other presidential election units taught in the past three decades (Haas 2001; Journell, 2011; Shultz & Taft-Morales, 1984) in terms of topics and activities covered. The 2016 presidential election unit may be divided into the following parts: the historical context of American elections and history behind the vote, the nominating process and system of the Electoral College, key campaign issues in the past elections and in the 2016 election, domestic and international factors that impact elections, the qualifications to become president, and finally the impact of elections.

The unit may be introduced with a brainstorming activity in which students are assessed about their previous knowledge of elections, either through web charts or mind maps. As the unit moves forward, the news media activity (explained below) can be implemented daily to incorporate key issues and events of the election. The teacher may use various role-play,

simulation, discussion-based, individualized, and group-based activities to teach about the history and the processes of presidential elections to match the needs of school curriculum. When talking about the history behind the vote, teachers may encourage students to analyze primary sources like the U.S Constitution and key laws, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Students ought to be introduced to multiple viewpoints, where diverse groups within American society are represented in class discussions. Students can also participate in a mock election and at least in one debate in order to experience key aspects of the election process. A community service activity, where students hold a voter registration drive or conduct a community survey, may be included as a service-learning component. Furthermore, students may be encouraged to work in collaboration with their peers in completing projects. Students can use technology to create presentations, conduct relevant research, and present new information to their classmates. As students follow the election, at least one assignment can be graded where students are recording, reporting, and keeping track of election results. Summative assessments can include a group project, an essay, or a multiple choice/free response test.

Developing News Media Literacy: The News Media Activity

Throughout the school year, social studies teachers can engage students in current events through incorporation of a news media activity. This news media can be a major part of the election unit plan, in that it is used every day to introduce new issues and current events. In the activity, students should be encouraged to examine the nature of the news, including biases and political motivations behind the creators of the media. In understanding the nature of news, students should be introduced to a diverse and broad range of news sources, domestic and international. Students should be free to deliberate on the issues presented and engage in discussions that makes the news relevant to their lives. Teachers engage students in critical discussions about the issues presented, as long as the issues are relevant, held in a civil manner, and are not obscene in nature. Teachers can remain neutral or present their views to the students; however, if teachers present their views, they must make clear that all views are welcomed and respected in the classroom. The news media activity can be a 5-10 minute activity implemented every day as warm-up or an initial activity after a warm-up. It may be presented through various means, including print, video, and audio media. Students should be given enough time to absorb, comprehend, and respond to the media presented. After the presentation of the media, students

may be asked to think individually about the media and respond to two to three specific questions in a journal entry. These questions should relate specifically to the media presented and measure comprehension, reactions, responses, and opinions. After students record their individual responses, the teacher may encourage class discussion to deliberate on relevant topics. Students should be encouraged to take lead in the trajectory of the discussion; however, the teacher may mediate discussions and ask students to think about the nature of the media, the implications of the media on the election, biases in the media, thematic undertones of the media presented, and how the media relates to the lives of the students. When applied consistently, this news media activity may enable students to develop a strong understanding of important domestic and international issues and make the election unit exciting, engaging, fun, and relevant to the lives of students.

Practicing the Liberating Education Model

While the news media activity is important for incorporation of pertinent election issues and current events, it may not be done effectively without the practice of the liberating education model (Freire, 1968). Teachers ought to understand that they can learn from the students, just as they can teach their students. The teacher is not merely a possessor of all knowledge; instead, I believe, the teacher is a student-teacher at all times, no matter how many years of experience she or he has. This attitude will allow for important reflections and discussions for both the teacher and the students. In practicing the liberating education model, the teacher should respect the students, and the students should respect the teacher and each other. Through civil dialogue, the teacher can effectively engage students in active discussions, where knowledge is being created with a shared understanding of the world. The liberating education model may enable students to see their role in society as equals and self-confident citizens just like the teacher, instead of passive consumers of information. Students may come to know that their voice matters not only in the classroom but also in their communities and the society in which they live.

Conclusion/Discussion

While the development of news media literacy and implementation of the liberating education model are interrelated, they are not the same thing. The liberating education model may be applied to any activity with the use of civil dialogue to engage in critical discussions. The news media activity is designed to introduce and engage students in relevant issues and current

events; however, this activity may not be effectively implemented without the liberating education model. If students are to critically analyze news media, they must have freedom to engage in dialogue (Journell, 2011); thus these models are interrelated and synergetic.

I conclude by stating that through the liberating education model and the development of news media literacy, social studies teachers can effectively teach the 2016 presidential election. Students will be excited to learn about relevant topics and issues through civil dialogue and free expression of their views. Consequently, they will be better informed about the events of the day and ready to take the reins of citizenship tomorrow.

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Using Social Justice Education to Develop Literacy and Global Awareness in the Secondary French Classroom

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Issues of social justice should concern *everyone*, not simply the groups they impact the most in everyday life. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1964) poignantly recognized, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly” (p. 79). Thus, it is crucial that these topics become a consistent part of our society’s discourse. Despite progress toward social justice, it is clear that issues of race, class, sex, gender, sexuality, language, and disability can continue to pose major challenges if not addressed (Nieto, 2005). Equality is critical in all aspects of life; more specifically, it is acutely important in education. Social justice should not only be practiced in the classroom to provide equal education, but it should also have a strong presence within the K-12 curriculum across all disciplines.

Furthermore, one of the most obvious disciplines in which to incorporate social justice education is the world language classroom. It is crucial for the development of 21st century skills, particularly global awareness, for K-12 students to be exposed to the inequalities that speakers of other languages encounter. Social justice education in the K-12 world language classroom should give students the opportunity to develop more profound global awareness as well as reflect upon our own society’s inequalities. In an ever-globalizing 21st century world, our students will be most successful when social justice education is incorporated in their world language classroom.

Literature Review

Articulated by renowned scholar of multicultural education, Sonia Nieto, social justice is “a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (Nieto, 2010, p. 46). Issues of social justice affect all aspects of life, but they are especially critical in education. It is vital that our young people are exposed to social justice early on in order to foster tolerant, open-minded citizens who understand that structures of power in our society oppress some groups of people and advantage others.

In finding ways to integrate social justice into the K-12 curriculum, world languages is a discipline that offers natural connections because the study of languages involves learning about diverse cultures. However, a study with university world language students revealed that most felt that social justice issues were not discussed in class, primarily because of a focus on grammar and vocabulary (Kubota, Austin, and Saito-Abbott, 2003). These findings make it clear that we have a large gap in the field of language learning related to discussion of social justice. Kubota et al. (2003) feel that it is crucial to not only focus on language and cultures, but also the diverse experiences of people of a language and culture. It is a goal of world language teachers to develop students' intercultural competence which involves a deep understanding of the way others experience the world, and that does not mean focusing solely on the dominant group that speaks a language (ACTFL & P21, 2011).

Social justice education aligns closely with the goals of the world language teaching profession and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2014; ACTFL & P21, 2011). Additionally, in his article titled "Teaching Literacy for Social Justice and Global Citizenship," Banks (2003) calls for literacy in the 21st century to "include a focus on global issues and problems as well as action that can help to resolve them" (p. 19). As literacy is so important, it is essential that the world language curriculum support it. ACTFL makes clear their commitment to the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy* (CCSSI, 2016) through the connections they make between the Common Core strands of Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening and the three modes of communication (interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational) for world languages (ACTFL, 2012a).

In a study that combines world language teaching and literacy development, Warford and White (2012) emphasize the necessity for students to develop literacy skills in the second language, which supports the continuing improvement of first language literacy. Additionally, a recent publication from ACTFL, *Words and Actions: Teaching Languages through the Lens of Social Justice*, focuses its content on strategies to implement social justice education into the world language classroom (Glynn, Wesley, and Wassel, 2014). It is important now to emphasize the necessity of implementing instructional strategies used to address social justice and to explore how the inclusion of these topics affects students' language learning. The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the use of instructional strategies using social justice topics impacted literacy development and global awareness in the high school French classroom.

Methodology

This study was conducted between March 7 and March 21, 2016, and included fourteen students in a Level IV French class in a public high school in North Carolina where the teacher-researcher was placed for a student teaching internship. This study generated three data sets. The first data set consisted of student work. The researcher's instructional strategies were based on the interpretive and presentational modes of the Intermediate range of the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors* and the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, which are research-based language learning measures (ACTFL 2012a; 2012b). The researcher examined student development of literacy and global awareness through reading and writing activities where comprehensibility, language control, vocabulary usage, identification and understanding of main ideas and supporting details, reaction statements, and ability to synthesize and compare and contrast were analyzed.

In Data Set One, the teacher-researcher collected data four times using a series of written questions based on readings about food insecurity in Paris, Montreal, and the students' hometown, which led to a culminating written essay in which students demonstrated what they learned from the readings on this social justice issue. As a result of the readings, students demonstrated their understanding of similarities and differences in food access between their hometown, Paris, and Montreal. Data was collected from the students' responses to reading comprehension questions, post-reading reflections, as well as from the content of their essays, demonstrating their literacy development.

The second data set consisted of field notes taken by the teacher-researcher following instruction and while observing the students. The teacher-researcher video recorded the class periods during the study in order to reflect upon the instructional practices used. In observing the students, the researcher focused on the students' development of literacy and global awareness with regard to social justice, and their engagement while participating in class activities.

The third data set consisted of student responses on a 12-item survey designed by the teacher-researcher, which included eight Likert-scale items, three yes-or-no items, and one open-ended item. The survey gave students the opportunity to give feedback concerning the effectiveness of the study's instructional strategies. The teacher-researcher analyzed the data from the student work, field notes, and student survey in order to identify recurring themes associated with students' L2 development in reading and writing and global awareness.

Results and Discussion

The results from Data Set One revealed that more time with varied instruction and reading and writing practice was necessary for all fourteen students to make the gains for which the researcher was hoping. Overall, however, students appeared to show slightly more evidence of a consistent increase in global awareness during the limited duration of the study. Moreover, despite the need for more time, all students showed either some or a significant improvement in literacy across the unit, particularly in vocabulary growth and ability to understand the main ideas of texts, reflecting the Intermediate range of the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors* (ACTFL, 2012b). Finally, though all students still needed to work on language control, almost all students were able to effectively communicate their ideas in French at every data collection point of the study with little or no interpretation needed from them.

Data Set Two, consisting of field notes on class instruction and student engagement, revealed several important findings. One of the most significant findings, which supports the results of Data Set One, was the need for more time in the unit in order to infuse a wider variety of activities to increase engagement as well as to allow for more exposure to the topic and more reading and writing practice. Another related finding was the need for better differentiation of instruction in order to address the needs of all students, to cut down on boredom for students who finished tasks quickly, and to allow the researcher to help struggling students. The results of Data Set Two also supported those of Data Set One, which revealed that students' global awareness as well as literacy skills, particularly in vocabulary development and usage, improved across the duration of the study.

The results from Data Set Three, the student survey, also reflected the findings from the previous two data sets. Based on the items that directly related to students' growth in literacy skills, it is evident that the vast majority of students felt that they made progress in their reading and writing of French, and particularly in their vocabulary development. With regard to global awareness, the students were clear in their comments that they felt more informed about the important topic of food insecurity and that their perspectives on the world and their community had changed. Data Set Three also supported the finding from the other two sets that more instructional time was needed for all students to demonstrate the improvement in literacy and global awareness for which the researcher intended.

Conclusions

This study was implemented in a French IV classroom, where students were used to reading and writing frequently, but who were unaccustomed to pre-, while, and post-reading activities, as well as the topic of food insecurity within social justice education. Although students became fatigued by the repeated reading and writing activities, it was evident by student responses to guiding questions as well as on the survey that their literacy skills improved and their awareness of the world expanded. There was variety in how much improvement was made for these two measures, but, overall, each student demonstrated progress throughout the study. The researcher hypothesizes that the students with average language ability at the start of the study demonstrated some of the most significant improvement in literacy skills because the instruction was appropriately scaffolded for their level, and they were challenged just enough to write comprehensibly and thoughtfully without the researcher's assistance (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016). The researcher believes that both the students who struggled the most and those who really excelled would need more time to make the same degree of improvement in language ability demonstrated by the other students (Glynn et al., 2014).

Regarding literacy, the results of the study showed that repeated practice of reading texts and writing responses made a strong and positive impact on the students' ability to write a complex essay without the guidance of the researcher. These findings support the need for frequent exposure to readings and practice with writing involving higher order thinking in order for students to progress in proficiency (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016). The students demonstrated that they can communicate their thoughts adequately (comprehensibly with improving language control) by appropriately using new vocabulary, that they can understand the main ideas and supporting details of complicated texts, and that they can compare and contrast information. The researcher found these results to be extremely positive because they show how effective literacy activities are on students' overall language development (Warford & White, 2012).

The other primary focus of the study was global awareness. This study combined increasing student awareness of their own community with that of two francophone countries, France and Canada. This focus allowed the students to utilize a literacy-related strategy of comparison and contrast as well as widen their global perspectives on a significant social justice issue and its impacts on cities in three places in the world. Furthermore, the results of this study revealed that not only were students interested in social justice within the context of their French

class, but they also found it has a worthwhile place in the school curriculum. Many students commented that social justice is often overlooked in education (Kubota et. al, 2003) and that students, as young adults, should be informed if there is any hope to fight injustice and inequality (Nieto, 2005). The first step to tackling a problem is awareness, and as a result of the successes of this study, the researcher plans to incorporate social justice themes within her French instruction in the future to help all of her students become not only more proficient learners of French but also, and more importantly, thoughtful and informed 21st century global citizens.

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Integrating Francophone Cinema into the High School French Class

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The *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* emphasize the importance of five interlinking goals: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (ACTFL, 2014). The first of these five Cs, Communication, is further subdivided into three modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication (ACTFL, 2014). Listening comprehension, “based largely on the amount of information listeners can retrieve from what they hear and the inferences and connections they can make,” is essential to the overarching goal of communication, specifically in the attainment of a second language, or L2 proficiency (ACTFL, 2012b, p. 15). When developing students’ listening comprehension, language educators must decide which aural resources best support this development. Authentic resources offer many advantages; Shrum and Glisan (2012) argue that integrating “authentic oral and printed texts serves to merge culture and context with language, provide engaging topics for learners to explore, stimulate learners’ interest in language study, and offer a means for engaging learners in more challenging, higher-order thinking tasks” (p. 182). These resources should be introduced with clearly intended language outcomes and careful preparation with students. Otherwise, language learners may experience cognitive overload, or “too much new information to process in working memory” (Swaffar & Vlatten, 1997, p. 177). Educators can maximize the benefits of authentic videos by supporting listening comprehension through scaffolding of language and meaning. Some valuable techniques for developing listening comprehension through exposure to authentic video include the use of same-language (L2) subtitles while viewing a video and the use of targeted listening strategies (Swaffar & Vlatten, 1997; Mitterer & McQueen, 2009; Vandergrift, & Tafaghodtari, 2010).

Literature Review

Interpretive forms of communication, including listening, reading and viewing, often catalyze language production in presentational speaking and writing (Shrum & Glisan, 2012). Learners of foreign languages must develop their comprehension and interpretation skills in

order to become effective communicators in the target language (Shrum & Glisan, 2012). As one of the four skills associated with language learning, listening can occur both in the interpersonal and interpretive modes of communication. However, interpretive listening requires learners to make meaning from oral and/or visual texts without the possibility of clarifying meaning that is characteristic in interpersonal communication. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research informs our understanding of listening comprehension. *Acquisition*, “a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language” is distinct from *learning*, which refers to “conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them” (Krashen, 1982, p. 10). According to Krashen’s “Input Hypothesis,” acquisition occurs when learners encounter “an optimal quantity of comprehensible input that is interesting, a little beyond their current level of competence ($i + 1$), and not grammatically sequenced, but understandable using background knowledge, context, and other extralinguistic cues such as gestures and intonation” (Krashen, 1982). More simply put, comprehensible input can be understood as “target language speech or texts that include challenging yet comprehensible portions,” making input vital for advancing students further along the continuum of proficiency (Altman, 1989, p. 2).

When using oral comprehensible input, language learners can be taught to listen more effectively through meta-cognitive strategies – by activating prior knowledge, informing them of the purpose of a given listening task, and encouraging them to think critically about the way they listen. Vandergrift and Goh’s (2012) listening framework results in four processes: planning for a listening task, monitoring comprehension, solving the task’s problems, and evaluating outcomes. In this study, these processes were simplified into three stages: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening. The researcher guided students through these processes as they viewed clips chosen by the researcher. The researcher elected to use authentic film clips, as opposed to clips purposefully created for language instruction, because prevailing research shows that students exposed to authentic resources “demonstrate a significantly higher level of comprehension on texts” that are experienced in their “unedited, authentic forms” (Shrum & Glisan, 2012, p. 196). Researchers have found that students who view authentic videos demonstrate greater listening comprehension, acquisition of grammar, cultural knowledge, as well as “greater confidence in generating output” (Herron, Morris, Secules, & Curtis; 1995; Weyers, 1999; Shrum & Glisan, 2012, p. 187). Authentic French video can, however, pose significant challenges to French

learners, due to “rapid speech rate, unfamiliar vocabulary, slower processing skills, and difficulty in parsing speech into distinct words” (Baltova 1999, p. 34). With some exceptions, researchers have found that using same-language subtitles can mitigate these difficulties by separating and visualizing words for viewers, as well as to increase vocabulary recognition and increase learners’ overall understanding of authentic film clips (Baltova, 1999; Stewart & Pertusa, 2004; Winke, Gass, & Sydorenko, 2010; Mitterer & McQueen, 2009). In this action research study, the researcher investigated the question: How will instructional strategies focused on the pre-, while, and post-viewing of authentic Francophone film clips with same-language subtitles develop high school French students’ language ability, specifically listening comprehension?

Methodology

This action research project included 18 participants in a Level 3 French class at a North Carolina public high school. Only partial data is available for one participant (#18) due to absences; that student was also absent for the study survey described in the results section below. The research was conducted from February 19-March 23, 2016. Parents/guardians signed informed consent letters; students under 18 signed letters of assent students over 18 signed informed consent letters. Data collection took place over the course of normal instructional delivery during which all students were required to participate. The researcher used a numerally coded system to ensure participants’ privacy: each participant was assigned a different number (1-18). Following completion of the study, all data collected were stored on password-protected computers to which only the researcher and his advisor had access.

The study generated three data sets. The first data set included student work collected at three points during instruction using French film clips with same-language subtitles. The researcher prepared students in each pre-viewing phase by activating their schema relating to the film clips’ topic, main ideas, and supporting details. Students used graphic organizers to collect their ideas while viewing the clips. The researcher guided the students through pre-viewing (review/activation of schema), viewing, and post-viewing (whole group discussion to ensure understanding) activities to support their listening comprehension development. Students’ written output from these activities allowed the researcher to observe evidence of growth in their listening comprehension estimated to be between the Novice High level, at which learners should be able to get “the main idea from simple, highly predictable oral or written texts” to the

Intermediate Low range, where students should be capable of “understanding main ideas and some supporting details on familiar topics from a variety of texts” (ACTFL, 2012a, pp. 16-17).

The second data set consisted of field notes made by the researcher following instruction and review of video-recorded instruction. The third data was derived from student responses to a 12-item survey after the study’s instructional phase. Students answered questions about their perceived language development and attitudes toward authentic French films.

Results and Discussion

The first data set consisted of students’ written output in the form of the graphic organizers completed after viewing French film clips. The researcher found that exposure to authentic French film clips with same language subtitles, paired with instructional activities, resulted in gradual, clear development of students’ listening comprehension, specifically the ability to listen for and understand a film clip’s main ideas and important supporting details. Because students demonstrated their understanding through written output on the graphic organizers, there was a secondary benefit in that most students’ presentational writing ability in French also improved. Most students progressed from completing the graphic organizers primarily in English to completing their organizers entirely in French, many of them with increased language control (correct tense usage) and use of more advanced quotidian and film-related vocabulary, which the researcher attributes to the presence of the same language subtitles. The researcher’s objective of helping students bridge the gap from Novice High to Intermediate Low proficiency in the interpretive mode of communication was at least partially realized, as students demonstrated evidence of their ability to routinely understand the main ideas and some important details from complex authentic film clips. Students also exhibited development in their ability to “show emerging evidence of the ability to make inferences by identifying key details from the text,” a key language function in the Intermediate range (ACTFL, 2012a, p. 16).

Data Set Two, the field notes and video-recorded instruction, indicated strong student engagement when viewing the film clips and in the accompanying activities. After watching video-recorded instruction, the researcher feels that a more ambulatory teaching style could yield greater student engagement in classroom discussions. The researcher also found that the Level 3 students were not uniformly performing at the Intermediate Low proficiency level in accordance with the student proficiency goals set forth by North Carolina’s *World Language Essential*

Standards (NC DPI, 2013). In the future, time spent remediating students' basic language skills prior to a film-based unit of instruction may facilitate even greater language development.

Findings from the third data set, the survey, gave insight on students' perceptions of their language growth, their feelings about the efficacy of the instructional strategies used, and their attitudes toward authentic French films. Seventeen students (100%) agreed that viewing authentic French film clips, in conjunction with same language subtitles, helped them understand the film clips' main ideas and supporting details; 17 (100%) also agreed that the pre- and post-viewing activities improved their overall understanding. Fifteen students (83%) agreed that using the graphic organizer supported their understanding whereas three students (17%) did not. Seventeen students (83%) also agreed that subtitles helped them to learn new French words/phrases. Seventeen students (94%) agreed that subtitles helped their understanding of main ideas and supporting details. In regards to students' attitudes toward French cinema, 16 students (94%) also agreed that they would like to watch more French films, and 15 (88%) said they would seek out such films in the future.

Conclusions

Findings from students' participation in the study supports Second Language Acquisition research on the use of authentic French film clips to develop students' listening comprehension. This study focused on the development of listening comprehension, and student growth was determined based on analysis of students' written output. Students' showed language development in both interpretive listening and presentational writing; their written output indicates growth in their ability to understand authentic film clips for main ideas and important supporting details. Students also showed an impressive ability to retain and accurately reuse both everyday vocabulary, as well as more advanced and film-specific vocabulary.

The researcher gained many insights over the course of the study. He found that time was the single greatest limiting factor in terms of student outcomes. While numerous data collection points yielded a good quantity of student data, the researcher feels that in the future spending more time with one film and/or fewer film clips could result in deeper student understanding. Incorporating more peripheral language instruction may support greater listening comprehension and language output. Overall, the researcher found that integrating authentic French film clips engaged students and facilitated their listening comprehension development. The researcher will

keep abreast of research related to the use of authentic films and will continue to experiment with their use in his own classroom.

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The Effect of Intelligent Tutoring Systems on Student Attitudes and Achievement

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With the increase of technology within education, computer programs have been developed to meet the individualized instructional needs of each student and fill the gaps in their content knowledge. As technology has progressed, many of these tutoring computer programs have moved to online platforms and artificial intelligence has begun to be incorporated to fill the role of the teacher within these tutoring systems which have come to be known as intelligent tutoring systems (ITS). Intelligent tutoring systems are “instructional systems that contain empirical models of the student to predict student behaviors and knowledge, and to act upon these predictions to make pedagogical moves as students progress towards gaining expertise and mastery of the target domain” (Arroyo, 2014, p.388). ITS are able to “diagnose and adapt to a student’s developing knowledge and skills [and use that information] to provide precise feedback” (Canfield, 2001, p.152). With the progression of technology, artificial intelligence has been explored to create a more lifelike interactive experience which mimics a one-to-one human tutoring experience (Chien, 2008). This combined with designing ITS to tailor instruction to students’ instructional needs and interests is meant to increase engagement with the content through active learning (Chien, 2008).

Mimicking a one-to-one tutoring experience and providing the same level of support is the purpose of programming algorithms which tailor instruction to each student within an ITS. These algorithms not only gather data on which questions were answered correctly or incorrectly but they also take into account student actions such as time spent on a problem, amount and type of help requested, and the number of attempts used to solve a problem (Arroyo, 2014). From these efforts, several intelligent tutoring systems have been developed such as *Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS)*, *Thinkwell*, *Plato*, *Cognitive Tutor Algebra I (CTAI)*, and *Khan Academy* (Kennedy, 2007; Pane, 2014). Studies of these intelligent tutoring systems have been conducted to investigate their role in achievement growth and a more positive attitude toward mathematics among students.

Literature Review

Cognitive Tutor Algebra I (CTAI) is an ITS which is a first-year algebra course designed to develop problem-solving skills and promote understanding of algebraic concepts and principles to students across a variety of ages and grades. The system provides a self-paced approach to individualized instruction and attempts to bring students to mastery before progressing to more advanced topics. A study investigating the use of *Cognitive Tutor Algebra I* (CTAI) found that when the program was used as an additional component to the curriculum, students performed better on state end of course exams and received better course grades (Pane, 2014). The researchers attributed this increase in achievement to the ITS ability to individualize instruction and serve each students' instructional needs.

Studies have shown that the ability of an ITS to personalize instruction based on the student's prior knowledge can raise student engagement and achievement when its unique functionalities, hints tailored to the individual student, consistent and detailed feedback, and in some cases, interest based questions, are consistently used by the students. Not all of these ITS are programs that need to be bought by a school or district. With the growth of the internet, some ITS have been developed using online platforms to provide all students with free instructional support outside of the classroom. Those students who do use the internet for instructional support do so for a variety of reasons, the most common being that they believe parents and teachers are often wrong, embarrassed to ask others for help, or because they believe what is on the internet is correct. Researchers found that once these students were introduced to a variety of online math learning resources (*Khan Academy* and *Mathletics*) they were not necessarily more likely to increase their use of the internet for instructional support, but rather use the resources introduced in this study because they believed them to be credible and effective (Muir, 2013).

A high school in Los Altos, CA participated in a research study where the use of *Khan Academy* was studied for its effects on student achievement for Algebra I students who had previously failed the course. The students were divided into two classes, a traditional class and a class utilizing *Khan Academy*. The researchers suggest that the daily use of *Khan Academy* within the classroom and its ability to differentiate instruction to individual students is why the *Khan Academy* class outperformed the traditional class on the California Algebra I end of course exam. A similar study was conducted by the same researchers with fifth and seventh graders in Los Altos, CA where they used *Khan Academy* as a supplement to instruction during the school

year. It was found that of the seventh graders, 41% scored proficient or advanced on the California Standards Test at the end of the school year compared to 23% the year before. The fifth grade students also showed an increase in the percentage scoring proficient and advanced to 96% compared to 91% in the rest of the district (Kronholz, 2012).

Murphy (2014) conducted a study over the course of two school years involving twenty schools ranging from charter, independent, and public as well as elementary, middle and high schools to investigate how teachers use *Khan Academy* within the classroom and its effects on students. Researchers observed that roughly 80% of students were engaged while using *Khan Academy*, and positive student responses in interviews and surveys supported those observations. Students also reported feelings of greater confidence about learning mathematics independently. Features of the program such as immediate feedback, hints, access to videos, and the gaming feature where students earn badges for progressing through content were identified as causes for positive student attitudes toward *Khan Academy*. Students displayed a sense of ownership of their learning at the end of the study after working with the program which is a suggested cause for the high engagement and positive attitudes observed.

The ability of an ITS to differentiate instruction to meet students' needs has guided the development of this study. The research question being studied was: How does an online intelligent tutoring system (*Khan Academy*) affect student achievement and attitudes when used as a supplement to instruction?

Methodology

The participants of this study were two high school Math I students who were taking the course for the first time and showed signs of struggling. The high school is located in a rural area in the southeastern United States.

The treatment portion of this study took place over six weeks. This time did not include pre/post interviews. Khan Academy allows teachers to assign lessons with specific learning objectives, which are based on the Common Core State Standards, to specific students. The researcher created six units, which are identified in the standards, within *Khan Academy*. During the six-week instructional period, the students were scheduled to meet with the researcher after school twice a week for one hour at a time. At the beginning of each week students were instructed to start working on a new unit even if they did not master the previous one.

Throughout this time the students received instructional support through the assigned lessons

within *Khan Academy* in the form of short instructional videos, practice problems, and mastery quizzes. Each students' data within the *Khan Academy* progress reporting system was used to measure each student's progress. To measure student attitudes about math, the researcher conducted pre- and post- treatment interviews.

Results and Discussion

The data for this study fit within three categories; achievement, operations, and attitudes. Operational data relates to how the students used the program's features such as the number of videos watched and hits used, the number of points and badges earned, and the amount of time spent within the program. While achievement data consists of the number of objectives attempted, the number of problems attempted per objective, the number of problems answered correct or incorrect, the amount of time spent on each problem, and at which mastery level each attempted objective was rated as. The attitudes data was gathered during two fifteen-minute sessions in the form of individual pre- and post-interviews in which both students participated.

Each student was assigned a total of sixty-seven objectives spanning across six major concepts identified within the Math I curriculum, one concept for each week of the study. Both students attempted approximately 15% of the total objectives assigned. As *Khan Academy* collected achievement data, it ranked student performance for each objective on a level of mastery scale with five levels; *Needs Practice*, *Practiced*, *Level 1*, *Level 2*, and *Mastered*. Both students in this study had half of their attempted objectives rated at the lowest *Needs Practice* level and the other half at the *Practiced* level which is likely due to the amount of time spent on each objective. Neither student made substantial gains in achievement. But if we take a closer look at the data for the objectives rated at the *Practiced* level, we do see some trends for growth.

Student 1 attained the *Practiced* level for five of the ten objectives he attempted, while Student 2 obtained the *Practiced* level for five out of the eleven total objectives he attempted. Taking a closer look at one objective from each student for which the *Practiced* level was achieved, we see a common theme related to the amount of time spent on each problem as more problems are attempted. The content and number of problems attempted varies between the students' objectives, but as each student encounters more problems within each objective, the amount of problems they answer correctly increases until a streak of at least five in a row is reached. As the students increasingly answer more questions correctly, the length of time spent on each question decreases to about half the amount of time used for questions attempted at the

beginning of the objective. The decrease of time spent on each problem as they began to answer more questions correctly in a row displays higher levels of mastery for each objective than they previously had.

Another aspect of this study focused on how the students used the functions *Khan Academy* provides, specifically instructional videos and hints. Student 1 only used videos, no hints, used the closed caption feature of the videos, and would often not watch the entire video. On the other hand, Student 2 watched fewer videos but did not use the closed caption feature and would watch the whole video before returning to the problem. He also appeared to prefer the hints feature more than the videos because he used hints for the majority of objectives he attempted. For both students, videos would be used during the first problem of an objective, likely to learn or relearn how to successfully complete the problem. The majority of the time a video was watched, the student answered the problem correctly. However, that did not guarantee they would answer the next problem correctly. This could be due to each problem containing different types of numbers such as fractions or decimals versus integers, because of a different context in the case of a word problem, or different information is given within the problem such as a table versus a graph or equation. It is unclear as to whether students would have performed better sooner within an objective had they watched more than just one video during an objective.

The attitudes data gathered during individual pre- and post-interviews contained four focus areas; (1) feelings toward math, (2) seeking help in person, (3) seeking help online, (4) Khan Academy as a tool for supplemental instruction. Both students had the same general feelings toward math and had sought out tutoring in the past.

During the pre-interview, both students expressed a dislike for math for various reasons such as feelings of difficulty, struggling with forgetfulness, and feelings of low self-esteem. After completing the study, both students expressed a slightly more positive attitude toward math but for different reasons. Student 1 enjoyed using a computer for learning math and appreciated knowing that there was a video available for each problem if he felt he needed it. Student 2, on the other hand, did not associate his slightly more positive attitude toward math with the features in the program but rather because he felt he understands some things better, which is in accordance with his achievement data.

Prior to this study Student 1 would occasionally use the Google search engine to search for math help, while Student 2 would exclusively use videos from *Khan Academy* for support.

although they both would struggle to find material that was helpful. After the study, both students said they were more willing to seek help online because of the positive experience with *Khan Academy*, although they both preferred receiving tutoring in a face-to-face setting.

The features they found most helpful were opposite from each other. Student 1 found the videos most helpful because “you can go over and see what you did wrong,” while Student 2 appreciated the hint feature and the continual repetition of problems. A criticism both students had of the program was that some of the videos went too quickly, there was too much information contained within them, and they explained concepts in a complicated way.

Even though large gains in achievement were not made for either student, they both showed progress. The way in which students used the program was highly influenced by their beliefs about the helpfulness of specific features. So, it is not clear that there is a causal relationship between achievement and the use of specific program features. We can conclude there is an interaction between student achievement, student attitudes, and the utilization of an intelligent tutoring system in mathematics.

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Instructional Strategies to Build Higher-Order Thinking Skills and Develop Language Ability in the Secondary Spanish Classroom

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Critical thinking is an essential skill for success in education and careers and for participation in a robust democracy. In 2003, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), a public-private partnership of leaders in education and business, highlighted the importance of critical thinking in a call to America's education leaders to better prepare students to succeed in a world of increasing global competition, rapid technological change, and accelerating accumulation of knowledge (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003). When the National Education Association later interviewed leaders from different fields to determine which of the 18 skills from the P21's "Framework for 21st Century Learning" were most important in K-12 education, there was near unanimity that critical thinking was one of the top four skills (National Education Association, n.d.).

Literature Review

Theories on learning in general and on second language acquisition in particular highlight the many benefits that engaging students in cognitively challenging tasks in collaborative learning situations can have on the development of language and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Sociocultural theory highlights that, when students work with peers, they are able to do more than they can do by themselves and can also acquire new knowledge and skills they may later use independently (Vygotsky, 1978). Swain's Output Hypothesis, meanwhile, posits that, when students attempt to create meaning in a second language during interactions with others, they discover what they can and cannot do and have motivation to fill the "holes" in their linguistic knowledge (Swain, 2000). Substantiating these theories, classroom-based research by Alc3n (1993) and Ayaduray and Jacobs (1997) found that when students were challenged to ask each other higher-order questions in target-language discussions of passages they had read, they both produced more elaborated language and demonstrated better higher-order thinking skills.

A number of best practices that world language teachers should follow when working to design instructional strategies to develop thinking skills and language skills emerge from the

existing body of research on this topic. The first is that critical thinking tasks must be calibrated to students' linguistic skills (Heining-Boynton & Heining-Boynton, 1993; Stroupe, 2006, 2013). Teachers must remain cognizant of the limits of their students' language ability when designing activities requiring critical thinking, stretching them to the point at which they will grow linguistically and cognitively but not so far that they become lost and disengaged. An essential planning tool for world language teachers that should be used in planning critical thinking activities is the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* (2012). Teachers should also carefully scaffold the language that students will need in order to complete critical thinking tasks successfully and give students multiple opportunities to practice this language (Alcón, 1993; Ayaduray & Jacobs, 1997; Lin & Mackay, 2004; Stroupe, 2006, 2013).

Next, when students are given critical thinking and problem-solving tasks in the world language classroom, teachers should have them work in small groups (Alcón, 1993; Ayaduray & Jacobs, 1997; Lin & Mackay, 2004). Peer interaction is essential for the development of language proficiency because it provides opportunities for true negotiation of meaning (Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Swain, 2000). Furthermore, opportunities to produce output in peer interactions help students hone communication strategies because they have to be flexible with their language depending on their peers' level of understanding (Alcón, 1993).

During instruction, teachers should employ deliberate questioning strategies to move students from lower to higher order thinking (Caram & Davis, 2005; Costa & Kallick, 2015; Lin & Mackay, 2004). One key tool they can use to understand the level of thinking that classroom activities require of students and purposefully push students' thinking beyond the lower levels is the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, which lists the six levels of complexity of human thought (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Teachers should also take the added step of asking students to reflect on their experiences after critical thinking tasks so that they build metacognitive skills and will be more likely to apply the strategies practiced to other contexts (Lin, 2011; Lin & Mackay, 2004).

In light of the successes previous researchers and practitioners have had in simultaneously developing higher-order thinking skills and language ability (e.g., Alcón, 1993; Ayaduray & Jacobs, 1997; Lin & Mackay, 2004; Stroupe, 2013), the researcher investigated how the use of instructional strategies to build higher-order thinking skills can help students develop language ability in the secondary Spanish classroom.

Methodology

The study was conducted between April 4 and April 14, 2016 and included 30 Spanish II students in a central North Carolina public high school where the researcher was assigned for student teaching. There were three data sets.

Data Set One consisted of student work resulting from the researcher's use of instructional strategies that focused on building higher-order thinking skills and Spanish language ability. These instructional strategies were tailored to the Novice High level of language ability as defined by the ACTFL *Performance Descriptors* (2012). The researcher was looking for participant growth in two modes of communication: interpersonal speaking and presentational writing. To evaluate participants' language performance and compare students' performance from one data collection to the next, the researcher used the ACTFL *Performance Descriptors* (2012) and the Fairfax County Public Schools' PALS (Performance Assessment for Language Students) analytic rubrics for Level 1 (novice) speaking and writing tasks (2013a, 2013b). Specifically, the researcher examined students' speaking and writing in terms of its comprehensibility, language control, and vocabulary. The researcher also evaluated how well students employed critical thinking and problem-solving skills when completing the tasks.

The study was situated within a two-week thematic unit about natural disasters, which provided a rich context for creating opportunities for participants to imagine themselves in situations in which they would need to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills to get help for themselves or others. For the interpersonal speaking component of the study, instruction centered on thinking of appropriate questions to ask a survivor of a natural disaster in order to learn important details and formulating those questions using the imperfect and preterit tenses and appropriate vocabulary. For the presentational writing component of the study, instruction centered on having participants practice writing about events in the past tense, using the imperfect and preterit tenses, and deciding what information was the most important to share about an emergency situation in a time-sensitive context.

Data Set Two included field notes, recorded videos of class sessions, and observations about instruction. Data Set Three included participants' responses to a survey in which they were asked to reflect on their perceived development of Spanish language ability and critical thinking and problem-solving skills during the study. The researcher analyzed the three data sets to look

for evidence of students' development of interpersonal speaking and presentational writing language ability, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Results and Discussion

The first two data collections for Data Set One involved interpersonal speaking tasks in which students took turns playing different roles in a post-natural disaster scenario: one partner asked questions she had brainstormed for homework and the other answered them based on a reading passage. According to an analysis of student work using the PALS rubric for Level 1 speaking tasks, most participants' Spanish language ability in the interpersonal speaking mode improved (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2013a). Overall, participants were able to ask their partners better, more elaborated questions because of modest gains in language ability: a majority showed substantial improvement in vocabulary and maintained an acceptable level of comprehensibility despite using more elaborated language in data collection #2, while a minority of participants demonstrated improvements in language control. The majority of participants (63%) also showed improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills insofar as the questions they asked evidenced an improved ability to imagine what kinds of things they would want to know after a natural disaster depending on the role they were playing.

The next two data collections involved presentational writing tasks in which students had to communicate information about what happened during a natural disaster in a time-sensitive context, indicating what details were most important by putting "tweets" or "texts" in priority order. According to an analysis of student work using the PALS rubric for Level 1 writing tasks, almost half of participants' language ability in the presentational mode improved (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2013b). While the variety and richness of most participants' vocabulary did not improve noticeably and their comprehensibility largely stayed the same (although a quarter of participants showed improvement in this regard), almost half demonstrated gains in language control by more accurately using the preterit and imperfect in data collection #4 as compared to data collection #3, despite the two data collections occurring only three days apart. In terms of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, only one participant showed gains by more appropriately prioritizing her "texts" in data collection #4. However, the researcher assesses that this was due to flaws in the design of the task for data collection #4 and the communication of the instructions for the task, and not a reflection of the participants' actual critical thinking and problem-solving ability.

The findings from the survey were overwhelmingly positive. Participants almost unanimously said that they believed their Spanish language ability improved during the unit. All but two participants (Students U and Y) (93%) at least agreed somewhat with the statement “My ability to use Spanish improved between the beginning and end of the unit.” A third of participants (33%) strongly agreed with the statement. Participants also almost unanimously said that they believed their critical thinking and problem-solving skills improved because of instructional strategies used in the unit, both in terms of their ability to ask good questions in a critical situation and to provide the most important information about something that happened. Finally, the survey results highlighted the value of teaching a unit that, in giving participants the opportunity to practice critical thinking and problem-solving skills by having them imagine how to cope with emergency situations, helped them build valuable 21st century skills. Twenty-eight participants (93%) reported that they felt more confident in their ability to deal with emergency situations after the unit, with over a third (37%) saying they strongly felt that way.

Conclusions

Study participants demonstrated gains both in their Spanish language ability and their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Thus, this action research study corroborated the body of research described above that has found that teachers can help students simultaneously develop better critical thinking and problem-solving skills and language ability through designing and executing instructional strategies which give students multiple opportunities to engage in collaborative higher-order thinking activities in the target language and include explicit focus on the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills (Alcón, 1993; Ayaduray & Jacobs, 1997; Lin, 2011; Lin & Mackay, 2004; Stroupe, 2013).

As a result of the study, the researcher gained valuable insights on the importance of incorporating cognitively challenging tasks into language instruction, even with Novice level learners, and having students work in pairs or small groups to work on them collaboratively. She also witnessed how deliberately employing questioning strategies that stretched students beyond lower-order thinking benefitted their development of language ability and critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and observed how incorporating deliberate strategies to develop students’ metacognition was beneficial to their intellectual growth. As a result, the researcher plans to incorporate instructional strategies that give students multiple opportunities to engage in

collaborative higher-order thinking activities in the target language and explicitly focus on the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills in her Spanish language classroom.

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Multimedia and Historical Empathy in the Social Studies Classroom

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As Staley (2007) noted, it is not difficult to observe that the historian's practice—and by extension the history teacher—is rooted in words. Historical thinking has traditionally coincided with narrative thinking, and has created a pedagogy which focuses on teaching our students to think of the past in terms of "...sentences, paragraphs, expository or narrative essays" (p. 24).

In contrast with this narrative approach to presenting history, Gaudelli (2009) observed that today's youth have been called digital natives as they have never lived without access to multiple forms of computer technology. This generation of students has had nearly continuous access to several forms of digital communication—including television, blogs, and cellular phones—and has lived in what Kellner (2003) called a total media environment.

This observation is not intended as a criticism on narrative teaching. Rather, it can serve as a reminder that there exists a gap between the structure of the traditional historical narrative and the multiple mediums through which students communicate today. Recognizing this communications gap provides an intriguing lens through which to re-examine social studies pedagogy and the development of historical skills in the 21st century classroom—particularly in the teaching of historical empathy.

In asking four teachers to define historical empathy, Cunningham (2009) highlighted two recurrent beliefs—that empathy requires understanding perspectives held in the past and that understanding historical context is critical. According to one teacher,

It's all about understanding...why people acted the way that they did in the past. And that goes back to attitudes because attitudes inform actions, and attitudes are the product of the environment in which you live and the historical context. (p. 684)

If understanding attitude is critical and attitudes are the product of a historical environment and context, then a question arises within using *only* historical narrative to teach

empathy. Attitudes belonged to people who did not exist and experience the world as a one-dimensional verbal space. Simply put, historical actors did not experience the past exclusively through words.

As Staley (2007, p. 26) argued, through recognizing that historical actors were shaped by tangible and rich environments, educators should consider teaching historical empathy through “...representing the past not only as a one-dimensional sentence but also as a multidimensional visual space” with an audience already accustomed to communicating visually via several types of medium.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a multimedia instructional approach in meeting these challenges of empathy instruction in the 21st century classroom. If historical empathy is understanding *another's* perspective, and that person's perspective was shaped through a variety of factors in an authentic visual environment, then a multimedia approach might be used as a supplement to traditional instruction to help to increase student engagement with historical empathy.

Literature Review

Throughout the professional community the topic of historical empathy has been discussed and debated for decades. Historians, teachers, administrators, and philosophers have all offered their own answers as to what historical empathy actually is, whether it matters, and how its instruction might be actualized in a classroom setting.

As with any debated topic, there exists a range of opinions on these definitions. On one hand, philosophers like Lee (1983) celebrated the importance of historical empathy as a central element to historical understanding, claiming that without it history cannot begin. In this sense, the development of historical empathy in the social studies classroom could be considered one of the paramount goals in history instruction. Others like Kohlmeier (2005) identified historical empathy as a singular part in a larger toolkit of historical thinking skills, which includes historical knowledge and historical significance.

While there is little research published to suggest that empathy—particularly within the social studies classroom—is a bad thing unto itself, questions do exist within the broader academic community toward its exact identity and import. Noddings rejected empathy as practically useful within the field of moral education as it was primarily intellectual and projective by nature (as cited in Cunningham, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, historical empathy was defined in keeping with Grant's (2001) study on ninth grade history instruction as a mode of historical thinking which includes understanding multiple perspectives of a historical figure's actions and historical events, in addition to exhibiting an ability to take an empathetic stance.

As a supplement to a traditional narrative approach to pedagogy, Staley's (2007) approach to history instruction was emulated. He offered a multimedia heuristic framework for teaching historical content to students through critical photographic analysis. Within this study he emphasized the importance of focusing on history as a three dimensional space. He outlined a pedagogical framework for approaching a lesson (or unit) of instruction through the lens of a big idea question from the outset. This big idea functions as an argument that shapes and forms the subsequent structure and presentation of the multimedia devices utilized for instruction.

Within the current body of literature there is room to investigate the effects of combining these two approaches to teaching—between the traditional narrative and a multimedia model—on students' ability to engage in historical empathy. The resulting research question for this study was, what is the effect of a heuristic multimedia approach to history instruction—in which images are used as the main carriers of information and instruction—upon students' ability to engage in historical empathy.

Methods

This action research study investigated the effects of integrating a multimedia teaching strategy which borrowed from Staley's (2007) big idea and photographic analysis strategies into a secondary social studies unit. Through the triangulation of data from a pre-test, post-test, two narrative writing assignments, and observational data, this study sought to answer the question of how much, and to what extent, the incorporation of such a multimedia strategy impacted students' ability to engage in historical empathy.

This study took place in two American History I classes in a high school located in a mid-sized urban district in the southeastern United States. Both classes were standard level courses, and included 28 and 32 students respectively.

The participants in this study were a non-random purposeful selection drawn from this available pool of students. In other words, all students were invited to participate and the students who voluntarily completed the consent form process constituted the sample of this study. In all, 21 students completed the study and constituted the sample.

This study spanned the same unit for each of the two classes, specifically the World War II unit. The study began with the implementation of a pre-test. It then included two lessons which paired a workstation-based activity with a narrative writing assignment. The first workstation-based activity and narrative writing assignment followed a more traditional mode of historical instruction, with the majority of content the students interacted with being narrative historical sources highlighting the Hitler Youth Movement.

The following workstations and narrative writing assignment included a series of intervention exercises designed along the framework established by Staley's (2007) heuristic approach to multimedia instruction. A series of 8 iPads was utilized to create a multimedia representation of the Holocaust in World War II in the workstations exercise.

After this second workstation-based activity, a narrative writing assignment identical in structure to the first was implemented. This assignment was used in comparison with the first assignment to analyze for any changes or resurgent trends among the students with regard to their ability to empathize or other themes unanticipated by the researcher.

This research study ended with the students completing a post-test questionnaire. This post-test was identical in structure and content to the pre-test to provide a baseline for comparing changes in student response over time.

Results

The pre-test and post-test were identical, and as such the results of the post-test were compared with the pre-test to gauge student progress in developing their historical empathy skills. The results highlighted in this study indicated a narrow overall positive trend in the student body.

For question 1 which asked the students to describe empathy, the number of students who scored a 3 or 'significant knowledge' increased from 2 to 5. Additionally, on question 2 which asked students how to define historical empathy, the number of students who moved from a score of 1 to 2, or 'no knowledge' to 'elementary or little knowledge' increased from 9 to 13.

Perhaps more intriguing, within question 3 which asked students to what extent they felt they engaged in historical empathy in their classes, the scores of 2, 3, and 4 all saw increases in the number of answers—by 2, 1, and 1 respectively. More specifically, in the words of Carol Ann, "(I felt like I engaged in historical empathy to...) A very deep extent especially what

happened to the Jews.” Carol Ann wasn’t alone in this feeling, an additional 6 students referenced the World War II unit in which we performed this action research.

Overall the shift in results between the pre- and post-tests indicates a positive increase, albeit a narrow one. If the pre- and post-tests were scored holistically—adding up all the scores of 1-4 or 1-5 and multiplying by the number of students to create a “lump score”—the pre-test score would be 356, while the post-test score would be 382. That indicates a 7.3% increase overall. These results indicated an increase in student ability to define historical empathy (even if only at an elementary level) and support for multimedia instruction within the history classroom.

In addition to the pre- and post-tests, three individual student’s experiences throughout this action research were examined in tandem with their narrative writing assignments. Each of the three—Carol Ann, Jamias, and Jake—illustrated varying abilities to engage with historical empathy and unique interpretations of the source material. Regardless of their performances on the pre- and post-tests, each of these three individuals highlighted varying abilities to engage in historical empathy in their writing.

Discussion

The outstanding literature on historical empathy highlights a recurring theme: it is notoriously difficult to define what historical empathy is and what it looks like in classroom practice (Cunningham, 2009). The pre- and post-test questions asking students to define historical empathy highlighted answers ranging from, “Feelings,” to “Explaining things that happened in history.” Given the previously established definition for historical empathy it would seem that this lack of consensus indicates a failure for the participants to engage in historical empathy.

When these results are viewed through another perspective, however, it seems that another possibility emerges. Riley (1998) argued for using historical empathy within the classroom as a tool to understand the motives, words, and actions of historical figures throughout history—particularly in large scale events including the Holocaust. As previously mentioned, Carol Ann, Jake, and Jamias all highlighted through their narrative writing assignments unique and insightful interpretations of historical content befitting this definition.

The primary measurement used in this study to gauge student growth in engaging with historical empathy was the pre- and post-test. However, if these students exhibited historical empathy within their writing, regardless of their answers on a post-test, it could be reasonably

concluded that the students did in fact learn to engage with historical empathy. As Riley (1998) notes, this question might not even matter. So long as the students gained a deeper understanding of the motives, words, and actions of historical figures through the use of historical empathy then the overarching goal of improving historical instruction was accomplished.

This knowledge paired with Staley's (2007) model for crafting metonymic historical instruction should serve as encouragement for future teachers. Historical content can be taught with strategically crafted presentations of multimedia content, and as the results of this action research indicate, a significant portion of my students preferred this approach to instruction as a best practice.

This action research study has played a significant part in shaping my own views regarding social studies pedagogy and historical empathy in the classroom. With regard to pedagogy, I intend to embrace Staley's (2007) model for metonymic instruction within my classroom wherever possible.

With regard to my own feelings regarding historical empathy in the classroom, my views have shifted more toward the attitude highlighted by Riley (1998) that historical empathy holds value as a skill that is cultivated to better understand the motives, words, and actions of others throughout history. I have recognized the value that shaping my instruction with empathy in mind has to deepen my students' understanding of the material and give my students the opportunity to express that knowledge creatively.

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Impact of Narrative Readings on Student Achievement and Interest in U.S. History Classrooms

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A clichéd version of a high school history class typically consists of a teacher imparting knowledge at the front of the classroom, droning on, with a textbook to supplement that learning. The students are often expected to read from the textbook and fish out vocabulary and key events from the book to be prepared for class and the test. The downside to this is that history gets boiled down to a dry, basic relating of events with dates and definitions, souring the students from becoming truly interested or remembering any context beyond the test.

In some classrooms, however, the study of history becomes the telling or reading of stories. Those stories become the basis of understanding not only the events that took place, but also the knowledge of the key figures that drove those events, and the ideas and concepts that drove the characters. All of these ideas should be encompassed in the study and teaching of history. Teaching history as stories, spoken or written, will not only give the students more context than a textbook. It often can bring the story, and thus history, to life. By giving the student a story to read and illustrate the history in their imaginations, they would hopefully become more attached to the material and remember the story for the characters and themes (Stoddard, 2012).

Teachers and researchers have expressed frustrations with the traditional textbooks used in classrooms for many years, and several have given their own solutions to the problem (e.g. VanSledright & Kelly, 1996). One of the more prevalent answers to textbooks has been the introduction of alternative texts and methods, which can range from primary sources to computer learning to historical fiction to making students write stories themselves to become more engaged in the material. Whether from bedtime stories as children, novels from English class, or from watching shows and movies on Netflix every weekend, many students are accustomed to stories, and often come to care about the characters and plot as they get farther along.

The difference between textbooks and a more narrative telling of history can be analogous to watching a documentary and watching a movie or show on the same topic. The information may be there, and the documentary may be more factual, but the movie will likely be remembered in more detail. Movies or narrative stories hopefully would force the students to think about it on a higher level by processing the narrative and making a connection from the action of the story to the information. It is up to the teacher to make sure that the students do not just take in the entertainment value of the story and ignore the historical perspective and value to be gained from it.

Literature Review

Reading is often used as a measuring stick for how educated a person is, or even if they are educated at all. Literacy rates identify successful schools and well-off neighborhoods across the United States. It has been designated as important enough to inspire programs to increase literacy levels in people of all ages. One way that programs have sought to improve both literacy and content knowledge is through the telling of stories, hoping that the learners will be able to connect it and make meaning easier from a story than from non-fiction, fact driven readings.

One of the most apparent aspects of many of the studies on teaching with a narrative approach is that they are focused on younger students, often late elementary school. Some teachers have felt that primary sources provide another way to increase students' content knowledge, and have ended up using more narrative primary sources, primarily journals, diaries, and letters to attempt to increase students' historical reasoning and content knowledge (Monte-Sano, 2011; VanSledright & Kelly, 1996). Despite the increase in content knowledge, primary sources can occasionally be as dry as textbook reading to learners, particularly when the reading is from different eras with vastly different writing styles than the students are used to.

On the other hand, studies that have focused on narrative or literature approaches to teaching history have also found strong connections in both student interest and increasing content knowledge (Smith, Monson, & Dobson, 1992). Reading in class is by far the most popular option, both to make sure that the students are actually reading the material, as well as to help struggling students and to have discussions immediately after the reading (Smith, Monson, & Dobson, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

Another aspect that many of the studies stress in the conclusions are to not focus entirely on the literature and alternative readings. Some non-fiction readings, usually from a textbook,

can be beneficial, helping to give the students both differentiated readings and also more context to what is going on beyond the story (Stripling, 2011). In one of the few reported high school applications of the narrative approach, Stripling praised literary readings for history to show social context, but also particularly cautioned that the teacher had to scaffold not only the context outside of the reading, but separate fact from literary flair for the students, to make sure they did not take all the information in the book as true.

VanSledright and Kelly (1996) also found that the students were more interested in the literary or alternative texts than the primary sources or textbooks, but that the students did not show any deeper questioning of the alternative texts than textbooks. The students read both styles of readings as fact without diving into their sources or whether the alternative texts were entirely true or just telling the story. Regardless of how much more care the teacher has to show in making sure the students understand where fact ends and fiction begins, the study showed that the students often chose the alternative texts to read if they were given a choice, and they were much more interested and engaged in the material.

However, when the students are also prompted to discuss what they are reading, both their interest and comprehension increase. Huson (2007) in a study that focused on an entire fifth grade curriculum that included narrative readings being introduced, found a significant increase in student engagement and interest, but also attributed the upswing to the students' discussion. Discussing the readings also allowed students to draw their own conclusions from the books and support them, which gave the students more ownership of their learning along with higher interest levels from the reading material.

Though much of the literature has been focused on elementary school students rather than the high school level, this study will see if narrative studies will have a similar effect on older students as well. It will also take a hard look at how well the readings engage the students and the effect on their attitudes and interests toward history. The research question of the study is- "How does focusing on literature or narrative based reading affect student achievement and interest in history in the high school classroom?"

Methodology

The participants in this study came from an Honors American History 2 class of twenty-four from a rural high school near a medium sized city in the southeastern United States. The

research took place over a two week period during the spring semester of the 2015-2016 school year. Eight students returned consent or assent forms to participate in this study.

The class was taught in the same manner as the units leading up to it, with lecture and classroom activities, however, for two class periods, twenty minutes each day were given to reading the selections chosen for that day and the discussions that followed. The students read selections from John Crowley's *Four Freedoms*. The book focuses on perspectives of nontraditional participants of the period, and offers a different view of American society during World War II, focusing on women and disabled men who stayed at home working in factories during the war to replace the soldiers.

The selections were read silently by the students, though they could ask questions as they read. At the end of each class period, after the reading, the teacher led a discussion on the selection, having the students answer questions and discuss what happened, making sure the students understood the information they needed from the reading, both from a factual standpoint as well as understanding larger concepts and differing perspectives, as well as to point out where fact ended and fiction began if necessary for that day's readings.

At the beginning of the Unit, the students took a pre-test to determine their prior knowledge and baseline on the subject, as well as a pre-survey to determine their interest and attitudes toward history, reading, and historical fiction. The survey consists of questions on a Likert scale, with the last few questions giving the students an opportunity to give open ended answers and write their thoughts more explicitly if they wished.

At the end of the unit, the students took a post-test to measure how much of the content they learned, as well as a post-survey to measure their interests and attitudes toward history, reading, and historical fiction, in the same manner as the pre-survey, through Likert scale questions as well as open ended questions to allow the students to express their feelings more overtly.

Results

The students improved in all areas on from the pre-test to the post-test. The areas that showed the most improvement were easily the identification and essay sections, which were open ended and involved the students writing out their answers. Their writing improved, as well as the amount of detail they remembered from the areas that were touched on in the reading.

Leah chose the domestic issues essay on both tests. On the pre-test, she wrote a paragraph about people helping, sending supplies and money themselves to soldiers, along with mentioning women working more. In the post-test, she wrote over a page and a half of an essay on domestic issues in the U.S. during World War II. She wrote that “with a lack of income for many families who once depended on the male’s paycheck, many companies started hiring women to work. Women stepped up and got jobs.” She went on to write about saving for food to go overseas, including that Americans “participated in themed days, such as ‘meat-less Mondays’ and ‘wheat-less Wednesdays.’ Others chose to grow Victory Gardens as well.” She added a section for internment camps before ending with the sentiment that “Everyone had to make changes in war times, big or small, in order to contribute to the war effort... some wanted to help in any/every way possible. A war is not won solely by the soldiers, its [sic] also by the country which backs them.” Erin wrote on Pearl Harbor as well on both tests, with her answer growing from one sentence on an attack to start the war to a paragraph with lots of detail. She gave an approximate casualty count, mentioning the U.S.S. *Arizona* and the memorial there today where “you can still see oil leaking,” and noted that it was “the turning point for the U.S. to get involved.”

For the most part, there was little variation between the pre- and post-survey on the Likert scale questions, the positive answers remained positive, the negative remained negative, though the degree shifted slightly from one to the other. The open response questions generally indicated that the students felt they learned at least some from reading the book, and gained a better understanding about the time period from it. However, the answers about whether the students enjoyed reading in class more than a standard lesson was mixed. Several of the students did indicate that the book itself was important in whether they remembered the information. Erin noted on her pre-survey that she does not “like reading books that someone picks for me because they have no idea of what I’m interested in.” Megan wrote that it can help “somewhat if its [sic] an interesting book that will keep my attention,” and Steve responded that “it can, depends on what it is.”

Conclusion

Overall, the students did well on the portions of the test that were covered and discussed on the days we read from the book. Students’ tastes and interests differ, as always, so some were more interested in the material than others. What did appear to help all of the students was having a discussion on the sections we read immediately after reading them. It allowed them to

bring out aspects that their classmates missed, introduce new ideas and perspectives on the events of the book and that actually happened in history. As expected, the social issues brought up by the book seemed to interest and stick with the students more than the description of the factory and a job, which was reflected in the discussions, as well as in some of their test responses.

Going forward, I still believe that reading more helps the students in multiple ways, including basic literacy and writing skills, critical thinking, and opening up their perspective, so my students will continue to read and write in my social studies classes. However, the students were noncommittal about their feelings that the reading itself helped them actually learn the material, even the ones that enjoyed reading and participated in the discussions.

Probably the biggest takeaway from this project is the importance of the post-reading discussion in the process of helping them understand the material. Sharing ideas and bringing new thoughts and perspectives to the class as a whole was the biggest success across the board, and even made students who did not enjoy the reading sit up and pay more attention. There is often something in every era of history that a student can latch onto and enjoy, and perhaps through reading and discussion, teachers can help all students find it.

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Exploring the Effect of Social Studies Simulations on Student Engagement in the Secondary Classroom

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Some students fail to see the relevancy of the social studies curriculum, and it can be difficult for educators to develop means of guiding students toward this realization (Chiodo & Byford, 2004). In a study by Chiodo and Byford (2004) examining student attitudes toward social studies in the United States, two themes emerged: first, the importance of the teacher's enthusiasm and involvement to lead to positive attitudes and second, the perceived utilitarian value of the subject matter. In the study, students had a difficult time identifying the utilitarian value of social studies content, leading the students to have a less positive attitude toward and interest in social studies than other subjects in school (Chiodo & Byford, 2004). One can then surmise that teachers are not only challenged with making content engaging but also challenged with helping students to uncover the relevancy of social studies content.

One possible avenue for teachers to combat these challenges is using various pedagogical tools. Student engagement levels have shown increases across subject areas when teachers utilize group activities over lecture in the secondary classroom (Birnbaum, 2000). Simulations are one such tool that have shown to help promote active learning in the classroom (Alvarez, 2008). In addition, simulations can be an avenue to get everyone in the classroom engaged, even the quieter students or students who were previously less likely to participate in other activities (Devline-Scherer & Sardone, 2010). In an activity where all students can be included and the students have a positive perception of the activity, students can utilize critical thinking skills that help them see the relevancy of the material that, in turn, can create a desire for students to learn the material (Christie, 2004).

Review of Literature

Social studies teachers face the difficulties of covering content that is often viewed as irrelevant and boring to students while also facilitating vast amounts of content through lecture, an approach that is not always as engaging to students. Teachers who were once used to lecturing for ninety minutes now compete with students with cell phones and computers who may tune out

after hearing a fifteen-minute lecture. Pedagogical practices in the social studies classroom must adapt, and teachers must search for ways to engage students in the content so they can see the relevancy and importance of the information they are learning.

Social studies courses have historically been taught with an emphasis on the memorization of facts, dates, and people throughout history (Wineburg, 1996). The result of this type of instruction is "classrooms emphasizing the coverage of a series of neatly packaged, socially disengaged chronicles of fragmented facts presented to students by their teachers" (Hicks, van Hover, Doolittle, & VanFossen, 2012, pp. 284-285). In the image described, students are being told exactly what they need to know by the teacher, and this scenario may inevitably create a passive approach to learning. This type of teaching, asking students to know historiography, does not give students an authentic experience in the classroom and therefore students can become disengaged because they do not have the opportunity to experience history (Kobrin, Abbott, Ellinwood, & Horton, 1993). These experiences put students in a situation where they are told the answer regarding what they need to know about history.

In contrast, Kobrin et al, (1993) studied students from two schools in Providence, Rhode Island, that varied considerably in both demographics and socio-economic status. They found that having these students work collaboratively to examine primary documents, having them act as the historians and determine the significance of historical events and placing value on their interpretation, received positive feedback from students in both schools (Kobrin et al., 1993). Authentic experiences in the classroom help students see real-life applications of what they are learning in school and have the potential to increase engagement (Johnson, Adams Backer, Estrada & Freeman, 2015).

Methodology

A purposive sample of 27 high school students participated in this study. The study was also purposeful as all students in one of the researcher's classes were invited to participate. Permission was granted to use student data by the Wake Forest University Institutional Review Board, the school district, the principal, parents and the individual student participants. An honors level World History class was chosen because of the diverse grouping of both male and female students, and because it was a larger class. The class was also chosen based on the graduation requirement of the class and the difficulty of the subject matter because it was an honors level course. Because the researcher believes that World History is often less exciting to

students than other high school classes, using simulations in these classes may help make the content more engaging and help develop self-efficacy among the students as a by-product.

Each simulation was designed to mirror historical events and themes. Students received background information prior to each simulation and thorough instructions in the days leading up to the simulation to be prepared for their role. The digital game simulation was incorporated into the unit on Ancient Egypt to learn about Egyptian scientific knowledge and religious practices. The role play simulation was incorporated into the unit on Ancient Rome for students to better understand the consequences of the Roman senate.

Prior to the first simulation, participants filled out a pre-questionnaire regarding engagement and a pre-assessment about their knowledge of the subject matter in the particular unit of study. All questionnaires include open-ended questions to gather participant beliefs as well as Likert scale questions to assess engagement. Following each simulation, participants completed a post-questionnaire about their engagement and also had time to respond to the open-ended questions pertaining to the individual simulation. The reflection asked participants about specific concepts or themes from the simulation as well as provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on what they did and did not enjoy, and why. At the conclusion of the unit, there was a post-assessment about the participants' knowledge to assess any change in performance.

Constant comparative analysis was the data analysis strategy used in this study. Constant comparative analysis is a coding mechanism consisting of three stages: open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Merriam, 2009). In this study both qualitative and quantitative data was examined. The qualitative data were derived from the open-ended responses on the pre- and post-questionnaires as well as researcher field notes. The quantitative data were derived from the pre- and post-questionnaires that contained Likert scale questions as well as the pre- and post-assessment scores.

Results

After the game simulation, the perception of enjoyment of role play activities increased the most based on the pre- and post-questionnaire Likert scale results, but after the second simulation where the students participated in role play, the enjoyment of social studies increased the most. The perception of social studies being boring decreased the most significantly after the second simulation as well.

In comparing the digital game simulation and the role play simulation, the digital game had the highest level of performance increase overall. The class average increased 31 points on the post-assessment. The role play simulation had only a 10 point increase on the post-assessment average. However, the role play pre-assessment class average was 8 points higher for the role play than the digital game.

As evidenced from the pre-questionnaire data, students had established perceptions of social studies and activities in the social studies classroom. However, with post-questionnaire data and reflections from both simulations, these perceptions did vary, and overall, the class average pertaining to enjoyment of social studies increased, and views pertaining to social studies being boring went down after each simulation.

Discussion

Overall, the students' perceptions of their enjoyment of activities did not change drastically based on the Likert scale variance. I think it is important to note that the increase in enjoyment of social studies as a whole and the decline of students believing that social studies was boring occurred over the duration of the study. While I do not think it is possible to determine whether role play activities were the sole causes of increased engagement of social studies, I think it would be safe to say that diversifying instruction may lead to an increase in engagement.

In regard to the increase in performance, I think it can be determined that both simulations helped increase student performance. However, it cannot be determined whether the simulations were the sole cause of the increase in performance. Both of the simulations involved information that had been previously addressed in class and students may have asked questions prior to the post-assessment that may have increased their understanding as well. In addition, I would argue that the content covered in the role play simulation was significantly more difficult for the students to grasp and required students to utilize prior knowledge much more than the digital game, which provided students with all of the information necessary to understand the topic presented. For both simulations, all students' performance either increased or stayed the same, except for one student in the first simulation with the digital game whose pre-assessment score was higher than his post-assessment score.

Something I observed right away was how interested the students were in the game simulation because of the incorporation of technology. Anytime students saw the laptop cart in

my room after the simulation, they immediately asked if they were playing another game online. Huneycutt (2013) found that incorporating technology can be more attention-grabbing for students, and I certainly found this to be true, although I am not sure how excited they would have been if I had told them we would be planning a non-digital game. However, I think this increase in interest could also be attributed to the fact that we used laptops infrequently during class because of the resources available at the school.

In the results I mentioned that my students, and especially some of my more bashful ones, enjoyed being able to work at their own pace. I do believe that game simulations like the one my students played can “provide students with a sense of power and competence” (Pace et al., 1990, p. 54) that they may not feel in other classroom situations. Playing the game individually allowed them a time to feel comfortable and not feel like they needed to talk or interact constantly with other students.

Alvarez’s (2008) research discovered that students may find simulations more engaging than other activities in which they have participated previously. While I did not find that to be the case with my students based on their post-questionnaires, it may have been the type of simulation or the content that made it engaging for some, but not more enjoyable than other activities they had participated in within the class.

Conclusion

For teachers who may want to utilize simulations in their classes, it is important to note that simulations vary significantly in both skill level and breadth and depth of content. Therefore, simulations may require more preparatory work on the part of the teacher, or even an additional lesson to expose students to content to help ensure that their prior knowledge is on an appropriate level before beginning the simulation. During both simulations in the study, the students’ prior knowledge was expected to be equitable. If their prior knowledge had been revisited, the simulations may have been more effective overall.

Based on comments from the student participants, it is clear that diversification of instruction was important to them. They enjoyed having new activities to look forward to and having a new activity seemed to play a large role in their engagement of the subject matter at hand. It was also evident as an observer that some of the shyer students preferred the game simulation because they could work quietly and alone, whereas the more social and outgoing students seemed to enjoy the role play simulation more because they were able to interact with

their friends in the class. Having activities including both individual and group work caters to the diverse students in the classroom more effectively.

In my own teaching practices, I plan to continue to integrate the use of simulations in the social studies classroom and also continue to gather feedback from students about their enjoyment of the activities. Continuing to track enjoyment and performance will help determine the effectiveness and appropriateness of integrating these activities. The role of the teacher executing simulations is important to their success, and I think properly executing simulations is a learned skill that will take time. I do believe that creating these authentic experience can increase student understanding, but I also hope it will help the students become more engaged in the content (Johnson et al, 2015).

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