

Fostering Engagement in the Classroom Through Creative and Motivational Activities

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*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment
of the requirements of this master's degree.*

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In my K-12 experiences, I have felt, for the most, part very seen and understood by my teachers and schools in general. I grew up in Newport, Oregon, and I had the privilege of living in the same town for my whole K-12 experience. My family never had to move, I had a stable home life, and I was lucky to have the same friends basically throughout my K-12 experience, many of whom I am still friends with currently. In my elementary school years I was creative and a little rambunctious. I also liked to do little “crafty” things like make origami birds and paper dolls during instruction time when I was supposed to be working or listening. Sometimes I got in trouble for it, but usually I was praised for my creativity. When I was in the fourth grade my teacher suggested that I be put in the Talented and Gifted Program at our school. I was privileged enough that my creativity was rewarded instead of punished for being distracting. I think I was lucky to have teachers that recognized creativity and helped me use it to my advantage instead of forcing me to conform.

I went to Newport High School as a teenager. It was not a very big school and many of the students I had known for most of my life. It is a wonderful community and my mother also happened to work there, so she was never far away and the school felt very familiar. I had great teachers for the most part and almost all of them were kind and supportive. I never had any behavioral problems or really got in trouble. I always felt seen by my teachers and understood when trying to learn. I struggled with math and science in high school, but even then I felt understood because my teachers would help me after school in study groups to work through material and help me retake tests.

I had always gravitated towards social sciences and history in particular. I had amazing social studies teachers in high school and that experience of great teachers became one of the

contributing factors in wanting to become a teacher myself. I was pushed to do well and had teachers that taught in a fun and interesting way, and I want to be that role model and engaging teacher for other students.

I gravitate towards history so much because it holds so many applicable lessons for our future. It also plays a huge role in political and cultural efficacy because politics and the relationships between countries often have a long history with each other that is important to understanding current events we face as a society today. History is also so fluid in the sense that sometimes historians do not know all the answers from the past, and they just make their best guesses with the information they have. It is so interesting to look at the influences and nuances of primary sources and wonder what propelled people in the past to make them. As a student I liked being able to theorize and play “detective” when learning about history, as well as tie the events I learned about in the past to the ones happening in the world around me. I particularly enjoyed primary source work because it helped me connect more to the events and people of the past while also letting me explore and draw my own conclusions. I think as a teacher this is something I can use to help engage students as well.

It sometimes pains me when people say something to the effect of “I never liked history in school, it was so boring.” I think this type of rhetoric demonstrates a major flaw in the way history is sometimes taught. History and the social sciences in general are filled with so much intrigue, drama, double crossing, political and social changes, inventions, and complicated relationships. I think it is important that educators grab students' attention in a way that helps them see how entertaining learning history can be. Students want to be entertained, and history is one giant story we as educators can tell them. Obviously there is much more that goes into social studies than just telling stories, we want to make sure our students understand the government

and world politics, we want them to be able to analyze texts and documents, and we want them to be able to discuss their findings with one another in a productive way. But the hook and the buy-in from students is important to start with when teaching history.

The issue I see a lot with history classes is that the students do not buy in because they do not see the material as interesting or applicable to their own life. A lot of history curriculum is taught out of textbooks that are outdated in some cases. I think teaching history could be easier and more interesting to students if as teachers we ask ourselves; what are effective ways to use classroom curriculum to improve engagement and performance? I think it is important to create a social studies classroom environment where students can be creative and explore history in interactive ways. My teachers growing up always rewarded my creativity and helped me challenge myself by coming up with creativity based projects for the class to do. Additionally they did a great job of creating a curriculum that always felt engaging and lively. I credit a lot of my positive performance in school to teachers who allowed me to create. A creative and interactive classroom environment and curriculum can help students be more engaged and perform better.

Guiding Pedagogical Theory

I was drawn to the works of Paulo Friere, a Brazilian educational philosopher who pointed out in his 2018 book that anything less than a critical and cognitive conversation about learning in the classroom is borderline oppression of the next generation. If we do not give students the power and tools to think for themselves and be creative, how do we as teachers expect them to be able to think critically outside of the classroom later in their lives? And if we

start out with students at a young age thinking that the banking system of education is the only “right” way to learn, how can they expect anything else?

The main tenets of Freire’s pedagogy include the oppressor vs. oppressed distinction where he surmises that two models of education exist. One model aims to integrate learners into the logic of the present system, and the other aims to function as a liberating and transformative tool that causes students to think critically about the world around them. The second tenet is a criticism of the “banking model” of education, where students act as an empty vessel that teachers put information into. The third tenet is a critique of the culture of silence often used to keep the status quo in societies, and the fourth calls for action and reflection. The last tenet is conscientization, the process of becoming aware of one’s own oppression and aiming for social change. This process requires lots of critical thinking and reflection, which teachers should help students develop the tools to do.

Freire (2018) states that, “The students, no longer docile listeners, are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration and reconsiders her earlier considerations as the students expressed their own. The problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students...” (p. 81). In this quote Freire tells the reader that students should not only be docile listeners, and that the classroom should be a place of engaged investigation where the students also talk and form their own opinions. The teacher should be open to changing their opinion as well, or at least engaging in a critical and open conversation with their students. Freire’s theory puts the learner and the teacher on more equal footing within the classroom, inherently changing the way we engage with students as free thinkers and not just listeners that we need to “train.”

As a teacher I believe that a way I can lead from a “bottom-up” approach is by encouraging thoughtful conversation between my students through group discussion and activities and primary source analysis that highlights community and culture. Students should be given opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and analyze primary source material in order to be more involved in investigating history. In Paulo Freire’s book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he states that one of the pitfalls of education is the “banking method.” The simple transferral of information or the “top-down” approach in education that he refers to is when students are expected to listen to the information and store it for a later date while the teacher acts as the conduit for that information.

This same logic can also be applied to textbook reading and usage in the classroom. I often hear the complaint from students that their textbook feels too daunting to read that many pages, or it goes over information that they simply forget after the test. While I think that textbooks are great supplemental tools that present information in an orderly and concise way, sometimes the task of reading the textbook feels tedious to students. Textbooks come in all shapes and sizes, new and old, and some textbooks prove more useful than others. I think the main issue that I see with textbooks is that students either don’t feel challenged enough, are intimidated, or feel as if the information is unnecessary. When used improperly or without other supplemental activities, discussions, and primary source readings, textbooks require students to participate in the “banking method” of education.

In my own personal K-12 experience, there was only a few times that my history classes used textbooks to supplement the majority of the class material, and it was in my middle school social studies class. In high school I do not remember having to read textbooks or check one out and take it home. The teachers I had tended to rely on other types of supplemental readings. The

readings often came in packets and were mostly primary source material. The packets made the readings seem manageable and easy to read, and we were encouraged to interact with the text, highlight, and make notes on the paper. Marking up the text is usually not feasible with textbooks that have to be reused the next year. I believe that the lack of a textbook used in my high school classes made reading less daunting for me. The use of primary source readings and activities was personally more engaging to me than the activities in middle school where we read primarily out of a textbook.

I want to explore how textbooks can be disengaging to students in a classroom setting, like how the use of textbooks seemed more daunting to me in middle school. I would like to analyze the limitations of textbooks and explore how textbooks can be used as a supplemental tool instead of a main pillar of the social science classroom. Outdated textbooks often marginalize or exclude minority groups, or inadvertently focus on narratives that exclude certain groups throughout history. This type of singular narrative is often disengaging to students or not challenging enough to their critical thinking. The social science classroom should help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to recognize these patterns in any type of text that they read. Opening up a dialogue in the classroom about the limitations of textbooks helps students actively learn from the textbook while reading with a critical eye and recognize patterns of oppression or marginalization in the materials that they read.

I also would like to explore primary source activities as a way of making a more engaging classroom environment for students. Multidimensional texts and sources that include many different perspectives and backgrounds can be more interesting to read about. Not only do diverse primary sources pull from multiple narratives, cultures, and backgrounds, but can include different modes of information like pictures, newspapers, videos, etc. These types of sources help

students engage with the curriculum and gain a better understanding of the past and people who lived during it. More importantly, primary source material and textbooks used in tandem or textbooks used as a supplemental tool rather than the main focus, can be even more effective in giving students well-rounded perspectives and complete information. Most importantly, creating a classroom that is creative and engaging to students can be done through primary source work and other activities that foster curiosity and attention.

Connection to InTASC Standards

My instructional goals for this project aligned with InTASC Standard 3: Learning Environments, and Standard 8: Instructional Strategies.

Standard 3: Learning Environments

“The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.”

The Learning Environments standard is applicable to my instructional goals because I would like to use primary source activities to increase learning and engagement. Implementation of engaging activities, culturally relevant sources, and firsthand accounts can challenge students more than solitary textbook learning. Creating a challenging learning environment and an environment where students can exercise their critical thinking skills and come to their own conclusions about primary source material. The activities and materials used in the classroom are part of the learning environment as well, and Standard 3 calls for teachers to develop learning experiences that are engaging to students, involve them in collaborative learning with peers and in self-directed learning. Self-directed learning includes developing and using critical thinking

skills like the ones required for in depth reading using primary source documents. Primary sources will vary in type, author, and time period, making them interesting to students.

These instructional strategies and goals relate back to Standard 3: Learning Environments because they help foster a classroom culture that is focused on “active engagement in learning and self-motivation.” Students are more likely to be actively engaged when they have some sort of buy-in to the class. If they feel like the content is applicable to their future, they will buy in. They are also more likely to engage if they can be creative and tap into their own interests in the classroom. If teachers are able to focus on creative interests, applicability for students, and differentiated ways of delivering curriculum, students will have an easier time engaging in material that they would otherwise see as boring.

Standard 5: Application of Content

“The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.”

InTASC Standard 5 has more to do with the delivery of instruction, and less with the classroom environment. Some instructional goals I have that I think are applicable to the standard are teaching students how to evaluate primary sources of information and teaching students how to read both primary sources and textbooks critically. Using this standard, the teacher should connect students with primary source concepts by implementing projects that help students use questioning perspectives across different disciplines.

This standard focuses on the teacher’s ability to foster creative, collaborative, and critical activities. In order to do this with the differing perspectives of primary sources, the teacher should consider age appropriateness, readability and accessibility, adequate background

information, opportunities for collaborative engagement approaches, and purpose of each source that is used in the classroom.

Summary

My own experiences in classrooms that rewarded my creativity and taught history in fun and engaging ways made me want to try and teach history and social science in a similar way. I had teachers who explained historical concepts in fun ways, and had us do creative activities. I thrived in this type of environment, and I have always strived to emulate a similar environment for students. I also thrived when I was able to read material that I could decipher and use critical thinking skills to draw my own conclusions. Textbooks were not an effective way for me to learn, and I often wondered why. I also was curious why the students in my clinical placement were disengaged by reading from textbooks or seemed intimidated by activities pertaining to the textbook. The aim of this investigation is to explore the limitations of textbooks, and consider an alternative that could be more engaging for learners.

The guiding pedagogical theory for this project is Freire's (2018) process of educational liberation. He states that we have to give students the right tools to become active members of society. He also said that students and teachers should be on equal footing in the classroom. He also talks about the traditional "banking model" of education and how it can be hard for students to engage with the material and textbooks because they don't have very much buy-in. The traditional textbook, when used in solitude, asks students to participate in the "banking model" of education.

As a teacher I would like to recognize and encourage creativity and critical thinking in the classroom, while also making the material differentiated and applicable to the everyday lives

of students. One way I can include multiple perspectives, encourage critical thinking and close reading of texts, and give my students access to many different types of sources is by advocating for primary source use in tandem with traditional textbook activities.

These instructional goals fit in with InTASC standards Standard 3: Learning Environments and Standard 5: Application of Content. Standard 3 emphasizes the importance of the learning environment on student engagement. The learning environment also includes the types of materials featured in the classroom and the activities that the teacher does with students. Opening up a dialogue about the limitations of textbook sources with learners can help them become critical thinkers. Standard 5 highlights the importance of connecting concepts like primary source reading to the learner by vetting primary sources themselves, and making sure they fit criteria like age appropriateness, readability and accessibility.

The goal of this project is to circumvent the traditional “banking model” of education by fostering engagement in the classroom through creative and motivational activities. This project focuses on primary source work as a means of bringing curiosity and engagement into the learning environment, as well as other activities that help students practice creativity and diverse learning strategies. Primary source activities used in tandem with textbook learning can help students be more engaged in the learning environment.

Chapter 2. Review of Relevant Research and Scholarship

The topic for this project is examining how teachers can utilize the environment and other resources to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students. I started by looking for articles that could explain why social sciences is a commonly difficult subject for students and why social science textbooks are sometimes a struggle for students to read and interact with. Then I looked for articles that helped me gather ideas and gain a better picture of how teachers can make social sciences, specifically history, more interesting in the classroom through the use of primary sources.

Bambrick-Santoyo, P., (1970, May 15). Make history real: Activate student engagement by giving access. *Uncommon School*.

This article describes a lesson that engages students by activating their prior knowledge and hooking them into learning. The article outlines a specific lesson about W.E.B DuBois and Booker T. Washington and their differing approaches for dealing with systemic racism in the South at the end of the 19th century. The article follows the lesson plans of a specific history teacher who employs this lesson with her students. The teacher starts with a central question that prompts students to think about four elements: what happened, what was the author thinking, why then and there, and what do we think? This prompt and an oral review of the topic followed by short discussion acts as the hook for the activity that activates student prior knowledge of the topic. The teacher then primes her class for the challenge to tackle the question and makes sure they are excited to do so.

A strength of this article is that it includes a short video of the lesson being carried out in real time by the teacher, which is helpful for application of the lesson. The article also includes a

short lesson outline so the framework can be replicated. The article could have included more information about how textbooks and primary source material fits into this particular social science lesson. The article gives excellent information on how to hook students and use historical questioning methods to keep them engaged, but it lacks the instructions on how to incorporate primary source material into the historical questioning process.

If the lesson provided in the article plans on using a textbook in the class, it does not specify. This article offers no commentary on how textbooks impact student learning in social science classrooms. The scope of this investigation requires sources that discuss how textbooks impact student engagement, but also requires sources that discuss how student engagement can be better attained in the classroom. Looking critically at this source, I think it can be beneficial for my project because it gives a very structured questioning strategy to get students engaged in a social science classroom. This information has important practical implications when I will need to develop engagement strategies for future research.

Buckingham, B. R., Caswell, H. L., Durrell, D. D., Jobe, E. R., Kottmeyer, W., Leavell, U. W., Lodge, E., & Whinnery, J. C. (1952). What are textbooks for? *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 33(5), 241–247. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20332196>

The main points of this article explore what a textbook is, what it is used for in the classroom, and how teachers use the tool of a textbook in curriculum. The source argues that textbooks are a tool for teaching and should not be the main focus of the curriculum. It both highlights strengths of textbooks in the classroom, like their concise nature and portable format, while also acknowledging the limitations of some textbooks. For example the tendency for textbooks to be regimented or bland when used wrong. The article surmises that the effectiveness

of the textbook relies on the teacher and how they employ textbooks in their classroom, and even though technology is changing, the textbook can still be a relevant source of information for teachers and students. This source comes from the Phi Delta Kappan education magazine, a professional magazine for educators that was founded in 1916. This long-standing publishing organization writes about school improvement, leadership, standards, accountability, the achievement gap, classroom practice, professional development, teacher education, and research, technology and innovations in teaching and learning.

This source's strengths are that it points out the limitations of using textbooks in classrooms while also pointing out the ways in which textbooks can be useful for supplementing curriculum and guiding students when they are used correctly. The author argues that the teacher should be the one picking the textbooks and making sure that the ones included in the curriculum fit the needs of students who need extra support, and students who are ahead of their grade level. The source also points out that the textbook is merely a book, and the application of the learning relies heavily on the teacher to pick relevant sources and textbooks, and teach them in a way that is not just transactional. For example, the students read the textbook and memorize the information in it. The authors of this source advise against such uses of textbooks in the classroom. A strength of their argument is that the authors neither demonize or elevate the use of textbooks, but advocate for their correct use as a learning tool, giving the article a more unbiased approach to the topic. The articles level approach to textbook usage in the classroom is useful for making sure this investigation has a well-rounded bed of research from which to pull.

A limitation of this source is that it was released in 1952, and although the points made in the article are still relevant in today's classrooms, it is important to note that technology and the scope of primary and secondary source material available for teachers to use has increased since

this article was published. The main argument of the article, that textbooks are a tool and teachers should choose textbooks based on relevance to their students, is still a relevant argument. When using this article for this investigation, the date of publication and how modern methods impact the argument should still be noted.

Grant, S. G., Swan, K., & Lee, J. (2017). *Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education : Understanding the Inquiry Design Model*. Taylor and Francis.

This article outlines the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) of building curriculum and instructional materials. In this model the teacher uses knowledge and expertise to build compelling and supportive questions to help frame content, includes summative and formative activities and performance tasks, and includes primary source material that helps students build their own compelling questions and conclusions. The teacher also helps students develop content disciplinary skills to support and defend their own ideas. IDM uses the framework for State Social Studies Standards and builds off of the C3 Inquiry Arc. This article outlines the IDM framework and gives a one page guide that teachers are able to fill out and use in their own lessons to facilitate the framework in class. The reasoning behind framing questions in this way is because many issues in social sciences have a multidisciplinary or multifaceted history behind them and require a multidisciplinary answer and approach.

The article's strengths are that it goes over step by step instructions on how to implement this model into teaching. It starts by explaining the questioning approach and how to build compelling questions for students, how to root those questions in standards, how to assess students using this model, and how to choose disciplinary sources that are beneficial in this

model. This article is impactful because it underscores the idea that students should be given ample opportunity to draw their own conclusions and ask their own questions about source material. The article then gives a tangible way to achieve this goal and be a guide for students to ask compelling questions and make their own arguments about content.

This article could include commentary about source material like textbooks and their uses and impacts on students and classroom engagement. However, I do think that the overarching theme of the IDM process as outlined in this article is that students should be taught in a way that propels them to ask original questions and analyze sources themselves. I think that if the IDM method is correctly employed in classrooms that the manner of source material should not matter because students are thinking critically about the textbooks they are reading or the sources they are looking at. This includes biases, authors, and context of the sources. The method that this article surmises can tie into the research for this project because it gives a solid questioning framework for teachers to employ in classes to engage students in critical thinking about sources.

Kaiser, C. (2010). Redrawing the boundaries: A constructivist approach to combating student apathy in the secondary history classroom. *The History Teacher*, 223-232. Society for History Education.

This article describes how social science can be a difficult subject to convey to students because the scope of it is so large. The article points out the struggles of adhering to state standards and choosing topics that meet these standards, and on top of that forming lessons that are engaging and feel relevant to students. The article poses the question; how do we combat student apathy, engage all students, and make history relevant? Individualized thematic research

and assessment is one of the approaches this article suggests. Students construct their own understanding and look at history through their own perspectives.

In order to achieve this thematic research approach, the article outlines how history has been divided in the classroom into different thematic eras or units. Dividing history into eras makes the study more focused and allows the students to look at changes over time, as well as patterns in a chronological order of events. The article then calls teachers to look beyond our traditional view of history and redefine historical perspectives. It gives examples of some different ways of grouping history, for example using the history of music to teach US history. Starting with the rise of Jazz in New Orleans and moving through different musical eras in order to teach what was happening in the country at the time.

One of this article's strengths is that it shows educators how they can use a different type of historical approach to hook students into the subject matter. If students are apathetic about war and foreign policy, but like learning about new technologies, the teacher can teach war and foreign policy through the lens of what types of technology was being invented during certain wars. This differentiation of historical approach is useful for the scope of this project because it can be used to engage students in a type of historical analysis that works for many different class types and groups of students. The article only briefly mentions source material and the limitations of textbooks in classrooms. Thinking critically about this article, it can be used in this research to tie in more student engagement options for social science classrooms, but fails to link in how source material and textbooks factor into student engagement.

Loewen, J. W. (2018). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. The New Press.

This source examines the elements of textbooks used in social science classrooms specifically and weights their benefits and downfalls. The book also analyzes why social sciences can be a difficult subject for some students to get involved with and relate to. Textbooks can be a contributor to this lack of interest or engagement because of the way they are written. James Loewen analyzes twelve popular American textbooks and critiques their content and layout. He concludes that many textbooks only portray events and historical figures through one lens instead of encouraging students to view history and people through many lenses. He also states that many American textbooks turn historical people into heroes and gloss over many of the complex or imperfect parts of their history. Textbooks can make history very one dimensional, straightforward, and flat. He also states that excluding diverse perspectives, turning historical figures into one dimensional people, and making history boring to students.

This source was impactful because it casts a critical eye on why social sciences are difficult to learn and why some students think the subject of history is “boring.” It also critiques textbooks and not only points out some of the flaws in our modern textbooks, as well as points out new ways to teach history in a way that is more engaging to students. I think the strengths of this source is its ability to call out injustices in American textbooks and point out the ways in which minorities have been misrepresented or underrepresented. Students can feel alienated or disinterested if the only source in a class is telling history from one flat perspective.

This source gives ample critique of course material and the limitations of textbooks and when used in tandem with previous articles and sources will help build a comprehensive argument for why textbooks are sometimes difficult for students to learn from and engage with. I learned that including diverse perspectives, primary sources, and critical thinking about the

limitations of the textbooks we use in class can help students relate to and engage with material. A takeaway from this source is that textbooks are often hard for students to relate to, and are much more effective when supplemented with primary source material that make historical figures and events more than one dimensional for students.

In the larger scope of this project, this book can be used to examine the limits of textbooks and develop a way to communicate these limitations to students and teach them not to take the textbook at face value. Teachers can turn this lesson into a greater discussion about effectively analyzing the biases and weaknesses of all kinds of different source material. Discussions about source material can impact student engagement in a positive way because it kick-starts the process of critical thinking about history and gives students more tools to use when coming to their own historical conclusions.

Musbach, J. W. (2001). Using primary sources in the secondary classroom. *OAH Magazine of History*, 16(1), 30–32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163484>

Using primary sources in a secondary classroom can be an alternative to textbook reading, or used in tandem with textbook reading to give a better picture of historical events, personal motivations, and firsthand experiences. This source is a basic guide to using primary source material in the classroom. The author of this article, J.W. Musbach surmises that primary source work is often seen as a solution for engaging history students, but they are the most effective when matched with the educational and developmental level of students. Musbach outlines a few factors of primary sources that teachers should consider before including those sources in the lesson. The considerations include age appropriateness, readability and accessibility, adequate background information, opportunities for collaborative engagement

approaches, and a purpose behind including the source that motivates students to learn about it. While primary sources should be embedded in the class, they should also be adequately vetted for readability, and include enough background information that they are easily understood by students.

This article was published by the *OAH Magazine of History* in 2001. The magazine itself was founded in 1985 and has been publishing informative articles, lesson plans, and current historiography since. One of the strengths of this article is its reliable publisher and subsequently its sound information. However, this article was published over 20 years ago and may need additional cross referencing to make sure the practices it advises are still applicable. The article can also be used to form a curriculum that centers primary source learning as a supplement or replacement to textbook reading and learning. The source will help build alternate activities for social science students that may boost classroom engagement.

Pearcy, M., & Duplass, J. (2011). Teaching history: Strategies for dealing with breadth and depth in the standards and accountability age. *The Social Studies*, 102(3), 110-116. DOI: 10.1080/00377996.2010.525546.

Planning for the breadth and depth in a history course can be difficult, this article outlines strategies for dealing with the scope and scale of history and forming content into tangible and teachable lessons that students will understand. The article first outlines what constitutes “historical knowledge.” It is more than the input of information and the ability to recall that information, but is classified as knowing how to think and how to employ different modes of reasoning to history learning. Modes of reasoning can be ideas such as historical method,

contextualization, present-mindedness, historical projection, multiple causation, organizing themes, cause and effect, etc. The article then goes on to describe several different approaches to teaching breadth and depth in a history classroom. Different scholars weigh in and are cited throughout this article, and a strength of this article is that it gives multiple different perspectives and approaches for learning and teaching history that help employ modes of reasoning. The author surmises that content should be aimed at engaging students in modes of reasoning and encouraging them to think critically about high level questions.

A few strengths of this article include exploring the limitations and challenges that social science teachers face when dealing with the large scope of history and sifting through information that is relevant to their students. This applies to the scope of this investigation because it outlines different methods of planning curriculum that account for the large scope of history. This article could be used in lieu of the traditional structure of a textbook, or in tandem with the traditional structure of a textbook in order to develop a curriculum that is more engaging for social studies students. This particular article can be used as a tool for curriculum planning that engages modes of reasoning for students.

Ruswick, B. (2015). What does it mean to be an American?: Training history students and prospective teachers to see the assumptions in their textbooks. *The History Teacher*, 48(4), 667–692. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24810453>

Ruswick writes about their struggles and musing about teaching a college history course to undergraduate students going into the field of education themselves. Ruswick points out the struggles of using textbooks and how the scope of textbooks can be lacking, or how textbooks sometimes sanitize history to fulfill various social, economic, or political pressures. The author argues that it is important to teach students to read textbooks with a critical eye.

Ruswick explains how he tries to give the future teachers in his class a more comprehensive narrative of history outside of textbooks, and how in his own classroom he has students reflect on their own past experiences with K-12 textbooks and their pitfalls. Students in Ruswick's classroom completed an activity that had them reflecting on the demographics of the historical figures included in the textbooks they chose to analyze. The assignment concluded that out of the 1,000 individuals Ruswick's students identified, only 8.9% were women, and there was barely any representation of other minority groups. Ruswick then explains how he uses this activity to create a more open dialogue with his students about how history is taught and who gets represented in typical narratives.

This article is useful because it offers a perspective from higher education/college that can be interesting to compare to high school sources and textbooks. Because the scope of this project is looking at history textbooks used in college classrooms however, there will need to be other sources included in this investigation that help apply the findings of this article to a high school level classroom. The project Ruswick has his students do in his class could also be applicable to a high school social science class. If the teacher wanted to open up a dialogue about representation in social studies textbooks, a simplified version of this investigative activity could help students view textbooks with a critical eye.

Schussler, D. L. (2009). Beyond content: How teachers manage classrooms to facilitate intellectual engagement for disengaged students. *Theory Into Practice*, 48(2), 114–121.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40344601>.

This source takes more of a classroom management approach to getting students engaged in material. The article argues that students are more engaged with classroom activities and

material when students feel that there are opportunities for them to succeed in the class, that there are multiple avenues for learning available to them, and that they are respected as people or that the teacher believes in their ability to learn and grow. This source cites interviews and notes from a group of students from an alternative school for students who are disengaged but have “academic potential.” A strength of this source is that it contains firsthand accounts of what works for a certain group of students in this particular classroom. It also takes a classroom management and support approach towards the topic of student engagement rather than a content approach like many of the articles compiled in this project.

The publisher of this article has existed since 1962. *Theory Into Practice* is a nationally recognized and peer-reviewed academic journal, making it a strong reliable source for this investigation. *Theory Into Practice* covers topics like learning and teaching, counseling, teacher education and professional development, classroom management, administration and supervision, curriculum, and technology. A limitation of this article in the big picture of this investigation is that it does not cover textbook learning, or the advantages and disadvantages of textbooks. However, it does point out that one of the reasons for classroom disengagement is that students do not feel challenged enough. There is a middle ground between too easy and too hard where students thrive. The same logic employed in this article can be applied to textbooks and their use in classrooms. If a textbook is too easy and the accompanying activities and lessons are not challenging enough, it can cause students to be disengaged or view textbook reading as busywork. If the textbook is too dense or there are too many chapters assigned at once, students can feel daunted by textbook work.

Xerri, M. J., Radford, K., & Shacklock, K. (2018). Student engagement in academic activities: a social support perspective. *Higher Education*, 75(4), 589–605.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26449270>

Student engagement is a critical factor in student success according to Radford and Shacklock in this article. This source credits a students' sense of purpose and a students' relatedness to peers and teachers to be the driving force behind student engagement in classroom material. The article centers around a survey done in 2015 in Queensland, Australia that studied how student to student, and student to teacher relationships impacted student engagement in the school. This article is useful to the scope of this project because it outlines some different ways teachers can help combat students' apathy that is more than just within the history textbooks, sources, and content.

The article focuses on the feeling of belongingness that students need to feel in order to be successful. This approach is different from other approaches outlined in the previous article, and a sense of belonging can be hard to quantify and harder to replicate exactly from one student to another. This source is useful for rounding out the sources for this project because it appeals to and accounts for student belongingness as one of the main reasons why students become engaged in classroom material. A limitation of this source is that the students participating in the survey and subsequent research were undergraduate students and not high school students, which is somewhat out of the scope of this project.

All of these articles have to do with student engagement in the classroom, and they all center around high school or college students and classrooms. Most of the articles dive into the struggles and limitations of textbooks in social science classrooms and how the limitations of

textbooks can relate to student engagement, specifically in social science classrooms. Some articles just focus on the limitations of social science textbooks and what teachers can do to mitigate some of these struggles. There are a few articles that relate to student engagement generally, and how students need to feel a sense of relatedness and interest in the class to be successful.

The articles given above will help this investigation to analyze textbook shortcomings, why textbooks can be disengaging to social science students, and how primary source activities, readings, and references can give more depth and dimension to social studies learning, subsequently increasing students' levels of engagement. I will use any sources that analyze the breadth and depth, limitations, and any lacking representation of minority groups or sanitized events. These articles will help develop a dialog with students about how to read textbooks with a critical eye and analyze the information in them. The articles about engagement, primary sources, and relatedness and classroom interest will impact my project by helping to develop an alternative curriculum based more on primary source activities rather than textbook reading. The goal of using these sources is to identify if a primary source centered activity is more engaging for social science students than traditional textbooks.

Chapter 3. Methods

Action research is the process of inquiry that assists the researcher in bettering their own actions. Action research is about exploring a research question in a disciplined way that is both conducted by the researcher and for the researcher. Richard Sagor (2000) defines action research as “a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the “actor” in improving and/or refining his or her actions. (p. 3)” The purpose of action research is to better one's own actions by conducting an inquiry process. The inquiry process is conducted by the researcher and consists of a detailed and disciplined research process.

The action research process often has a positive effect on the researcher and is an empowering experience because the research is always relevant to the participants. The researchers curate the focus and methods of the project and also are the primary consumers of the project's findings, ensuring relevance to the researcher. The process of action research also helps educators be more effective at what they do because it focuses on the growth and development of their students. The outcome of action research usually produces tangible and applicable results when done correctly, and both the teacher and the students benefit from the process and outcome because the teacher can use the data collected and the focus of their research question to make the student experience better in the classroom.

The steps to take in the action research process are as follows; selecting a focus, clarifying theories, identifying research questions, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting results, and taking informed action (Sagor, 2000). Selecting a focus is determining what aspect of student learning the teacher wishes to investigate and what is going to be the most beneficial and worthwhile. Clarifying theories means picking a theory that aligns with the teachers own values

and perspectives that is also applicable to the research question. Identifying research questions means generating focused research questions that align to the central focus of the project. Collecting data means collecting information that is valid and reliable. Analyzing that data includes sorting and arranging data to see what the data is telling and why the data played out the way it did. Reporting your results could be as simple as writing them down and sharing them with your colleagues, or can be something more official like publishing the findings. Taking informed action is the last step in the research process and consists of applying the findings to the classroom environment and refining teacher practices.

The action research method is effective for this study because action research enables the researcher to explore a question and improve the educational setting through research on the actual classroom itself. The information gathered is always applicable because the focus is the classroom and the students in it. This process allows for the researcher to focus on an area that they think will improve the classroom environment. The process of the research is just as important in the learning process as the product.

In the case of my project, action research is an effective method because it allowed me to see how my students respond to certain activities in real time. The research focus of this study is how teachers can utilize the environment and other resources to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students. Action research fits the scope of this prompt because changes in the environment and the class activities had to be analyzed to see if students learn better doing one activity versus another. The teacher had to analyze which environmental factors make students learn better. Learning this information by the end of the project made me a better teacher and helped me identify what aspects of the classroom environment/activities students are enjoying in real time.

The main research question that guided this study was: how can teachers utilize the environment and other resources to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students? A creative and interactive classroom environment and curriculum can help students be more engaged and perform better. A curriculum that uses relevant primary source analysis and interactive group activities can help foster student engagement in the classroom.

Contexts of the Study

This study took place at ABC High School in Oregon. The town is very rural and surrounded by farmland and is also known for logging. This town is located in the Willamette Valley just outside Salem, Oregon. At ABC High School there are 850 students enrolled, 44 teachers, an average of 20 students per class, 83% are on track to graduate, 14% students with disabilities, 26% of students are experiencing poverty, 2% American Indian/Alaska Native, <10 Asian students, <10 Black/African American students, 13% Hispanic/Latino students, 3% Multiracial, <10 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 56% female, 53% male, 78% White, and <10 students in foster care. There are 4 administrators at ABC High, 7 counselors, 15 educational assistants, 15 elective teachers, 4 food service staff, 5 language arts teachers, 5 facility and maintenance staff, 3 math teachers, 10 office staff, 4 PE and health teachers, 5 science teachers, 4 social science teachers, and 6 special education teachers.

This particular class that my action research took place in is a freshman Accelerated US History class that takes place during 6th period. There are two students with 504 plans in this class, and one student who attends the Talented and Gifted program. There are a few students with health concerns, one student has a heart condition that sometimes induces anxiety, and advocates for breaks if needed. Another student is currently on crutches due to a knee injury and

is allowed to pack up a few minutes before the bell. One student has a heart condition and 911 needs to be called immediately if they faint. There are three students who have some sort of seasonal allergy, dust/mold allergy, or asthma. These students are able to advocate for themselves and some carry a rescue inhaler if needed.

In this class there are 22 students, 13 girls and 9 boys, there are no nonbinary students that have disclosed this to me or made it known in the classroom. There are no students who identify as emergent bilinguals, although there are a few with Latine heritage, Native American heritage and Filipino heritage. Because of the diversity in this class, it is important to highlight cultural funds of knowledge. 6th period Accelerated History is at the end of the school day, causing more absences for away games and tournaments for students that participate in Spring sports. The needs of these students will included making up work or looking ahead on Canvas to see the assignments ahead of time, they also required verbal reminders or review of previous material for classes that were missed.

I have worked with this particular group of students since September when the school year started. The course included several group activities like group presentations, socratic seminars, or information swaps that students do in sets of two. I have noticed that this group of students interact well with one another and like to work in pairs or small groups. It is beneficial for this particular class to include more group or partner work, or activities where students can discuss as a group. The students in this class are never hesitant to speak up during class discussion or answer questions that the teacher poses. Preparing activities that catered to the class's enthusiasm to talk helped me play to the student's strengths.

My strengths with this class were that I communicated well with my students. They felt comfortable opening up to me, joking around, and communicating their struggles or worries.

They also felt comfortable discussing topics in class, and we had great discussions about the class material. Students were comfortable asking questions in class. I also am comfortable with adjusting my class plan or curriculum to accommodate students' needs. I am flexible and can pivot easily to differentiate learning in my classroom.

In some cases, however, the class can grow a little rowdy or off-topic because they are so comfortable in the classroom. I think I could improve with my redirection tactics in the future and getting the class to refocus when their questions get off-topic. In my opinion, this is a good problem to have as I would prefer my students to feel comfortable and be outspoken in the classroom and have to reign them back in rather than be afraid to speak up.

Data Collection & Analysis

The types of data I collected for this project were lesson plans, student interviews and feedback, class surveys, teaching reflection journals, rubric scores and primary source work or assignments that we did in class, and reflections on how students did on those assignments. According to Sagor (2000) lesson plans and grade books are a great way to collect data because they contain a vast arrangement of classroom activities, usually arranged in chronological order. Gradebooks are good data collecting tools because they offer feedback on assignments in real time, and keep a record of what types of assignments on which students do well. Gradebooks are also informative for teachers when looking at what subgroups of students did well or struggled with certain assignments. Separating data into different groups of students like gender, access to computers at home, socioeconomic status, sports and workload outside of school, etc., can help differentiate what types of assignments and activities are beneficial to all students and which assignments can be altered to better serve the whole classroom.

The curriculum was important to the data collection process because it gave me a comprehensive look at the lessons for the whole year. Sometimes when looking at lesson plans and day by day outlines, teachers can get caught up in the minutia of the lesson and how little details affect students. This hyper focused assessment is a good thing, but sometimes a wider lens needs to be looked through to make sure the flow of the lessons make sense in the greater scheme of the curriculum. This type of broad analysis ensured that the pacing and flow of the lessons made sense to students.

Teaching reflection journals can be an excellent source of data for both student and teacher. Student behavior is also important data, and often the details of everyday classroom happenings fade from the teacher's mind as time passes. Keeping journals of student behaviors and their reactions to the assignments or activities can be effective data for gauging student engagement and interest. Keeping journals and reflecting on classes helped me as the teacher collect data over time, which was extremely beneficial for trend analysis.

Assessments are a key part of measuring student understanding and engagement because they compare student performance to an unbiased and carefully thought out scale that leaves student performance with room for personal growth. When creating a rubric assessment scale, Sagor suggests that teachers consider where you would be likely to find most of your competent students after a successful instructional experience, what type of performance would you likely see from a student whose work was truly exceptional, and what type of work would you likely get from a student whose performance was only minimally acceptable? This type of assessment and rubric building strategy sets up a rubric that accounts for a student's every changing ability and improvement. This helped my assessments be both classroom and student specific, and

created a more accurate scale for collecting data because the instrument of measurement was fine tuned to my particular set of students.

When I collected data in the classroom during this unit I based the majority of the data collection off a few key research questions. “How can teachers utilize primary source activities to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students?” And “What types of activities are most engaging for students?” I looked for ways my activities made the classroom environment and learning social sciences more fun and engaging, and I looked at how my students did when learning from primary source material. In the table below, I outlined which forms of data collection I planned to use to obtain information for each research question. I collected data about the effectiveness and engagement of my planned activities by collecting lesson plans, student grades, student surveys and feedback. To collect information about how effective primary source instruction and activities were in this class I looked at my own lesson plans, surveys about if students found the primary sources effective, and student grades on the primary source assignment we did in class.

Research Questions	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3
How can teachers utilize primary source activities to make history and other social sciences more engaging for	What data from your WOUTPA will help answer this question? -Lesson plans	Class/Homework assignments - Primary source reading assignments versus textbook	Assessments -Surveys

<p>students?</p> <p>(The topic for this project is examining how teachers can utilize the environment and different types of activities to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students.)</p>	<p>-Do students prefer primary source and secondary sources better than textbook reading?</p>	<p>reading assignments</p> <p>-Student grades on primary source work, assess effectiveness of primary source work and other activities on student retention and engagement through grades.</p>	
<p>What types of activities are most engaging for students?</p>	<p>Interviews, surveys</p> <p>-Student interviews and student feedback into what they like reading/working on/doing in class.</p> <p>-What about</p>	<p>Assessments</p> <p>-How well are students doing on quizzes, surveys that students answer.</p>	<p>Checklists and teacher reflections</p> <p>-What am I doing during class with all types of sources that could bias the data one way or another?</p> <p>Have a checklist of</p>

	textbooks make it so hard to finish reading? Length of chapters or content?		things I do when introducing material that is the same for all sources.
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The data analysis used in this procedure is focused on qualitative data and student feedback, reactions, demeanor, written surveys, and assessment. Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to make insights beyond numbers, which is beneficial in a classroom with diverse students who learn differently and have different opinions and insights. I followed the traditional qualitative data analysis procedure by conducting interviews with students, running surveys, and asking open-ended questions. A way to adapt qualitative data analysis to a particular classroom is through open coding.

Open coding is an interpretive way of looking at data and running qualitative tests. It allows the researcher to adjust the collection methods to fit the classroom and the students in it. Open coding allows the researcher to adapt the data collection method into a code that best fits the survey group. In this case the survey group is the students in my classroom. I used open coding to make sense of the data by organizing the data into groups. In this analysis the groups are student written feedback, written surveys, assessments, and teacher records. The concepts and themes that came from the data were how students felt about the creative and interactive assignments, how students learned when working with primary sources, and how students did on assessments.

I asked my cooperating teacher to review my data, and the feedback I received helped me reinforce the themes I was already seeing in the data. My cooperating teacher also helped me

address some of the technical problems in the presentation of the data, and made sure the flow of the presentation made sense to the audience and presented the data in a digestible way both for myself trying to understand themes, and any potential new readers.

Researcher Positionality

The scope of this project was how interactive activities and primary source analysis was an effective way of engaging students. In my social science classes in high school, I was fortunate to have teachers that understood me and the way I learned. I was also fortunate to have teachers who incorporated lots of primary source work into their curricula. In my social science classes I remember doing a lot of primary source work, and it engaged me in the learning process because it made me feel like a detective. Whenever we did primary source analysis it helped me connect more vividly to the people we were learning about. I want to unlock this same feeling in my students and try to get them hooked on the idea of being a detective and diving into history in tangible ways.

A large part of my identity is my love for history, and another large part of my identity is my love for art and doing creative projects. I wanted to try and incorporate creativity and art into the classroom. I remember doing one-pagers or creative posters for my history classes. I invested so much time into the research for those posters, enjoyed the creative process, and always felt proud of the result. I want to incorporate this type of creativity into my lessons. Although I know that not every student enjoys being creative in the same way that I do, I think it is extremely beneficial to student engagement to incorporate creativity and a sense of fun into the social studies classroom.

In Chapter 1 I described how Paulo Friere and his philosophy applies to the type of classroom environment that I was to curate. Friere states that students should be critical co-investigators with the teacher as they look at the past. He states that students should not be docile listeners, and that the student's opinion and reflections should impact the teacher just as much as the teacher impacts the student. (Freire, 2018) This approach to my classroom has led me to focus more on qualitative data, student feedback, surveys of the classroom, and other types of data that can gauge student engagement and interest based on the investigative and creative aspects of the class. I would like to know how much students are enjoying and engaging with the activities. Student feedback and surveys, as well as journals and reflections about student behavior is an effective way to see if students are engaging with the curriculum. Gradebooks and lesson plans are concrete ways to measure if students are actually learning and absorbing the material in the lessons. Used together, I think these methods of data collection gave me a well-rounded picture of the effectiveness of different types of activities on student engagement.

Chapter 4. Findings

Four major themes emerged from analyzing the data. They are, *Primary Source Work is Fun! What Do Students Find Engaging? Engagement Through Rubric Scores*, and *Who Read the Textbook? Textbooks vs. Primary Source Supplementation*. Each theme is discussed with supportive data. Table 4.1 below outlines the research questions and methods of data collection used in this project.

Research Questions	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3
<p>How can teachers utilize primary source activities to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students?</p> <p>(The topic for this project is examining how teachers can utilize the environment and different types of activities to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students.)</p>	<p>What data from your WOUTPA will help answer this question?</p> <p>-Lesson plans</p> <p>-Do students prefer primary source and secondary sources better than textbook reading?</p>	<p>Class/Homework assignments</p> <p>- Primary source reading assignments versus textbook reading assignments</p> <p>-Student grades on primary source work, assess effectiveness of primary source work and other activities on student retention and engagement through grades.</p>	<p>Assessments</p> <p>-Surveys</p>
<p>What types of activities are most engaging for students?</p>	<p>Interviews, surveys</p> <p>-Student interviews and student feedback into what they like reading/working on/doing in class.</p> <p>-What about textbooks make it so hard to finish reading? Length of chapters or content?</p>	<p>Assessments</p> <p>-How well are students doing on quizzes, surveys that students answer.</p>	<p>Checklists and teacher reflections</p> <p>-What am I doing during class with all types of sources that could bias the data one way or another? Have a</p>

			checklist of things I do when introducing material that is the same for all sources. -What activities are students engaging with the most?
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Table 4.1. Resource Questions and Data Sources.

This table shows the research questions that helped to structure the research process, and the types of data collected to help answer the research questions. It also includes the research question about how teachers can utilize primary source activities to make history and other social sciences more engaging for students, and what other types of activities are engaging for students in this particular history class. It was included in this introduction to show how data will be collected and which questions to keep in mind when reading the conclusions of this study.

Primary Source Work is Fun!

This theme is named after a mantra I repeat in the classroom a lot when teaching about primary sources and analyzing primary sources. This theme centers around the effectiveness of one primary source activity in particular and how students reacted to it, and if the sources helped them relate to the real people and events from the time period of the unit.

Data were gathered in this theme from class survey insights and student feedback. Lesson plans and teacher reflections were also used to demonstrate what type of primary source activity was used in this lesson and how students reacted to it. Data was also collected from student surveys to see if they found the primary source work effective for their learning.

In Figure 1 below I have included the primary source activity that students participated in in class. This activity is classified as “primary source work” because it was an exercise in reading primary source documents that all center around the same event, comparing and corroborating the sources together, and assessing their reliability and biases. The primary sources themselves were about the desegregation of Little Rock High School in Arkansas in 1957, and the incident where Minniejean Brown, a member of the Little Rock Nine, was suspended.

The lesson plan included the main activity and step by step explicit instruction of the material. The student expectations, classroom management techniques, and behavior expectations are also included in this illustration. The inclusion of these steps helps the viewer see how each step of the lesson is supposed to affect student engagement and acquisition of the learning targets. Figure 4.1 shows a snapshot of the lesson plan for the Little Rock Nine Activity below.

STEP-BY-STEP EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION: → (models/explains skill/strategy & teacher talk): ADD ROWS AS NEEDED	STUDENT EXPECTATIONS TOWARD LEARNING OUTCOME: →	CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES/TRANSITIONS/DIRECTIONS: →	STUDENT BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS: →
Opening/Hook (10): Teacher will have an agenda slide up on the board with a bellringer on it for students to think about as they come in. “Good afternoon students, today we will be continuing our Civil Rights Unit. Please grab your chromebooks if you haven’t already and find your seats. How was everyone’s day so far?” Introduce the lesson and go over reminders and the daily agenda.	Opening: Students should be in their seats and have chromebooks out by the time the bell rings. Students listen while the teacher outlines the activities and agenda for the day so that students can be prepared for the class and no assignments come as a surprise.	Agenda slide and the established routine of coming into class and getting their assigned chromebook out of the chromebook cart. Checking in with students to make sure their days are going good and no one has any major concerns or problems in the classroom or outside of it.	Students will listen to the daily agenda and be in class/in their seats when the bell rings. <u>Phones away from bell to bell.</u>
Bellringer (15): <u>Legacy of Little Rock Nine C-SPAN Classroom</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does Ernest Green describe his experience at Little Rock Central High School? Describe the relationship among the Little Rock Nine students as Ernest Green explains. What is the legacy of the “Little Rock Nine” that Ernest Green describes? 	Bellringer: Students will be engaged during the video and will respond to the prompts in 1-2 sentences.	Bellringer: Visual timer for completing bellringer. <u>Verbal and written instructions.</u>	Bellringer: <u>Phones away from bell to bell.</u>
Lesson (5): Little Rock Nine Slideshow/video <u>The Little Rock Nine</u> (3) Primary Source Analysis refresher. Refresh students’ minds on how to analyze sources. <u>Date of publication, authors name, authors motivations, the reason the document was written, historical context, etc. (2)</u>	Lesson: Students will be engaged with the short video about the Little Rock Nine and keep in mind that it is the background for the assignment we will do later in class. Students will connect to their prior knowledge about how to interpret and analyze primary source material.	Lesson: Chromebooks shut or turned around.	Lesson: Students will have chromebooks shut or turned to the front so they are not a distraction. <u>Phones away from bell to bell.</u>
Activity (35): <u>Little Rock primary source activity</u> Explain the activity and separate students into pairs or groups of three if needed. <u>Little Rock Nine Assignment</u>	Activity: <u>Students will use their own critical thinking to answer questions about the primary source documents and will connect what they learned to the learning target.</u> How did the Little Rock Nine protest in their own ways? <u>Students will collaborate with one another on this activity to foster community and group learning in the classroom.</u>	Activity: Partner or small group learning, frequent check-ins from teacher, teacher walking around the room and asking leading questions, visual timer so students know how much time they have to complete the assignment. <u>Verbal and written instructions.</u>	Activity: Students will be on task while working with groups and partners, students will use appropriate language while working together. <u>Phones away from bell to bell.</u>

Figure 4.1. Lesson Plan from Little Rock Primary Source Activity

The expectations in this lesson for the students was that they used critical thinking to answer questions about the primary source documents. This assignment was also collaborative

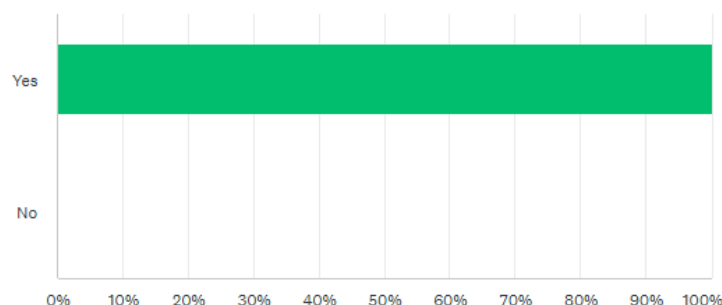
and students were able to work together to complete the assignment, which could have helped the lesson be more engaging for students because they could discuss the material with peers.

Student feedback was unanimously positive about the effectiveness of the primary source activity at helping them gain a better understanding of the material. First, the measurements of “engagement” must be defined. Engagement is the attention, curiosity, interest, and motivation that students exhibit in the learning process. Motivation and curiosity can be fostered by a variety of different strategies in the classroom. Helping students relate to and identify with people and figures from history that relate to the material and time period can help students be curious and motivated to learn by humanizing and personifying historical content. Primary source work is an effective way to deliver content while also piquing curiosity and relating the material to students.

In Figure 4.2 below, students were asked if they felt that the primary sources used in class helped them relate to the time period and the people living in it. The primary source activity used in class was a series of documents, interviews, and transcripts about the expulsion of Minniejean Brown from Little Rock High School. The purpose of using these documents was to help students relate to the Little Rock Nine students using first hand accounts and interviews.

Did you feel like the primary sources we looked at in class helped you gain a better understanding of/relate to the time period and people living in it?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Yes	100.00%	19
▼ No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		19

Figure 4.2. Primary Source Activity Effectiveness Graph

In this graph I noticed that 100% of students who answered the survey found that primary source activities gave them a greater understanding of the time period and the people living in it. The students also felt that primary source activities we did in class, like the Little Rock Primary Source Activity in Figure 4.1, helped them relate to the material. This particular poll does not gauge how much students *enjoyed* the activity and primary source work, but it does measure if students were engaged with the material and gave them a better understanding of the time period and people involved.

In summary, student polls showed that the class appreciated primary source learning as a means of understanding and relating to the people from the time period. Teacher lesson plan data showed what the lesson entailed and how to replicate similar understanding for students in the future. Although the poll did not measure student enjoyment of the activity, it did underscore the

importance of primary source activities in helping motivate and engage students through texts that allowed them to relate to and empathize with the people in the sources.

What Do Students Find Engaging?

This theme analyzes the different types of activities in the lesson plan and if those activities helped engage students. This section looks at which activities students liked the most and which activities helped engage them and increase their retention of the unit's objectives and information. I picked a few different activities to focus on in this section. These were activities we did in the unit that students seemed the most interested in. Students were given a choice between the Little Rock Nine Primary Source Activity, the Key Figure Project One-Pager, and the Human Timeline Activity. All these activities were designed with student engagement, attention, motivation and curiosity in mind.

Figure 4.3 below shows the lesson plan excerpt from the Key Figure Activity to demonstrate the learning objectives, plan, student behavior expectations, and the academic supports used in the activity. The figure is included in this section to show an overview of the activity and what its intended effects on students are, and to give the observer a picture of what happened in the class during the activity.

<p>Activity: Explain the Key Figures activity and worksheet. Each group will be assigned a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement that they will have the rest of the class to research and fill out their Key Figures Worksheet. After filling out their worksheet, groups will make a one pager in Google Slides or on a poster board that briefly summarizes their key figure. (Who, where, when, why was your key figure an important person in the Civil Rights Movement? How did your key figure facilitate change? In what ways did your key figure face adversity? (discrimination, marginalization, racism))</p>	<p>Activity: Students will work in groups to facilitate collaboration and make the activity more engaging. Students will use class time wisely to answer the questions on the worksheet and craft their one pagers.</p>	<p>Activity: Frequent check ins, teacher monitoring the room to make sure students are on task and to answer questions about the instructions or material.</p>	<p>Activity: Students will use class time to work on their questions and one pagers in their groups, they will discuss their key figures with each other as well. Phones away from bell to bell</p>
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Figure 4.3. Key Figure One-Pager Activity Plan.

The activity above facilitated student engagement by fostering independent research and interest. Students were also able to research with a partner to help engagement through peer

learning and group support. The goal of the independent research activity was that students were able to use scaffolded guidelines and research questions to guide their research, but also foster creativity by allowing them to use different methods of research and presentation to display their projects. The research guidelines were “who was your key figure, what did they do, where were they from, why were they important to the Civil Rights Movement, how did they facilitate change, and in what ways did they face adversity?” These guidelines helped students meet the learning targets for this lesson but also were broad enough to foster creativity and self-guided research and interpretation.

The next activity was a human timeline activity that required students to get up out of their seat and arrange themselves into a timeline based on what they remembered from the whole unit. This activity is demonstrated in Figure 4.4 below. A group of students were given an event from the Civil Rights Movement taped to their back that they could not look at. The rest of the class had to describe the event to the first group of students and get them to guess which event they were in order to “unlock” them and place them in the timeline. Once the timeline was complete, we went through as a class to see how many events the students deduced correctly.

<p>Activity (15): Timeline and context activity: Discuss the timeline of the Civil Rights Movement.</p> <p>"In this activity, I will need 15 volunteers (if not enough volunteers, use the wheel of names to randomly select 15 students). Each person in your human timeline is going to get an event taped to their back, it is your job to arrange them in chronological order as closely as you can. You are welcome to use the American Vision textbook to look up dates and help complete the human timeline. Use what you have learned so far this week and what you learned from the video we just watched to help guide you. The catch is, you cannot tell the person with an event taped to them, exactly what they are. You need to explain the event to them, what happened, who was involved, etc. in order to "unlock" that person and arrange them in the timeline.</p> <p>Visual timer up on the board so students know how much time they have for the timeline.</p> <p>Activity Part 2 (15): Using Canva or a piece of paper, create a timeline on paper individually, using the knowledge you gained from the human timeline activity, and using colors and designs. Timeline entries must follow the criteria below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include all 10 events from our human timeline activity. Be colorful or incorporate some type of design (refer to the examples we saw at the beginning of class today if you need inspiration). Include the date that the event happened on. Include a short blurb describing the event. (1-2 sentences) Any key figures heavily associated with that event that we have learned about so far or that you presented. <p>Instructions: Written Timeline Instructions</p>	<p>Activity: Students will use the human timeline activity to round out their knowledge of the early CRM and test their retention from the last four days.</p> <p>Activity Part 2 (15): Students will complete the activity individually. The paper timeline will include elements from students' key figure projects in order to encompass all that students have worked on in the unit. Students will be able to identify key figures that took part in the events, and will be able to pinpoint those events in a chronological timeline.</p>	<p>Activity: Verbal directions, check ins from teacher, visual timer, and hints from teacher if necessary. Verbal and written instructions.</p> <p>Kinesthetic Human Timeline Activity: Students move around the room and have to use problem solving skills and communication to arrange their classmates and "events" within the timeline.</p> <p>Flexible seating Gamifying lessons and activities to make it more relatable to students</p> <p>Activity Part 2 (15): Frequent check-ins, both verbal and written instructions.</p>	<p>Activity: Phones away from bell to bell. Use appropriate language when interacting with peers during the activity.</p> <p>Activity Part 2 (15): Students will work on their paper timeline individually. Phones away from bell to bell</p>
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Figure 4.4. Human Timeline Activity Plan

The goal of the activity was to review the material from the whole unit and do a kinesthetic activity that helped students engage with the material and reinforce memory through a full body response. This activity used student motivation and curiosity to increase engagement. Figure 4.4 below shows the plan for this activity, the learning goals, student outcomes, and instructional strategies used during this activity. This figure was included to help the observer visualize the lesson as it took place in the classroom.

As discussed in the previous section, the Little Rock Nine Primary Source Analysis Activity was designed to engage students via interest and motivation to solve questions about the sources using deduction and analysis skills. Figure 4.5 below shows the goals, strategies, and plan for the activity.

<p>Activity (35): Little Rock primary source activity: Explain the activity and separate students into pairs or groups of three if needed.</p> <p>Little Rock Nine Assignment</p>	<p>Activity: Students will use their own critical thinking to answer questions about the primary source documents and will connect what they learned to the learning target. How did the Little Rock Nine protest in their own ways?</p> <p>Students will collaborate with one another on this activity to foster community and group learning in the classroom.</p>	<p>Activity: Partner or small group learning, frequent check-ins from teacher, teacher walking around the room and asking leading questions, visual timer so students know how much time they have to complete the assignment.</p> <p>Verbal and written instructions</p>	<p>Activity: Students will be on task while working with groups and partners, students will use appropriate language while working together.</p> <p>Phones away from bell to bell</p>
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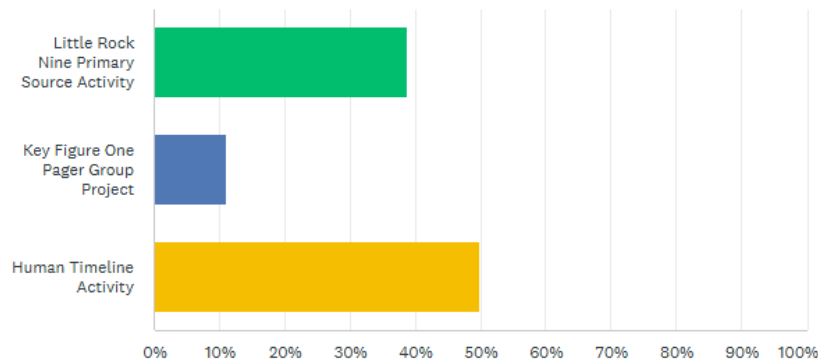
Figure 4.5. Little Rock Nine Primary Source Analysis Activity Plan.

This figure shows how the activity uses collaboration to foster community and engagement, while also using guiding questions to help students hunt for information in the primary sources themselves.

Now that the activities in this section have been introduced and discussed, the consensus of student interest can also be discussed. For this section, data was collected through student surveys and interviews, as well as the lesson plans from the unit to identify which lessons were the most effective at engaging this group of students. The three activities that this section focuses on were listed on a poll for students to vote for which one they enjoyed the most. This poll is demonstrated in Figure 4.6 below.

What was your favorite CRM Unit activity we did in class?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Little Rock Nine Primary Source Activity	38.89%	7
▼ Key Figure One Pager Group Project	11.11%	2
▼ Human Timeline Activity	50.00%	9
TOTAL		18

Figure 4.6. Class Favorite Activities.

According to the above figure, 11.11% of the students said their favorite Civil Rights Movement activity was the Key Figure Group Project, 38.89% said the Little Rock Nine Primary

Source Activity was their favorite, and 50.00% of students said the Human Timeline Activity was their favorite. The activity with the least preference was the Key Figure One-Pager, which could be because the activity included a short presentation about the student's key figure. Some students expressed nervousness about presenting in front of the class, but all groups did well on their presentation. The primary source activity was preferred more than the Key Figure Activity. Teacher observation of student behavior during the primary source activity suggests that students liked the group work aspect of the activity and were engaged with the material because the primary sources allowed them to relate to the Little Rock Nine students.

The poll revealed that 50.00% of the student's favorite activity was the Human Timeline Activity. This activity was dynamic and fun and the nature of the activity required the class to get up out of their desks and move around the room. We moved the desks aside to make more room for the "human timeline" and allow participants to arrange their peers in the correct order. The activity changed the learning environment so that everyone was participating and discussing in one area, using teamwork to solve the timeline as well as accessing prior knowledge from the unit as a whole. The activity fostered engagement through group work and gamification of learning, which could account for why it was a favorite for half the class.

The data suggests that students preferred an active and collaborative type of classroom activity, exemplified by their preference for the "human timeline" activity. The data also suggests that students enjoyed the primary source activity done in class that helped them understand and relate to people from the time period and practice social science skills like source analysis and finding textual evidence. The one-pager activity was less popular compared to the other two activities, although it did foster engagement through creativity. The reason for the unpopularity of this activity could be due to the presentation of the key figures that students did after

completion of their project. Some students could have been nervous about presenting in front of the class.

To summarize, this theme analyzed the different types of activities in the lesson plan and if those activities helped engage students. The section analyzed which activities students liked the most and which activities helped engage them and increase their retention. Students were given a voice between the Little Rock Nine Primary Source Activity, the Key Figure Project One-Pager, and the Human Timeline Activity on a class survey. The data collected through the student polls concluded that students liked the Human Timeline activity the most out of the three choices they were given, most likely due to the group and teamwork focused structure and the ability to move around the room and engage with other students, as can be seen in the lesson plan snapshot.

Engagement Through Rubric Scores

This theme analyzes how students performed on one of the activities in the previous section. This activity was a key-figure analysis one-pager that allowed students to work in groups to deep dive into a key figure's life and impacts on the Civil Rights Movement. This section analyzes student performance on this activity based on their rubric scores and how well they met the learning targets, using rubric scores to measure engagement rather than student interest based on survey answers.

The goal of this section is to explore an isolated assignment in depth and see how students performed on it. The rubric created for this particular assignment included five different criteria of measurement. The criteria are “clearly identifies the key figure with detailed information (who, where, when), explains why the figure was important and connects it to

broader civil rights goals, thoughtfully analyzes how the figure contributed to social change with specific examples, clearly and critically discusses the challenges faced, with examples of discrimination or oppression, and demonstrates analysis and reflection about figures' impact.”

These standards were designed to reflect the student learning objectives for the lesson. Student data was sorted and summarized in Table 4.2 below.

Summary Data					
	Clearly identifies the key figure with detailed information (who, where, when).	Explains why the figure was important and connects it to broader Civil Rights goals.	Thoughtfully analyzes how the figure contributed to social change with specific examples.	Clearly and critically discusses the challenges faced, with examples of discrimination or oppression.	Demonstrates analysis and reflection about figures' impact.
# & % Not Yet Met	1 4%	4 18%	4 18%	1 4%	7 31%
# & % Met	10 45%	8 36%	6 27%	9 40%	3 13%
# & % Exceeds	11 50%	10 45%	12 54%	12 54%	12 54%

Table 4.2 Rubric Scores Summary

The table above shows the summarized data of student performance. As seen above an average of 51.4% of students exceeded expectations across all categories of the rubric. An

average of 32.2% of students met the standards across all five criteria, and an average of 15% of students did not meet all of the standards across all five criteria. However about 80% of students still met or exceeded all the standards across the rubric, showing that they were engaged with the activity enough to perform well on the assignment. This numerical data, used in tandem with anecdotal evidence from student surveys, shows that this particular assignment fostered student engagement in terms of helping students meet and exceed expectations, and was the preferred assignment for 11.11% of the class when compared with other more preferable activities.

This project also allowed plenty of room for creativity both in the process and the product of work. The only parameter for design on this project was that the one-pager had to include a picture of the key figure. This allowed students to be creative with their design process, the pictures they chose, and the way they chose to format the information they researched. Figure 4.4 below shows a student work sample that exemplifies the creativity shown on these projects.

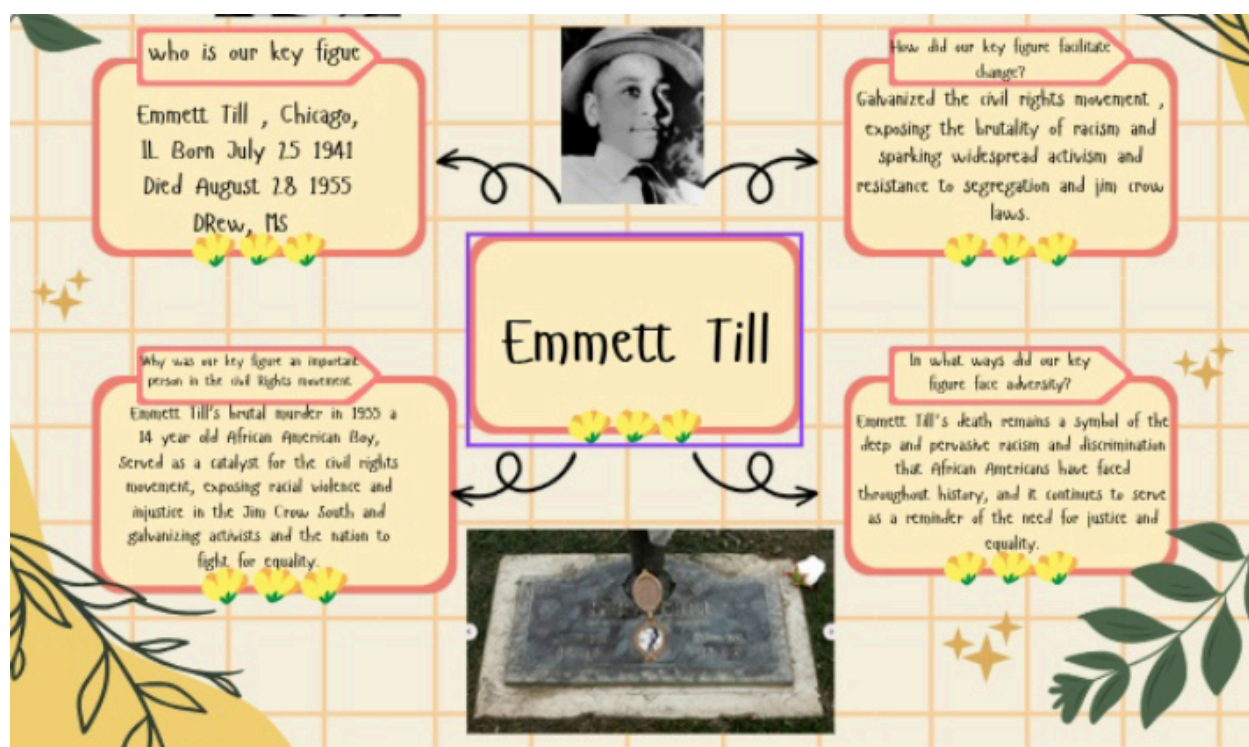


Figure 4.7. Student Work Sample.

The work sample shown here displays how one group of students chose to be creative in their designs. This project increased engagement because the parameters for the finished product were relatively loose, enabling students to show creativity and choice in how they wanted to display their research. Cultivating creativity in the classroom is one of the ways educators can increase engagement with the material. According to Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Friere, creativity in the classroom is a central element of education and liberation and can help educators circumvent the “banking model” of education.

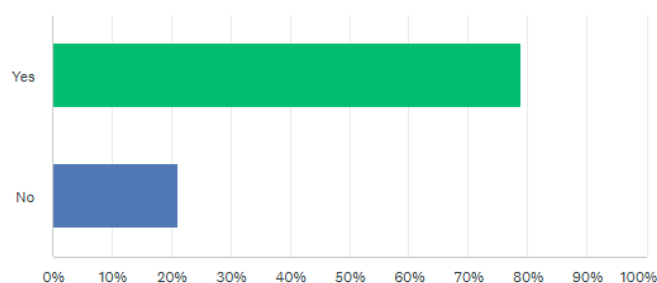
Therefore the data shows that at least 80% of students met or exceeded rubric criteria when creativity was structured into the lessons themselves. Leading to the conclusion that students are more engaged when they are prompted to exercise creativity. The rubric data shows this engagement through rubric scores.

Who Read the Textbook? Textbooks vs. Primary Source Supplementation

This theme explores the degree to which students read the textbook and compares textbook effectiveness with the other activities explored in this chapter. One of the goals of this project was to explore the relative effectiveness of textbooks and how they can be used in tandem with primary source work and other activities to increase student engagement. The students in this class each have a textbook with them that they checked out at the beginning of the year and are regularly assigned chapters from to read that gives them background knowledge for the unit. In Figure 4.9 below, the graph shows a student poll asking about how many students read the textbook for class.

Do you read the textbook for class?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Yes	78.95%	15
▼ No	21.05%	4
TOTAL		19

Figure 4.8. Textbook Reading Percentages

The graph shows that 78.95% of students do read the textbook for class and 21.05% do not. Some limitations of this particular question is that some students could have misrepresented data, and that the survey does not ask students if they feel like the textbook is effective as a learning tool. The survey was anonymous, but some students may have put down a different answer than what they actually did. This misrepresentation of data could lead to incorrect results and assumptions. If I did this data collection again, I would include a more descriptive question asking students about the effectiveness of their textbook in preparing them for the lessons and offering them background about the material.

In summary, students engaged with the textbook when it was used supplementally in addition to other engaging activities. The data showed that about 80% of the students read the textbook when it was assigned reading for class. Leading to the conclusion that some students did find the textbook helpful or deemed it relevant enough to read in addition to their other activities.

The theme I have found across the data is that students engaged with their textbook and preferred primary source activities and gamified activities that focused on interest, creativity, motivation and group work. The data showed that students most preferred the human timeline activity that centered around group discussion and problem solving, and also allowed them to get up out of their desks and physically change their learning environment.

Students also did better on their rubric scores when they were prompted to be creative and incorporate creative designs and aspects into their assignments. Increasing engagement in the classroom is more achievable when lessons are gamified, incorporate creative aspects, or include group work and team based activities.

Despite my own reservations about the limitations of textbook learning, I found through research and student feedback that textbooks, when used in tandem with primary sources and other engaging activities, can bolster the learning environment. Around 80% of students that participated in the class survey said that they did read the textbook when it was assigned for class. Although the research poll administered did not extend far enough into asking students about the effectiveness of the textbooks on their own learning, I was able to learn more about the activities they did enjoy doing in the classroom.

Chapter 5. Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

The teaching techniques I used during the course of this research process were similar to some of the teaching techniques discussed in Chapter Two of this study. This project explores some of the limitations of traditional textbooks in social science education and examines alternative instructional approaches. Particularly the use of primary sources to enhance student engagement, as well as other activities that aim to increase student motivation, curiosity, and interest.

Throughout the course of collecting this data, I employed several different strategies and theories for teaching that helped me grow as an educator and explore ways of incorporating engaging lessons into my repertoire. One of the main pedagogical approaches to this study was the works of Friere. In his 2018 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Friere surmises about student engagement, that students should not just be docile listeners in the classroom, and that the classroom should be a place of engaged conversation and open dialogue with the teacher. He cautions against the “banking model” of education and encourages educators to lead from a “bottom up” approach.

The way I chose to embody Friere’s pedagogy in my social science classroom was by trying to give students meaningful social science tools and education that allows them to participate in critical conversation about the material and the world around them. Analyzing sources, focusing on group work and discussion, and encouraging creativity are the main ways I incorporated opportunities for engagement, interest, and motivation in my lessons. I also chose to analyze how textbooks, when used incorrectly, feed into the “banking model” of education, and some of the limitations of textbook learning when they are used on their own. The focus of this

investigation was to find ways to incorporate activities that can be used in tandem with textbooks to create a well-rounded learning process for students.

Chapter Two of this research project describes a few different learning strategies that can help foster engagement in the classroom through primary source analysis, gamification, and other motivating activities, as well as exploring the limitations of textbook usage. In Buckingham, et al. (1952) the role of textbooks in education is assessed asserting that they are tools to aid teaching instead of dominate it. It praises textbooks for their utility but warns against overly rigid use. The article and framework also emphasizes the teacher's role in selecting and using textbooks to suit diverse student needs. In my own teaching I utilized these practices by selecting primary sources to focus lessons on, and used textbooks as a supplemental background tool for my students.

Loewen (2018) and Ruswick (2011), outlined in Chapter Two, critique the oversimplified and biased nature of textbooks. I chose to explore this idea in my analysis, but ultimately I found that textbooks were a supplemental tool that the majority of my class did read when given as homework in order to give them a deeper understanding of the material. My approach to textbooks differed from Loewen and Ruswick because I found over the course of this project that my thoughts about the inadequacies of textbooks changed. Yes, they can be outdated or disengaging to the student, or can gloss over issues of diversity and representation, but they do offer a concise overview of the material. This preliminary overview reading, when done before the lesson, gave students the necessary background knowledge for them to critically engage with the lesson and other primary source material we reviewed in class.

Grant, et al. (2015) and Musbach (2001) advocate for inquiry-based and constructivist teaching methods that encourage critical thinking and student agency. I also tried to encourage critical thinking and student agency in my classroom throughout this process. Grant, et al. calls for inquiry based questions to be designed in the classroom and outlines how to implement the Inquiry Design Model framework into teaching. I used similar questioning strategies when making the questions and rubrics for the Key Figure One-Pager discussed in Chapter Four. However, I chose to deviate from some of the IDM framework by focusing on student group work and gamifying activities instead.

Yeager, et al. (2014) and Vogler (2005) emphasize the importance of fostering student belonging and improving classroom management, both of which are crucial for engagement. I incorporated a sense of belonging in my classroom through teamwork activities that built up student confidence and participation. Similarly, Xerri, Radford, and Shacklock (2018) emphasize that a student's sense of purpose and a student's relatedness to peers and teachers to be the driving force behind student engagement in classroom material. I wanted to make sure to incorporate peer collaboration into the activities I planned.

Together, these sources suggest that primary source instruction promotes deeper learning and classroom participation, and explores some of the limitations and ways of combating textbook apathy in the classroom and fostering engagement.

Limitations

The main tenets of Freire's pedagogy aim to integrate learners into the logic of the present educational system as well as use liberating and transformative tools that allow students to think critically about the world around them. The second tenet of Freire's theory criticizes the

“banking model” of education, where students act as an empty vessel that teachers put information into. The third tenet critiques the culture of silence often used to keep the status quo in the classroom. The fourth calls for action and reflection of both the student and the teacher, and the last tenet is conscientization, the process of becoming aware of one’s own oppression and aiming for social change.

In this project, I aimed to incorporate learners into the logic of the classroom by teaching them the system and routines of social science learning through analysis tools. I avoided the “banking model” as much as I could by decentralizing textbooks and using them as an added tool instead of the main focus, and by encouraging critical thinking and collaborative work. Friere’s third tenant states that teachers should encourage conversation as a way to break the culture of silence sometimes seen in education. I think I could have included more activities that catered to this tenant in order to fully embody all of Friere’s pedagogy. However, the crux of the project was more pinpointed on exploring different types of engaging activities for students instead of focusing only on classroom conversation and collaboration. Lastly, Friere calls for the awareness of one’s own oppression and calls for social change. There was no room in this project to fully bring this tenant to fruition, but there was room to have my students learn critical thinking skills about social science sources that will help them think about the world around them and the information they consume.

In future study, I would plan on adding more activities that center around Friere’s tenant of conversation and collaboration. I focused on engagement, motivation, and creativity in the classroom when building the activities analyzed in this study. Incorporating activities that cater to all of Friere’s tenets more fully would be a good way to make this project more well-rounded.

Some of the methodological limitations of this study are that the study took place over the course of five days, which made time for collecting data limited on top of teaching the unit and catering to student needs. The data collected was mainly from lesson plans, teacher reflections, observations, and student polls. I also included student work samples, although I could have included more examples from each different project I chose to analyze.

The practical limitations of this study were that I spent the majority of my time in the classroom focusing on how to incorporate engaging strategies for my students, and less time focusing on how to use textbooks in tandem with these strategies. The focus of this project was to explore some of the limitations of textbooks, which was done in Chapter Two. The data collection of the project focused on engaging activities, particularly primary source analysis projects, and less on the limitations of the textbooks. This choice I made in the project does pose limitations for the well-roundedness of the project in reference to textbook limitations in my own practical classroom setting. In the future, I might dive deeper into the practical applications of textbooks by analyzing different types of textbooks and how they impact student learning in the physical classroom.

Other teachers could incorporate elements of this study into their teaching. Many social science educators already use primary source analysis activities and other engaging strategies in their classrooms more adeptly than I demonstrated in this study. I also think that many teachers are aware of the limitations and potential pitfalls of textbooks in the classroom. The main pitfall of this study is that the research may be redundant in the grand scale of education because many scholars agree that engagement in the classroom is important, and that there are proven ways to help foster that engagement. But the benefit of this study for me as an educator was that I was

able to test out a variety of different activities and teaching strategies, and explore literature about the pitfalls of textbooks to avoid in my classroom.

Conclusion

In this study I explored different approaches and activities that fostered engagement for students via primary source analysis and other creative activities, as well as the relative limitations of textbooks and their impacts on learning in the classroom. The works of Paulo Friere helped guide my pedagogical process with a focus on engaging students in critical learning about primary sources and giving them the tools to analyze social sciences for themselves. Loewen (2018) and Ruswick (2011) informed some of my thinking about the limitations of textbooks in the classroom,

I learned much through this process about data collection and conducting a research project on a classroom of diverse learners. I learned that an activity I plan will not always have the desired outcome or produce the data I expected it to produce. But I also gained experience planning interactive and motivational lessons that engaged my students and explored how to supplement textbook learning with primary source learning. My planning skills have grown throughout the process of this project, and I gained valuable skills and information about which activities helped engage this particular group of students.

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