

Journaling Through History

The College of New Jersey

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Context Question

As teachers we are always reflecting on what takes place in the classroom, and looking for ways to improve our teaching and the learning process. In creating a research question, I focused on the areas, which are most challenging in the classroom. It was important to think about something that would have a profound impact on my students and improve their quality of education. When students are actively engaged in the learning process, they are more likely to succeed. I also focused on things that are important to me as a teacher and would be beneficial to other teachers. These are the things that I kept in mind while creating a research question and focus. Ultimately, I am interested to find out what happens when I use journaling as a form of assessment in social studies.

I find that many students in my social studies classes do not enjoy the subject as much as I think they could. After speaking with my students and reflecting on prior teaching experience, I found that remembering dates and events can be challenging. When I was a student I always felt that social studies classes focused so much on remembering rote facts, and many exciting details or events were left out. I also remember that social studies tests and tests in general can be intimidating. Each year it seems that I find more and more students who say they have test anxiety. I believe there are different reasons for test anxiety: there are those who studied and have difficulty recalling the information, and those who are nervous because they did not study. I have been interested to see if there is another way, besides a traditional exam, to find out if my students know the required information. It is crucial for students to know important dates and people in history, but what purpose does it serve to memorize a date but not know why the event occurred. It is my goal to change the perception that students have of social studies from being just memorization to truly understanding the exciting events that have sculpted history.

In thinking about a research topic, I considered how I could assess student knowledge instead of testing them on dates and people. I determined that journaling would be a positive means to assess student knowledge. I could give an open-ended topic that students could write everything they know about in a journal format. Many students do not do well on formal tests even when they know and understand the information. Because individuals learn differently there are different ways to assess their knowledge to meet their personality and learning style. Not all students enjoy or are successful taking formal assessments and would do better with different types of tests. I would like to find out if having student's journal their responses about social studies events would provide greater success than formal tests. Students should have different assessment opportunities in order to show their knowledge of a topic.

I value the ability of students to articulate knowledge of a topic in their own words more than how well they are able to remember rote facts. Therefore, with this question I will find out how students learn best. I also would like to gain insight into student's knowledge of a social studies topic through open-ended journaling. I will have students write journal entries for each topic or area of study. They will also take a formal test on the information as they normally do. I will compare these responses in journal entries to their test scores to see which way they are better able to show an understanding of the material. This will show how students learn better and the different learning styles of the students in my classroom. All students learn differently and it can be challenging to find ways to meet all their needs. Most teachers use formal testing to assess student knowledge, but I would like to find out if there are better ways to do this. Some students might feel more comfortable writing a short journal entry than they would answering multiple-choice questions. The idea of having student's journaling and taking a formal exam raised a question in my mind as to how I should grade them. Currently, tests are worth thirty

percent of a student's total grade. I believe in order for this to be fair I have to make their journaling assignments worth the same as a test. This hopefully will not hurt any one group of students. Those who excel on traditional exams will still be able to take them. For those who struggle with a traditional exam, journaling may be an excellent way for them to convey their knowledge on a topic to me.

I have also wondered about how journaling might affect my student's attitude. I know that there are certain students who have basically given up because they feel that they will never get a good grade on a test. I want to know, if they are given the opportunity to write in a journal which will count as a test grade, will that help them feel that they can do it? As the teacher, I am apprehensive about changing the way things work in my classroom. I am hoping that allowing students to journal will really help me assess my student's more accurately. What makes me a little nervous is what happens if it does not work. Students who have been getting A's on traditional multiple choice exams now are unable to get that same grade in a journal. I am also curious if it will change the way I teach. Will I be able to get more in depth on a certain topic? Can I tell more of the interesting side stories from history that normally would not be on a traditional exam? What will I look for in their journals? These are some of the questions that I hope will be answered by doing more research and then actually implementing this idea in my classroom.

I teach five sections of social studies that have approximately twenty-five students each. The town is located in Northern Bergen County, and contains approximately 6,000 residents with a median household income of \$125,000. The largest ethnic group is Caucasian at sixty percent followed by Asian at nine percent. The parents of my students are quite involved in their child's academic lives. Some parents are overly involved and often do not allow teachers to do their job

without questioning us daily. Mostly, the parents in my school are supportive and want what is best for their child.

When I first came into teaching I believed that a teacher taught the material and then gave a test. Those who did not do well on the test must not have studied. I know in many cases that is true. However, I have come to realize that certain people just do not do well on tests. That is what spurred my question. Could there be another fair way to assess students in social studies that would help aid me to see whether or not my student's "get it." In looking at this topic for the past few weeks it has really made me think about what I value as a teacher. I realized that I still value the same thing, having my students understand the topic. What has changed for me is the idea that journaling might be a viable addition to my classroom.

Literature Review

One way to find out more about journaling in the classroom is to research the topic to gather more information. In researching this topic I gained a great deal of information that helps to determine the benefits of journaling in the classroom. I would like to use journaling as a form of assessment in conjunction with formal testing to see which is the most beneficial way to meet the needs of students. There are pros and cons to having student's journal about different topics in the classroom. The following sections review current literature examining the use of journaling as a pedagogical tool.

Importance of Journaling

One of the main themes throughout the current research is efficacy and the importance of using journaling in the classroom. Andrew August (2000) discussed writing in journals to demonstrate students' knowledge of reading. He explains how to use journals to increase motivation among students to complete readings because they know a response is expected. The

entries are not graded, but a syllabus helps students to understand what is expected of them. Journaling can be an effective teaching tool when used appropriately in the classroom. Students are able to assess their own knowledge as they are writing. When given a broad topic to write about they can see for themselves how much information they know. This helps students to become more aware of their own learning process. In a social studies class students complete readings regarding a specific topic, then journal to show their understanding. It is an informal way to assess how well students understand a topic because they can write an open-ended response. I feel that journaling writing based on readings could be beneficial for students, although this would not meet the learning styles of all students.

According to Brenda Leibowitz and Leslie Witz (1996) journaling should provide a means to write about history more extensively and express their own opinions. Students could write responses to questions, as well as responses to general historical events. I think both of these options could be useful in my classroom. I would like my students to write responses to specific history questions related to topics we discuss in class. This would provide an opportunity to see how well students really understanding what I am teaching them. Also, giving students the opportunities to write openly about events that are of interest to them is crucial. One important aspect of journaling is having students write about a lecture or reading presented to them. In this format, teachers are able to get immediate feedback related to what students are learning and what aspect of teaching needs to be adapted. Journaling can provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their own experiences and knowledge base to expand entries. I would be interested in having my students write freely because this type of writing is important for them and helps to show what aspects of history they are most knowledgeable about.

There are many reasons why journaling should take place in classrooms. Often we realize that students do not actually grasp the concept we are trying to teach them. Students play a large role in the learning environment, as they are the ones who need to make sense and meaning of the material. There are many instructional practices and assessment techniques to increase awareness and interest of students. According to Hampton and Morrow (2003), journaling is a way to supplement instructional practices in teaching concepts, make a difference in how students learn and retain these concepts. When students use personal examples in reflective journaling it may help them to better understand abstract ideas. Reflective journaling is a strategy to enhance student interest, awareness, and learning about a topic. There are two types of journaling that can be used in the classroom, double entry and creative. Double entry journaling allows students to discuss their assignments with themselves. This is done through posing written questions in a journal. This can provide the teacher with an opportunity to create a written response directly in a student's journal in order to provide them with feedback and answers to their questions. Creative journaling is a way for students to express themselves and share their thoughts. They can link what they already know to new concepts that are introduced. When students are able to link concepts to personal experiences, it often enhances interest and understanding. Journaling can be done before a new topic is introduced in order to see what prior knowledge students have. It can also be used during the learning process to check for understanding and make connections (Hampton & Morrow, 2003).

Journaling at the completion of a lesson or theme can show student understanding of what was taught to them. The student can use this information so they can see for themselves how well they understand material. Teachers can use student's journals to see if there are areas that they should re-teach or delve into further. It is important for teachers to see if the need to

adapt their teaching style to better meet the needs of students and help them better understand concepts. For many students, using journaling can be more effective than taking formal tests. Students have different learning styles and some are more successful when they are able to express themselves through open-ended experiences, such as journaling. Using journaling is a way for students to express their interest in a topic because they have the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas. A teacher can quickly assess student journaling by walking around to view responses. Journaling can be used as a quick inspection during class to see what students really know, or to check if they understood an assignment. Journaling is a worthwhile experience that increases self-awareness, interest, as well as student and teacher perceptions of learning according to Hampton and Morrow (2003). Students are able to apply their new knowledge to their personal lives and life experiences. This helps to increase the learning process and improve the experience for all involved. In addition to enhancing self-awareness, journaling contributes to student growth and development in an academic area.

How to Assess Journaling

Another key factor is how to assess students when they are engaging in journaling. Hampton and Morrow (2003) state that, “you can expect what you test.” There are learning opportunities for students in the classroom and outside of school. Often they prioritize their efforts and focus on those that will be graded. Students put the most effort into those activities that teachers will assess or inspect in some way. Therefore, reflective journaling should be assessed to encourage students to do these activities, as well as their homework assignments. Journaling can be assessed formally for content and informally to make sure that it has been completed. Having students complete a journal entry after a reading homework assignment is a

way to check for completion and understanding of the task. Entries can be assessed according to how students are able to connect their learning to what they already know.

Teachers can review journals to assess the depth of responses and if all aspects of a topic are covered. Homework responses may not always be perfect because they are connecting concepts of reading to personal experiences. A formal way to assess journaling is to include questions on an exam. This can be done by using a quote or passage from a homework assignment on a test at the completion of a unit or chapter. The students will know that there will be a journaling question from their homework, so they are motivated to study their entries and reflections. Having students review their journals helps to increase learning by refreshing their memory and expanding their knowledge base. It also encourages them to put effort into their journal responses, so they are helpful during a test. Teachers can assess if student journal responses on an exam are correctly linked to the concepts of the class.

Using journals in social studies is important because students need time to represent their feelings in order to maintain motivation (Ediger, 1999). I agree that journaling should be based on content or knowledge of the material, but I do not think that I should evaluate student's feelings toward a subject. I think that students do not have to like a topic, but it is more important to be able to explain a historical event. It is great when students enjoy a topic, but just as crucial to have an understanding of what they are learning. Also, researchers (August, 2000; Ediger, 2001; Leibowitz & Witz, 1996) debate whether journals should be used as a teaching tool and graded based on grammar, sentence structure, and spelling. This is something that I have spent a great deal of time thinking about and feel that it might be best to have students write informally. If students write informally in their journals they may think it is acceptable to do this for other assignments as well. Yet, I think that if they are forced to do their best writing they will

focus more on that than the content. I am more concerned about students truly understanding the concepts, than how they are able to write. Researchers share ideas that having students engage in journaling can improve their writing skills. This is something that is a focus in my school district. Students are expected to be writing across the curriculum and having them journal in social studies can help to accomplish this goal.

Having student's journal about a topic can also express they interest and feelings about it. Students are able to share their own input and feelings about an issue or topic, something they are unable to do on formal tests. It is important for teachers to gain perspective related to how students understand and feel about social studies. This helps to provide insight as to what areas of social studies should get more attention. Teachers are able to see how their teaching styles are impacting their students learning in different ways. One researcher is able to debate both sides of this argument and has valid points related to each area. I agree with the idea that forcing students to focus on grammar and how they write will take away from what they are trying to express through their writing (August, 2000).

Types of Assessment Related to Journaling

Finding ways to assess journaling is an important area to focus on when you have students engage in this activity in the classroom. Researchers cannot come to agreement on what is the best way to assess student's journal writing. One article written by Ediger (1999) focuses on the idea that journals should be assessed based on the objectives and purpose of their writing. This researcher also believes there should be ample time given daily for journaling and students should be evaluated based on the content related to social studies (Ediger, 1999). In other work by (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008) they feel that journal writing should be used to develop summative assessments that count for a grade. Students should therefore receive feedback

related to their journaling, so they are able to see their own learning process. One way to do this is to have students comment on their own progress by asking them questions. For example, having students describe what change they have noticed or what insights into themselves as learners they have discovered. When students are using feedback from the teacher, it helps them to self-assess and set their own goals. They are also more likely to take ownership of their own successes. Journaling can increase collaboration between teachers and students by providing feedback and ideas. Teachers can adapt their instruction based on evidence of student learning through journal entries. Also, students are able to see evidence of their individual progress to manage and adjust their own learning.

There are many different ways that assessment can take place in the classroom. Teachers can use journaling as a form of testing knowledge of a content area and how deeply students truly understand a topic. A topic question can focus on a specific content area that the teacher would like students to master. Teachers can use journaling instead of formal testing in order to provide students another means of expressing knowledge. When journaling is used for formative purposes there is no grade and instead serves as a practice for students. It is more of an assessment for learning and can be used to adapt instruction, as well as evidence for students of their own progress (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008).

Using journaling for both formative and summative assessments can be beneficial within the social studies classroom. I think that there can be a blend of both types of writing for students to engage in. I would like students to write in journals to share their knowledge of a topic and as evidence to themselves for what they need to study more. Students often think they know everything about a topic, but when it comes time to take a test they struggle. Therefore, informal journaling would allow them to look back at an entry to see how much they really know

and what else they need to learn. I can also use this information to adapt my instruction to better meet student needs. Yet, having student answer an open-ended journal question for a formative assessment can be useful as well. Many students do not do well with multiple choice or other typical test questions. Writing open-ended responses for a test would be a way for many students to express what they truly know about a topic. These students would possibly perform better in this way than if they took a typical test (McTighe & O'Connor, 2005).

When determining the most effective way to assess students, it is important to compare different formative and summative methods. Feedback is important to the success of students. According to Alison Rushton (2005), “feedback can usually be considered as processing two key components, the teacher providing feedback and the student receiving feedback” (p. 509). There are many ways that students can be provided feedback, which can impact learning and self-esteem. Formative assessment should assist the development of the learner. There are many ways for teachers to provide feedback to assist student learning. In order to do this it is important to provide information about what the student does and does not know, as well as giving them direction for improvement. Journaling can provide students with immediate feedback from the teacher, as well as individually about their learning. It helps them to see what they really know about a topic and how much more they need to learn. This can be valuable for students because they can self-assess what learning has taken place and what more needs to occur. Through journaling, teachers are able to also get a clear view about what knowledge students have and this can help to drive instruction. When teachers can see the gaps in student learning, they are able to see how they can adapt instruction to better meet the needs of students.

Formative assessment informs about learning and instruction, while summative assessment is used to measure and report student learning. Many people question, which is more

valuable to teachers and students, as well as the impact each has on learning. Most teachers engage in giving tests, which are summative assessments of student learning. They are usually used to calculate a grade for a student, but they do not show what students know. The purpose of giving formal testing was to provide a means for differentiation based on student levels of achievement. This formal testing has always been called summative assessment. These assessments are what most teachers use in order to assign students a grade. Students do not learn what areas they need to learn more about and what they have mastered. Formative assessments are usually done throughout the marking period and help to show teachers and students what areas need greater focus (Wininger, 2005).

Research has shown that high quality formative assessment can increase student learning. According to Joan Herman and Ron Dietel (2008), quality formative assessment requires paying attention to teaching and learning goals, assessment of those goals, and using the assessment results to better achieve goals for student learning. It is crucial to have quality goals, which reflect the immediate and long-term targets for teaching and learning. Giving students quality assessments can have a positive impact on the learning process, as well as increase student success. Journaling can be a formative assessment technique that helps students to understand their own learning and adapt according to areas of weakness. It also provides a means for students to write more freely and open-ended related to a topic, instead of having to answer specific questions on a test. Usually when students take summative tests, they do not look back at the questions they got wrong to see where they can adapt how they prepare. Journaling in turn, can give students a way to see what their strengths and weaknesses are before the end of a chapter or when it is time for a test. Formative assessments throughout the marking period help students to be more accountable for their own learning. Well-designed classroom assessments

and grading practices can provide the kind of personalized information needed to guide teaching and learning.

Through this research I was able to gather more information related to the benefits of journaling, as well as the different uses within the classroom. There are many areas of journaling that can be explored further to find out how they can be most useful in the classroom. Many students prefer journaling rather than taking formal tests because they are better able to express themselves through open-ended responses. Others seem to do better with straight forward testing questions instead of having to write without specific guidelines. These aspects of journaling, as well as how to assess it appropriately, are areas that I will continue to research and focus on in my classroom.

Methods

Participants

I selected 110 seventh grade students who were in my social studies class. The students are broken up into five sections containing 20-25 students per class. Two of the classes are supported by a special education teacher. The class is setup in five rows with five desks in each row. The entire seventh grade participated in this study.

Materials

Each student brought a marble notebook to class to be used for their individual journal entries. Each student labeled his or her notebook. The notebooks were kept in my classroom and organized by class sections. The students also received an exit slip to answer at the conclusion of this study.

Design and Procedures

The students were assigned two journal assignments per week for the length of this study. I designated a section of my white board for the journal topic/question. The students knew that when they saw a question written in that section, they needed to get their journals as they walked in the door and begin writing. The students did not know which days of the week to expect a journaling assignment.

At the conclusion of this study the students were asked two questions on an exit slip:

1. Did you like writing in a journal? Why or why not?
2. Do you feel that it helped you prepare for the test? Why or why not?

The students had as much time as they needed to fill out their exit slip. I asked them to be honest and not write what they think I wanted to hear.

Data Collection

For four weeks I assigned my students two journal topics per week. I planned when I would assign each journal topic, but my students did not know when they would be asked to journal. The students had as much time as they needed to answer their assigned question. At the end of each week I graded the student journals on a relative point scale i.e. 9 out of 10 points.

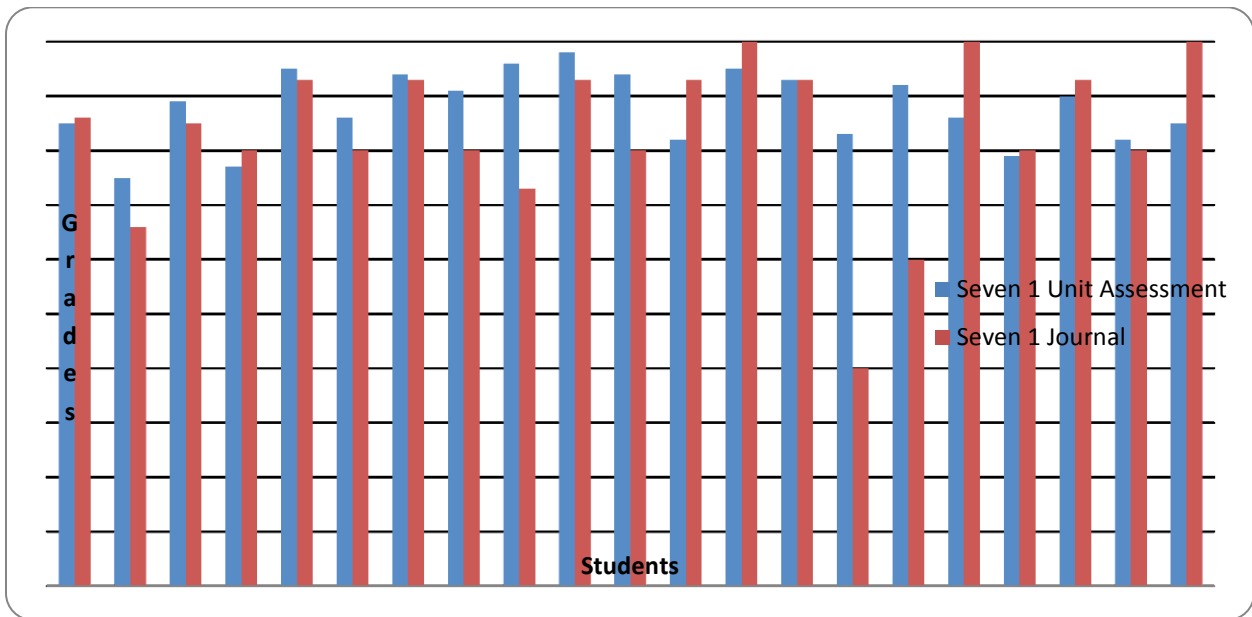
Students did not fill out their names on the exit slips in hopes that they would be candid and honest about their experience. The exit slips were be coded to help reveal what the students felt about journaling for a month in social studies.

I assigned journal topics for some of the more difficult concepts we covered in class to see if it helped the students better understand the material. Each week, through their journals, I was able to assess whether or not many of the students understood that weeks topics. At the end of the week I transferred each student's journal grade into my grade book so it could be calculated into their final grade.

Results

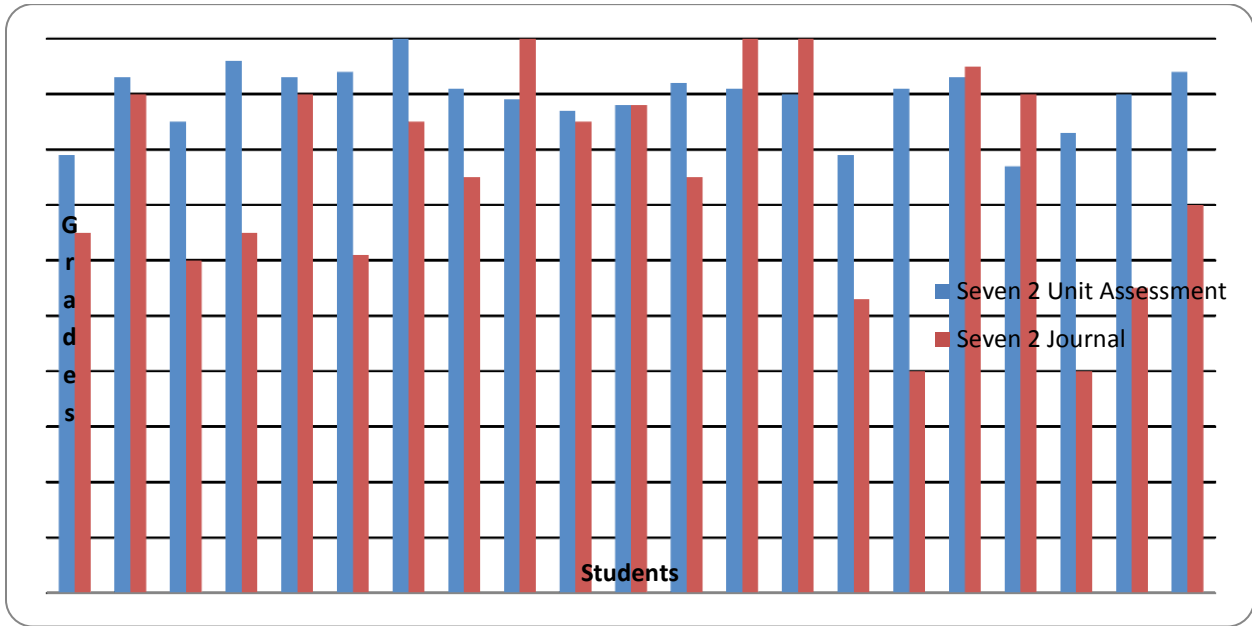
Upon completion of researching the impact of journals as an assessment in a social studies class, I analyzed the data. I used student exit slips, test grades, and graded journal entries to create a graph showing the difference in student grades. Students were graded based on their journals and end of the unit assessments in order to determine if journaling helped to improve their grades. Over the course of the data collection period I assigned my 110 seventh grade student’s nine journal topics. The topics directly related to the content we were currently discussing in class, and were ultimately topics that would appear on their unit assessment.

Table 1: Student scores in one class section on their unit assessment and journal entries.



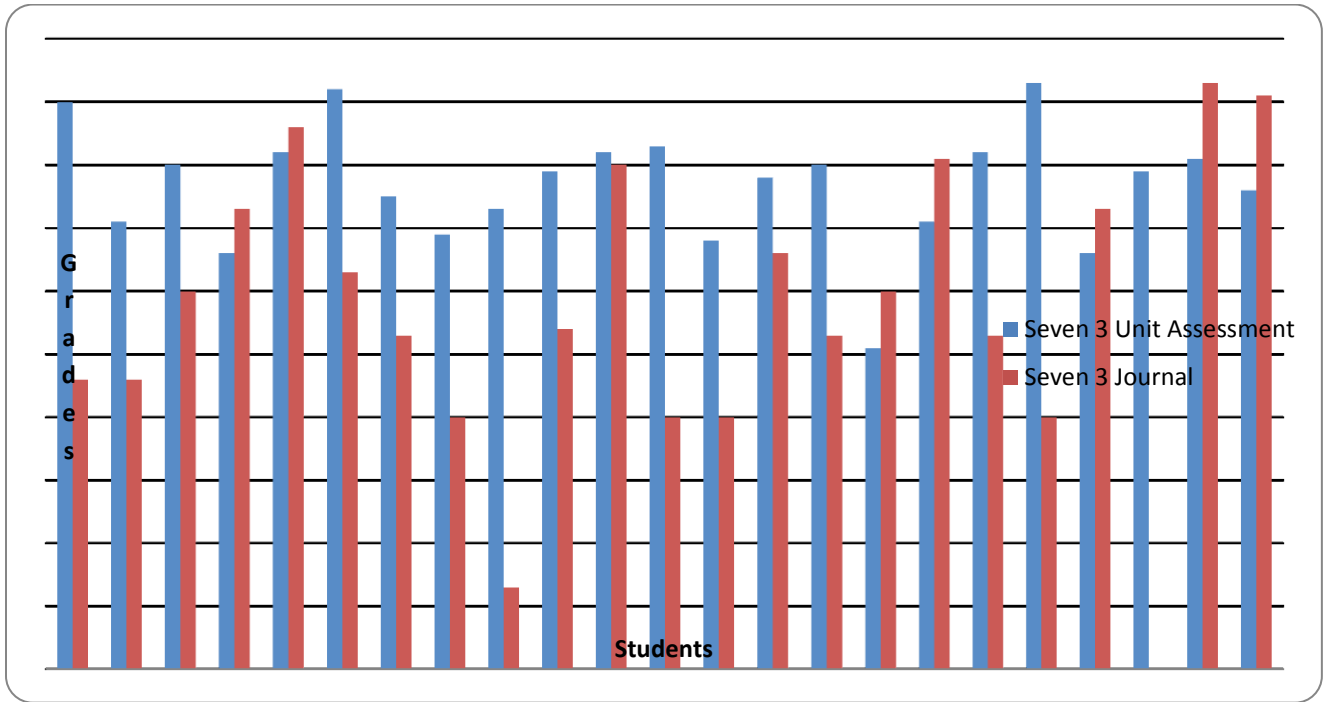
In this section of twenty-one seventh graders eleven out of the twenty one students (52%) performed better on their unit assessment than the journal assessment.

Table 2: Student scores in one class section on their unit assessment and journal entries.



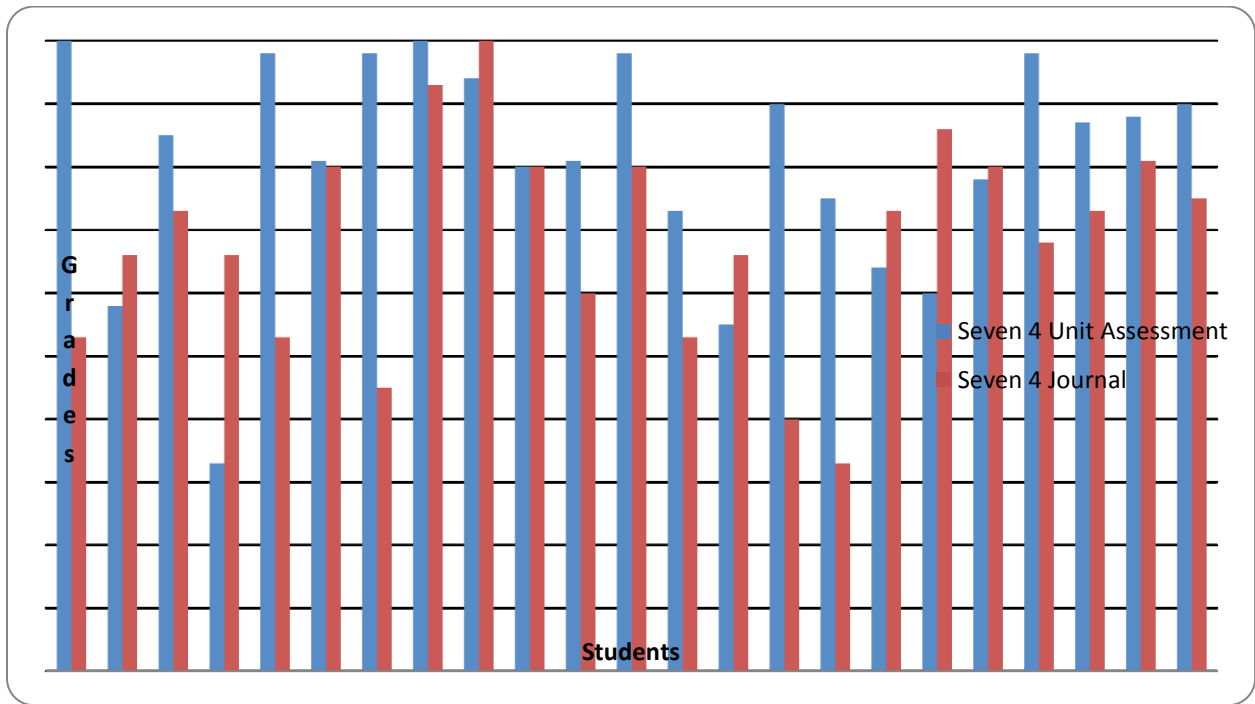
In this section of twenty one seventh graders fifteen out of the twenty-one students (71%) performed better on their unit assessment than the journal assessment.

Table 3: Student scores in one class section on their unit assessment and journal entries.



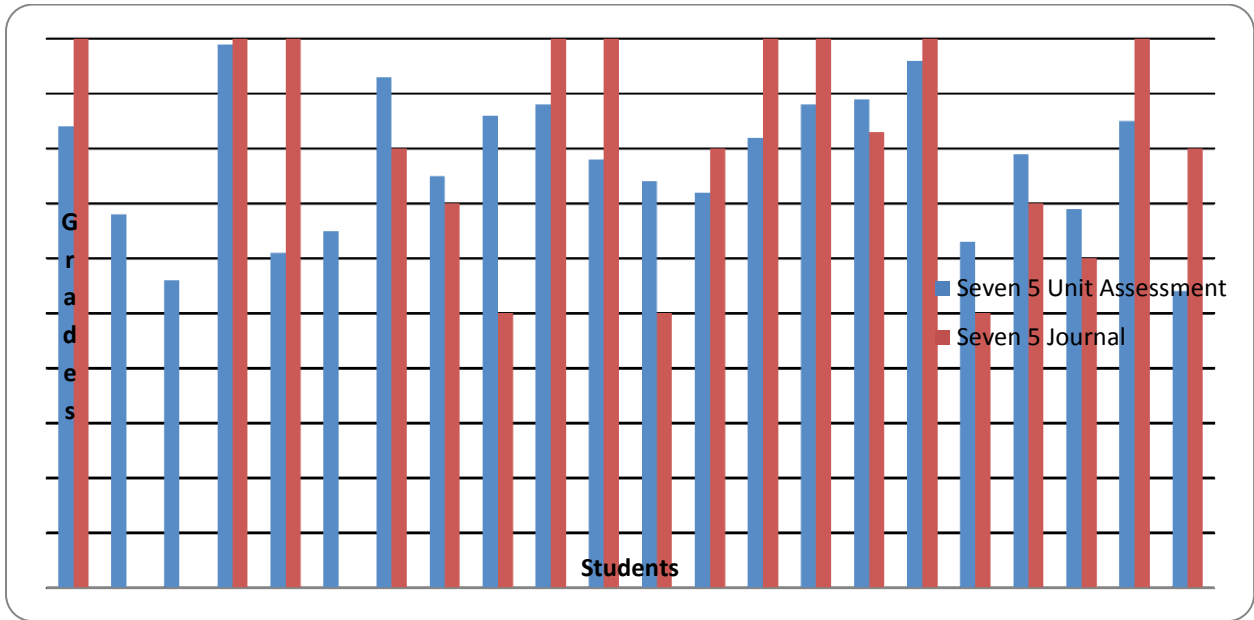
In this section of twenty three seventh graders sixteen out of the twenty-three students (70%) performed better on their unit assessment than the journal assessment.

Table 4: Student scores in one class section on their unit assessment and journal entries.



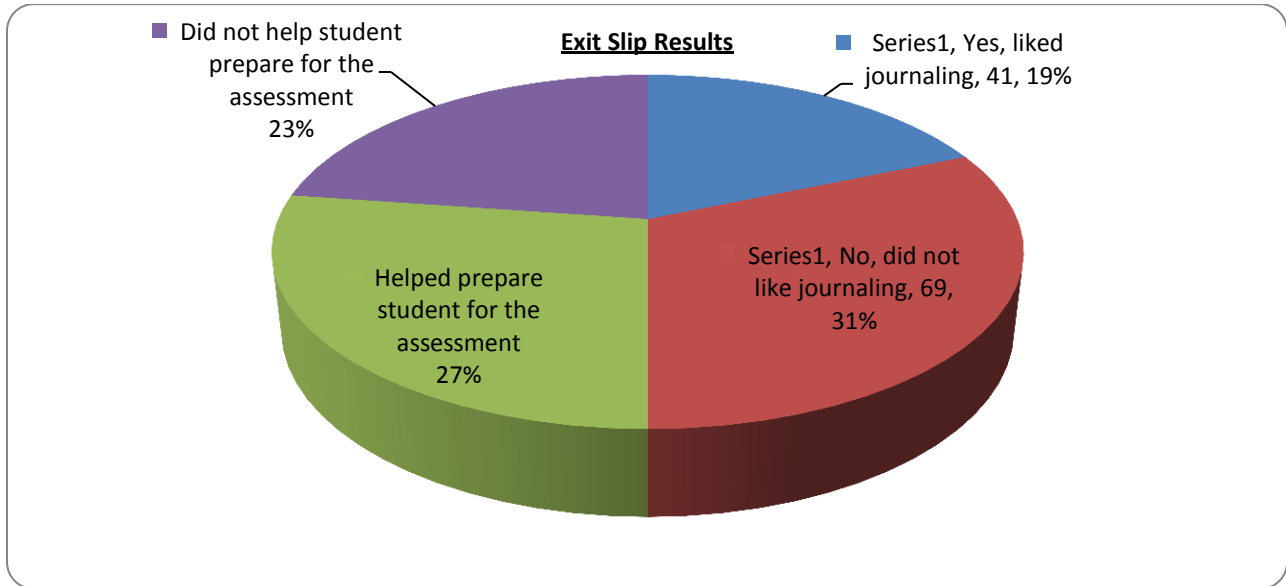
In this section of twenty three seventh graders fifteen out of the twenty-three students (65%) performed better on their unit assessment than the journal assessment.

Table 5: Student scores in one class section on their unit assessment and journal entries.



In this section of twenty two seventh graders the results were evenly split. Eleven scored higher on their unit assessment and the other eleven scored higher on their journal entries.

Table 6: Exit Slips. These were assigned to my students at the conclusion of the data collection to assess their opinion on journal writing.



At the conclusion of data collection period I asked my students to fill out an exit slip.

They were asked the following questions:

1. Did you like writing in a journal? Why or why not?
2. Do you feel that it helped you prepare for the test? Why or why not?

Forty one of my students responded that they did in fact like writing in a journal, while sixty nine responded that they did not like writing in a journal. Sixty students said that it helped them prepare for their test, and fifty said that journaling did not help them prepare. The exit slips aided in finding out what students really thought about journaling in class. One student wrote “Yes, I really enjoy writing journals. It helps refresh the information and helps me be more prepared for the quiz/test. By doing this, it has helped my memory a lot. I think it has changed my grades for the better.”

Another student responded, “No, I hated writing in the journal because I had to stay up on the reading. Although I usually do read I did not enjoy this.” After reading all of the students exit slips I felt that most resembled this response: “I didn’t like writing in the journal. However, I have to admit that it did help me prepare for the test because it kept me focused on what we were learning in class.”

The majority of students that I teach did not like having to complete journal entries in class. This forced them to remain on top of daily readings and topics, which they found challenging. Yet, most students felt that having to complete journal entries helped them to be more prepared for end of unit tests. Writing in journals made it imperative to stay abreast of class material, which ultimately was beneficial when it came time to take an end of unit test. A quarter of students did not feel that journaling helped them to be more prepared for tests. Although journaling did not seem to be something students enjoyed or would like to do again, it positively impacted the summative assessment grades of many students.

Discussion

Student Learning

I conducted research in my seventh grade social studies class to determine the impact that journaling, a formative assessment, had on end of unit summative assessments. Students had to complete journal entries, which were graded, in order to expand on readings and discussions of a topic. They were not told when they would have to complete journal entries, and therefore had to remain abreast of classroom readings and nightly homework assignments. Many students were frustrated by the fact that they had to read for social studies every night to be prepared to have to write a journal entry in class. I graded the student’s journal entries as well as their end of

the unit assessments to determine if there were any improvements. I graphed the results of journal entries and end of the unit assessments in order to see the change and correlation between them.

The majority of students did not like journaling but felt that journaling did help them prepare for their unit assessment. I believe that forcing students to journal in social studies about topics we were currently covering pushed many of them to stay up to date on reading and class discussions. For that exact reason I believe many of my students wrote that they did not like journaling. The disposition of students changed when they entered the room and realized they would have to journal in class. Many reacted by making negative comments about how they dislike journaling and are not prepared to complete this task. They were relieved on days that there was no journaling necessary, as many did not complete their readings and were unprepared. Having to journal was easier for the students who went home each night and did readings, whether or not they were specifically assigned. These students are over achievers on a daily basis and had no problem when it came to journaling, as they were always a step ahead of new information and topics in class. The students who benefited the most from journaling were those who sometimes procrastinate with their work. These students were forced to stay on top of class work so they were prepared for journaling. When they became more prepared for class each day, they began to enjoy journaling more and ultimately were more successful when it came time to take end of unit assessments. The practice of incorporating journaling fits into our school goal to have students writing across the curriculum. Having to better understand and stay on top of material forces information into student's long term memory and hopefully stays with them, instead of just memorizing facts to prepare for an assessment. Introducing journaling so late in the year was a tough adjustment for those students who usually wait until the last minute to

study. The students did not know which day of the week I was going to assign the journal entry so it forced them to be ready every day. Some students appreciated the journals because they felt it helped to limit their procrastination. A few wrote on their exit slips that although it was a little tougher to keep up with everything, they really felt it helped them once they took the unit assessment.

Limitations

My research was limited because the entire seventh grade took part in journaling. I did not believe that it was ethical to pick two sections and do something with them that could possibly benefit everyone. However, in doing so, I was unable to compare a section that had used journals to one who had not.

Implications for future teaching

It appears that journal writing in social studies can benefit students. In the future I will use journals in my classroom. It is a great way to keep students writing across the curriculum as well as supporting them in learning and developing study skills which will help them in future classes. Even though I assign formal essays in my class, writing in a journal is an excellent way to keep students writing more consistently. Many of the findings that I had correlate with the literature that I reviewed on this topic. Rushton, Hampton, and Morrow all discussed the importance of feedback. The quote, “you can expect what you inspect,” (Hampton & Morrow, 2003, p. 187) is something that I found to be true when having students complete journal entries. In order for them to see what they were missing from a lesson, I had to make sure their grades were completed so they could review comments each week. It was important to inspect the work of students if I expected them to remain abreast of learning, so they were able to see the results of their hard work. According to Chappuis and Chappuis (2008), journaling does not

necessarily need to count towards an overall grade. In completing this research I see the positive and negative aspects of journaling for formative and summative purposes. I feel that journaling in the classroom must be a summative experience because these students do not take journaling seriously unless they are held accountable by a grade. I think many of them do not yet understand that remaining on top of readings is for their own good and should take place; therefore it positively impacts their learning to be held accountable for what they do. I believe that they are another way to hold students accountable for the information that I need them to learn. However, I need to find a way to make journaling a little less intimidating. In my opinion it seemed that I was asking my students to prepare for a pop quiz every day for over a month. I do not want to do that to my students every day next year. I need to find a method to take some of that stress away while still holding my student's accountable for the information. Journaling can work in many subject areas. It can be used as a tool to get students writing in subjects that traditionally do not require it or have formal assignments where it is expected.

Subjectivity Paper

The research that I conducted all began with determining the question that would be most appropriate and would have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. There are many reasons why I decided on the question, what happens when I use journaling as a form of assessment in social studies. I feel that this question would produce results that would help to clarify what I can do to help students become more successful in social studies class. Journaling is something that some students really enjoy and I thought might have a positive impact on their ability to retain information and perform better on unit assessments. I thought that journaling might provide students an outlet for expressing their knowledge and thoughts before having to take a unit assessment.

One of the reasons that I chose this question is because one of our school and district goals is to improve writing across the curriculum. Writing is an area students in our school are struggling with and one that has not been a focus in previous years. Having students write across the curriculum is one way to make sure they are always engaging in this area of literacy, while learning other subject material. I thought that by having students write in journals it would help to fulfill the requirement that the school has put on each teacher. I believe that journaling is a fun and relaxing way for students to convey their knowledge and information.

Another reason that I felt this question is important is because I felt that students were simply studying for tests and not really learning the information. There is a difference between being able to provide straight definition answers and truly being able to explain a topic in detail. I feel that in social studies students are not always able to take in what they are learning and fully understand it. I wanted them to really know the information and I thought that journal writing would force them to stay up to date with the material we were covering in class. Social studies can be a challenging subject area for many students and I do my best to make it interesting and meaningful for everyone. Having them engage in journaling is a way to force students to be more conscious of their own learning and make necessary changes in their study and work habits. Many students need to put more emphasis on understanding material instead of simply memorizing the basics just for an assessment. It was important for students to complete their readings on a daily basis in order to stay on top of the information and to be prepared for what they will learn the next day. Students had no idea when I would have them write in their journals. This means that they had to do readings every night and stay abreast of the information in order to be prepared when I would surprise them with a journal entry in the beginning of class.

This question was something I wanted to learn more about because I had never used journaling in my classroom and I thought it would be interesting to see what would happen if I made this change. I am not someone who normally writes in a journal or reflects on what I learn, so I was interested to find out the impact it would have on my students. I wondered what impact journaling would have on students and how they would feel about this change in our classroom routines. I believe that some students would be really excited about being able to engage in journaling, while others might be more hesitant to try something new and different.

There are many assumptions about myself as a student and constant learner that had an impact on my question and research. I have always been the student who procrastinated and never completed tasks when they were assigned. Until junior year of high school I always put everything off until the last possible minute. Having the assignments hanging over my head would cause me stress, yet I still continued the same routines. Also, I had difficulty participating in class because I had not done the readings or truly listened in class. I always earned good grades and was able to hold my own, but did not engage in positive work habits. At some point I realized that I was doing myself a disservice and made a change in how I approached school and learning. Therefore, part of the reason that I chose this question is because I was hoping to show my students that doing the required work when you are supposed to would result in them doing better on their unit assessments. If students complete nightly readings and are prepared for journal writing everyday, they should be more successful in learning the necessary information to succeed on a unit assessment.

There are many assumptions about my students that impacted my decision to choose this question and include journaling in my research. I think that most of my students do as little as possible to get a grade that they are satisfied with. Granted there are those students who work

hard on a daily basis and keep up with all readings and assignments. These are the students who should find journaling a simple task and would also do well on unit assessments. Yet, other students do not complete their daily reading and are surprised and upset when they come to class and have to write in their journal about what they are learning. I think that many students do not come to school to expand on what they already know and are learning about. They realize that school is the vehicle that will get them to the next step in life, but they are more concerned with their grade than understanding important facts, such as what got this country out of the Great Depression. It can be frustrating to work with students who are really not at all interested in the subject material or learning further about a topic. Most just want the basic information that they will need to get a good grade on a unit assessment. I hope that students will be want to know why events occurred in history and how they shape life today, but most are not as interested in this aspect. Yet, I still find it important to make learning as interesting as possible for students to peak their interest and prepare them for a positive learning experience. Changing the mindset of all my students to focus more on details than basic facts is an unrealistic goal. However, if a few students realize in seventh grade that staying on top of their work with help them learn and get a good grade, I would be satisfied. I hope to instill this in students and help them to realize the importance of studying and keeping up on their work on a daily basis. This is something that I did not learn for a while, and if I am able to help my students to realize this now, I am satisfied. Having students journal about what they read each night forces them to stay abreast of all assignments. Most were very unhappy with this aspect of class and preferred to only have to read and study when it came time for a unit assessment. Although, they do not realize that learning the information and staying on top of readings are work habits that will only cause

positive results in the long run. It is something that will help them to be more successful throughout their schooling and in their future endeavors.

The idea of coding is something that I had to think about when it came to engaging in research related to my question. When I began to code I did not have any ideas in mind about how to do this. I read through two sections of student journal responses and the codes emerged slowly as a result of their writings. The coding was fairly simple because the questions I asked on my exit slip were fairly straightforward. When I first started I was nervous because it seemed like I was reading a lot of negative responses. Of course I wanted students to have a positive reaction to journaling and feel that it was something that they enjoyed and helped their understanding of material. It was frustrating at first when a common response was, “No, I did not like it and it did not help me prepare better.” I wanted to hear my students saying that they learned more and felt good staying on top of their nightly readings. It seems simple to think that students should just read each night, be prepared for daily journaling, and ultimately understand the information so they can succeed on a unit assessment. Initially, when I began reading their responses from the exit slip I thought that my research did not provide the results that I thought it would.

As I kept on reading I found that there were many other students who enjoyed the journaling and found it to be helpful in preparing for assessments and understanding the material. The students who did nightly readings were well prepared for writing I their journals. I did not tell students what day I would have them write in journals and therefore many were not well prepared. I did this on purpose because I wanted to force students to do their nightly readings so they would be prepared everyday. It was great to see that many students did the readings and found that writing in a journal helped to better prepare them for taking unit assessments. They

also said that it provided them with a way to express what they were learning and confirm that their reading and assignments were correct. These students performed better on assessments because they were well prepared and understood all of the information that I presented to them. I understand that it is not always feasible to think students will do readings on a daily basis, but many realized that with some more effort and work at home, they are more likely to be successful in the long run. I had different reactions to this research as I completed it. Mainly, it was shocking that many students saw the true benefit to completing daily assignments and readings. They were able to see the long term positive impact this would have on their overall ability to understand material, as well as their test scores. These students did not get upset and complain about having to do more work, instead they realized that it was for their own benefit and something they should engage in across subject areas. I was initially concerned when students got upset due to seeing a question on the whiteboard, because I did not expect them to have such negative reactions to it. As time went on, I realized that what I was doing would only benefit student achievement and in the long run they would see that as well. When I completed the study and analyzed the results, I was happy to see that in most cases journaling had a positive impact on students. They had a better understanding of course material, were able to engage in more class discussions, and ultimately scored higher on end of unit assessments. Having students engage in journaling to express their knowledge of a topic has provided many with the ability to fully understand the material and ultimately be more successful on their unit assessments.

Implementation Plan

The goal of completing research is to take what you learn and put it towards future use and to make changes in the classroom and your educational perspective. I researched and

implemented actions in my classroom in order to determine the impact journaling has on students and their unit assessment scores. It is important to implement, use, and share all of the information and knowledge gained throughout this research. As an educator I must look at what worked best during my research, as well as to identify what changes I can make in the future. Having students engage in journaling randomly throughout the week is something that I will recreate next school year. I have learned ways to improve this activity and make it more effective and meaningful for the students.

One way that I can make changes to my research for next year is to adapt the “weight” of the journal grade so that it will not be equal to that of a quiz grade. Having these two assignments equal for students can really impede on final grades. A mistake or difficulty with journaling can severely lower a student’s report card grade. Also, I feel that having journaling equal to a test grade seemed to create an overwhelming amount of stress for students. They were not aware when there would be a journaling assignment and really needed to remain on top of readings and topics discussed in class. I think this was positive because students were forced to focus more on readings and therefore had more knowledge of topic areas. Yet, the downside is that they were so focused on their grade and when journaling would take place that it impacted their learning in the classroom. I still plan to assign one to two journal entries per week on topics that we are covering in class. This will keep students on top of their material and ultimately will help them to better understand information and score higher on unit assessments. When students have to complete nightly readings and keep up on material they should be more prepared when it comes time to take a unit assessment.

I shared the results of this study with the participants before the school year ended. I hoped that students would learn from it and take this knowledge with them in the future. Even if

teachers do not require students to engage in journaling in their classrooms, hopefully my students will understand that if they keep up with their daily assignments and complete required readings on time they will do well on tests. Some of my students did not like the idea of journaling because it was time consuming and challenging for them. Yet, others found it to be a great study skills strategy that would work to help prepare them for unit assessments. Whether or not students enjoyed the idea of journaling, I believe that it has impacted most in a positive way or taught them a lesson to take with them. It is my intention that as much as I have learned from this research, I hope my students learned from this experience as well. I will also explain this to future classes when I introduce them to the idea of journaling in social studies. Now that I have completed this study I am better prepared to explain it to incoming students and provide them with necessary tools and ideas to be successful.

Another way that this study will impact the school is through sharing what I have learned with colleagues. I find it important to share ideas, strategies, and results with others so they can use it in their own classrooms. One method for accomplishing this is through our professional learning community groups in which we share ideas and strategies for improving classroom learning. I will create a presentation and hand-outs to share with colleagues during these meetings in order to share what I have learned and explain the impact this research has on my philosophy of teaching.

It is important to look at the skills that are involved in journaling in the classroom, as well as the dispositions developed that enhance student learning, motivation, and engagement. The most important skill that students will develop through this research is to improve their writing. Having students writing across the curriculum is a school wide goal that we have been working

on. Journaling in social studies works to meet this goal and improve the writing skills of students in all areas.

The disposition of most students has changed throughout this research, as many have become more engaged in social studies. I have also found that journaling in social studies has improved study skills for most students. This is because it has forced them to stay on top of readings and classroom assignments each night. Having good study skills is something that students can take with them in the future and will provide positive results in all subject areas. Journaling in social studies has increased the motivation of students to want to succeed and that is a great thing to see. I notice students who were struggling to score well on unit assignments coming to school more prepared than ever because they are reviewing material at home and looking further into social studies topics. There are those few students who do not like journaling and have a negative attitude about having to study every night. Therefore, their motivation to succeed has somewhat decreased and they are not as interested in succeeding. There will always be students who are not as motivated as others by their own successes. Hopefully, each student has learned valuable study skills and strategies to take with them in future classes.

Many students have increased their engagement in the classroom during this research because they wanted to be aware of all topics being discussed. My students understood the idea that if they remained on top of the material we were learning each day, they would be more prepared when it came time for unit assessments. For the majority of students they were happy to focus more in class because it would provide a positive outcome for them. As always, there were a few students who made the decision to decrease their engagement in class because of frustrations or laziness. They did not want to put in the extra effort to be successful, and instead

were upset that they could not succeed without engaging in journal writing. Overall I found that the engagement level of my students greatly increased during this research and ultimately that means higher unit assignment scores.

In completing this research I found ways to implement, use, and share the knowledge that I gained. I will take what I have learned and use it to improve how I implement journaling in the social studies classroom in the future. I have found what worked best and what aspects need to be improved in order for journaling to work best. One change would be to change the value of journaling grades and adapt it so that it would not be equal to quiz scores. I have found that the motivation, engagement, and student learning in my classroom have been enhanced throughout journaling and this research. There are many ways to take what I have learned regarding journaling in the social studies classroom and use it for the future to improve learning and increase student success.

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