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Teaching Strategies to Increase Student Engagement at the 4th Grade Level

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Teaching Strategies to Increase Student Engagement at the 4th Grade Level

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of Study

Every day when I teach fourth-grade in my elementary classroom, I try hard to make a difference in my students' lives, whether that is academically, emotionally, or socially. I consider myself a dedicated, quality teacher who cares about the overall well-being of my students and enjoys seeking new ways to teach more effectively. It is a passion of mine to ensure that I am offering the best education I can to my students in the limited time we are together during the school day. Learning about teaching strategies that I can use personally and share with my colleagues that would encourage higher levels of engagement among my students is important. Elementary teachers all work daily with a variety of students, teach many subjects throughout each day, are presented with a new group of students every year, encounter ever-changing technologies, and deal with shifting societal norms and values.

It is not enough for any teacher to stick with the same techniques that he or she was taught with in elementary school. Times are different, students have changed, and so should teaching strategies. Research on the topic of engagement suggests that the amount and variety of practices that teachers use to motivate students and otherwise support learning are important indicators of quality learning environments (Bogner, Raphael, & Pressley, 2002; Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley, & Vincent, 2003). This study is designed to help identify teaching strategies that are currently most effective for engaging fourth-grade level elementary students, and to make comparisons between teaching strategies commonly used in elementary classrooms and those found to be most engaging today.

Engaged students are attentive, committed, persistent, and find meaning and value in tasks that make up work (Schlechty, 2011). At school, teachers should find ways to promote these characteristics of engagement in their students as often as possible. Elementary students are able to distinguish between domains in terms of task value, task enjoyment, and task-related feelings of competence (Rimm-Kaufman, Baroody, Larsen, Curby, & Abry, 2015). This means that even young students can easily disengage with their schoolwork if not provided meaningful and valuable lessons designed to appropriately challenge and foster their learning development. Existing research establishes that engagement is critical for learning and that engagement forecasts school success.

My interest in the topic of student engagement stems from my daily work with fourth-grade students. I have seen both positive and negative results from the lessons I deliver to my class and from the teaching strategies I utilize. It is such a rewarding feeling when I see my students excited about learning, curious to know more, asking questions of themselves, each other, and me; looking forward to the next lesson, or even asking me what more they can do at home to keep learning. Seeing that exhilaration and passion for learning in my students makes me want to identify strategies that will create that enthusiasm as often as possible. It is certainly not the case that every lesson in my classroom goes that way, and I do not think it is realistic to expect that they ever will. However, if I can purposely plan activities and lessons around teaching strategies that I know to be engaging to my group of students, why would I not? It is best practice to try to meet the needs of the particular group of learners in your classroom. Taking the time to study their learning preferences, evaluating my own teaching techniques, learning from other students and teachers, and reviewing literature will be time well spent since teaching strategies that increase engagement will benefit every subject area. Students who stay

on task, attend to learning goals, and participate actively in the learning experience show better

academic achievement in elementary school (Fredricks, Blumenthal, & Paris, 2004). My hope is

to see increased levels of engagement in my students which would lead to higher academic

results and increased interest in school and learning.

Research Questions

To help me determine which teaching strategies are most effective for fourth-grade

students, I decided to utilize both students and teachers in my research. Including viewpoints

from both the teaching and learning parts of school would help me to understand the differences

and similarities between each group.

- What teaching strategies are most effective at engaging fourth-grade-level elementary
  students?

- What teaching strategies are used most often by intermediate-level elementary
  teachers in their daily teaching?

- Is there a similarity between strategies that students find most engaging and those that
  teachers think students find most engaging?

- Do the strategies that teachers most often use in their teaching correlate with those
  that students and teachers find most engaging?

To answer these questions, this study reviewed the literature on student engagement and

elementary teaching strategies focused on the intermediate grades. Students and teachers at the

elementary school I work at also completed confidential surveys rating teaching strategies

according to how engaging they found each strategy to be. They were both given the same list of

strategies and asked to rate each strategy on a scale of 1-5. Teachers were asked to rate the same

strategies from the survey in order of how often they use each one in their classroom in while teaching. The data collected were used in reporting descriptive statistics.

Use of Findings

Using the results of the surveys, I was able to determine which teaching strategies fourth-grade students at my school find most engaging, which teaching strategies teachers feel engage students the most, and what strategies are used most often in daily teaching at my school. I was able to evaluate those results, comparing strategies that students found engaging, to those teachers found engaging. I was be able to determine if there is any connection between the strategies that teachers use most often in daily teaching to those strategies determined to be highly engaging to elementary students and teachers.

Through my literature review, I was able to identify strategies that teachers at other schools are using to engage their students in the concepts they are teaching at the intermediate-level grades. I will be able to use these strategies myself and present them to my colleagues. There may be incredible teaching strategies that we were unaware of before my research was completed.

Collectively, my findings will be used to inform my daily instruction at the fourth-grade level. I am also a member of a professional learning community (PLC) within my elementary school. The results of my research will be shared with my colleagues through meetings, modeling, and the resources I will provide to them. Within the school I work at, I would like to share the results of my research and literature review during a professional development day or at an Edcamp, where any staff member can present information to interested staff members.

Limitations

This study was conducted using a convenience sample of the students in fourth-grade at the school I currently work at. I also surveyed teachers at the intermediate grade level from the same school building. This study was limited to the perspectives of students and teachers from a relatively small sample during one school year in a traditional public school. Students receiving free or reduced price lunches is around 25% of the school population. The school is located in an outer suburban city that has a mostly white, middle-class population of approximately 8,000 people.

This study did not rely on statistics, and the methods used to gather data are descriptive in nature. Student and teacher survey results were assessed using a rating scale.

Definitions of Terms

These terms are used throughout this paper and in the research surveys conducted. They were chosen specifically for use in the surveys because they are common teaching techniques used in elementary school instruction. For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Cooperative learning: a teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement (Balkcom, 1992).

Field experience (based on my own experience): learning outside of the classroom setting.

Hands-on, active participation (based on my own experience): activities designed so that students are actively involved in the project or experiment.

Intermediate-level grades (based on my own experience): grades 3, 4, or 5.

Jigsaw learning method: each student in each Jigsaw group must learn a unique segment of information, which he/she then teaches to the other members of the Jigsaw group (Walker & Crogan, 1998).

Literature circles/book clubs (based on my own experience): students discuss portions of books in a small group. Sometimes roles are assigned for group interaction. Students at varying levels are able to share different points about the book.

Project-based learning: work done for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic and complex question, problem, or challenge (Buck Institute for Education, 2018).

Reciprocal teaching (based on my own experience): students learn from each other through discussion focused on predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing.

Student engagement: students are attentive, committed, persistent, and find meaning and value in tasks that make up work (Schlecty, 2011).

Teaching strategy: methods used to help students learn the desired course contents and be able to develop achievable goals in the future (Armstrong, 2013).

Think-Write-Pair-Share (based on my own experience): when presented with new information, students are first given time to think of their own ideas, write those ideas down, partner together with another student, and then share their ideas.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The way today's students learn and want to learn, can be very different than the way their teachers learned when they were young. There have been many changes in our technology, society, and expectations that factor into students' behavioral, emotional, and social needs. It can become a challenge for teachers to engage their students on a high level in their lessons when the teachers themselves may not be aware of appropriate techniques to use to engage today's student. Teachers are assigned standards and requirements they should teach their students academically, but if students are not engaged, instruction will not take hold. This research focuses on highlighting motivational strategies that fourth grade elementary teachers can use to engage their students in all academic areas.

The Meaning of the Student Engagement

Engagement is described as "the glue, or mediator, that links important contexts—home, school, peers, and community—to students and, in turn, to outcomes of interest" (Reschly & Christensen, 2012, p. 3). Student engagement is an outcome that is affected by what happens at home and at school. Family background is considered to have both direct and indirect effects on student engagement outcomes, while classroom and school learning climate have direct effects on student outcomes. Teacher engagement and intention on fostering student engagement is important to students' success in school, since the classroom and school learning climates directly affect students every day (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009).

Research has also provided evidence that the amount and variety of practices that teachers use to motivate student engagement and otherwise support learning are important indicators of quality learning environments (Bogner et al., 2002; Dolezal et al., 2003). Providing teachers with strategies and techniques to use for engaging today's student is valuable in the fast-

paced, diverse society we live in--especially considering that the older students get, the more disengaged they tend to become.

Engaged students are attentive, committed, persistent, and find meaning and value in tasks that make up work (Schlechty, 2011). At school, teachers should find ways to promote these characteristics of engagement in their students as often as possible. Elementary students are able to distinguish between domains in terms of task value, task enjoyment, and task-related feelings of competence (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015). This means that even young students can easily disengage with their schoolwork if not provided meaningful and valuable lessons designed to appropriately challenge and foster their learning development. Existing research establishes that engagement is critical for learning and that engagement forecasts school success. Students who stay on task, attend to learning goals, and participate actively in the learning experience show better academic achievement in elementary school (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Types of Engagement

The reason engagement is so important is that it contributes to long-term learning, persistence in learning complex material, and commitment to apply new learning (Schlechty, 2011). There are many variations of the specific meaning of engagement and what it means for students to be engaged in school, but most researchers agree that engagement consists of several factors that all contribute to students' overall engagement. A three-part definition of engagement that includes behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement is frequently used (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

This multi-tiered student engagement definition is detailed, according to Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2015), as follows:

Behavioral engagement refers to paying attention, completing assigned work,

participating in teacher-sanctioned learning opportunities, and showing an absence of

disruptive behaviors. Cognitive engagement refers to a willingness to exert effort to

understand content, work through difficult problems, and manage and direct their

attention toward the task at hand. (pp. 171-172)

Fredericks et al. (2004) defined emotional engagement as feelings of connection to content,

interest in learning, and enjoyment of solving problems and thinking about content. As teachers

plan for lessons around content they are required to teach, these three factors of student

engagement should be considered, as they all contribute to students' overall levels of

engagement with, interest in, and retention of the lessons.

Engagement Strategies Used in the Classroom

According to Prensky (2005), "All the students we teach have something in their lives

that's really engaging—something that they do and that they are good at, something that has an

engaging, creative component to it" (p. 62). Today's children have a multitude of activities,

games, and information available to them instantly via computers, tablets, smartphones, and

other mobile devices. They can easily choose to access games, videos, music, or literature that

appeals to their interests anytime they are outside of the classroom. In school, especially in

elementary, their choices are limited by decisions and plans the teacher makes. There are many

ways that teachers can capture the high levels of engagement students are capable of exhibiting

when planning for lessons and activities in the classroom. Some of the main categories that

encompass these techniques are: creating opportunities for success, developing curiosity and

creativity, making connections, and building relationships with teachers and peers.

Creating opportunities for success. Engaging teachers do much to motivate their students, using many mechanisms that can increase motivation; the less engaging the teacher, the more prominent was the use of instructional approaches with potential to undermine student motivation (Dolezal et al., 2003). In their study of how nine third-grade teachers at eight Catholic schools motivate student academic engagement, Dolezal et al. (2003) identified two of the nine teachers as "highly motivating. Through observations, interviews, and collections of student work, the motivating techniques these two teachers used in their classrooms were documented. Common strategies used by both teachers to foster success in their students include: encouraging positive self-concepts in their students (e.g., letting them know that they could improve their performance by trying hard), giving students a wide range of strategies for accomplishing academic tasks, providing clear learning objectives and clear directions; and giving effective praise and feedback (Dolezal et al., 2003). The limitations of this study are that observations were conducted solely in Catholic schools, only nine teachers were involved, and observations were made at certain times of the day--not throughout the entire school day. However, their findings show that engaging teachers do much to motivate their students, using many mechanisms that can increase motivation, and specific examples are provided in this study.

In their research, Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that the creation of structure in the classroom provides the basis for student success. This includes clear communication of expectations, consistent responding, offering help and support, and adjusting teaching strategies to the level of the child. Students are intellectually engaged when there are high expectations for success and appropriate intellectual challenge (Willms et al., 2009). Past research has found that a teacher conveying a belief that academic success is possible and teaching material that is

perceived to be relevant to the student (Nicholson & Putwain, 2014) is important to fostering

re-engagement and creating engagement among students.

One specific way for teachers to make learning relevant is to harness teachable moments

as they naturally occur in the classroom. Another strategy to encourage engagement among

students who are typically disengaged is to intentionally place those students in a leadership role

within the classroom or small group, playing on the natural strengths that those students have.

This can lead to formation of intrinsic motivation as the students feel successful, and are

recognized by their peers who may have otherwise ignored or not noticed their special talents

and qualities.

Developing curiosity and creativity. According to Hartley and Plucker (2014):

Traditionally, elementary classrooms in the United States are often thought of as

interactive and imaginative places where children can explore; however, it is possible that

modern classrooms, especially those where standardized testing has become a regular

classroom experience are more conforming and restrictive than ever before. (p. 391)

In their study of creativity in American and Chinese classrooms, Hartley and Plucker (2014)

discovered that the majority of teachers in the United States perceive challenging, creative

classroom activities to contribute significantly to students' creativity; although American

teachers were much less inclined to have students work collaboratively on projects than Chinese

teachers.

Ideas for incorporating creativity and fostering motivation into the classroom include:

cooperative learning, authentic experiences, drama, music, games, manipulative, brainstorming,

sharing ideas with a classmate, creating something individually, learning by doing, and

encouraging risk-taking (Dolezal et al., 2003). Teachers may also choose to take advantage of

technology offered in their school by giving students projects or research that can be completed using resources such as SMARTboards, iPads, video cameras, cell phones, computer applications, interactive media presentations, or digital photography.

Making connections. The use of autonomy support, or giving students some freedom of choice in classroom activities, and providing connections between school activities and student interests builds students intrinsic motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). One instructional strategy that supports engagement from making connections is the 10:2 method. This technique involves two phases, the "Teacher Phase," where learning comes from the teacher, and the "Learner Phase," where learning happens by interaction between learners or at the learner's level (Rao, Savsani, & Vakharia, 2011). After every 10 minutes of teacher instruction, students should be allowed two minutes to process and respond. This student-level processing may be through writing, asking questions to each other or the teacher, or discussing the content with another student.

Another strategy that promotes making connections between subjects and students' personal interests is the 3-2-1 strategy. This response technique was created by Cash (2011) to advance student differentiation in learning. At the end of a class session, or as homework, students write or discuss their learning for the day using the 3-2-1 strategy: 3 ideas or things they remember about the class session, 2 connections they can make to other subject areas or topics they know something about, and 1 question they still have or would like to ask in the next class session.

Building relationships with teachers and peers. There are better learning results when students know the educator is paying attention and will respond to their level of engagement. Ignoring disengagement does not make it go away. Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that

student engagement is optimized when students' basic psychological needs are met. In other words, when students feel safe, nurtured, and supported in their educational environment, they will thrive. Students in Nicholson and Putwain's (2014) study on facilitating re-engagement in disengaged students identified four key aspects important to the student-teacher relationship. These teachers:

(a) treated them with respect to which they reciprocated by showing respect back;

(b) spent time getting to know students on a personal level; (c) cared for students, understood that problems at home often caused behavioral issues at school and made a genuine effort to help; and (d) encouraged and believed in students, which actively promoted students' self-belief that they could achieve. (p. 39)

Skinner and Belmont (1993) also suggested the need for teachers to be involved with their students by showing affection toward students, enjoying teacher-student interactions, and dedicating resources. Having a low student-teacher ratio and positive student-teacher relationships are particularly important for re-engagement, as well as treating students with respect, non-punitive behavior management, offering flexible routes to learning (Nicholson & Putwain, 2014).

The effects of a positive student-teacher relationship on increasing student engagement is highlighted in the findings from Willms et al.'s (2009) study of the Canadian school system. Canadian students in grades 5-12 reported being more socially, academically, and intellectually engaged when there is a positive school climate, high expectations for student success, appropriate instructional challenge, and positive student-teacher relationships. Students in this study reported being engaged only 37% of the time during language arts and mathematics instruction, but students reported that their engagement increased when a positive environment is

present (Willms et al., 2009). The findings from this study are limited to the students' perspective on engagement, but this study does include survey results from a large student sample, which shows that having a positive student-teacher relationship is important to many students.

Students said that classmates' active involvement in academic tasks increased their own motivation to learn and invest in school (Ulmanen, Soini, Pyhältö, & Pietarinen, 2014). Having students work in collaborative groups encourages students to consider others' ideas in relation to their own and explain their thinking to others, which helps a student either solidify or question their own thinking (Franke et al., 2015). Collaborative learning is a teaching strategy that consists of organizing a classroom activity where students work in groups in a coordinated way to resolve a given problem, which cannot be resolved by students alone given the time assigned to the activity (Genç, 2016).

A technique that uses collaborative work effectively is the jigsaw method, which is explained in detail by Strambler and McKown (2013):

> The material to be learned is divided evenly across all of the students with each student being responsible for one piece of the total lesson. The entire lesson is designed such that it cannot be fully comprehended by the group without each of the pieces coming together, thus requiring each student to teach his or her section to the other group members. When it is time for students to be tested, each group member is responsible for the totality of the lesson for their group. (p. 89)

Using the jigsaw technique in the fourth-grade elementary school classroom provides opportunities for all students to become "experts" in their assigned task, give students leadership roles as they taught others, provides a positive group experience where all students are benefiting

from the group's collective knowledge, and engages students in their learning and teaching of others.

Another technique that could be used to encourage social interdependence and build relationships with peers is the creation of assignments based on reward. For example, teachers could assign a project where each student's grade is affected by how others in his or her group perform, creating an incentive to help group mates achieve their best (Strambler & McKown, 2013). This would encourage students to help each other, work positively as a group, and build relationships with each other as they complete the task.

Summary

There are many ways that a teacher can increase student engagement in the classroom. It is important to note that there is not just one proven method or teaching technique that motivates all children. The teacher must spend time getting to know his or her own students before determining what teaching methods will be most effective for engaging a particular class of students. Many studies pointed out that establishing a trusting and positive rapport is the first step to increasing engagement in the classroom. Further conclusions and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Research Study

As a fourth-grade teacher, I see students excited about learning, curious to know more, asking questions of themselves, each other, and me; looking forward to the next lesson, or even asking me what more they can do at home to keep learning. Unfortunately, I do not see those eager and engaged students as often as I hope to see them. Taking the time to study students' learning preferences, evaluating teachers' beliefs on what engages students, and evaluating what teaching strategies are being used in the classroom and how often, is time well spent since teaching strategies that increase engagement will benefit every subject area. Students who stay on task, attend to learning goals, and participate actively in the learning experience show better academic achievement in elementary school (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Participants

Fifty-two fourth-grade students and nine teachers who work with students in grades 3, 4, and 5 completed confidential surveys ranking teaching strategies according to how engaging they find each strategy. All students and teachers in the study were enrolled or employed the same school. Of the teachers surveyed, seven were general education classroom teachers, and two were special education teachers. The school is a traditional public elementary school located in the outer suburbs of the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota. Students receiving free or reduced price lunches is around 25% of the school population. The school is located in a city that has a mostly white, middle-class population of approximately 8,000 people.

Procedure

Research was conducted and personal experience was considered in creating a list of commonly used teaching strategies in a fourth-grade classroom. This list was broken down into

three categories: independent activities, partner or small group activities; and large group (whole class) activities.

Via a Google survey that was sent through e-mail, students and teachers were presented with the same list of commonly used teaching strategies and asked to rate them on a scale of 1-5. The rating scale was: 5 being the most engaging and 1 being the least engaging. Students and teachers were also provided with a common definition of engagement: "Engaging" means being attentive, committed, persistent, and find meaning and value in tasks that make up the work (Schlechty, 2011). See Table 1 for the list of activities students and teachers were asked to rate according to how engaging they felt each activity was personally or for students.

Table 1

Student and Teacher Engagement Survey Questions and Directions

Directions: Please rate these strategies in the order of how engaging you think they each are. 5 being the most engaging and 1 being the least engaging. "Engaging" means being attentive, committed, persistent, and find meaning and value in tasks that make up the work (Schlechty, 2011).	
Independent Activities When you are working on your own, please rate how engaging you find each activity to be. 5 is very engaging and 1 is not engaging at all.	• Having a choice of assignments • Drawing/art/visualization • Electronic-based activities • Working one-on-one with the teacher • Journaling • Paper worksheets • Project-based learning • Reading to self • Writing
Partner or Small Group Activities When you are working with a partner or in a small group, please rate how engaging you find each activity to be. 5 is very engaging and 1 is not engaging at all.	• Game-based learning • Jigsaw • Learning centers or stations • Literature circles or book clubs • Partner reading • Reciprocal teaching • Think-Write-Pair-Share

Table 1 (continued)

Large Group (Whole Class) Activities When you are learning together with a large group, please rate how engaging you find each activity to be. 5 is very engaging and 1 is not engaging at all.	- Chunking and questioning - Discussion or debate - Field experience - Hands on, active participation - Incorporating kinesthetic movement - Lecture or direct instruction from teacher - Modeling or teacher demonstration - Note-taking - Read-aloud - Role paly, simulations, or drama - Watching a video

Teachers were also asked to rate the same strategies from the survey in order of how often they use each one in their classroom while teaching. The rating scale for this survey was also 1-5, but the rating scale values were as follows: 5 is at least once every day, 4 is almost every day, 3 is two or three times per week, 2 is one time per week, and 1 is rarely or never. See Table 2 for the list of activities teachers were asked to rank according to how often they use each activity in their teaching.

Table 2

Teacher Frequency of Use Survey Questions and Directions

Directions: Please rate these learning activities in the order of how often you use each strategy in your classroom. 5 is at least once every day, 4 is almost every day, 3 is two or three times per week, 2 is one time per week, and 1 is rarely or never.	
Independent Activities	• Having a choice of assignments • Drawing/art/visualization • Electronic-based activities • Working one-on-one with the teacher • Journaling • Paper worksheets • Project-based learning • Reading to self • Writing
Partner or Small Group Activities	• Game-based learning • Jigsaw • Learning centers or stations • Literature circles or book clubs • Partner reading • Reciprocal teaching • Think-Write-Pair-Share

Table 2 (continued)

Large Group (Whole Class) Activities	- Chunking and questioning - Discussion or debate - Field experience - Hands on, active participation - Incorporating kinesthetic movement - Lecture or direct instruction from teacher - Modeling or teacher demonstration - Note-taking - Read-aloud - Role paly, simulations, or drama - Watching a video

Results

Independent activities. The student survey results indicate that the top five independent activity teaching strategies that fourth grade students find most engaging are: electronic-based activities, drawing/art/visualization, having a choice of assignments, project-based learning, and reading to self. The teacher survey results indicate that the top five independent activity teaching strategies that intermediate level teachers believe that students find most engaging are: electronic-based activities, having a choice of assignments, drawing/art/visualization, working one-on-one with the teacher, and project-based learning. In the frequency of use survey completed by the teachers, the top five independent activities used most often in the classroom

are: electronic-based activities, reading to self, paper worksheets, writing, and working one-on-one with the teacher. See Tables 3, 4, and 5 for the results from student, teacher, and frequency of use surveys.

Table 3

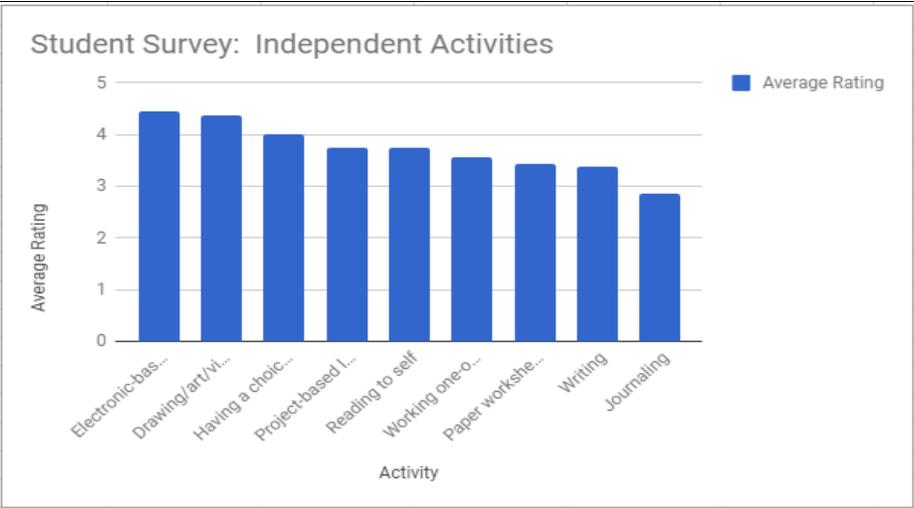**Summary of Student Engagement Survey Results**

Student Survey: Independent Activities	

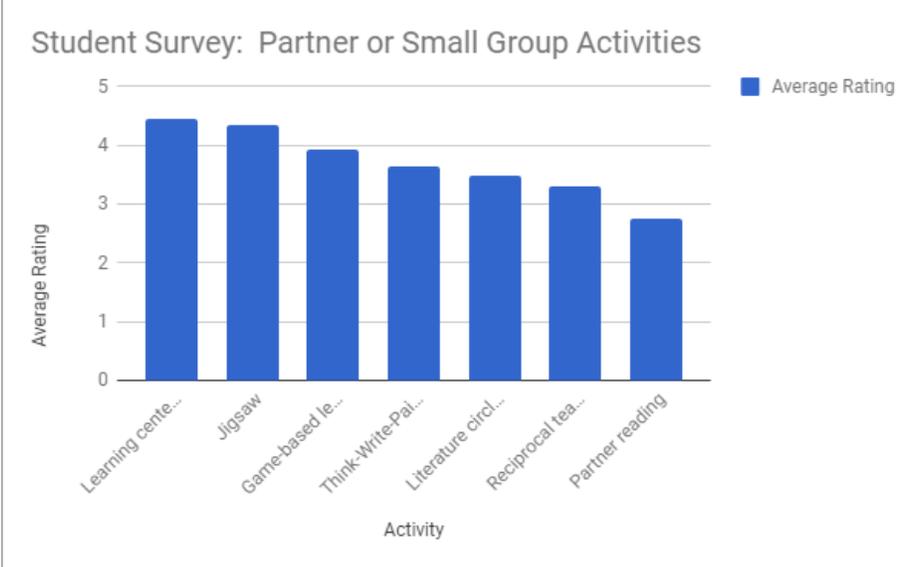| Activity	Average Rating
Electronic-based activities	4.45
Drawing/art/visualization	4.36
Having a choice of assignments	4
Project-based learning	3.75
Reading to self	3.75
Working one-on-one with the teacher	3.57
Paper worksheets	3.43
Writing	3.38
Journaling	2.87

Table 3 (continued)

Student Survey: Partner or Small Group Activities	

Activity	Average Rating
Learning centers or stations	4.44
Jigsaw	4.35
Game-based learning	3.92
Think-Write-Pair-Share	3.65
Literature circles or book clubs	3.48
Reciprocal teaching	3.31
Partner reading	2.75

Table 3 (continued)

Student Survey: Large Group (Whole Class) Activities	

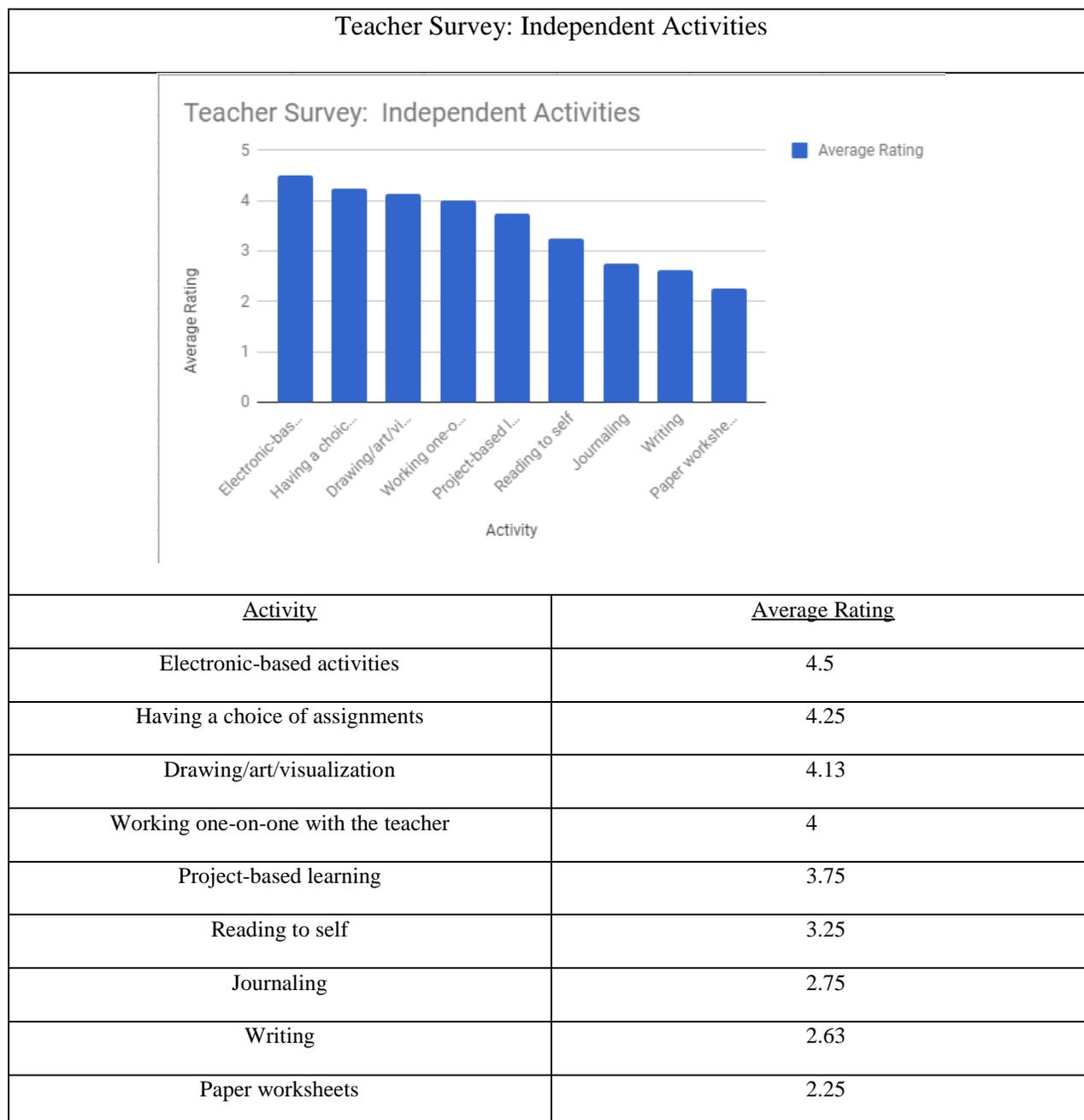| Activity	Average Rating
Debate or discussion	4.41
Field experience	4.39
Role play, simulations, or drama	4.31
Chunking and questioning	3.87
Note-taking	3.77
Modeling or teacher demonstration	3.72
Hands-on, active participation	3.54
Lecture or direction instruction from teacher	3.34
Watching a video	3.28
Read-aloud	3.27
Incorporating kinesthetic movement	2.8

Table 4

Summary of Teacher Engagement Survey Results

Teacher Survey: Independent Activities	

Activity	Average Rating
Electronic-based activities	4.5
Having a choice of assignments	4.25
Drawing/art/visualization	4.13
Working one-on-one with the teacher	4
Project-based learning	3.75
Reading to self	3.25
Journaling	2.75
Writing	2.63
Paper worksheets	2.25

Table 4 (continued)

Teacher Survey: Partner or Small Group Activities	

Teacher Survey: Partner or Small Group Activities

Activity	Average Rating
Game-based learning	4.13
Learning centers or stations	3.5
Literature circles or book clubs	3.5
Reciprocal teaching	3.38
Jigsaw	3.25
Partner reading	3.25
Think-Write-Pair-Share	3

Table 4 (continued)

Teacher Survey: Large Group (Whole Class) Activities	

Teacher Survey: Large Group (Whole Class) Activities

Activity	Average Rating
Hands-on, active participation	4.75
Field experience	4.38
Role play, simulations, or drama	4.13
Incorporating kinesthetic movement	4.13
Debate or discussion	4
Read-aloud	3.75
Watching a video	3.75
Chunking and questioning	3
Modeling or teacher demonstration	2.75
Note-taking	2.13
Lecture or direct instruction from teacher	2

Table 5

Summary of Teacher Frequency of Use Survey Results

Teacher Frequency of Use: Independent Activities	

Activity	Average Rating
Electronic-based activities	4.44
Reading to self	4.22
Paper worksheets	3.78
Writing	3.67
Working one-on-one with the teacher	3.56
Having a choice of assignments	3.44
Drawing/art/visualization	2.67
Journaling	2.67
Project-based learning	2.44

Table 5 (continued)

Teacher Frequency of Use: Partner or Small Group Activities	

Teacher Frequency of Use: Partner or Small Group Activities

Activity	Average Rating
Reciprocal teaching	3.67
Partner reading	3.11
Literature circles or book clubs	2.67
Learning centers or stations	2.56
Game-based learning	2.56
Think-Write-Pair-Share	2.11
Jigsaw	1.22

Table 5 (continued)

Teacher Frequency of Use: Large Group (Whole Class) Activities	
Teacher Frequency of Use: Large Group (Whole Class) Activities	

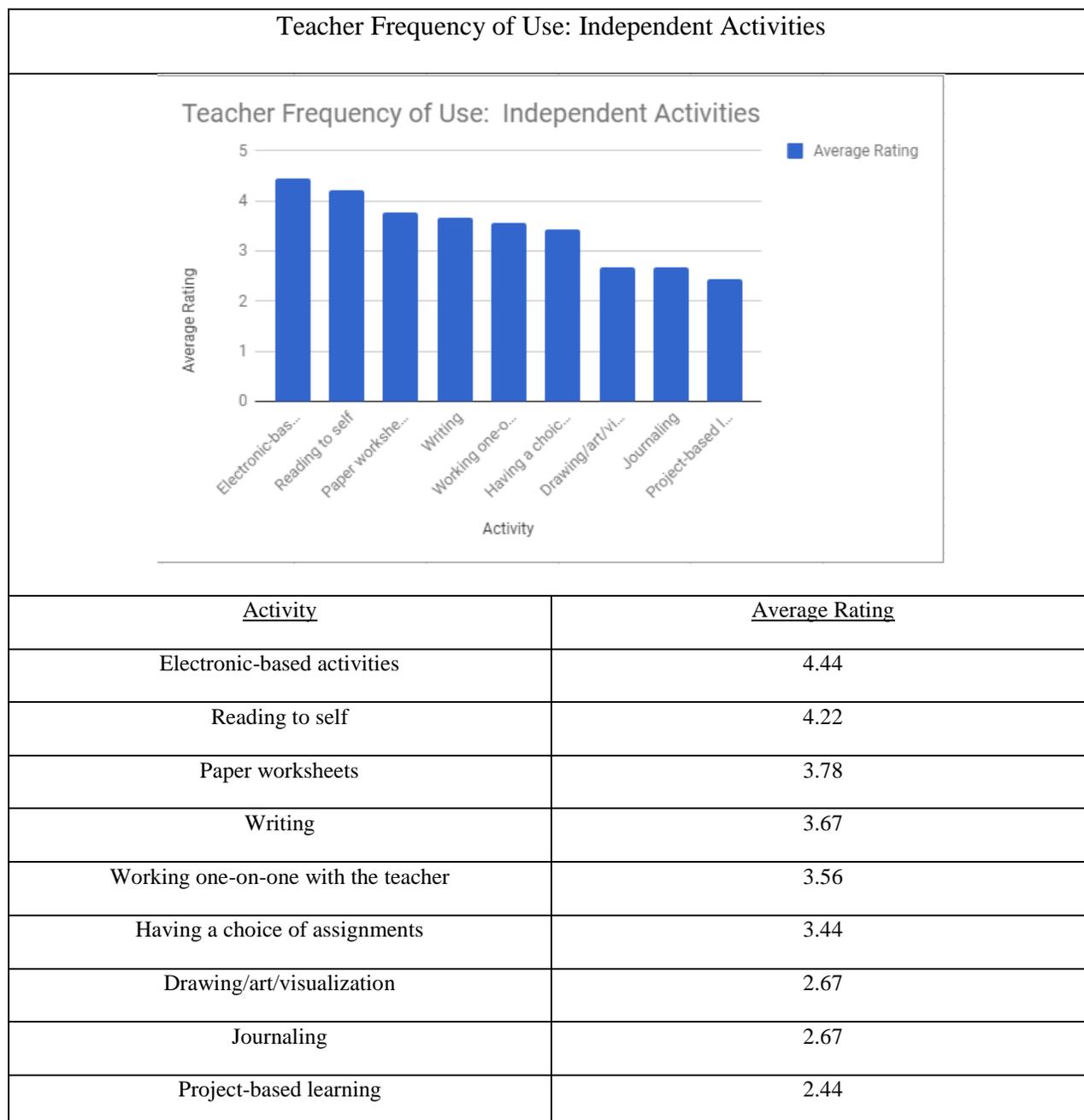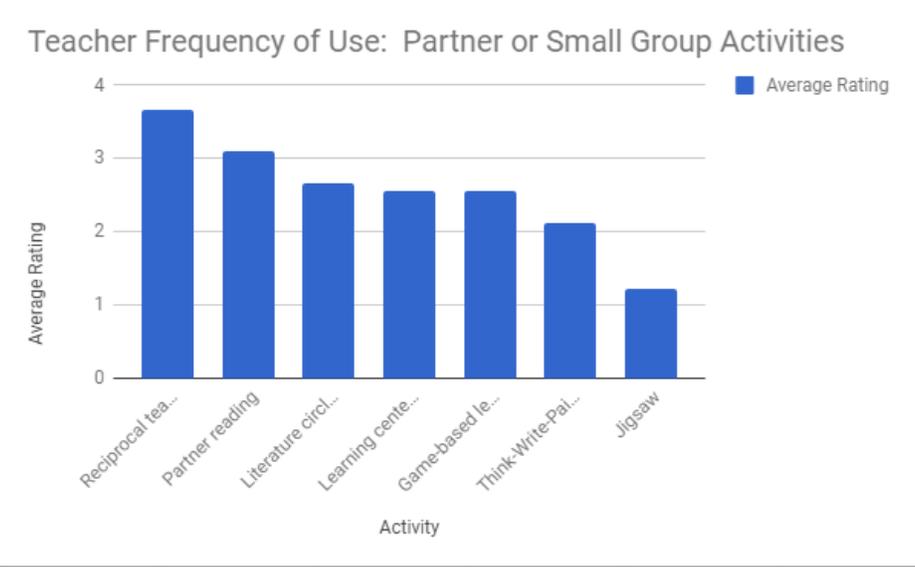| Activity	Average Rating
Chunking and questioning	4.33
Modeling or teacher demonstration	4.11
Read-aloud	4.11
Lecture or direction instruction from teacher	4
Debate or discussion	3.78
Hands-on, active participation	3.44
Watching a video	3.33
Note-taking	3
Incorporating kinesthetic movement	2.22
Role play, simulations, or drama	2.22
Field experience	1.67

Partner or small group activities. The student survey results indicate that the top five partner or small group teaching strategies that fourth-grade students find most engaging are: learning centers or stations; jigsaw, game-based learning, think-write-pair-share, and literature circles or book clubs. The teacher survey results indicate that the top five partner or small group teaching strategies that intermediate level teachers believe that students find most engaging are: game-based learning, learning centers or stations; literature circles or book clubs; reciprocal teaching, jigsaw/partner reading (tie in average rating). In the frequency of use survey completed by the teachers, the top five partner or small group strategies used most often in the classroom are: reciprocal teaching, partner reading, literature circles or book clubs; learning centers or stations; and game-based learning. See Tables 3, 4, and 5 for the results from student, teacher, and frequency of use surveys.

Large group (whole class) activities. The student survey results indicate that the top five large group teaching strategies that fourth grade students find most engaging are: debate or discussion; field experience; role play, simulations or drama; chunking and questioning; and note-taking. The teacher survey results indicate that the top five large group teaching strategies that intermediate level teachers' believe that students find most engaging are: hands-on, active participation; field experience; role-play, simulations, or drama; incorporating kinesthetic movement, and debate or discussion. In the frequency of use survey completed by the teachers, the top five large group teaching strategies used most often in the classroom are: chunking and questioning; modeling or teacher demonstration; read-aloud; lecture or direct instruction; and debate or discussion. See Tables 3, 4, and 5 for the results from student, teacher, and frequency of use surveys.

Discussion

  Independent activities. Both students and teachers indicated that they believe the most engaging independent activity for students is using an electronic-based device. This was also listed as being the activity used most often in the classroom by teachers for independent student work. In our modern society, there is high level of interest among adults and children in electronic tools such as computers, tablets, smartphones, and other mobile devices. This is most likely due to the ease in accessing information, the enjoyment and simplicity of using these devices, and the engaging manner in which devices are designed. It does not seem surprising that both students and teachers would list using electronic devices as a very engaging activity, since using them is becoming more and more popular and expected in today's world. Teachers are capitalizing on this level of engagement from students by incorporating frequent use of electronic devices in their lessons.

  Students and teachers also designated drawing/art/visualization, project-based learning, and having a choice of assignments as highly engaging independent activities for students. However, none of these activities were recorded as any of the top five strategies that teachers use most frequently in the classroom. Teachers indicated that more frequent strategies used include reading and writing-based activities as well as working one-on-one with the teacher. Something important to note here would be the students' preference towards more creative, artistic, or choice-based learning. Teachers could incorporate the read to self that they expect students to do with reading about project-based learning topics that students choose. Students could also complete writing activities within project-based learning. Currently, project-based learning is at the bottom of the list of the most commonly used strategies by teachers, but knowing that

students find this activity engaging is an indication that teachers should put more value and time into planning lessons that incorporate project-based learning.

Another interesting result from the surveys is that teachers rated paper worksheets third on the list of most frequently used independent activities, but teachers ranked paper worksheets at the bottom of the activities they believe students find most engaging. Students ranked paper-based worksheets slightly higher than teachers, but still towards the bottom of the list. An important consideration here is that paper worksheets are very commonly used, but not found highly engaging. Worksheets are easy to use, quick to reproduce, and provide documentation for the teacher to grade and send home to families, but it seems as though students' preference in engaging learning activities leans more toward electronic, creative, or choice-based activities. Teachers who want to engage students more deeply in independent work could utilize websites such as MobyMax, Xtra Math, or other online based learning websites as alternatives to worksheet practice that would provide results and progress of student work electronically to the teachers and families, but would also give students more choice and engagement with electronic based activities.

Partner or small group activities. Commonalities between the student and teacher surveys showing which activities students find most engaging while working with a partner or small group include: learning centers or stations, game-based learning, jigsaw, and literature circles or book clubs. All of these activities involve some kind of movement, discussion with other students, and a focus on working a little bit at a time. Students rated jigsaw learning as their second favorite partner or small group learning activity, but jigsaw was rated at the bottom of the list of strategies that teachers use most frequently in the classroom. Teachers also suggested that jigsaw is a strategy that students find engaging, yet they themselves do not include

it often in lessons. Recognition here is that jigsaw learning strategies should be used more frequently to engage students in learning. Setting up for jigsaw learning does require more preparation from the teacher than other strategies might, which is one reason why it may be used infrequently among teachers. However, students seem very interested in participating in jigsaw lessons, and jigsaw learning does provide excellent opportunities for students to take on leadership roles and teach each other through cooperative learning. Providing leadership roles to all students, even those typically not placed in those positions, and learning through cooperative strategies are proven methods of engaging students at all levels.

This survey showed that teachers at this school used reciprocal teaching strategies the most often with partner or small group work. It should be noted that the school district in which this school is a part of has recently put a lot of emphasis, training, and resources into using reciprocal teaching strategies with elementary and middle school students. This is probably the reason why it is rated highest amongst strategies that teachers use, since it is expected to be used daily in the classroom within this school district. However, students did not list reciprocal teaching work as a highly engaging strategy when working with a partner or small group. This introduction of reciprocal teaching is fairly new to the district. Perhaps if this survey was given again in several years, the results would be different with more students indicating that they find reciprocal teaching strategies engaging or teachers using the strategy less since it wouldn't be something new at that point.

Large group (whole class) activities. The survey ratings for engagement strategies used for large group engagement are fairly similar between students and teachers, but there is a large discrepancy between which activities are found engaging and which are used most often in the classrooms. Common activities that both students and teachers find engaging in large group

settings include: debate or discussion; field experience; and role-play, simulations, or drama. All of these activities involve students taking a more active, rather than passive, role in their learning. Students want to be involved in debates or discussions with their classmates and teacher, they find learning outside of their classroom setting to be engaging, and they enjoy participating in role plays, simulations, or dramas. Surprisingly, the students did not indicate that hands-on participation was a highly engaging large group activity for them, but the teachers surveyed did believe that hands-on participation was engaging for students. Teachers also thought that incorporating kinesthetic movement was engaging for students, but that is listed at the bottom of the survey results for students. Perhaps the students did not fully understand what kinesthetic movement meant, since they gave other more active activities a higher rating.

Interestingly, three of the top five strategies used most frequently for large group activities in the classroom (chunking and questioning; modeling or teacher demonstration; read-aloud; lecture or direct instruction; and debate or discussion) are not included in either of the teachers' or students' top five list of most engaging large group learning activities. The exceptions provided are chunking and questioning (which students only listed as highly engaging), and debate or discussion (which both students and teachers indicated as a highly engaging activity). This is a strong indication that teachers need to rethink how they structure and plan for large group activities. The most commonly used strategies are not found engaging to students or to teachers, so using them seems counterintuitive. Teachers need to take more time to be thoughtful about planning large group activities so that more students can be engaged in learning. A lot of time is spent during the school day in large group activities, so planning more engaging large group activities is especially important. Teachers should focus on lessons that involve more student interaction and discussion with each other, incorporate more role-

playing activities, and find opportunities to take students on a field trip outside of the classroom to extend learning opportunities to locations elsewhere.

Limitations

This study was conducted using a relatively small convenience sample of 52 students in fourth-grade at a traditional public elementary school. The number of teachers surveyed for this study was limited to those teachers working with intermediate-level students at the same public elementary school. There were only eight teachers who completed the survey on engagement strategies and nine teachers who completed the survey on frequency of use. The surveys were only given at one point in the school year, which was in February.

This was a small research study that did not collect statistical data. The evaluation of the data was only descriptive in nature. Student and teacher survey results were assessed using a rating scale, and the choices of teaching strategies were limited to those presented in the survey. Students and teachers did not have an option to include their own additional choices about which strategies they found engaging or not engaging.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research paper was to examine teaching strategies and other learning factors to determine whether or not they encourage student engagement. Chapter 1 provided background information on the topic, Chapter 2 offered a review of the research literature, and Chapter 3 presented the results of a descriptive research study conducted on student engagement teaching strategies. In Chapter 4, I discuss findings, recommendations, and implications from research findings.

Conclusions

Providing elementary teachers with strategies and techniques to use for engaging today's student is valuable in the fast-paced, diverse society we live in--especially considering that the older students get, the more disengaged they tend to become. Teachers need to be in touch with their students' interests, and they need to work strategically to ensure that student are engaged with their learning, and that they are finding meaning and value to their work. Research has provided evidence that the amount and variety of practices that teachers use to motivate student engagement and otherwise support learning are important indicators of quality learning environments (Bogner et al., 2002; Dolezal et al., 2003).

Elementary students are able to distinguish between domains in terms of task value, task enjoyment, and task-related feelings of competence (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015). By means of literature review and a research study, I have concluded that even students as young as fourth grade recognize the value and importance of various activities that they engage with throughout their school day. Their opinions on what teaching strategies are most engaging to them are important for teachers to consider when planning lessons and activities. Students who stay on task, attend to learning goals, and participate actively in the learning experience show better

academic achievement in elementary school (Fredricks et al., 2004). If teachers are looking to improve the academic results of their students, as well as boost motivation and interest levels in class lessons, putting a focus on increasing engagement should be a priority.

Recommendations

The teacher must spend time getting to know his or her own students before determining what teaching methods will be most effective for engaging a particular class of students. Many studies pointed out that establishing a trusting and positive rapport is the first step to increasing engagement in the classroom. Taking time to get to know students and to ask them about their own interests and what activities most engage them would be valuable time spent.

Teachers looking to hone in on a particular group of students' learning preferences should consider conducting a survey similar to what I conducted with the group of fourth-grade students at my building. At the very least, a teacher should consider the results from this small survey and put extra emphasis on increasing discussion and debate, give more time for students to collaborate together, allow choice in assignments and projects; deemphasize worksheets and writing assignments; and increase student participation in using electronic learning tools.

Summary

In summary, there is no one way to absolutely increase engagement for all students, or even a teaching strategy that will engage every student all the time. The research here suggests that teachers should focus on lessons that involve student interaction and discussion with each other, incorporate role-playing activities, and extending learning opportunities to locations outside of the classroom (field trips). Other suggestions include finding ways to provide leadership roles to all students, even those typically not found in those positions, and having students learn through cooperative strategies such as jigsaw and project-based learning. Students

will also benefit from including electronic devices in lessons and completing tasks involving drawing, art, or visualization.

Teaching is not a science, but it is an art. Teachers need to recognize student differences and needs, as well as provide a diverse array of experiences and activities to suit the learning styles of many different students. When students feel they have choice or the activities are tailored to their interests, they will be more engaged. Engaged students are attentive, committed, persistent, and find meaning and value in tasks that make up work (Schlechty, 2011). At school, teachers should find ways to promote these characteristics of engagement in their students as often as possible.

Suggestions for Further Research

My suggestion for further research on the topic of student engagement would be to involve the students at an entire grade level or even school in a research study similar to the one I conducted. Since students are passed on from year to year to new teachers and staff, everyone could benefit from information gained in a study on student engagement. Having more data to review to determine if the results I attained through my studies are similar to students at other grade levels or even other schools would be valuable.

It would be important to continue to conduct similar research over time since students' and teachers' interests change. There are always new technologies or new teaching techniques to consider when thinking about ways to increase student engagement. This study is only a small glimpse at the preferences for student engagement at this point in education.

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