STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH STATE ADOPTED CURRICULUM MATERIALS

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education

by
Ashley Dossey
Summer 2012
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APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

_________________________________
Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

_________________________________                  _________________________________
Cris E. Guenter, Ed.D.         Rebecca Justeson, Ed.D., Chair
Graduate Coordinator

_________________________________
Maria Sudduth, M.A.
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ABSTRACT

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH STATE ADOPTED CURRICULUM MATERIALS

by

Ashley Dossey

Master of Arts in Education
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School should be a productive learning environment where students gain knowledge and build on top of their background knowledge. In order to fully comprehend information, students must show interest in the subject matter. Due to the curriculum being tremendously controlled, students are limited when it comes to reflecting on their background knowledge or studying a subject that is appealing.

This study investigated a variety of teaching strategies used to enhance the level of student engagement while using stated adopted curriculum materials. My mentor teacher and I explored different aspects of student engagement that involved: implementing different teaching strategies into the classroom, asking for student and parent feedback, analyzing student work samples, interviewing teachers, and maintaining
anecdotal records on our lessons. We also looked for any attitude changes involving academics such as an increase in student engagement, active participation, and deeper understandings of the content.

The methods and procedures used contributed to answering: How can I improve the student engagement in my second grade classroom using a variety of teaching strategies with state adopted curriculum materials?

Anecdotal notes, pretests, posttests, feedback forms, interviews, and student work samples were the methods used to demonstrate that it is possible for students to be engaged while using a variety of teaching strategies with state adopted curriculum materials. The results of the methods used were consistent. Student engagement increased when visual learning, team tasks, and student choice were implemented into the curriculum when compared to teaching using state adopted curriculum materials only. In many cases, students became motivated to extend their own learning through independent research after exposure to engaging teaching strategies.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

I believe children are entitled to a systematic and stimulating education. School should be a productive learning environment where children gain and build on top of their background knowledge. In order to fully comprehend information, students must show interest in the subject matter. Everlove, Fisher, and Frey (2009) believe guided instruction is more interesting than direct instruction. They state, “A large body of research shows that students involved in cooperative work demonstrate higher levels of academic learning and retention than their peers working individually” (p. 3). With laws such as No Child Left Behind and required scripted curricula, it is increasingly difficult for US schools to provide such an education for all students. Novice teachers such as myself are scrambling to create an engaging classroom for our students. Other teachers whom I personally know, including myself, want nothing but the best for children. Children are quite capable of performing tasks such as problem solving, thinking critically, and exploration. Due to the curriculum being tremendously controlled, students are not given an opportunity to implement any of these strategies into their learning process. They are expected to sit, listen, and retain—which is rather challenging if they are not actively engaged.
Speaking from personal experience, I need to do much more than sitting and listening in order for my learning to be enhanced. Appleton, Christenson, Kim, and Reschly (2006) mention that there are four types of engagement which need to be targeted in order for engagement to take place: academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological. Academic engagement typically deals with students completing their homework and other academic in class assignments while behavioral engagement includes attendance and participation. Students may choose to complete their homework because they are interested in the subject taught in class and want to learn more. Cognitive and psychological engagement are not as easy to identify because the cognitive side deals with how one values education while the psychological side is commonly based upon the student’s relationship with peers and the teacher (Appleton et al., 2006). Children need an even larger variety of instructional activities considering their attention span is low, therefore, how can we expect students to be fully engaged with such limited amounts of critical thinking or hands-on-activities built into the curriculum.

Highland Hills Elementary School, which is located in a rural northern California town, became a program improvement school in 2003. Ninety three percent of children who attend Highland Hills come from families with a low socio economic status and only five percent of parents have a college degree. Fifty-four percent of students come from a Hispanic background, 33% of students are Caucasian, and the remaining students’ ethnic backgrounds are Asian, African American, and American Indian. Nearly 45% of students are English Learners. When a program improvement school is under No Child Left Behind, the state will provide the school with extra support and interventions. Due to the state funding, Highland Hills needed to follow a strict curriculum in order to
raise test scores. A great deal of effort was put in from every staff member and students in order to dramatically improve Highland Hills. The hard work did eventually pay off, but the majority of lessons came straight from the adopted curriculum and very few outside resources were implemented.

The California system provided grants to the lowest-performing schools in the state, relied on a school improvement planning process to develop a school improvement plan that would lead to improved student achievement, and required the school to work with an “external evaluator” or consultant in developing the plan. (Orfield & Sunderman, 2006, pp. 549-550)

In the 2010/2011 school year, the state took over Highland Hills and reorganized it. With the help of the state, 90% of the staff being replaced, and an increase in test scores, Highland Hills was able to exit program improvement. Highland Hills is still carefully monitored and teachers are constantly being observed to make sure the curriculum is being properly taught using this state sanctioned restricted curriculum.

Children from all over the world come from poverty and environmental factors which are out of their control can be responsible for some students’ lack of motivation. “Certain student characteristics, such as grade level, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) may be related to one or more of the variables of interest” (Antaramian, Appleton, Huebner, & Reschly, 2008, p. 421). Other contributing factors to lack of motivation during lessons may include: content that is beyond or far below a student’s current background knowledge, very few teaching strategies, limited student interaction, and repetitive activities. I would like to make a difference by giving these children something to look forward to when they come to school. Since I am only with students at school, I have limited control over their home life, but I can control their life at school to a certain extent by creating engaging lessons. My hope is for students to view
learning as fun. Hopefully students can learn the skills of engagement and practice them throughout their future. If I can implement engaging teaching strategies with a restricted curriculum, I believe my students will become successful.

Statement of the Problem

Student engagement is crucial when it comes to learning. Staying engaged is a challenging task for a great deal of students in my classroom. We are required to teach straight from the book, using Open Court for Language Arts. Open Court does not allow much critical thinking to take place. The primary teaching strategy Open Court stresses is direct instruction, which requires a great deal of lecturing. This leaves very little time for student interaction. The Open Court lessons also do not allow time for students to discuss their thinking process. Students are instructed to read, make a prediction or two, and summarize. It is the teacher’s job to write the information on a chart and students then copy it. The majority of the students struggle to complete their own charts due to a lack of motivation. Even if students do complete the chart, their focus is on writing and completing, rather than understanding or making connections, therefore, they are missing the purpose. Only a handful of students in my class are able to answer questions regarding what has just been taught. The Open Court lesson format and strategies were new to the students. With these strategies being unfamiliar, I made the assumption students needed to practice this teaching style more in order to successfully retain information.

After several weeks of practice with Open Court, approximately four more students were able to contribute, but more than half of the class was still disengaged. I
started to carefully monitor each student’s behavior during lessons. Very few appeared to be focused. I observed students doing everything but paying attention. The main behaviors I saw were: students looking at the ceiling, playing with the Velcro on their shoes, or searching for a piece of trash on the floor to play with. After witnessing such behavior, I thought to myself, how can I keep students engaged using only state adopted curriculum materials?

Fortunately, I was not alone in noticing the lack of motivation among students. My mentor teacher also noticed how uninterested the class was and we agreed that some major changes needed to take place starting with our teaching styles. The issue of student engagement was also mentioned during our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Apparently, student engagement was a major concern for multiple grade levels at our school site. With this issue being so common, the rest of our PLCs were dedicated to transforming our disengaged students to engaged and successful students.

Purpose of the Study

Once the discovery of poor student engagement was recognized throughout multiple classrooms at Highland Hills, we decided to take action as a school. Our PLCs focused deeply on analyzing the true meaning of student engagement. For several sessions, we were given an opportunity to brainstorm individually, which led to small group work. While I was brainstorming, I began to think of behaviors I wanted to see from students. I wanted to know my students were paying attention. Some physical behaviors I thought to include: eyes on the speaker if someone is speaking, eyes on the
text if we are reading, and listening ears. Other behaviors I wanted to see were students being physically engaged in an activity or displaying excitement. In order for this behavior to occur, they must be interested, so how can I increase the level of student engagement with such a restricted curriculum? After developing a concise definition of student engagement in our small groups, we came together as a whole and put our ideas together where everyone agreed on an appropriate meaning of student engagement:

*Student engagement is active learning through verbal and nonverbal communication; using cue strategies. Students are engaged when they are using academic language, complete sentences and they are actively participating either verbally or nonverbally. They are able to paraphrase what they have learned. Students are providing evidence of understanding the task at hand, by actively participating and interacting in their own learning process.*

Once our definitions had been determined, it was our goal to have our students show us they were fully engaged. It was determined that we would be allowed to make minor accommodations to our Open Court Program as long as we used Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies. GLAD consists of multiple teaching strategies where a combination of language acquisition, teamwork, and critical thinking take place. It provides a clearer understanding of content with immediate feedback and targets all students’ needs, including English Language Learners. As of October 2011, my mentor teacher and I began looking for changes in behavior once we implemented GLAD strategies into the curriculum. It was our job to marry the two teaching strategies together; Open Court and GLAD.

GLAD is an instructional model which uses a combination of many teaching strategies. Scaffolding plays a large role in GLAD strategies which Davis, Guthrie, and Lutz (2006) describe as teachers supporting students’ cognitive and motivational abilities
during instructional activities. Motivation is a contributing factor in student engagement, therefore, it is important to give students something to look forward to during lessons. “Active engagement is present when students are behaviourally and positively emotionally involved in the learning activity at hand” (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 595). By implementing GLAD into the classroom, I hope to see my students fully involved by actively participating and staying on task. This behavior will tell me that they are engaged.

Theoretical Bases and Organization

GLAD strategies offer a variety of approaches where students are given an opportunity to practice critical thinking skills. One strategy used before reading a story as a class is to make a pictorial input chart. Students are able to analyze pictures and write down any observations or questions they may have. This stimulates their thinking and prepares them for the story. While students are reading through the story, there are many stopping points which allow students to summarize. As the student summarizes, the teacher writes the summary down. Once the story is read all the way through, a full summary has been formed. The sentences from the paragraph are then transformed onto sentence strips and passed out to the class. Students are asked to add information or details to their sentences. Once the class completes their sentence strips, the students properly place the sentence strips carefully into a pocket chart making sure the sequence is precise. Next, the teacher cuts the sentence strips into one or two word phrases and passes them back out to the class. Then, the class is once again instructed to place their
phrases back in the pocket chart. This GLAD task is more challenging and every child is responsible to actively participate.

Estell, Manzeske, and Perdue (2009) believe that student engagement is crucial when it comes to drop out rates. If students are actively participating, then they are more likely to stay in school to further enhance their learning. This is why student engagement is crucial. Students will further their education and have no desire to drop out if they are interested and enjoy learning.

Another strategy that can increase student involvement is for teachers to simply provide ample opportunities for all students to respond by using response cards (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). While this is whole class instruction, students are required to participate. Before students answer, they can be given time to discuss their thoughts and ideas with each other. This can be accomplished first thing in the morning during a warm up or during simple transition periods. Greenwood et al. (2002) also believe instructional strategies should be implemented to reduce the amount of teacher led discussions and lectures.

Limitations of the Study

In order to further conduct research on the level of student engagement while implementing GLAD strategies, I looked for specific behaviors in my students. I consistently observed my entire second grade class to make sure they remained on task and understood the content presented. My hope is for the level of student engagement to significantly increase. While Open Court was being taught, approximately four or five students actively participated. With GLAD, every student is required to actively
participate. Students are encouraged to share their thinking process with the class. As this action research began, I looked for an increase in the number of hands raised, paid closer attention to the use of academic language, and listened for supporting evidence to support student’s ideas. Out of all of my students, I was hoping to see them eager and willing to participate. Most of my research took place in the classroom. Names of students were done with the use of pseudonyms. My limitations included a small sample size and a short duration of data collection within my classroom. Other limitations included the setting and age of the students as I cannot be certain my finding can be generalized to other settings or age levels.

Definition of Terms

**Cognitive Content Dictionary (CCD)**

Brechtel (1992) describes CCD words as signal words. The teacher writes the word down explaining where it came from and why the class should learn it. The class works in teams to make predictions of the meaning by explaining the clues used. The teacher shows the class a gesture along with stating a synonym to transform the CCD word into a signal word for the day. The next day, students work in teams to define the word and use it in an oral sentence. The teacher records the definition along with a sketch.

**Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD)**

An instructional model where children, including English Language Learners, typically experience achievement through cognitively complex academic content. The model has concrete strategies which encourage effective interactions between students
and teachers (Project G.L.A.D., 2009). Thinking skills and problem-solving abilities are developed that reinforce effective practices. A Tier 4 Project GLAD Consultant (2012) also describes GLAD as an overriding theme where visuals are provided and teamwork is encouraged where students can practice speaking using academic language.

**Metacognitive Skills**

Baker and Brown (1984) (as cited by Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2009) describe metacognition as the process of purposefully monitoring thinking. This can be accomplished through clarification, thinking and problem solving strategies, self-questioning, self-monitoring while comprehending, and immediate action is taken if one fails to understand (Dermondy & Speaker, 1995, as cited in Echevarria et al., 2009).

**Professional Learning Community (PLC)**

Borko (2004), Darling-Hammond (1998), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and NCTAF (1997) (as cited by Echevarria et al., 2009) describe PLCs as educators who collaborate to share knowledge, experiment with ideas, and provide opportunities for teachers to be engaged in teaching through an intensive development that benefits teachers, students, and anyone involved in the learning process.

**Program Improvement**

Title I funded schools fall into program improvement when they fail to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in language arts or math. If the school is still in program improvement after five years, the state will require the school to strictly follow their requirements. A school exits program improvement once the Annual Yearly Progress is achieved for two consecutive years (California Department of Education, 2012).
Student Engagement

A child who actively participates with eagerness in an academic setting while showing persistence and effort (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Students who write, participate in tasks, read aloud and silently, discuss academics by asking, answering, and analyzing questions demonstrate engagement (Greenwood et al., 2002).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The public education system in the United States seems to be more challenging as time goes by due to our nation’s laws such as No Child Left Behind. The No Child Left Behind act has good intentions, but the outcome has made teachers feel extremely pressured. Students are not receiving the most thorough education as possible since they too are feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of standards with which the state has bombarded public schools. The focus of all of these standards appears to be based on quantity, not quality. Students are entitled to receive a quality education through engaging teaching strategies.

A teaching strategy that is encouraged by the district is direct instruction. “There is critical need for research on professional development that differs from traditional, stand-up-and-deliver models to help school learning communities move toward lasting change” (Truscott & Truscott, 2004, p. 53). Direct instruction can be beneficial teaching strategy for some standards, but most students need a variety of teaching strategies used in order for information to be retained. There are many different teaching styles embedded in Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies where students can use metacognition to enhance their literacy and academic language. Chamot and O’Malley (1996) suggest students reflect on their own learning while
teachers support their mental processing in order for effective learning to take place. GLAD allows students to work in cooperative groups, actively participate, and build background knowledge. This can be done by allowing students to have a say in their learning experience and by the teacher scaffolding. Teachers can also scaffold lessons and use guided inquiry to keep students’ minds stimulated.

Engagement

In order for student engagement to take place, teachers must provide a comfortable atmosphere as students are enhancing their metacognitive skills. Rushton and Juola-Rushton (2008) explain the significance of keeping the mind stimulated: “Effective teachers support brain development by encouraging children to make discoveries in well-planned environments that support student autonomy” (p. 88). One way Furrer and Skinner (2003) define student engagement is a child who actively participates with eagerness in an academic setting; effort and persistence also contribute to student engagement. If a student is disengaged, their attention will shift to something completely off topic. Effective teachers will get their students back on track and focused on the lesson.

Academic engagement is a goal many teachers strive for when it comes to teaching their students. Greenwood as cited in Greenwood et al. (2002) state: “Academic engagement refers to a composite of specific classroom behaviors: writing, participating in tasks, reading aloud, reading silently, talking about academics, and asking and answering questions” (p. 329). Asking a question shows curiosity while answering a
question with accuracy shows effective attentiveness. In order for a child to be curious or attentive, they must be interested in the content being taught.

“Academic achievement and social skills are two child characteristics that exert powerful influences on school engagement” (Estell et al., 2009, p. 1085). Specific characteristics in which students express interest is consistent completion of homework, motivation, and good communication skills. In order to have social skills, students must know how to communicate their ideas and express their thinking process. Being aware of metacognition goes hand in hand with motivation because it shows students are aware of specific strategies (Bajšanski & Kolić-Vehovec, 2006). Students are in control of their own learning when they participate in cognitive tasks. Students need to use their prior knowledge and context clues to make inferences which help with language and content tasks (Chamot & O’Malley, 1996). Metacognition also shows that students are competent and are knowledgeable in the subject matter due to understanding the strategies taught by the teacher.

GLAD

GLAD is a teaching model used to improve language acquisition and promote critical thinking skills. GLAD also uses many techniques to enhance a positive learning environment. Teamwork, kindness, responsibility, and respect are just some of the concepts GLAD focuses on. Students are encouraged to work in teams and are provided with a great deal of visuals. A Tier 4 Project GLAD consultant (personal conversation, May 2012) expressed a key goal in student engagement is students who use academic language in a meaningful conversation. She believes students must show interest and
passion in academic discussions, which GLAD trains students to do. GLAD supports unmotivated students by constantly reinforcing the three standards: showing respect, making good decisions, and solving problems. The Tier 4 Project GLAD Consultant also motivates students by recognizing their positive attributes and giving them an opportunity to earn awards. She has seen unmotivated students blossom into motivated students by challenging them with higher expectations. Challenging students with higher expectations, giving them opportunities to earn awards, and reinforcing positive behavior are strategies that highly impact students when it comes to student engagement.

In order to keep students engaged, there must be an overriding theme that is interesting and broad (Tier 4 Project GLAD Consultant, personal conversation, May 2012). Visuals, such as pictorial input charts, and teamwork all play major roles in keeping students engaged.

Teamwork is crucial in order for many GLAD lessons to be successful. Rather than telling students they need to practice teamwork, it is the students’ responsibility to define teamwork by describing what teamwork looks like and what teamwork sounds like. This is done in order for student to have a solid understanding of the definition. Students are able to know what they should look and sound like while working in teams.

Visual Learning

Visual learning is a technique used in which students can see what is being taught. Some visuals that aid in learning are: brainstorming webs, task-specific organizers, and thinking-process maps (Hyerle, 1996). These visuals allow students to organize their thoughts and categorize different topics. These representational formats are
more appealing to some students when compared to other formats (Kolloffel, 2012). If some students are intrigued by these visuals, it is possible that they may pay more attention to the information inside of them when compared to focusing on the same information written on a piece of paper or on the white board. Visuals also assist some students in organizing information in their mind so that they can interact with the content more easily. Students respond well to visuals and usually remain engaged (Tier 4 Project GLAD Consultant, personal conversation, May 2012). Visual learning can allow students to think critically as well as link ideas together in order to clarify meaning.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning requires a great deal of teamwork. Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Liévano and Queija, 2009) define cooperative learning as students who work together in small groups to enhance their own learning as well as that of their peers. Kagan (1995) explains the advantage cooperative learning has over the traditional classroom:

In the traditional classroom, students are called upon one at a time. During this whole-class question-answer time, the teacher actually does more talking than the students, because the teacher must talk twice for each time a student talks: first asking the question and then providing feedback in the form of praise, comment, or correction opportunity. (p. 9)

Kagan (1995) also goes on to explain that cooperative learning saves time. It takes approximately one hour in the traditional classroom setting to master what is accomplished in two minutes during cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning is a beneficial tool according to Everlove et al. (2009) because students can gain confidence, develop healthier relationships with peers, and
improve their social and academic skills. This is very important since it can contribute to motivation. Slavin (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 1997), conducted a study showing cooperative learning to be a contributing factor to students working hard and succeeding due to their ability. Students have the ability to accomplish assigned tasks due to the strategies cooperative learning provides. Açıkçı and Güvenç (2007) state, “Cooperative learning promotes effective learning strategy use, and it is an effective method of strategy teaching. It is also easy to implement and combine with active instructional tasks such as concept mapping” (p. 118). Concept maps provide students with an opportunity to link their existing knowledge with their new knowledge. Concept maps usually have a positive outcome on student learning (Açıkçı and Güvenç, 2007).

Students also benefit from cooperative learning because they practice their communication skills. “Students talk to each other, providing immediate feedback and correction opportunities” (Kagan, 1995, p. 14). An important task an effective teacher must remember is to be involved with students at all times, even when they are working in groups. Teachers need to be present to monitor student learning as well as to continually encourage critical thinking.

**Scaffolding**

A student who shows a high level of engagement may be someone who reads a relevant book during an appropriate time, participates in class discussions through thought-provoking questions, and is willing to express their ideas to peers (Davis et al., 2006). Educators need to be the scaffold to model the appropriate behavior and academic thoughts expected from their students instead of verbally instructing them. “Vygotsky’s
theoretical perspective suggests that social interactions like the aforementioned facilitate cognitive development, especially when more skilled ‘experts’ provide assistance to novices” (as cited in Fair, Vandermaas-Peeler, Beaudry, & Dew, 2004, p. 230). Guiding children through learning processes because it is beyond their knowledge is known as scaffolding. Fair et al. (2004) also view scaffolding as an approach for children to become independent. After enough guidance, students should be able to solve problems on their own and be less dependent on the teacher.

Scaffolding can certainly aid in levels of student engagement. Students take the guidance received and use the strategies to assist them in future tasks. When modeling this behavior correctly, some educators may view this as a high level of engagement which supports cognitive development as well as social development. Since scaffolding requires a great deal of guided inquiry where students are receiving help and staying in engaged because they are still required to explore and think on their own:

Because the teacher makes possible the student participation, students have multiple opportunities to self-correct or evaluate approaches and solutions. In doing so, instructional scaffolding creates opportunities to build and demonstrate competence, revealing ways to learn, monitor, and evaluate, which are simultaneously supporting opportunities to self-regulate. (Meyer & Turner, 2002, p. 20)

Students need to experience this type of success because it is rewarding. If students are succeeding, it is common for their engagement in the classroom to increase which will motivate students to learn even more.

Even when students are working in cooperative groups, teachers should still closely monitor and participate with the students. This can be a reminder to students on how to work as a team as well as stimulate their thinking as the teacher asks questions.
Gillies (2006) (as cited in Gillies & Khan, 2009) explain “. . . teachers play a critical role in promoting interactions among students and engaging them in the learning process” (p. 9). The questions asked by teachers can help students make connections between their past experiences and current readings in the classroom to establish a new understanding.

Teachers should have high expectations of their students regardless of their learning level or student engagement level. Educators should challenge their students’ abilities and try to make their learning experience interesting.

Choice

Even though the curriculum can be restricted at times, teachers should put in the effort to make it more student-centered. This may be time consuming, but it is beneficial especially if students can relate or feel they are a part of the decision making process. Reeve (1999) (as cited in Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCinto, & Turner, 2004) explains that teachers should not rely on their students to become motivated on their own when it comes to specific academic tasks:

We are suggesting that, although clearly student interest is key when one considers determinants of persistence, it may be that interest develops as a result of interactions with learning tasks that have been structured in such a way as to promote engagement rather than as the precursor to engagement. (p. 101)

If students are engaged, they are more likely to be on task. Allowing student choice in the classroom decreases behavioral problems (Morgan, 2006). Therefore, students must be on task because they are engaged in their schoolwork. Since the curriculum is so restricted, giving students a choice is difficult. Some schools will require a standard to be covered using a specific approach while others are more lenient as to what the approach is as long as the standard is taught. For autonomous schools, educators
can give students a few options from the specified standard and allow students to vote. The winning vote will determine the topic students will study next. Morgan (2006) also states that giving students a choice may be a way to create positive reinforcement. This can dramatically increase a child’s perspective on school in an optimistic manner. Also, Rushton and Juola-Rushton (2008) stress the significance of choice: “Creating a classroom environment where student expression and choice are solicited provides a welcoming atmosphere for children to grow at independent rates” (p. 88). It is crucial for children to grow as individual learners since children are at different levels.

Guided Inquiry

Guided inquiry can be defined as asking questions, planning investigations, and communicating results to one another (Bass, Contant, & Carin, 2010). Guided inquiry is an approach used to further enhance metacognition skills. Students are supported through the process as well as engaged. An example Everlove et al. (2009) share is a teacher who models her thinking process to solve a word problem for her students: She states her answer choices and discusses each choice in detail to determine if it makes sense. Modeling strategies can be accomplished in any subject. “The teacher’s role is to model these kinds of responses and monitor their practice” (Everlove et al., 2009, p. 77). Students are more likely to benefit from watching/hearing an example of a thinking process rather than watching the teacher write the answer or solve the problem.

Direct Instruction/Explicit Direct Instruction

In some situations, direction instruction can be effective, but it should not be the only teaching method used. Open Court uses direct instruction. Teachers do the
majority of the talking and students are not able to interact with one another. Explicit
direct instruction is also used at Highland Hills for Board Language and Board Math.
Students sit and listen as teachers use a pointer to practice specific math and English
Language Arts standards. Students are encouraged to follow the pointer and read aloud,
but they are not given an opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions or ask
questions.

In order for students to be fully engaged they need to be involved in the
lesson. Truscott and Truscott (2004) discuss the disadvantages of traditional teaching:
“They report that students acquire virtually all of the 5,000 words they learn per year (on
average) from real-life situations, compared to only about 100 to 200 vocabulary words
per year learned through traditional instruction” (p. 53). This is why it is important for
teachers to implement a variety of teaching strategies rather than (explicit) direct
instruction only.

Conclusions

Even though it is a challenging task for teachers to hold their students’ interest
during lessons, research shows that it is possible. Using a variety of strategies will help
keep the level of engagement high. Several of the teaching strategies which are embedded
into GLAD are cooperative learning, guided inquiry, student choice, visual learning, and
scaffolding. The research proves that students will benefit from these teaching styles
because they allow for accommodations as well as modeling, visuals, and teamwork.
Teachers who practice these teaching skills are effective and their students benefit.
This action research will attempt to discover if students are more engaged through GLAD strategies rather than traditional teaching or teaching from scripted lessons. Chapter I examined ideas on how to keep students engaged when the curriculum lacks thought provoking activities. Chapter II examined research in which to keep students engaged. Chapter III will reveal the methods used to study student engagement while Chapter IV will describe the results of implementing different teaching strategies into the classroom to increase student engagement. Implications for future action in student engagement will be examined in Chapter V.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

During my action research, I investigated a variety of teaching strategies to enhance the level of student engagement among my second grade general education class. This question was derived once I began witnessing students who appeared to show a lack of interest during some daily lessons. My question was also confirmed once our professional development days were used to analyze student engagement behaviors as well as the effects that teaching strategies have on student engagement. My co-teacher and I came to the realization that we needed to immediately take action in order to raise the level of our students’ engagement. I thought this was a valuable question to research because I visualized a great deal of positive effects from a high level of student engagement, such as: an increase in student understanding/learning, an increase in student motivation/active participation, and a possible decrease in student disciplinary actions. Everlove et al., 2009, explain how group work can raise the level of student engagement by students’ self-esteem increasing, improved relationships among students, as well as enriched social and educational skills.
Design of the Investigation

The question researched throughout this thesis is, how can I improve the level of student engagement in my second grade classroom using a variety of teaching strategies using only state adopted curriculum materials? More specific questions include: If students are engaged will behavioral problems decrease? Will students actively participate? Will students think more critically? Will students develop deeper understandings? Will their attitude toward specific lessons change? Rather than using only state adopted curriculum materials as my mentor teacher and I used the first few weeks of school, we wanted to raise their level of student engagement. We believed if we used outside materials with our adopted curriculum, Open Court, that students would become more interested and have a deeper understanding of the content. We combined Open Court with other teaching styles to see if we could produce thinking, motivated students.

Student Population/Demographics

The data collected for this action research was derived from a rural school in the Northern California region. Ninety three percent of the students at the kindergarten through sixth grade school come from families of a low socioeconomic status who qualify for the free or reduced-priced meals program. The focus of my study is my second grade class. There are 22 participants in this study: thirteen are male and nine are female. Thirteen of the students are English Language Learners whose primary language is Spanish with the exception of one student who is Hmong. Two English Language Learners fell into the advanced category of the California English Language
Development Test (CELDT). Seven students scored early advanced and four students fell into the intermediate category of CELDT testing. All English Language Learners with the exception of one student who has an auditory processing delay did not receive any additional support outside of the classroom. Two students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in my class; one student’s IEP is for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism while the other student’s IEP is for having an auditory processing delay. The student diagnosed with ADHD and Autism has a full time instructional aide who further supports him daily. The student who has an auditory processing delay received modifications such as preferential seating near the instructional aide, extra time to complete assignments, and small group as well as individual instruction for 45 minutes, four days out of the week with an RSP (Resource Specialist Program) teacher.

Data Collection Instruments

The process of observing the participants took place the entire school year, but the majority of the data gathered and analyzed used in this study was from the end of January 2012 throughout the month of May 2012. The instruments used to test various levels of student engagement were: anecdotal notes, pre and posttests, interviews, student/parent feedback forms, and student work samples. A variety of instructional approaches such as: Cooperative Learning, Scaffolding, Choice, Guided Instruction, and Visual Learning were used to study the participants’ responses throughout the action research, many of which are listed in Chapter II of this thesis.
Anecdotal Notes

As my mentor teacher and I began collecting data while specifically looking for any sign of an increase in student engagement, we made sure to document our observations. Everlove et al. (2009) explain anecdotal notes as: “Recording kidwatching observations can be as simple as using a clipboard with sticky notes in order to jot quick comments about a student’s participation in group work” (p. 55). Our notes were kept at each of our desks and occasionally on a shared desk where the Elmo was located. Anecdotal notes consisted of verbal and nonverbal communication, active participation, academic language, and body language displayed by the students. If we observed an obvious behavior, we quickly made a note of it and took it into careful consideration. Throughout the week, we would compare our notes with one another and combine them. After reflecting on our notes, at times we were able to remember other significant occurrences from the day, which we added to our notes.

Pre-tests/Post-tests

Pre and post-tests were administered sporadically before beginning a new unit and after the completion of a unit. The tests were given in small groups and as a whole class. The pre and post-tests consisted of identical questions and were each graded with the scores being compared to each other. I searched for any differences or similarities between the pre and posttests, hoping students’ scores did not decrease on the posttest. Once the pre and posttests were graded and compared, they were used to measure student progress. I analyzed the tests carefully and looked for an increased number of correct answers on the posttests.
Feedback Forms

Feedback forms were completed by students and parents in order for perspectives outside of the classroom to be gained. Students completed the surveys in class in small groups and as a whole class. Parent surveys were sent home with the students with a set of instructions explaining the purpose of the survey. The parent feedback form consisted of two brief questions. Fourteen students returned completed parent feedback forms to me. If students and parents chose to complete the survey, they were highly encouraged to be honest in order for me to improve my teaching strategies for their child’s best academic interest. It was not required for any names to be written on the surveys for confidentiality purposes. The purpose of the student feedback forms was to learn how students felt while participating in specific activities. I wanted students’ feedback in order to make future lessons even more successful. I asked students to be completely honest. I let them know it was perfectly acceptable if they did not like something. I also told students they did not have to write their name on their paper if they were not comfortable doing so. Due to some absences and students moving, twenty students completed the feedback form.

Student Work Samples

I collected a variety of student work samples throughout the duration of this study. Some of these samples included the pre and post-tests as previously discussed. Other work samples included in this thesis are different summarizing strategies where students worked in cooperative groups to practice equal participation and accountability. Even though the students were working in teams, they were not completely independent
due to my mentor teacher and me scaffolding the small groups. Another student sample is a poem that students wrote in a small group. Students were given the opportunity to select their favorite dinosaur studied during our fossil unit and write a poem using adjectives and verbs. I also collected writing samples after we completed our *Our Country and its People* unit. The students created their own books which consisted of: the westward movement, the frontier, immigration, statue of liberty, Native Americans, and important things about America. Students included an illustration with each writing piece. They were able to create their books on their own using background knowledge, learning tools, and resources which were available for use. Other writing samples and drawings were collected which were other contributing factors to student engagement examples.

**Observation/Interview**

My mentor teacher and I were fortunate enough to have two Project GLAD teachers teach our students for four days. The GLAD teachers worked hard to implement their strategies into the classroom and I carefully watched each strategy presented. I was able to witness the way the GLAD teachers presented new information to the students as well as the students’ responses to it. I also had an opportunity to speak to one of the Project GLAD consultants who shared her thoughts on keeping students engaged while following the state adopted curriculum.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Quantitative sources of data were used to find out how students felt about participating in specific activities using GLAD strategies and direct instruction when they shared their opinions on a feedback form. I asked the class questions and they answered
yes, sometimes, or no. I was able to graph their results and compare their likes and dislikes. Feedback forms were also sent home for parents to respond to if they wished to do so. These were also carefully analyzed to determine whether students engaged in conversation at home with their parents about what they enjoyed learning most at school.

Pre and posttests were also thoroughly analyzed to measure student progress. I counted the number of correct answers on the pretest and compared it to the number of correct answers on the posttest. The pre and posttests were identical; therefore, I looked closely for improved scores on the posttests.

Another method used to conduct research was qualitative data which determined if students were engaged by using academic language, asking questions, making connections, and using metacognition. My mentor teacher and I kept track of these observations in our anecdotal notes which we were able to reflect upon.

Student work samples were carefully analyzed to determine if student engagement had increased. I compared multiple student work samples and was able to determine which assignments students spent more time on or put more effort into by checking for: accuracy of the content, academic language, penmanship, and neatness.

An interview from a Tier Four Project GLAD consultant was also taken into careful consideration in determining methods to help increase the level of student engagement. The GLAD consultant has taught GLAD strategies to students ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade. She shared her definition of student engagement as well as other strategies she uses for all grade levels that contribute to student engagement.
Conclusion

With the variety of methods and procedures that were carefully analyzed in determining ways to increase student engagement, my hope was for each procedure to be consistent. The quantitative and qualitative data used to conduct this research helped to gather multiple perspectives that could possibly be linked to one another.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

Chapter II of this thesis described the need for teachers to implement a variety of teaching strategies into the classroom rather than using only direct instruction. It also explained the importance of teachers incorporating other materials with the state adopted curriculum materials. I was able to use qualitative and quantitative data to determine strategies that increase the level of student engagement with state adopted curriculum materials.

Anecdotal Notes

The anecdotal notes my mentor teacher and I collected primarily focused on student reactions and changes in attitudes toward activities. Once we began incorporating other strategies while using Open Court, we saw an instant increase in student engagement. Students instantly began finding CCD words in books and reporting back to us. We also noticed students adding CCD words to their everyday vocabulary. They began using CCD words as descriptors to compare and contrast characters as well as making connections between stories. While using strategies from the curriculum only, students were not participating as much as we had hoped. The same students raised their hands to summarize, make a connection, or ask a question. The students who did not
participate seemed to struggle. We began selecting students besides the five who always participated to share their ideas. The students we called on struggled to share information. The facial expressions I witnessed appeared as if students were frustrated and confused. They would start to say something and stop mid-sentence because they did not fully understand the content. One student in particular, who I will call Jasmine, was completely disengaged. While trying to summarize a story, she either had a confused facial expression or shared information that was irrelevant to the discussion. When I asked her to further explain the information I was struggling to understand, she said, “I don’t know” and sighed. We tried having students work in teams, but we saw very little progress being made.

The first strategy my mentor teacher and I used before reading a story from Open Court was to have students preview the story. Students read the title only, looked at the pictures, and made predictions with their teams. Then my mentor teacher and I wrote ten vocabulary words from the story on a piece of chart paper. Students worked with their teams and made predictions using the words. We wrote their predictions below the ten vocabulary words on the same piece of chart paper. Then, we used the Open Court strategies such as: students reading the story independently, students reading the story aloud, and students listening to the story on a CD. Once the class understood the story, we checked their predictions for accuracy. Students worked in teams to discuss their thoughts and were allowed to use their books to double check information. Using the same vocabulary words in making predictions, the students summarized the story. If a prediction was correct, we put a check mark next to it and rewrote it on a separate piece of chart paper. If a prediction was incorrect, we wrote what really happened. The students
seemed to respond much better to this. Jasmine became an active participator quickly. She was full of ideas and excited to share. I noticed an increase of student engagement with other students as well, but Jasmine’s was the most obvious to me.

I also observed a major improvement in another student who was Autistic. This student had a full time instructional aide at all times. He was a very bright student, but vaguely participated in class or team discussions. He spoke to his aide frequently, but was hesitant to communicate with peers. When we began using GLAD strategies everyday and encouraging more teamwork, this student became much more independent. He volunteered to participate and willingly expressed his ideas with peers. The students respectfully responded and encouraged him to be a part of the team. He eventually did become a dedicated team member and did not need his aide to assist him. He contributed just as much, if not more, than other students once we used GLAD as our main teaching strategy.

I also took notes when students expressed a strong interest or disinterest. For example, when I mentioned it was time for blending, board language, or board math many of the students reacted in a negative fashion. Some would sigh, grunt, or look disappointed. Others asked, “Can we do something else instead?” Blending was a requirement from Open Court and board language and math were part of our curriculum. The content from board language and board math was crucial because students were tested on it on the district benchmark exams.

Board language, board math, and blending were taught using direct instruction. Students read aloud and answered questions as I pointed to the slides. I observed many students talking to each other instead of reading and staring everywhere
except for the board. This was the method our school was required to use in order to teach and review English Language Arts and math standards. Since my mentor teacher and I had very limited control on how to get these standards across, my mentor teacher suggested we reward students for good behavior during the direct instruction lessons. We looked for students who: participated, did not complain, sat crisscross applesauce, had hands in their lap, eyes on the board, and did not distract others around them. We appointed two scouts who immediately followed all directions. The two scouts sat behind the class and continued to participate, but it was also their job to look for other students who were following all directions. After the lesson, the scouts selected one or two people they saw making a good decision, showing respect, or solving a problem. The scouts and students selected by the scouts earned an award. The awards were small pictures with brief facts from the unit that the class was currently studying. Students responded well during direct instruction lessons once they were given an opportunity to earn academic awards. Students enjoyed collecting awards and gluing them onto their folders. Awards did encourage students to remain on task and to participate. Rewarding students is not necessarily a teaching strategy, but it is an approach I found that contributed to student engagement. Even though the students did not like sitting through the direct instruction lessons, they looked as if they were engaged.

When I mentioned other activities to the students such as: pictorial input charts, Cognitive Content Dictionary (CCD) words, cooperative paragraphs, or expert groups, students responded in a positive manner. Many looked excited and stated, “Yes! This is going to be fun!” All of the above activities are GLAD strategies which we frequently embedded into our curriculum. GLAD provides high expectations for student
learning, metacognition, scaffolding, student choice, visual learning, cooperative learning, and active participation (Project G.L.A.D., 2012).

Pretests/Posttests

Pretests and posttests were administered before and after some units and lessons. These tests consisted of summaries, short answers, and multiple-choice questions. Students needed to reflect on their knowledge in order to answer the questions. Summarizing tests were performed in teams, as a class, and independently. Short answer and multiple-choice tests were performed independently. I administered a 5-question test to students before and after learning about an important historical figure. Out of the 22 students who participated, fifteen improved on the posttest, five students had no change, and two students scored better on their pretest. These tests were used to measure their knowledge after implementing GLAD into the curriculum. The tests were another way to assess their understanding. I informally assessed students every day throughout the day, but I wanted to confirm my observations with a formal assessment. While analyzing the different types of summaries, students performed better on the post summary or stayed the same.

Feedback Forms

I administered two separate feedback forms to students and parents. The feedback form I sent home with students for their parents to look at consisted of two questions. The first question asked: When your child comes home from school, does he/she discuss what was learned in class? I only expected yes or no responses. If a parent answered yes, then there was a second question to answer: If you answered yes to the
question above, what does your child enjoy learning? I sent 22 feedback forms home and received 16 of them back. Fifteen of the parents answered yes to question number one. As I read responses to the second question I began to think of ways my mentor teacher and I presented the information they enjoyed learning to the students. Twelve of the responses for question number two consisted of one or more of the following topics students enjoyed learning: Native Americans, dinosaurs, famous historical figures, and animals. One parent commented that her child enjoys learning about these different topics because she is able to be creative and artistic. Another parent exclaimed her child has so much fun at school and talks about school all of the time. Three of the parents responded that their child enjoys learning math, reading chapter books, and learning new words in English.

As I read the feedback forms, I realized we used GLAD strategies when students learned about Native Americans, pioneers, dinosaurs, famous historical figures, and animals. Each Native American, animal, historical figure, and dinosaur students studied was introduced using a pictorial input chart. Pictorial input charts were labeled with facts which served as a visual for students. As the pictorial input chart was being drawn and labeled, direction instruction was the teaching strategy used. I stopped after about five minutes of lecturing and allowed the students approximately two minutes to share interesting facts learned so far. Brechtel (1992) describes guided oral practice as extremely important: “Guided oral practice offers an excellent opportunity to use cooperative learning strategies and provides students with a means of interacting with each other by using the vocabulary and concepts in guided situations to negotiate for meaning” (p. 34). Once students shared with each other, they were redirected toward the pictorial input chart in order for me to finish it. Once I finished labeling, drawing, and
lecturing, I allowed students to share more new facts they had learned with one another: “Reading and brain research reinforces the importance of that metacognitive aspect of processing not only what information has been learned, but how it has been learned or acquired” (Brechtel, 1992, p. 28).

Pictorial input charts took anywhere from two or three days to complete. We revisited the chart frequently and clarified any confusion. Before formally revisiting the input chart, my mentor teacher and I labeled index cards with one or two phrase facts pulled from the input chart. We passed one or two index cards to each student and had them carefully read it independently. Then, as we revisited the chart, students listened carefully. As we lectured, students walked to the input chart and taped their index card over a fact that we had just discussed. This encouraged students to listen and move around during the review.

Once students had a solid understanding of the pictorial input chart, we assigned each group to write about a topic from the input chart in order to form a cooperative paragraph. Brechtel (1992) states, “Cooperative learning is an extremely valuable tool in language acquisition” (p. 146). Topics typically included: habitat, family life, physical characteristics, food, predators, prey, tools, protection, clothing, games, etc. Once students were assigned a topic, they worked in teams to write complete and detailed sentences on sentence strips. “Cooperative learning allows for that crucial negotiation for meaning with text and peers” (Brechtel, 1992, p. 147). Then, students placed their sentence strips into one large pocket chart where we read each sentence strip aloud as a class. The next step was to arrange the sentence strips in the order students thought fit best. As a class, students revised and edited sentences as my mentor teacher and I used
scaffolding to guide them. At last, the cooperative paragraph would be complete after two or three days. Students practiced reading their paragraph and at times, my mentor teacher and I typed the paragraph for each student to have their own copy. Many students took the paragraph to recess and read it to their peers and other teachers. Students showed a sense of pride after completing and reading their paragraph.

The feedback form students completed consisted of eleven questions. Based on my observations from watching student reactions and responses during lessons, I had a general idea as to how students felt about some lessons, but I wanted to confirm it with them before I made any assumptions. Students were able to respond to each question by answering *yes, no, or sometimes.* I asked the students if they liked: blending, board language, board math, and summarizing independently which are direct instruction lessons. The majority of the students answered *no,* they do not like board math, board language, or blending. Answers varied when asked if they liked summarizing independently. When students were asked if they liked learning new CCD words, pictorial input charts, cooperative paragraphs, and expert groups which are all GLAD strategies, most students answered *yes.* Then most students answered *yes* when asked if they liked creating their own books from our unit, *Our Country and Its People* which involved student choice. Students were asked if they liked summarizing as a class and if they liked summarizing as a team which involved scaffolding and answers varied. Lastly, all but one student answered *yes* when asked if they liked publishing parties. We had publishing parties at the end of every unit. Students invited their families and other teachers to come to our class to show off their work. Students looked forward to sharing their work. It was a way to reward them for working hard and it gave the students
something to look forward to. I think they were more motivated to do well when they knew they were going to eventually present it.

Student Work Samples

I collected many student work samples throughout this action research project that helped show students were engaged. The students created their own books by reflecting on their background knowledge. They were able to write about early American life and their work showed they were very knowledgeable in the area. The content of their writing was accurate, neat, and organized. Most of the students did not need much revising or editing because of this. They learned and retained this information by being exposed to multiple pictorial input charts, books, short stories from Open Court, and many peer discussions.

Interview/Observations

I had the opportunity to interview a Tier 4 Project GLAD consultant who taught our students for four days using GLAD strategies. The purpose of this was for teachers to be trained in GLAD. She expressed student engagement as students using academic language in a meaningful conversation. She believes students must show interest and passion in the discussion which GLAD trains students to do. Next, I asked how GLAD supports unmotivated students. She constantly reinforces the three standards GLAD uses which are: show respect, make good decisions, and solve your problems. She also motivates students by recognizing their positive attributes and giving them an opportunity to earn awards. She has seen unmotivated students blossom into motivated students by challenging them with higher expectations. Challenging students with higher
expectations, giving them opportunities to earn awards, and reinforcing positive behavior are strategies that highly impact students when it comes to student engagement.

I have given my students an opportunity to earn awards which has helped keep students on task, but I asked the GLAD consultant if she ever found her students becoming bored with the awards. She has had students who have become bored with the awards, therefore, she frequently changes the awards by using different pictures and facts. She has randomly given pop quizzes where students are allowed to use their awards. Many of the awards have key facts so if students have earned many, passing the pop quiz is definitely achievable.

The GLAD consultant informed me of the specific aspects GLAD uses that contribute to student engagement. She believes there must be an overriding theme that is interesting and broad. The visuals such as the pictorial input charts and teamwork all play major roles in keeping students engaged.

GLAD also uses many skills to enhance a positive learning environment. Teamwork, kindness, responsibility, and respect are just some of the skills GLAD focuses on. When my class was being taught by the GLAD consultant they focused on teamwork. Teamwork is crucial in order for many of GLAD lessons to be successful. Rather than telling students they need to practice teamwork, the students defined teamwork by describing what teamwork looks like and what teamwork sounds like. This was done in order for student to have a solid understanding of the definition. They were able to know what they should look and sound like while working in teams.
Presentation/Discussion of the Findings

Students were given a new CCD word every day. Each word selected was related to our unit. For example, during the unit, *Our Country and its People*, one of the CCD words was *journey*. I introduced *journey* by saying it aloud and having the class repeat it back. I asked students to raise their hands if they had ever heard of the word *journey*. I recorded the number of students who had heard of *journey* and the number of students who had not on chart paper. Then, I instructed the students to count how many syllables *journey* had. Next, students spelled *journey* for me as I wrote it down on chart paper. Once I wrote the word, students worked in their teams to make predictions on what *journey* meant. As students worked in teams, my mentor teacher and I monitored team discussions and questioned their thinking. After giving teams an opportunity to discuss, we selected a person from each team to share their prediction with the class. I wrote down each prediction from the different teams on the chart paper. I asked representatives from each team to share their prediction, share the clues that lead the team to come up with the prediction, and lastly I asked if they worked as a team. If students worked as a team, they earned a point for their team. After each team earned a point, I stated a partial definition, “a trip.” I also showed the students an action for “trip” by flipping my hand down and using my index and middle fingers to represent people walking. *Journey* was used the entire day as a transition word. For example, I would say, “When I say the word, I would like to you put your books away and sit in the ready position so you can line up for recess. *Journey!*” Students echoed *journey* back and said “a trip” as they performed the action. A great deal of repetition, movement, speaking, listening, and looking carefully took place while learning new CCD words throughout the
day. *Journey* was briefly discussed later in the day during a video the students watched and again when we read a book as a class.

The next day, I asked students to work in their teams and discuss what they knew about *journey*. They did this by using their background knowledge they had learned the day before while watching the video and reading the book. Just as before, my mentor teacher and I monitored group discussions and continued to question their thinking. Once students came up with a definition, I selected another representative from each group to share with the class what *journey* meant. Then, I asked students, “How do you know that’s what *journey* means? Did you work as a team?” Once again, if students were able to explain their thinking to me and work as a team, another point for their team was earned. After students told me the definition, I wrote it down on the chart paper: “a long trip or adventure.” Next I instructed students to create a sentence using *journey*. Students worked in their teams as my mentor teacher and I monitored each team. Just as before, a representative from each team was selected to share their team’s sentence. If they worked as a team, another point was earned for their team. After all teams shared a complete sentence, I added a check mark under the sentence category on the chart (Figure 1).

Students went through this process with each word. Students responded well to CCD words and added it to their everyday vocabulary. Their academic language improved overall once we implemented CCD words into our everyday routine. I asked students if they liked CCD words and the majority of the students did (Figure 2). They showed me throughout the year that they liked learning new CCD words because they actively participated and started using the words in their everyday vocabulary. If
they were reading a story on their own and came across a past or present CCD word, students always came to show us the word in their book.

Most students liked doing Pictorial Input Charts (Figure 3). Whenever I would draw the picture and write the important facts next to the picture, the students were always full of questions. I could tell they were interested by the way they sat crisscross applesauce on the carpet, with their hands in their lap, and eyes on the chart.
they were listening because they asked very relevant questions. Students even began checking out books that were related to the topics covered using Pictorial Input Charts and eagerly shared information they had read. The majority of the students were excited to learn even more and asked to share with the rest of the class.

**Figure 2.** Results to the question “I like learning new CCD words.”

**Figure 3.** Results to the question “I like Pictorial Input Charts.”
When I asked the class if they liked writing Cooperative Paragraphs, most students said yes (Figure 4). Students were able to use information from Pictorial Input Charts and other class resources to develop a detailed paragraph in which they stayed on topic. Students took their time while creating sentences and showed good teamwork skills.

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

*Figure 4. Results to the question “I like writing Cooperative Paragraphs.”*

Most students enjoyed working in Expert Groups (Figure 5). Expert Groups gave students an opportunity to choose a topic they wanted to learn about. My mentor teacher and I listed a variety of topics on the board that were relevant to whatever unit we were on. For example, during our Fossil unit, students chose the top three dinosaurs they wanted to learn more about from the large list on the board. Using the lists the students made, they were placed into small groups. Groups were not created based on academic level or California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores.
Students learned many different facts about their topic. They were knowledgeable in categories such as the dinosaurs: family life, time period lived, predators, prey, diet, habitat, and other interesting facts. At times, students referred to activities from their Expert Groups to guide them into developing paragraphs. Students also shared their newly learned facts with students from other Expert Groups.

During the *Our Country and its People* unit, students created their own books about America. Students enjoyed making these books (Figure 6) because they were able to work on them at their own pace and be creative while learning American history. My mentor teacher and I guided them throughout the process by providing a great deal of different resources that they had learned in class and allowing them to reflect on their knowledge. We also revised and edited with students, but some students were able to use their rough draft as a final draft once they came close to finishing their books because they used their knowledge from their previous writings to help them.
Figure 6. Results to the question “I like making books.”

One student who had an IEP and who was an Intermediate English Learner struggled with his writing. He received extra support throughout the year and frequently needed his writings to be revised and edited. He responded very well to the GLAD strategies used because when I compared a writing sample from his journal to a writing sample he produced using his knowledge from GLAD, there was a significant improvement. The following writing sample was produced without any GLAD strategies to guide him. For a rough draft, the sample is acceptable (Figure 7).

The writing sample below was produced using GLAD strategies (Figure 8). The student reflected on his background knowledge and used many resources. The student came to me in order for us to revise and edit together, but we did not need to revise or edit. He was able to use his rough draft as his final draft. I was amazed by the tremendous improvement he had made and he was quite proud of himself.
Figure 7. Rough draft writing sample.

Figure 8. Final and rough draft writing sample.
All but one student who answered *sometimes* enjoyed Publishing Parties (Figure 9). Publishing Parties were a fun way for students to show off their work to family members, teachers, friends, and peers.

![Bar chart showing I LIKE PUBLISHING PARTIES](chart.png)

*Figure 9. Results to the question “I like Publishing Parties.”*

Students worked hard on challenging projects in order to attend Publishing Parties. My mentor teacher and I had high expectations that they were capable of accomplishing tasks even if they were challenging. Since students knew we were confident in them, self-efficacy was gained.

When I asked students if they preferred summarizing independently or as a class, answers varied (Figures 10 and 11). Students did not have a strong opinion on a summarizing style. Regardless of the way students summarized, they were able to accomplish the task.

I asked students if they liked Blending, Board Language, and Board Math. Most students answered *no* or *sometimes* (Figures 12 and 13). Board Language, Board
Figure 10. Results to the question “I like summarizing independently.”

Figure 11. Results to the question “I like summarizing as a class.”

Math, and Blending consisted of direct instruction where students had little interaction with each other.
Figure 12. Results to the question “I like blending.”

Figure 13. Results to the question “I like Board Language and Board Math.”
After reviewing the graphs where students were able to express their opinions, it appears that students did like participating in GLAD or GLAD-related activities. CCD words, Pictorial Input Charts, Cooperative Paragraphs, and Expert Groups are Project GLAD activities that students enjoyed. Creating books and attending Publishing Parties were not specific GLAD strategies, but techniques such as cooperative learning, reflecting on background knowledge, and scaffolding were used which are key components of GLAD. Summarizing was the only question where students showed inconsistency. Summarizing techniques involved Open Court strategies as well as some GLAD strategies, but it is unclear as to why students do not have a strong opinion. Lastly, Board Language, Board Math, and Blending were taught using direct instruction which most students did not enjoy when compared to GLAD.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This action research project examined specific strategies to raise the level of student engagement. I studied strategies to support my question: How can I improve student engagement in my second grade classroom using a variety of teaching strategies with state adopted curriculum materials?

Chapter I introduced the topic of student engagement by describing its significance. Chapter II examined research that supports teachers using a variety of teaching strategies and materials with the state adopted curriculum. It is important for teachers to model and encourage critical thinking in order for students to fully understand content:

By using interactive experiences, students activate their own prior knowledge and recall past experiences. Often, it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide direct experiences so that students can begin to build background information that is essential for reading comprehension. (Brechtel, 1992, p. 28)

Implementing skills such as teamwork will allow students to think critically. They are able to discover information on their own which can be much more meaningful when compared to a teacher telling the information.
In Chapter III, the specific methods and procedures used to collect information for my study were discussed. Qualitative and quantitative data were used to test the different skills and strategies that highly impacted students. My mentor teacher and I used anecdotal notes to collect data while specifically looking for any signs of an increase in student engagement. Our notes consisted of verbal and nonverbal communication, active participation, academic language, and body language displayed by the students. We also looked at pre and post-tests which were administered before beginning a new unit and after completing the unit. Tests were given in small groups and as a whole class. The tests were graded, compared, and used to measure student progress. Feedback forms were another method I used to support my research question. Feedback forms were completed by students and parents in order for perspectives outside of the classroom to be gained. Parent feedback forms were sent home with the students with a set of instructions explaining the purpose of the survey. Student feedback forms were completed in class where students expressed their attitudes toward specific teaching strategies and activities they participated in throughout the school year. Honesty was highly encouraged and names were not required for confidentiality purposes.

Another research method used was an interview from a Project GLAD Consultant who expressed her thoughts and experiences regarding student engagement. She trains teachers and students across California using different GLAD strategies to help promote skills such as language acquisition and academic literacy. A variety of student work was collected throughout this experiment. Samples included different summarizing strategies where students worked in cooperative groups or independently. Other samples included drawings, short reports, and poems.
Chapter IV of this thesis included the results found using the methods and procedures discussed in Chapter III. I carefully analyzed anecdotal notes, pre and posttests, feedback forms, an interview from a Project GLAD consultant, and student work samples. I compared the data from each method used to determine if there was any consistency. Using the qualitative and quantitative data helped show that teachers need to use more than state adopted curriculum materials in order for students to be engaged. The curriculum involves a great deal of direct instruction, but students need to be shown, not told: “With mirroring in mind, it’s important to focus on how to model the behaviors necessary to make group interactions effective and productive” (Everlove et al., 2009, p.41). Modeling allows students to understand what is expected of them as well as an opportunity to practice.

Conclusions

I tested different teaching strategies and implemented specific activities into the classroom to see exactly what students excelled in while following the state adopted curriculum. With an increased level of student engagement, I was able to observe active participators, meaningful connections, and witness a decrease in student behavioral problems. I was able to discover their strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, and motivation toward these activities which helped me plan more engaging lessons to help students succeed.

As I analyzed my data and reflected on my teaching practices, I realized student engagement and classroom management are closely linked to one another. At the beginning of the school year when my mentor teacher and I used Open Court only, I
observed behaviors such as: wandering eyes, students talking to each other rather than listening, and playing with materials inside their desks instead of focusing on the lesson. Once we began implementing other strategies besides Open Court strategies, I saw a decrease in wandering eyes, talking, and playing. Since more students were engaged in the lessons, they were able to focus on the lessons.

Giving students an opportunity to think for themselves made students feel independent. My mentor teacher and I did not overwhelm students with information. We gave them time to process, think, and discuss on their own in which they gained more knowledge. Everlove et al. (2009) are confident that with time, students eventually use their learning and thinking processing skills independently.

Even though the curriculum is restricted at times, teachers should try to the best of their abilities to make it more thought provoking. This may be time consuming, but it is beneficial, especially if students can relate or feel they are part of the decision making process. My mentor teacher and I discovered effective learning taking place most frequently when students collaborated with one another and participated in hands on activities. Everlove et al. (1992) describe collaboration as an opportunity for students to solve problems, discover information, and complete projects through teacher-modeled lessons and guided instruction.

After I observed an increase in student engagement after implementing the above skills into the classroom, I was able to reflect. Reflecting on observations is crucial when it comes to action research. Taking the time to reflect made me realize what strategies worked best for my students in order for them to succeed. Teachers who practice these skills are effective and their students benefit.
Recommendations

Since I witnessed active learning take place when students participated in hands on activities and collaborated with one another, I recommend teachers spend the extra time to make sure their students are motivated to learn. The planning and prepping we did before teaching lessons was time consuming; we had to research information using our curriculum materials as well as many other sources. My mentor teacher and I became knowledgeable in the subject before teaching it which also takes time. Before teaching lessons we created pictorial input charts and chants. We also thought of words to be used for the students Cognitive Content Dictionary (CCD) words. At times, multiple visual learning charts were designed for one lesson. It is definitely worth spending the extra time to plan and prep in order to teach engaged, motivated students. It also helps to collaborate with other teachers just as we did during our weekly grade level meetings. We were able to share and use each other’s ideas while researching topics to extend our own knowledge. Doing this allowed us to spend more quality time on the lessons and less time on disciplinary actions.

Since my mentor teacher and I presented new information in an engaging way, our students were eager to learn more and many of them continued to research on their own to gain even more knowledge. I plan to spend the extra time preparing engaging lessons in order for my future students to succeed. I also plan to reflect upon all lessons in order for any adjustments to be made. I look forward to extending my research and learning even more strategies to raise my future students’ level of engagement.
REFERENCES


