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College Athletics and the High School Athlete: Perspectives of High School Coaches

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Introduction

The connection between high school athletics and the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) is a recurring topic of discussion about the advancement and recruitment of upcoming athletes. There is a transformation occurring in college athletics due to changes in NCAA regulations such as name, image, likeness (NIL) and the transfer portal. Changing policies have rippled down to the high school level impacting the way athletes have traditionally been recruited to play in college.

According to the NCAA, out of eight million high school athletes less than 3% make it to the college level (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2024). Getting recruited to play in college has never been easy, but with a changing landscape it is of great importance to see the impact it has on the athletes who want to compete at the college level in the future. Analyzing the perspectives of high school coaches is pivotal in understanding the ways that recruiting has changed with the newly implemented policies in the NCAA. Coaches are a crucial part of a high school athlete's journey to college. They provide the guidance that is needed for an athlete to get recruited by college coaches. This research study explores the dynamics between the NCAA and high school athletes through the perspectives and opinions of high school coaches who are mentors, trainers, and supporters of their athletes.

Literature Review

Research has found that with change at the doorstep, the NCAA has been put in a position to adapt their policies to maintain order (Poulin, 2023). In recent years there have been increased lobbying efforts to legally strengthen their grasp on maintaining amateurism status in collegiate athletics. The court ruling of *O'Bannon Vs. The National Collegiate Athletic Association* ruled against the NCAA and allowed for student athletes to be compensated for their Name, Image, and Likeness (Poulin, 2023). Likewise, the NCAA was dealt with another court battle of *Johnson v NCAA.* This court hearing argued that student athletes should be deemed employees of the NCAA. It was concluded that with vast change occurring, the NCAA has taken the position of letting the change come to them. Instead of trying to create the changes themselves, they have started to allow it to be handled by the legal system.

The NCAA's *Guide for the College Bound Athlete* provides the definition for what it means to be recruited: "If a college coach calls, texts, emails or contacts you via social media; comes to visit your high school; pays your expenses to visit the campus; or (in Divisions I and II) issues you a National Letter of Intent or a written offer of financial aid, you're considered recruited" (NCAA, 2024). The first step to getting recruited is understanding what it means to be a recruit. The guide provides a step by step analysis of the recruiting process that can help aid student athletes in finding the best fit for them.

NIL is considered to be the end of amateurism due to the fact that there is currently no capped income in the process. Research has found that it would be beneficial for there to be a cap system similar to many professional team models (Albers, 2023). It was also concluded that the NCAA allowing players to make money through NIL is not the end of their controversy over paying players fairly. Albers stated that a cap system is a necessary step for the future of collegiate athletics in order to stop the monopolization of power five schools over mid majors and other divisions. The money is not as available at lower level schools, so the concept of amateurism does not apply to the power five schools that can afford to pay their players through NIL deals. If NIL policy were to remain as it currently stands, power five schools would eventually be following a strictly professional model compared to other schools following an amateur/student model.

The transfer portal has one of the biggest impacts on the ability for high school athletes to get recruited. To put this in perspective, Dohrn and Lopez (2019) studied the prevalence of the transfer portal in college quarterbacks. The research was conducted pre covid and it shows the various reasons for transfer before restrictions were lifted in 2020. This study found that the main reasons for transfer under restrictions was due to coaching changes experienced by players during their career. Since then the restriction of sitting out of competition for a year after transferring schools has been lifted. It is easy to conclude that the reasons for transferring are in many different forms, especially with the introduction of NIL.

The new transfer portal has opened up endless opportunities for power five conference teams. To confirm this, McMahan (2023) conducted research around football in the ACC and his data shows how the combination of NIL and the new transfer rule has created a more competitive atmosphere. Additionally, he found that this event created more opportunity for FBS mid major players to transfer into the power five conferences. It is important to note that the increase of transfers from mid majors to power fives is beneficial for the power fives, but detrimental to the mid major schools themselves. On the contrary, the massive amount of players that are being hoarded in power five tend to flush themselves back into mid majors when they realize they won't get any playing time. The portal has created an ongoing cycle, that in turn has actually resulted in players sitting out a year, and in some cases ending their careers. Players always want to reach the pinnacle of the level they are currently at, but players are often misguided to transfer to bigger schools where unbeknownst to them they are simply providing backup or filler positions to power five schools' hefty rosters.

Methods

When conducting research with high school coaches, the Snowball Method was used for sampling. In this specific case, the Snowball Method involved identifying and interviewing a few previously known high school coaches in the area who were knowledgeable about the subject. Through these interviews, additional contacts were gathered, creating a snowball effect to expand the data set. The goal of utilizing the Snowball Method was to expand our reach to individuals known by the initial coaches. A total of four high school coaches were identified.

There were four interviews conducted in person or via Zoom depending on location constraints of the interviewee. All interviews were recorded for later analysis. The interview questions were split into the topics of NCAA, recruiting, NIL, and the transfer portal with emphasis on the high school athlete’s experiences through the high school coach’s perspective.

A Thematic Approach was utilized during the analysis phase. Recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. This process allowed for the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and key insights related to the recruitment process of high school athletes. Recorded interviews provided a rich dataset, ensuring the accuracy of the coaches' perspectives in their own words. This combination aimed to capture an understanding of the beliefs, experiences, and strategies used by high school coaches in guiding student-athletes through the college recruitment process.

Results and Discussion

Coach 1: Women’s & Men’s Soccer

The coach stated that there is a heightened difficulty for high school athletes to get recruited in the current state of the NCAA. The options have greatly expanded for college coaches in recruitment, so seeking out high school talent is not as common as utilizing the transfer portal in 2024. He also reported that the differences in funding between colleges has created disparities between divisions in the NCAA. He explained that the club teams have a massive influence for high school soccer in recruitment. He further stated that it is very common for club coaches to not allow their star players to participate on the soccer team at their high school. Most of the time players will play for a club team as well as their high school team to increase their chances of being exposed to college recruitment.

The processes that were noted to be present in soccer recruitment were as follows: 1: Having a coach see you play, 2: Word of mouth, 3:Showcases, 4: Highlight tapes/videos, 5: Emphasis on club team, 6: Earlier recruitment for female athletes, 7:Socio-Economic status and knowledge of recruiting process, 8: Importance of player/parent communication and expectations. The processes that he thought to hinder the recruiting process the most were unrealistic expectations and poor parent/player communication. Coach 1 stated that NIL is so new that they prefer not to discuss it due to what they perceive as a lack of importance to the high school athlete. He further said that the transfer portal has increased the difficulty for high school athletes to get recruited to play in college. NIL is not as common in soccer, but the transfer portal is utilized heavily.

Coach 2: Women's Field Hockey

Coach 2 provided an in-depth overview of the realities present between the NCAA and high school athletics. This coach stated that there is an immense hyperfocus of high school athletes to achieve Division 1 status. Recruiting was a hot topic of discussion in the interview process. The interviewee stated that communication was one of the most vital parts of the recruiting process. Finding out what a student athlete wants with their career is an important first step so that coaches and staff can properly assist with recruiting. Opening student athletes' minds to more realistic options is common due to high aspirations and the competitiveness of their athletes. Reaching out to college coaches via email is a strategy that is used often, but further steps need to be taken to ensure that there is a chance for the athlete to be seen. Creating videos and utilizing social media platforms gives even more chances of exposure.

This coach is well versed in NIL due to state-run seminars on the topic. She stated that she knows people who work for NIL-based companies and it is ramping up to a new height. She said that in high school it would be very hard for students to be NIL worthy, and it would be uncommon for a highschooler to have enough influence to earn a deal. She says that NIL needs about 10 years to possibly reach the high school level, but she believes it would be fine for the high school level even though it would not be as lucrative.

Coach 3: Baseball

This coach stated that Twitter was the most impactful tool for the recruiting process because it makes it much easier to be exposed to college coaches. Full rides are usually not given in baseball, so the parent and player's ability to afford school is a barrier for many who want to play at certain schools. He said that character was not enough anymore, and that coaches are looking for "ready now" players which puts more stress on a high school athlete's recruitment journey. He felt that players were aware of the recruiting process but at the same time naive because they tend to compartmentalize their own recruitment.

In baseball, high school players rely heavily on their travel ball organizations for recruitment help over high school coaches. This shifts high school focus to development and travel ball teams to performance. The most important asset to a player in high school was reported to be a cumulation of the parents, player, and travel ball coaches due to paying for school, player expectations, and travel coaches reach towards college coaches. Travel ball occurs out of the normal season so college coaches are more available to come to see players play. This coach felt that NIL was more readily available to bigger schools that have more of a financial reach over others. This has created disparity between divisions because now NIL money can be used to fill scholarships while normally funded institutions only have 11.7 scholarships for their entire team. Particularly in baseball student athletes are not on full ride scholarships.

Coach 4: Football

This coach reported that the landscape of the NCAA was changing at a very fast rate. Coaches at mid major schools used to be able to recruit very solid rosters. Lately, coaches have to spend a majority of their time recruiting their own current players so that they do not leave for a "better opportunity". Twitter is a huge asset to players in recruitment so that they can show their athleticism. As a former college coach, he mentioned that coaches identify the primary decision maker when it comes to college choice (parent or player) and usually work off of that.

As far as awareness of the recruiting process, he said parents were more unaware of the realities compared to the players. Making sure parental expectations are realistic and in line with the player is very important.

This coach emphasized that communication and expectations are very important when it comes to recruitment in football. Parents tend to have more unrealistic expectations for their kids than the players do themselves. He felt that high school athletes are getting less opportunity in the football space. The “win now” society has created an atmosphere where only the best players will get opportunities at big schools. Coaching was said to be a volatile profession with new hires being casted on ESPN every day, so this win now society is pressuring coaches to seek out talent over development. Football has been impacted heavily by NIL and the transfer portal. This results in less opportunities for high school players because it is usually the transfers who are being offered the big money to play. It is very “win now” based and this is why the best players are being offered the big money to switch universities.

Conclusions

Overall, high school athletes have been impacted heavily by the changes in the NCAA, recruiting, and NIL/Transfer Portal. The players and coaches are aware of the realities they face in the “Win Now” society that has been amplified recently. All sports at the high school level will continue to change with the tide that the NCAA is sending outwards. All themes that emerged in this research are defining factors that have impacted high school athletes' ability to get recruited in light of recent changes in the NCAA.

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The Influence of Blogging on Self-Efficacy in Students' Writing

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Blogs are defined as an online publication that is frequently updated by an author, tends to be about a specific topic, and is curated through a creative and informal writing style (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Despite being seen as 'informal' writing, bloggers may acquire strong writing skills, such as "exploration of a topic, curating an outline, researching the topic, fact-checking, and creating writing that is influential and interesting" (Shewan, 2023, para. 2). Self-efficacy is defined as "an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). Self-efficacy can be reflected in an education setting that prioritizes "students' beliefs and attitudes toward their capabilities to achieve academic success, as well as belief in their ability to fulfill academic tasks and the successful learning of the materials" (Hayat et al., 2020, p. 2).

Literature Review

English language arts (ELA) writing pedagogies have changed throughout the decades. The writing that happens across ELA classrooms has historically been where "the teacher does all the composing, and students are left only to fill in missing information…replicating highly formulaic essay structure keyed to the high stakes test" (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 26). When looking at motivation in writing, the three primary means are motives of the writing (i.e., meaning the person's desire to write), writer's perception of their ability to write, and cognition to achieve the writing task (Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). However, the most vital aspect is likely the motive behind the writing, meaning the student's 'why' of writing, which includes a student's interests (Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). Among all research reviewed by Camacho et al. (2020), the researchers found self-efficacy to be the major denominator in writing motivation. Watkins (2016) used a blog intervention to observe how students communicate with one another while responding to the anchor text of the instructional unit. After the intervention using student interviews and artifacts was complete, the researchers found that the interactions between students were enriching where students were challenging each other's ideas, asking each other questions, and engaging in conversations about the anchor text (Watkins, 2016). Watkins found that blogs were also helpful for increased comprehension of the anchor text. As for the gaps in research, there are few studies that look directly at secondary ELA students in the United States and how blogging influences their self-efficacy in writing. However, there is an abundance of research on how blogging affects secondary ELA students' engagement and collaboration. Also, there is relatively little research that looks specifically at blogs not rooted in an anchor text, rather rooted in the creative interests of students and how these blogs may influence self-efficacy. As a result, this research project will answer the question: How does blogging in a secondary ELA classroom influence self-efficacy in students' writing?

Methods

This action research project took place in a high school located in the southeastern United States in a ninth grade honors English class during the spring semester of the 2024 school year. The participants in the study were selected by convenience sample based on their enrollment as students in the researcher's student teaching internship. All students were invited to participate in the study via informed consent and assent forms. Students under the age of 18 needed to provide parental consent to participate in the study. Students were given verbal and written instructions that the study was voluntary and that they could ask to be removed from the study at any time. Participant confidentiality was guaranteed. All students' names were changed to pseudonyms.

The intervention was predicted to take place over a three week period, though it took less than two weeks. The students were asked to create two blogs, one rooted in the current anchor text, *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1993), and one rooted in a topic related to each student's interest. Before entering the phases, the teacher defined a blog and discussed the components of a blog. After direct instruction, students were asked to fill out a blog interest form of general topics that may interest them.

There are a total of four qualitative data sources: inventories, questionnaires, reflections, artifacts, and field notes. Prior to the first intervention, there was an inventory form that asked students what kind of blogs interest them. The data collected from the survey was only used to support instruction and for data collection purposes. For the second data collection source, the questionnaire was administered three times: before the intervention, during the intervention, and after the intervention. The questionnaire included "I" statements to emphasize personal relationships with and attitudes toward writing. At the end of the survey, there were two open-ended questions that were considered as qualitative data sources. After the intervention was administered, students were asked to reflect on the blogging experience regarding their writing skills. The students were given guided questions to complete their reflection. The students reflected on the practice with a written response. Field notes were also included in the qualitative data resources. Field notes included observations, questions from students, and general banter/comments from students. Student artifacts were included as qualitative data. Artifacts included students' blog posts, students' comments on other blog posts, and students' portfolios.

Results

There were a total of 23 participants. Thirteen students felt blogging gave them the capability to improve their writing skills. Similarly, thirteen students felt more confident in their writing skills as a result of the blogging. The reflection questions asked students to directly respond to the research question, and the surveys demonstrated the students' thoughts and attitudes about writing. As for common themes amongst the students' responses in pre- and post-questionnaires, the researcher found that themes of grammar and vocabulary, organization, and writer's block emerged.

When asked about being a good or bad writer, multiple students mentioned in their surveys that grammar was a common theme. Daniel wrote in the pre-survey, "My grammar is decent." In the post-survey, however, Daniel said, "I think I understand grammar pretty well, I think my 'style' is good. But I constantly worry about what people think about what I write (in a bad way) and I usually take a long time to write especially when I'm doing creative writing."

There was a commonality amongst students who commented about the organization in their blog. Penelope wrote in her pre-survey that she felt she was a good writer when "it comes to things that are factual and questioning, but writing prompts that have to come with stories about yourself or things such as a life experience cause me to write bad, due to not knowing what's good or not to write *[sic]* due to school and maybe even teacher expectations." In her post-survey, Penelope refined her thinking by saying, "I think I'm a good writer because I'm good at informational questions and using evidence like with ACES response type of questions," with ACES referring to (A) Answer the question related to the prompt, (C) cite a source, (E) Explain the question, and (S) Summarize your answer.

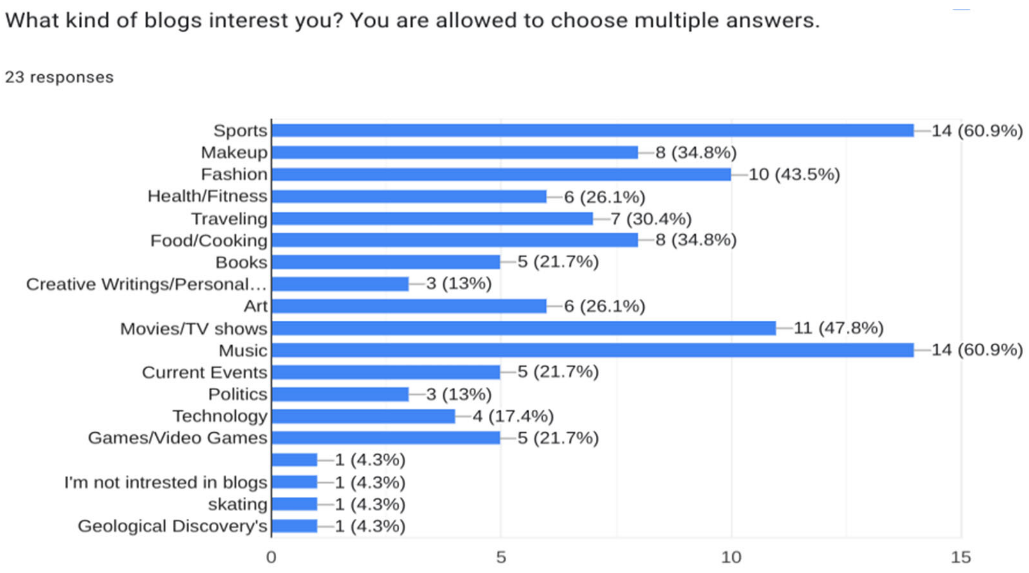
The themes of organization in writing were addressed when students were asked in the written reflection if they felt more or less confident after writing the blogs. Jackson wrote, "Yeah, I'm better at freely writing now then before as a result of the 2 blogs." When asked if students liked or disliked the blogs, Xavier said, "I liked being able to just write in kind of a 'free verse' style." Naomi wrote, "I like blogs because you can express your own opinions and ideas freely." Karson wrote in her post-survey, "I think I am a good writer because of my format."

The final theme that emerged from coding that affected the students' views on writing was their experience with writer's block. In his pre-survey, Andrew wrote that he did not feel he was a good writer because he gets "side tracked really easily and fast." He wrote the same thing in his post-survey. Katherine responded, "I don't think I'm a good writer…I also always have trouble thinking about what to write even if I'm told what to write about."

Discussion

In analyzing data prior to interventions, students suggested possible topics that they would be interested in blogging about. The results are as follows:

Table 1



Other than one student, all 23 students had a general interest in blogging. In the anchor text phase, students were asked to write a blog about the characters in *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1993). From there, they were allowed creative interpretation with their blog. The only requirements for the blog included 250 words, one quote from the text, and a picture. One student even aligned each character in *Romeo and Juliet* with a character from *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan & Johnson, 2013). In the second phase, students were given freedom to write whatever they pleased. The only requirements were it had to be school appropriate, 250 words, and include a picture. The students blogged on a range of topics such as Met Gala looks, fashion, pop culture, etc. The most common topic was music. Out of 23 students, 13 students felt blogging gave them the capability to improve their writing skills. Similarly, 13 students felt more confident in their writing skills as a result of blogging. The data are supported by the research and findings by Chandler (2007) and Deegan (2010), which show that creative writing in a classroom can have a positive increase in self-efficacy in writing. However, for the eight students who felt indifferent about blogs influencing their self-efficacy, Puozzo and Audrin (2021) do suggest that support for creative writing could lead to indifference in students' self-efficacy in writing.

As a result of writing the blog, students showed an increase in comprehension of the anchor text, which lines up with Watkins (2016), who found that blogs were also helpful for increased comprehension of the anchor text. As for the implications for teaching, blogs can be a great assessment tool for teachers to gauge students' knowledge and understanding of the text through either a formative or summative assessment. As for creative blogs, the literature suggests that creative writing invites students to challenge different interpretations through a creative lens (Venuta, 2020). In a secondary ELA classroom, an intervention of tasking students with daily creative writing, specifically a personal narrative, has been known to show an increase in self-efficacy (Chandler, 2007). In comparison to the current data, this creative outlet allows students to write what they want based on what motivates them individually.

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Impacts of Environmental Justice Topics on Student Perception of their Identity in STEM

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As environmental concerns have continued to rise, the disproportionality within communities that are affected by these issues is becoming evident. Low-income communities and those that are typically composed of families of color have been disproportionately subjected to unsafe living conditions in the means of air and water quality. Although individuals have spoken out against it, there has been a lack of funding put into the communities' remediation and prevention of further environmental injustices. Not only is it important for remediation/ prevention funding to be supplied to these communities, but it is also crucial that members of the community are educated on the science of these toxic chemicals. By including science-based, environmental justice (EJ) topics in our primary and secondary education science standards, young members of an affected community will be given a strong foundation on which young activists can be created. To bridge EJ awareness as well as student engagement with a sense of belonging in science classrooms, researchers examined the opportunities that emerged from including instruction on EJ cases through inquiry-based projects in high school science classrooms.

Literature Review

Beneath the surface of statistical trends lie the untold stories of individuals navigating the leaky STEM pipeline, a journey fraught with challenges, setbacks, and missed opportunities that shape the destiny of aspiring scientists and engineers. Women and people of color have been disproportionately subjected to these challenges leading to the STEM fields being largely made up of white males. A 2021 study by the NSF’s National Center for Science and Engineering statistics (NCSES) reported that 35% of individuals working in a STEM field were women, 15% of workers were Hispanic, 10% were Asian, and only 9% of individuals working in STEM careers were Black (Dietz, 2023). Although these statistics show a more diverse field population than in years before 2021, there is still a need for greater diversification and representation in STEM fields. Studying diverse topics, learning about diverse scientists, and investigating relevant scientific phenomena are all necessary for a classroom that fosters feelings of identity and belonging for its students (Singer, et al., 2020). Lessons rooted in issues that students are experiencing can provide a sense of meaning to the information as well as get the students motivated to find a way to solve the problems.

Research suggests that disciplinary curriculums focused on EJ issues may be an effective tool to motivate student learning and engagement inside the classroom, leading to increased civic engagement outside of the classroom (Barrón, et al., 2022). These researchers' findings provide science teachers with another tool that should be used when designing lesson plans (Lasker & Brush, 2019). Creating lessons that dive into the causes, concerns, and remediation potentials of EJ cases allows students to become invested in a cause that directly affects their long-term satisfaction with life.

Environmental injustices disproportionately affect our students of lower socio-economic status; these are also our students who are most frequently leaving the STEM field before going into professional careers. As educators, we *must* rethink and redesign our pedagogies to be inclusive of *all students,* this requires a thoughtful approach to reducing spatial injustices and nature-culture binaries in our classrooms (Kayumova et al., 2018). We are given a special responsibility to empower our students by giving them a strong sense of identity and belonging in our classrooms, and justice-centered science pedagogy is the ground-breaking catalyst leading to our success (Morales-Doyle, 2017).

This research project bridges the gap between these researchers’ findings by investigating if with the integration of a relevant EJ-centered curriculum (Lasker & Brush, 2019), the students will also gain a sense of identity and belonging in their high school chemistry classroom (Cohen et al., 2021). My research included a treatment period of EJ instructional content that students can become passionately engaged with, ask questions about, and maybe even continue to spread their knowledge confidently with their families and others outside of their physical classroom. By strengthening adolescents' identity in science, we hope to grow a community of adults who can identify and bring awareness to environmental injustices. The research question to be answered in this paper is as follows: How do environmental justice-centered lessons affect student perceptions of their STEM identity in a high school chemistry classroom?

Methodology

Participants & Location - This research study was conducted at an urban, Title 1 high school located in North Carolina. All students were invited to participate in the study; however, participation was not mandatory. The participants were from an 11th-grade honors chemistry classroom, with a class population of 25 students, of which 13 submitted pre-surveys *and* post-surveys. A demographic report was constructed by a short identity survey which was completed at the end of the research period. Out of the 13 responding students, 54% identified as male, 38% identified as female, and 8% identified as other.

Assessments and Treatments - To better understand how incorporating an EJ lesson in a traditional chemistry classroom led to changes in students' science identity, I modified an existing STEM identity survey to be given at the beginning and end of the treatment session (Singer, et al., 2020). Survey data collection as well as the EJ treatment lesson occurred during the students' regular class periods, so EJ cases were chosen following the curriculum the students were studying at the time of the research period. Connections were made from NC chemistry standards on gas laws to the TCE Superfund Site in Western North Carolina to connect these lessons to the standards that the honors chemistry class follows.

Following the introductory case, the discussion transitioned toward Flint, Michigan's water crisis. Students were given instructions to complete an investigative research activity to contribute to the activity product: a timeline of events for the Flint, MI water quality crisis. All students participated in the creation of the timeline, they were asked to explore and identify pivotal events that contributed to Flint's crisis and rehabilitation. Each student contributed at least one important event, this event was recorded on a collaborative timeline created on Canva.

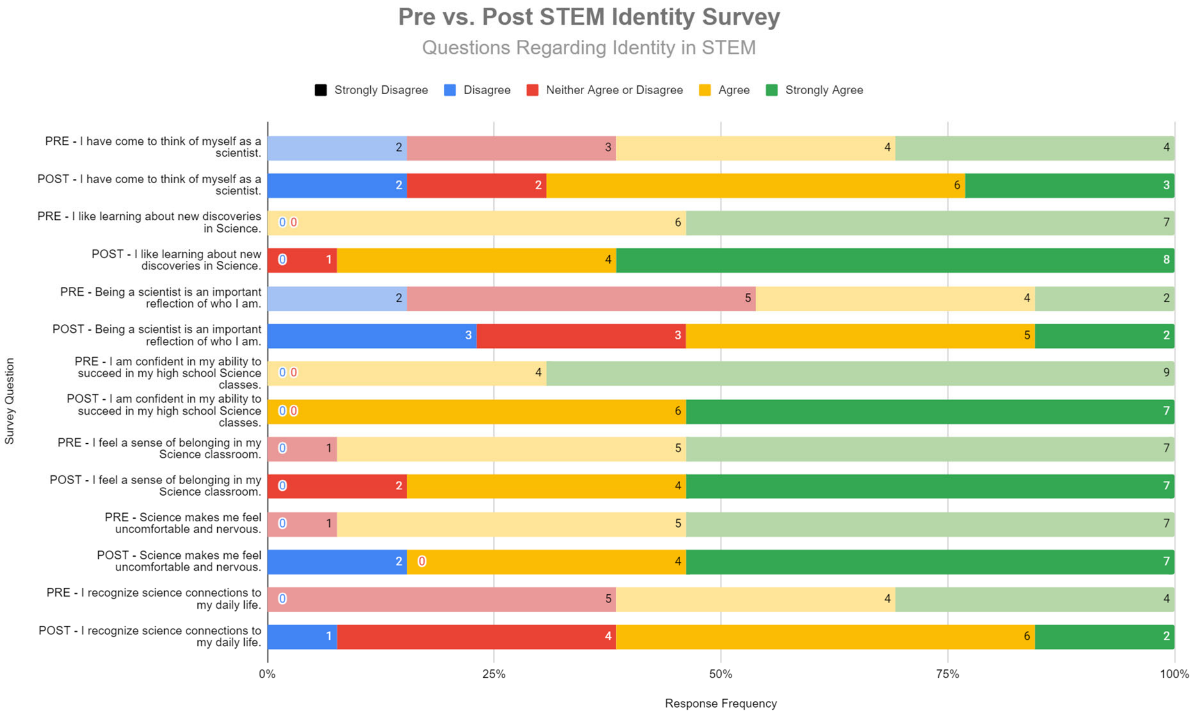
Analysis & Results

The findings of this action research study reveal insights into the state of high school students' perception of their own identity in STEM, including how the inclusion of EJ topics into their daily curriculum affects this perception. The preliminary results collected from the 13 responding students showed a promisingly high amount of "strongly agree" responses. This indicates that this sample population of students already has a high perception of their Identity in STEM. Survey question one asked students to consider the following question, "I am confident in my ability to succeed in my high school science classes." This survey question received high responses (Agree or Strongly Agree) more frequently than all others included in the survey, with 69% of students responding that they Strongly Agree with the statement and the remaining 31%

of students responding that they Agree. Receiving a high response rate for this question indicates that the students in my class believe they will succeed in their high school science classes, including the chemistry course they were taking at the time of this action research study.

Data collected from both pre and post-STEM identity surveys were combined in Figure 1 to show changes in response frequency. Survey questions were separated into 3 groups: questions regarding STEM identity (Figure 1) are shown below.

Figure 1 - *Pre vs. Post STEM Identity Survey (Questions Regarding Identity in STEM)*



Upon analysis of the survey data collected from responding students regarding their perception of having an identity in STEM, there were no significant changes in response frequency following the EJ learning sequence that occurred during the treatment period of this study. Survey response data was analyzed by grouping responses into two groups. Agree and strongly agree responses were combined into one group and all other responses were grouped into another. The majority (79%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with each survey question regarding their STEM identity. Thus, while students' STEM identity did not change as a result of this treatment; these results show that it was strong to begin with. Following the EJ learning sequence, students were 1% less likely to respond to survey questions with Agree or Strongly agree.

Discussion

Based on data collected from the preliminary STEM identity survey, students arrived at the study already having high perceptions of their identity as a scientist and their ability to succeed in a STEM classroom. This left little room for growth upon the inclusion of EJ topics in their day-to-day class curriculum.

This study did not find any significant differences between responses collected during the pre and post-survey for questions regarding STEM identity and science skills. This indicates a promising change to the narrative of how students are arriving in science classrooms. Research findings prior to this study showed that high school students were more likely to arrive in a science classroom with negative predispositions regarding their identity and abilities in the subject. This research study found that students arrived at the chemistry classroom with a high perception of their identity in STEM already, as well as high confidence in their ability to use important science skills.

This conclusion was not formed entirely on the basis of data collected from survey responses, but also on the students' engagement during the EJ learning sequence. This research study was not designed to measure student engagement as a variable, however observational data collected during the treatment period could indicate this as an interesting variable to be investigated further in the future. During the EJ learning sequence and activity, students were more likely to contribute to class discussions, providing interesting viewpoints as well as background information. The students’ overall engagement was markedly greater during this learning sequence than the engagement level observed in a typical class period. These findings require further investigation before coming to any conclusions.

Limitations - The greatest limitation of this research study was the lack of a large sample size, with only 13 out of 25 students responding to both pre *and* post-surveys. Since this research was conducted entirely during the students' regular class periods, the student's attendance greatly impacted how much data could be collected.

Future Research Observations from this research project eluded to a promising increase in classroom engagement, and over time this engagement could create a positive feedback loop by simultaneously increasing student perceptions of their identity in a STEM classroom/field. Although this research suggests that students are already arriving in the science classroom knowing they have an identity in STEM, more research with a greater sample population should be conducted before any concrete conclusions can be drawn. If future research results in similar findings, the focus can begin to shift from "creating" a STEM identity for our students to "strengthening" their STEM identity, creating opportunities for students to make connections to STEM concepts in their everyday experiences, and utilizing these connections to enhance their communities.

Conclusions

According to the survey data collected during this study, students are already arriving at chemistry classrooms with high perceptions of belonging and confidence that they will succeed. Although these results were unexpected, they are exciting and provide promising evidence of the progress toward inclusivity that is being made in STEM classrooms. STEM classrooms should continue to represent this inclusivity by being a place where all students know they can succeed, that they belong and that they are valued. The future of our planet relies on scientific discovery, and the future of scientific discovery relies on our students.

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Historical Thinking in Small Group Cooperative Learning

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Actions in every facet of life are historically contingent, based on factors outside of our control and decisions made by people long before our lives began. However, American social studies students are not adept at understanding the impact of history on their lives. The task of recognizing our historical contingency is both, “an act that goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think” (Wineburg, 1999, p. 491), as well as one of the most important aspects of history education (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 219). This task, as well as others that fall under the umbrella of historical thinking, is vital to creating a democratic society, and allowing students to realize that history is not set in stone, but can be changed, and has already been changed by millions of decisions. History has also been made as a social process, by the decisions of people working together for many centuries. Cooperative learning, introducing a variety of perspectives into a history class, seems a natural fit for creating greater historical thinking skills for students. However, in high school, history education focuses on individualized tasks, recall, and high-stakes assessments. The impacts of cooperative learning on achievement, as well as on students’ historical thinking skills, have been deserving of more study. This research set out to understand to what extent historical thinking skills can be developed through cooperative learning techniques in small group settings.

Literature Review

The purpose of public education in the United States is to prepare students for their place in a participatory, pluralistic, and deliberative democracy. The role of history education in this preparation is threefold. Firstly, history education must allow for reasoned judgment of past events. Secondly, history education must promote an expanded view of humanity, beyond students’ own experiences. Finally, history education must involve deliberation over the common good, and expose students to questions of judgment (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

Historical thinking, as a key part of history education, involves reckoning with two poles in tension; The familiar past, which can be twisted and used for our own purposes, and the strange and inaccessible past, which can seem irrelevant (Wineburg, 1991). In historical texts, readers must be able to recognize their own modes of thinking as historicized, while also seeing the past through the eyes of historical figures, without being trapped in a "presentist" view of history (Wineburg, 2001). Historical thinking means recognizing the distinction between history as the practice of interpreting the past and the past itself (VanSledright, 2013).

Teaching and learning historical thinking is quite difficult in high school social studies classes. Even students with high levels of reading comprehension and good grades are unable, when presented with historical texts, to understand author intention, the situation of a historical text, and other key elements of historical thinking (Wineburg, 2001). When historical thinking is taught best, students are led to question a document, provided stability when they reach something they don't understand, and teachers model how *they* approach reading a historical text (Reisman, 2015).

Overall, historical thinking must involve students understanding specific historical concepts, including, "evidence, accounts, decline/progress, change/continuity, causation, historical significance, historical context, and human agency" (VanSledright, 2013, p. 35). Students must also be able to develop specific cognitive strategies that include reading accounts from the past, identifying those accounts, attributing those accounts, assessing the author's perspective, contextualizing what they read, determining whether those accounts constitute evidence for questions, judging the reliability of accounts, and corroborating evidence from those accounts to the questions posed (VanSledright, 2013).

Cooperative learning has been one of the most successful and widespread educational tools since the 1980s. It has been shown to produce statistically significant outcomes over and above other types of learning and resulted in higher achievement, quality of reasoning, time on task, and long-term retention. Successful cooperative learning depends on positive interdependence among students, individual accountability, promotive interaction between students, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing and reflection (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

In practice, cooperative learning has been successful in a number of environments. The use of ice-breakers and long term cooperative learning groups helped students in a high-school economics class achieve higher scores on their end of course test (Beavers, 2011). In an 8th grade social studies class, students found benefits in understanding their peers ideas' better and becoming more independent learners through cooperative learning (Gratton, 2019). In one social studies classroom, long-term cooperative learning groups led the creation of local, original research on the history of Warrensburg, Missouri (Scheurell, 2010).

Methodology

This study was conducted in an American history class in a public high school in the southeastern United States over the course of 10 instructional days of about 90 minutes each. The class was composed of 32 juniors and seniors. 21 students returned adult student consent forms or parental consent and student assent forms, meaning that only data from these students were used for this study. The research period took place during one unit of instruction, the topic of which was foreign policy's role in American history. Students were divided into groups based on the teacher-researchers' understanding of the principles of cooperative learning and his knowledge of the students.

Students participated in a discussion of the best practices while working in cooperative learning groups, and participated in a whole class discussion of George Washington's farewell address as a model and introduction to historical thinking skills when working with historical texts. Students then participated in three activities designed to test their historical thinking skills in small groups, including creating a "Say-Mean-Matter" chart about quotes relating to the expansion of the United States during the Mexican-American War, interpreting images related to United States imperialism and the Spanish-American War, and analyzing the Roosevelt Corollary speech given by Teddy Roosevelt.

Students also completed a survey pre- and post- intervention which asked them a series of questions about their understanding of historical thinking skills and their attitudes towards cooperative learning in small groups. Six questions were on a likert scale that allowed the teacher-researcher to gather quantitative data, while eight questions were open-ended and allowed the teacher-researcher to gather qualitative data.

Results

In their pre-surveys, students shared that they mostly enjoyed working in small groups already, and especially enjoyed that groups allowed them to divide work and interact with their peers socially. However, some students shared reservations that not everyone in their groups would do the work they needed to. Students also showed a limited understanding of the differences between history and the past, although some understood that historical thinking was the interpretation of evidence from the past. Students also showed an overall trust in the reliability of textbooks, and had limited knowledge of how to analyze primary sources.

Through observations and student artifacts, students' historical thinking skills were able to benefit somewhat from cooperative learning, but there were often roadblocks to students working in groups that impacted their work. Students who worked well in their groups performed the best on the "Say-Mean-Matter" assignment, and even students who had lower reading comprehension were able to interpret the quotes they were given adequately. For example, one group of students that included several multilingual learners were able to interpret a Henry David Thoreau quote about civil disobedience, writing, "He went to jail because he ain't payed [sic] his taxes, due to know [sic] they were going to use it for war." Students had difficulty working in groups during the image interpretation activity, and their responses showed a limited understanding of the meanings of these images. Students also had difficulty analyzing the Roosevelt Corollary's text, and especially how Teddy Roosevelt's perspective as president impacted the document's contents. Some groups also did not function as cooperative learning groups, sometimes due to lack of student engagement with their peers, and sometimes due to absences and interruptions to class.

The post-surveys revealed little change in students' attitudes towards group work. A few of the higher achieving students expressed more frustration that their peers didn't do work while in groups, and some students shared that they enjoyed getting to hear more of their peers' ideas. Students also showed little change in their understanding of history and the past, although more students used ideas like point-of-view and bias when they were describing historical thinking and how they understood the past. Students also seemed to have a better understanding of how to analyze primary sources, again using terms like bias and perspective. Overall though, students still rated textbooks as mostly reliable sources and most did not understand that primary sources all have some sort of bias.

Discussion

The data from this study are difficult to generate a firm conclusion from, but some student artifacts and observations seem to support cooperative learning in small groups as a strategy for developing students' historical thinking skills. In groups that were able to successfully work as a cooperative learning group, many students showed historical thinking skills in their assignments that went beyond what they showed in their responses to survey questions as well in other, independent assignments. This was most apparent on the "Say-Mean-Matter" assignment. However, many cooperative learning groups needed significant prompting from the teacher-researcher in order to work together. Other groups did not work together at all, leading to frustration from higher performing students in those groups, and results that reflected the work of an individual rather than a cooperative learning group.

Limitations of this study included the small sample size of students, as well as a significant interruption to class during the image interpretation activity, and frequent absences from students. These circumstances affected the ability of students to consistently engage in cooperative learning with their group. The circumstances of the curriculum were also a limitation, as the teacher-researcher had to cover lots of content in a relatively short period of time. This meant that some events and sources were learned by students quickly, and some depth from these topics was missed, giving the students a poorer understanding of the context of the sources they were looking at and harming their ability to engage in historical thinking. The student population of this study also included a number of multilingual learners and students who struggled with reading comprehension, which shaped the texts and activities that the teacher-researcher chose for this study.

While the study's data were limited by its circumstances and execution, it has been a helpful experience for the teacher-researcher in learning how to design cooperative learning activities. In the future, an area of improvement for this study would be to have longer term cooperative learning groups, as in similar studies on the effects of cooperative learning, as well as more activities that allow students to form relationships with their cooperative learning group mates. The teacher-researcher would also spend more time building students' skills in analyzing primary sources and using other historical thinking techniques, rather than attempting to cover more content.

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The Effect of Adaptation on Student Engagement with Shakespeare

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As recently as 2019, Shakespeare instruction might have seemed an inevitability given that his work was specifically mentioned in the Common Core State Standards (Torres, 2019). The rigidity of Shakespeare's status within the classroom is further demonstrated by near moral panic when college English departments began to no longer explicitly require Shakespeare courses for majors, a choice that traditionalists feared would wipe all value from the field of study (Martin et al., 1996). However, two major pressures seem to be working in tandem to reduce the amount of exposure students have to his plays. As teachers must navigate both the call for culturally relevant texts and the increasing content restrictions in many states, the solution is often to nix Shakespeare, whose works neither elevate the voices of people of color nor shy from sexuality or violence (Murdock, 2018; Newstreet, 2017; Sokol, 2023).

This study will move beyond the perspectives that Shakespeare must be utilized in the secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classroom because his work has always been taught or must be discarded as a manifestation of a racist and sexist Western canon. Instead of resorting to either of these fallacies, this study seeks to examine the interaction of student-centered practices, adaptation, and performance of Shakespeare. The most important means for making this author's work exciting to students may be demonstrating how Shakespeare persists within modern culture through adaptations. Rather than just treating these adaptations as ancillary materials for building understanding, what happens when we encourage students to see adaptation as being in conversation with a text? Further, when students are encouraged to challenge, add to, or question a text, do they feel more empowered to view themselves as creators? The belief that traditional Shakespeare instruction, particularly that involving the use of film, may obscure how dynamic Shakespeare's written works can be, which informs the broader question for this research: How does teaching Shakespeare through adaptation influence student engagement?

Literature Review

The ubiquity of teaching Shakespeare has sometimes come with a burden of resentment from students and teachers. To many, it may represent a process of pulling teeth for student engagement or a plateau for teacher creativity. Lathrop (2021), for example, describes his gradual disenchantment with the relatively standard Shakespeare instructional methods of reading an act and watching an act all while students are confined to their desks. In both Lathrop's (2021) and Felter's (1993) initial approaches, they assessed student comprehension through recall quizzes or multiple-choice tests. These traditional approaches may act as a way to limp through the material without having to deviate from a department- or district-established approach, but they may often leave students paralyzed, drawing no true life or meaning out of the words on the page (Felter, 1993). Apart from the lifelessness that both teachers and students perceive in Shakespeare's texts, a specific weakness of many curricula is the lack of featured voices from persons of color, resulting in a phenomenon Hedgespeth (2020) describes in which students might never encounter stories like their own. The gravity of this lack of diverse perspectives may be exacerbated by the likelihood that by not encountering their own voices, students will internalize that their experience does not matter (Hedgespeth, 2020). It is true that this aim of highlighting diverse voices may not be met by reading Shakespeare.

Film alone is not that groundbreaking of an intervention, in ELA classrooms as a whole or in Shakespeare pedagogy specifically. It is easy and perhaps even justifiable to dismiss film as a brain break for students if an instructor does not proceed to ask students about choices within the films. In a study with instructors who integrate film well, they emphasized that they would not allow students to sit passively while viewing a film, much as they would not allow students to read a text idly (Goldberg, 2021). Felter (1993) described a method for boosting student engagement in his unit on *Hamlet* in which he showed clips from three different adaptations rather than a singular full-length film. In his article, he was able to capture the progression from students asking why directors made what they perceived as changes to the original text to realizing that "every line [could] be open to interpretation" (p. 64).

Methods

This study took place in a Pre-AP English I class at a traditional public school in a suburb in the Southeastern United States. This school is high achieving, having exceeded academic growth on the state school report card each year since 2017. 31% of students at this school are economically disadvantaged. Roughly 35% of students are enrolled in advanced coursework with 54% participating in career and technical education.

In a unit on *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 2014), the researcher eschewed the *film as dessert* approach to instead introduce students to three film adaptation's interpretations of pivotal scenes. Students did not read the whole play due to time restrictions. They instead read the Prologue, Act 2 Scene 2 (the Balcony scene), and Act 3 Scene 1 (Mercutio dueling Tybalt) to get a snapshot of the play's themes and critical moments. Students were instructed to first read individually, then aloud as a group, with an effort to make character choices. Students then viewed clips of each scene from three different adaptations–*Romeo and Juliet* (Zeffirelli, 1968), *Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, 1996), and *West Side Story* (Spielberg, 2021). The researcher designed a graphic organizer for students to document their thoughts about how various filmic and textual elements are conveyed, including setting, artistic license on the part of the director, and character choices on the part of the actor. By taking detailed notes while viewing, students were encouraged to consider what is flexible and what is absolute in a text, particularly as they evaluated the way that established directors navigated this question. The final assignment was for the reading groups to pitch an adaptation concept, presenting their casting choices, setting, and general aesthetic to the class with justifications.

Pre- and post-questionnaires gauged student attitudes toward Shakespeare and the use of film in ELA classes before and after the intervention. The assessment primarily contained single sentence statements in which students assessed their own agreement or disagreement based upon a four point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Additionally, both the pre- and post-questionnaires included open-ended questions for students to reflect on their previous experiences in ELA classes and how their views shifted, if at all, as a result of the intervention.

The student artifacts demonstrated the impact of the intervention on students as they represented the work students produced as a result of the intervention. For example, film viewing guides, presentation slides, and artist statements may all provide insight into whether Shakespeare, through the lens of adaptation, is an effective intervention. If students produce high quality work that shows a creative thought process and a clear attempt at making an interpretation of the source text, the researcher may extrapolate that the intervention was successful. In contrast, work that is lacking in inspiration or interpretive vigor may suggest that this intervention did not have a strong impact upon students.

Results

The findings from this study respond to the initial research question, “How does teaching Shakespeare through adaptation influence student engagement?” The results contain students’ pre- and post-questionnaire responses, including from both Likert scale and open-ended questions as well as excerpts from their adaptation pitch submissions and their accompanying artist statements. In their post-questionnaires, roughly 40% of the participating students strongly agreed and another 42% agreed with the statement, “I think that I can respond to stories by adding onto or changing them” (q5). The mean response to this statement in the post-questionnaire was a 3.19, slightly above an “agree” response, marking an 18.1% growth from the pre-questionnaire. This was the largest quantitative growth in student responses. The other statements that students agreed with over the course of the study included, “I feel that my experiences viewing films in ELA classes have enabled me to understand a text more” (q3, 8.1% growth from pre-questionnaire), and “I feel like I have been well-equipped to read Shakespeare” (q1, 8.3% growth from pre-questionnaire).

Beyond the strictly quantitative findings of the Likert scale questions, students were able to demonstrate their personal flair in constructing adaptations and responding to them through open-ended questions, their adaptation pitches, and their statements regarding their pitches. Across these artifacts, there seemed to be some discrepancies between student perceptions (as represented by the questionnaire) and the actual products created (their adaptation pitches). The major themes that emerged throughout this study were students’ identity affecting their appreciation of adaptation and Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s perceived lack of relevance, challenges in decoding the language, and discrepancies between student responses and their creativity in their adaptation pitches.

Discussion

The most positive growth occurred in relation to the statement, “I think that I can respond to stories by adding onto or changing them” (q5). Between the pre- and post-questionnaire, there was an 18.1% change in the mean response to the statement. The other two statements that garnered a high percent change in the mean response were “I feel that my experiences viewing films in ELA classes have enabled me to understand a text more” (q3, 8.1% growth from pre-questionnaire) and “I feel like I have been well-equipped to read Shakespeare” (q1, 8.3% growth from pre-questionnaire). These Likert scale responses and their respective growth reveal that students developed an understanding of how film adaptations can be a tool to decode and interpret a text within the English classroom and that they have acquired techniques for their future encounters with Shakespeare.

This study found a positive correlation between how students perceive adaptations when exposed to them, yet it has also revealed that students do not necessarily view adaptations as boosting personal relevance of the text. For example, at the end of the unit, Micah still responded with the idea that film adaptations are “better if they’re older because they are more realistic” and that Shakespeare “interprets his work in a different way since he lived so long ago.” Micah was a member of the group that created a post-apocalyptic interpretation of the text, yet he explicitly noted that Shakespeare is irrelevant due to the time between now and when he was alive. His perception of his group’s deeply novel interpretation is distinct from how he perceives Shakespeare. The adaptations ranged in time period, with multiple sets in the 1990s and early 2000s and even one set in a post-apocalyptic future. Furthermore, the tone ranged from clear spoofs to standard rom-coms to moody spy dramas. Thus, the student submissions demonstrated how they applied the notion of responding to stories by changing them in their own work. However, examining student responses in the classroom and in their post-survey responses revealed that they viewed this process of creating an adaptation as something distinct from their own understanding of Shakespeare.

The tepid outcome is instead likely connected to the seemingly insurmountable barrier of the language. On one hand, some scholars do have the opinion that language is the only truly Shakespearean thing about Shakespeare’s work (Newstreet, 2017). Furthermore, assuming language was a major obstacle in this study fits with findings from Murphy et al. (2020) that language is the primary barrier for university students studying Shakespeare, regardless of whether they are native English speakers or received performance or seatbound instruction. This study’s efforts to navigate around the language with the action and visuals of films did not mitigate the student perception that the language itself may divide Shakespeare from their own lives, even if they understood the literal happenings of the play.

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Story Maps and Reading Comprehension in Second Grade Students

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Reading comprehension is described as the process of extracting and constructing meaning from a text. Students who are at an age-appropriate level in other reading skills, often struggle with comprehension for many reasons. One reason is that students may not have the ability to remember information learned in a text in the time that is needed to apply the information in a discussion or quiz. Keenan et al. (2006) examined whether genetic or environmental factors have a greater impact on reading comprehension. Their study with 191 pairs of twins indicated that genetic factors significantly influence reading skills, although non-shared environmental factors also play a role. This finding suggests that remediation strategies should target specific reading areas since improving one aspect, like word recognition, may not address genetic difficulties in comprehension.

Nation et al. (2010) conducted a study on early reading skills to identify predictors of poor comprehension. Their research with 242 students showed that while early reading skills were similar across groups, poor comprehenders scored lower in language assessments over time. This highlights the importance of early intervention in language skills to prevent future comprehension difficulties. Classroom instruction also significantly impacts reading comprehension, as Connor et al. (2004) found that existing language and reading skills influence growth in comprehension. Their study showed that classroom instruction accounts for 33% of a student's growth in reading comprehension, emphasizing the need for effective teaching strategies that consider students' backgrounds and experiences. Despite this, little time is spent explicitly teaching comprehension, with only about one minute per day devoted to this skill out of the average 90-100 minutes spent on language arts lessons

According to Connor et al. (2004), there is ample evidence that reading comprehension can be taught even though not much research has been done on how. Clarke et al. (2010) investigated the impact of three instructional strategies on reading comprehension: text comprehension, oral language, and a combination of both. Their study with 736 students revealed that all three interventions improved reading comprehension scores compared to a control group. However, the oral language group showed the most significant long-term gains, underscoring the importance of focusing on oral language skills and vocabulary. Edwards Santoro et al. (2008) examined how classroom read-alouds combined with comprehension strategies affected first graders. Their findings indicated that read-alouds, when coupled with scaffolded questions and graphic organizers, enhanced students' comprehension and recall. McKeown et al. (2009) compared content instruction and strategy instruction for teaching reading comprehension to fifth graders. Both approaches were effective, but content instruction led to marginally higher scores, suggesting that multiple strategies can be beneficial, with a particular emphasis on content and oral language skills.

A common instructional method that targets content is to attempt to teach strategies for comprehension using how people think and learn. One such strategy is the use of graphic organizers, specifically a type of graphic organizer called a story map, which can be used to assist students in comprehending a story. A story map guides student’s understanding of a story’s plot, characters, and setting (Wisconsin DPI, n.d.). This tool not only provides a reference for students but also encourages deep thinking about story elements and offers visual and physical memory cues to aid recall.

Graphic organizers, including story maps, are a useful tool for teaching reading comprehension. Geddes (2023) explored how graphic organizers impacted third graders' comprehension of nonfiction texts. Similarly, Louisot-Mesopotanese (2009) showed that graphic organizers helped second graders understand stories better, although the low difficulty level of the texts might have influenced the results. Both studies suggest that graphic organizers are valuable tools in increasing students' confidence and engagement in reading.

The current study explored how the use of story maps affects reading comprehension and engagement. The sample consisted of eight second grade students, divided into two groups. The intervention in this study was a specific reading comprehension strategy called story mapping that students participated in after read-alouds. The students in the two groups were read aloud the same book from the McGraw Hill Wonders small group curriculum on each lesson day. Groups switched off who was using the story map intervention and who was not.

After the read-aloud, the students were asked to complete a comprehension assessment. Each story had a corresponding comprehension assessment that asked questions about the plot, setting, and characters of a story. It also had a modified Likert scale using emojis to gauge students' engagement.

The first Wonders book, "A Little World" by Betsy Hebert, was read on the first day to Green Group. Then, Green Group was given time between the read aloud and the assessment to complete a story map as a group. We walked through the story map together as a group to ensure there was no confusion. "A Little World" by Betsy Hebert was read on the second day to Blue Group. Blue Group was immediately assessed after reading was completed with no story map activity.

The second Wonders book, "Star Party" by Betsy Hebert, was read on the third day to Blue Group. Then, Blue Group was given time between the read aloud and the assessment to complete a story map as a group. "Star Party" by Betsy Hebert was read on the fourth day to Green Group. Green Group was immediately assessed after reading was completed with no story map activity.

After the read-aloud, the students were asked to complete a comprehension assessment. Each story had a corresponding comprehension assessment that asked questions about the plot, setting, and characters of a story. It also had a modified Likert scale using emojis to gauge students' engagement. All assessments, surveys, and focus group questions were the same for both groups. Focus group interviews were conducted with both groups on the fifth and final day of the study, although these were later discarded without being analyzed due to confidentiality concerns.

Assessment scores were compared in two ways. One way compared the scores of both groups on the assessment for the same story and analyzed whether scores were different if they used the story map intervention vs. if they did not use the intervention tool. The second method compared each participant's scores to see if their score changed based on use of the story map.

Once the data was collected, it was organized to allow the researcher to attempt to find any patterns that described trends in the data. Each assessment was scored out of 11 points. Questions about engagement were analyzed separately.

The data collected from assessments shows that most students comprehended the first story well. Seven out of eight students scored either 10/11 or 11/11 regardless of which group they were in or if they received the intervention. One student who participated did receive a lower score than their classmates with a 6/11. This student did not receive the intervention before taking the comprehension assessment. The data from the second story shows much more variation. Students received a variety of scores anywhere between 5/11 to 11/11. Whereas in the previous assessment, 5/10 students scored a perfect score of 11/11, this time only two students had a total score of 11/11. Also different is that no student scored 10/11. Instead, there were two 9s, one 8, two 7s, and one 5 out of 11.

To measure engagement, students were asked for their opinion on the day's activity and for their opinion on reading comprehension in general on every assessment . Positive reactions consist of students choosing or creating adjectives including "good", "happy", "cool", and "surprised". Negative reactions consist of students choosing or creating adjectives including "bored" and "worried". Neutral reactions consist of students choosing or creating adjectives including "semi-neutral" "ok". Unrelated reactions consist of students creating responses such as "I want to go home" and "I got a puppy".

The data from the engagement assessments show a general positive reaction to the intervention with five students having positive responses and only one student having negative, neutral, and unrelated responses. The non-intervention responses were more evenly distributed. Four students had positive responses and four students had negative responses. One had a neutral response and there were no unrelated responses. Students also had a generally positive response to reading comprehension instruction in general. Ten responses showed connotations while only three responses were negative, two were neutral, and one was unrelated (student C really wanted the researcher to know about their new puppy).

The researcher also gathered data via observations as the study was conducted. She found that students seemed moderately engaged in the intervention. Generally, two or three students in the group answered most of the questions about the story map activity and others only participated if prompted by the researcher. She also noted that much of the engagement stemmed not from the intervention or activity itself but the novelty of having a new adult in the class and having the opportunity to do something different than their peers.

The results from comparing the individual student data from both assessments showed that every student scored the same or better when they used the intervention compared to when they did not. Three students scored 11/11 on both assessments, so they had no room for improvement. The rest of the students scored between one to four points higher when they used the story map intervention.

The results of the student engagement data were organized by positive, negative, neutral, or unrelated. In all scenarios, positive responses were the most common (in the non-intervention scenario, positive and negative responses were tied for the highest place). The next most popular response was negative. However, negative responses were tied with other responses with and without the intervention. Negative, neutral, and unrelated were all tied with one response for the intervention activity. There was also one unrelated response for general reading comprehension instruction. Neutral responses were the lowest response for non- intervention (there were no unrelated responses) and second lowest for general comprehension.

The overall pattern shows that general reading comprehension and the story map intervention had high positive responses with low negative, unrelated, and neutral responses. The non-intervention responses were equally positive and negative with one neutral response.

The results of this study show that the use of the story map graphic organizer as a tool for aiding reading comprehension is effective. For the first story, there did not appear to be much of a difference in comprehension between students that participated in the intervention activity and students who did not. There was only a difference up to one point except for one student who had an outlying score of 6/10. The second story showed much more obvious differences between those who participated in the intervention and those who did not. The engagement data also showed generally positive responses to the intervention activity.

Based on these results, the researcher would suggest teachers utilize the story map tool to aid with reading comprehension in the classroom. While the results do not show a large difference, it is enough to make the adoption of this tool worthwhile.

After completing the research study, there are multiple things the researcher believes could be improved upon in future studies. It would be beneficial for the researcher to be someone who is familiar with the students. This would eliminate the increased engagement responses due to novelty rather than the specific activity itself. It would also be beneficial to conduct comprehension assessments again after time has passed to see if the story map helped students retain information about the stories they heard.

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Poetic Composition’s Influence on Student Attitudes Toward Poetry

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Kingsolver (1998) articulates in her poem “Beating Time” that “the fans overhead / whispered ‘I am I am’ in iambic pentameter” (lines 15-16). Rhythm and poetry surround students in their daily lives, and they can use it as a tool of self-expression. The teacher’s responsibility, then, is to make clear the connection between students’ experiences and poetic expression. As Milner et al. (2017) emphasize, “[t]he word *poet* derives from the Greek *poietes*, which means ‘one who makes’” (p. 187, emphasis in original). Poetry involves an act of creation in which teachers can invite themselves and their students to partake. Milner et al. (2017) argue that forging is a key for students to engage in poetry in a way that is meaningful to them before they jump to what they call “probing” or formal analysis (p. 209). As the literature currently stands, there are some studies that survey students’ attitudes toward poetry generally, but there is a gap in the literature regarding how students’ composition of poetry impacts their attitudes toward poetry. In response to Milner et al.’s (2017) advocation for student composition, this action research project will test their claims by responding to the question: How does engaging with poetic composition influence students’ attitudes toward poetry?

Literature Review

Somers (1999) notes that there seems to be a conclusion that “schools and teachers are, in general, a large part of the problem that poetry faces” (p. 28). This is why it is equally as important to investigate teachers’ attitudes toward poetry as much as it is important to consider students’ attitudes. In the literature, there seems to be some consensus that studying poetry is challenging and the study of poetry in American high schools is undergoing a crisis. This difficulty with teaching poetry prompts the question, why should we fight to keep the study of poetry in the classroom? Studying poetry in high school classrooms is important because our world is saturated with poetry, and poetry can be a vehicle through which our students convey their unique perspectives and experiences (Hanauer & Rivers, 2004). It also allows students to broaden their language skills because of the large lexical base and linguistic control that poetry and songwriting requires (Hanauer & Rivers, 2004). Even though poetry is valuable for both the cognitive and affective benefits to students, Ray (1999) found that when teachers were asked why poetry should be taught in primary school, 75% of the reasons given were for the cognitive rather than affective benefit of poetry.

Although Peskin (2007) discovered that students engaged more positively with poetic-shaped text, there are other studies which suggest that students (and teachers) possess an aversion to poetry. As addressed in the introduction, students as well as teachers often attribute their dislike of poetry to be associated with their lack of confidence in interpreting it. Wade and Sidaway (1990) conducted a study on middle schoolers' and middle school teachers' attitudes toward poetry and literature. The researchers found that while the teachers recognized the value of poetry in the classroom, 70% of those very teachers also reported their perceived lack of knowledge and confidence regarding poetry as well as limited ability to strategically encourage poetry in the classroom (Wade & Sidaway, 1990). Another study addresses the rationale for why teachers feel so ill equipped to teach poetry. In this study, Weaven and Clark (2013) found through their interviews with teachers that there were three separate sources of fear, anxiety, or apprehension of teaching poetry. The first is the fear of doing something "out of the ordinary," which could potentially lead to professional ostracism (Weaven & Clark, 2013, p. 206). Another teaching apprehension is the fear that students will not understand the genre of poetry. Finally, there is fear due to the teachers' perceived insufficient knowledge of poetry (Weaven & Clark, 2013).

Methods

This action research took place in a high school in the southeastern United States. This public high school is a Title I school, and 59.5% of its students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The school's performance grade is a C. Students who participated in this study were enrolled in Standard English IV Inclusion class. Students had the opportunity to engage in low-stakes poetry writing throughout the course of six weeks. Over those six weeks, they were exposed to a variety of different ways to compose poetry, such as poetry templates, found poetry, and black-out poetry. Students used a poetry template inspired by Lyon's (1999) poem "Where I'm from." Students also practiced found poetry when they selected their Self-Selected Reading (SSR) at the beginning of the semester. When studying *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1623), students made a black-out poem of Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be" speech, and they composed a poem about grief, as grief was one of the thematic concepts that the students studied. Toward the end of the six-week research study, students spent a week doing concentrated poetic composition and reflection on that process. A whole week of instruction was spent on students writing poetry, selecting poems to create a poetry anthology, and reflecting through a Socratic seminar. At the beginning of the week, students participated in poetry stations. This involved six stations that included a mixture of composing poetry and responding to poetry. Students used two days of class time to finish up the poetry stations and began selecting poems for their poetry anthologies. For the poetry anthology, students had to include their "Where I'm from" poem and an additional three poems from their writers' notebooks or from their poetry stations handout. After creating their anthologies, students participated in a Socratic seminar about poetry and participated in a Symphony Share of one of their poems.

Results

Overall, students proved to have more positive attitudes toward poetry after the intervention compared to before. This is evident in how their mean scores shifted from the pre-survey to the post-survey, both of which contained the following Likert scale: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Agree, (4) Strongly agree.

Table 1

Pre- and Post-Survey Mean Scores Per Statement

Statement	Pre-survey mean score	Post-survey mean score
I like poetry	2.875	3
Through writing poetry, I could express my personal feelings	2.5	3.25
There is a correct way to write poetry	2.143	1.714
I would never write poetry because this would reveal my personal feelings	1.875	2
Poets write in ways that most people cannot understand	2.875	2.625
Writing poetry is a form of art	3.375	3.5
You need to know how to properly read poetry before you can write it	2.857	2
Poetry can capture a specific feeling or moment	3.5	3.625

From the shift in mean scores, the data show that students grew in their appreciation of poetry and their confidence to express their own feelings through writing poetry. From these Likert-scale surveys, open-ended questions, and Socratic seminars, three prominent themes emerged from the data: students prefer reading poetry to writing it, students who disliked writing poetry cited a lack of knowledge on proper form as their primary reason, and students primarily view poetry as a mode of self-expression and vehicle for sharing feelings and emotions.

Discussion

The data from this sample size indicated that students' attitudes toward poetry generally improved, and the primary variable was introducing student composition. Despite the general positive shift in students' attitudes toward poetry, many students cited that they prefer to read poetry rather than write it. Although many students preferred reading over writing, the intervention of allowing students to write poetry in a low-stakes manner still demonstrated improvement in students' general attitudes toward poetry. This finding is reminiscent of Michaels (1999) as he also highlighted how being writers of poetry can make us better, more curious readers of poetry. Representative of many student responses, Anna said that through writing poetry she learned, "I can come up with the words and be creative." These student responses echo what Wilson (2013) found in their study about language that teachers used to describe what teaching poetry writing was like. One of the primary findings of Wilson's (2013) study was that teachers found teaching poetic composition to encourage students in their personal creativity. The results from this study demonstrated the benefits of student creativity and self-expression in the classroom; more importantly, the students themselves also noticed and put language to this theme.

After participating in sustained poetic composition, more students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that there is a "correct" way to write poetry. If students believe there is not a clearly correct way to compose poetry, it allows for their confidence to grow because they are not concerned with following a certain set of rules. Wade and Sidaway (1990) and Weaven and Clark (2013) reported that teachers attributed their fear of teaching poetry to a perceived lack of poetic knowledge. Here, there is a similar connection in students' expressing a lack of confidence in their ability to write based on a perceived lack of knowledge. There were a couple students who expressed that what they learned from writing poetry was their dislike and/or perceived inability to write it. In her response, Francis directly attributed her dislike for writing with her perceived inability to do so. She wrote, “What I learned about myself with writing poetry is that I suck and do not know how to write some.” It is clear from this response that Francis lacks the self-efficacy to feel confident in her poetry writing, which contributes toward her general dislike of the practice.

An aversion to which the researcher, in her role as a classroom teacher, tried to respond is the perceived rigidity and difficulty with which poetry is traditionally taught in conjunction with deep analysis and literary terms (Davis, 2023). Hanauer and Rivers (2004) instead make the case that poetry writing makes space for students to express themselves. As discussed above, students noted that they were able to be creative through writing poetry, and students demonstrated that they primarily view poetry as a vehicle through which the writer expresses their feelings. From the Likert scale surveys, there was also a significant positive jump from students’ responses to the statement, “Through poetry, I could express my personal feelings.” On the post-survey, all students either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement, while initially four out of the eight students “disagreed.”

When describing what poetry is, students focused on how it is a way for someone to convey their emotions. Students noted that “people use [poetry] to express their feelings,” to “express emotions,” to “put emotions in words,” to “describe how someone feels,” to “give a view from someone else’s eyes and [learn] how they feel,” to “feel emotions” of the poet, to “show your emotions.” Six out of the seven students who turned in the Socratic seminar handout defined poetry in relation to expressing one’s lived experience and how they feel; not one definition involved poetic structure or poetic devices. While some students demonstrated a lack of confidence in their ability to write poetry because they did not think they knew enough about poetic structure, these student responses demonstrated that students saw poetry as a mode of self-expression rather than a code they had to decipher. These descriptors of poetry combat the traditional view birthed through a traditional teaching style of highlighting the genre conventions and poetic elements over experiencing the emotion of a poem.

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Student Engagement with Graphic Novels

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Introduction

Graphic novels have led to debates about what types of texts should be taught in the English classroom. While some teachers may be challenged by teaching visual genres, others have successfully implemented graphic novels and comics into their teaching. Graphic novels have been slowly introduced into the English curriculum due to their numerous opportunities for engagement. Teachers may deal with conflicting perspectives from professors, colleagues, school boards, principals, administrators, parents, and students, all of whom may have something to say about what a graphic novel does for learning, what it should do, and if teachers should incorporate it into their teaching (Hansen, 2012).

To understand graphic novels as students know them today, teachers must learn to recognize what elements are essential to reading graphic novels and why they might have limitations for classroom instruction. Creating a study to discern whether visual literacies, namely graphic novels, may be beneficial to the field of English language arts (ELA) has the potential to help future teachers see the benefits or limitations that visual arts can bring to students' experiences and how it shapes their attitudes about reading. In fact, few studies even mention attitudes toward graphic novels from the student point of view. As a result, this study will focus on the following research question: How do graphic novels influence student engagement with literature?

Literature Review

Graphic novels have been denounced by some for being a dumbed down version of literature. While recent works have improved the image of graphic novels, some educators and adults feel as if teaching graphic novels are illicit and justify no meaning (Monnin, 2010). Some parents and educators have condemned and disapproved of the new genre, though Hansen (2012) notes, "newness isn't a justification for dismissing something outright" (p. 57). Some educators may feel graphic novels are not necessary for the ELA curriculum, especially with so many students struggling with reading (Hansen, 2012). Nevertheless, while some educators may prefer to read standard novels (Monnin, 2010), a growing number of teachers are using graphic novels to advance knowledge in the classroom (Connors, 2010).

Reading graphic novels can be harder than a student might think (Bakis, 2011). Students have assumptions that graphic novels are easy, uncomplicated, and unchallenging because people associate visual literacies with kids or being 'kid' like, yet that is simply not true. Berger (1972) expresses how "seeing comes before words" (p. 525), which describes how words can be inadequate and visuals can deepen the meaning found in the text or storyline. Educators may need to step away from the presumption that all students know and are acclimated to graphic novels (Bakis, 2011). Exposure to graphic novels may be limited based on the curriculum as well as teachers' biases and exposure to the genre. It is educators who must stand up and engage in pedagogical practices in the classroom to better inform the use of graphic novels and the critical thinking that comes from it (Bakis, 2011).

Graphic novels allow students to read the text and help them through the appeal of visual arts (Bakis, 2011). As a teaching resource, graphic novels can be a great tool for teaching English learners because they deepen the engagement of reading in a student's learning through a multimodal approach to literacy (Chun, 2009). Using graphic novels allows students to better connect with critical literacy and build empathy toward diverse cultures. However, simply reading a novel does not show the impact it can have on students. For instance, *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1996), a graphic novel about the Holocaust, was presented to a group of students to capture the descriptive darkness of genocide (Chun, 2009). Students who engaged in *Maus* were reading critically and contextualizing language in order to capture the cavernous meaning behind the book, tasks that are especially important for students who struggle to read in a narrative format (Chun, 2009).

Methods

One possibility for using graphic novels in a classroom is to engage them alongside the works of canonical and/or linked text. Critical reading is a way teachers can implement a proxy of students' tools such as remembering, understanding, processing, engaging, and comprehending the readings (Sun, 2017). The goal of reading any assignment in an ELA classroom is to create engagement. As Milner et al. (2017) stated, English teachers "agree on their goals for teaching literature: Student self-understanding is first; critical and analytical skills are second" (p. 129). Considering self-understanding and critical/analytical skills in the context of teaching texts leads to a relevant question: How do graphic novels influence student engagement with literature?

Students participating in the study were enrolled in high school English classes. Specifically, this study was conducted during the 2024 spring semester in two English II Honors classes. A total of 35 students participated in this study. These English Honors classes were fast-paced environments with few disciplinary problems. Students were advanced readers who engaged in many literary readings and activities. Students under the age of 18 signed assent forms to participate in the study, and their parents signed consent forms. Students over the age of 18 signed adult student consent forms. Both parents and students could choose not to participate in the study at any time.

The researcher gave students the first chapters of *All Rise: Resistance and Rebellion in South Africa* (Conyngham, 2022) to read independently for 15 minutes. After completing the chapters, students were tasked with comparing content analysis with visual analysis. The students were put into groups after individually reading the graphic novel chapters to draw comparisons. The groups were tasked with writing a summary of the graphic novel, creating and comparing elements of the graphic novel via worksheet and storyboard, and sharing their work with peers to discuss stylistic choices. The researcher specifically asked students to share why they created a certain picture and the importance of those moments.

The researcher then had two additional class days of 90 minutes each. The researcher presented ten graphic novels to the students. The students were asked to work in groups of no more than three to read the first chapter of each graphic novel then answer questions. For each graphic novel, students received ten minutes to read and write responses. After each graphic novel was read in their groups, the researcher offered opportunities for students to discuss the summary, what they noticed about the visuals, what aspects were most and least engaging, and anything else they thought was important.

The data collected for this study included a pre- and post-survey, student artifacts, questionnaire, and observations notes of the final performance. Prior to each graphic novel lesson, students filled out a Google form that asked them about how they felt about graphic novels. Students were asked to group themselves in two to three people per group. The students read in five stations with five different graphic novels. After having ten minutes to read each graphic novel's first chapter, students were asked:

1. What elements of the story did you like about the section that you just read?
2. What elements of the story did you dislike about the section that you just read?
3. What aspects of the graphic novel made it most and least engaging? (e.g., Panel, Gutter, Bleed, Dialogue Balloon, Thought Balloon, Story Ballon, Word Balloon)
    a. Most engaging:
    b. Least engaging:
4. Other comments:

After the group work with graphic novels, students completed a Google form comparing their experience with standard novels and graphic novels, including what genres they approved of and what graphic novels interested them. Data collection of the final performance included students being assigned to small groups creating a final scene of the story in graphic form. As part of this activity, students examined the effect of graphic novels. Students were given a rubric to help create clear expectations and help them understand components of the assignment. The researcher coded the data and came up with four themes of importance related to the research question. These themes included art, storyline, realism, and dialogue.

Results

When beginning the unit, students were asked if they enjoyed reading a graphic novel using a Likert scale; 22 students strongly agreed or agreed with the statement while nine students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. After the students completed the unit, they were asked if reading graphic novels influenced or changed their likeability toward reading graphic novels. Twelve of the 35 students said they changed their perception about reading more graphic novels.

Among the four major themes, the main one that appeared to influence students in relation to engagement with literature was art. Student 1 stated how she would engage more with the book when the colors were more vibrant, such as when reading *The Great Gatsby: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (Fitzgerald & Woodmad-Maynard, 2021). "I like the color scheme because when it's just black and white it seems more boring. I like how the story was suspenseful and mysterious," said Student 1.

Another theme the researcher noticed from the graphic novel student worksheet was the storyline. Many students would comment if the story was either catchy or not. When reading the first chapter of *Speak* (Anderson & Carroll, 2018), for example, Student 4 stated, "I liked all the plot twists in the book," and what he said was most engaging were "the plot twists."

A noticeable theme that arose from coding research data was realism. Student 25 stated, "It was hard to relate to as I've never experienced that kind of stuff," while Student 2 said, "I found the storyline interesting because I find things about history very interesting…." thus creating a connection to history and the real world when speaking about *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation* (Frank et al., 2018).

One recurring theme brought up on several occasions was dialogue. About the graphic novel *New Kid* (Craft, 2019), Student 25 stated, "There was *[sic]* a lot of weird words," and Student 31 said, "It was also very engaging with the dialogue balloon from the character. I was reading it in real time." While most liked the dialogue presented in *New Kid* (Craft, 2019), some students had similar reactions to Student 22, who stated, "The communication between characters is unrealistic at times and not engaging for me."

Discussion

The results of this study suggest student engagement can be influenced by graphic novels. Through observation and classroom discussion, the researcher noticed how students liked to connect the stories they were reading with adaptations of different forms and media. Another result found from the data analysis and student responses is how little knowledge students had in understanding and connecting visual literacy with written literacy. Many students changed their perceptions from graphic novels being childish reading books to advanced reading materials. The researcher also noticed that students with extra reading time would look up the graphic novel on their computers to keep reading further in the book.

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