The Effects of Location of Instruction on Student Engagement

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Abstract

This study reviewed the effects of altering the location of instruction on student engagement. The three children in this study were selected based on different levels of achievement in their regular English class. I collected qualitative and quantitative data by recording field note observations which included documentation of student participation and other behaviors, as well as surveys which prompted participants to reflect on the experience of altering the location of instruction and their own engagement levels. Other data collected included student work samples from each of the different locations during the data collection. Findings were derived from the research. The findings were as follows: (1) all participants showed an improvement in the quality of their completed work when the location was altered from the traditional classroom setting to the library or computer lab; (2) all participants ranked their engagement highest when the location of instruction was the computer lab; (3) each student received their highest score on the writing assignment that was completed in the computer lab. Results of this study suggest that altering the location of instruction does have a direct impact on student engagement levels. Further, the results of this study suggest that different locations have different effects on the level of student engagement.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"We get to go outside?! Are you serious? This is amazing!" A seventh grade boy exclaimed these words to his teacher after she suggested doing their learning for that class period on the bleachers outside since it was a beautiful day. The excitement in this particular student's voice is a testament to the potentially tremendous engagement that could exist if teachers investigate instruction in alternate locations. Even more, student engagement levels need to drastically improve in order to stay competitive in a global economy. According to Newmann (2012), "Teaching stands out as the profession whose success depends on exceptionally long-term committed participation of its clients." This means that as teachers, our clients, students of any age, must maintain consistent engagement in order to be successful. The negative consequences of the lack of consistency in regards to engagement in the classroom are endless. Thus, we need to identify new strategies or techniques, such as altering the location of instruction, in order to promote long-term student engagement and ultimately, success, for all students.

Problem Statement

Current research shows significant benefits of physical activity or movement during the school day, including during classroom activities. Classroom activities that incorporate movement in some way, like gallery walks or skits, allow students to maintain their focus and ultimately, end up achieving more in class as a direct result. Movement is a factor that has been proven to be beneficial to student engagement levels. However, little research has been done to investigate the effects of location of instruction on student productivity and/or engagement. If this question is investigated, teachers have the potential to observe significant improvements in engagement levels of their students during class time, which would result in greater productivity

on a daily basis. If engagement levels improve, the overall productivity, environment (student

and teacher attitudes), among other important aspects, will be impacted in a positive way.

Research Question

The purpose of this research project is to determine the impact, if any, that the location of

instruction (i.e. classroom, auditorium, cafeteria, hallway, outside school, etc.) has on student

engagement. I plan to share the results of this study with building leaders and administrators to

brainstorm ways in which teachers may best support their students and student learning with

differentiated location(s) of instruction. Given the need to have ways to improve student

engagement in classrooms and teachers' constant search for finding new strategies to implement,

it is important to consider factors that have not been investigated yet.

Significance of Problem

Given that student engagement is the main factor when determining the success or failure

of each lesson that is taught, it is a component of our classrooms that needs to be paid more

attention. Further, since this classroom component is so overarching, various factors of

instruction that impact student engagement should be investigated in order to determine what

teachers can manipulate or alter to increase the engagement levels of their students, with the

ultimate goal of improving student success and achievement. In addition, since student

engagement is such a complex component of instruction to analyze, multiple considerations and

types of data must be collected and reviewed in order to have a reliable data analysis and

conclusions.

Purpose of the Research Study

Student engagement levels impact every other factor in classrooms, including

productivity and participation, as well as student and teacher attitudes and full implementation of

the "growth mindset" that all classrooms should adopt. While student engagement encompasses a number of different aspects of learning, this study aims to investigate whether or not altering the location of instruction (i.e. teaching students outside for the day, bringing students to a different classroom or the gymnasium, cafeteria, etc.) has any impact(s) on student engagement levels. If it does, it leaves educators with potential to improve the efficiency of their classrooms and ultimately, support their students in the best way possible and allow them different pathways to success.

In order to be able to gage whether or not the level(s) of student engagement improved while altering the location of instruction, data collection and analyzation methods were determined. Further, considerations were made in order to incorporate both verbal and non-verbal behaviors that may or may not be observable. To do this more effectively, other English teachers in the school and the head of the department at the school were interviewed to provide input into the best ways to measure this in an ELA classroom/setting. Having a clear understanding of how to best measure student engagement provided the researcher with insight into what types of data needed to be collected, as well as how to most effectively analyze it.

Summary

Student engagement levels are a concern of all teachers and administrators, as they directly impact the productivity of the classroom as a whole, as well as individual student achievement and progress. When considering the possible factors that may alter student engagement levels on any given day, the location of instruction is one that should be investigated. This study determined the effect(s), if any, of location of instruction on student engagement levels. In this study, the researcher pre-selected three students from which to collect work samples, as well as documented field notes, and analyzed their participant surveys from

each of the lessons during the data collection period. The combination of quantitative and

qualitative data collection methods, as well as the process for data analysis, ensure that the

findings are more reliable and include a more complete picture of the students' engagement

levels.

<div align="center">Chapter Two: Literature Review</div>

Introduction

Student engagement is a factor that directly impacts students' learning and productivity in

the classroom. Student engagement may be measured in a number of different ways across

disciplines, but regardless of the content area or grade level, teachers are constantly seeking new

or innovative ways to improve student engagement levels. Few educators have investigated the

concept of whether or not altering the location of instruction has an impact on student

engagement levels. Possible locations for instruction and investigating this question include the

school cafeteria, auditorium, hallway, other teachers' classrooms and outside of the school

building (i.e. soccer field, bleachers, football stadium, etc.).

As student engagement includes a multitude of factors including amount/frequency and

quality of participation, completion and quality of student work, as well as levels of excitement

and/or happiness and the connections or value students acknowledge between the lesson or skills

and their own lives, it is important to consider more than one isolated component or instance of

observable data to determine student engagement. In addition, multiple locations need to be used

to assess the value (if any) of altering the location of instruction. Even more, the regular or

traditional classroom setting should be used to collect data in order to serve as a constant or basis

for comparison of other student engagement levels. Given the importance of student engagement

on student productivity and learning, as well as the lack of current research, it is necessary to

investigate the potential impact that altering the location of instruction may have on student

engagement levels. It is my hypothesis that if the location of instruction is altered, student

engagement levels will improve.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is something that all teachers want to improve, or even master, in

order to have the most productive and efficient classrooms as possible. While it is clear that

student engagement is important in any classroom, one must consider a number of ways to

measure or assess student engagement levels, as there is not a single best practice or method. The

level of student(s) engagement during a class activity may be determined by an array of different

factors, or even a combination of them, including verbal or non-verbal participation,

reflection/responses to prompts, quality of work, general work completion and other observable

behaviors, which may include a student's willingness to work with partner or focus/make eye

contact, comfort level or willingness to ask questions, among other things. Student engagement

can be assessed or observed by collecting qualitative information (i.e. student work samples that

will be graded and analyzed), simple quantitative data (tallies for participation/number of times

of verbal communication during lesson, or even the number of relevant, thought-provoking

questions that a student asks the teacher. When collecting data in this study, it is also important to

note that there may be other factors of engagement level that may not be assessed entirely, given

the constraints of the study. However, these have been addressed in the limitations section of the

paper.

Classrooms are evaluated by the amount of improvement or progress that each student is

making, the rigor or level of challenge that each student is presented with, the connections that

the students are able to establish between the content or skill that they are learning and their own

lives, among many other things. Given that student engagement is critical in order to have a productive learning environment, it is important to acknowledge the significant benefits of student engagement, as well as recognize its role in a classroom setting. Student engagement is often considered to simply be compliance with teacher directions. If a student simply looks like they are on task, then some teachers would consider that that particular student is, in fact, engaged. However, it is often the students that are asking deeper, higher-level questions or questioning what they're doing and asking "why" that are truly the ones who are engaged at the highest level. These students may not always be the easiest students in regards to the time/pacing of certain activities or teacher frustration, but the fact that they are able to ask higher level questions needs to be considered when observing and analyzing their engagement levels. This leads to the question of how we measure the success of a lesson in general, given that student engagement encompasses so many things and is so broad, but so important to master in order to have a successful lesson or learning experience.

Degol and Wang (2014) of the University of Pittsburgh acknowledge that "Student engagement has become prominent in psychology and education because of its potential for addressing problems of student boredom, low achievement, and high dropout rates" (p. 137). They acknowledge in their study the difference between engagement and motivation. Even more, engagement can be observable behavior or be an internal, non-observable behavior (or cognitive, which may be observable). This fact is critical to the study's significance due to the fact that only a limited amount of data can be collected, provided that the participants are in a regularly schedule English class and a significant amount of time to reflect on one's own engagement level is not provided. The study addresses the three levels of engagement: the first level is "within the school community," the second level "narrows the focus to the classroom or subject domain" and

the third level "examines student engagement in specific learning activities" (p. 138). The researchers explain, "by focusing on only one level of engagement, we understand little about the process through which engagement is formed and leads ultimately to academic achievement" (p. 139). This study acknowledges a number of important features related to student engagement, including "engagement is distinct from motivation, engagement is multilevel, engagement is multidimensional, engagement is malleable, engagement predicts student outcomes, engagement comes in qualitatively different patterns, [and] disengagement is more than the lack of engagement" (p. 137-139). This study concludes that "engagement can be measured as a multidimensional construct, including both observable and unobservable phenomena" (p. 141). Considering that student engagement is much different and must be considered separate from motivation, it is even more important to use both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in the study.

Parsons et. al. (2014) argue that "Students need to be actively engaged in order to achieve…but engagement declines as students progress through the elementary grades to middle school" (p 24). Elementary school students are more excited to attend school and want to share their experiences with their families when they return home. As students get older, this excitement decreases consistently until they graduate from high school. Researchers explain "affective engagement included a sense of belonging in the classroom and an interest, curiosity, or enthusiasm around specific topics or tasks" (p. 24). When students feel that they are a part of a community and the classroom is partially theirs, they feel a deeper connection and are more motivated to work harder. Students need to wonder or ask questions about what they're learning about. They also need to be interested, to some degree, in the topic, or at the very least, acknowledge/understand the connections between the topic/new learning and their own life or

real world applications. Even more, if a student has a connection or relationship with the teacher, they are going to be more likely to find success in that class, regardless of what the content area may be. The research conducted shows three trends regarding student engagement. "Engagement is associated with student achievement, student engagement can increase or decrease, and there are a variety of ways to evaluate student engagement" (Parsons et. al., 2014, p. 25). This study will use multiple ways to determine student engagement levels before drawing conclusions or findings. However, as current research supports, further investigation must be done to determine whether the same findings are made with alternate or adjusted data collection methods are used. Even more, "by understanding engagement levels, educators can alter the tasks they assign, which will increase or decrease student engagement" (Parsons et. al., 2014, p. 25). If students aren't interested in what they're learning about or are simply not challenged with what they're learning about or assigned to do, they are bored in school and have low engagement levels, which could lead to other concerning behaviors or outbursts. Most behavior concerns or problems that arise in schools are a direct result of student confusion or lack of interest in the content/activity. Research shows that there are a number of factors that go into measuring engagement levels of student(s), which include participation, ability to persevere through challenges, asking questions, exceeding expectations, demonstrating boredom, giving up easily, and not completing tasks/work. Student self-reports, teacher reports, and observations are the main sources of identifying student engagement levels through data (Parsons et. al., 2014, p. 26). Multiple studies prove that a number of factors need to be considered in order to determine any student's level of engagement, rather than focusing on a sole component or piece of data that is collected.

Kahu (2013) explains in his study that "engagement is complex and multifaceted; an overarching 'meta-construct' that aims to draw together diverse threads of research contributing to explanations of student success" (p. 758). Kahu (2014) acknowledges the fact that student engagement is no longer deemed as a controversial topic in regards to its significance. Educators consistently demonstrate understanding of the significance that student engagement plays in classrooms today. However, the inconsistency lies with the definition and criteria for student engagement. The study presents four approaches or perspectives to student engagement: "behavioral, psychological, socio-cultural, and holistic" (p. 759-764). As Kahu explains, the "four relatively distinct approaches to understanding engagement can be identified in the literature: the behavioral perspective, which focuses on effective teaching practice; the psychological perspective, which views engagement as an internal individual process; the socio-cultural perspective, which considers the critical role of socio-cultural context; and finally a holistic perspective, which strives to draw the strands together" (p. 758). The main focus of this study is to acknowledge and learn of the different influences in all of these categories to fully understand why a student is engaged, disengaged, or somewhere in between. The framework that was created serves as a basis for understanding student engagement, but has some areas of weakness (doesn't cover all potential views, experiences, etc.). Suggestions for improving the credibility of the findings will be outlined in the limitations section.

Within the behavioral perspective that Kahu outlines and describes as "the most widely accepted view of engagement in the higher education literature," student engagement is defined as "the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities" (p. 759). As a supporter of unlocking a student's funds of knowledge and recognizing the significance in a student's background and ability to establish powerful or meaningful connections to the content,

I believe that this suggestion, that a student's engagement is based solely on the time that he/she dedicates to work, isn't credible. While the time that one devotes to the work and improving skills may be important, at least in some situations, it is certainly not the all-encompassing or most definitive factor in regards to student engagement. Within the psychological perspective that is outlined in the research conducted by Kahu (2014), it is argued that, "participation in both the classroom and wider school leads to success, which then develops a sense of belonging which, in a perpetual cycle, further increases participation" (p. 761). Teachers see this on a daily basis in their classrooms. When students take chances and volunteer to participate or share and then they receive meaningful praise, they feel better about themselves and are more willing to take chances. This cycle continues, but it also creates a gap, where some students are constantly participating and others are seemingly always afraid to. The socio-cultural perspective on student engagement "focuses on the impact of the broader social context on student experience" (p. 763). Kahu goes on to explain that students may feel alienated from their peers or have trouble with student engagement due to being isolated or not being comfortable from a social perspective/standpoint. Finally, the holistic perspective recognizes the importance of emotion on student engagement levels. Believers of this perspective "argue for a wider focus that incorporates the notion of 'becoming'…" (p. 764). Even more, they argue that "engagement is a dynamic continuum with different locations and thus not measurable by surveys but best understood through in-depth qualitative work" (p. 764). Given the nature of the study, the qualitative data that was collected is not in-depth due to time constraints. However, the Holistic perspective that Kahu (2014) explains presents an idea of delving deeper with the quality of research rather than focusing on simple, short answers or surveys that students can fill out fairly quickly.

This study presents an interesting concept on student engagement, proposing that there's a potential/possible conceptual framework that allows teachers and other individuals to understand students and their engagement levels better. The "sociocultural influences" includes structural influences, psychosocial influences, proximal consequences, and distal consequences. The concern that still exists with this conceptual framework, as well as any like it, is the fact that regardless of how much is added to this framework, teachers will not have a "cheat sheet" for understanding their student(s). Each student has unique experiences, living situation, social and psychological factors/context, etc. and I feel that this is a major weakness of this study. While it may be beneficial for a starting point with a particular student, I believe that teachers should be unlocking these challenges for engagement themselves, rather than using this pre-conceived framework that may or may not fit a particular student. The perspectives that are multi-faceted and address a range of different factors are much more reliable and ones that should be adopted to test the theory of whether or not altering the location has any impact on the engagement levels of students.

Location of Instruction

Given the importance of student engagement and the need to constantly improve engagement levels in our classroom, students may benefit from altering the location of instruction. Potential locations include auditoriums or performing arts center(s), school cafeteria, different classrooms, hallways, or even outside (sports field, bleachers, etc.). When students are introduced to a new activity during a lesson that they may already be used to, having a new activity has the power to increase student engagement due to the students being more motivated and engaged in the skill or content. A similar theory is tested in this study with the location of instruction. Maxwell (2015) addresses the importance of active learning and how the approach

benefits teachers and students alike. This study addresses the prevalence of negative attitudes or disengagement among students and current teaching practice that is used in classrooms all over the country. Active learning "is a student centered teaching method that requires students to be responsible for their own learning" (p. 433). Students are given choice and asked open-ended questions, which allows them to access and utilize background information and expand upon their genuine interests and skills. Maxwell gives steps that are required in order to implement active learning successfully, including discussion, differentiation, and engagement (p. 434-435). This means that if we are able to keep students active, which could encompass a number of things, then we will have better levels of engagement. "Active learning levels the playing field" (Maxwell, 2015, p. 441). Even with the amount of technology and resources that schools and teachers have access to, so many classrooms continue to be teacher-led, while students are in the background. Students should, instead, be the center or focus, of every classroom. "Rather than receiving information passively via lecture or PowerPoint, students are responsible for discovering the desired information" (Maxwell, 2015, p. 433). Given Blooms Taxonomy and higher level of thinking, Maxwell explains, "students are able to teach their peers and teachers what they have learned. To a certain degree, active learning allows the teacher to be led by the student" (p. 433).

Nulan and Parsons (2014) explain the importance of student engagement and more importantly, how educators facilitate and assess it. Students may be on task, but there is a difference between being on task or compliance and "demonstrating strategic consideration of content or an enthusiastic desire to learn" (p. 24). This is important to keep in mind as we are collecting data or observing students. Simply following directions isn't "enough"… students

need to be asking relevant, thought-provoking questions, show a high level of interest or excitement about the topic/skill, among other things.

To determine a location for altering the location of instruction (anything other than at a desk, inside a classroom), it is important to acknowledge the fact that students should be giving input and making suggestions for this. According to Maxwell (2015), "Students can and should have a voice in their education, and school should be a place where they look forward to spending their days" (p. 441). Allowing students to choose the location (or at least, give input towards possible locations for instruction) allows them to take ownership and be invested in their learning. Students who feel as they are a part of a community or that their teacher values and respects them are more likely to take chances, participate, and ultimately, learn more. "Active learning motivates students to want to come to school and excel, making school a place where they are reminded of their strengths more often than their weaknesses" (Maxwell, 2015, p. 441). In her study, Waite (2011) explored "the role that outdoor learning had or might have from the perspective of mainstream settings for children aged 2-11 years within a rural county" (p. 68). While this study was conducted in England, the benefits for children of this age group would be applicable in the United States as well. The study focused on the benefits of associating being outdoors with positive memories or thoughts, which would hopefully improve students' engagement or productivity. It was concluded that students were enthusiastic about their real-world learning experiences outdoors and allowed them to be "exploratory learners and enjoy the rich qualities of outdoor contexts" (p. 79). This study acknowledges the need for having fun or enjoying class and having a positive attitude in order for the students to be successful, or at the very least, show improvement. With play being such an important part of the daily lives of younger children, it is unclear how learners transition from such an extensive amount of their day

being dedicated to play to none within just a few years. It is important to clarify what "outdoor learning" comprises, as discussed in this study, because of the skepticism one may encounter from other teachers and/or parents. The purpose of learning outside is to enhance the learning experience, rather than distract or take away from it in any way, so it is important that my study acknowledges this fact. As a skill essential for students as outlined by the common core, authentic assessments and activities are encouraged and using the local community "to extend learning opportunities for children outside" is a prime example of this.

Nulan and Parson (2014) present a spectrum of engagement, which includes indicators of high and low student engagement, as well as "affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement" (p. 24). High engagement indicators include behavioral involvement in learning, perseverance when challenged, asking questions, exceeding expectations, etc. These are just a few suggestions or examples of high engagement indicators/data. Low engagement indicators or examples include not completing assigned tasks, demonstrating boredom and giving up easily. Students are often frustrated or become frustrated easily when they are not engaged in the lesson/activity. The measurements for student engagement includes three types: (1) affective; (2) behavioral; and (3) cognitive.

Conclusion

Research by Degol and Wang (2014) presented the concept that engagement should be measured on multiple levels, rather than just one. There are a number of important considerations when collecting and analyzing data related to student engagement. New research needs to be done to investigate how we can measure, on a daily basis, engagement levels, so we are able to target them effectively and improve them to maximize productivity and growth in the classroom. As Degol and Wang (2014) explain, "We have barely scratched the surface in understanding how

engagement and disengagement can affect academic development, and how engagement unfolds over time by tracking interactions across contexts, dimensions, and levels. We also cannot dismiss the personal traits and affective states that students bring to the classroom, which may influence engagement regardless of the supportive nature of the environment." There will always be a number of outside factors that can't be controlled by an educator or other person that impact a student's engagement level, so even with more research, each student's level of engagement will be individualized based on their own experiences, attitude(s), etc. Parsons et. al. (2014) acknowledge that student engagement levels decrease as students progress from the elementary schools to middle school grades. This shouldn't be the case, and teachers need to find new ways to maintain (or even improve) the engagement as students get older, which shows the need for this study. As engagement is so critical for student achievement and success, it "is important for educators of all grade levels to understand engagement, how to facilitate it, and how to assess it" (Parsons et. al., 2014, p. 24).

Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluation

Participants were taught four lessons, each of which focused on the same reading and writing skills, each of which was taught in a different location on the school campus, including the classroom, cafeteria, library and computer lab. The lessons focused on the same reading and writing skills in order to ensure that the work samples and data remained comparable for the analysis. Degol and Wang (2014) of the University of Pittsburgh acknowledge that "Student engagement has become prominent in psychology and education because of its potential for addressing problems of student boredom, low achievement, and high dropout rates" (p. 137). They explain that engagement can be observable behavior or be an internal, non-observable behavior (or cognitive, which may be observable). Further, Parsons et. al. (2014) argue that

"Students need to be actively engaged in order to achieve…but engagement declines as students progress through the elementary grades to middle school" (p 24). Researchers explain "Effective engagement included a sense of belonging in the classroom and an interest, curiosity, or enthusiasm around specific topics or tasks" (p. 24). Kahu (2013) explains in his study that "Engagement is complex and multifaceted; an overarching 'meta-construct' that aims to draw together diverse threads of research contributing to explanations of student success" (p. 758). Engagement is a crucial part of classrooms and the input that the semi-structured teacher surveys provide will be valuable for future studies of measuring engagement level(s). With student engagement being a concern of all classroom teachers as it determines the productivity and overall environment and/or structure of a class, it is important to investigate new ways to improve student engagement in order to best support students and their needs. This study aims to address the question of whether a particular feature of instruction such as location can impact a student's engagement.

Participants

All participants of this study were eighth grade students that are instructed in a regular English class by the researcher, ranging in age from 13 to 14 years old. Each of the lessons were taught in this study were during the regularly scheduled English class and align with the same essential skills that are outlined by the Common Core State Standards and locally developed curriculum. From the 25 students in the researcher's English class, three were selected by the researcher in order to ensure that more attention would be paid to work samples and specific data of these three particular students. The number of participants for the study is 3. They were selected by the researcher prior to data collection. In order to select the participants for the study, the researcher divided cards with each student's name on them into three separate piles,

identified by category. The categories included below average, average and above average and were determined using the students' scores on the common ELA assessment. Below average scores were scores >65%, average scores were those ranging from 65% to 80%, and above average were scores ranging from 81% to 100%. Once each student's name was sorted into one of the three piles, the researcher randomly selected one name/student from each of the three piles. As outlined in the Results section, students were selected from each of the three categories, Once selected with this method, the teacher required students to submit a consent and assent form.

Having three participants enables the researcher to look more closely at their specific data. Further, this ensures that participants of the study include a range of skill/ability levels, which increases the credibility of the findings and conclusions. In addition to the 3 study participants, the researcher taught each of the four lessons to a maximum of 25 students, as the researcher is also the regular ELA teacher and this is the number of students that are in the class. The researcher's rationale for including all students in the class is to ensure that the setting is as close to how it is on a typical day as possible. Having the same number of students in the class to participate is an important consideration that was kept as a constant during the data collection period. The work samples and data collected regarding the three study participants were looked at closely for the qualitative cross-examination of data. The data collected includes field notes and student work samples (of participants, only), as well as student surveys.

Positionality as the Researcher

I obtained my Bachelor of Arts degree in Adolescent Education (7-12) and English Literature from St. John Fisher College. I also obtained an extension for the adolescent education degree to grades 5-6. I am currently earning my Master of Science in Education degree through

The College at Brockport's Literacy Education B-12 program, which will be complete as of

August 2017. I also serve as the participants' regular English teacher, as I work at a suburban

school district in upstate New York. I have worked in this district for two years and 4 months,

which provides me with insight into the strategies, behaviors and research that is investigated

throughout my graduate coursework. This is the first research that I have conducted at the

graduate level.

Procedures of Study

This case study was conducted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative

research methods, including student surveys, field notes and student work samples. The lessons

that were taught to study participants focused on the same essential literacy skills (reading and

writing) and can be taught multiple times within a short period of time, using the Common Core

State Standards and the researcher's locally developed curriculum. While the lessons that were

taught 4 times are not exactly the same, the student work samples that were collected as data

from the lessons requires the use of the same reading and writing skills. This ensures that the

lessons are comparable. In the review of the data, it was noticed that some students improved

upon their writing skill by the fourth lesson.

Three different ELA teachers in the building, including the head of the ELA department,

were interviewed by the researcher prior to data collection, in order to get a better understanding

of how to best measure "student engagement" when analyzing the data. The input collected from

other ELA teachers was used to get a better understanding of what teachers would deem as

"student engagement," rather than solely the researcher. These teachers served as professional

experts to guide the direction and rationale of the data collection and analysis of data. They are

not deemed participants in the study. From the information collected from the teachers and head

of the department, I was able to determine that the methods I was using as both qualitative and

quantitative data collection were best. Further, to make the study more credible, I would need the

regular lesson or location of instruction as a form of comparison. All teachers agreed that student

engagement encompasses a number of different factors and multiple forms of data would need to

be collected to get an accurate depiction.

      The three participants were taught the four lessons in four different locations. The lessons

focused on the same reading and writing skills in order to ensure that data is comparable. One of

these locations was the regular English classroom to serve as a basis for comparison of data.

Field notes, which will include documentation of participant's verbal and non-verbal

participation/observations, were taken throughout each of these four lessons. In addition,

students submitted the work they completed during the class (each of the four lessons) that was

analyzed later by the researcher. Students also filled out a survey at the conclusion of each of the

four lessons to assess their own level of engagement on that particular day. The survey also

allowed the student participants to reflect on their experience with learning in a different location

rather than the traditional classroom setting. Due to the fact that the researcher is an ELA teacher

and literacy skills are in the Common Core ELA standards and curriculum, the lessons that are

used for data collection will occur in the students' regular ELA scheduled class.

      All students in the researcher's English class were taught each of the four lessons,

regardless of their selection or not as a participant. This was done for two reasons. First, the

students have to complete the same reading and writing activities regardless of their participation

in the study. Second, it is important to keep the class size as a contained variable. Having the

same size class as the study participants are used to will ensure that the data is more reliable. It

also ensures that the student's comfort level and participation level are not altered due to the

class size, which could cause these points of data to change drastically. Since only three students were selected as participants in the study, they were identified prior to the researcher asking selected students to get consent form signed. The reason to have 3 participants is to enable the researcher to look more closely at their specific data. The rationale for having the remaining students in the class participate in the lesson is to ensure that student class size is contained as a potential variable. This way, the 3 participants had a regular class size when the researcher was collecting data. The class meets from 9:00 am to 9:50 am four times each week, so the observations/data were collected from 9:00-9:50 am on each of the days of the lessons used for data collection purposes.

Once data was collected, the researcher separated the work samples and data from the three alternate locations (i.e. cafeteria, library, outside). The traditional classroom setting served as a basis for comparison. The level of engagement at each location was analyzed based on the information the ELA teachers provided in the early stages of data collection. The researcher looked for patterns or trends in the data collected and then conclusions were drawn from these findings. No deception was involved in this study.

Instruments for Study

During the four lessons taught over the data collection period, the researcher took field notes on a special document. The field notes included tallies for student participation, notes on behavior and accuracy/quality of student responses, as well as behavior (attitude, ability to use other resources/materials, follow directions, etc.) and student interactions with other individuals. In addition to the student surveys that each participant filled out, work samples of the students were also collected for each of the four lessons to compare the student's self-assessment with the actual results of the quality of the work that was completed during each lesson.

At the conclusion of each of the four different locations, students were given a survey to fill out created by the researcher. As student self-assessment is important data to collect for this study, the survey provided the researcher with valuable insight in regards to what the participants thought of altering the location of instruction. The students were asked to answer specific questions about their engagement levels and provide evidence to support their responses that was later analyzed by the researcher. The survey includes both multiple choice and short answer and open-ended questions that allow students more freedom with responses. This survey prompted students to rate their level of engagement on a scale of 1-5 and gave them an opportunity to reflect on their engagement level relative to the altered location of instruction. They were allowed to reflect on their thoughts of learning in the altered location to provide the researcher with specific, individualized student feedback.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Prior to the data collection period, English teachers were provided with simple questions regarding student engagement. The English teachers, including the head of the English department, served as professional experts who help guide the study and the data analysis for the researcher. A common theme in the responses from the English teachers was that student engagement is not limited to just one factor or quantitative measure. It is, rather, a combination of behaviors and both quantitative and qualitative measures, with other factors to take into consideration.

According to the responses given by the English teachers, participation is an important component to show student engagement. However, every teacher that was asked also pointed out that some students may be more introverted, and thus, less comfortable speaking in front of the entire class, so participation should be more all-encompassing, rather than just the number of times a student volunteers to share a response or talks aloud. Students following directions and/or being on task was another common theme in the teacher's responses to the question, "What is student engagement?" In response to the question/prompt, "How do we measure student engagement?" the teachers wrote that taking the work samples/quality of work completion of the students into account is important. Further, if a student has a positive attitude or seems like they are enjoying the class from either their own reflection in the survey, or their behavior during the lesson (verbal, vocal expression of excitement for lesson, or non-verbal, high-fiving a student or slouching, etc.) should be considered as well.

The responses of the professional experts definitely guided my research, as I was more aware of certain characteristics and behaviors for my field notes during each of the four lessons.

Being reminded that student participation can be displayed through a number of different actions

or behaviors, and not simply the scores on a writing assignment, I was better prepared to look at

the student engagement as a whole entity, instead of simply tallying times that each student

participated.

Each time that the researcher explained to students in the beginning of the class period

that they would be learning in a different location for that lesson, it was documented that the

participants (all three) reacted positively by expressing their excitement for the altered location.

It was also documented that the four different locations for the observations included the

traditional classroom setting to serve as a basis for comparison to the cafeteria, library and

computer lab.

Each of the participants selected was determined by a common ELA assessment

previously taken and scored by the teacher/researcher, which is outlined in Figure 1. Pseudonyms

and achievement information is outlined in the chart below to show which student correlates with

which achievement category.

Achievement Category (based on previously taken common ELA assessment)	Name (pseudonym)
Low/below average	Bob (participant #1)
Middle/average	Joe (participant #2)
High/above average	Sarah (participant #3)

Figure 1. Potential participants of the study were grouped before selection by

achievement category, which included: below average; average; and above average. One

participant was selected from each of the three designated categories. This figure illustrates the

pseudonym assigned to each of the participants, based on the achievement category.

The Student Survey that was provided to each of the study participants at the conclusion

of each of the four lessons is included in the Appendix section.

As a result of having each of the three study participants fill out a Student Survey at the

conclusion of each of the four lessons, I was able to collect valuable quantitative and qualitative

data. Their responses provided the themes and commonalities between different sets of data.

Figure 2 shows the quantitative data collected through the participants' self-assessment and

completion of the Student Survey.
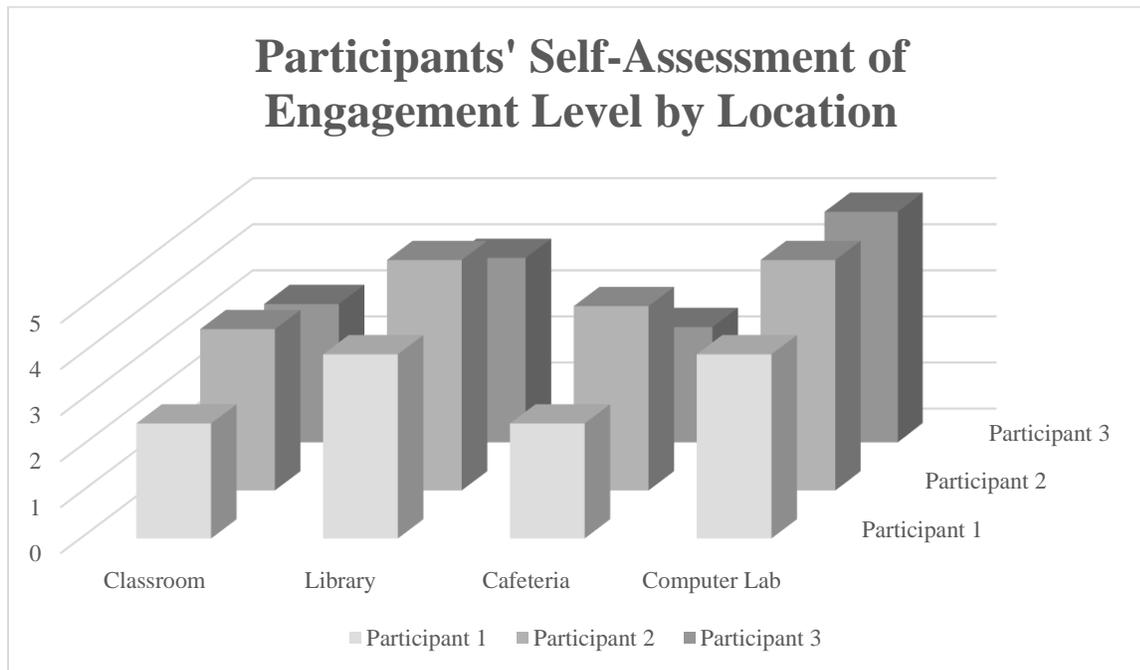
Figure 2. Students were prompted to self-assess their engagement level at each of the four

locations by ranking their engagement on a scale of 0-5. Figure 2 illustrates the rankings

provided by each participant, categorized by each of the four locations.

Work samples were collected at each of the four lessons. The lessons that were used for the data collection period all incorporated a writing response that students were required to complete. The directions for this response included identifying relevant evidence to support a provided claim and interpreting or explaining how the evidence supported their claim. This argumentative style writing is based on the Common Core ELA State Standards, as well as the locally developed curriculum.

The scores for the different locations and the work samples (written short response) for each of the study participants is outlined in Figure 3.

WORK SAMPLES - SCORES BY LOCATION
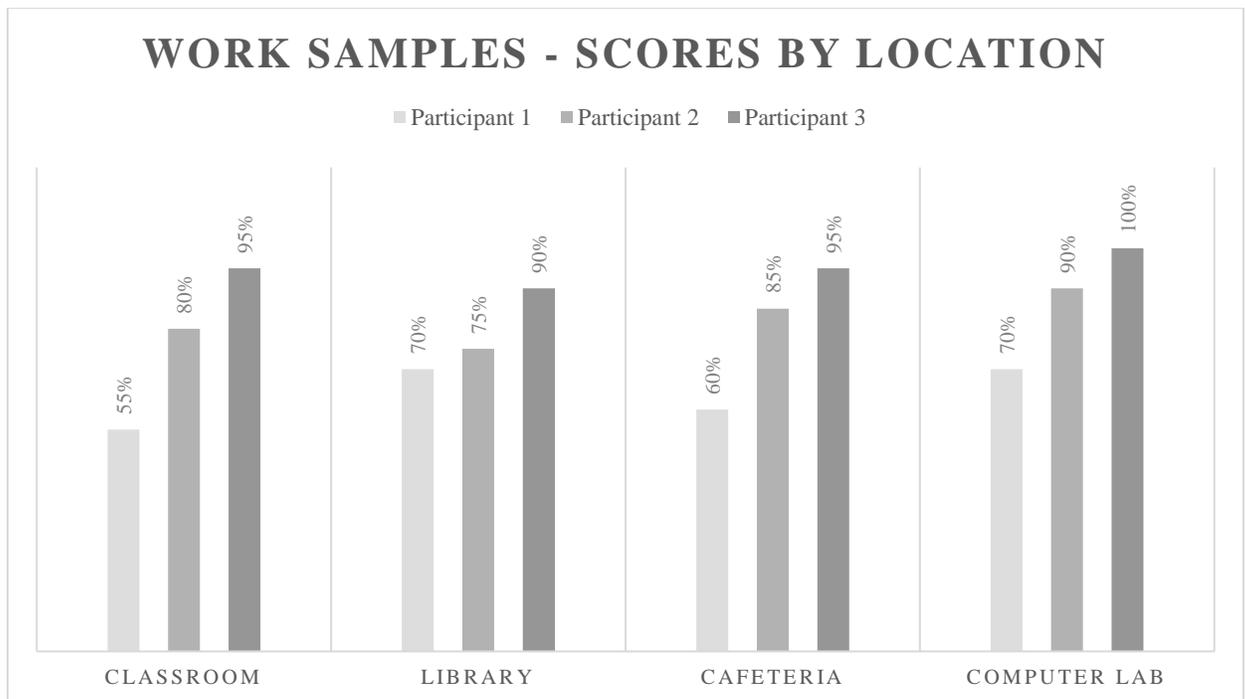
Figure 3. Work samples were collected from each of the three participants for each lesson taught during the study. Scores on the work samples varied. Figure 3 illustrates the scores on the work samples, categorized by the location of the lesson, as well as the participant.

Data Analysis

Data collected in this study was analyzed and findings include the following: (1) all participants showed an improvement in the quality of their completed work when the location was altered from the traditional classroom setting to the library or computer lab; (2) all participants ranked their engagement highest when the location of instruction was the computer lab; and 3) each student received their highest score on the writing assignment that was completed in the computer lab.

Finding 1

The first finding of the data is that all participants showed an improvement in the quality of their completed work when the location was altered from the traditional classroom setting to the library or computer lab. By using the classroom scores as a base for comparison, Participant #1 scored a 55% on the first writing assignment, which was taught in the classroom. Participant #2 scored an 80% on the assignment in the same location, while Participant #3 scored a 95%. When the location was altered to the library, Participant #1 scored a 70%, Participant #2 scored a 75% and Participant #3 scored a 90%. In the computer lab, Participant #1 scored a 70%, Participant #2 scored a 90%, while Participant #3 scored 100%. All three participants' scores improved when the location was altered from the classroom to the library or the computer lab.

Finding 2

The second finding of the data is that all participants ranked their engagement highest when the location of instruction was the computer lab. At the conclusion of each of the four lessons, each of the three participants filled out a student survey, which included a self-assessment, where they ranked their level of engagement during the lesson. Participant #1 (Bob) had the lowest self-assessment ranking of a 2.5, which was for both the classroom and cafeteria. The highest rank was both the library and computer lab, which were ranked 4. Participant #2 (Joe) ranked his engagement highest at both the library and computer lab (5) and lowest in the classroom (3.5). Joe ranked the cafeteria as in between the classroom and the computer lab and the library. Finally, participant #3 (Sarah) ranked her level of engagement highest in the computer lab (5) and lowest in the cafeteria (2.5), followed by the classroom (3) and then the library (4).

The computer lab received the highest ranking for engagement level as shown on each student's self-assessment. This is the students' perception of their self-assessment and engagement levels. It should also be noted that zero of the three participants consulted or asked the researcher what engagement levels meant or any other clarifying questions in this process of ranking their own engagement level.

Finding 3

The third finding of the data is that each student received their highest score on the writing assignment that was completed in the computer lab. The highest score for each of the three participants (Participant #1 – 70%, Participant #2 – 90%, Participant #3 – 100%) was earned when the lesson was taught in the computer lab.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Given that student engagement is at the heart of every lesson across the content areas, it is critical for teachers and administrators to identify effective ways to harness this as an effective component of teaching and learning. Further, students should have a voice in their learning experience in order to have greater personal connections, motivation and buy-in for each lesson. In order to test one factor of student engagement, the location of instruction, this study alters the location of instruction to include not only the traditional classroom setting, but also the cafeteria, library and computer lab in the school.

Participants' self-assessments and reflection, anecdotal notes, as well as work samples suggest that the location of instruction does, in fact, have an impact on student engagement levels. The differences in the locations and the engagement levels are outlined and explained further in the conclusions and implications sections. In addition, the limitations of the study are acknowledged and recommendations for future research are explained to support the credibility of future research studies related to this topic.

Conclusions

Findings were noted as a result of the data analysis. The findings were as follows: (1) all participants showed an improvement in the quality of their completed work when the location was altered from the traditional classroom setting to the library or computer lab; (2) all participants ranked their engagement highest when the location of instruction was the computer lab; and (3) each student received their highest score on the writing assignment that was completed in the computer lab. Results of this study suggest that altering the location of instruction does have a direct impact on student engagement levels. Further, the results of this study suggest that different locations have different effects on the level of student engagement.

Implications

Given that the participants improved their quality of work when the location of instruction was altered, it is important for teachers and administrators to take this into account and brainstorm ways that we might be able to continue to test and identify the most beneficial locations that would foster the highest levels of engagement. While I investigated a handful of very simple, everyday locations that are accessible to most teachers across the country, it is important to investigate other options. While the cafeteria, library and computer lab provided some insight, there were certainly drawbacks of each, which leads me to think that if we continue to investigate a number of different locations, we will be able to find what works best for our students. Furthermore, it is important that teachers acknowledge that what may work for one teacher and/or group of students and especially, content area, may not work for others. Thus, this needs to be done on an individual level to ensure that the best locations for different activities and lessons, content areas and student interests, are utilized.

In addition, since the participants ranked their level of engagement highest when the lesson was taught in the computer lab, one must take into consideration the actual activity/structure of this particular lesson and how that may have influenced the outcome. It can be inferred that the devices and the task of writing a short response would have aided this further. The findings of this study also suggest that students could have more voice in decisions involving class locations. Allowing students to provide feedback and guide some of the decisions that are made on a daily basis makes them feel valued, empowered, and ultimately, makes them want to work harder in class. Even if the location may seem strange at first, if we listen to the students and at least hear their rationale behind their suggestions, then there may be reasonable benefits that we wouldn't have found otherwise.

One major factor to consider when analyzing the data that was collected through the self-assessments is whether or not the desire to go to the separate location influenced the student's decision or ranking. For example, a student that really enjoys going to the library may rank his/her engagement level highest at the library, even though that may not be the case. This is explained further in the limitations section.

Given the importance of student engagement and the need to investigate this further, administrators must provide teachers with the opportunities and freedom to investigate the possibility of using different locations to bolster student engagement levels. Teachers need to stay open minded about this process and understand that it will most likely take trial and error and to determine the best, most productive learning environments for different students, classes or activities. If administrators are supportive, then the teachers have an easier time bringing students outside and receiving approval from the school nurse, parent/guardian(s), as well as students themselves.

Limitations

Given the lack of research that exists currently related to student engagement levels and the impact location of instruction has on students, it is important to delve into this topic and investigate any correlations that may exist. This study aims to clarify any connections between engagement and location, but barely scratches the surface, as a number of limitations exist and must be acknowledged in order to show the need for further investigation. A more credible study would focus on additional students or a larger participant number.

The first limitation of this study points directly to the limited number of participants, specifically only 3. Using a small group of participants allowed me to look more closely at the data that was collected, but it is still a small sample, which makes the findings less credible.

Further, since the students were identified and pre-selected based on scores from a common ELA assessment, this could have misled the selection process. It may be beneficial to take data from an entire school semester or full year in order to determine students to select rather than selecting students based on a single assessment. This would ensure that more groups (i.e. lower achieving, struggling readers, etc.) are represented more accurately.

Another limitation to this study is the few measures available to accurately measure student engagement to indicate the non-observable behavior other than using a self-assessment. The self-assessment instrument's flaws include ranking certain locations higher in order to go to that location again, even if it didn't improve one's level of engagement (or did nothing, or maybe even hindered engagement). This is certainly something to consider for further research, but it is also a major limitation of the study because of the lack of ability to confirm accuracy of this reflection from the researcher's perspective. Perhaps more research would provide guidance on more effective ways to collect this type of data. However, a positive of the study is that the researcher knows the students very well and is able to better understand students' behavior and motives based on that level of personal knowledge. If this is able to be expressed more clearly (i.e. Joe never participates and he participated) and the researcher could provide subjective data that relates to student engagement. This way, I think the results and findings would be more valuable and credible.

It is important to note that the lesson focused on writing skills, so each student was using a desktop computer. It is also important to note that in the regular classroom used as a basis for comparison, students use laptops, which may not be as fast or efficient as the desktop computers. While students didn't have to do research or use the speed of internet in the lesson, the speed and processing of using a desktop computer may have influenced this finding.

Another limitation of this study that proved challenging was the lack of time. There was not a sufficient amount of time to allow participants to thoroughly reflect on their levels of engagement and provide compelling details to support thinking on the self-assessments. On some of the student surveys, students didn't provide evidence for why they ranked their engagement levels the way they did, which leaves unanswered questions for the researcher.

Finally, the largest and most significant limitation of this study is that the study was done with one type of lesson to ensure credibility. More lessons need to be done to ensure that the findings are accurate. Since the lessons were for a writing assignment and focused on the same essential skills four times, we need to investigate other content areas, other activities and lessons ad other locations too. A particular location may be best for a certain activity (i.e. science lab, reading book, completing worksheet, speaking prompt, skits, etc.) and terrible for another. If this topic is investigated in the future, then we can ensure that the findings are more reliable, and most importantly, other teachers may want to conduct their own mini investigations on a regular basis to ensure that they are utilizing the best locations for their own instruction that have the most significant benefits for all their students.

Recommendations

Given that the lessons focused on the skill of writing, it is important to consider the impact that this activity had on the results. If the activities and lessons were varied, the data wouldn't be comparable and findings or analysis would be skewed. However, it would be wise to test this theory or investigate the research question by doing the same thing with different activities. For example, we could do the same study and use the same methods, but have 2 different lessons of different activities in the same location. We might do a word sort and focus on vocabulary review in the cafeteria one day and compare it to engagement levels and data

collected in the cafeteria while completing an activity on reading and answering comprehension questions. This would make the findings more conclusive and supported. Another area to delve deeper with or investigate is the location of instruction. This could be done by taking suggestions from the participants prior to starting the study and data collection period. If students are suggesting locations in which they are interested, then they will be more motivated because they know their input may have influenced to some degree, the decisions made. I would like to use outside (field, football/soccer stadium, bleachers, etc.) as one of the locations that is investigated in the future. Obviously, weather may hinder these opportunities throughout the year, but if it is early in the year or later in the school year, teachers can certainly take their kids outside to test this.

Finally, the last component that needs further research is determining how to best measure student engagement. Given that there are a number of factors to consider when assessing student engagement, the data that is collected needs to be representative of each of these important components. Student work samples would be one factor to consider, as well as participation, attitude and behaviors during class, as well as self-assessment and reflection. Although the importance of student engagement is acknowledged in many current studies, most lack a clear or definitive way of assessing and measuring it during a simple, everyday lesson.

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Appendix

1. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not engaged at all and 5 being very engaged), rank your level of engagement during today's lesson.

   1   2   3   4   5

2. What examples can you give that show your level of engagement from today's lesson? List as many as you can think of on the lines below.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. How was your learning today different (if at all) from how it usually is? Explain fully.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____