

SECTION ONE

Introduction

Motivating 14 and 15-year-olds to take an interest in the Magna Carta, the Cold War, and the Election of 2016 – while getting them to learn state content material – is arguably one of the most important things I do on a daily basis. In fact, it was something I set out to accomplish long before I started reading about “why” teachers should. That being said, teaching the same students how to reflect on their educational experiences and developing their ability to identify academic strengths and weaknesses, however, proved to be a bit more challenging. As a result, there was a natural gravitation toward developing metacognitive practices within my classroom when it came to the informational feedback following class assessments. This was a key component of a major grading transformation within my own classroom that resulted in the implementation of Standards-Based Grading (SBG) in 2008. Combining both Mastery Learning and Mastery Teaching practices created differentiated reassessments that now allow me to synthesize student progress and create meaningful units tied to learning targets.

In education, grades are often extrinsic motivators, meaning their power to influence student behavior originates from *outside* the student (O’Connor, 2007). Many teachers, parents, and guardians, however, inadvertently use grades as extrinsic motivators when they say things like, “If you do not get a B or better on your math quiz, then you are not allowed to go to the football game.” Students often struggle to reach many of these imposed goals because they lack intrinsic motivation, meaning their desire to achieve and improve needs to come from within. To help students, teachers must motivate students toward goal acceptance (Wiggins, 2012). If the end-product is content mastery, then that needs to become the student’s goal and not just the teacher’s. In other words, NBA All-Star Shaquille O’Neal had to *want* to be a better free throw

shooter; Coach Phil Jackson could not want it *for* him (Knoblauch, 2015). The importance of intrinsic motivation and the fact that students are more likely to complete a task they enjoy doing corresponds beautifully with “creative” assignments. Of course, assignments tied to extrinsic motivators undermine intrinsic motivation (Wiggins, 2012). Since schools, guardians, and teachers constantly use grades as extrinsic motivators, it is no wonder students become disengaged. Thus, as educators and administrators think about current and future grading practices, it is important to look at what does and does not motivate students (O’Connor, 2007).

Metacognition, which is the ability to properly evaluate one’s own learning and thought process (Weimer, 2013), is two-fold and includes mindfulness of one’s thinking and learning as well as a critical awareness of oneself as a thinker and learner (Chick, Karris, & Kernahan, 2009; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Through reflection, students that know their strengths and weaknesses as writers, readers, test-takers, and overall learners are more likely to monitor their learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). By educating students about effective problem-solving strategies and discussing the cognitive and motivational characteristics of thinking, teachers shift accountability for monitoring learning to their students (Paris & Winograd, 1990).

As a teacher who uses a standards-based curriculum to create differentiated reassessments, and as a firm believer in having students reflect on how they did after the initial assessment, I was particularly interested in seeing if these practices truly had metacognitive and motivating effects on how my students perceived their learning. Did this impact their mastery of the material when compared to students assessed in more traditional classrooms that do not offer reassessment or assessment reflection?

The Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this instructional inquiry project was to determine if my use of Mastery Learning (that includes differentiated reassessment) and Mastery Teaching (that operates with a standards-based curriculum) had a 1) metacognitive and/or motivational effect on how my students perceive their learning and 2) whether or not Mastery Teaching had an impact on their mastery of the material when compared to students assessed in more traditional classrooms that did not offer reassessment.

Data for this research were collected using a motivational survey and a self-directed learning survey given to all mainstreamed 9th grade American History classes. These surveys asked about student perception, satisfaction, and motivation concerning learning with respect to their American History classrooms. Additionally, data collected from district-created, district-approved, and district-mandated Start of Course Assessments (SOCA) and End of Course Assessments (EOCA) for the 9th grade American History classes were used. A thorough examination of survey results and SOCA/EOCA data helped draw conclusions about the effectiveness of differentiated reassessment.

The Research Questions

This study addressed three research questions. These questions were:

1. Does being taught in a social studies classroom that utilizes differentiated reassessment within a standards-based curriculum have a *metacognitive* effect on how 9th grade students perceive their learning?

2. Does being taught in a social studies classroom that utilizes differentiated reassessment within a standards-based curriculum have a *motivational* effect on how 9th grade students perceive their learning?
3. Does Mastery Teaching have an impact on the mastery of the material by 9th grade students when compared to students assessed in more traditional classrooms that do not offer reassessment?