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ABSTRACT

An action research project developed a program for increasing student engagement in social studies. The targeted population consisted of fourth-grade students in a Midwestern suburban community. The problem of limited engagement was documented by interviews with third and fourth grade teachers, entries in the teacher's journal, and a series of student surveys. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a dislike of social studies, saying that it was somewhat useful but boring. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of strategies from constructivist, engaged learning, authentic learning, cooperative grouping, project-based, and problem-based models. Post-intervention data indicated that the students' engagement in social studies class improved. Social studies was enjoyed more by students and they perceived it as more useful. In addition, cooperative skills and thinking skills improved. Contains 19 tables of data and 27 references. Appendixes contain teacher interviews, excerpt from teacher journal, student surveys, and a group assignment. (Contains 26 references and 19 tables.) (Author/BT)

Increasing Student Engagement in Social Studies

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Abstract

This report describes a program for increasing student engagement in social studies. The targeted population consisted of fourth grade students in a Midwestern suburban community. The problem of limited engagement was documented by interviews with third and fourth grade teachers, entries in the teacher's journal, and a series of student surveys.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a dislike of social studies. Many said it was somewhat useful but was boring.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of strategies from the constructivist, engaged learning, authentic learning, cooperative grouping, project-based, and problem-based models.

Post intervention data indicated that the students' engagement in social studies class improved. Social studies was more enjoyed by students. They perceived it as more useful. In addition, cooperative skills and thinking skills were improved.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted elementary population exhibit only limited engagement in their own learning during social studies class. Evidence of the existence of this problem includes interviews with third and fourth grade teachers, entries in the teacher's journal, and a series of student surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project takes place in a fourth grade classroom located in a school in a Midwestern suburban community. The school has an enrollment of 434 kindergarten through fifth grade students. The classroom is located in the original wing of the building, which has been in use since the late 1920s. Additions were made to the school during the 1950s. During the 1990s three mobile classrooms were positioned on part of the playground to

accommodate an increasing student population. A referendum passed in November of 1998 provided funds to substantially increase the size of the overcrowded school.

The fourth grade classroom contains approximately 660 square feet of tiled space. It is located on the "garden level," with ground level about four feet higher than the floor. Four windows, located high in the wall, look out onto the parking lot. The room does not contain air conditioning or a sink; but the windows are screened, and restroom facilities are located nearby. There is a computer in the classroom, which is linked to the Internet.

During the 1998-99 school year, 28 students are assigned to this classroom. Five of them receive pull-out services as part of the school's education for the gifted program, and two children receive pull-out speech services.

The school contains three sections of each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade, except that there are four sections of third grade. Class size ranges from 20 to 28, with 23 being the average. In addition to regular education teachers for these classrooms, other teachers provide classes in art, gym, vocal music, instrumental music, speech, remedial basic skills, and special education. Other part-time certified serve the students of the building as well: a social worker, nurse, psychologist,

and instructor of the gifted. The office staff consists of the principal (who joined the school district in August of 1997), a full-time and a part-time secretary, and a full-time health clerk.

The upper level of the 1920s wing contains a carpeted learning resource center containing approximately 1100 square feet. At the other end of the building, in the basement of the 1950s wing, is a computer lab equipped with 15 student Macintosh 575 computers. A teacher work station, consisting of a similar computer with an attached projector, allows for demonstrations. All of these computers are networked to the Internet. The library and computer lab are staffed by a part-time teacher, a full-time library assistant, and numerous parent volunteers. Under the supervision of its classroom teacher, each class is scheduled to visit the learning resource center for thirty minutes per week and the computer lab for fifty minutes per week. Time for additional visits to these facilities are frequently available.

Statistics from the 1997 School Report Card, shown on Table 1, indicate that the student racial ethnic background is as follows:

Table 1

Student Racial Ethnic Background

White	95.4%
Hispanic	2.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.8%
Black	0.5%
Native American	0.2%

Statistics further state that 6.2% of the students come from low-income homes and 0.5% have limited English proficiency. The average attendance rate is 96.5%, the student mobility rate is 14.1%, and the chronic truancy rate is 0.2%.

Analysis of data from the state's goal assessment program for the 1996-1997 school year, shown on table 2 through 6, revealed the following:

Table 2

Reading Scores of Third Graders

	% who do not meet state goals	% who meet state goals	% who exceed state goals
This school	7	48	45
School district	9	53	37
State	29	52	20

Table 3

Mathematics Scores of Third Graders

	% who do not meet state goals	% who meet state goals	% who exceed state goals
This school	0	42	58
School district	1	40	60
State	10	63	27

Table 4

Writing Scores of Third Graders

	% who do not meet state goals	% who meet state goals	% who exceed state goals
This school	5	44	51
School district	4	58	39
State	14	61	25

Table 5

Science Scores of Fourth Graders

	% who do not meet state goals	% who meet state goals	% who exceed state goals
This school	2	31	67
School district	1	29	70
State	11	52	37

Table 6

Social Sciences Scores of Fourth Graders

	% who do not meet state goals	% who meet state goals	% who exceed state goals
This school	0	43	57
School district	1	36	62
State	19	47	34

(1997 School Report Card)

The School District

The elementary school district in which this school is located serves the western two thirds of its town as well as several unincorporated areas and a small portion of a neighboring town. It has a total enrollment of approximately 3200 students, who are instructed in six K-5 elementary buildings and one 6-8 middle school (General District Information).

In this school district, social studies instruction is largely delivered through a text-based approach. The fourth grades are expected to utilize the textbook Exploring Our Land, copyrighted in 1997 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

The district has received the Big Red Apple Award four years in a row in recognition of meeting or exceeding standards set by School Search. All schools in the district have been granted exempt status from the requirements relating to state quality review visits. Classroom teachers

have been trained by the district in "Skills for Growing," "Process Writing," "Pattern for Thinking," and "Cooperative Learning" (44 Reasons). The first of the district's four goals for 1997-1998 is to, "Engage all students as active participants in the learning process" (1997-98 Yearly Goals).

The 234 teachers and administrators employed by the district reflect the community's dominantly Caucasian background: 99.2% of the faculty is White, while 0.8% is classified as Asian/Pacific Islander. Males comprise 11.9% of the staff, while 88.1% are female. The average teaching experience is 14.7 years. Master's or higher degrees have been earned by 54% of the certified staff. During the 1996-97 school year, the average teacher's salary was $49,039 while the average administrator's salary was $86,444. The 1995-96 operating expenditure per pupil of $6,400 was slightly higher than the $6,158 expenditure statewide (1997 School Report Card).

The Surrounding Community

The town in which the school district is located had a population of 39,408, according to the 1990 census. Of these people, 36,820 were White, 1,751 were Asian/Pacific Islander, 1,090 were of Hispanic origin, 519 were Black, 269 were described as "Other," and 49 were American

Indian/Eskimo. The county development department has projected that by 2010 the town's population will be 46,100.

In 1990, 73% of the town's residents owned their own homes, while 27% were renters. The median home value was $118,000 (Demographics and Economic Profile). In 1996 the average home sale price was $155,000.

The town is served by a public library which, according to the local chamber of commerce, "is acknowledged as one of the finest libraries in [the state]." The 34,930 square foot building contains over 192,000 volumes. It is networked to a library system which allows it to locate and obtain materials from many neighboring public libraries or, if not available there, from statewide interlibrary loan service. During the school year, the library is open seven days a week (Community Directory). Staff form the children's department make "book bag" loans to any of the town's schools to temporarily supplement the school's collection of materials on any needed topic.

Regional and National Context of the Problem

Traditional American schools have been organized around a factory concept: teachers, armed with lists of minimum standards, teach and test required skills and

information. A teacher is seen as a low-order "mind-stuffer" (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991), a purveyor of discrete, low-level skills and content (Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, & Rasmussen, 1995). Our educational practices have fostered dependency and passivity (Barell, 1995a).

This is certainly true of instruction in the social studies. The result is that for decades it has been one of the least liked subjects studied in our schools. Students say they find it uninteresting and irrelevant (Hope, 1996). Critics characterize social studies as "dreary" and "fact-driven." Some go so far as to call for totally eliminating it from the school curriculum (Gordan, 1998).

The state's learning standards for social science seem to be calling for quite another type of student. Students must be asked to analyze information from a variety of sources and to solve problems based on goals and criteria, they say. Further, since social science is about people's interactions, pupils should learn and contribute on teams, as members of groups (Social Sciences).

Indeed, learning should be an active, constructive, community building process. Students must build constructs about how the world works by interpreting the facts and experiences around them (Brown, 1992). A hallmark of effective learning is that students are in charge of their

own learning, in essence, that they direct their own learning process (Barell, 1995a).

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Fourth grade students at the targeted elementary school do not particularly enjoy studying social studies. This is documented in several ways. Interviews with the third grade teachers who taught the students the previous year indicate that social studies was not a well-liked subject (Appendix A). Interviews with fourth grade teachers at the school further attest to the unpopularity of the subject (Appendix B). The researcher's own journal reveals her long-standing perception that social studies is disliked by students (Appendix C). Finally, surveys of the students themselves reveal that social studies is among the least liked subjects (Appendixes D-G).

All but one of the students in the targeted fourth grade classroom had attended the elementary school being studied during the previous year. The researcher conducted interviews with each of the three third grade teachers who

had worked with these children (Appendix A). When asked about the attitudes of those students toward social studies, all three stated that the children did not seem to like it very well. Indeed, two of the three identified social studies as the pupils' least liked subject.

The fourth grade teachers at the targeted school concurred with their third grade colleagues' statements: social studies is not a well-liked subject (Appendix B). The researcher herself is one of these fourth-grade teachers. Her journal relates that for many years she has observed student disinterest in learning information about their world during social studies class (Appendix C). In fact, there was a period of several years when she heard children referring to the subject as "social slops" instead of "social studies."

At the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, the researcher asked the students to complete a survey ranking school subjects according to how enjoyable they were to learn in school (Appendix D). They were asked to order these six subjects: reading, English, spelling, math, social studies, and science. The students reported that social studies was the least enjoyable subject to study. Table 7 summarizes the results of the survey:

Table 7

Ranking of School Subjects

Ranking	Subject
1	Math
2	Spelling
3	Science
4	Reading
5	English
6	Social studies

This survey was followed the next day by a second, similar questionnaire (Appendix E). This time the students were asked to assign a point value to each subject to indicate how they felt about learning it. They were provided with the following key:

Table 8

Key for Responses

5 points	I enjoy this subject very much.
4 points	I enjoy this subject somewhat.
3 points	My feelings are neutral: I don't really like or dislike the subject.
2 points	I dislike this subject somewhat.
1 point	I dislike this subject very much.

As with the previous survey, the results revealed that social studies was a disliked subject. Table 9 summarizes the data collected in this survey.

Table 9

Point Values for School Subjects

Subject	Average Score
Reading	4.2
Math	4.0
Science	3.8
Spelling	3.6
Social Studies	2.7
English	2.6

These surveys clearly indicated that social studies was an unpopular subject with the targeted fourth graders. In an effort to learn more of the students' feelings about social studies, two additional surveys were administered during the following few days.

The first follow-up survey (Appendix F) presented the children with four statements about what might happen during social studies class. The statements were:

- In social studies class students have to learn a lot of facts.
- In social studies class students have to solve problems.
- In social studies class students have to make projects.
- In social studies class, students have to think a lot.

The children were told that some of the statements were true and that others were not so true. They were asked to decide how they felt about each statement and select one of the following responses to it:

- This statement is very true.
- This statement is pretty true.
- This statement is a little true.
- This statement is not true.

Most students seemed to perceive social studies as a subject for which they had to learn a lot of facts and to do a lot of thinking. To a lesser extent, they thought of social studies class as requiring the making of projects. Interestingly, they were split in their perceptions of the extent to which social studies involved problem solving: nearly a third felt strongly that students had to solve problems in social studies class, while over a third took the opposite point of view. The remaining 29% took intermediate positions on the issue. The students' responses are summarized in Table 10:

Table 10

What Happens in Social Studies Class

	very true	pretty true	a little true	not true
In social studies class students have to learn a lot of facts.	25%	50%	14%	11%
In social studies class students have to solve problems.	32%	11%	18%	39%
In social studies class students have to make projects.	21%	36%	36%	7%
In social studies class students have to think a lot.	43%	32%	25%	0%

The final survey (Appendix G) collected both quantitative and qualitative data. First, the pupils were asked, "How useful do you think it is to learn social studies?" The children were asked to select from four possible responses. About two thirds of them indicated that social studies was either very useful or fairly useful. Table 11 summarizes the data collected:

Table 11

How Useful Is Social Studies?

Question: How useful do you think it is to learn social studies?	Percent of pupils selecting this response
• Learning social studies is very useful.	31%
• Learning social studies is fairly useful.	38%
• Learning social studies is only a little useful.	19%
• Learning social studies is not at all useful.	12%

Next, the students were asked to elaborate on their answers. They were invited to tell about ways that they use social studies in their lives now or might use it in the future. Although nine lines were provided for these comments, most answers were quite brief. Positive comments about the value of social studies included the notions that it was a good thing to be knowledgeable about one's community, country, and world; that learning to prepare for social studies tests would enable the students to be better test-takers in higher grades; and that knowing social studies would somehow prove useful to the children when they became adults. The children wrote:

- "It's good to learn about it. It's good to learn about the world."

- "Social studies is fairly useful. You can learn about your country."
- "To learn about your community."
- "You can learn about your town and different places. Like the different blocks."
- "It helps me learn more about history."
- "It is useful because if you go on a trip you would know some good places to go."
- "Because it will give you ideas in the future."
- "I think social studies is fairly useful because it helps me learn and when I'm older I'm going to need to know my history."
- "It can help you with your future. Social studies will help you learn more."
- "When you get older you have to take tests a lot in every grade."
- "I think it is fairly useful because you learn the skills for some tests and when you get older you'll use it more."

There were also negative comments about social studies' value. Some students saw it as not particularly useful, but few were able to clearly explain why they felt that way. Comments included the following:

- "I barely learned anything last year in social studies."
- "Because I don't like it that much. I don't use it a lot. I don't think I will use it a lot."
- "It is only a little useful because we don't use it a lot, like math or spelling we need to know all the time."
- "You don't really need social studies because you just don't."
- "I think social studies isn't very useful because I don't use it very much."
- "The reason I think that it isn't is that there are not jobs."

This final survey followed with another question: "How enjoyable do you think it is to learn social studies?" As with the previous question, four possible responses were provided. Nearly three quarters of the respondents indicated that social studies was only a little enjoyable or not enjoyable at all. Table 12 summarizes the students' replies:

Table 12

How Enjoyable Is Social Studies?

Question: How enjoyable do you think it is to learn social studies?	Percent of pupils selecting this response
• Learning social studies is very enjoyable.	8%
• Learning social studies is fairly enjoyable.	20%
• Learning social studies is only a little enjoyable.	48%
• Learning social studies is not at all enjoyable.	24%

Once again the children were asked to write explanations for their answers. They were asked to tell about activities that made social studies class enjoyable and also to tell about ones that they did not like. According to the children, these are some of the things that make social studies enjoyable:

- "It is fun because you learn about neat places."
- "You can make a lot of models and pictures in social studies."
- "Sometimes you watch movies."
- "If there is a history movie, I'll understand it better and will be able to enjoy it."
- "I think it is nice because you don't really have to think or to take tests that much."

- "It will help us when we are older."

When students who did not enjoy social studies wrote their comments, most mentioned that they found the subject matter dull. A few didn't like it because it was harder for them than other subjects. The children wrote:

- "I don't think it is fun because all you learn about is nothing."
- "It's sort of boring sometimes."
- "Because it's boring and I don't like it."
- "It is very boring. I do not like it."
- "It's really boring."
- "I think social studies is not enjoyable because it gets boring if you do it too long."
- "Social studies is not enjoyable because it's boring. It's boring because you do nothing. All you do is sit around and do nothing."
- "Learning about stuff that already happened is boring."
- "Because I'm not into history."
- "You sometimes have to study."
- "Because I don't get it that much."
- "I don't do as well as other subjects."
- "I think social studies is not enjoyable because I am not at all good at it."

The problem of lack of student engagement in their own learning is certainly not limited to the targeted school. Concern over it has been raised at both state and national levels (Adams, Cooper, Johnson, and Wojtysiak, 1996).

Hope writes of the thoughts expressed over the years by his college students as they reflected on their experiences in studying social studies from elementary school through high school. Time after time they have told him that they disliked the subject, that their teachers did not make it interesting, and that the subject matter was irrelevant. He cites research which reveals that for decades it has been regarded as one of the least popular subjects in the curriculum.

Probable Causes Literature Review

What could cause such lack of engagement in learning? What causes social studies in particular to be so disliked? A search of professional literature suggests three possible explanations.

Problems can arise when social studies instruction is based on textbook presentation of material. Students do not enjoy reading and learning from them (Richardson & Morgan, 1997). An examination which focused on social studies text books commonly used in American classrooms finds that the

books are poorly written. The authors make inappropriate assumptions about what the students already know. The style is dry and wooden, and the goal of the writing is unclear. Rather than covering a limited amount of material in a coherent, powerful way, the social studies texts try to make children culturally literate by introducing a parade of isolated facts. Both important and trivial ideas receive similar superficial treatment. Facts, ideas, events, and actions seem unconnected to each other (Bracey, 1993).

A second explanation of the problem may lie in the social studies curriculum itself. Gordan is one critic. He uses terms like "decontextualized," "dreary," and "fact-driven" to describe the curriculum social studies educators provide for children. What students need, he says, is the power to follow their own interests and reach their own conclusions. "Students not only *should* see their work in school related to the real world but they *must* see it that way, if they are to be able to apply their learning in real-life contexts (p. 393)." Traditional curriculum does not provide this. Some commentators go so far as to wonder if social studies is worth saving. Others call for its outright abolition.

A third possible cause of the problem can be found in the methodology often used to teach social studies. The

professional literature teems with criticism. Torp (1993) is one who decries American teaching methods. She characterizes them as mimetic and as a Trivial Pursuit approach. Our students, she says, learn what they must only long enough to pass their tests. But they are unable to apply their learning effectively, especially in non-routine situations.

Barell (1995b) echoes Torp's concerns. American students learn by rote, he says. They're not asked to figure things out for themselves. This has reached the point where they are unable to explain a phenomenon in their own words.

Sage (1996) characterizes traditional teaching methods as disconnected and inauthentic. Both classroom teachers and professional organizations, she says, are seeking alternative instructional strategies that would be characterized by authenticity, active learning, higher order thinking skills, and problem solving.

Bridges (1992) criticizes traditional teaching methods for two reasons. First, students do not remember much of what they learn and tend to use knowledge inappropriately. Secondly, traditional methodology does not effectively utilize what we know about motivation theory.

Other researchers agree that motivation to learn is weak when traditional teaching methods are used. Because students are heavily controlled, they loose interest in learning and may experience burnout (Share, 1997). To Svinicki (1996), motivation to learn grows out of two things: the student's estimate of how useful the task will be and the probability that he or she will be successful at it. If people feel that they really need a skill, she says, they care about learning it. Students do not see a need for what they are learning in social studies class.

VanFossen (1997) explores reasons why elementary teachers do not plan and teach social studies lessons that take advantage of children's natural inclination to investigate. More material can be covered in a limited amount of time using traditional approaches. Many teachers have not been trained in alternative methods and are uncomfortable in experimenting with them. Such teachers may be afraid of ceding some control of decision making to students.

Hope summarizes the criticism of traditional teachers well: "Although some social studies teachers have made efforts to invigorate their students through experiential learning, add real-world relevance to their teaching, and infuse their course work with stimulating assignments, too

many are yoked to the textbook, captive to chalk and talk, unable or unwilling to connect objectives with the real world" (p. 150).

In summary, students in classrooms across the country and in the targeted fourth grade classroom are unmotivated by social studies instruction. Possible causes include dependence on poorly written text books, irrelevant curriculum, and teaching techniques that emphasize memorization of facts.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A theory about learning called constructivism is serving as a foundation for many current ideas about reforming education. Teachers who espouse this theory see themselves not as "givers of information and managers of behavior" (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 102) but rather as "mediators of students and environments" (Brooks & Brooks, p. 102). Constructivist teachers behave differently than their more traditional counterparts. They accept and encourage student initiative and autonomy. They plan tasks for their students that ask them to think deeply, to make connections, to analyze, question, predict, and synthesize. They solicit student ideas and encourage students to reflect upon them. Further, they adapt their lessons to follow student interests, and they encourage students to answer their own questions through research (Brooks & Brooks). Teachers such as these liberate students from a

focus on facts, allowing them to attend instead to large ideas (Gordan).

Reformers, including Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen, want teachers to help their students become engaged learners. Such students are self-regulating, taking responsibility for their own learning. They define their own goals, perceive how the activities in which they engage support those goals, and evaluate their own work. Engaged learners are also energized by learning. They find it intrinsically motivating and go on to become life long learners. Engaged learners develop a repertoire of strategies for learning and solving problems. These strategies enable them to apply and transfer what they have learned to new situations. Finally, engaged learners are collaborative. They have the ability to communicate ideas to others, to resolve conflicts, and to identify the strengths of others as well as of themselves.

Teachers who follow the engaged learning model assume non-traditional roles. They become facilitators, providing rich, exciting environments and tasks for their students. They become guides, who mediate, model, and coach. They also become co-learners with their students, joining them to explore new ideas and to produce new knowledge.

Using this model, teachers must seek out challenging tasks for the children with whom they work, tasks that are complex and require sustained amounts of time. The tasks must require pupils to stretch their thinking and utilize strong social skills in order to achieve success. They should result in a blending of disciplines into an integrated approach to instruction. In addition, the tasks should be authentic, closely related to real-world problems.

Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen are only one set of authors out of many to call for more authentic education. Newman and Wehlage (1993) list standards for authentic instruction, including the need for coherent, focused inquiry and a stress on in-depth knowledge. Additionally, students and teachers must share a commitment to respecting each other, working hard, and adhearing to high standards. Gordan adds that an authentic educational program requires that pupils solve problems, work together, and publicly exhibit what they have learned, often judged by real-world standards for quality. He concludes:

> Authentic learning is a laudable goal that should be promoted and pursued vigorously. Students not only should see their world in school related to the real world but they must see it that way, if they are to be

able to apply their learning in real-life contexts (p. 393).

One educational strategy that has been highly studied is cooperative grouping. In fact, researchers know considerably more about the results of cooperative learning than almost any other aspect of education. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1988) reviewed 122 studies involving this method and found that:

> cooperative learning experiences tend to promote higher achievement than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences. These results hold for all age levels, for all subject areas, and for tasks involving concept attainment, verbal problem solving, categorization, spatial problem solving, retention and memory, motor performance, and guessing-judging-predicting. For rote decoding and correcting tasks, cooperation seems to be equally as effective as competitive and individualistic learning procedures (p. 3:13).

Of special interest for this research study on increasing student engagement was Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec's finding that cooperative learning increases motivation. In part this grows out of the liking students develop for each

other as a result of their collaborative efforts. But these researchers also note:

> Involved participation in cooperative learning groups inevitably produces conflicts among the ideas, opinions, conclusions, theories, and information of members. When managed skillfully, such controversies promote increased motivation to achieve, higher achievement and retention of the learned material, and greater depth in understanding (p. 3:14).

Bellanaca and Fogarty describe cooperative learning as a powerful instructional tool which can increase student achievement, responsibility, self-esteem, higher level thinking, and positive attitudes towards school in a dramatic way. As a part of this strategy, student groups work together to achieve a shared learning goal. Well planned cooperative lessons have several attributes. They cause the students in each group to depend on and trust each other while assuming responsibility for their own work and learning. They include explicit training in social skills and require students to use higher order thinking. Finally, they cause students to reflect on their own work and learning. Working in cooperative groups, say Bellanaca and Fogarty, facilitates internal motivation and encourages students and teachers to learn and grow together.

Share and Rogers (1997) promote a project-based approach to learning that is very applicable to social studies. Project based learning requires students to select and investigate a problem using varied resources and methods, to create a product summarizing what they have discovered and concluded, present their work to an audience, and reflect on what they have done and learned. This approach has been shown to be motivating to students because it gives them increased responsibility for their own learning. "Students who get to make choices feel better physically and mentally, achieve more academically, develop positive attitudes, and feel respected as people (p. 62)," note Share and Rogers. They go on to state that children's natural curiosity and motivation are engaged by the challenging content and process for learning that project-based instruction can provide.

There are additional benefits to project-based learning. Teaching is transformed from "telling about" to "doing." Learning is connected to the real world and thus becomes more meaningful and memorable. Students learn organization, social skills, life skills, and community awareness. Share and Rogers offer guidelines for teachers embarking on a project-based approach. As much as possible, students should take the lead and the teacher should opt to

facilitate and coach. Teachers should "become the guide on the side" (p. 62), asking themselves, "Do I need to do this, or could a pupil do it?" The students will very likely make mistakes and take wrong turns, but they must be allowed to do things their way and to learn from their failures as well as their successes. The teacher should avoid the impulse to study the subject before the start of the project, instead learning with the students and modeling "the thrill of learning and risk taking" (p. 63). Decisions should be made by the entire group, through consensus or voting.

One final active and experiential instructional method is problem-based learning. It differs from those previously discussed in that it places students firmly in the center of a messy, authentic problem which changes as the learners progress and has many possible correct answers (Sage). Coleman (1995) terms problem-based learning "one of the most exciting approaches to curricula being explored today" (p. 18) and notes that it emphasizes learning through the process of solving problems. As with the previously discussed methods, problem based learning has been shown to increase student motivation. (Torp)

Barell (1995b) enumerates the steps that students go through as they engage in problem-based learning. First,

they must examine the situation before them. What about it intrigues them? What do they already know, and what do they need to find out? Next, students must create a research plan, mapping out the strategies they will use to obtain the information they need. They must make decision about which individuals or subgroups will be in charge of which parts of the total information gathering process. As facts are gathered, they must be discussed and tentative conclusions must be drawn. What is the information telling the students? Are the sources reliable, or do they contain bias? Students must continually monitor their own progress. When the research has been concluded, plans must be made to use and share the information. Should the students write reports, make presentations, or plan an exhibition? Finally, when all work has been completed, students must evaluate what they have done. How well did they do? What did they learn? What would they do differently next time?

Barell finds that life is full of problems suitable for study with a problem-based approach. Gordan offers this caution, however:

> Real-world problems, by their nature, are messy—involving uncertainty, complexity, and nuanced judgment. These characteristics tend to clash with the norms that are prevalent in most schools. Real-world

> problems often don't mesh well with mandated curricula, textbooks, standardized tests, state standards, and the seven period day (p. 390).

Gordan identifies three levels of problems. The first he labels academic challenges, and he states that they provide a good entry point into problem-based learning. They are problems which are developed by transforming existing curriculum into problem formats. They look fairly familiar to teachers and pupils and serve as useful beginning points upon which other types of problems may be built.

Gordan's next level contains scenario challenges. Such challenges assign student real-life roles and require them to perform these roles as they work through a fictional or reality-based scenario. Sage offers an interesting comment on scenario challenges. She notes that elementary, middle school, and high school teachers often ask their students to assume adult identities as they work through the tasks they are given. Students sometimes learn more by taking on more authoritative roles than young students generally have.

Gordan concludes his list of problems with the most advanced level. This level consists of real-life problems—

"actual problems in need of real solutions by real people" (p. 392).

There are many benefits attributed to problem-based learning. A very important benefit is that students develop higher level thinking skills. In problem-based learning, pupils are actively engaged with the subject matter they study. They must know, comprehend, and apply information. They must also analyze, synthesize, and evaluate it as they struggle with the problems they seek to solve (Torp). Students become engrossed in inquiring, conducting research, analyzing ideas, making connections, and drawing conclusions. Because they have worked through them so intently, students are able to understand complex ideas (Barell, 1995b).

Torp enumerated other benefits of problem-based learning. She states that experimental research and program evaluation have shown it to accomplish many worthwhile goals. Problem-based learning makes school more exciting and motivational for students. It promotes a meaning orientation to learning. It improves long term retention of information and the ability to retrieve that information. Students who participate in problem-based learning develop the ability to solve problems and to regulate their own education.

Teachers considering using problem-based learning are cautioned that not everyone is comfortable with approaching learning this way. As students actively acquire knowledge, they make many decisions about what content they will master. Teachers worry that essential information will not be studied and learned (Dolmans, Gigselaers, & Schmidt 1992). Further, students have learned to be successful within the more traditional system; many feel comfortable with the passive learning styles they require. Some learners are uneasy with the level of independence problem-based learning demands of them. Others worry that they will not learn what they are supposed to learn (Torp).

Project Objectives and Processes

The researcher has decided to utilize strategies from the constructivist, engaged learning, authentic learning, cooperative grouping, project-based, and problem-based models. As a result of the use of these strategies during the period of September through December 1998, the fourth grade students from the targeted class will become more engaged in their own learning during social studies class as measured by student surveys and teacher observations.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Problems will be created for the students to solve.
2. Resources will be located and made available for the students to use as they solve problems and create projects.
3. Lesson plans will be developed.

Project Action Plan

Unit 1: The Midwest

Week 1

- Form cooperative groups.
- Introduce the problem: Your team has been hired by a game company to create an educational game for eight-to-twelve-year-olds. The game must teach students important information about the Midwest. Through playing your game, children should learn about the Midwest's physical features, climate, plants and animals, natural resources, economy, cities, history, and interesting places to visit. In addition to being educational, it must also contain clear rules so that the children can learn to play it without adult help, contain a well-organized list of all the facts it teaches, be

physically attractive, and be fun to play.

- Brainstorm with the class on how they might approach the problem.

Week 2

- Have the school library/media specialist meet with the students to identify resources which may help them solve their problem.
- Provide the students with guidance as they begin their research.

Week 3

- The students should continue their research.
- The teacher should meet individually with each team.
- Hold a class meeting to discuss common problems.
- Have the students reflect in writing on their experience so far.

Week 4

- Students should conclude their research this week.
- Teams will move into the game creation phase.
- Meet individually with each team.

- Hold a class meeting to discuss common problems.

Week 5

- Students should complete their games by the end of the week.
- Meet individually with each team.
- Hold a class meeting to discuss common problems.
- Have the students create journal entries about their experience so far.

Week 6

- Teams will play the games created by the other teams and participate in the evaluation process.
- Have the students participate in the evaluation of their own work and the work of other teams.
- Hold a class debriefing session to discuss reactions to this unit.

Unit Two: State History

Week 1

- Introduce the problem: An educational television company is planning a series of shows about our state's history. Your team has been asked to create one of the

shows. You have been assigned a specific topic from our state's history.

- Discuss the evaluation system.
- Form cooperative groups.
- Brainstorm with the class on how they might approach the problem. Provide models of a fact list and a script based on it.

Week 2

- Have the school library/media specialist meet with the students to identify resources which may help them solve their problem.
- Provide the students with guidance as they begin their research.

Week 3

- The students should continue their research.
- Meet individually with each group.
- Hold a class meeting to discuss common problems.

Week 4

- Students should conclude their research this week.
- Teams will move into the script creation phase.

- Meet individually with each team.
- Hold a class meeting to discuss common problems.

Week 5

- Students should complete their scripts by the end of the week.
- Teams will move into the play rehearsal stage.
- Meet individually with each team.
- Hold a class meeting to discuss common problems.

Week 6

- Teams will rehearse and present their plays.
- Have the students participate in the evaluation of their own work and the work of other teams.
- Hold a class debriefing session to discuss reactions to this unit.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, the surveys completed at the beginning of the school year will be readministered to the class following the intervention, and the change in student responses will be analyzed. In addition, the teacher will keep notes covering

her observations and the comments of her students during and after the intervention.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this action research project was to increase student engagement during social studies class. I selected strategies from the constructivist, engaged learning, authentic learning, cooperative grouping, project-based, and problem-based models as tools to effect the desired change.

I began the intervention by distributing copies of the group assignment sheet (Appendix H). Using this sheet, I previewed the Midwestern game project with the class, noting that the children would be working in groups of four students to complete it. I invited the children to help me decide how to form the groups. After a lengthy and spirited discussion, the class decided that one boy and one girl should be selected at random for each group, that the boy would select another boy, and that the girl should select another girl. I had some concerns about creating groups in

this way, because I wanted the groups to be heterogeneous. I felt it was important for the children to own the project and make as many of the decisions surrounding it as possible, however. Therefore, I supported their decision. When one group wound up composed of four of my weaker students I knew that this group would need special monitoring and assistance.

Our school library media specialist compiled a collection of print, audio-visual, and electronic resources for the children to use in their research. She and I provided instruction and guidance as the children began using these sources to locate information and write lists of facts.

The children had had some instruction and experience with the cooperative group process prior to the commencement of this unit. Additional social skills lessons on solving problems cooperatively were taught as the children continued their research and worked on their games. Several groups cooperated quite well, sharing the work and decision making processes smoothly. More typical, however, was the emergence of some friction, and for two groups this friction proved quite severe. One of the problem groups was the group of four weak students I had been concerned about. The troubled groups were provided

with guidance and mediation as they struggled to work through their difficulties.

When a group completed its research, its members brought their facts to me for approval and grading. One frequently voiced concern had been that some students were working harder and more productively than other students. The productive students did not want their grades diluted by the lesser output of others in their group. Therefore, groups were asked to decide whether each member should be graded individually on the facts he or she had collected or whether all members of the group should share a common grade for the entire collection. Four of the seven groups opted for individual grades, and all of the children seemed comfortable with the fairness of this grading approach.

While some groups worked smoothly and productively to produce the actual game, other groups continued to experience problems. There were conflicting ideas on how the physical components should look and on which students should be assigned which responsibilities. I was frequently called on to mediate disputes. When I sat with a group I modeled reflective listening and consensus building techniques but refused to impose decisions on the group. I expressed confidence that the children could find their own solutions.

As the children in each group finished their games they played them to determine if they had met the goal of creating a product that was easy to understand, attractive, educational, and fun. When necessary, the children decided on and made changes they deemed appropriate. After evaluating their own products, they played those constructed by other groups, providing feedback to the creators. As the teacher, I also evaluated and graded the games.

At its conclusion, a class meeting was held to discuss how our Midwestern unit had gone. The majority of the class had enjoyed the unit and looked forward to more cooperative project work. There were still many concerns about grading and getting along with teammates, however.

In light of the student's concerns, I made some adaptations in my plan for the second unit. The project called for teams of students to research, write, and produce scripts for educational television programs about aspects of our state's history. I decided to create small teams of only two students each for researching and script writing. Later, two of these small teams could join together and select one or both of the scripts to produce. Furthermore, I provided the chart below and asked each student to identify his or her target grade.

Table 13

Grading Chart

Grade	
C	Research your topic and write a good quality fact list.
B	In addition, write a script for a children's educational television show to teach these facts to viewers.
A	Join with another group. Select one of the two scripts. Rehearse it and present it as a play for our class.
A+	Chose one of these options: • Instead of presenting your show as a play, videotape it and present it as a TV show. (You will need to either stay after school to prepare the videotape or make it at home.) • Instead of presenting one of the scripts as a play, rehearse and present both.

The students who wanted to earn each particular grade met together with instructions to find a partner. Everyone quickly selected a teammate who had agreed to work for the desired grade.

Work proceeded much more smoothly during this second unit. There were several probable reasons for this. First, the children were more familiar with the research process and tended to move through it in a more organized, focused manner. Second, most children had grown in their ability to work cooperatively with others. Finally, the groups were

small and were composed of children with similar achievement goals.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

I didn't want to wait until the end of the intervention to collect information from my students about how they were reacting to it. I needed to be able to adapt my lesson plans to meet the needs they were experiencing. Therefore, in addition to several whole class and small group discussions of this new approach to social studies instruction, I collected written comments from the class midway through the first unit. The students were asked to respond in writing to this question: Do you prefer studying social studies the old way or the new way? They were given paper and asked to elaborate on their answers. Most students—79%, in fact—indicated that they preferred the new way. Their comments included the following:

- I prefer the new way because it's fun making games.
- The new way, because it's very fun.
- I like the new way because there are fun activities.
- I prefer the new way. Because you get to do more interesting things.
- The new way because I like making the board game.

- I like the new way because you can work with a group. It is also funner to work on games.
- I like the new way because it makes it look funner to learn and it is. And you get to see old friends and make new ones.
- I like the new way better because its funner and I work harder. Also because my group helps me when I get stuck.
- I think doing projects is better because it is funner. But we have a group that sometimes fools around and I am afraid that we won't finish our game.
- I like the new way of social studies because we don't have to read out of the book.
- I think the new way. Because it is more fun and I think that it is more fun working in a group to make a game than working in the book.
- I like making projects better. I just fall asleep with the book.

Not all students preferred the new approach. The remaining 21% preferred the more traditional approach that had been used in third grade and during the first several weeks of fourth grade. The comments of these children included the following:

- I like the old way because it is easier.

- I like the old way because it is more easier for me in the book.
- I like the old way because it is not as complicated.
- I prefer the old way because we don't have to fight about how we are going to do it and we don't have to worry so much that we are going to get a bad grade.

After the intervention had been concluded, the four surveys the students had completed prior to its commencement were readministered. The first asked students to rank six school subjects in order, according to how enjoyable they were to study. Social studies, which had been the least popular subject in September, had risen to third place. Table 14 summarizes the results of this survey.

Table 14

Compared Rankings of School Subjects

Ranking	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
1	Math	Math
2	Spelling	Spelling
3	Science	Social studies
4	Reading	Reading
5	English	Science
6	Social studies	English

The second survey asked students to assign a point value to each subject to indicate how they felt about learning it, using the following scale:

Table 15

Key for Responses

5 points	I enjoy this subject very much.
4 points	I enjoy this subject somewhat.
3 points	My feelings are neutral: I don't really like or dislike the subject.
2 points	I dislike this subject somewhat.
1 point	I dislike this subject very much.

Three subjects received more points than they had prior to the intervention, while three received less. Social Studies had advanced 0.6 points and was now in third place, tied with spelling. Table 16 summarizes the data collected in this survey.

Table 16

Compared Point Values for School Subjects

Subject	Pre-intervention Average Score	Post-intervention Average Score
Reading	4.2	3.6
English	2.6	2.7
Spelling	3.6	3.3
Math	4.0	4.3
Social Studies	2.7	3.3
Science	3.8	3.0

In the third survey, students were given four statements and asked to indicate how true they were. Prior

to the intervention, most students said they thought of social studies as a subject in which they had to learn a lot of facts and to do a lot of thinking. This perception was even stronger after the intervention was completed. In September the children also perceived, although less strongly, that social studies involved making projects; and this perception had also been strengthened. Before the intervention, the children were split in their perceptions of the extent to which social studies involved problem solving: nearly a third felt strongly that students had to solve problems in social studies class, while over a third took the opposite point of view. The remaining 29% took intermediate positions on the issue. But after the intervention, two thirds of the class placed themselves in one of the two intermediate positions, leaving far fewer students feeling strongly or disagreeing with the statement. Table 17 provides details from this summary.

Table 17

Compared Perceptions: What Happens in Social Studies Class

	very true	pretty true	a little true	not true
In social studies class students have to learn a lot of facts.				
pre-intervention	25%	50%	14%	11%
post-intervention	59%	26%	11%	4%
In social studies class students have to solve problems.				
pre-intervention	32%	11%	18%	39%
post-intervention	11%	26%	41%	22%
In social studies class students have to make projects.				
pre-intervention	21%	36%	36%	7%
post-intervention	63%	15%	11%	11%
In social studies class students have to think a lot.				
pre-intervention	43%	32%	25%	0%
post-intervention	70%	22%	8%	0%

The final survey asked pupils how useful it was to learn social studies and how enjoyable it was. More students indicated that social studies was useful than had done so in the fall. This data is summarized in Table 18.

Table 18

Compared Perceptions: How Useful Is Social Studies?

Question: How useful do you think it is to learn social studies?	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
• Learning social studies is very useful.	31%	56%
• Learning social studies is fairly useful.	38%	33%
• Learning social studies is only a little useful.	19%	11%
• Learning social studies is not at all useful.	12%	0%

The children were asked to write comments explaining their answers. Those written in September seemed vague. Positive comments included the beliefs that it was useful to learn about one's community, country, and world and that social studies would somehow be useful in the future, especially for taking tests. The post-intervention comments tended to be slightly more specific. The idea that social studies would be useful in the future was joined by thoughts that it was helpful to learn research and social skills. Positive comments included these:

- It helps you when you're older.
- I think the learning in social studies is good because you learn a lot and figure out what you're going to be when you grow up.
- If you become a teacher.

- Cause if you want to do a job that requires social studies it's helpful to know.
- I think social studies is very useful because we learn a lot.
- You learn a lot when you study, read, and make projects.
- To study and on tests. It helps you to work with other people.
- I could use social studies in tests in the future, and it's also useful in the library and in groups.
- It's very useful because doing projects helps everyone get to know each other better.
- I think learning social studies is useful in groups. Because you learn teamwork and you know more about history.
- It's useful because you learn to work with others. You learn to do research. You have to think hard.
- It helps you find research.
- I think social studies is very useful because you have to do the research. And if we learn to do research by ourselves we'll get smarter.
- I think it is useful because if you have to write a report it's easier to put things in your own words.
- It teaches history.

- I think it is useful learning about history.
- You can learn a lot about history. I want to learn more in history.
- Because if you're ever in a war or something else that has to do with the government you'll know about it.
- It takes a lot of learning. I use more social studies than any other subject.

The post-intervention comments included fewer negative ones than in September. There were only these three:

- I think that social studies is not useful.
- Because it's not like you will need to know about the stuff.
- I don't really think that social studies is going to be very useful for my future. It would be useful for the upper grades.

As in the fall, this survey included a second question: "How enjoyable do you think it is to learn social studies?" Again, four possible responses were provided. Earlier, nearly three quarters of the respondents indicated that social studies was only a little enjoyable or not enjoyable at all. But after the intervention only about a third of the class selected one of those responses. Instead, most children indicated that it was very enjoyable

or fairly enjoyable. Table 19 compares the two surveys in greater detail:

Table 19

Compared Perceptions: How Enjoyable Is Social Studies?

Question: How enjoyable do you think it is to learn social studies?	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
• Learning social studies is very enjoyable.	8%	42%
• Learning social studies is fairly enjoyable.	20%	27%
• Learning social studies is only a little enjoyable.	48%	23%
• Learning social studies is not at all enjoyable.	24%	8%

The children provided comments to support their positions. Most enjoyed working cooperatively on projects. They said:

- I think its very enjoyable because I like social studies.
- It is very interesting. I would like to learn about it.
- I think learning social studies is very enjoyable because you earn your grade. Example: If you fool around and you don't do your work you wouldn't get such a good grade.
- Because we get to do projects.
- I like learning social studies but only in groups. Because the book doesn't get your attention. And people get bored and stare of into space.

- I like when we do projects. I dislike when we study out of the book.
- I like projects. I don't like to read out of the book.
- I don't really think that learning social studies from the book is fun. When we do projects it's more fun. Also we learn how to find data for 5, 6, and 7 grades.
- I like social studies a lot when we do a project to go with what we're learning.
- I think social studies is very enjoyable because it's very fun. I also liked to make the projects. I liked every project.
- I most likely like to make projects 'cause they're fun and you get to work together.
- It's fun to do projects. I like to make things and I get to work with a friend.
- I think working on projects because I like working with friends.
- It's fun to work in groups and work on projects.
- Because it's cool making projects but its sometimes hard.
- I think its very enjoyable. But I don't like the Midwest.
- I think it is very fun. You get to know people better. It isn't boring.
- It is fun in all ways.

Not all comments were positive. Some children wrote the following:

- It's boring to read out of the book.
- I think social studies could be more enjoyable if we used the book more because sometimes your group acts silly.
- I don't like social studies. It's very boring.
- I don't think it's fun and I don't like the projects.

During the twelve weeks of the intervention, I kept a professional journal, noting my observations of the students during social studies class and my reactions to what was happening. Although there were setbacks, most of these notes are positive, describing smiles instead of sighs when it was time for social studies class. There are occasional entries quoting students who made comments like, "This is fun!" or "Can't we spend more time on social studies?" The deduction I drew was that the students were definitely interested in and enjoying the study of social studies.

At the conclusion of the two units of study which comprised the intervention, the students and I discussed how these units had gone. I asked the class to help me plan our social studies program for the rest of the year. Should we return to a more traditional, textbook-based approach, or should we continue to work in groups to do research and

projects? The class enthusiastically endorsed continuing our "new way" of studying social studies. Although the surveys suggested that some students would prefer more traditional instructional methods, no one spoke in favor of them during this discussion.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the data collected prior to, during, and after the twelve weeks of this intervention, the students' engagement in social studies class improved by altering the teaching methodology and instructional materials. Student surveys showed increased enjoyment of the subject and increased perception of its usefulness. My teacher observations documented strong student interest during the two units. The students' preference for continuing the experimental approach during future units further spoke of the intervention's success.

Additional benefits were realized. Increasing students' ability to work cooperatively and make shared decisions was not a specific goal of the intervention, yet it certainly occurred. Individuals learned to communicate their thoughts more clearly to their peers, to compromise, and to trust themselves and each other. They learned how to budget time effectively and how to find their way around a library.

I was very pleased with the experimental method as I noticed the sorts of thinking my students were doing. In a traditional, textbook-based program, emphasis is on comprehending the information and recalling it for tests. As my student worked through the two units described here they had to do more than that. I would frequently hear groups of children discussing facts, trying to determine if the information was useful for their specific purpose. I watched them organize information and ideas in ways that seemed useful and effective to them. I saw them create products, compare them to the products created by others, and evaluate the effectiveness of those products.

In spite of these successes, I do have some small concerns about the methods I used during the intervention. Bracey discussed the perceived need for cultural literacy which resulted in American textbooks being stuffed full of facts for children to digest. Dolmans, Gigselaers, and Schmidt wrote of teachers' concern that essential information might not be covered. To a certain extent, I find myself sharing some of those concerns. My students have developed in-depth knowledge about some topics but in doing so have ignored others.

I also worry about the minority of students who preferred a more traditional approach to social studies.

Torp had cautioned that they would exist, comfortable with a passive learning style, uncomfortable with a structure requiring a high degree of interdependence. I believe that these children need to grow, but I also want to provide some opportunity for them to exercise their preferred learning style.

Because of these concerns, I plan to experiment by interjecting a small amount of direct instruction on "the important facts" into my next social studies unit. Most of the instructional time and emphasis will definitely be based on the constructivist, engaged learning, authentic learning, cooperative grouping, project-based, and problem-based models. At the same time, I recognize that there may be a place for direct instruction as well. I'll try putting a little back into the mix and see how my students react.

Teachers considering experimenting with models similar to those I have used may be surprised at the amount of time during the day these methods take to implement. Teachers should recall Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen's perception that authentic instruction blends the various academic disciplines into an integrated whole. Many language arts goals are achieved through units of study such as these. Teachers should feel comfortable utilizing

some of the time reserved for language arts for these units.

To me, social studies is a fascinating, engrossing subject. For years I have been frustrated by my ineffectiveness in transmitting my enthusiasm to my students. Now I have discovered ways to do just that. Through their words and their actions, more and more of my children are telling me that social studies "is very fun." And I am discovering that teaching it is very fun, too.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview with Third Grade Teacher

Name of third grade teacher _____

Date of interview _____

Please reflect on your third grade class from last school year.

What school subjects most motivated and engaged your students?

_____

What school subjects least motivated and engaged your students?

_____

What was your class's reaction to the social studies program?

_____

What social studies activities did your students especially like or dislike?

_____

_____

Do you feel you have adequate preparation time for social studies?

_____

To what extent do you base your instruction on our textbook?

_____

Appendix B

Interview with Fourth Grade Teacher

Name of fourth grade teacher _____

Date of interview _____

Please reflect on your fourth grade classes from the last several school years.

What school subjects most motivated and engaged your students?

_____

What school subjects least motivated and engaged your students?

_____

How do your students generally respond to the social studies program?

_____

_____

What social studies activities do your students especially like or dislike?

_____

_____

Do you feel you have adequate preparation time for social studies?

_____

To what extent do you base your instruction on our textbook?

_____

Appendix C

Excerpt from Teacher Journal

To me, social studies is a interesting, vital, and important subject. When I learn about history or geography I can see why things are the way they are. Social studies is the story of people, how they live, and why they live that way.

But to too many of the children of the students I work with, social studies is boring. In fact, for a number of years the kids referred to it as social slops. Thank goodness I haven't heard that for a while! But although the nick-name is gone the attitude remains. I want to try to change that.

Appendix D

School Subjects

Look at the subjects in the subject box.
Which do you most enjoy learning in school?

Subject Box

- Reading
- English (writing paragraphs and making speeches)
- Spelling
- Math
- Social Studies
- Science

Write your favorite subject on line number 1.
Write your second-favorite subject on line 2.
Keep going, until your least favorite subject is on line 6.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Why do you think subject #1 is your favorite? _____

_____

Why do you think subject # 6 is your least favorite? _____

_____

Would you like to make comments about any other subjects? You may write them on the back of this paper.

Appendix E

More About School Subjects

Directions: Decide how you feel about learning each of these school subjects. Give each subject the number that best tells how you feel.

Key

5 points – I enjoy this subject very much.
4 points – I enjoy this subject somewhat.
3 points – My feelings are neutral: I don't really like or dislike the subject.
2 points – I dislike this subject somewhat.
1 point – I dislike this subject very much.

Subject	Number of Points
Reading	
English (writing paragraphs and making speeches)	
Spelling	
Math	
Social Studies	
Science	

Appendix F

What do you think?

Directions:

- Here are some statements about social studies. Some are true and some are not so true.
- Read each statement. Decide how true you think it is.
- Mark the sentence that tells how true you think the statement is.
- There are no right or wrong answers for this survey.

Statement:

In social studies class students have to learn a lot of facts.

_____ This statement is very true.
_____ This statement is pretty true.
_____ This statement is a little true.
_____ This statement is not true.

Statement:

In social studies class students have to solve problems.

_____ This statement is very true.
_____ This statement is pretty true.
_____ This statement is a little true.
_____ This statement is not true.

Statement:

In social studies class students have to make projects.

_____ This statement is very true.
_____ This statement is pretty true.
_____ This statement is a little true.
_____ This statement is not true.

Statement:

In social studies class students have to think a lot.

_____ This statement is very true.
_____ This statement is pretty true.
_____ This statement is a little true.
_____ This statement is not true.

Appendix G

What do you think about social studies?

How useful do you think it is to learn social studies? (Check one.)

_____ Learning social studies is very useful.

_____ Learning social studies is fairly useful.

_____ Learning social studies is only a little useful.

_____ Learning social studies is not at all useful.

Write a paragraph or two to explain your answer.

- Try to give many examples and details.
- Tell about ways that you use social studies in your life now or may use it in the future. Or, tell why you don't think you'll have much use for the things you learn in social studies class.
- If you have any ideas for making social studies even more useful, tell them too.

Turn the paper over. There's another question on the back.

How enjoyable do you think it is to learn social studies? (Check one.)

_____ Learning social studies is very enjoyable.

_____ Learning social studies is fairly enjoyable.

_____ Learning social studies is only a little enjoyable.

_____ Learning social studies is not at all enjoyable.

Write a paragraph or two to explain your answer.

- Try to give many examples and details.
- Tell about the activities that make social studies class enjoyable for you, and also tell about the ones you don't like.
- If you have any ideas for making social studies even more useful, tell them too.

Appendix H

Group Assignment: The Midwest

Your team has been hired by a game company to create an educational game for 8-to-12-year-olds. The game must teach students important information about the Midwest. Through playing your game, children should learn about the Midwest's:

- physical features
- climate
- plants and animals
- natural resources
- economy
- cities
- history, and
- interesting places to visit.

In addition to being educational, the game must also

- contain clear rules so that the children can learn to play it without adult help,
- contain a well-organized list of all the facts it teaches,
- be attractive and inviting to look at, and
- be fun to play.

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