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Primary Sources & Historical Understanding in High School American History

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Abstract

Learning history in high school is often disconnected from the process used by professional historians to understand the past. This research studies the implementation of primary source analysis in the high school American History classroom as a means to increase historical understanding. Previous research focuses on increasing achievement while this study also includes impact on engagement and attitude. Primary source analysis was the main instructional strategy used in one unit of study in a required ninth grade American History course at a suburban high school in April 2016. Student historical understanding was assessed using student self-reports on a daily basis, pre and post formal test questions and surveys, and teacher observations. A variety of data sources indicate positive impact of primary source analysis on student engagement, achievement, and attitude. Results indicate further study is needed to identify the impact of primary source analysis on social studies education.

Primary Sources & Historical Understanding in High School American History

History education is controversial in its approach and content. Quite often, a watered down version of the past is presented to students via a textbook that seeks to provide merely an overview of history. Little time in the classroom is devoted to teaching the skills which coincide with that of the professional historian. This is unlike what occurs in math and science classes as students are taught the skills of mathematical reasoning and scientific inquiry. Therefore, it is important to provide students an opportunity to learn how the narrative presented in their textbooks is built. To do this, students can analyze primary source documents and apply historical thinking skills to develop an understanding of the past through the skilled ability to source, contextualize, corroborate, and closely read historical documents for comprehension. Past studies have gathered data about the use of primary sources in the classroom. This study goes further in its approach to also measure the increase of engagement, which is the level of participation in building history, and the extent of student interest and enjoyment as measured by attitude.

Based on the evidence from the studies discussed below, it is clear there is a general positive impact on the use of primary sources in the classroom. Much of the research is either overly general or entirely specific, very little has been devoted to looking at the high school American history classroom alone. There exists adequate evidence that the use of primary sources in the classroom creates deeper overall understanding. Yet more research needs to be conducted as to the use of primary sources requiring students to build their own historical narrative via historical thinking skills as well as the use of primary sources increases engagement in the classroom.

To complete high school graduation requirements, all students must earn credit in one or more American History courses. These compulsory courses deliver content either chronologically or thematically but neither delivery system is intentional in actively teaching historical thinking skills to build understanding. American History courses too often teach a passive view of the past in which students do not form their own view but adopt the view of those who interpret for them. Michael Eamon (2006), a history professor at Trent University, Ontario, Canada, states, “students are taught about the past, but rarely get to see the elements that helped construct that vision of the past” (Eamon, 2006, p. 310). It is with this idea in mind that history educators seek to implement the use of sources in the classroom to allow students to build a construct of the past. This enables students to actively develop an understanding of the past while increasing engagement, achievement, and positive attitudes about history. Research and professional journals support the use of primary source analysis as a way to better deliver historical content and promote understanding. Major themes include:

- The use of primary sources in the classroom creates deeper overall understanding.
- The use of primary sources requires students to build their own historical narrative via historical thinking skills.
- The use of primary sources increases engagement in the classroom.

The use of primary sources in the classroom creates deeper overall understanding

Historical understanding has its foundation in a narrative of the past. Students arrive in our classrooms with a pre-built historical narrative. Drake and Brown (2003) found that although flawed it cannot be entirely discredited as it is still relevant in historical understanding (Drake & Brown, 2003). Wineburg and Martin (2004) point out that in the average classroom, students are taught volumes of information but are rarely asked to question the validity of the source

(Wineburg & Martin, 2004). This is further complicated as we live in a digital world where so much information is at our fingertips. Students are often mis-informed or hold an incomplete narrative of the past (Wineburg & Martin, 2004). The narrative becomes fully rounded by embedding the analysis of primary sources into the curriculum. As Tally and Goldenberg (2005) found “using primary source documents gives students a sense of the reality and complexity of the past” (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005, p. 3).

However, it is important to note that relying only on primary sources to teach American history is not a viable option. Keith C. Barton (2005) indicates that student understanding of the past depends upon their understanding of the context to develop meaning (Barton, 2005). Therefore, primary sources should be used to deepen understanding of the narrative. According to David Kobrin (1995) students become historians, who can become highly productive and develop numerous higher level thinking skills as a result of primary source investigation (Kobrin, 1995). In order to teach those skills, historians such as Drake and Brown (2003) believe that implementing a historical thinking process in the classroom will improve knowledge and understanding (Drake & Brown, 2003).

Dr. Avishag Reisman (2012) implemented one such process into several high schools in the San Francisco Bay area as a study to discover how teaching the historical thinking process would increase students’ abilities to transfer skills to modern problems, retain factual knowledge of history, and increase reading comprehension (Reisman, 2012). The study, spanning six months and eighty-three lessons, used the “Reading Like a Historian” curriculum developed Sam Wineburg (2016) and others at the Stanford History Education Group (Wineburg, 2016). The students in the study scored much higher on exams than their peers who did not use the curriculum which taught historical thinking skills to increase comprehension (Reisman, 2012).

Teaching and utilizing primary sources does not cause “lost” instructional time, the evidence of historical facts shows that it is highly useful in helping improve recall abilities (Reisman, 2012, p. 105). As results from Reisman’s study indicates, teaching students to read and work with primary sources will help them build a narrative that includes more than just one side as well as a deeper understanding (Wineburg & Martin, 2004).

The use of primary sources requires students to build their own historical narrative via historical thinking skills

Reisman’s study was meant to teach students to build their own narrative based on reading competing texts about one event (Reisman, 2012). To do this, students need to be introduced to the historical thinking skills used by historians. These include the ability to source, contextualize, corroborate, and closely read historical documents for comprehension (see Appendix A). Secondary sources, such as textbooks, miss the feelings and thoughts that primary sources can convey to students today. Using primary sources allows students to have insight into the thoughts and experiences of the people in the past (Barton, 2005). With this insight students can begin to accurately source the document’s author. Neumann (2010) purports “documents function as substitutes of speech” it is important to get students to recognize that the audience influences the content of the communication in the document itself (Neumann, 507). The use of primary sources allows students to consider audience (source) and also context. In weaving together the document’s source and its context, teachers can guide students to a greater depth of understanding an era (Reisman, 472).

In selecting primary sources to study, teachers should choose those that “strategically support” the larger questions and concepts addressed (Neumann, 2010, p. 506). For example, in teaching about the Reconstruction Era of American History, a teacher might select competing

speeches by 1860s Congressmen on the rights of newly freed slaves. Selecting such documents will supply evidence for the historical accounts and teach students about “historical indeterminacy” thereby enabling students to build their own understanding (Barton, 2005, p. 751). Corroborating competing sources is part of historical thinking skills which will require students to use a variety of sources to support their own conclusions (Barton, 2005). Primary sources should become part of the instructional framework with a context of inquiry for the student to create a more complete and reflective understanding (Barton, 2005).

The use of primary sources increases engagement in the classroom

Primary source analysis requires critical reading & historical thinking skills as students must look for sequence, argument, tone, and evidence (Neumann, 2010). Zepke and Leach (2010) say that to promote such skills teachers can “create education experiences for students that are challenging, enriching, and extend their academic abilities” (Zepke & Leach, 2010, p.171). This is one of the ten proposals to increase engagement as synthesized from 93 studies by Zepke and Leach of the School of Educational Studies. In their meta-analysis, they discovered that “while students attitudes to learning varied greatly, those who engaged in higher forms of learning such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating tended to be most engaged” (Zepke & Leach, 2010, p. 171). As history is more or less a “great investigation” of the past, teachers can push their students to become investigators of the past by giving them the tools, such as primary sources, to do so (Drake & Brown, 2003).

Students who are provided investigatory opportunities (a hands-on approach to history) creates students who are more invested in the results of history and their own learning (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). In allowing students to explore the primary sources and corroborate documents, better engagement occurs as students emulate the work of trained historians (Tally &

Goldenberg, 2005). The flexibility of primary sources provides students an opportunity to construct their own narrative, thereby promoting self-belief in ability. Student engagement is strongly linked to the self-belief of ability (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Students in one study of primary source implementation reported they learned more in correlation with a higher likeability of the subject of history (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005).

Method

Subjects

The participants in the study were ninth grade students in an American History survey course. Twenty-six students were in the required nine-week course that meets for 90 minutes during the last period of the school day. The study itself lasted eight class periods. In addition to myself, there was also a participant-observer in the role of instructional coach for the researcher.

Setting

The school was a small suburban district with approximately 1800 students enrolled pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The high school where the study was completed had approximately 570 students with 14.05% qualifying for free/reduced. The minority population of the high school is five percent.

Research Questions

Table 1 includes the research questions: How does primary source analysis impact historical understanding? How does primary source analysis impact student engagement? How does primary source analysis impact student achievement? How does primary source analysis impact attitude? Historical understanding has been defined in multiple ways. I defined historical thinking as the ability to source, contextualize, corroborate, and closely read historical documents as constructed by the Stanford History Education Group (see Appendix A). Student

engagement is defined as students' engagement in reading a textbook or another non-fiction excerpt and answering questions, watching videos/movie clips and completing a guide, participating in a discussion/debate about a topic, and analyzing/critiquing the viewpoints of people who lived the history. Student attitude is defined as the level of enjoyment and interest in the subject and the level of capability to achieve proficiency in the content.

Data collection procedures

Table 1 - How does primary source analysis impact historical understanding?

Sub Questions	Data Source 1 Surveys	Data Source 2 Assessments	Data Source 3 Exit Slip
How does primary source analysis impact student engagement ?	Pre & Post Survey	Teacher Observation	Self-Report Daily
How does primary source analysis impact student achievement ?	Pre & Post Survey	Pre/Post Test Questions	Self-Report Formative Assessment On-going
How does primary source analysis impact attitude toward learning history?	Pre & Post Survey	Teacher Perception	Self-Report On-going

Data was collected using multiple techniques to create multiple viewpoints to answer the research questions. Data source one was collected via surveys given to students. Prior to beginning the unit on Reconstruction (1865-1877), students were given a survey via Google Forms. Students answered 11 questions related to engagement, achievement, and attitude toward learning history (see Appendix B). Students were given the survey again at the end of the unit. This tool is holistically reliable and valid due to the fact that students surveyed are a unique group.

Data source two were assessments derived from teacher observations/perception and a formal student assessment. Students were given a four question multiple choice pre-test requiring primary source analysis. As a post-test, students were given these same questions on the larger unit exam. The researcher conducted on-task assessments using a form to measure student engagement in a lesson (see Appendix B). To include another viewpoint, an instructional coach school conducted the same on-task assessments. I also kept a lesson journal in which anecdotal evidence on student data was assessed at the end of each lesson. Assessments are valid in that each provides multiple perspectives to measure the sub-questions. One could reliably repeat these assessments but may find varying results according to teacher perception and observation.

Data source three was daily student exit slips via Google Forms. Students were asked to self-report their attitude and engagement with the lesson on a scale from one to ten (see Appendix B). The daily exit slip also included at least one formative assessment question based on the content learned during the lesson. Content questions measured student achievement in proficiency of the content. The self-reporting of student is reliable as it measures the student's reality and perception of instruction, engagement, and attitude.

Instruction

Students addressed the following Minnesota Department of Education (2014) 2011 Academic Standards in Social Studies throughout this research project:

9.4.1.2. Historical inquiry is a process in which multiple sources and different kinds of historical evidence are analyzed to draw conclusions about how and why things happened in the past.

9.4.4.19 Regional tensions around economic development, slavery, territorial expansion and governance resulted in a civil war and a period of Reconstruction that led to the

abolition of slavery, a more powerful federal government, a renewed push into indigenous nations' territory, and continuing conflict over racial relations. (Civil War and Reconstruction: 1850—1877) (p.141)

State curricula suggests chronological coverage of historical events and requires the use of primary documents as well as the teaching of historical thinking. Students were instructed on primary source analysis and historical thinking prior to the implementation of the research.

Resources such as the “Reading Like a Historian” lessons developed by the Stanford History Education Group and originally created by Sam Wineburg (2016) are available to history educators via the web (Wineburg, 2016). The lessons developed students' historical thinking skills by centering on a central historical question. Each lesson contained the following process:

1. Establishment of historical background knowledge: Each lesson contained lecture notes, a Power Point presentation, a timeline, or a link to a video source to provide adequate background information. This portion was teacher-led with supplemental materials when necessary.
2. A central historical question: Each lesson contained a brief and catching question that students answered throughout the lesson.
3. Primary sources: Each lesson contained two to five primary sources that students were asked to read and analyze using guided questions, a graphic organizer, or small group discussion. There were a variety of lessons contained within the primary source analysis. Often the sources held conflicting viewpoints of the event/era. Primary sources were modified to be more accessible both lexically and syntactically for early high school readers. Original text of the primary sources was also included as an option for more advanced readers.

4. Class discussion about the central question: Students were asked to articulate their perspectives and defend them using evidence from primary sources. As a class, students were exposed to the multiple perspectives of historical inquiry that is the foundation of building a consensus on an event.
5. Exit Slip: Students completed a daily exit slip on their engagement/attitude toward the lesson as well as summative and/or formative questions related to the day's lesson.

Throughout the study, students were taught four separate lessons using the “Reading Like a Historian” curriculum. Most lessons spanned one class period or more. Overall, the unit took place over eight class periods with one extra day for needed review/re-teaching. Lessons are available on the Stanford History Education Group website (Wineburg 2016):

- Radical Reconstruction Lesson Plan
- Sharecropping Lesson Plan
- Thomas Nast Political Cartoon Lesson Plan
- Reconstruction Structured Academic Controversy

Results

Data was collected to determine the impact of primary source analysis on historical thinking. Each data tool addressed at least one of the sub-questions in the study. Various tables and charts address the results found using these tools.

How does primary source analysis impact student engagement?

Students were asked to self-report via a Google Form survey prior to the implementation of primary source analysis and then again at the end of implementation (see Appendix B). Using a ten-point scale students indicated their engagement levels based on a variety of activities that occur in a high school American history classroom. Of the four questions displayed in Table 2,

the third and fourth are most related to primary source analysis. In Table 2, results indicate that students in the study were least engaged by reading a textbook/excerpt and answering questions as the average was 6.6 out of 10 on the pre-survey and 6.7 out of 10 on the post-survey. Slightly more engaging were videos/movie clips which averaged 7.8 and 7.9 on the pre and post surveys, respectively. Interestingly, students reported reduced engagement in discussion/debates from the beginning to the end of the study. The final engagement question about analyzing/critiquing viewpoints enjoyed the biggest gain over the course of the study as the average increased .23 from 7.1 out of 10 to 7.3 out of 10. Questions related to discussion/debate and analyzing/critiquing viewpoints were targeted during the study as the intervention involved primary source analysis that hinged upon activities such as these.

Table 2 - Student self-report pre and post survey data on engagement

Student	I am engaged in learning when I am reading a textbook or another non-fiction excerpt and answering questions.			I am engaged in learning when I am watching videos/movie clips and completing a guide.			I am engaged in learning when I am participating in a discussion/debate about a topic we learned in class.			I am engaged in learning when I am analyzing/critiquing the viewpoints of people who lived the history.		
	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇
A	7	8	1	9	9	0	8	7	-1	8	7	-1
B	8	10	2	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	0
C	7	6	-1	6	8	2	6	6	0	8	6	-2
D	9	10	1	8	9	1	8	9	1	7	8	1
E	9	8	-1	10	10	0	10	6	-4	7	6	-1
F	4	6	2	5	7	2	7	8	1	6	7	1
G	4	8	4	8	8	0	7	9	2	7	9	2
H	8	7	-1	6	4	-2	8	5	-3	4	4	0
I	7	7	0	8	7	-1	8	8	0	7	7	0
J	8	7	-1	9	9	0	8	8	0	9	8	-1
K	7	7	0	7	7	0	10	10	0	9	9	0
L	9	9	0	6	9	3	8	9	1	10	8	-2
M	7	7	0	7	7	0	6	7	1	7	7	0
N	8	7	-1	8	10	2	9	8	-1	8	5	-3
O	2	5	3	5	5	0	8	7	-1	3	6	3
P	7	6	-1	6	5	-1	6	5	-1	5	6	1
Q	7	7	0	9	7	-2	9	7	-2	7	7	0
R	8	6	-2	8	7	-1	9	8	-1	8	8	0
S	7	4	-3	10	10	0	6	8	2	5	6	1
T	9	9	0	8	7	-1	9	9	0	10	9	-1
U	5	6	1	8	8	0	8	8	0	6	7	1
V	6	3	-3	9	10	1	10	10	0	10	8	-2
W	7	5	-2	8	8	0	9	5	-4	5	8	3
X	4	7	3	8	10	2	7	8	1	7	7	0
Y	8	9	1	8	9	1	8	9	1	8	9	1
Z	1	1	0	10	7	-3	7	10	3	5	10	5
Average	6.6	6.7	0.07	7.8	7.9	0.11	8	7.8	-0.19	7.1	7.3	0.23

To further measure engagement, students were asked to complete a daily exit slip in which they self-reported their engagement in the day's lesson on a scale from one to ten (see Appendix E). Data was also collected by the researcher using a chart to record student at-task behavior during the lesson (see Appendix D). This was done during three separate lessons: early, mid, and late intervention. Twenty-six students participated in the study, however, teacher observation data was collected on 16 students chosen at random to observe. Table 3 compares student self-reported engagement as well as teacher observation of student engagement. Self-reporting of the sample of students observed followed similar patterns of engagement averages for the three lessons displayed in Table 3. For example, students rated themselves at 7.8 and the teacher 78.1 for Day 1: Early Intervention. There was significant increase in engagement during the unit from Day 1 to Day 4 as shown through student self-reporting and teacher observation. Student average engagement from Day 1 to Day 4 increased .2 and teacher observation of engagement increased 6.1%. However, this trend did not hold as student perceptions saw a decline from 8 to 7.8 at the end of the unit while teacher observation remained on the trend from 86.2 to 85.

Table 3 - Comparison of Student Self-Perception and Teacher Observation of Engagement

Student	Day 1: Early Intervention		Day 4: Mid-Intervention		Day 7: Late Intervention	
	Self	Teacher	Self	Teacher	Self	Teacher
A	8	60	9	60	9	80
B	8	60	10	80	10	80
C	7	60	7	80	7	80
F	6	80	6	80	8	100
H	7	100	8	100	6	100
I	8	100	9	100	8	100
J	8	80	9	100	9	80
K	10	100	9	100	8	100
L	9	100	9	100	8	100
P	5	60	5	80	5	60
R	9	80	8	80	7	100
T	9	100	10	100	9	80
U	9	100	7	80	8	80
V	8	100	8	100	8	80
W	9	100	9	80	8	80
X	5	60	5	60	8	60
Observed Average (n=16)	7.8	78.1	8	86.2	7.8	85
Class Average (n=26)	8	n/a	8.1	n/a	7.8	n/a
Observed Mode	8/9	100	9	100	8	80

How does primary source analysis impact student achievement?

At the beginning and end of the unit on Reconstruction, students were asked to self-report on three questions related to achievement in the unit (see Appendix B). The questions were designed to gather student perception on achievement as related to the use of primary source analysis. Using a ten-point scale students evaluated their achievement levels using primary sources. As shown in Table 4, the first question saw a small improvement over time as there was

a .26 increase students' perception that primary sources helped them connect to the required content. Six students indicated a negative change over the course of the unit in the effectiveness of primary sources, however, ten students indicated a positive change. The second question addressed the effective use of primary sources to achieve learning targets. From the pre to the post survey, student responses improved by .5% with 13 of 26 students responded that primary sources did positively impact their ability to achieve the learning targets. The third question related to achievement indicated that over the course of the unit, student perception of achieving a B or better in the unit declined by .03, yet 22 of 26 students indicated a positive or no change in their belief about achievement over the course of the unit.

Table 4 - Achievement: Student Self-Report Pre and Post Survey Data

	Using first person (primary sources) in the classroom helps me to connect to the required content.			Effectively using primary sources will help me better achieve the learning targets in the unit.			I believe I can achieve proficiency (a B or better) for all learning targets in a unit.		
Student	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇
A	9	8	-1	7	8	1	9	7	-2
B	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	0
C	7	7	0	6	8	2	8	9	1
D	9	9	0	8	8	0	10	10	0
E	4	6	2	6	9	3	5	6	1
F	7	8	1	8	7	-1	9	9	0
G	7	7	0	9	8	-1	9	10	1
H	4	5	1	5	5	0	7	8	1
I	8	10	2	10	10	0	10	10	0
J	8	8	0	9	9	0	10	8	-2
K	9	9	0	9	10	1	10	10	0
L	8	7	-1	9	7	-2	10	9	-1
M	7	7	0	7	7	0	7	7	0
N	8	10	2	5	8	3	9	10	1
O	5	5	0	3	5	2	4	5	1
P	6	5	-1	4	6	2	5	5	0
Q	7	7	0	7	8	1	8	8	0
R	8	7	-1	8	7	-1	10	10	0
S	7	4	-3	6	4	-2	10	10	0
T	9	10	1	9	10	1	10	10	0
U	9	8	-1	8	6	-2	9	9	0
V	10	10	0	6	8	2	10	10	0
W	5	8	3	8	8	0	8	8	0
X	7	8	1	6	8	2	8	8	0
Y	8	9	1	8	9	1	8	9	1
Z	9	10	1	8	9	1	10	7	-3
Average	7.5	7.7	0.26	7.2	7.7	0.5	8.5	8.5	-0.03
Mode	7	8	n/a	8	8	n/a	10	10	n/a

The effect of primary source analysis on achievement was additionally measured by formal assessment via a pre-test and post-test (see Appendix C). Students were given a four question pre-test using primary sources to correctly answer multiple choice questions. Those questions also appeared in the same format in the comprehensive unit exam at the end of the study. As shown in Table 5, the pre-test score averaged 2.35 out of 4 with student answers ranging from 0 to 4 questions answered correctly. Evidence of improvement was seen in the post-test as the class improved their score on the same four questions by 1.4; a significant improvement of 34%. Furthermore, 12 students out of 26 improved their score by 50% or more from the pre-test to the post-test while only one student showed negative growth in achievement.

Table 5 -Achievement: Pre-Test and Post-Test Student Scores

Student	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	∇	Percent +/-
A	1	4	3	75%
B	2	4	2	50%
C	1	4	3	75%
D	3	4	1	25%
E	2	4	2	50%
F	3	4	1	25%
G	3	3	0	0%
H	4	4	0	0%
I	3	4	1	25%
J	3	4	1	25%
K	3	4	1	25%
L	2	4	2	50%
M	2	4	2	50%
N	2	4	2	50%
O	2	1	-1	-25%
P	0	3	3	75%
Q	2	4	2	50%
R	2	4	2	50%
S	3	4	1	25%
T	4	4	0	0%
U	3	4	1	25%
V	1	4	3	75%
W	3	3	0	0%
X	3	4	1	25%
Y	2	2	0	0%
Z	2	4	2	50%
Class Average	2.3	3.7	1.4	34%
Class Minimum	0	1	0	0%
Class Maximum	4	4	3	75%

How does primary source analysis impact student attitude?

As part of the pre and post-survey in which students rated their engagement and achievement, three questions related to student attitude were also included (see Appendix B). As Table 6 demonstrates, each question was tailored to a specific component of attitude: enjoyment, interest, and capability. Students rated themselves on a scale from one to ten. Pre-survey data indicates low enjoyment of learning history as student perception averaged 6.8. At the end of the unit enjoyment improved by .19 overall but several students (11 of 26) indicating a negative impact of primary source analysis on enjoyment. Attitude improved in the second/interest question as student perception improved from an average of 6.7 to 7.1 out of 10 at the end of the unit. Fewer students (7 of 26) reported a negative impact of primary source analysis on interest than did enjoyment. The final question on student perception of their capability related to primary source analysis saw the greatest gain over the course of the study. An average of 7.2 out of 10 improved to 8.4 out of 10 at the end of the unit, an increase of 1.19. Only one student indicated a negative impact of primary source analysis on their belief of their capability to learn history. Another six students' answers to the third/capability question remained the same from pre to post survey, but most of those students started out with a very high perception (9 or 10) of their capability. In total, 17 of 26 students' perception of their capability to learn history improved during the course of the unit.

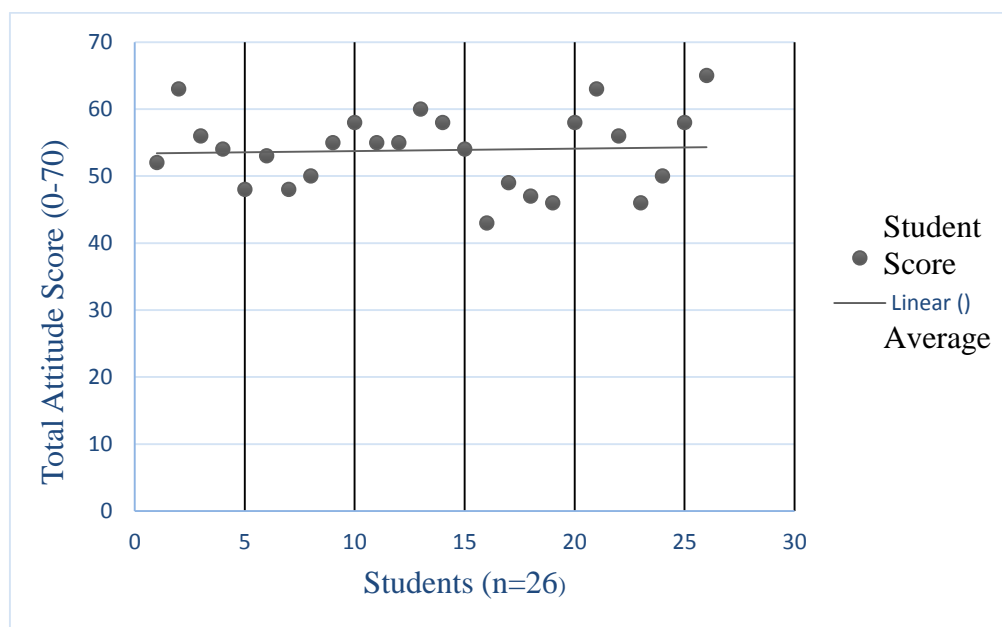
Table 6 - Attitude: student self-report pre and post survey data

Student	To what extent do you enjoy learning history?			To what extent do you have interest in learning history?			To what extent feel capable of learning history?		
	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇	PRE	POST	∇
A	7	7	0	5	7	2	9	9	0
B	8	10	2	8	10	2	10	10	0
C	10	8	-2	10	9	-1	9	9	0
D	10	9	-1	6	8	2	9	10	1
E	8	9	1	6	7	1	7	10	3
F	8	9	1	9	9	0	8	9	1
G	8	7	-1	7	7	0	8	9	1
H	4	4	0	6	4	-2	4	5	1
I	3	5	2	3	5	2	6	8	2
J	7	6	-1	8	7	-1	7	8	1
K	8	8	0	8	8	0	9	10	1
L	8	7	-1	8	7	-1	7	9	2
M	7	6	-1	6	6	0	6	6	0
N	9	8	-1	10	8	-2	6	9	3
O	5	4	-1	3	4	1	2	4	2
P	6	6	0	8	6	-2	6	6	0
Q	7	5	-2	7	7	0	7	6	-1
R	5	7	2	5	7	2	7	8	1
S	8	7	-1	8	6	-2	10	10	0
T	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	0
U	8	6	-2	6	6	0	10	10	0
V	2	4	2	4	7	3	6	10	4
W	3	6	3	3	5	2	5	8	3
X	5	7	2	6	8	2	5	7	2
Y	8	9	1	8	9	1	8	9	1
Z	7	10	3	7	9	2	7	10	3
Average	6.8	7	0.19	6.7	7.1	0.42	7.2	8.4	1.19

To further measure attitude, students were asked to complete a daily exit slip in which they self-reported their attitude in relation to the day's lesson on a scale from one to ten (see

Appendix E). Figure 1 shows each student's attitude score over the course of the seven lessons. Attitude scores, when totaled for each individual student, could range from 0 to 70 with the average total score of all students indicated by the horizontal line on Table 7 as 53 out of 70. Approximately one-third of student total attitude scores were below the class average while two-thirds were at or above the average.

Figure 1 - Aggregate total of student attitude.



Discussion

This study sought to understand the impact of primary source analysis on historical understanding. Engagement, achievement, and attitude in the history classroom were also looked at under the larger action research umbrella of historical understanding.

Research indicates that those students engaging in higher level thinking skills are more engaged than those not using those skills (Zepke & Leach, 2010, p. 171). Primary source analysis requires several higher level thinking skills which must be taught in order to achieve understanding. This study sought to engage learners with primary sources and measure the

perception of the learner and the teacher. Data supports a positive effect on engagement when using primary source analysis to increase understanding. When daily student self-reported engagement data is paired with teacher observation data there is a strong correlation between teacher perception and student perception. Those students engaged in learning rated themselves higher on a ten-point scale which usually was mirrored by teacher observation of engagement. Over the course of the study, those students who were moderately engaged at 60% or 80% of the time, as judged by teacher observation, tended to stay in the same range throughout the unit.

Student achievement is most often studied as part of primary source analysis lessons in high school social studies. These studies, such as those of Dr. Avishag Reisman (2012) point to a positive impact on learning. Data from this study also supports that conclusion. As two of three student self-report questions on achievement saw an improvement during the unit as well as pre-test/post-test data demonstrate learning. The pre-test/post-test data allows the researcher to see that students did learn how to successfully analyze primary source documents in the context of a historical era.

Attitude of the learner studying history is an important component that has not been thoroughly examined through research. The self-reporting by students show a relatively neutral attitude toward interest and enjoyment in learning history in both the pre and post-surveys. This is somewhat expected as American History as a required course is typically not approached with enthusiasm by the average ninth grader. There is strong evidence that student attitude toward their capability of learning history improved significantly during the unit of primary source analysis. Perceptions of one's capability seem to outweigh attitudes related to interest and enjoyment.

Implementation of this study was rather limited due to scheduling constraints. Students were new to the researcher's classroom as this unit was only second in a series of six that were to be covered over the nine week term. Without a strongly established teacher/student relationship the study's implications may have been impacted. Furthermore, most students encountered primary source analysis for the first time during this unit of study. The steep learning curve required of students may have also negatively impacted the results shown.

Future studies should include more lessons and multiple units of study to more adequately show the impact over time when using primary source analysis to increase historical understanding. Better measures of historical understanding need to be developed to gauge the specific skills such as corroboration, contextualization, sourcing, and close reading. Yet is important to implement primary source analysis in the high school American History classroom as each student can then build their own narrative of the past by interpreting its witnesses.

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Appendix A: Historical Thinking Chart

HISTORICAL THINKING CHART			
Historical Reading Skills	Questions	Students should be able to . . .	Prompts
Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who wrote this? What is the author's perspective? When was it written? Where was it written? Why was it written? Is it reliable? Why? Why not? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the author's position on the historical event Identify and evaluate the author's purpose in producing the document Hypothesize what the author will say before reading the document Evaluate the source's trustworthiness by considering genre, audience, and purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author probably believes . . . I think the audience is . . . Based on the source information, I think the author might . . . I do/don't trust this document because . . .
Contextualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When and where was the document created? What was different then? What was the same? How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how context/background information influences the content of the document Recognize that documents are products of particular points in time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the background information, I understand this document differently because . . . The author might have been influenced by _____ (historical context) . . . This document might not give me the whole picture because . . .
Corroboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do other documents say? Do the documents agree? If not, why? What are other possible documents? What documents are most reliable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish what is probable by comparing documents to each other Recognize disparities between accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author agrees/disagrees with . . . These documents all agree/disagree about . . . Another document to consider might be . . .
Close Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What claims does the author make? What evidence does the author use? What language (words, phrases, images, symbols) does the author use to persuade the document's audience? How does the document's language indicate the author's perspective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the author's claims about an event Evaluate the evidence and reasoning the author uses to support claims Evaluate author's word choice; understand that language is used deliberately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think the author chose these words in order to . . . The author is trying to convince me . . . The author claims . . . The evidence used to support the author's claims is . . .

Appendix B: Data Source One**Survey Questions for Pre/Post Student Survey**

To be completed before and after the unit of study for research. Given to students via Google Form.

1. I am engaged in learning American History when I am:
 - a. Reading a textbook or another non-fiction excerpt and answering questions
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
 - b. Watching videos/movie clips and completing a guide
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
 - c. Participating in a discussion/debate about a topic
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
 - d. Analyzing/critiquing the viewpoints of people who lived the history
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
2. To what extent do you _____ history.
 - a. Enjoy
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
 - b. Have interest
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
 - c. Feel capable
 - i. Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 10 (most engaged)
3. Using first person (primary sources) in the classroom helps me to connect to the content in class.
 - a. Scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always)
4. To what extent do you agree: Effectively using primary sources will help me better achieve the learning targets in the unit:
 - a. Scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always)
5. I believe I can achieve proficiency (a B or better) for all learning targets in a unit:
 - a. Scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always)
6. Choose the statement which best corresponds with your attitude toward learning at school in general.
 - a. Scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always)

Appendix C: Data Source Two**Assessments**

Pre/Post Test Questions:

1. “None will deny the right to confiscate the property of the Southern states, as they made war as the Confederate States of America. The bill provides that each freed slave who is a male adult, or the head of a family, will receive forty acres of land, (with \$100 to build a house).”

You can assume the author of this source supports:

- a. Southern Democrats during Reconstruction
- b. Southern Republicans during Reconstruction
- c. Northern Democrats during Reconstruction
- d. Northern Republicans during Reconstruction



Courtesy of HarpWeek, LLC.

2. When was this cartoon likely created?
 - a. Before the Civil War
 - b. During the Civil War
 - c. During Reconstruction
 - d. Cannot be determined without more information

Document A: Henry Blake of Little Rock, Arkansas.	Document B: A contract between Mial and Powell:
<p>“ When we worked on shares, we couldn’t make nothing, just overalls and something to eat. Half went to the other man and you would destroy your half if you weren’t careful. A man that didn’t know how to count would always lose. He might lose anyhow. They didn’t give no itemized statement. No, you just had to take their word. They never give you no details. They just say you owe so much. No matter how good account you kept, you had to go by their account and now, Brother, I’m tellin’ you the truth about this.”</p>	<p>“That the Said Fenner Powell agrees to work faithfully and dilligently with-out any unnecessary loss of time, to do all manner of work on Said farm as may be directed by Said Mial, And to be respectful in manners and deportment to Said Mial. And the Said Mial agrees on his part to furnish mule and feed for the same and all plantation tools and Seed to plant the crop free of charge, and to give theSaid Powell One half of all crops raised and housed by Said Powell on Said land except the cotton seed.”</p>

3. When you read Documents A and B together, you can assume
 - a. Newly freed slaves were treated well under the sharecropping system.
 - b. Newly freed slaves could easily navigate the contracts & rules of the sharecropping system.
 - c. Newly freed slaves often found themselves in unfair and poorly understood circumstances of labor.
 - d. Both documents share a positive view of sharecropping in the south.

4. Using Document A from the last question, what does the author mean by the statement “A man that didn’t know how to count would always lose”?
 - a. Plantation owners would often lose crops to their sharecropping tenants.
 - b. Plantation owners were uneducated and often confused their profits with those of the tenants.
 - c. Sharecropping tenants lost land when they were not able to read their itemized lists.
 - d. Sharecropping tenants who were poorly educated would often lose portions of their crop to the plantation owners.

Appendix D: Data Source

Teacher Observation At-Task Chart

Measures Engagement: reading, watching, participating, and analyzing

1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.

Appendix E: Data Source Three**Exit Slips**

To be completed at the end of each lesson which includes primary sources. Students will complete via Google Form.

Engagement (Daily): Scale

For today's lesson I would rate my level of engagement as:

- Scale of 1 (least engaged) to 5 (most engaged)

Attitude (On-going): Scale

For today's lesson I would rate my attitude (interest, enjoyment, and capability) as:

- Scale of 1 (negative) to 5 (positive)

Achievement (On-going):

- Varied based on lessons presented each day