Guided Notes: An Action Research Plan

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Introduction

As I was student teaching at Lockport Township East High School, one of the first things that I noticed was that many of the students in my junior level United States History class did not read the book, and therefore did not do as well on the exams as they potentially could have. Curious about this, I talked with my cooperating teacher who said that he assigns readings from the chapter and requires that they write notes explaining the important topics, but as I read these notes, it was clear that they simply looked for bold words and completely skipped the parts essential to the lesson. As I started taking over the teaching position, I noticed that it was very difficult to hold an intelligent conversation with my students because they did not know the information. It was at this point that I realized something had to be done. Starting with the next chapter, I began reading through it and sifting out the important information from the nonessentials. I then compiled this information in the form of questions and made them into a guiding note worksheet. It was a lot of work, and took far more time than I would have liked, but I noticed that several classes actually began learning the information and performing better on the tests.

After several chapters, I did an informal observation where I asked random students what they thought about the worksheets. Overall, many were excited by the idea because they could easily find the important information, and it helped them study for the tests because they were not studying useless knowledge while missing the meat of the event. Encouraged, I decided to compare test scores after creating these worksheets, while having other classes continue to work on the standard reading notes. After gathering the data together and analyzing the test scores, it was clear to see that these worksheets were well worth my time.

Students and Educational Setting

Lockport Township High School (LTHS) consists of 35.7% male students and 64.3% female students, and is predominantly made up of white/caucasian students (77%). Following them are Hispanic students that consist of 10.9% of the total population, Black students that come in at 6.7%, Multi-racial at 3.1%, Asian at 1.6%, and finally Native American at 0.7%. While these numbers may seem small, the population of the school actually suggests that there are significant numbers of people from these ethnicities, even in the smaller groups like Native Americans. About 0.7% of these students do not speak English at home, and in the 2008-2009 school year, LTHS's total student population came in at 3,900 students; showing that even with only 0.7%, there are still about 27 people that fall into this category.

My particular classroom follows these trends, but it is clear that many of the white/caucasian students are of direct Polish descent. There is a significant Polish population in the school, and I have at least two or three students in every class that have Polish-speaking parents and many direct ties to Poland. This makes for an interesting class, because they have their own culture and ideals that I had to become familiar with very quickly in order to keep from offending anyone inadvertently.

I have on average about 29 students in every class, and I teach four United States History classes to high school juniors everyday, as well as a class on the Vietnam War that I co-teach with my cooperating teacher Mr. Burnett. Within these classes, there is a lot of personality including one class where many students are of diverse ethnic backgrounds and who typically misbehave, one class that is quiet and subdued, one that is fun but rowdy, and one that has a vast amount of overachievers. These personalities make for an interesting teaching experience, and they all require special attention in order to pass the standardized tests issued by the school.

Literature Review

Throughout recent years, many studies have shown that giving students worksheets is less than ideal, and they should be actively engaged in the task at hand if the teacher expects any learning to take place (Childre, 2009). Although I am a firm believer in hands-on learning, I think that having a worksheet not as a tool to substitute actual teaching (like many people believe), but rather as a guide to highlight important events can really help students learn (Pincus, 2005). In history classrooms especially, there is a lot of information that students must sift through, and more often than not, if they are not directed properly, they can miss events that played a key role in the topic we are discussing.

Many schools (including Lockport Township High School East where I am student teaching) require that their teachers utilize the textbook almost constantly. To help my students pull out important information from each section, I developed worksheets that corresponded directly to each chapter and that served as "guided notes" to help them grasp the main concepts. Prior to this, my cooperating teacher had the students read each chapter and simply write notes on what they thought was important. While grading these notes, I noticed that many students would do the bare minimum, and most of the important information was ignored altogether. With this in mind, I created guided notes and would pass them out to two of the four US History classes. The other two US History classes (all Juniors in high school) would do the standard reading notes. At the end of the chapter, I would then pass out the test that I created to see if the worksheets helped student learning. At the beginning of the next chapter, I would switch classes. If first and second period used the worksheets, they would then do the standard notes, and vice versa with fifth and sixth period.

As I was developing my action research plan, I looked at several peer-reviewed journals

to determine the best course of action that I should take with my project. One journal in particular gave some advice that I thought was very important. It stated that teachers should use "M.A.X." when they are teaching (Forget, 2003). M.A.X. is an acronym that stands for Motivation, Acquisition, and eXtension. Essentially, I used this as I developed my lectures to make sure they corresponded to the readings that I assigned out of the book. By "eXtending" on each section, I hoped to show the students what was important in the chapters, why I put it on the worksheet, and how it played a role in our topic.

Another journal that I referred to discussed exactly *how* to create a worksheet, and what methods would make it most effective. The author (Harms) stated that there were six main contributing factors to creating a worksheet, and that if these are implemented, they can have a great influence on student learning (Harms, 2008). Some of these factors that I really focused on were guidance, free/ample time, social cooperation, and focusing attention. When I passed out the worksheets originally, I would make sure the students understood what was going on, and asked several times if there were any questions that I could answer. Also, if there was any extra time after a lesson, instead of carrying on and adding activities to fill in time, I would allow students to get out their notes and work on them in class, sometimes with a partner if they were working diligently. Finally, the point of creating these worksheets in the first place was to focus attention on important parts of history. I would read through each chapter and each section, and pull out information that I knew was important based on my studies, and ask a question either about that particular point, or about something that led to the specific event. By utilizing these techniques and implementing them into my worksheets, I noticed an improvement in classroom discussions, completed homework, and test scores.

One thing that I really wanted to stay away from was creating these worksheets to

substitute hands-on learning and fill in for a lecture or activity that could have taught the information in a more exciting manner. If students are required to constantly listen to lectures, then fill out worksheets without any form of activity or hands-on learning, they will quickly shut down and view the class as more of a chore instead of an exciting time to learn about events of the past (Mayer, 2006). By supplementing these worksheets with hands-on learning activities where they are *directly* involved with the course material, these students will hopefully be able to fill out the worksheet almost effortlessly, and they will serve as more of an Acquisition (from the M.A.X. theory) than anything else (Forget, 2003).

By giving out worksheets to supplement and guide the students' reading, I hope to improve understanding, test scores, and motivation to learn history. These worksheets serve to focus their attention away from minor details and toward the main ideas that really impacted the time period.

Procedures

Before beginning my action research plan, I had the students take a pre-test where they simply took a test taking the standard notes that they had been using since the beginning of the semester. This test, like all the other ones that I created, consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions typically working straight through the chapter and sections. Overall, the scores for this test came to an average of 70%, with second period at 63%, first period next with 66%, sixth period with 74%, and finally fifth period with 77%. There was clearly a gap between these four classes, which would play into my action research plan later on.

After getting these grades, I began creating worksheets for the seven remaining chapters. As I created them, I would typically start with a small section where students would define content-specific vocabulary and terms in one to two sentences. These terms were typically written in bold letters throughout the chapter, but many also required close reading in order to find the actual definition. After the definition section, I would work through the chapter and separate the essential information from the supplemental and formulate a question that would lead students to answer the important questions relating to the topic. By creating worksheets in this manner, not only did it ensure that students were reading the required material for the class so they would be prepared to engage in the lecture, but they would also be able to distinguish the important information from the non-important information and get a better understanding of the unit as a whole.

Once the worksheets were created, I would distribute them to specific classes. Before I began creating the worksheets at all, I tried to gauge the classes to determine which ones were similar to each other. I discovered that first and sixth periods were similar, and second and fifth were alike. With this in mind, I would only pass out the worksheets to two of the classes in each

group (ie: first and second, or fifth and sixth), and the other two classes would work on the standard notes straight out of the book. By doing this, I hoped to get an accurate reading of how the classes performed with the worksheets, and there was always a control group to determine if the worksheets were doing a better job or if the standard notes actually helped students more.

On the day of the test, I would have review the test questions with the students, then ask if they had any questions. After that, they would pass in their notes and/or worksheets and take the test. I specifically made the tests multiple choice and true or false so there would not be any biases as I was grading them. Next, I would scan the tests and take the average grade from each class. I would then record these grades in my action research notebook where I would also mark the tests and which classes used the worksheets. For the next unit, I would switch and if the first two class periods were given a worksheet they would then have the standard notes, and vice-versa. I would then repeat the procedures for each unit.

Results

Overall, my action research plan *did* improve student learning, but it was not quite to the extent that I had originally anticipated. After my pre-test, I gathered data from five other units where two classes had worksheets and two did not. The results showed an improvement, but some of the individual tests had the opposite effect of what I had hoped for.

After the pre-test, I gave the worksheets to my fifth and sixth period classes, and had my first two classes do the standard notes. They worked on these notes throughout the unit, then turned them in the day of the test. For this test, the average percentage of my first two classes was 76.5%, while my last two classes (that had the worksheets) had 86.5%. This was a very promising start to my action research plan.

The second test began to worry me somewhat, and I realized that there may have been a minor flaw in my class judgments. My first two classes had an average of 80.5% (they used the worksheets), while my second two classes without the worksheets got an 86%. I did not expect the class that did not use the worksheets to get a higher grade, and I realized that the first and sixth, and second and fifth classes were not the most alike. Instead of giving the worksheets to my first two and last two classes, I should have given them to my first and fifth, and my second and sixth periods to have a better control group. Later in the semester, I realized that my first two classes typically scored *significantly* lower in almost every assignment than my last two classes simply because my last two classes have many students that are highly motivated to do well in school, whereas my first two classes overall are either uninterested in school in general or wish to do only the minimum amount of work necessary to pass the class. While this was disheartening, the scores *did* improve the grades of my first two classes who initially did not use the worksheets. With this in mind, I continued my experiment.

The averages of the next tests were 81% for my last two classes with the worksheet, and 77% for my first two classes without the worksheet. Chapter 26 (my fourth test) yet again had a wider margin with my first two classes scoring an average of 73.5% without the worksheets, and 83.5% without the worksheets. The final test that I gathered data from I gave the worksheets to my fifth and sixth period classes, and they scored an average of 79%. My first two classes on the same test but without worksheets scored an average of 64%.

While some of this data may seem scattered, it does in fact show an overall improvement. After gathering this data, I took the average of all of the tests where students used the worksheets, and the average of the tests where students wrote the standard notes. For the former, the average came out to 80.1%, where as the latter averaged out at 77.9%. While the improvement was not as drastic as I had hoped, there was a 2.2% increase on average between the classes that used the worksheets and those that did not.

Reflection

Overall, I was fairly satisfied with the outcome of my action research project. Although the results did not show exactly what I wanted them to, it did show student learning and minor improvement by using the guiding worksheets as opposed to student-led notes.

While I was satisfied, I would make several improvements to my plans if I were to repeat the project. One of the more outstanding improvements I would make that would affect the results the most is to simply watch the class for a longer period of time *before* making judgments about which ones are most similar to each other. By doing this, my results would be more accurate and I could use the data more. Also, I would try to extend the project over more than just five units. By covering more units and gathering more data, the results would show trends more clearly and the results would be more founded than anything I could ever hope to gain in five units.

As a secondary form of assessment, I informally asked students in every class what they thought about the notes and if they honestly thought that they helped them study and gain the important knowledge from the chapters. Almost unanimously (except for second period where most of them wanted to do the standard notes because they could get away with writing less) the classes wanted to use the worksheets, and were sometimes even upset when I told them they could not use them. The students said that they learned more, it encouraged them to actually read the chapter instead of looking for words written in bold, and it helped them get a better picture of the unit material overall.

This action research project was a success in my mind, not only because of the increase in test grades, but also because I found a way to encourage many students to enjoy history while learning the content material. Even if there was no effect on the grades, the latter point would be

enough to satisfy me. The students are my priority, and by finding something that they enjoy and getting more of the course material across to them, I feel my teaching experience so far has been a major success.

References

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Appendix/Explanations

Artifact I (pg. 15-22): This is an example of a worksheet that I created after reading the chapter. Students would work through this sheet that corresponds directly to the book, then study it in preparation for the test that would take place at the end of the unit.

Artifact II (pg. 23-25): The tests that I created typically came directly from the worksheets to further show the importance of the information from the textbook. Oftentimes, as a review, I would tell them generally what was on the test the day before so they knew what to study, then they could refer back to their notes to find the answers.

Artifact III/IV (pg. 26-27): As I lectured, many of the things I talked about would reinforce the information from the worksheets. I specifically geared my lectures toward the information in the text and the sheets in order to reach as many students as possible, regardless of their style or type of learning. As I spoke, I would say statements that students would listen to, then fill in the blank spaces that I left on the sheets. This helped them pull important information from my lectures as well, and ensured that they paid attention to what I was saying.

Chapter 26, Section 1
Origins of the Cold War

1) **Define:**
-Satellite Nation:

-Containment:

-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):

2) List the differences between the United States and the Soviet Union in their respective areas.

United States	Soviet Union

3) Why was the United Nations (UN) established? How did the US and Soviet Union use it?

4) Who coined the term "Iron Curtain"? What did it mean?

5) What was the "Cold War"? What does it mean when a war is "cold"? How long did it last?

6) What was the Truman Doctrine? Why did Truman create this doctrine? How was this similar to the Marshall Plan?

7) What did the Soviet Union do to try and take West Berlin? How did the US and Great Britain counter this? What was it called, and what did it do?

8) What countries were a part of NATO?

9) What was unique about America's involvement in NATO? What political position did it make impossible?

10) Describe, in two or three sentences, something interesting you learned in this section that you did not know before.

Chapter 26, Section 2

The Cold War Heats Up

1) List at least five qualities held by the following leaders:

Chiang Kai-shek	Mao Zedong

2) Why did civil war break out in China? How did the United States help?

3)How were two nations created in Korea? Where was the split? What were their political views?

4) How did the Korean war start? Who did they ask for help? What did the US do?

5) Who led the forces in South Korea? What did he do that saved the South Koreans from disaster?

6) What country intervened and pushed UN and American troops south? Why did they do this?

7) What does MacArthur propose as a way of ending the stalemate in Korea? Why was this important? What does it show about the countries involved?

8) After MacArthur's plans were rejected by Truman, what did he do? How did Truman respond?

9) Who called for a cease-fire? What two points did they agree on?

10) What was one thing you found interesting that you did not know before reading this section?

Chapter 26, Section 3

The Cold War at Home

1) **Define:**
-House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC):

-Blacklist:

-McCarthyism:

2) Many Americans were afraid that some people were loyal to what country instead of America? Why would this be a problem?

3) What was HUAC concerned about with regards to movies? What did they do in response?

4) Who were the "Hollywood Ten"? What did they do? Why?

5) What was the McCarran Internal Security Act? What did Truman say/do in response? What ended up happening?

6) Who was Alger Hiss? What was he accused of? What happened to him? Who gained fame by pursuing the charges against Hiss?

7) Who were the Rosenbergs? What were they accused of? Who gave them the information?

8) Why did Joseph McCarthy say Communists were taking over the government? What did he say he had to prove his point? What came from this list?

9) Who did McCarthy accuse that eventually brought about his downfall? What did the Senate condemn him for? What happened to him three years later?

10) List three causes and three effects of McCarthyism.

11) What was something you found interesting in this reading?

Chapter 26, Section 4

Two Nations Live on the Edge

1) **Define:**
-Brinkmanship:

-Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):

-Dwight D. Eisenhower:

2) What decision did President Truman have to make concerning morality? What did he decide?

3) What did the CIA do? Where were their first missions? What did they do in these places?

4) What did the Soviet Union create when Germany joined NATO? What was it called? What did this pact do?

5) What were the results of the Summit in Geneva? How did the world view it?

6) What did Abdel-Nasser do after the US stopped negotiations over a loan? Who did this effect? What did they do in response? What was the outcome?

7) What was the Eisenhower Doctrine? Who was it aimed at defending (and from whom)?

8) How did the Soviets respond when Hungarians wanted a democracy? What US policy was supposed to prevent this?

9) Who became the Soviet leader after Stalin died? _____

10) What was the U-2? What did it do? What did the Soviet leader demand after one was shot down? What did Eisenhower do? What happened because of the "U-2 incident"?

11) Explain something you learned that is not in the worksheet.

Chapter 26 Test

The Cold War

1) A country dominated by the Soviet Union to serve as a buffer country:
    a) Outlier Nation
    b) Defense Nation
    c) Satellite Nation
    d) Orbital Nation

2) The policy of keeping Communism from spreading to the rest of the world was known as:
    a) Containment
    b) Contaminate
    c) Controlled Borders
    d) Conquering

3) Why was the United Nations established?
    a) To attack enemies of the Allied powers
    b) To supply impoverished countries with supplies
    c) To promote peace
    d) To seek out Communist nations

4) What was the Iron Curtain?
    a) Armor used by the Soviet soldiers
    b) Defensive structure used by the USSR
    c) Plan of attack by the US and Great Britain
    d) Boundary between Communism and Democracy

5) What made the Cold War "cold"?
    a) It was fought during Winter
    b) The Soviet Union is known for being cold
    c) Many people were killed
    d) No shots were fired

6) What supported countries attacked by Communism and gave monetary aid.
    a) Marshall Plan
    b) Truman Doctrine
    c) United Nations
    d) None of the above

7) The missions that brought supplies into Germany were known as the:
    a) Luxembourg Drop
    b) Frankfurt Airlift
    c) Berlin Airlift
    d) *Blitzkrieg*

8) North and South Korea was divided along the:
    a) 38th Parallel
    b) 56th Parallel
    c) 25th Parallel
    d) 43rd Parallel

9) How did the United States aid the South Koreans?
    a) Sent warships
    b) Sent troops
    c) Sent supplies
    d) All of the above

10) How did the Korean War begin?
    a) South Korea invaded North Korea
    b) North Korea invaded South Korea
    c) China invaded North Korea
    d) US invaded South Korea

11) Who aided South Korea and helped them attack the North Koreans?
    a) China
    b) United Nations
    c) Germany
    d) Soviet Union

12) What did MacArthur say would end the Korean War?
    a) Bombing South Korea
    b) Attacking the Soviet Union
    c) Attacking China
    d) An amphibious assault on North Korea

13) What was agreed upon at the end of the Korean War?
    a) The location of the border between countries
    b) The maximum number of soldiers allowed in either army
    c) Creating a demilitarized zone
    d) A and C

14) What was a "blacklist"?
    a) List of people accused of murder
    b) List of people accused of being Communists
    c) List of people accused of espionage
    d) List of people accused of trying to sabotage the government

15) Who said that they had a list of alleged Communists in the State Department?
a) McCarthy
b) McCarran
c) MacArthur
d) McDonald

16) What was HUAC concerned about?
a) Communists were infiltrating the Army
b) Communists were fighting in Korea
c) Communists were putting propaganda in movies
d) Communists were cutting off supply routes to Berlin

17) Why didn't the "Hollywood Ten" testify in court?
a) They were guilty of being Communists
b) They were blackmailed by McCarthy
c) They thought it was unconstitutional
d) They wanted the publicity

18) What is an unfair tactic of accusing people of disloyalty without providing evidence?
a) McCarthyism
b) Blacklist
c) HUAC
d) McCarranism

19) The Rosenbergs were accused of giving the secrets of the atomic bomb to the Soviets.
a) True or b) False

20) "Brinkmanship" was going to the very edge of an all-out war.
a) True or b) False

21) The Soviet Union joined NATO in response to the Warsaw Pact.
a) True or b) False

22) The world blamed Eisenhower for failing at the Summit in Geneva.
a) True or b) False

23) Abdel-Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal after the Soviet Union refused to give them a loan.
a) True or b) False

24) The Eisenhower Doctrine said it would defend any country in the Middle East attacked by Communism.
a) True or b) False

25) Nikita Khrushchev became the Soviet leader after Stalin died.
a) True or b) False

Chapter 26, Section 1 Lecture Guide

1) _____ led the Nationalists in China.

2) _____ led the Communists in China.

3) Characteristics of the Nationalist Party

a) Area Controlled:

b) Relied on _____ for aid

c) _____ leadership

d) _____ morale

4) Characteristics of the Communist Party

a) Area Controlled:

b) Relied on _____ for aid

c) _____ leadership

d) _____ morale

5) What happened after Japan left China? _____

6) Split along the _____ Parallel.

7) _____ attacked _____ first.

8) _____ supported South Korea militarily.

9) _____ supported North Korea militarily.

10) What was established between the two countries? _____

(Hint: Outside of the war in the Middle East, it is the most militarized area in the world.)

11) _____ wanted to attack China after pushing into North Korea.

12) What happened to him? _____

Chapter 26, Section 2 Guided Notes

1) What made the Cold War "cold"? _____

2) The Soviets were angry with the US because we kept the _____ a secret.

3) US was angry at the Soviets because they _____

_____

4) USSR was supposed to allow _____. Did they? ___ Yes ___ No

5) The Soviet Union started controlling _____ and made them Communist.

6) The _____ took a policy of _____

7) Only two powers in the world. 1: _____, 2: _____

8) The division of Europe between these two views was known as the _____

(Coined by Winston Churchill)

9) After the attack on Turkey and Greece, President Truman made the _____

10) The _____ said the US would _____ and _____

_____ that is _____ pressures to become _____

11) The _____ provided $_____ to _____ countries in

_____ Europe in hopes of making them like _____

12) The city of _____ was divided into two main sections.

13) _____ tried to starve out the _____ by closing roads/railroads.

14) _____ responded by sending _____ full of _____

and _____.

15) Lasted _____ days, and had _____. (About _____ per day)

16) _____ realized it couldn't work alone, so it joined _____

17) _____ prevented the _____ from ever being _____ again.