Exploring Middle Level Learner Experiences with Learning About World Religions & Philosophies Using Authentic Pedagogy

by

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Abstract

The United States is a highly religious nation. Unfortunately, the teaching about various world religions and philosophies in public schools remains highly contested across the nation, particularly in highly Christianized environments such as the Bible Belt. In a state located solidly within this region, the state mandated course of study standards for eighth grade World History requires instruction about world religions and philosophies. This course is the first time many learners are confronted with a culture or belief that is vastly different and outside their comfort zone. These eighth-grade students, or middle level learners, sometimes openly refuse to complete coursework about faiths other than their personal Christian faith while others make derogatory comments or disengage from the course material. Middle level learners are still heavily influenced by the environment in which they are raised but are also trying to find their identity within the world. They are also undergoing immense cognitive, social, and emotional changes which provides both opportunities and challenges for middle school teachers who desire to widen their students understanding of the world while honoring their home cultures. This action research study explored the engagement of middle level students learning about world religions and philosophies through an intervention of authentic pedagogical units of instruction in an eighth grade World History course. Additionally, this study sought to better understand the cognitive, emotional, and social opportunities and challenges that influence learner engagement in a highly Christianized environment, such as the Bible Belt of America's Deep South, about world religions and philosophies for eighth grade students. The results for this study should be viewed within a narrow scope,

limited to the classroom setting where the study was conducted due to the small sample of students and the role of teacher as researcher.

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List of Abbreviations

ALCOS	Alabama Course of Study
AIW	Authentic Intellectual Work
DCI	Disciplined Civic Inquiry
DI	Disciplinary Inquiry
HOT	Higher Order Thinking
NCSS	National Council for the Social Studies

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2014, I accepted a position teaching eighth grade World History at a traditional junior high school located in a town that is now considered a suburb of a mid-size city in the deep south. Originally established as a cotton manufacturing town in the early 1800s, the town nearly doubled in size in the mid-1900s and has maintained steady growth since that time while still maintaining its southern small-town charm (United States Census Bureau, 2020). Many of the families who live in the area have lived here for generations. New manufacturing facilities for building automobiles and a processing plant for chickens, as well as a United States military base that hosts training for military personnel from allied nations around the world, however, have contributed to the population increasing over the past few decades. Currently, the population sits at roughly 37.7 thousand, 74.3% of which identify as White (Non-Hispanic), making it the largest inhabited community within the county it is located. This area is also highly religious. The 2010 Religious Census detailed 106 religious congregations located in the county with a little over 37,000 people identifying as religious.

While I had enjoyed the teaching position I previously held, I was excited for this new endeavor. I believed the eighth grade World History curriculum, which covers a breadth of content from Prehistory through the Middles Ages, would be the perfect setting to foster global citizenship by teaching about the diverse civilizations and religions that helped form our modern world. I sought to instill my appreciation for cultures and religions in my students. However, as my first year of teaching this course progressed, I found I was unprepared for the suspicion exhibited by both parents and

students toward learning about the different religions of the world apart from Christianity.

My first encounter with a parent who was concerned with education about world religions came after I had assigned an in-class group project in accordance with the State Course of Study Standard 8.3, which states "compare the development of early world religions and philosophies and their key tenets" (*2010 Course of Study Social Studies*, p. 52). The project required learners to create a poster with the basic tenets of a particular religion to present to their classmates. Students chose their own groups but blindly selected a religion that their group would research from a bucket. That night, I received an email from a parent who refused to let their child learn about or work on any assignment dealing with a religion other than their personal Christian faith. That student was withdrawn from our school within the week and sent to a private Christian school. Year after year, I constantly reworked the units of study for various religions including Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, to diffuse accusations that I was trying to convert students to follow those faiths. Without fail, every year I received additional messages from parents not wanting their child to learn about or complete assignments pertaining to various world religions. Students have also refused to do work pertaining to religions other than their own as well as openly made derogatory comments of other faiths and their followers.

Through my doctoral studies, I studied how social studies instruction at all academic levels should be oriented to prepare students as citizens of a pluralistic democracy at local, national, and global levels. It should teach learners to be move beyond their own self to appreciate, tolerate, and empathize with people of other

backgrounds, cultures, and religions throughout the world as well as locally as communities become even more diverse. However, during the sixth through eighth grade academic years, students are undergoing many developmental changes that make them unique compared to other K-12 learners (Daniels, 2020). While a variety of factors influence the mindset of learners of all ages, including the environment in which the student lives (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018), the middle level learner is also undergoing cognitive and psychological changes that must be considered by teachers when developing instruction (Daniels, 2020). During this distinctive period of development, students are trying to become more independent but also seeking acceptance from their peer group and non-parent adults (Caskey & Anfara, 2007). As our school is located deep within the Bible Belt, I wondered what cognitive, social, and emotional challenges and barriers the middle level students in my classroom were experiencing when confronted with state-mandated world history standards that required them to learn about several prominent world religions as an essential component of learning about the ancient civilizations in our course.

Research about the study of world religions exists throughout American K12 education (Bakali, 2016; Bellitto, 1996; Brooks, 2019; Davila and Volz, 2017; Gillikin, Hubbard, and Stapleton, 2019; Gravett, 2003; Klepper, 2019). Much of this research, however, is conducted in large, diverse cities as opposed to the suburban Bible Belt of the South. During the 2020-2021 school year, I conducted a pilot study in my classroom inquiring how eighth grade students perceived religious education in the World History classroom as well as if units of traditional instruction changed prior mindsets about world faiths. The data collection focused on student responses to class assignments and in-class

observations during units of study about world religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Shinto, and Sikhism. From the questions posed to learners at the beginning of the academic year, findings showed 80.7% of the students interviewed believed they should learn about world religions as part of their schooling. Of the other 19.3%, several students were ambivalent with their stance on whether instruction about world religions should be part of their World History course, while others felt that as an American citizen, they do not have a responsibility to learn about other religions. Throughout the year, several students made inappropriate or stereotypical comments during the study about religions. Interestingly, most of the student resistance appeared during the unit of instruction about Judaism with a few even refusing to complete class assignments. Most importantly, I learned that traditional units of instruction do not fully engage learners or increase their motivation to learn about world religions unless it was about their personal faith.

This research study was built off that pilot study. With this study, I sought to understand the engagement of middle level students learning about world religions and philosophies through an intervention of authentic pedagogical units of instruction in an eighth grade World History course. This study additionally sought to better understand the cognitive, emotional, and social opportunities and challenges that influenced the engagement of these middle level learners located within a highly Christianized environment, such as the Bible Belt, about world religions and philosophies.

Overview of the Proposed Study

This research study developed out of insider concerns emerging from everyday practice (Manfra, 2017). It sought to contribute to the small body of research focusing on

student engagement when learning about world religions and philosophies. Specifically, I hoped to add understanding to current knowledge of student cognitive, social, and emotional factors that influence middle level learner engagement during units of authentic intellectual instruction about world religions and philosophies.

While there are a variety of approaches and practices for research, this study was designed as an action research study to examine how eighth grade students at a traditional junior high school in America's Bible Belt engage with learning about world religions though authentic pedagogical units of instruction as part of the World History course. Data collection focused on student work and responses to questionnaires as well as in-class observations conducted by me, the teacher-researcher, throughout these units of study. The data was triangulated with school and community demographics, and teacher-researcher reflective journaling. Through the findings of this study, I hoped to gain insights into a particular group of students from a specific school in the Bible Belt of the Deep South with a goal of developing their understanding of the religious other. This study added to the research involving the cognitive, social, and emotional opportunities and challenges middle level students may face when learning about world religions based on their personal culture or prior knowledge. It additionally sought to help teachers understand the need to address these student constructs before new learning takes place.

Research Questions

This action research study focused on three questions:

1. What knowledges about religions and philosophies do students bring to an eighth grade course?

2. How do units of authentic pedagogy in an eighth grade course influence student knowledges about religions?
3. How does authentic pedagogy shape learner engagement in the study about religions and philosophies?

By using student responses to open-ended questionnaires as well as Likert scales, ongoing observation by the teacher-research, and units of both disciplinary inquiry (DI) and disciplined civic inquiry (DCI), an understanding of how eighth grade students at a traditional junior high within the Bible Belt engaged with learning about religious education emerged. The findings hope to add to existing literature about middle level student engagement in a World History classroom during instruction about world religions and philosophies as well as the underlying cognitive, emotional, and social factors that influence engagement. While these results are not generalizable to a broader population, they should provide insights into student learning that could inform teacher education as well as curriculum and lesson development.

Definitions

For this research study, conceptual definitions of frequently used terms are given to provide an understanding of their use in this study.

Action Research, also called practitioner research or teacher research, formalizes teacher inquiry (Manfra, 2009). According to Efron & Ravid (2020), action research is typically defined as "inquiry conducted by practitioners in their own educational settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students' learning" (p. 13). According to Manfra (2009), teacher researchers conduct action research when they "study their classrooms in a systematic and intentional manner and share their knowledge

with the larger educational community" (p. 32). A variety of classroom instructional practices and student learning are possible topics for action research (Johnston, 2006). Action research can be situational as it allows teachers to better understand the complexities of their students and setting (Efron & Ravid, 2020). It can also be practical as teacher researchers may choose to study personal concerns that have that developed out of professional interests (Efron & Ravid, 2020).

Alabama Course of Study (ACOS) - The Alabama Course of Study, shortened to the acronym ACOS, is a statewide standards system established by a team of stakeholders. It details standards for each grade level that are to be taught in all public schools across Alabama. Textbooks are also approved by the state for district selection that align with these standards set forth by the ACOS. The current ACOS Social Studies standards for public schools was adopted by the state in 2010 with content that "focuses on enabling students to become literate, analytical thinkers capable of making informed decisions about the world and its people while also preparing them to participate responsibly in society at local, state, national, and international levels" (*2010 Alabama Course of Study Social Studies*, p. iv).

The eighth grade course of study standards begins with a discussion about this age of learner. It states, "students in the eighth grade can be described as curious and independent learners, discovering who they are and determining their place in the world" (2010 *Alabama Course of Study Social Studies,* p. 51). It additionally acknowledges that these students are beginning to "assert independence from adults and become more reliant on peers" (2010 *Alabama Course of Study Social Studies,* p. 51) while still needing guidance.

For eighth grade, the ACOS includes seventeen standards addressing time from prehistory to the emergence of the Renaissance. Of these seventeen standards, fifteen address religion with many using a religion as an example of what should be taught or using a religious term, person, or event as a substandard to focus on. Standards 8.3 and 8.11 are devoted entirely to the study of religion. ACOS 8.3 requires students to "compare the development of early world religions and philosophies and their key tenets" (2010, p. 52). Examples for this standard include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Greek and Roman gods. As a substandard for 8.3, students are to identify "early cultural contributions of early world religions and philosophies" (2010, p. 52). ACOS standard 8.11 asks students to "describe early Islamic civilizations, including the development of religious, social, and political systems" (2010, p. 54).

Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) – Authentic pedagogy supports student engagement and learning in the classroom (Saye, 2017; Saye, Stoddard, Gerwin, Libresco & Maddox, 2019). Authentic intellectual work (AIW) "requires application of knowledge… to questions and issues within a particular domain" (Scheurman and Newmann, 1998, p. 23). Researchers developed standards to measure AIW students conducted during lessons of authentic pedagogy in classrooms. In the form of rubrics, these standards measure both teaching and learning. According to Saye et al. (2019), the AIW standards:

> "(1) Require the construction of knowledge about important issues, (2) employ rigorous inquiry that emphasizes disciplinary concepts and practices, (3) require complex explanation and argumentation and (4) feature student work products with value beyond school." (p. 2)

The AIW rubrics have been "adopted, field tested, and revised in numerous studies internationally" (Kohlmeier, Howell, Saye, McCormick, Shannon, Jones, and Brush, 2020, p. 496)

Bible Belt - The Bible Belt is a term assigned to the Southeast United States based on the belief that it is a distinct region of religious fundamentalism. In this region, conservative Protestantism plays a strong role in society and politics. The current Bible Belt encompasses the entire Southeast from Texas east to the Carolinas and from the Florida panhandle north to Kentucky. The first use of the term Bible Belt was used by American journalist H.L. Mencken in 1925 during his reporting on the Scopes Trial, which brought high school teacher John T. Scopes to trial for teaching evolution in a Tennessee school against state law (Brunn, Webster, and Archer, 2011).

Cultural System – Extensive research has been conducted on how people learn and what affects their learning process. According to the researchers of *How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures* (2018), "learners function within complex developmental, cognitive, physical, social, and cultural systems" (p. 2). A person's cultural system and prior knowledge play a significant role in their active learning. Cultural systems are in place in a person's life from a very young age and are very complex. Culture can deem what is important to learn as people are willing to learn content they are connected to (*How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures*, 2018). Prior knowledge creates biased thinking that can cause learners to disregard new knowledge or lead to the development of negative stereotypes (*How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures*, 2018).

Disciplinary Inquiry (DI) is the subject-specific method of reading and writing (Monte-Sano, 2010). This type of work in the history classroom does not come easy to students as it mirrors the work of professional historians (VanSledright, 2004). However, if incorporated properly, it can increase student interest and historical literacy. For example, DI can ask students to become actively involved in learning history by using historical empathy, which involves "using the perspectives of people in the past to explain their actions" (Barton and Levstik, 2004, p. 208). It may also ask students to contextualize historical sources to show a deeper understanding of the time period being studied.

Disciplined Civic Inquiry (DCI) is systematic and rigorous (Saye, 2017). This type of inquiry requires learners to go beyond just reading and thinking historically (Wineburg, 1991b). DCI promotes student learning through active exploration of authentic problem-based questions with the end goal of learners becoming expert citizens who can investigate and deliberate (Saye, 2017). DCI involves using disciplinary inquiry toward solving ethical questions. Ethical questions differ from those typically asked by a historian. These questions ask, 'what should we do' or 'was this action justified'. When students have the knowledge and tools to participate in disciplined civic inquiry in a history classroom, it puts them at the center of their knowledge construction (Saye, 2017). Authentic intellectual work promotes disciplined civic inquiry as it requires learners to have substantial discipline-specific knowledge (Sheurman and Newmann, 1998).

Engagement for the purposes of this study will be defined as "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their

classes… and each other" (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 38). Axelson and Flick (2011) state there are three forms of student engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) which interrelate and have a role in learning. Some students may show behavioral engagement by outwardly appearing engaged in course content but are cognitively disengaged. Learners may also be invested or cognitively engaged in their course work but display few emotional or behavioral traits associated with engagement. Normally engaged learners may also disengage under certain circumstances (Axelson & Flick, 2011).

Global Citizenship is a mindset for understanding the interconnectedness and dependencies of the world and the people within it brought about by globalization. According to Oxfam, a registered charity in Great Britain, a global citizen is someone who "is aware of and understands the wider world – and their place in it" (Oxfam GB). Nussbaum (2002) argued that the world around us is inescapably international, but Americans dangerously neglect differences "assuming that lives in distant places must be like ours" (p. 296). In discussing the need for better education for global citizenship, or world citizenship, Nussbaum (2002) stated

> "citizens who cultivate their humanity need, further, an ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern." (p. 295)

Additionally, Myers (2010) stated global citizenship "functions primarily as a personally constructed affiliation" (p. 485) and that educators need to be aware of how students' think about their citizenship identity.

Highly Christianized environment, for the purposes of this paper, refers to a geographical location or space that has a high number of Christian followers who also deem religion to be important in one's life. According to the 2014 Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study, the southern region of the United States identifies as 76% Christian (Pew Research Center, 2022). This percentage is higher than any other region within the nation. Additionally, the South has a significantly higher percentage of people, 62%, than the other regions who believe religion is very important in one's life (Pew Research Center, 2022). In Alabama, this idea of religious importance increases to 77% as 86% of the state's population identifies as Christian (Pew Research Center, 2022). In the local community of the school used in this study, the 2010 Religious Census stated that there were 105 Christian congregations with the majority of the population identifying as Evangelical Protestant.

The school in which learners find themselves will ultimately reflect the "goals and values of the larger society in which the school is embedded." (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018, p. 23) Therefore, as the greater community identifies with the Christian faith, the school will echo these beliefs. Additionally, the research completed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2018) reports that in the educational setting, learners may also "embody and express the culture of his [or her] own family and group." (p. 23) Using this knowledge, the community and school used within this study will be considered highly Christianized environments.

Historical Empathy is described as a powerful tool for students seeking to understand history (Foster and Yeager, 1998). According to Barton (1996),

> "students must move beyond their own perspective as members of twentieth century Western culture. Making sense of the past requires a recognition of how people at the time viewed their circumstances, evaluated their options, and made decisions, and this involves understanding how their perceptions were shaped by their values, beliefs, and attitudes." (p. 3)

Students can move past their own perspective by utilizing historical empathy. The definition of historical empathy varies among scholars. The definition developed by Endacott and Sturtz (2014), which will be used for the purposes of this study, states, "historical empathy is the process of students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions" (p. 1). For students, historical empathy requires a combination of intellectual and imaginative skills using knowledge of historical facts, concepts, and interpretations (Yilmaz, 2007). Through historical empathy, learners can better understand the multiple perspectives of the past and its participants. Students are also able to explain the actions of people in the past more effectively (Barton and Levstik, 2004).

Middle Level Learner is used to describe the age group of students who are roughly between the ages of 10 and 14 years or in grades fifth through eighth. Some even consider middle level learners to be ninth graders. In this study, middle level learners are students in eighth grade and roughly between 13 and 14 years of age.

Perceptive Recognition is put forth by Barton and Levstik (2004) as a requirement for meaningful engagement in the history classroom. They align perspective recognition with historical empathy and state it "involves imagining the thoughts and feelings of other people from their own perspectives" (Barton and Levstik, 2004, p. 206).

Students who have truly grasped perspective recognition can "identify difference both within and between groups at any given time in the past as well as to explain why – out of the range of possible beliefs – people held the particular ones that they did" (Barton and Levstik, 2004, p. 216). Perspective recognition also allows students to recognize their own personal perspectives. In addition to being a necessary skill for truly understanding the study of history, Barton and Levstik (2004) argue that perspective recognition may also help prepare students for citizenship in a pluralistic society.

Religion as defined by Yang (2011) for the social-scientific study about religion is a "unified system of beliefs and practices about life and the world relative to the supernatural that unite believers or followers into a social organization or moral community." Religious beliefs are central to many people's lives around the globe and impact both society and politics including America. Additionally, religion is a factor in many of the world's conflicts today (Smock, 2005).

Religious Education (RE) is the teaching about world religions in the academic setting by ensuring a neutral and scholarly viewpoint of religions, not a devotional one (Dever et al., 2001; Moore, 2015).

Religious Literacy as defined by Bishop and Nash (2007) is the "ability to understand the languages, meanings, and beliefs of the world's major and minor religions" (p. 20). In today's global and pluralistic society, religious literacy is necessary for students to understand the role religions play in civic life as well as to have the ability to respect religious others (Rosenblith and Bailey, 2007).

Social Constructivism – The theory of constructivism is about how people learn and the learning process (Liu and Chen, 2010). Social Constructivism contends that the

learner constructs knowledge through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). According to Powell and Kalina (2009), Vygotsky, the father of social constructivism, believed social interaction and culture greatly affected students and their learning. Aligning with Vygotsky's theory, they stated "students have to understand themselves and others around them before they can start learning the curriculum" (Powell and Kalina, 2009, p. 245).

Tolerance is the opposite of prejudiced. Neusner and Chilton (2008) defined religious tolerance as "the capacity to live alongside a different religious tradition from one's own" (p. viii).

World History – A variety of historians have created definitions for World History (Mazlish, 1998). However, Bentley's (1995) definition seems most appropriate, stating "world history represents… a dialogue between the past and the present, in that it seeks to establish a historical context for the integrated and interdependent world of modern times" (p. 1).

In the state of Alabama, the study of World History is divided into a sequence of two courses taught in eighth and ninth grades. In eighth grade, the course covers the widest span beginning with Prehistoric times and concluding in the 1500s C.E. The ACOS book for Social Studies introduces eighth grade world history stating,

> "content standards for this grade incorporate the strands of economics, geography, history, and political science, with an emphasis on the history and geography strands. Course content focuses on the migration of early peoples, the rise of civilizations, the establishment of governments and religions, the growth of economic systems, and ways in which these events shaped Europe, Asia, Africa,

and the Americas. Unique to this course are experiences that provide for the study of how human beings view themselves over time."

Ninth grade continues the study of World History from the Reformation and Renaissance to modern day.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The United States is one of the most religious nations in the Western world (Finkelstein, 2005; Erb, 2007), yet education about world religions in history classrooms throughout America's public schools has always been controversial. Although required as part of the Alabama Course of Study, the teaching about world religions and systems of faith brings to light misconceptions students have as well as instances of resistance. This study explored how students engaged with the study about world religions and philosophies in an eighth grade World History course. This study also investigated the cognitive, social, and emotional factors that influenced the engagement of middle level learners in a highly Christianized environment of America's Bible Belt during these units of instruction. Past and current literature from researchers helped place this study within the framework. To get a better understanding of this area of study, a review of research literature is required. This literature review examines:

- Middle Level Learners
- Review of World History Education
- Discipline Specific Skills for the History Classroom
    - Disciplinary Inquiry
    - Disciplined Civic Inquiry & Authentic Intellectual Work
- Controversy of Religion in Schools
- Religious Education & Religious Literacy
- Study Importance

Middle Level Learners

Middle level learners are in a unique phase of life between childhood and adolescence. Aged between ten and fifteen years, these learners are undergoing puberty which has a profound effect on the cognitive, social, and emotional lives of these learners (Armstrong, 2006). The development of these characteristics is interrelated, each affecting another (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). Many factors influence this development including the learner's cultural system.

During the middle level school years, a student's brain is undergoing significant changes which contribute to how they navigate adolescence (Daniels, 2020). While these neural changes are not visible like the physical changes of their body, it is as intense (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). According to Daniels (2020), "because changes in the brain contribute to increased complexity in the ways that youth navigate adolescence, it is necessary for educators to develop a deep understanding of the way this organ works" (p. 92). Middle level learners are entering the formal operational stage of cognitive development (Armstrong, 2006), which allows them to think more like an adult. Middle level learners are typically now able to think more abstractly, use deductive reasoning skills and metacognition skills, as well as develop logical thoughts. Their brain is extremely malleable since it is constantly in a phase of rewiring. It creates or strengthens neural connections from learning new skills or academic content and continuously eliminates connections that are not frequently used (Daniels, 2020). It is during this time that brain growth also drastically decreases. When learners have reached the end of puberty, their brain no longer continues to grow, and students become able to handle increased thought processes such as arguing a position or analyzing and synthesizing data (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). Not all learners reach this theoretical finish line at the same

time which is why some students of this age seem to easily navigate school while others struggle.

According to Blakemore (2018), the social and emotional brain is also undergoing significant transformations during the second decade of life as young adolescents begin to develop a sense of self identity and affiliate with their peer group. The frontal cortex of middle level learners' brains has yet to fully develop, which allows the amygdala, the brain's emotional center, to take control particularly during stressful times (Daniels, 2020). Therefore, a young adolescent's social and emotional maturity typically does not occur as quickly as their physical and cognitive developments (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). The emotional processing young adolescents experience affects their behavior, thought, and learning processes (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). While middle level learners desire to be independent, sometimes acting rebellious towards adults, they also want to be accepted by them. Peer acceptance is also a major factor in the actions of young adolescents which can lead to feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness.

Also significant during social and emotional brain development, is the formation of the attitudes and values that students will carry with them into adulthood. Students bring an individual "cultural meaning system, derived from their out-of-school experiences in homes, neighborhoods, and communities" (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018, p. 139) into the classroom with them. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2018) argue that "culture is a matter not only of what people learn but also how they learn" (p.23). Students are more motivated to learn content and skills in which they are emotionally interested based their personal culture and future goals.

Along with all these cognitive, social, and emotional changes, middle schools and junior high schools typically expect more out of these students. Middle level learners are expected to be more organized and focused in the classroom as well as able to intellectually engage with deeper content. However, it is during these middle years that engagement in school tends to decrease for many learners. The brain intensifies feelings with rewards and pleasure (Daniels, 2020), but middle level classroom instruction includes less play and instead focuses on lecture, textbooks, and testing (Armstrong, 2006). Students begin to doubt their academic ability during this time as content is becoming more demanding. According to Daniels (2020), while educators "cannot make students care about school, they can create contexts that encourage students to engage" (p. 94). In a study completed on student engagement, Marks (2000) found that middle school students were not influenced by prior academic achievement or success.

Furthermore, it is during this time that students also begin to question the value of what they are learning and its applicability to their own lives. Donovan and Bradford (2005) stated that students hold preconceived notions about the ways the world works and if that information is not engaged, learners typically do not retain the new information. Researchers believe learner preconceptions must be addressed in order for students to learn new concepts (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018, Saye, 2017). To reduce learner disengagement, Voltz (1999) argued that "not only should teachers be familiar with the content to be taught, but [teachers] also should be familiar with the learners to whom it is to be taught" (p. 29). Additionally, teachers should provide authentic learning and real-life experiences to promote learner engagement on cognitive, social, and emotional levels.

Review of World History Education

The subject of history is the most common social studies course in the United States (Maddox & Saye, 2017). In 1971, Molteno wrote, "the most common reason offered for the study of history in school is that giving our pupils a knowledge of the past helps them to understand the present" (p. 21). Initially, instruction of history was a way in which educators could strengthen student knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. It was not until after the American Civil War that history developed into its own course of study. This result was an effort to unite students from both the North and South into citizens of one nation through a common history that included escaping religious persecution to the revolution that won them independence from a governing nation who refused their request for parliamentary representation. As children of immigrants began entering America's public schools, educational focus shifted to assimilating the learner's identity as a citizen of the nation by offering a glorified history to urge allegiance to the country's elite (Evans, 2004).

Dissatisfaction of history instruction, which typically included rote memorization of facts given to students through teacher lectures and textbooks, led to reformist groups rising in the late nineteenth century (Evans, 2004). The Ten and the Seven committees were the first to advocate for a reorganization of history instruction in public schools. Both of their reports laid out "a logical and persuasive case for the value of the study of history in schools" (Evans, 2004, p. 14). World history, one of the four history courses established by the reports of these committees, focused on the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome to include their politics, philosophies, and achievements. A later report in 1916, brought forth by scholars including John Dewey and James Harvey Robinson,

called for public junior highs and high schools to condense world history into a single course "combining ancient, medieval, and Oriental civilizations to the end of the 17th century" (Evans, 2004, p. 25) as well as teach a separate course on European History. Dewey additionally wanted classroom instruction including history education to utilize progressive education. Since classroom experiences are only one factor in learning (Hess & McAvoy, 2015), progressive education promotes the life experiences of students as well as their cultural backgrounds to be placed in the curriculum to create active learners (Evans, 2004; Donnelly, 2019).

In 1921, the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) was founded to further organize and promote social studies education, including world history. Alongside the American Historical Association (AHA), the NCSS was concerned with the quality of history curriculum and teaching issues. In 1988, the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) was founded with a goal to standardize history education. The NCHS released standards in 1994, and revised standards in 1996, for history education. The NCSS also released standards in 1994 to help promote curriculum development. These standards were updated in 2010. In 2014, the NCSS released the College, Career, & Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards, also known as the C3 Framework, which consisted of an Inquiry Arc to support disciplinary concepts and practices (C3 Framework, 2019). In 2017, a supplemental document was added to the C3 Framework for religious studies.

The study of world history in America's public schools is encompassed as one area of the study of history within the social studies curriculum required by many states. The world history course of study has evolved over time, changing focus and depth of

content to include major world events. Yet, there is still cause for concern over the world history curriculum. According to Girard and Harris (2013), "despite the name, secondary world history courses in the United States have not consistently focused on global interconnections, multiple perspectives, and inquiry into global issues" (p. 438). Additionally, many states have minimal or vague requirements for the study of history in the curriculum (Wineburg, 2010), which includes world history. Some states require learners to take one or two courses of world history. Alabama, for example, requires public school students to take world history while in eighth and ninth grade, splitting the subject into two courses (2009-2010 Social Studies State Course of Study Committee and Task Force, 2010). Other states do not require the study of world history for graduation purposes. Research has shown that world history courses can promote global perspectives within instruction (Girard & Harris, 2013). By increasing learner perspectives of interconnectedness and dependencies of the world, educators can invoke a global citizen mindset within their learners.

Discipline Specific Skills for the History Classroom

How to teach content in history classes is under constant scrutiny since classroom educators, unlike professional historians, must clarify their purposes and reasons for teaching history (Levisohn, 2010). The study of history is meant to help learners understand the influence of events and people on both the past and future. Historians undertake this cognitive task through inquiry and the construction of narratives that comes from interpreting other narratives. Levisohn (2010) writes "history education, therefore, ought to help students improve their historical interpretations at the same time as it fosters those qualities that make them good interpreters" (p. 1). By teaching students

to think like historians, teachers are providing them with practical skills to make informed decisions as life-long learners, leaders, and citizens (Kelley, 1978; O'Brien & Kohlmeier, 2003; Kohlmeier, 2005; Fallace, 2017).

Many researchers discuss that the instilling of the history discipline-specific skills needs to begin in the middle grades (Waring & Robinson, 2010; Duhaylongsod et al., 2015; Kucan, et al. 2017), while others promote it as early as the elementary grades (Levstik & Barton, 2010), as their academic careers in high school will require them. Conducting instruction in the history classroom that promotes the learning and use of these skills promotes student engagement with the content. This work is difficult, and it is for that reason many teachers believe their students are unable to engage in learning these skills at the elementary and middle school levels (VanSledright, 2004). Duhaylongsod, Snow, Selman, and Donovan (2015) point out that this historical mind-set is not typical of the middle school history student. Students in this age group lack previous exposure (O'Brien & White, 2006). Yet, learners who understand and can use these fundamental skills better understand the content of history. It is for this reason, as well as the Common Core requirement adopted by many states, that middle school learners must be given multiple opportunities to utilize these skills within their history classroom (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008; Duhaylongsod et al., 2015; VanSledright, 2004).

Two groups of experts dispute the point of inquiry-based curriculum and instruction in the history classroom (Saye, 2017). The first faction noted as Disciplinary Inquiry, perceive the proficiency of all disciplinary related practices, such as disciplinary literacy, as a valuable end goal that will continue far beyond students' academic careers.

The second group, Disciplined Civic Inquiry, focuses on inquiry as a way for students to learn what expert citizens do. This second line of thought is more prominent in civics or government courses. However, both have a place in the study of history, including world history courses.

Disciplinary Inquiry

Disciplinary inquiry prompts students to take on the role of the historian. Monte-Sano (2010) simply defines disciplinary literacy as the "subject-specific ways of reading and writing" (p. 540). Hartzler-Miller (2001) states "historical inquiry can be viewed as an instructional approach that brings together new understandings in the discipline of history with recent developments in cognitive research, especially in regard to children's historical thinking" (p. 672). Whichever definition is applied, there are various reasons why middle school students should be undertaking historical inquiry in the classroom (Foster & Padgett, 1999). VanSledright (2004) points out those who do not learn historical skills believe historical sources to be neutral forms of information with no author. History textbooks are one example of this neutral, no author mentality. Due to the enormous amount of people, events, dates, etc., it is hard for them to learn the content of history. Mistry (2017) acknowledges that students find history textbooks tedious let alone understand how these books are created. According to Maddox and Saye (2017), "tasks that require disciplinary inquiry are beneficial in helping students to gain a more accurate understanding of how historical narratives are constructed while also building analytical and reasoning skills." (p. 56)

The tools required of learners to read and write about history are much different than the other disciplines student's encounter in their daily academic schedule, which is

why multiple opportunities to practice are needed. De La Paz, Felton, Monte-Sano, Croninger, Jackson, Deogracias, and Hoffman (2014) provided this to learners when they investigated demands of teaching history and writing through historical augmentation, integrating historical disciplinary literacy including thinking, reading, and writing into their study. Utilizing mixed methods, De La Paz et al. (2014) worked with eighth grade United States History classes, some of which were provided with curriculum intervention while others were used as a comparison group and did not receive special instruction. Over 18 days of instruction that consisted of multiple lessons, each lasting three days, the study classes were provided with instruction to promote disciplinary engagement over an entire academic year. Lessons included scaffolded instruction for historical reading, discussion, and evidence evaluation from multiple sources, before leading into a planning session and ultimately time to write historical argumentative essays. De La Paz et al. (2014) found that all students who received the year-long scaffolded instruction of disciplinary literacy skills benefited and wrote better historical arguments than the learners who did not.

Historical thinking is complex work (VanSledright, 2004). VanSledright (2004) tells us that younger learners typically see history as it is given but can come to understand "stories have authors and that these authors can hold very different perspectives on the same event or incident". It is important that teachers design classroom activities and assessments that mirror the work of historians (VanSledright, 2004). Requiring students to think like a historian and engage in historical thinking, promotes their development of historical literacy and critical analysis (Cowgill, 2015). In their lessons, De La Paz et al. (2014) engaged learners with primary sources during content

instruction to promote historical thinking. Research shows that using primary sources in the history classroom increases student interest and content understanding (Russell & Pellegrino, 2008; Cowgill, 2015). One reason behind this is learners tend to connect better to primary sources than textbooks due to the creation of a connection with another human (Barton, 2005). Primary sources are also more engaging to learners when they are unusual, visual, or provide more depth or interest to a subject (Barton, 2005).

Disciplined Civic Inquiry & Authentic Intellectual Work

Goals for history education must include more than the ability to read or think historically because most students are not going to become expert citizens and academic historical questions lack relevance and authenticity to students (Saye, 2017). Instead, students should encounter questions centered on public issues that are authentic to the historical time period and persist across time (Saye & Brush, 2004). Students must be taught the knowledge and tools to engage in deliberation on authentic questions (Levisohn, 2010; Saye 2017). Additionally, students must be able to convey their understanding in ways that experts would find acceptable (Schuerman & Newmann, 1998). Saye (2017) reports that through inquiry students are placed at the center of constructing new knowledge as they seek their own understandings. Pappas (2007) states learners are actively involved when they are using historical inquiry because "they can interact and feel like they are part of those events" (p. 20). To ensure students are receiving quality instruction to develop inquiry skills, teachers must focus on significant topics in depth and not skim the surface of history's expanse (O'Brien & White, 2006). While this is difficult work (Saye, 2017), researchers have found that this can be done by using Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) in the history classroom.

AIW promotes high order thinking (Saye et al., 2019). This type of instruction involves more than merely passing a test, it requires the application of discipline-specific knowledge (Scheurman & Newmann, 1998). Maddox and Saye (2017) note that AIW "asks students to construct knowledge using discipline inquiry to produce work that has value and impact beyond school" (p. 342). Additionally, utilizing AIW can benefit student's comprehension of how historical narratives are constructed.

Several research studies have been conducted to further understand the benefits of authentic intellectual work. Researchers John W. Saye, Jeremy Stoddard, David M. Gerwin, Andrea S. Libresco, and Lamont E. Maddox (2018) studied sixty-two social studies classrooms across six states to understand the extent authentic pedagogy was present. AIW rubrics were used to score classroom instruction and assessment. Many classrooms featured in the study were performing at low levels of authentic instruction according to the AIW rubrics. The few classrooms that scored high on the rubrics consisted of teachers participating in responsive teaching which allows for deeper student learning and increased learner engagement. They concluded that the number of classrooms utilizing this form of instruction must be expanded for student benefit (Saye et al., 2018). In another study, John W. Saye worked with the Social Studies Inquiry Research Collaborative (SSIRC) to investigate authentic instruction in social studies classrooms. This study found a "consistent pattern of positive relationships" (Saye and SSIRC, 2013, p. 111) between classrooms using authentic pedagogy and learner performance on standardized or state-mandated tests.

This study hopes to build on work completed by Saye and others. Since this research is being conducted by a researcher-teacher, it will provide an interesting

perspective of classroom instruction and engagement when using authentic pedagogy through an insider lens. Additionally, it will be unique due to its focus on units of instruction in a world history classroom about world religions and philosophies.

Religion in Schools

The founding fathers of the United States agreed with John Locke's argument from 1698 about the separation of church and government (Ajani, 2015) and included provisions within the Constitution to keep public spaces neutral. However, America's first public schools included instruction of religion promoting protestant beliefs (Passe & Wilcox, 2009). Over the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, many public schools began to remove religion from the curriculum but continued with daily prayers and bible readings (Haynes, 2019). Today's public schools no longer begin with these practices, but the historical connection between Christianity and the school system is still visible in yearly academic calendars as well as recognition of holidays and celebrations (James, 2015).

During the latter part of the twentieth century, the United States Supreme Court ruled on several significant cases regarding religion in schools declaring various violations of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause. *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), the first of these cases, ruled starting each school day in the state of New York with an official nondenominational prayer a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. In *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963), the court decided that public schools who required student participation in reading verses from the Bible were not only in violation of the Establishment Clause, but also violating the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause. This case made clear the

legal distinction "between teaching religion to convert of promote the practice of (teaching of or for religion), which is prohibited, and the academic study of religion (teaching about religion), which is permitted at all levels of public education" (Torres, 2019, p. 256). The ruling for *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), the Supreme Court established a three-pronged test to determine the constitutionality of a law. It was deemed constitutional if "(1) it has a primarily secular purpose; (2) its principal effect neither aids nor inhibits religion; and (3) government and religion are not excessively entangled" (Religious Liberty: Landmark Supreme Court Cases, n.d.). Later landmark cases that found violation of the constitution and the three-prong test included *Stone v. Graham* (1980), regarding the display of the Ten Commandments in Kentucky public school classrooms, and *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985), where Alabama law allowed for a moment of silence that could be used for voluntary prayer. The Supreme Court's rulings then pushed the remaining references about religion out of state curriculums due to controversy and misinterpretation of the rulings (Dever et al., 2001; Haynes, 2019; Torres, 2019).

In the 1980s, lawsuits against how textbooks represented religions brought various educational groups together, including the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). Since states were already approving textbooks that had content of world religions (Ayers & Reid, 2005), these committees determined a need for the study of world religions in American public schools. Over the late 1980s and the 1990s, guidelines for instruction about religion as well as curriculum were created. In the year 2000, the United States Department of Education sent each of America's public schools a packet of these guidelines (Haynes, 2019). States and districts once again began to

include content standards for the teaching about key world religions, particularly with world history courses. Since that time, new guidelines and standards have been created. The American Academy of Religion (AAR) published a set of guidelines for teaching about religion in 2010 titled *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States*. Four years later, the NCSS released a statement for religious study being an essential part of curriculum and in 2017 added a Religious Studies supplement to their College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework.

Studying about religion is important for citizenship (Jackson, 2009) as well as history education (Passe & Wilcox, 2009). Yet, many schools and educators still fail to address diverse religions during instruction for reasons such as misunderstanding legal verdicts, personal views, and fear of conflict with parents as well as students (Dever et al. 2001; Passe & Wilcox, 2009; Barton & James, 2010; James, 2015). Even though the NCSS academic content guidelines about religions are based on the decisions of the Supreme Court (Moore, 2015), and the fact that many state standards have various course of study standards for world religions, some teachers still believe that providing instruction about these religions is a violation of church and state (Passe & Wilcox, 2009; James, 2015). This thought process may be due to misunderstanding the court rulings. However, in the 8-1 decision of *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963), Justice Tom Clark (1963) wrote the majority opinion which states:

> it might be well said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religions and its relationship to the advancement of civilization…Nothing we have said here indicated that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular

> program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment. (Clark, 1963)

Teachers may also claim it is prohibited in public schools because they are uncomfortable or do not have a fundamental knowledge of religions other than what they may practice (Torres, 2019). There are also educators who do not teach world religions because they see it as their duty to move people towards their Christian faith. These teachers are in direct conflict with democratic education goals as well as the Constitution of the United States (James, 2010) and raise cause for concern. Additionally, parents are often discontented with their children learning about religions in the school setting. Some parents, like teachers, believe it goes against the separation of church and state. Others do not want their children learning about religions other than their own regardless of how the material is taught as they fear indoctrination (Passe & Wilcox, 2009; Barton & James, 2010). These mindsets lead to parents objecting to instruction about religions. Passe and Wilcox (2009) expressed that some of this conflict could be alleviated by schools communicating with guardian and parents that instruction is not teaching what to believe, but instead teaching about the religion. There are students who also sometimes object to the teaching about other religions due to intolerance or their deep belief in the historical narrative of their religion and the world (Barton & James, 2010; Torres, 2019).

While there has been some progress in teaching about world religions, there needs to be more (Smock, 2005). The teaching of various world religions and world views is key for civic education (Gillikin et al., 2019; Torres, 2019) of those living within a pluralistic society. Furthermore, understanding religion is essential for all citizens to comprehend the struggles for civil rights and gender rights throughout America's history

(Erb, 2007). Excluding religious and cultural minorities from scholarly instruction leads to disenfranchisement and promotes a sense of 'other' (Ajani, 2015), which often exacerbates conflicts within society (Smock, 2005).

Religious Education & Literacy

In the 1590s, the word 'religion' was first used in English to refer to the Catholic and Protestant faiths (Chidester, 2009). By the year 2000, there were thirty-three belief systems determined to be a religion including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism (Chidester, 2009). Rosenblith & Bailey (2007) tell us that "students, as participants in a democracy as well as members of a global community, must have the skills, tools, and knowledge, to function in a religiously diverse world" (p. 93). As the world's religions are essential to understanding history, literature, governments, and current events (Finkelstein, 2005), this type of learning must be promoted in public schools, which are able to provide space for student interaction with diversity (James, 2010; Davila & Volz, 2017). Therefore, religious education (RE) becomes an integral part of the curriculum. The reasons RE is beneficial for classroom learners are best stated by Panjwani (2005):

> Firstly, by helping pupils develop skills to analyze situations and to engage in open-minded discussions, RE fosters attitudes that are necessary for negotiations in a pluralistic society. Secondly, by exposing students to more than one religion, RE facilitates mutual understanding and promotes respect and tolerance. Thirdly, RE provides opportunities to reflect upon existential questions and limit-situations that concern all human beings and are claimed to be at the foundations of religions. (p. 387)

As it is tied to the standards set forth by the NCSS, RE ensures a scholarly viewpoint of religions, not a devotional one (Dever et al. 2001; Moore, 2015). Bishop and Nash (2007) point out standards "can be a justification and an entry point… to teaching and learning about religion" (p. 29). Students who partake in RE can also better understand themselves as they learn about other religions (Nash & Crabtree, n.d.). Additionally, RE promotes religious literacy, another necessary facet for citizenship.

To be productive democratic citizens, as well as global citizens, students must be religiously literate (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007). Bishop and Nash (2007) define religious literacy as "the ability to understand the languages, meanings, and beliefs of the world's major and minor religions" (p. 20). Rosenblith and Bailey (2007) expand on this definition noting that for a student to truly be religiously literate "they must learn to respect the religious other as well as understand the role of religions in contributing to civic life" (p. 160). Haynes (2019) states "religious literacy is a critical mission for public schools because religious literacy is a critical mission for citizenship in a pluralistic democracy" (p. 7). Without religious literacy, students are likely unable to understand others, the role of religion in civic life (Rosenblith & Baily, 2007), or how religions are historically part of human existence (Bishop & Nash, 2007).

Religious literacy is important because freedom of religion matters (Haynes, 2019). A United States' citizen that traveled beyond its borders, would find two people of other religious beliefs and faiths for every Christian (Erb, 2007). As research shows, Americans are in need of religious literacy (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007). Being religiously literate pushes students beyond being tolerant. A Gallup (2018) report put forth the definition that "tolerant individuals have a 'live-and-let-live attitude toward

people of other faiths, and they generally feel that they treat others of different faiths with respect. However, they are not likely to learn from or about other religions." Religious literacy works to create integrated individuals who "actively seek to know more about and learn from others of different religious traditions" (Gallup, 2018).

Some of us may not realize it, but religion is present in public schools across America from the school calendar to the curriculum themes of elementary schools. James (2015) wrote:

> Jewish students can quickly tell you that school events rarely take account of their holidays, Muslim students can explain that the daily schedule is not built around times for prayer, and atheist students can recite all the many times the devotional references to God are found in supposedly secular schools. (p. xiii)

Out of school experiences, such as cultural background and religious beliefs, are also brought into the classroom which help students formulate meaning of content taught (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Torres, 2019). Students also bring in misinformation about significant topics like religion that can affect their learning.

Researcher Jennifer Hauver James (2010) explored the conflict between the theological certainty of college students majoring in elementary education and democratic participation while enrolled in a social studies methods course. Most of her students were White females who identified as Protestant Christian. James (2010) looked through a psychological and social cognition lens to understand what she termed "defense behavior" (p. 631). James (2010) argued that it was feelings of insecurity in their faith that caused this behavior. She stated, "this insecurity, coupled with the risks students associate with doubt (being ostracized from their religious community, for instance),

make consideration of opposing views a particularly scary business" (James, 2010, p. 632). James (2010) further stated,

> we may, in applying lessons from psychology and social cognition research, be able to create spaces where these students feel more open to deliberation and consideration of opposing viewpoints… We may one day help them come to know that they can be both firm in their religious beliefs and open-minded. But resistance will surely play a role in our classroom interactions throughout this process. (p. 635)

Study Importance

Middle level learners are unique in K-12 education. Daniels (2020) points out that there is a need for research on how the cognitive, emotional, and social factors influence middle level student engagement in classroom experiences. It is additionally important to understand the cultural and contextual diversity of students to understand how they learn (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). Barton and James (2010) argue teachers also need to consider student understanding about world religions as this is important for today's society. According to Jackson (2009), "studies of religion have an important part to play in citizenship education… in relation to the experience of individual students" (p. 19) Plus, "a comprehensive examination of the world's major religions will provide students with specific knowledge and thinking skills that will enhance informed civic participation in issues that are vital to citizenship" (Moore, 2015, p. 234) By participating in engaging work about religions and philosophies, students can examine their own assumptions and reflect on their own identity.

When learners engage with new knowledge, problems, and ideas, they have emotional, social, and cognitive experiences (National Academies of Sciences,

Engineering and Medicine, 2018). By understanding these experiences as well as any cognitive, social, and emotional barriers middle level learners encounter, their learning can be enhanced using authentic instructional strategies (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1995) advocate for authentic instructional practices to engage learners in the history classroom. Marks' (2000) study found that middle level learners did become more engaged in lessons using authentic instructional practices.

This study is important because it worked to bridge together these several areas of research. It sought to add to the body of research that focuses on student engagement when learning about world religions and systems of. It also sought to add understanding to the current knowledge of the cognitive, social, and motional experiences that influence middle level learner engagement during units of authentic intellectual work about world religions and philosophies.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Purpose of Study

This study examined the engagement of middle level students learning about world religions and philosophies through authentic pedagogical units of instruction in an eighth grade World History class. Enhancing student engagement is a task many educators undertake across K-12 education (Marks, 2000). The middle school years are a significant period in the learner's academics because research shows many students begin to disengage from learning in school at this stage (Turner, Christensen, Kackar-Cam, Trucano, & Fulmer, 2014). A pilot study conducted during the 2020-2021 school year in my eighth grade World History classroom showed that students are typically only engaged in the study about their personal faith or system of belief during traditional instruction. Other students still disconnected entirely during the unit of traditional instruction about their personal religion due to predetermined concepts about what was being taught. By implementing an intervention with three units of disciplinary inquiry (DI) and three disciplined civic inquiry (DCI) units during the 2021-2022 school year about world philosophies and religions, I hoped to learn if student engagement could be increased in an eighth grade World History course. Overall, I additionally hoped to better understand the cognitive, social, and emotional experiences the middle level students in my classroom had in an eighth grade World History classroom during instruction about world religions and philosophies through this study. Research suggests that these concepts create both positive and negative learning environments for middle level learners (Daniels, 2020).

Design of Study

This research project was designed as an action research study that explored the engagement of eighth grade students in learning about world religions and philosophies through authentic pedagogical units of instruction in an eighth grade World History class. McCutcheon and Jung (1990) define action research as "inquiry teachers undertake to improve their own practice" (p. 144). Efron & Ravid (2020) expanded on this definition writing action research is defined as "an inquiry conducted by practitioners in their own educational settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students' learning" (p. 13). While action research can be implemented in a variety of forms, it is distinct in that it is constructivist, situational, and practical (Efron & Ravid, 2020). This research used descriptive statistics, combining quantitative and qualitative data, in order to develop a more complete understanding of the phenomenon (Guetterman and Fetters, 2018).

Action research allows teachers to intentionally study their personal classrooms in a methodical manner and share the knowledge they have learned with the greater educational community (Manfra, 2009). Researcher John Dewey was among the first to encourage educators to take on the role of examining their practice as a reflective practitioner (Efron & Ravid, 2020). In the 1970s and 1980s, K12 schools and colleges across America saw the restoration of action research (Manfra, 2017). Since then, many teachers have undertaken research to better their practices and benefit instructional experiences.

Several have studied if revising their teaching methods improves student engagement and learning within their classrooms. University professor Sandra L. Gravett

(2003) conducted a study with college-level students enrolled in one term of her religious studies class. On average these students had completed 2.04 classes in that field. After gathering information about her students' ability to define discipline-specific words and religious knowledge, Gravett (2005) saw very few had the fundamental skills to successfully answer her questions. In an effort to increase the skills and cultural awareness of her students, Gravett (2005) began requiring student to submit written summaries of reading assignment along with words they did not understand defined that were then peer reviewed. Over the term, the quality of the summaries became more in depth. She discovered that students needed to make memorable connections with material (Gravett, 2003). Gravett (2003) wrote "the content of a course only comes alive if it means something to a student, and retention beyond the span of a class depends on establishing this connection to their lives" (p. 201).

Dr. Jada Kohlmeier (2005) conducted a study with a purposeful sample of ten of her ninth grade students located at a suburban school in the Midwest. She researched the impact of engaging learners in critically reading and analyzing historical documents to write narrative essays in order to increase their understanding of historical knowledge. Dr. Kohlmeier (2005) implemented an intervention of having students play the role of historian in her world history class. Students completed reading webs, Socratic seminars, and historical narratives. They additionally kept journals in which they discussed their thought processes as they completed each of the strategies. In her findings, Dr. Kohlmeier (2005) was able to see changes in her students' appreciation for the history discipline and how historians work to interpret a variety of sources. Her students showed their changed mindset in their classwork as well as discussions. Collectively these studies were able to

see a positive change in learner engagement by incorporating instruction in their classroom relevant to the discipline of the subject as well as the personal lives of students (Gravett, 2005, Kohlmeier, 2005).

By using action research, teachers can better understand how students in their classroom setting learn as well as how motivation to learn occurs (McCutcheon and Jung, 1990). It must be noted, however, that students are as unique as the social and cultural setting of the school they attend. This action research study utilized a sample of students enrolled in my eighth grade World History course during the 2021-2022 school year. These students were selected due to their ability to provide insight into the phenomenon under study and the context of the community within which they live as well as attend school. Therefore, the students in this study were a convenience sample due to their accessibility. They were also considered to be typical of the students that I have taught in years past and will in the future. Since the findings of this study are representative of this small, nonrandom sample, this study is not meant to provide generalizability across all students enrolled in an eighth grade World History course. It is important to remember that while the instruction and tasks were effective in promoting student engagement in this class with these students, they may not be productive in a different situation. I leave it to the reader to determine if the instances described in this study are transferable to their situation (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, while this study was designed to demonstrate the complexity of learner engagement when learning about world religions and philosophies, there were several limitations beyond generalizability.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a descriptive review of the means of data collection and analysis of this action research study. This study focused on three questions:

1. What knowledges about religions and philosophies do students bring to an eighth grade course?
2. How do units of authentic pedagogy in an eighth grade course influence student knowledges about religions?
3. How does authentic pedagogy shape learner engagement in the study about religions and philosophies?

The sources and purposes of data for these research questions is displayed in Table 3.1. The findings are intended to add to existing literature about student engagement through disciplinary inquiry and disciplined civic inquiry as well as the cognitive, social, and emotional challenges and barriers middle level students in an eighth grade World History classroom had or experienced during instruction about world religions and philosophies.

Table 3.1: Sources and Purposes of Data

Research Questions	Data Type	Data Sources
What knowledges about religions and philosophies do students bring to an eighth grade course?	Qualitative	• Student responses to open-ended questionnaires
How do units of authentic pedagogy in an eighth grade course influence student knowledges about religions?	Qualitative and Quantitative	• Ongoing observation field notes made by teacher-researcher • Video and/or audio recordings during units of DI and DCI lessons • Likert Scale questionnaire completed by students before and after lessons • Student work samples • AIW rubric scores (task, instruction, student work)
How does authentic pedagogy shape learner engagement in the study about religions and philosophies?	Qualitative and quantitative	• Ongoing observation field notes made by teacher-researcher • Video and/or audio recordings during units of DI and DCI lessons • Likert Scale questionnaire completed by students • Student work samples • AIW rubric scores (task, instruction, student work)

Community and School Context

The community is in the southeastern United States on the outskirts of a mid-size city and is considered part of America's Bible Belt region, an area of the Southeast labeled so due to its being deeply rooted in Christian practices. The population is roughly 35.7 thousand with the largest ethnic group being White (Non-Hispanic) at 73.4%. In

2018, the foreign-born population was 3.19% with the majority originating from Mexico, Guatemala, and India.

Table 3.2: Data USA Reported 2018 Demographics

	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Members	0.222%	1.7%	18.6%	3.72%	0.014%	73.4%	2.31%

Data from the 2010 U.S. Religious Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study for the county in which the community is located shows many people in the area affiliate as Evangelical Protestant. Data from the 2020 U.S. Religious Census will not be available until late autumn 2022.

Table 3.3: Religious Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study Reported 2010 County Demographics

	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Black Protestant	Catholic	Other	None
Adherents	27,502	4,522	2,291	1,766	856	17,633
Congregations	79	12	13	1	1	-

The mid-size city that makes up this community is considered both a suburb and part of the larger metropolitan area which has two synagogues, two Hindu temples, a Buddhist temple and monastery, one mosque and two Muslim centers, as well as numerous Christian affiliated churches and worship centers. Besides the number of

followers and congregations, Christian doctrine can be seen throughout the school community. Five of the seven city council members mention the church they attend in their biographies on the city's website, while the remaining two do not. Local churches set up tent spaces at the city festival and can sometimes be seen proselytizing on intersection corners. They additionally sponsor local events such as the 5k Color Run, men's softball league and youth dodgeball.

The cultural environment of the school is significant in this study. According to Efron & Ravid (2020), "schools are complex, socially constructed institutions… [and] school experience is varied, shaped by individuals' subjective interpretations, and influenced by their personal, cultural, and historical background" (p. 45). This specific public junior high school incorporates many Christianity-based practices. For example, as with many schools in the United States, the annual academic calendar for the junior high, which is established by its county school board, has breaks scheduled for students during Christian holidays like Christmas and Good Friday (Markowitz and Puchner, 2018). Statues of angels can be seen in the lunchroom during the month of December. Crosses hang in the copier room that is visible to all who visit the school. Teachers and administrators wear shirts with verses from the Bible as well as have scripture hanging in their rooms. Many of these educators join in the school's Fellowship of Christian Students gatherings and participate in a professional capacity with See You at The Pole, a nationwide prayer event that occurs each year on the third Wednesday of September. The administrative team runs a school Instagram page that recognizes Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter but does not mention those of other faiths including those

practiced by students that attend the school. Administrators often initiate prayers or invite local ministers to pray during faculty gatherings.

As of 2019-2020, the school had a total of 1,007 students with 515 of those in eighth grade. Data from the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years has yet to be released. The student body is predominately from middle- to low-income families. Students of Color average 30% of the total population. The school is located close in proximity to a major vehicle manufacturing plant and a United States military establishment that provides training for the international military community, both of which bring several international students to the school each year.

Table 3.4: NCES Reported 2019-2020 School Demographics

	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Students	5	32	277	40	1	631	21

Participants and Setting

Action research is conducted within individual classrooms to illuminate specific issues (Manfra, 2009). As part of the classroom, students as participants are a "natural part of the inquiry setting" (Efron & Ravid, 2020, p. 5). For the purposes of this study, a purposeful sampling of eighth grade students at a traditional junior high school enrolled in my World History classes during the 2021-2022 academic year were be invited to join. These learners were spread across two classes of general education World History and two classes of advanced World History. The placement of the majority of students within

these four classes is computer generated. A small portion of students were placed in the class due to parent requests for the teacher specifically. These eighth grade students represented the middle level age group where disengagement among students become prominent. Additionally, many of the students have also lived in the community, which is largely identified as conservative Christian, their entire lives. The context of this Christian community, as part of their cultural meaning system, has influenced the cognitive and social development of these students. Therefore, these middle level learners were also selected as they represent the interest of this study.

Data collection for quantitative surveys, class recordings during units of instruction, and teacher-researcher observations included all students across the four classes. One class was selected for the video recording of lessons. This class was selected to represent a cross-section of students in all classes. It was also representative of the student population within my classes such as male/female, race, those who openly identify as Christian and those who do not. The selection of this class as a purposeful sample is important as it allows for deeper understanding and insight into the study (Merriam, 1998).

Data Sources

This action research study uses descriptive statistics to create a rich, holistic report of the phenomenon under study. Data collection spanned the 2021-2022 academic year, which included two semesters of instruction. Data was collected in a variety of ways to better understand student engagement and experiences. Since qualitative studies provide insight into how people construct meaning (Patton, 2014), this study was qualitatively driven. Qualitative data collected for this study included observation of

students during DI and DCI units of study as well as their responses to metacognitive writing prompt surveys. This study also employed basic quantitative methods in the form of Likert scale student responses on their perceived engagement as well as the use of pre-developed rubrics measuring authentic intellectual work in instruction and student work. Data collection was gathered according to convergent design meaning qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed side-by-side (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative Data

According to Patton (2014), qualitative inquiry is important for understanding "how humans engage in meaning making – in essence, making sense of the world" (p. 6). It is encouraged for students to share their familial and community values (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Recognition of how their social networks influence their perspective is also important in qualitative data collection (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Therefore, qualitative data will be essential to understand how students in this classroom, located within a highly Evangelical Protestant community, engaged with disciplinary inquiry (DI) and disciplined civic inquiry (DCI) units of instruction about world religions and philosophies. In addition to the ongoing observations and field notes in the classroom, I followed one specific class period in more depth by video recording three DI and three DCI units of instruction throughout the academic year. These recordings allowed me to focus more in depth on student behavior, comments, questions, and dialogue that I otherwise may have missed since I was in the role of instructor during that time. Additionally, the recordings allow me to see any evolution in student engagement over the year. Student work completed during the videoed lessons was also used to further understand the knowledges learners gained during this units of study.

Qualitative data also helped me, as both researcher and teacher, understand my students' preconceived notions about different world religions and philosophies s as well as the cognitive, social, and emotional challenges and barriers my middle level learners experienced and any change of mindset that occurred after units of instruction. Questionnaires that required open-ended responses were assigned to students to gather information about the knowledge they held when entering their eighth grade World History course (see Appendix A). This also helped create an understanding about any prior mindset the student had that included stereotypes or misconceptions about world religions or philosophies. Students were also given the opportunity to write about their personal beliefs and opinions as it pertains to world religions and other philosophies (see Appendix B). The open-ended questionnaires provided to students throughout the academic year were reviewed by Dr. Kohlmeier. Students were also given directions to complete these questionnaires.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative methods were also employed in this study. Quantitative Likert scales (Appendix C) were used to collect data that gaged student opinions about their perceived levels of engagement during both the disciplinary inquiry and disciplined civic inquiry units of instruction. The use of the Likert scale in this study was an exploratory analysis of student perceptions of their personal engagement and motivation with the different units of instruction. The Likert scale survey provided to students was reviewed by Dr. Kohlmeier and my committee. Students were given instructions prior to completing the Likert scale survey each time it was provided.

In order to validate the level of authenticity in the three disciplined civic inquiry lessons, I employed two authentic intellectual work (AIW) rubrics developed by Fred M. Newmann and colleagues that have been used in several national studies designed to measure classroom instruction and student work throughout social science classes (Saye and SSIRC, 2013). The first of these rubrics, AIW Scoring Criteria for Classroom Instruction, was used to verify the level of authentic disciplined civic inquiry instruction through classroom observation and measure higher order thinking skills (HOTS), deep knowledge, substantive conversation, and connectedness to the real world (Appendix D). All categories on this rubric are scored on a scale of 1-5 with five being the highest rating.

The second rubric, the AIW Scoring Criteria for Social Science Tasks (Appendix E) is rated on a scale of 1-4 with four being the highest rating for elaborated communication and three being the highest score for construction of knowledge and connection to students' lives. The rubric of scoring criteria for student work focuses on the cognitive work students complete including analysis, disciplinary concepts, and written communication. The rubric for scoring criteria for student work can be applied to a variety of tasks completed by learners in the social sciences classroom. It scores construction of knowledge, communication, and connection to students' lives, while considering learner grade level. The numerical scores developed using these rubrics provided a method of comparison of engagement during units of authentic pedagogy between learners.

An essential component of action research is to include the points of view of colleagues during data analysis (Manfra, 2017). Accordingly, I worked with Dr.

Kohlmeier on the scoring of lesson plans, videos of my classroom instruction, and samples of student work using the AIW rubrics to verify the level of authentic instruction used during the lesson as well as bring in an alternate viewpoint to my personal interpretations. This collaborative analysis of data with Dr. Kohlmeier was beneficial in this action research study as she has extensively used these rubrics in her own practice and research.

Threats to Data and Efforts to Mitigate

The findings of this specific action research study are specific to the students who were part of my eighth grade World History course during the 2021-2022 school year. To ensure that these results are trustworthy, and possibly transferable, to myself, my students, and others who share an interest in this study, I must be as transparent as possible with the processes as well as strengths and weaknesses of this action research study.

Security & Coercion

Security threats include uncovering participant identity. In an effort to prevent a breach of confidentiality, all participants and any other identifiers will be given pseudonyms. Data was kept on Box, which is a password-protected, duo-secure server endorsed by Auburn University. Hard copy data was kept in a locked file drawer in the teacher-researcher's classroom. The Likert scale surveys (Appendix C) were given using Qualtrics to ensure confidentiality.

To mitigate participants feeling coerced to participate, a fellow faculty member collected all participant consent forms signed by both student and parent. They held these forms from me until final grades were posted at the end of the school year.

Researcher bias/Human as researcher

My interest in completing this study was due to my personal and professional experiences in the classroom as an educator. While it is important educational researchers take a neutral position to prevent their personal biases from influencing the research process (Efron & Ravid, 2020), the traditional role of the teacher shifts in action research (Manfra, 2009). It can become messy as teacher-researchers try to understand questions that relate to teaching particularly because they can contain either or both practical and critical concerns (Manfra, 2009). Additionally, when utilizing action research in the constructivist model, limitations and bias can emerge as the researcher constructs their personal understanding of the data.

As I was the teacher-researcher conducting this action research study within my own classroom, I must be forthright and transparent with the personal biases that led me to undertake this study. My positionality will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. To mitigate potential threats to my interpretations of data, I was detailed in my observation field notes as well as carefully reviewed all student questionnaire responses and work. Additionally, the recorded class lessons provided a lens for me to revisit specific lessons, so I was not relying solely on personal memory in my analysis. I also relied on my faculty advisor, Dr. Jada Kohlmeier, as a critical friend who helped read samples of data analysis to check for misrepresentations, misunderstandings, or themes that I may have missed.

Procedures

I organized the procedures for this study into the Table 3.5 below for the data that was collected throughout the 2021-2022 school year. The schedule includes: 1) Recruit

participants, 2) Begin collection of data and observations, 3) Analyze and write up results.

Table 3.5: Summary of Procedures

Order of Events	Purpose/Information Generated
Student recruitment September 2021	
First student questionnaire/journaling September 2021	• Understand student preconceived notions and prior learning about world religions and philosophies • Understand initial cognitive, social, and emotional challenges and barriers that might be present during student learning • Document any misconceptions or stereotypes in the learner's mindset about world religions and philosophies
Disciplinary Inquiry Unit 1 Document learner experiences with the Hindu Caste System October 2021	• Questionnaires will be given pre- and post-unit of instruction to determine student knowledge • Qualitative themes of student engagement. • Authentic learning of instruction and student work scored with AIW rubrics. • Likert Scale for student engagement • Teacher/researcher observation field notes
Disciplined Civic Inquiry Unit 1 Document learner experiences with Chinese philosophies including Confucianism and Daoism as well as the political thought of Legalism. November 2021	• Questionnaires will be given pre- and post-unit of instruction to determine student knowledge • Qualitative themes of student engagement. • Authentic learning of instruction and student work scored with AIW rubrics. • Likert Scale for student engagement • Teacher/researcher observation field notes
Disciplinary Inquiry Unit 2 Document learner experiences with the	• Questionnaires will be given pre- and post-unit of instruction to determine student knowledge • Qualitative themes of student engagement.

traditional Shinto faith of Japan. December 2021	• Authentic learning of instruction and student work scored with AIW rubrics. • Likert Scale for student engagement • Teacher/researcher observation field notes
Disciplined Civic Inquiry Unit 2 Document learner experiences with Judaism and the Diaspora January - February 2022	• Questionnaires will be given pre- and post-unit of instruction to determine student knowledge • Qualitative themes of student engagement. • Authentic learning of instruction and student work scored with AIW rubrics. • Likert Scale for student engagement • Teacher/researcher observation field notes
Disciplinary Inquiry Unit 3 Document learner experiences with Islam and learning about the features of a Mosque February 2022	• Questionnaires will be given pre- and post-unit of instruction to determine student knowledge • Qualitative themes of student engagement. • Authentic learning of instruction and student work scored with AIW rubrics. • Likert Scale for student engagement • Teacher/researcher observation field notes
Disciplined Civic Inquiry Unit 3 Document learner experiences with the Crusades including perspectives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. April 2022	• Questionnaires will be given pre- and post-unit of instruction to determine student knowledge • Qualitative themes of student engagement. • Authentic learning of instruction and student work scored with AIW rubrics. • Likert Scale for student engagement • Teacher/researcher observation field notes
Last student questionnaire/journaling May 2022	• Understand student learning about world religions and philosophies during their eighth grade World History course • Understand any cognitive, social, and emotional challenges and barriers that might have arisen during student learning • Document any misconceptions or stereotypes that may have changed in the learner mindset about world religions and philosophies
Analyze data/Write-up results	

Summer 2022	

Researcher Positionality

The personal experience and insights of the researcher are an important part of inquiry (Patton, 2014). As the researcher of this study as well as the teacher of the students included in this study, I acknowledge I was immersed in the situation of my research and held a position that could affect my observations and interpretations. Additionally, by researching in the school that I have worked in for many years, I was also familiar with its unique societal and cultural connection to the community in which it is located.

While I worked to remain objective throughout the research process, my analysis of data was informed by my identity as a White middle-class, Christian female who has lived in the Bible Belt for much of my life. Although I no longer regularly attend religious services, I was raised in the church and still identify as Christian. My experiences as a scholar and public-school teacher also informed my analysis. I completed an undergraduate history capstone project about Shinto, the traditional religion of Japan. In more recent years, I undertook graduate coursework on the histories of Christianity and Islam. Both courses enriched my understanding of how each of these religions has evolved into their modern world form. For the past eight years of my teaching career, I taught both general and advanced World History classes at the school featured in this study. Over those years, I have faced a resistance from both parents and students about studying specific world faiths that differ from their personal religion, particularly Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. These experiences motivated me to better

understand how prior learner mindsets about world religions affects student's engagement and motivation to learn about these during the course I teach.

Data Analysis

The action research cycle includes "data collection, analysis, conclusions, and planning for change" (Manfra, 2009, p. 34). Analysis of data is a vital part of the action research process (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The data analysis done by an action researcher is an intentional process that results in reliable findings from which new understandings and conclusions can be made (Efron & Ravid, 2020). For this study, analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data began as soon as data collection started and continued throughout the academic year. Both forms of data were given equal priority due to their significance in contributing to my findings. However, in the next few chapters the findings based on their analysis will be presented separately.

Student responses to open-ended questionnaires began in September and occurred throughout the school year, with the final one assigned in May before end of year exams. To make sense of this data, in vivo codes were used. In vivo codes are developed through inductive analysis and use the exact words of the student participants to look for detailed descriptions that help illuminate the case (Creswell and Poth, 2018). It is important to use in vivo coding to create categories for this study to remain true to the purpose of this research (Merriam, 1998). From my analysis, I developed themes to represent the relationships between the category codes. Analysis of field notes taken throughout the academic year and recorded units of instruction were additionally analyzed using detailed description *in situ*, as I described what I saw or heard within the context of the classroom. From this content analysis, I derived emergent codes using inductive analysis that

ultimately formed into themes. I also used feedback from committee members to ensure data interpretations were clear and relevant.

Scores from the AIW rubrics (Appendix D and Appendix E) allowed for cross-comparison between the DI and DCI lessons. I used the a priori codes provided in the rubrics to examine qualitative data. A priori codes developed from the rubrics included codes such as Higher Order Thinking and Connection to the Real World. These codes were used to examine student work and recordings of classroom instruction. Connections were then made to the in vivo coding that emerged from analysis of student responses. The Likert scale survey (Appendix C) that these students completed about their perceived engagement levels were also compared to the codes developed from the rubrics and teacher researcher field notes. I also looked to see if there are any connections between the a priori codes of each rubric as well as if any emerging codes developed from the DI lessons and DCI instruction.

My primary goal through data analysis was to generate understanding of this specific case and what I learned.

Conclusion

During the 2020-2021 school year, I conducted a pilot study in my classroom. This study focused on understanding how students engage in learning about world religions through traditional instruction since strict social distancing measures were in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A variety of forms of engagement occurred during the course. Some students showed resistance to learning that Jesus of Nazareth, whose teachings are the basis of Christianity, practiced Judaism. Others were more resistant in learning about world religions that were Eastern in origin such as Hinduism. Most

learners appeared engaged during the study about their own personal faith or ones that seemed most familiar to them, predominantly Christianity. My findings from this study led to further questions about how students engage with learning about world religions and philosophies and ultimately led to the research study that is discussed in detail in these chapters.

Through the study discussed here, I hoped to better understand how the highly Christianized environment of the Bible Belt many of my students have been raised in affects their social, emotional, and cognitive abilities when learning about world religions and philosophies. I further desired to know if using disciplined civic inquiry engaged my students in the study about world religions and philosophies better than the modes of disciplinary inquiry instruction I had used in the past.

Chapter Four: Student Knowledges & Authentic Pedagogy

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings related to my first and second research questions: *what knowledges about religions and philosophies do students bring to an eighth grade classroom* and *how do units of authentic pedagogy in an eighth grade course influence student knowledges about religions?* This chapter includes my analysis of questionnaires answered by students at the start of the academic year and before each unit of study. These responses, which aligned with my first research question, are intended to provide insights into the knowledges the students in this particular study brought into my eighth grade classroom about world religions and systems of belief. The prior knowledge students brought in as well as their cultural social constructs helped me as both a teacher and researcher understand what knowledge they are already connected to. These findings show that the majority of learners were most familiar with Christianity. The religion they were second most familiar with was Judaism. Students were least familiar with the Asian religions of Hinduism and Shinto as well as the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. Students were also less familiar with Islam. The knowledge students did hold about these religions and philosophies came from family and friends or their own religious institutions. A small number of students discussed gaining knowledge through popular culture.

This chapter additionally includes discussion of observation and task scores from AIW rubrics for each of the six units taught as well as descriptive accounts by me, the teacher researcher. As discussed in Chapter Three, the scores from AIW rubrics (Appendix D and Appendix E) are based on analysis of components of authentic

intellectual work as seen in the observation of instruction and the learning task. Dr. Kohlmeier and I individually determined observation scores with a recording of classroom instruction during one day of each of the six units taught. Observations included students engaged in the task or instruction that prepared or reflected on the task during three units of disciplinary inquiry (DI) and three units of disciplined civic inquiry (DCI). The AIW rubric of Scoring Criteria for Classroom Instruction (Appendix D) measures higher order thinking (HOTS, deep knowledge, substantive conversation, and connection to the real world. Student work was also individually scored by each of us. The AIW rubric of Scoring Criteria for Social Science Tasks (Appendix E) analyzes the task learners completed by scoring construction of knowledge, elaborated communication, and connection to students' lives. After determining our individual scores, Dr. Kohlmeier and I then conferred and determined a consensus score for each observation of instruction and its corresponding student work. Inter-rater agreement for instruction scores was substantial ($r = 0.76$, $p < .001$) while task was almost perfect ($r = 0.97$, $p < .001$). The scores for each section of the rubrics add for an overall score that ranges between 4-20 on instruction and 3-10 on student work. The consensus and overall scores for Classroom Instruction and Student Work are shown in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.

Table 4.1: Consensus AIW Rubric Scores of Scoring Criteria for Classroom Instruction

	Hinduism	Chinese Philosophies	Shinto	Judaism	Islam	Christianity
Higher Order Thinking	2	4	1	5	3	5
Deep Knowledge	3	4	2	4	2	3
Substantive Conversation	2	4	1	5	2	2
World Connectedness	2	3	2	1	2	1
Overall Observation Score	9/20	15/20	6/20	15/20	9/20	11/20

Table 4.2: Consensus AIW Rubric Scores of Scoring Criteria for Social Science Tasks

	Hinduism	Chinese Philosophies	Shinto	Judaism	Islam	Christianity
Construction of Knowledge	2	3	1	3	2	3
Elaborated Communication	3	4	2	4	2	3
Student Life Connection	1	2	1	2	2	2
Overall Task Score	6/10	9/10	4/10	9/10	6/10	8/10

The purpose of scoring the six lessons was to ascertain to what extent we could compare/contrast the three Disciplinary Inquiry lessons (Hinduism, Shinto, and Islam) with the three Disciplined Civic Inquiry lessons (Chinese Philosophies, Judaism, and Christianity). The three lessons we intended as DI lessons did in fact score lower than the three lessons intended to be DCI. Instruction for the three DCI lessons engaged learners in higher order thinking. Construction of knowledge was also more prominent in the student work for the AIW lessons. The numbers displayed on Table 4.3 display the composite scores out of 30 for each of the lessons.

Table 4.3: Composite AIW Rubric Scores

	Hinduism	Chinese Philosophies	Shinto	Judaism	Islam	Christianity
Composite Score (out of 30)	15	24	10	24	15	19

The accounts discussed here are intended to aid the reader in forming a better understanding of the types of cognitive, emotional, and social challenges middle level learners experienced in their eighth grade course during units of instruction about world religions and systems of beliefs as well as understand the knowledge that they gained.

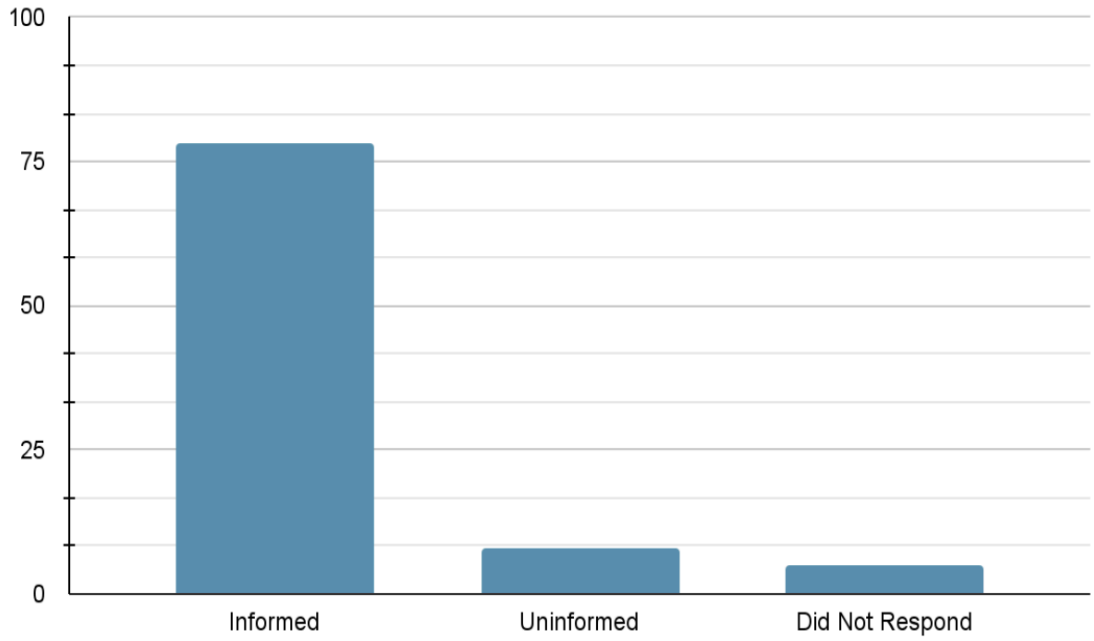
Beginning of Year Survey

Before instruction began on any of the six units about religions and philosophies, students were provided a questionnaire toward the beginning of the year. This survey asked them a variety of questions pertaining to religions instruction. Responses to questions asking their specific knowledge about a religion or system of belief will be discussed in detail in the corresponding units later in this chapter. In order to facilitate instruction about religions and systems of belief throughout the school year, it was important to understand student's personal thoughts about religions instruction, particularly how they defined or described religion. For students to understand how religion is infused in the history of human existence (Bishop & Nash, 2007) as well as how it continues to play a significant role in civic life (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007), they must have an understanding of what religion is. Therefore, this survey specifically asked students "what is religion?" Out of 91 students, 86 responded to this question.

In their responses, I hoped students would pull from prior and personal knowledge to provide a definition of religion in their own words. The majority of

students were able to do so. I divided their responses between two categories, informed and uninformed. As seen on Table 4.4, of the 86 students that responded, 78 students gave informed responses while 8 students provided uninformed responses.

Table 4.4: Student Responses to "What is religion?"



Uninformed responses were either off topic or did not attempt to define religion. Examples of uninformed student responses include "my religion is American" and "I don't think I have one, my mom has never said anything about it." The uninformed responses combined with those who did not respond estimated that 14.3% of the students who answered were unsure of how to define religion.

The informed responses show that 85.7% of students who responded had a general understanding of religion. Informed student responses included words individually and/or collectively that pertain to defining the word religion such as belief,

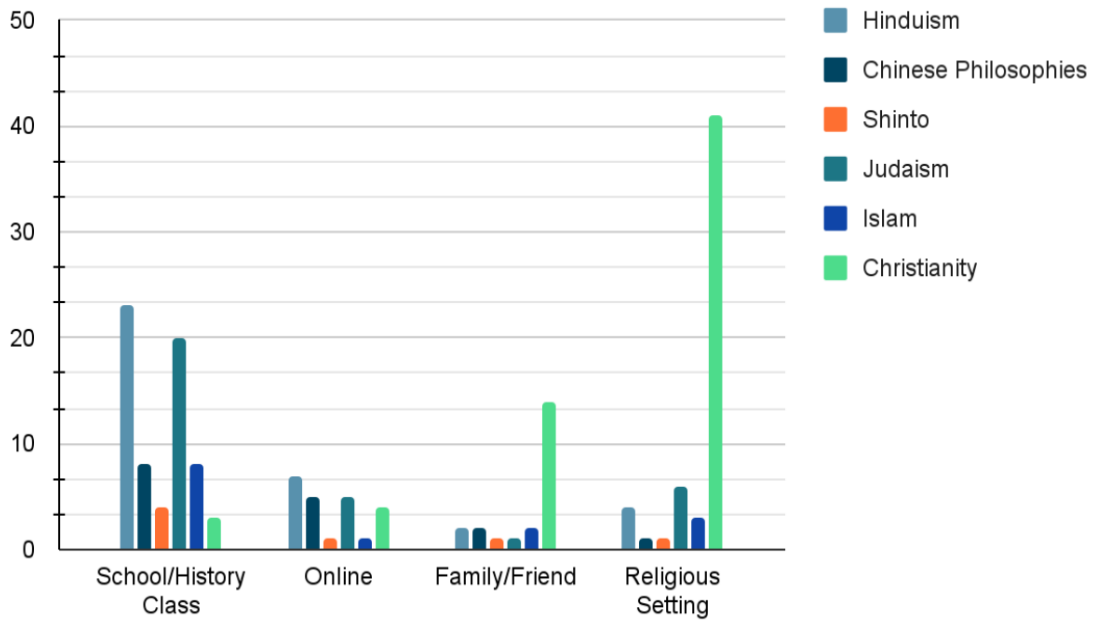
God, deity, higher power, or a particular religion. Examples of informed responses include the words of one student who wrote "religion is something people believe in and think is true like Christianity and Buddhism," as well as another that stated "religion is what things you apply to your life that aren't exactly laws but the things you get from a god or goddess." Some students included both the word belief and a reference to a higher power in their responses. One student made the comment that "religion is a belief of a god or gods that created us or created something." Overall, the responses gathered from this question let me know that the majority of students in the class had prior knowledge of what a religion is by their ability to simply define the term. As a teacher, understanding that most students were already informed was beneficial in further classroom instruction about world religions and systems of belief.

Students were once again asked to define religion at the end of the school year. A total of 95 students responded to the question. Only one response was off topic and another single response was uninformed. The off topic response decided religion was "American." The uninformed response noted "a religion is they have people helping them." The rest of the responses, 97.89%, were informed. Keywords similar to those used in the pre-questionnaire provided at the start of the school year were used in informed responses. The positive increase in informed responses shows that student knowledge of defining and understanding religion is benefitted from instruction about religions.

In addition to understanding student prior knowledge, I felt it was also important that I understood where students had previously learned about the religions and systems of belief that we would discuss in my classroom. Understanding where students had previously learned about a specific religion or system of belief, let me understand how

their family, community, and culture influenced their knowledge. Therefore, one of the questions on the pre-questionnaire for each unit asked students where they had previously learned about this religion or systems of belief. Students' responses consistently fell into four categories: school or history class, online, family or friends, or a religious setting. I considered a religious setting to be church, mission trips, youth group activities and religious small group gatherings. As is shown in Table 4.5 below, students learned the majority of their knowledge about the majority of world religions and philosophies from school while Christianity was most learned in a religious setting.

Table 4.5: Student Responses to "Where have you previously learned about this religion or system of belief?"



School and history class were a popular response for Hinduism, the Chinese philosophies, Shinto, Judaism, and Islam. Access to the internet also developed the

knowledge students had about different world religions and systems of belief before they entered my eighth grade classroom. One student mentioned that they follow a Jewish YouTuber who has shared information about their faith. Three students mentioned YouTube as where they had learned some facts about Hinduism, but they did not say what led them to investigate this religion online.

Family or friends was a popular response after the religious setting for Christianity. Students noted that learning about the world religions and philosophies other than Christianity typically did not come from family and friends. Only one student on each of the surveys for Judaism and Shinto stated they had previously learned about the faith from family or a friend. Two students on each of the surveys for Hinduism, the Chinese philosophies, and Islam noted that they had previously heard about these religions and philosophies from family or a friend. These responses show that while the surrounding area has meeting places for a variety of different faiths, the number of students within our school who practice these faiths is relatively small. Additionally, as observed within the classroom and school as well as overhearing student discussion amongst themselves, many do not interact with peers of other beliefs outside of school and its sponsored extracurricular activities.

The religious setting also provided some students with the opportunity to explore other faiths. When discussing what they had previously learned about Hinduism in a religious setting, one learner expressed judgmental instruction with their statement “my pastor says it is bad.” Others expressed the learning about other beliefs in a more neutral manner. One stated, “I have been on a couple of mission trips and there is one that I have been on 3 times and each time our leader teaches us about all different religions.” Two of

the six students who stated they learned about Judaism in a religious setting mentioned the annual choir tour their Methodist church youth group takes which provided them the opportunity to visit a synagogue. These responses did not further explain what was learned during these presentations or the manner in which those particular faiths were discussed.

The responses learners provided to this question, provided an individualized look at student's prior experience with religions education (RE). Understanding where they previously learned about specific religions and systems of belief allowed me to address preconceptions, which is important for students when they are learning new concepts (Saye, 2017). Additionally, by understanding what my students understood about religion and where they had previously obtained this knowledge, I was able to become more familiar with my students.

Units of Disciplinary Inquiry

Three of the units of instruction about world religions were taught via disciplinary inquiry (DI) which requires reading and writing specific to the academic subject. As defined in Chapter One and discussed in Chapter Two, DI is meant to promote proficiency in disciplinary related practices by asking learners to review sources for a deeper understanding of the historical period being studied. These particular units included individual instruction about Hinduism, Shinto, and Islam, which will be presented below in the order in which they were taught during the school year. The lesson focus question for each unit is listed below respectively:

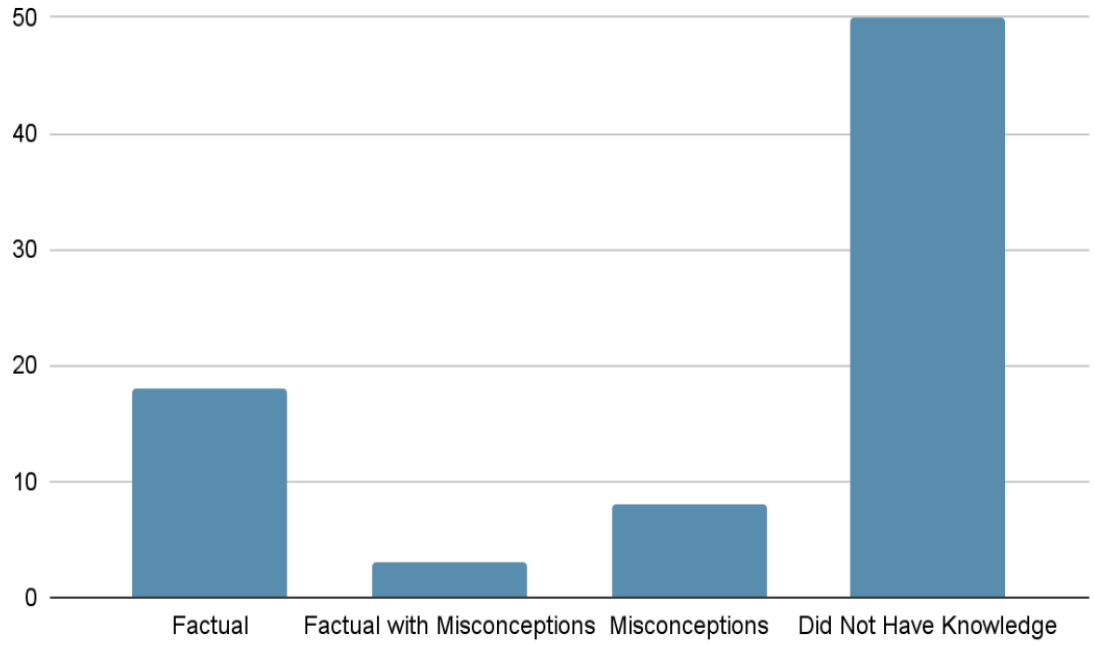
- How did Hinduism arise, evolve, and impact Ancient India?
- How does Shinto shape Japanese culture?

- What can we learn about Islam through its architecture and art?

Hinduism

Instruction about Hinduism was incorporated into a larger unit on India which spanned two weeks during October 2021. This unit was the first unit of the six included in this study to be taught and was one of the three labeled as DI. It included teacher-led lecture from the rise of civilization in the Indus River Valley to the raja dominated medieval period of India as well as a large in-class project. Before beginning the unit, students were provided with a questionnaire that asked their current knowledge about Hinduism. At the time of the pre-questionnaire for Hinduism, positive Covid-19 cases and quarantines for our school were on the rise. This led to fewer students completing this survey. A total of 79 student responses were recorded. As shown in Table 4.5, most students previously learned about Hinduism in school or history class. The responses to the question "what do you know" were divided into four categories. These categories included factual, factual with misconceptions, misconceptions, and did not have knowledge. Types of responses are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Student Responses to "What do you know about Hinduism?"



Of the 79 students who responded to the survey, 18 gave factual responses. Seven of the factual responses simply stated something along the lines of Hinduism being "a religion from India." Other students gave more detailed information about the basic beliefs. One learner wrote "I know that Hinduism is polytheistic in the sense that they worship many gods." Another student stated, "they have a thing called karma." While these responses provided insight into what these middle level learners knew about Hinduism, the knowledge was superficial and did not delve into complex ideas.

Misconceptions were more prominent in student responses on the pre-questionnaire surveys about East Asian religions and systems of belief. On the pre-questionnaire for Hinduism, eight of the 79 students responded with misconceptions, while three gave an answer that included both factual information and misconceptions. Three students associated Hinduism with worshipping Buddha as a deity. For example,

one student wrote “I think they worship the boudha or something.” Another included both factual information and a misconception when they stated, “I think it is an Indian religion and they believe in the god Buda.” One student response that I labeled as a misconception was simple, but powerful. They wrote “my pastor says its bad.” Unfortunately, further context was not given by the student about this comment. While the low number of misconceptions was a positive finding, 50 students stated they did not know anything about Hinduism.

After a few days introducing the early Harrapan and Aryan civilizations of ancient India as well as the early development of Hinduism, students were assigned an individual in-class project based off a PBS Teacher Resource (https://www.pbs.org/thestoryofindia/teachers/lessons/1/). The question guiding this project was “how did Hinduism arise, evolve, and impact Ancient India?” The task asked learners to produce a travel blog as if they were encountering different elements of Hinduism while traveling through India. The creation of the travel blog required learners to read a variety of internet articles and watch videos from pbs.org to gain basic knowledge about the religion such as its most prominent deities and festivals as well as how it has impacted India’s sacred locations, texts, and language. Students worked individually over six days to understand the information and design travel blogs with written interpretations of what they learned. While they worked, YouTube videos showing Hindu temples and scenic views of India played on the Smart Board. This task was scored using the AIW rubric for social science tasks (Appendix E). Consensus rubric scores are shown on Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Hinduism Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Social Science Tasks

	Hinduism
Construction of Knowledge	2
Elaborated Communication	3
Student Life Connection	1
Overall Task Score	6/10

After learners completed their projects, I provided a short lecture with additional information about the religion of Hinduism. This lecture built upon the basic knowledge students learned while completing their project. The lecture was recorded and scored using the AIW rubric for classroom instruction (Appendix D). Consensus rubric scores are shown on Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Hinduism Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Classroom Instruction

	Hinduism
Higher Order Thinking	2
Deep Knowledge	3
Substantive Conversation	2
World Connectedness	2
Overall Observation Score	9/20

The composite score for this lesson tied for the highest scores among the three DI units of instruction, 15/30. It tied for the third highest score across all six units of instruction as shown in Table 4.3.

Students showed the knowledge they gained in their work as well as during instruction. Students were required to complete one of their travel blog slides using the

link about Hinduism but were free to choose four of the remaining thirteen links to read for their remaining slides based on their personal interest. In their travel blog, students explained what they learned about the linked topics and then gave their opinion as if they were experiencing contact with Hinduism in India firsthand. By asking students to do both, my goal was to see their cognitive development through their personal interpretation and analysis of what they read and watched as well as how they socially and emotionally interacted with the knowledge they were learning based on their personal cultural beliefs. One student, who is openly Christian, explained how he learned that Hinduism is the oldest religion and has many sacred texts on the first slide of his project which focused on the religion as a whole. In his analysis toward the bottom of that slide, he noted "they are colorful and that is good," but also stated "they think animals are sacred which is weird." Several students called Hindu beliefs weird in their projects. Others stated that they did not agree with the beliefs of Hinduism based on their personal beliefs. However, most responses discussing their differences were positive, such as this comment written by a female student who is openly Christian, "this is very different than anything I'm used to. I don't believe in their gods which I think makes a huge difference in what they believe and what I believe. Also, what they think is right and what I think is right." These comments led me to understand that students were open to learning about Hinduism although it had very little connection to their personal lives or future goals.

During the video recording of the short class lecture, students were able to contribute what they learned from completing the task as well as ask questions for further clarification. Two learners were able to discuss basic information about the Hindu deity Ganesh that they had learned during their project.

Teacher: “Hindus believe that the Mahabharata was written by Ganesh. Did any of you read about him and if so, what or who was he?

Student A: He is the god with an elephant head and he has a sweet tooth.

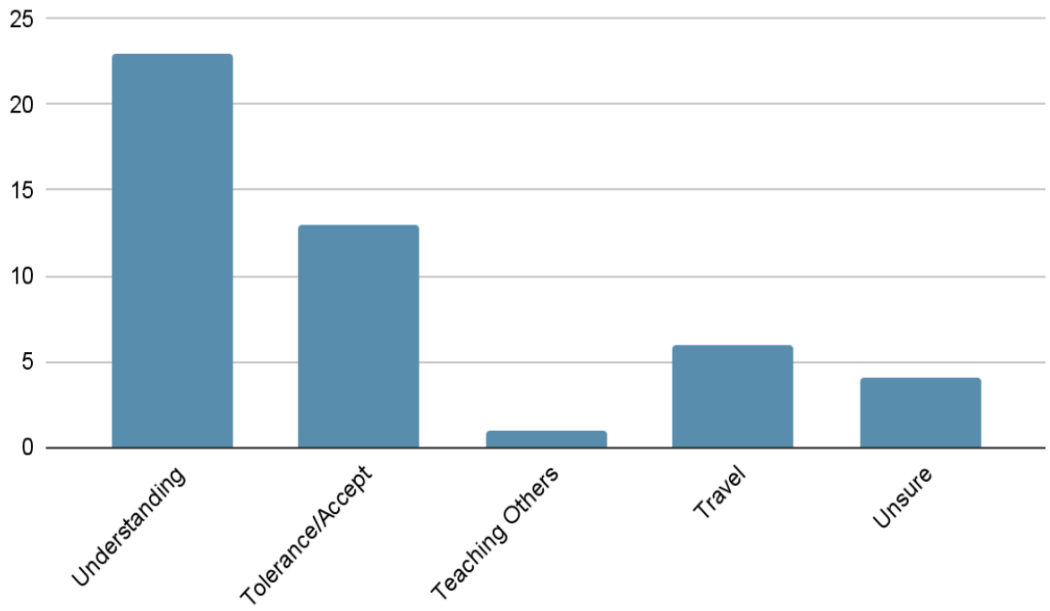
Student B: He’s the god of beginnings.

Student B was also able to add to the conversation that Ganesh was the son of the Hindu deity Shiva. Students, however, were unable to connect Ganesh to the major Hindu holiday of Diwali, to the myth of how he came to be with the head of the white elephant or discuss his overall impact as a deity of the Hindu faith. While the information students discussed did contribute to our overall conversation during the lecture, the knowledge they recited showed students were primarily engaged in lower order thinking (LOT) and only able to contribute fragmented pieces of information instead of a deeper knowledge such as the importance of Ganesh to Hinduism. Additionally, even though we do have a small population of students who practice Hinduism and attend our school, students in my class were unable to convey a worldly value in learning about Hinduism during our lecture and class discussion.

In addition to wanting to understand student learning, I also desired to comprehend how students felt they would use their knowledge. For this reason, on the post questionnaire (Appendix B) that students completed at the end of the unit, I asked “how can you take what you learned about Hinduism and use it to better understand its followers?” From the 44 students who responded to the survey, only four were unsure of how they would use what they learned. The total number of learner responses to the post

questionnaire was low as there was a peak in Covid-19 quarantines. As shown on Table 4.9, a total of 23 students felt they were more understanding of their cultural differences while another thirteen felt what they had learned would make them more tolerant and accepting of Hindus and their beliefs.

Table 4.9: Student Responses to "How can you take what you learned about Hinduism and use it to better understand its followers?"



Six learners noted that they felt their new knowledge would benefit them if they ever traveled to India. Only one student felt they could use what they learned to teach others.

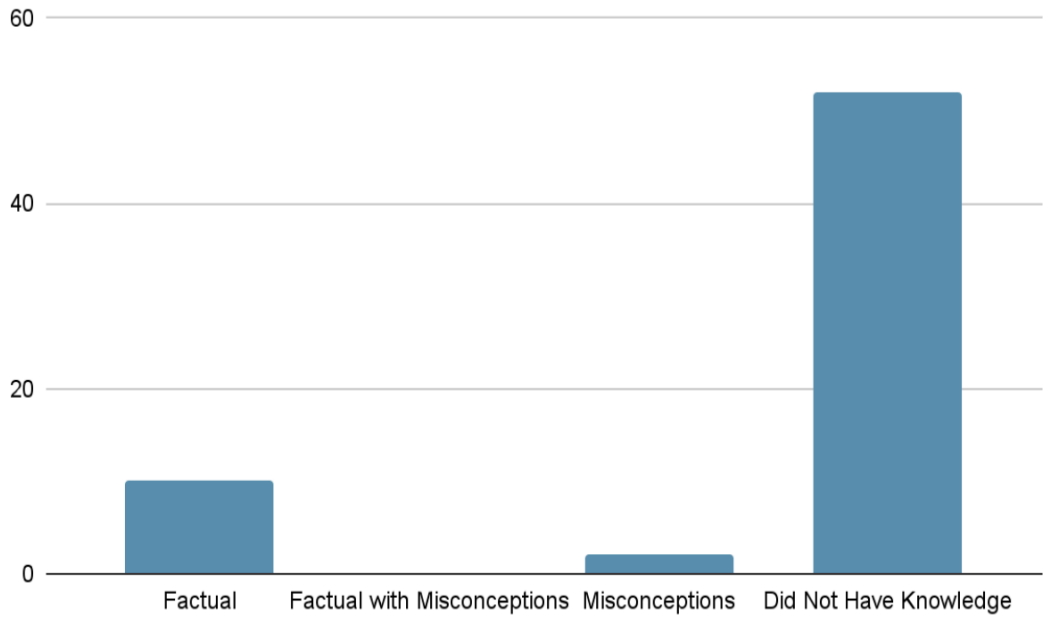
Overall, student discussions in class and in their travel blog projects showed some growth of knowledge that learners did not previously hold based on pre-questionnaire responses. However, the knowledge students displayed basic and fragmented. They were also unable to discuss the evolution or impact of Hinduism in India and the world in great

depth. With this limited gained knowledge, however, 52.27% of learners felt that what they learned during this unit would ensure that they were more understanding of those who practice this faith. This unit also saw more students stating that they would be more tolerant and accepting in the post questionnaire of those who practiced Hinduism based on what they learned than any of the other world religions or systems of belief covered over the year-long course.

Shinto

The DI unit providing information about Japan's traditional religion of Shinto was incorporated into a unit about the ancient and medieval island civilization. The unit spanned six days during the month of December during which time students spent two days learning about Shinto. At the start of the unit, a pre-questionnaire (Appendix B) was given to students that asked a series of questions to help me understand their current knowledge base about the religion of Shinto. Ninety-one students completed the pre-questionnaire. Only 63, however, responded to the question "what do you know about Shino?" Categorized responses for that question can be seen on Table 4.10. The religion of Shinto had the highest number of students, 52, out of all six units of instruction that stated they had no prior knowledge.

Table 4.10: Student Responses to "What do you know about Shinto?"



As shown on Table 4.5, the few students who had heard about the Shinto faith before their eighth grade world history course received this information in school or history class. Of the ten factual responses, nine of the responses were a superficial coverage of basic information. Eight tied the religion to the island nation of Japan while one student simply stated it was a religion. Another learner gave more detailed knowledge in their statement which read, "Shinto is polytheistic and revolves around the kami." Of the 63 students who responded to the question, three gave answers that held misconceptions. This was the lowest number of misconceptions for an East Asian religion or system of belief provided by students in a pre-questionnaire throughout the year. One learner stated that the Shinto faith revolves around "yoga and dances." One

student noted that they thought Shinto was a king, while another said it was the term used for a native from Japan.

At the start of the unit about Japan, students learned about the rise of civilization on the islands and their early development of government and religious beliefs that developed into Shinto. The lessons that covered instruction about Shinto were guided by the question "how does Shinto shape Japanese culture?" During the lessons about Shinto, students listened to a short lecture about the basic beliefs of Shinto, completed a WebQuest activity and went outside to write haiku about nature as well as fold crane origami. Unlike the lecture about Hinduism which occurred after student completion of their assigned task, learners listened to the short lecture about Shinto before beginning their WebQuest. For the WebQuest students used a weblink to answer a variety of questions about the traditional Shinto faith of Japan and how it compares to Buddhism with a partner. The AIW rubric for tasks (Appendix E) was used to score this WebQuest assignment. Consensus scores for this task are shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Shinto Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Social Science Tasks

	Shinto
Construction of Knowledge	1
Elaborated Communication	2
Student Life Connection	1
Overall Task Score	4/10

The day students listened to the short lecture about Shinto and worked with their partner to complete the WebQuest was recorded. This video was scored using the AIW

rubric for instruction (Appendix D). Consensus scores for instruction are shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Shinto Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Classroom Instruction

	Shinto
Higher Order Thinking	1
Deep Knowledge	2
Substantive Conversation	1
World Connectedness	2
Overall Observation Score	6/20

The composite score for this lesson was the lowest score among the DI units of instruction, 10/30. It was also the lowest score across all six units of instruction as shown in Table 4.3.

Very few learners asked or answered questions during the lecture or engaged in discussion at that time. This may be due to the limited factual knowledge students discussed in the pre-questionnaire. Students displayed the knowledge they gained about Shinto in the WebQuest assignment and in the class discussion after they completed the task. Learners were able to talk about some of the basic beliefs including their affirmation of nature.

> Teacher: You can follow the Shinto faith and Buddhist belief together as well as the Shinto and Confucianist. Does anyone remember why Shinto and Buddhist go together?
>
> Student A: They have a similar optimism about human nature.
>
> Teacher: Right. Who performs weddings for the Shinto faith?

Class: Shinto priests!

Student B: Buddhis priests perform funerals.

Teacher: Yes, Buddhist priests perform funerals. And who did they believe in the Buddha as?

Class: Kami

Teacher: Yes, kami. What is something else interesting?

Student C: The things they worshipped and the things in nature that they worship like the certain gods.

Teacher: Yes, everything is about nature… Nature is one of the four?

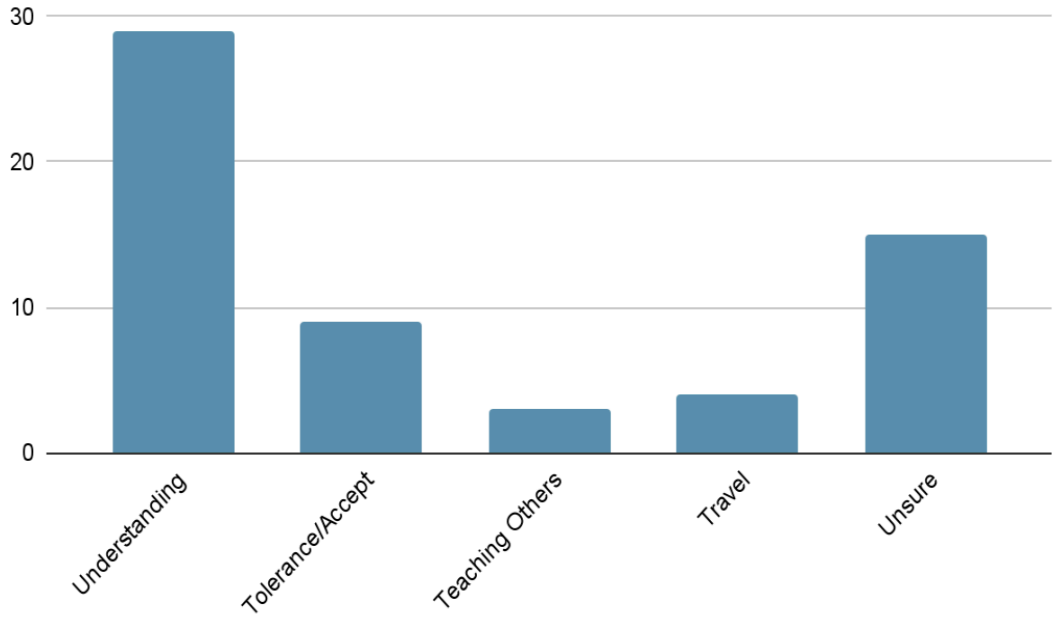
Student D: Affirmations.

The following day students spent time outside writing haikus about nature and folding origami cranes. Although students did basic work similar to that of a historian in this assignment by completing brief research about the Shinto faith through the WebQuest activity, there was no analysis of what they read or evaluation of the source. Additionally, students were primarily engaged in LOT. They had to be prompted by the teacher to further discuss what they had found during their reading about the religion. As shown in the discussion, their responses were basic recall of knowledge using the WebQuest worksheets that they had just reproduced. None of the learners were able to demonstrate a complex understanding of any of the ideas associated with Shinto that the WebQuest covered.

After the unit, student completed a post questionnaire (Appendix B) that allowed them to reflect on their learning process. On the survey, I asked "how can you take what

you learned about Shinto and use it to better understand its followers?" From the 60 students who responded to the survey, 29 felt as though they could take what they learned to better understand followers of the Shinto faith in today's world as shown in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13: Student Responses to "How can you take what you learned about Shinto and use it to better understand its followers?"



Nine learners felt that they now would be more accepting and tolerant of those who practiced the faith. Only four learners felt the knowledge would benefit them in future travels while three felt they could now teach others about Shinto. Of the respondents, fifteen were unsure how they could take what they learned to better understand followers of Shinto.

From this information, I found students had gained a very limited and superficial knowledge about Shinto during this unit of DI. Primarily engaged in lower order

thinking, these middle level learners were able to tie the Shinto faith to nature, one of its affirmations, as well as share some of the faith's similarities with Buddhism after reproducing information in the WebQuest that they completed. They were additionally able to employ basic vocabulary associated with Shinto after their task. While this unit saw the second highest number of students unsure of how they would use the knowledge they gained during this unit, 48.33% of learners felt they would now be more understanding of followers of the Shinto faith.

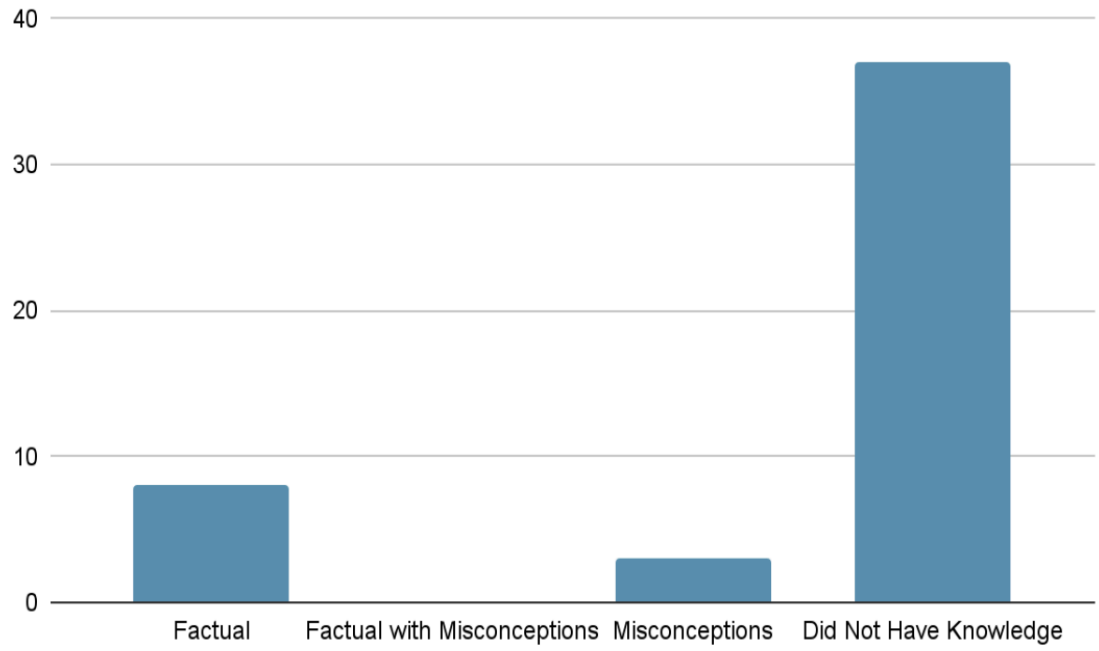
Islam

The third and final unit using DI included instruction about Islam. This unit extended over four days during the month of February including one eLearning day. This unit was shortened as I, the teacher researcher, was quarantined. Students were given a pre-questionnaire (Appendix B) to complete at the start of the unit. At the time of the pre-questionnaire surveys for Islam, a spike in positive Covid-19 cases and quarantines in our school was beginning. Therefore, only 72 responses were collected from this survey about Islam. Of those who responded only 51 students responded to the question "what do you know about Islam?" Thirty-seven of the respondents stated they did not have any knowledge of Islam. One of those wrote "I don't know much about other religions other than my own."

As shown in Table 4.14, only eight students gave factual information. The factual answers were a simple coverage of basic information about Islam. Two students stated they knew female followers of the Islamic religion wear hijabs. One stated, "it's an Abrahamic religion." Another learner wrote "it is split in two." An additional three students gave misconceptions as their answers. Two felt it was much older than it

actually is with one noting Islam was the oldest monotheistic religion. The third misconception pointed at Islam only being an Arabic religion. Three students answered the question stating, "I know a little," but did not state what they knew. Their responses were not included on the chart.

Table 4.14: Student Responses to "What do you know about Islam?"



On the first day of the unit, students completed an analysis of images of architectural features of mosques in small groups with teacher facilitation. This activity, developed by *History Alive!*, was meant to increase student interest in the short unit of instruction about Islam. This task was scored with the AIW rubric for social science tasks (Appendix E). Consensus scores for the task can be seen in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15: Islam Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Social Science Tasks

	Islam
Construction of Knowledge	2
Elaborated Communication	2
Student Life Connection	2
Overall Task Score	6/10

The subsequent days of the unit about Islam included a lecture about the rise and spread of the religion as well as its basic beliefs including the Five Pillars and discussion of Sharia Law. On the eLearning day, students completed a virtual activity about Islam.

Students were recorded on the first day of the unit which is when they completed the image analysis assignment. This video recording was scored using the AIW rubric for classroom instruction (Appendix D). The consensus scores can be seen in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16: Islam Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Classroom Instruction

	Islam
Higher Order Thinking	3
Deep Knowledge	2
Substantive Conversation	2
World Connectedness	2
Overall Observation Score	9/20

The composite score for this lesson tied for the highest scores among the three DI units of instruction, 15/30. It tied with the unit about Hinduism for the third highest score across all six units of instruction as shown in Table 4.3.

This task required students to construct knowledge about Islam through image analysis of a mosque's key features. Learners were guided by the question "what can we

learn about Islam through its art and architecture?" Working in small groups of three, learners discussed their personal thoughts about what was presented to them in the various images. They wrote the ideas they developed with their peers on a printed organizer. When the class came together as a whole group, the small groups were given an opportunity to share the conclusion they developed about the purpose of each of the photographed architectural pieces of the mosque. After the students shared their thoughts, I provided additional information to clarify the purpose of what was shown in each image.

Students were easily able to identify the purpose of the prayer hall. While looking at the image of a minaret, two of the student groups felt the tallness of the tower was a symbol of being closer to God. Two of the groups believed it was used for prayer and worship.

Teacher: What is your group thinking about this?

Group A: Um we think it is a place of prayer and worship.

Group B: I think the building is tall so their prayers can reach the gods.

Group C: We put calling Muslims to pray and the design is to be closer to God.

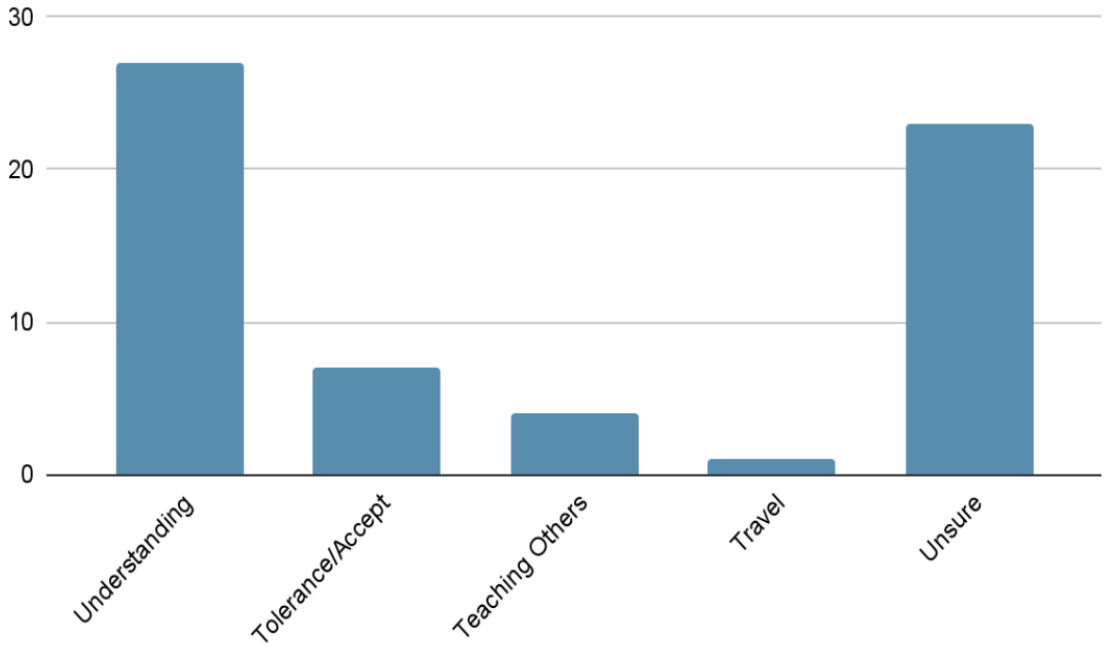
Group D: It's a tower of prayer and worship.

While one group mentioned the call for prayer, none of them mentioned that its height was to allow congregates to see the location of the mosque. The groups had more issues coming to a conclusion on the purpose of the minbar and mihrab based off the images. When discussing the minbar, one student in the recording stated, "maybe it is where the

leader stands and they all form around him and pray." The remaining five groups felt it was just a staircase. The mihrab evoked responses of "I don't know" from the various groups.

After completing the unit of instruction about Islam, students were assigned a post-questionnaire survey (Appendix B). As shown in Table 4.17, from the 62 learners who responded to the post-questionnaire survey, 27 felt as though they could take what they learned to better understand those who practice Islam in the world today. Seven learners felt that they would be more tolerant and accepting of Muslims and their religion. Four felt that they could use the knowledge they learned to teach others about Islam while only one student felt that they would benefit from this knowledge while traveling. Twenty-three students reported feeling unsure about how they would use this knowledge.

Table 4.17: Student Responses to "How can you take what you learned about Islam and use it to better understand its followers?"



This was the last of the three DI units of instruction taught during the academic year. Interestingly, students had less prior knowledge about Islam than the other disciplinary inquiry units of Hinduism and Shinto when they entered their eighth grade classroom. Only eight students or 15.69% of the 51 respondents gave factual information when answering the question "what do you know about Islam" on the pre-questionnaire. The task scored higher on the consensus score for HOT than the other three DI units. Students were able to combine their ideas that they discussed with their groups with facts about Islam by arriving at a conclusion for each image. While the task additionally had students engage in substantial conversation of images from various mosques within their small groups and as a whole class, the composite score tied for the highest rank among the three DI scores. With the knowledge students developed during this unit, the majority

of learners believed they would now be more understanding of those who practice Islam. However, many students were unable to connect the information learned about Islam to the real world outside of the school setting. This unit had the largest number of students, 23, unsure of how they would take what they learned and use it to better understand Muslims in the world today.

Units of Disciplined Civic Inquiry

The remaining three units incorporated disciplined civic inquiry (DCI). DCI, as defined in Chapter One and discussed in Chapter Two, involves disciplinary inquiry skills, but additionally requires investigative and deliberation skills to analyze authentic problem-based questions. Instead of questions focused on what experts in social science would do, questions focus on what expert citizens would do. One of these units engaged students in learning about the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. The final two units centered around the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Christianity respectively. Each lesson, presented below in the order taught during the school year, centered on a lesson focus question:

- Which philosophy is the best plan for a unified China?
- Which location of settlement will ensure the continuity and protection of the Jewish community?
- Who believed their claim to the Holy Land was stronger during the Crusades, Muslims or Christians?

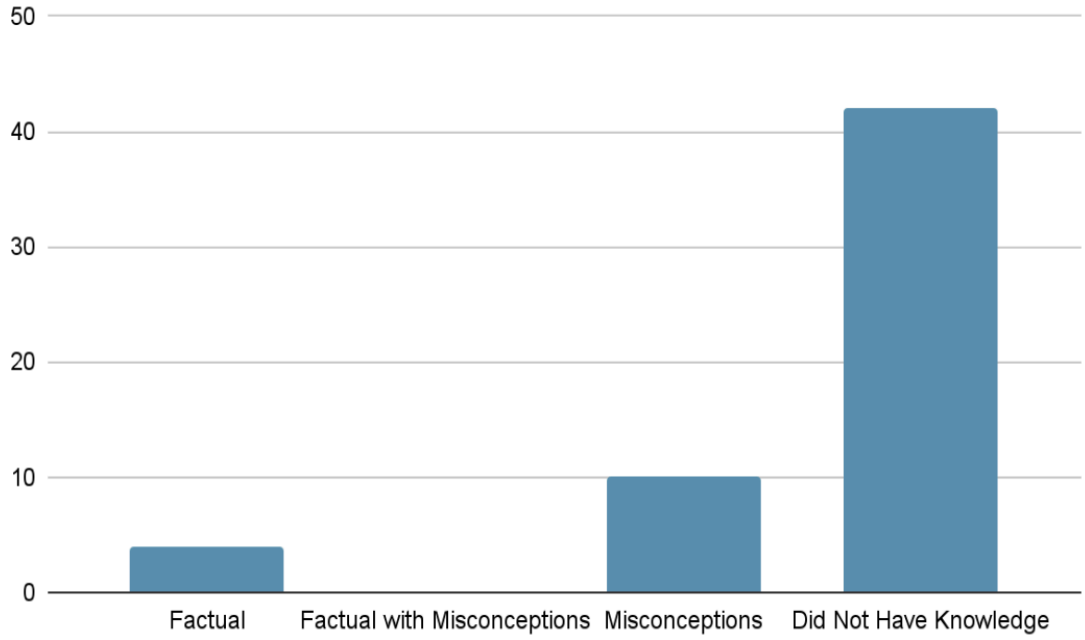
Chinese Philosophies

The first unit of instruction using DCI, spanned fourteen in-person days and one eLearning day during the month of November. It focused on the three systems of belief

from ancient and medieval China: Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. At the beginning of the unit, students were assigned a pre-questionnaire that asked questions to help me better understand their prior knowledge, if any, about these philosophies. As shown on Table 4.5, students who believed that they had previously learned about these three systems of beliefs felt that it was in school or history class. Ninety-one students completed the survey, but only 61 of them responded to the question which asked, "what do you know about Confucianism, Daoism, and/or Legalism?" Five of the responses given by students are not shown on Table 4.18 as they discussed how Covid-19 was from China. I did not include these responses with misconceptions as I was focused on student responses that discussed ideas about religion or a system of belief. However, as shown on Table 4.18, only four students were able to give factual responses. One student wrote about Confucianism and Daoism. He stated, "they are about learning and focusing on yourself." Another learner connected Confucianism to sayings.

Ten students held misconceptions about these systems of belief. Nine felt that they could not be Chinese as modern-day China is communist and therefore does not practice any religion or philosophical thought. One student went on to say if the Chinese did believe in one of these three that "they will get in big trouble." The last student mentioned that these three beliefs use dragons for religious ceremonies. Forty-two students simply stated that they did not know anything about any of these philosophies.

Table 4.18: Student Responses to "What do you know about Confucianism, Daoism, and/or Legalism?"



During this unit of instruction, students learned about the rise of civilization in China and studied its evolution through time until the end of the Ming dynasty. The assignment scored with the AIW rubric for tasks (Appendix E) was a large, in-class group jigsaw project that required students to collaborate to determine which of the three Chinese philosophies the Qin Emperor should use as the basis of his government for a newly unified China in the year 221 BCE. Learners were guided by the question "Which philosophy is the best plan for a unified China?" Students were initially split into expert groups that were each assigned one of the three philosophies to study. After one class period in expert groups, where students analyzed information and completed graphic organizers, learners were then placed in their project groups. One student from each expert group was placed in the newly created project groups, that then debated which of

the three systems of belief would be best based and ultimately created a marketing campaign for that philosophy. This project was assigned after students had received background information about the early Chinese dynasties and the systems of belief via teacher led lecture. Students also completed a hook activity before the project which allowed them to analyze short video clips that represented each of the philosophies and discuss them as a class. Consensus scores of the AIW rubric for task can be seen in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19: Chinese Philosophies Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Social Science Tasks

	Chinese Philosophies
Construction of Knowledge	3
Elaborated Communication	4
Student Life Connection	2
Overall Task Score	9/10

One day of recorded video from this task was scored using the AIW rubric for classroom instruction (Appendix D). The recording showed students in their project groups debating which philosophy their group should propose to the Qin emperor as the best foundation for his government policies. Consensus scores for the AIW rubric for Classroom Instruction can be seen in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20: Chinese Philosophies Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Classroom Instruction

	Chinese Philosophies
Higher Order Thinking	4
Deep Knowledge	4
Substantive Conversation	4
World Connectedness	3
Overall Observation Score	15/20

The composite score for this lesson tied for the highest scores among the three DCI units of instruction, 24/30. It also tied for the highest score across all six units of instruction as shown in Table 4.3.

Students were able to show the knowledge they gained in their expert groups throughout the completion of the assignment and discussions. The graphic organizers learners completed while with their expert groups were used as reference information during the project group debates.

Student A (Daoism): Daoism is going to make the people happy.

Student B (Confucianism): What is your structure? If you don't have a lot of rules, you have to make a strong structure in order to make it work.

Student A (Daoism): We can have a strong army.

Student C (Legalism): How will that help with structure if people are still able to do what they want? Legalism will provide structure.

Student B (Confucianism): Yes, but people deserve grace and you aren't giving them that. We are human and we make mistakes.

Student A (Daoism): Daoism allows mistakes.

Student C (Legalism): But you shouldn't make mistakes.

Student B (Confucianism): But what about the people who accidentally mess up? They don't get grace at all?

Student C (Legalism): How will that help the Qin emperor?

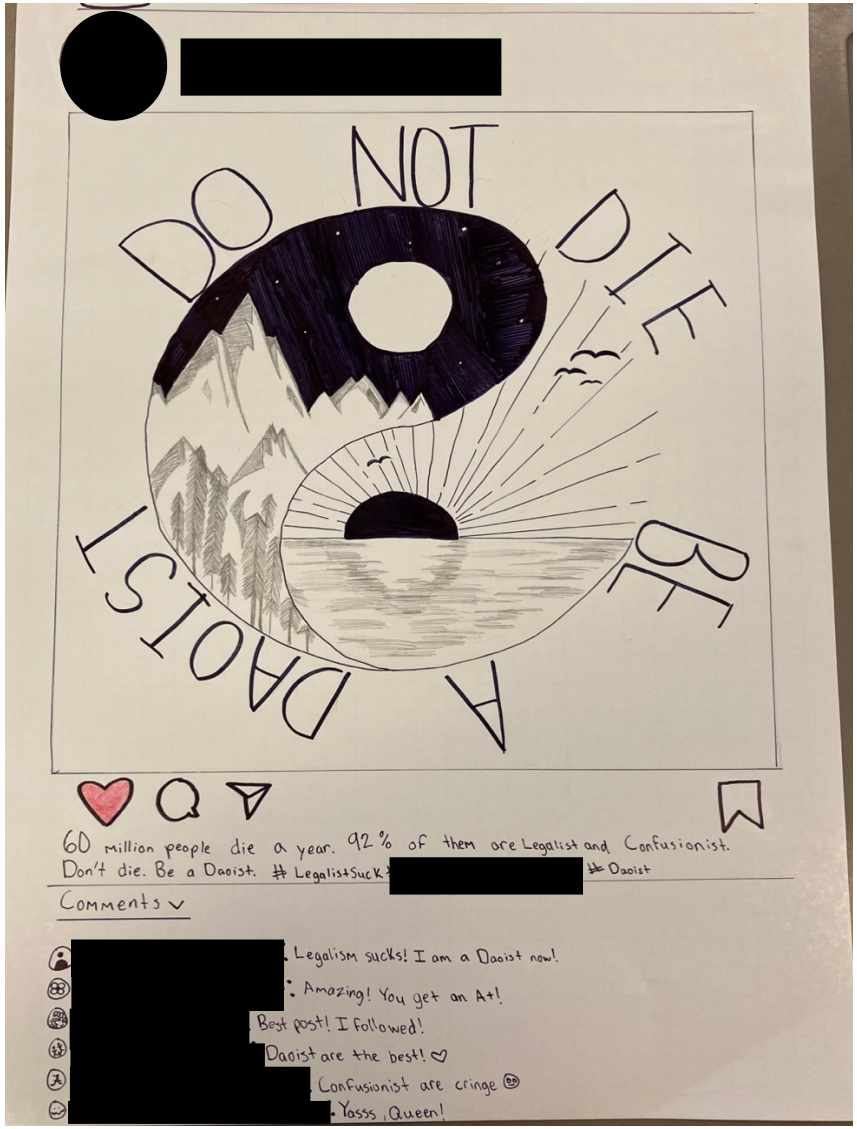
Student B (Confucianism): Nobody is going to like him if they are forced with harsh punishments. Yes, they deserve punishment, but they don't deserve no second chance.

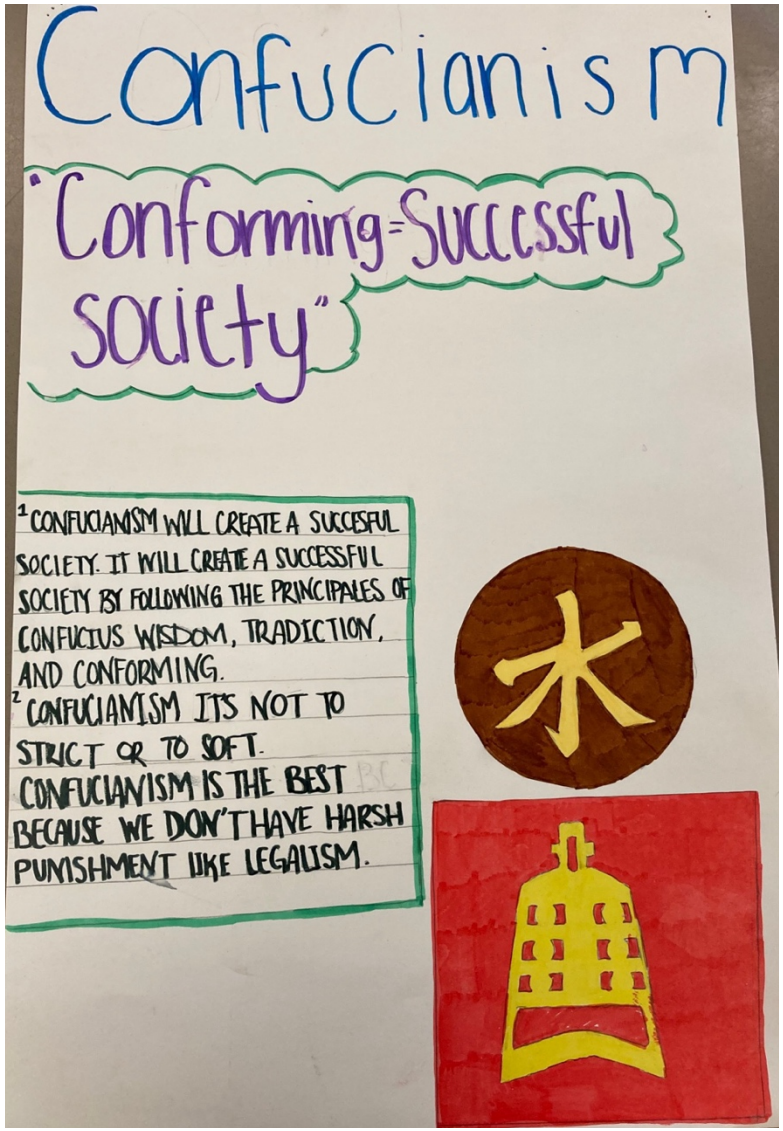
Student A (Daoism): Basically, it would make people mad enough to overthrow the government.

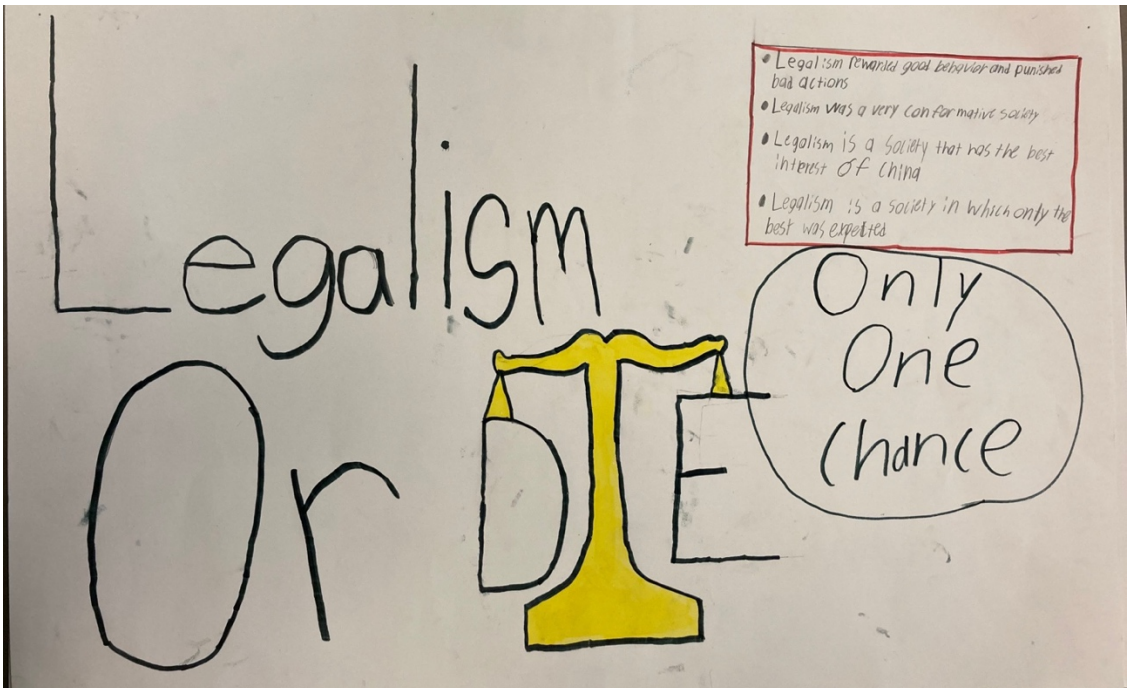
This conversation within a project group represents how these middle level learners were able to briefly discuss the types of thinking associated with the three philosophies. Confucianism as a philosophy establishes social values and ideals for its adherents, particularly respect for elders, loyalty to government, and maintaining one's societal role. Student B who became an expert on Confucianism was against the idea of Daoism due to its lack of structure. Student B also opposed to Legalism due to its extreme strictness as did Confucius in his time. Student C who studied Legalism was against the other two philosophies due to believing that people should not make mistakes. This aligns with the Legalist thought that humans are more likely to do wrong and, when they do, receive punishment. However, Legalism also rewards those who conform to their laws which Student C did not mention. Student A who was in the Daoist expert group tried to explain the philosophy to his group mates as one that would make

everyone happy and allow them to make mistakes. While the majority of the argument incorporated HOT and deep knowledge, their points could have been stronger if they expanded on how the philosophy of Daoism states that people will be happy if they adapt and live in accordance with "the way." The learner also could have incorporated how Daoism believes that people aren't bad, but they do bad things.

Once a system of belief was chosen, the groups worked together to create a poster to market the philosophy to the Qin emperor. The poster included a written argument explaining their choice. Students presented their posters and arguments to the class. Posters included slogans that were meant to creatively convey the basic beliefs of their philosophy. One group who supported Confucianism created the slogan "Confucianism: Conformity = Successful Society." A group that supported Daoism as the choice for the Qin Emperor declared "Do Not Die, Be A Daoist." A slogan in support of Legalism stated, "Legalism Or Die, Only One Chance."


DO NOT DIE BE A DAOIST
60 million people die a year. 92% of them are Legalist and Confusionist.
Don't die. Be a Daoist. #LegalistSuck# [redacted] #Daoist
Comments
[redacted] Legalism sucks! I am a Daoist now!
[redacted] Amazing! You get an A+!
[redacted] Best post! I followed!
[redacted] Daoist are the best!
[redacted] Confusionist are cringe
[redacted] Yasss, Queen!


Confucianism
"Conforming=Successful society"
1 CONFUCIANISM WILL CREATE A SUCCESFUL SOCIETY. IT WILL CREATE A SUCCESSFUL SOCIETY BY FOLLOWING THE PRINCIPALES OF CONFUCIUS WISDOM, TRADICTION, AND CONFORMING.
2 CONFUCIANISM ITS NOT TO STRICT OR TO SOFT. CONFUCIANISM IS THE BEST BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE HARSH PUNISHMENT LIKE LEGALISM.
木



The posters show student learning about each philosophy through the task they completed. The first poster was completed by a group who chose Confucianism for the Qin emperor. This poster was topped with the slogan "Confucianism: Conforming = Successful Society." Their slogan represented a key idea of Confucianism. The pictures they incorporated include the water symbol and a wooden clapper bell, both of which are important to Confucianism. The Chinese character for water symbolizes a life source, harmony, and calmness in the Confucian system of belief. The bell, known as the Li symbol, represents correct behavior for all. They additionally provided two reasons on their poster for why they believe Confucianism is the perfect choice for the Qin emperor. Their reasons encompass Confucian ideals of conforming for success, which is also discussed in the slogan, and the idea that it is not as harsh as Legalism. This group showed a deeper knowledge base about their philosophy by what they included on their

poster as well as that they were able to evaluate which information about Confucianism would be important for its use as the basis of a government.

The group who selected Daoism, the second poster shown, encompassed the idea of harmony with nature through a yin-and-yang symbol. While their image captures a central belief of Daoism, their slogan "Do Not Die Be A Daoist" and the social media post's comment that the majority of people who die are Legalist and Confucianist was propaganda. While the poster showed a social media set up which does connect to the students' lives outside of school, the group was unable to provide persuasive and detailed reasons as to why Daoism would be the best choice for the basis of a national government established by the Qin emperor.

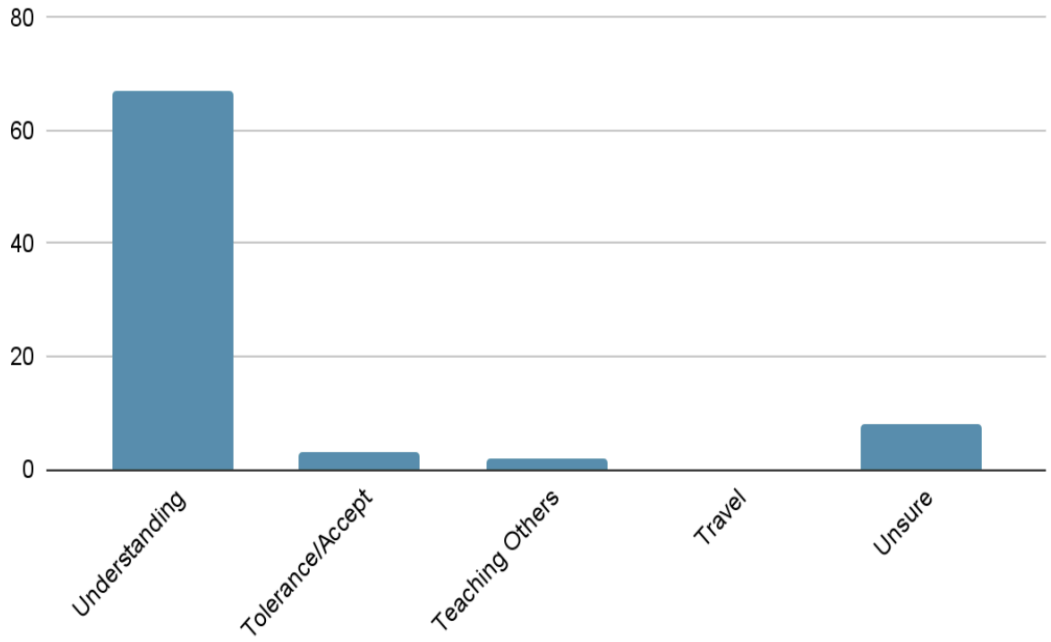
The third poster was able to capture several elements of Legalism as the basis of the Qin emperor's government. In its slogan "Legalism Or Die, Only One Chance," the group conveys that those who do not conform to the choice of Legalism as the basis of the Qin emperor's government will die. While this may seem draconian, it aligns with the Legalist idea that punishments for people who do not conform, or who do not constantly behave appropriately, must be harsh. The poster also gave several points, including one that appeared to be a propaganda point, which offered why this group believed Legalism was the best choice for China. One of its points, pointed out that a Legalist society is one in which people are rewarded for good behavior and punished for bad actions. Like the slogan, this point is in line with Legalist beliefs. This group, like the one that chose Confucianism, seemed to have a deeper knowledge of their philosophy.

Knowledge from this particular unit was also shown throughout the remainder of the school year. Students would refer back to the three philosophies in both class

discussion and peer conversations. Several of these conversations were attempts by students to connect the philosophies to their lives and the world. For example, during the Spring semester, one said that their teacher was Legalist for giving them break detention to which another student replied that they were Confucianist because they gave a consequence for not conforming. The student who was applied Confucianism determined break detention was long the lines of a Confucianist punishment that would be given for non-conformity, instead of a harsh Legalist style punishment. Another student asked if Russia was legalist during a late-February class discussion of reasons why Russia was invading the Ukraine. This inquiry brought us back to discussion of the key tenants of Legalism and how they either did or did not apply to Russia in this instance.

After completing the unit about China and its systems of belief, learners completed a post-questionnaire (Appendix B). Eighty students responded to the question, "how can you take what you learned about the Chinese systems of belief and use it to better understand their followers?" As shown in Table 4.21, 67 of the 80 respondents felt that they were now better able to understand followers of these systems of belief based on what they learned. One learner wrote "now I can look at their point of view and try to understand why they believe it." Another stated "I can tell what kind of person they are personality wise, understand their mindset." Three said they believed they would be more tolerant and accepting of those who believed in these philosophies and another two students felt they could use the knowledge they have gained to teach others. A total of eight students were unsure of how they would use this knowledge. None of the students who responded felt this information would benefit them in future travels.

Table 4.21: Student Responses to "How can you take what you learned about the Chinese systems of belief and use it to better understand their followers?"



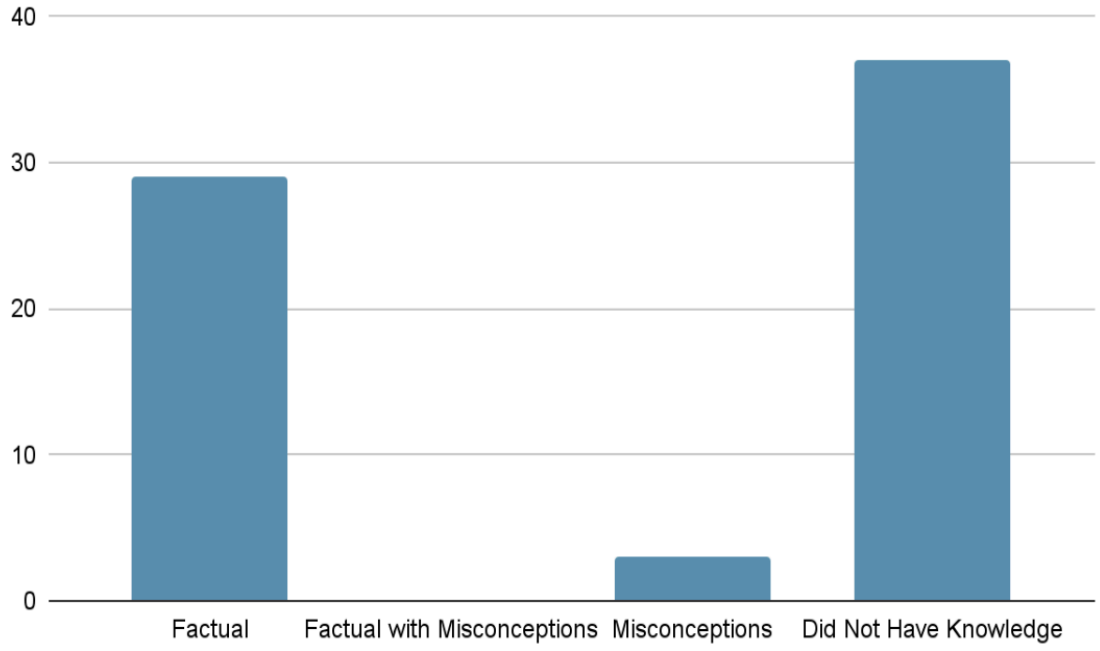
In comparison with the other systems of beliefs and religions discussed over the academic year, students had the least amount of prior knowledge about Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. Ten students stated misconceptions about the philosophies when asked what knowledge they had on the pre-questionnaire. However, after instruction, this DCI unit had the highest number of students out of all six units who felt that they were now more understanding of others. These middle level learners showed the knowledge they learned as they engaged in HOT throughout their discussions and while completing the task. Therefore, the misconceptions students brought in from the cultural meaning systems did not seem to inhibit their learning. Additionally, this particular unit was repeatedly brought into conversations by students during class and with peers throughout

the remainder of the year indicating that students had a deeper understanding of the content of this DCI unit.

Judaism

A unit of instruction about Judaism was taught over ten days from late January to early February. This unit began as soon as we returned to in-person classes from a two-week virtual learning period due to the rise in Covid positive cases at our school. The pre-questionnaire given at the start of the unit had 91 student responses. As shown in Table 4.5, the majority of students who believed they had learned about Judaism previously stated they gained their knowledge in school or history class. Of the 91 respondents to the pre-questionnaire, only 70 learners answered the question "what do you know about Judaism?" One of those learners gave an off topic answer so their response was not included in Table 4.22. This unit saw the second largest number of students, 29, giving factual responses to this question out of all six units. The responses were all basic recall information. Five students connected their responses about Judaism to World War II with one writing "I know that they were persecuted by the Nazis." Four other factual responses connected Judaism to the Christian Bible. The remaining nineteen factual responses connected the belief to monotheism. One student revealed that they knew everything about Judaism because it is their religion. However, they did not include more substantive information with this declaration.

Table 4.22: Student Responses to "What do you know about Judaism?"



Three responses were misconceptions. One commented on the origin of the faith with one stated "it started in ancient China." Another stated that Judaism was similar to Buddhism while the third said "it's like Catholic". Thirty-seven students claimed that they did not know anything about Judaism.

During this unit, students learned about the development and history of Judaism in the ancient and medieval world as well as its basic beliefs. The task of this DCI unit required students to work together in small groups to determine one of three locations for the Jewish community to settle after being released from the Babylonian captivity. Students were guided by the question "Which location of settlement will ensure the continuity and protection of the Jewish community?" Similar to the activity used for the Chinese philosophies from the Auburn PIH Network, this project included a jigsaw activity. Students were placed into expert groups to gain an understanding of one of the

three settlement choices for one class period. They completed graphic organizers to use as references in their project groups using the provided information of documents, images, and maps. Learners were then placed in project groups with at least one student from each expert group to debate where the Jewish community should settle. Students were required to create a marketing poster for their group choice and a written argument supporting their decision. The AIW rubric for social science tasks (Appendix E) was used to score this project. Consensus rubric scores for this assignment are shown on Table 4.23.

Table 4.23: Judaism Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Social Science Tasks

	Judaism
Construction of Knowledge	3
Elaborated Communication	4
Student Life Connection	2
Overall Task Score	9/10

Video that was recorded on the day students deliberated over the location to settle was scored using the AIW rubric for classroom instruction (Appendix D). This recording scored higher on higher order thinking and substantive conversation for classroom instruction than the other six lessons. The consensus scores are shown on Table 4.24.

Table 4.24: Judaism Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Classroom Instruction

	Judaism
Higher Order Thinking	5
Deep Knowledge	4
Substantive Conversation	5
World Connectedness	1
Overall Observation Score	15/20

The composite score for this lesson tied for the highest scores among the three DCI units of instruction, 24/30. It also tied for the highest score across all six units of instruction as shown in Table 4.3.

Students showed their knowledge they gained in their work as well as during group discussions. Learners completed graphic organizers in their expert groups while analyzing the pros and cons of that location for settlement. They then used these sheets for reference information during the debates with their project groups to select a location of settlement for the Jews released from the Babylonian captivity. The discussions held between the project groups required them to have a deep knowledge of the location from the expert group and displayed HOT.

Student A (Elephantine): On our picture yesterday, the island was a big picture and the Nile River was separating us from other areas. And the temple was there! On the island we could see if another was going to attack us and we could get ready and set up because they would have to cross the river. Makes us a step ahead.

Student B (Jerusalem): I would say his is the best military based.

Student C (Babylon): Military yes. He is a solder.

Student A (Elephantine): and we have the best food sources!

Student C (Babylon): We have the fertile crescent.

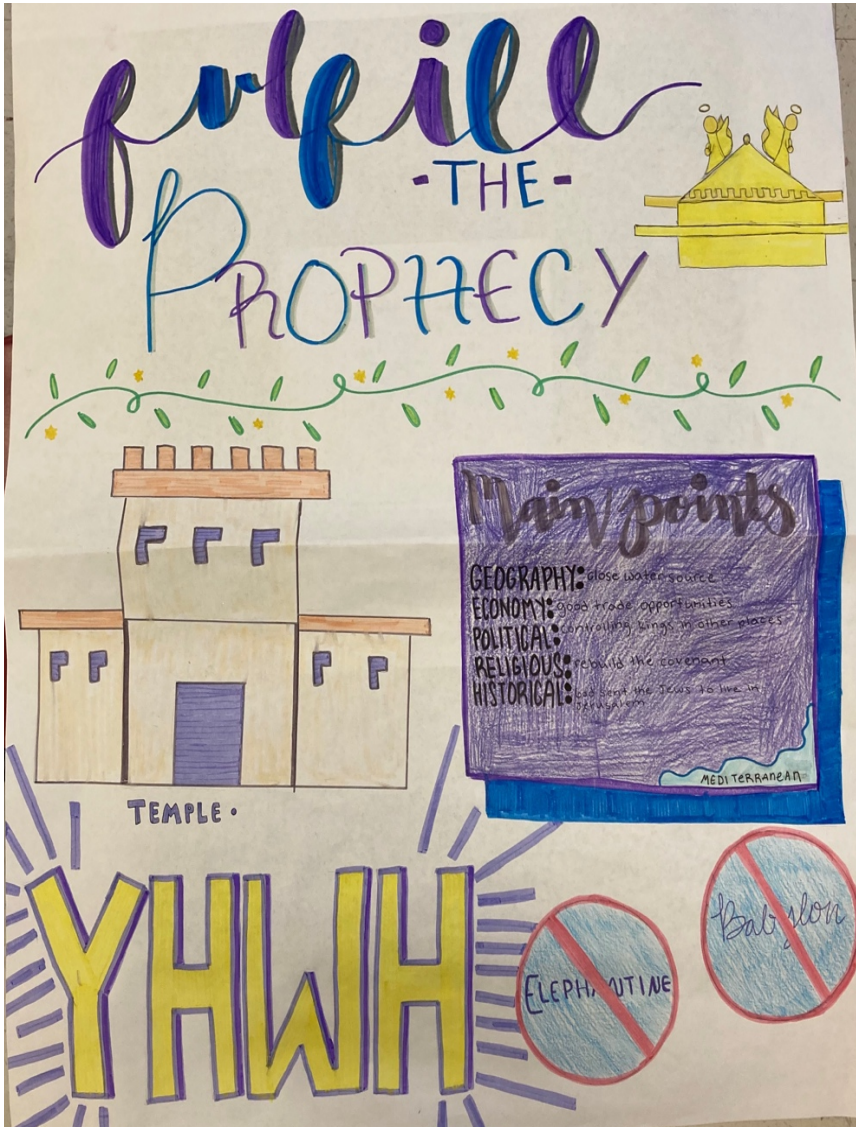
Student B (Jerusalem): We have the best religious source.

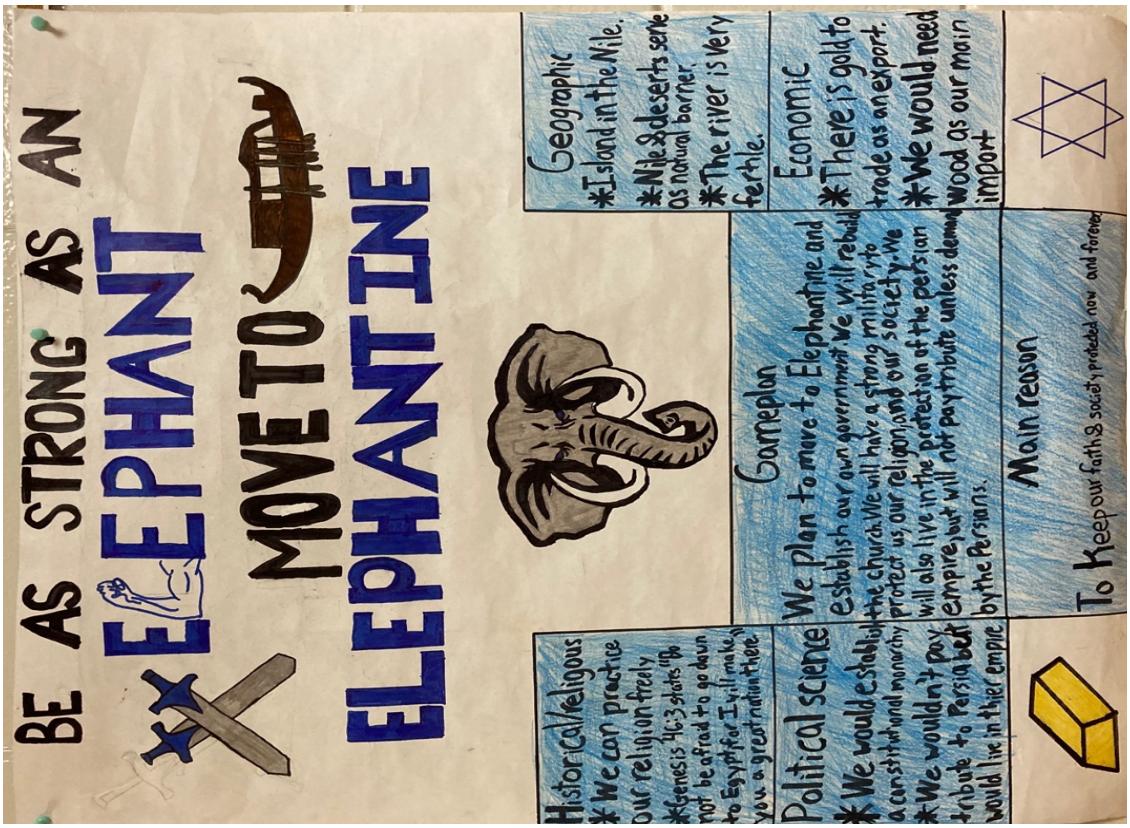
Student A (Elephantine): You can have the best religious source but without food or military you're going to die.

This dialogue shows students were attempting to apply the knowledge learned in their expert groups to the group discussion of where they should settle. The student who was representing Elephantine, an island located in the Nile River which held a small Jewish community and temple at the time when Cyrus the Great released the Jews in 538 BCE, came across as having a deep knowledge of the location. The learner was able had been able to develop a more complex understanding of Elephantine than the other two group mates. The student expressed how Elephantine as an island provided a strategic advantage for protection. Additionally, while not as articulate, the learner also tried to convey that Egypt was an agricultural state with an abundance of food during the time period discussed.

Once a location for settlement was chosen, the groups worked together to create a poster as well as a written argument supporting their choice to present at a townhall style meeting. Posters included slogans that would convey the benefits of the settlement location. For example, a group that selected to return to Jerusalem wrote "Fulfill the Prophecy" in regard to the Biblical statements that they should return to the promised land. Another group that chose Jerusalem made their slogan "Return, Rebuild, Restart." A student group that chose the military fortress on the island of Elephantine located in the Nile River created the slogan "Be as strong as an Elephant! Move to Elephantine!"


Return
Rebuild
Restart
Promised land in Canaan
Rebuild the infrastructure
Jewish homeland
Previous home & prophesied home
Jerusalem


fulfill
-THE-
PROPHECY
Main points
GEOGRAPHY: close water source
ECONOMY: good trade opportunities
POLITICAL: controlling kings in other places
RELIGIOUS: reveals the covenant
HISTORICAL: God sent the Jews to live in Jerusalem
MEDITERRANEAN
TEMPLE
YHWH
Babylon



The posters completed as part of the group project all showed knowledge of the chosen locations. However, some displayed that they had constructed knowledge on a deeper level. The first poster displayed, which selected Jerusalem as the area of settlement for the Jews released from captivity, connected their choice with the prophecy of Canon being the promised land that the Jewish God would rebuild and make prosperous. The second Jerusalem poster also discussed the prophecy. However, the first poster was able to give specific points as to why the location of Jerusalem was better politically and economically showing they had conducted a deeper analysis of the documents. The second poster only focused on the geographic location through its image of the globe and its religious importance.

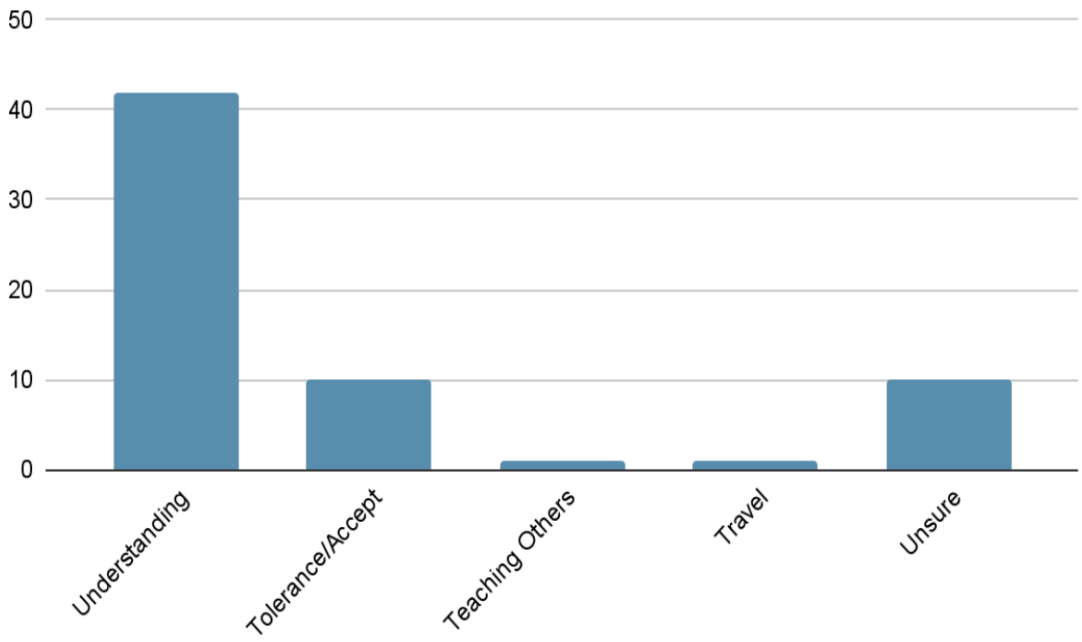
The poster promoting Elephantine as the location for settlement was also able to show deep knowledge and HOT. The group incorporated a variety of reasons as to why the Jewish community should settle there upon release from their captivity in Babylon. This poster used verses from the Old Testament as evidence to support their argument for the location historically and religiously. It also displayed an understanding of economics such as items they could trade for needed resources. The poster's points also incorporated the use of academic vocabulary such as tribute, constitutional monarchy, export, and import.

After completing the unit of instruction about Judaism, students answered a post-questionnaire. As Covid quarantines were back on the rise, 64 students responded. As shown in Table 4.25, of the 64 students who answered the post-questionnaire, 42 learners felt that they were now able to better understand the followers of Judaism based on their knowledge about the basic beliefs and history of the faith. One learner wrote "I can use it to better understand its followers be being more in-tune when they describe their faith without dismissing. I can better understand the background and why they do certain things, so I won't make them feel left out or confused on things we don't agree on." Another learner stated, "I can relate more with my relatives and not be awkward around them and actually can understand them."

Ten students felt they would now be more tolerant and accepting of those who practiced Judaism including one student who wrote "I can take this information and use it to be respectful to my Jewish friend" and another who noted "I can provide more tolerance to what they believe in." One learner thought they could use what they learned to teach others. Another individual learner felt that their knowledge would be beneficial if

they traveled somewhere with a large population of practicing Jews such as Israel. However, ten learners were still unsure of how they would use the knowledge they gained after instruction.

Table 4.25: Student Responses to "How can you take what you learned about Judaism and use it to better understand its followers?"



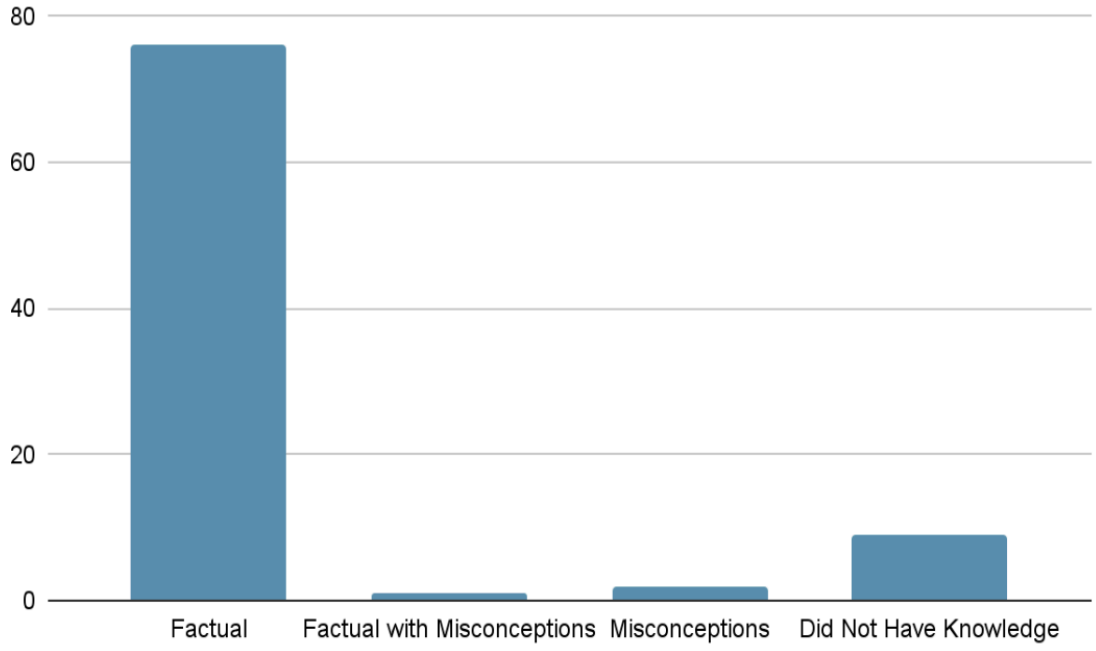
This unit saw the second largest number of learners who held factual prior knowledge. While one student disclosed that their family was Jewish, the majority of students who responded to the pre-questionnaire felt they had previously learned this information in school or history class. This DCI unit tied for the highest score among all three DCI units of instruction. It scored a five for both HOT and substantive conversation. Students engaged in substantive conversation with both their expert groups and their project groups. They also engaged in HOT throughout the project and in

completion of their task. Learners additionally showed the knowledge they gained through their deliberation of the authentic question as well as in completion of the task. Out of all six units, this particular one saw the second largest number of students who felt they would now be more understanding of the religion's followers after instruction.

Christianity

Christianity was the third unit of disciplined civic inquiry instruction. It included eight days of instruction during the month of April. This unit focused on the rise of Christianity and the Catholic Church from the Roman Empire through the Middle Ages as well as its widespread influence and power. Students complete a pre-questionnaire survey at the start of the unit. I hypothesized that due to our location within the Bible Belt of America's Deep South, the responses in the pre-questionnaires about Christianity would show that students in the classroom held more factual knowledge about this faith before the unit of instruction than the other world religions and systems of beliefs. My hypothesis was supported by the responses. As shown in Table 4.26, 76 learners, or 83.5%, of the 91 students who completed the survey held factual knowledge about the Christian religion. However, this was not surprising due to the location of the school.

Table 4.26: Student Responses to "What do you know about Christianity?"



Thirteen of the respondents provided answers that were two or more sentences to discuss the knowledge that they held. These were longer than the typical few words or one-sentence response provided by students on all other surveys in response to this question asking what they know. The responses were complete thoughts that showed a connection to their personal life. Additionally, the learners showed a deep knowledge of the faith by discussing at least one belief of Christianity in depth.

The responses in the pre-questionnaire for Christianity also saw fewer students who did not have any knowledge of the religion. Only nine students stated in their response that they did not know anything about Christianity. Two students had misconceptions about Christianity. One of those two students wrote, "you have to be married to have a baby." One student stated a fact but also a misconception. They wrote, "you praise the lord and not like LGBTQ+ people."

During this unit, students worked with a partner to create a reverse perspective poem displaying two varying medieval points of view of the Holy Land, the Catholic Church and the various Muslim factions. This assignment was scored with the AIW rubric for social science tasks (Appendix E), When read from top to bottom, the poem would convey the point of view of one group and showcase the opposite's viewpoint when reading bottom to top. The poem required students to pull from their previous knowledge gained from the disciplinary inquiry unit about Islam and what they had thus far learned about Christianity and the Catholic Church. In order to gain additional knowledge to create their poem, paired students looked at maps and a variety of primary and secondary source to gain information about why each group was desiring control of the Holy Land during the Crusades. These sources covered economic, political, socio-cultural and geographic reasons. The consensus scores for this task can be seen in Table 4.27.

Table 4.27: Christianity Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Social Science Tasks

	Christianity
Construction of Knowledge	3
Elaborated Communication	3
Student Life Connection	2
Overall Task Score	8/10

Students were video recorded working with their partner to create the reverse perspective poem. The video which was scored with the AIW rubric for classroom instruction (Appendix D), showed students discussing the viewpoints of the Muslims and

Catholic Church as they worked to fill in the poem's format. Consensus rubric scores for the scored video can be seen in Table 4.28.

Table 4.28: Christianity Consensus AIW Rubric Scores for Classroom Instruction

	Christianity
Higher Order Thinking	5
Deep Knowledge	3
Substantive Conversation	2
World Connectedness	1
Overall Observation Score	11/20

The composite score for this lesson was the lowest scoring among the three DCI units of instruction, 19/30. It was the second highest score across all six units of instruction as shown in Table 4.3. While this unit scored higher than the three DI units of study, it did not score as high as the other two DCI units. This can be tied to the focus question not requiring students to deliberate for a solution to who should have control of the Holy Land or including a more substantive second question along those lines.

For the reverse perspective poem, learners were guided by the question "who believed their claim to the Holy Land was stronger during the Crusades, Muslims or Christians?" Students showed the knowledge they gained during this unit by discussing the differing points of view held by the Muslims and Catholic Church who both sought control of the Holy Land during the Crusades with their partner. In some instances, I asked questions to promote their thinking.

Teacher: What would be something the Catholics don't agree with the Muslims on? What were they fighting over?

Student A: I don't know.

Teacher: Yes, you do. What were they fighting over? You were looking at maps the other day, they were both fighting over a certain area.

Student B: Land?

Teacher: Which land?

Student B: Was it terra sancta?

Teacher: (Nods) Did both of them think it was rightfully theirs?

Student B: Yeah.

Teacher: Ok so would the Muslims disagree that it was rightfully the Catholics?

Student A: Yeah.

Teacher: And would the Muslims agree that it was rightfully their own?

Student A and Student B nod.

While this lesson scored a five out of five for HOT, during this particular conversation, students were unable to display a deep knowledge or understanding of either religious group. After much prompting, the students were able to state that both groups were fighting for control of the Holy Land, also referred to as *Terra Sancta* in the documents. However, they had trouble articulating why they were fighting for this land geographically, religiously, economically, and politically.

Learners additionally had difficulty interpreting information to create the reverse perspective poem with partners. However, they were able to display some knowledge that

they gained in their assignment. When read from top to bottom, one can gain the proposed perspective of the Catholic Church in this particular reverse perspective poem.

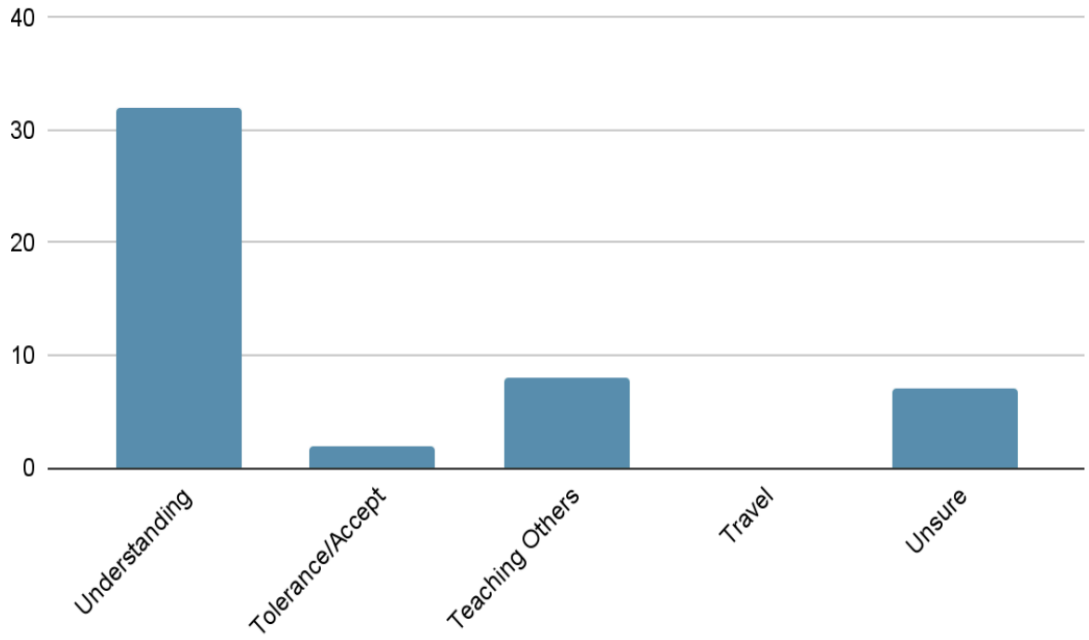
"We were obsessed with controlling the Holy Land.
Critics write that
Muslims were advanced in mathematics and science.
I do not disagree that
the Muslims made lots of inventions.
In the future, it will be celebrated that
Catholics have more power.
It is propaganda that
the land was promised to the Muslims.
It is unmistakable that
the Catholics first had the land.
Only the foolish trust that
The Holy Land belonged to the Muslim."

When this same piece is read from bottom to top, it provides the viewpoint that could possibly have been held by the Muslims during the time of the Crusades. While this particular group of students was able to bring forth a surface knowledge of the advances Muslims had made while living in the Holy Land as well as the belief by the Catholic Church that the Holy Land rightfully belonged as part of Christendom, they lacked a deep knowledge or overall understanding of several key topics that would have been beneficial

to incorporate for a richer end product. Politics of the Catholic Church in Europe were nuanced in the line about Catholic power; however, this topic could have been discussed much more deeply based on the readings, videos, and class lecture. The students were also unable to articulate why each faith believed the Holy Land was rightfully theirs based on their association with Abraham as discussed in class. They additionally did not include any discussion of the basic tenants of either faith within the poem.

At the end of the unit, students completed a post-questionnaire (Appendix B). Of the 49 who completed the survey, 32 students reported that they now felt as though they now have a better understanding of the followers of Christianity and two believed they would now be more tolerant or accepting of Christians. One learner wrote "I could take how Jesus came to the people and helped them to understand why people like this religion so much." Eleven of the 32 felt that they already had an understanding since they practice the faith but now understood themselves more. Additionally, as shown on Table 4.29, eight determined they could take what they have learned to teach others about Christianity. One learner exclaimed, "Spread the word more and be kind to people!! And love like Jesus!!!!!"

Table 4.29: Student Responses to "How can you take what you learned about Christianity and use it to better understand its followers?"



None of the students felt that what they learned would benefit them during future travels. Seven of the students were unsure how they would use this knowledge to better understand followers of Christianity while only two felt they would now be more tolerant and accepting of Christians.

Possibly due to the location within the Bible Belt of America's Deep South, this unit saw more students have a factual prior knowledge on the pre-questionnaire than any of the other six units. Thirteen of those students were also more confident of what they already knew about the religion by responding in two or more sentences, which contrasts to the fragmented ideas or simple sentences of other surveys. The composite score for this DCI unit was the lowest of the three. However, it tied for the highest consensus score for HOT with Judaism. The knowledge students displayed during their peer discussions

and the task the completed was not as deep as the other DCI units of instruction. Teacher prompting for deeper thoughts was necessary as they worked through the readings and the reverse perspective poem with their partner. However, this unit had more students, eight, report that they could take the knowledge they learned to teach others than any other unit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings for these particular research questions were overwhelmingly positive. In regard to the first research question, *what knowledges about religions and philosophies do students bring to an eighth grade classroom*, the majority of students had a prior knowledge base that enabled them to define religion in their own words. As expected, the majority of students in the class were more familiar with Christianity. Misconceptions were more prominent in student responses on the pre-questionnaire surveys about East Asian religions and systems of belief than the three Abrahamic religions. The Chinese systems of belief saw the most learner misconceptions. The knowledge these middle level learners held about the various religions and systems of belief we discussed came from school, family, and friends, as well as religious settings. Even though the misconceptions were developed in their cultural systems, they did not appear to inhibit the learning processes of the students.

While I learned that most did not bring prior knowledge about eastern world religions and philosophies into their eighth grade World History course, the students that were open to learning about these other world religions and philosophies significantly outnumbered those opposed to it. This is a positive finding that is opposite of the typical stereotype for predominant Evangelical Christian communities. There was an overall

openness and curiosity among these students that made it easier to engage them in the units of instruction about world religions and philosophies which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second research question discussed in this chapter, *how do units of authentic pedagogy in an eighth grade course influence student knowledges about religions*, also had positive findings. It should be noted however, less than 3% of students on each survey gave answers that were off topic in the post questionnaire responses given after each unit of study. Additionally, several students would skip answering specific questions on various surveys. For example, the pre-questionnaire survey about Islam, a total of 72 students completed the survey, however, only 52 of them answered the "what do you know" question. A total of 35 students out of the 91 recorded responses did not respond to that same question on the pre-questionnaire about the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. The question was also skipped by 27 of the 91 learners on the survey for Japan's original faith of Shinto. The number of respondents who skipped answering the question are not included in the "did not have knowledge" category. However, the number of students who elected not to answer the question "what do you know" question was interesting. The lack of response can either be viewed that they did not know anything about the religion or philosophies in question or that they may have knowledge but were unsure if it was correct.

In the post questionnaire surveys, I found more students felt they would be more understanding of the followers of each system of belief than unsure of what to do with the knowledge they had gained. According to Panjwani (2005), teaching students about a variety of religions "facilitates mutual understanding and promotes respect and tolerance"

(p. 387). The DCI unit about Christianity had more students report that they would use their knowledge to teach others than any other unit. However, the DI unit about Hinduism saw more students, 13, than any other unit who felt that they were more tolerant and accepting of its followers based on what they learned. This was followed by the DCI unit about Judaism where ten students said they were now more tolerant and accepting of Jews. Of all the units, the DI unit about Islam had the most students, 23, state that they were unsure of how they would use this new knowledge to better understand its followers.

The numbers of students who felt more understanding compared to the number of students who completed the post questionnaire can be seen in Table 4.30.

Table 4.30: Number of Students Who Felt More Understanding After Units of Instruction Based on Post Questionnaire Responses

	Hinduism	Chinese Philosophies	Shinto	Judaism	Islam	Christianity
Number of students who felt more understanding after instruction	23	67	29	42	27	32
Number of students who completed post questionnaire	44	80	60	64	62	49

As shown in Table 4.30, the three DCI units of instruction (Chinese philosophies, Judaism, and Christianity) had higher numbers of students report they felt more understanding of followers of those religions and systems of belief than the DI units. The units of the Chinese philosophies and Judaism tied for the top AIW composite score out

of all six units (24 out of 30 possible points). While students were less familiar with the three Chinese philosophies at the start of the unit, after instruction more learners in this unit, 67, felt that they were now more understanding of those who followed those systems of belief than any other unit studied. Judaism also showed significantly higher numbers of students, 42, who reported what they learned enabled them to develop understanding of the religious other. The unit about Christianity which had the lowest AIW composite score for DCI units had the third largest number of students who felt they were now more understanding. Out of the three DI units, the unit of instruction about Shinto, which had the lowest AIW composite score of 10 out of 30, had a higher number of learners report that they were now more understanding of the religious other. This may be due to learner engagement for this unit being higher which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Student Engagement

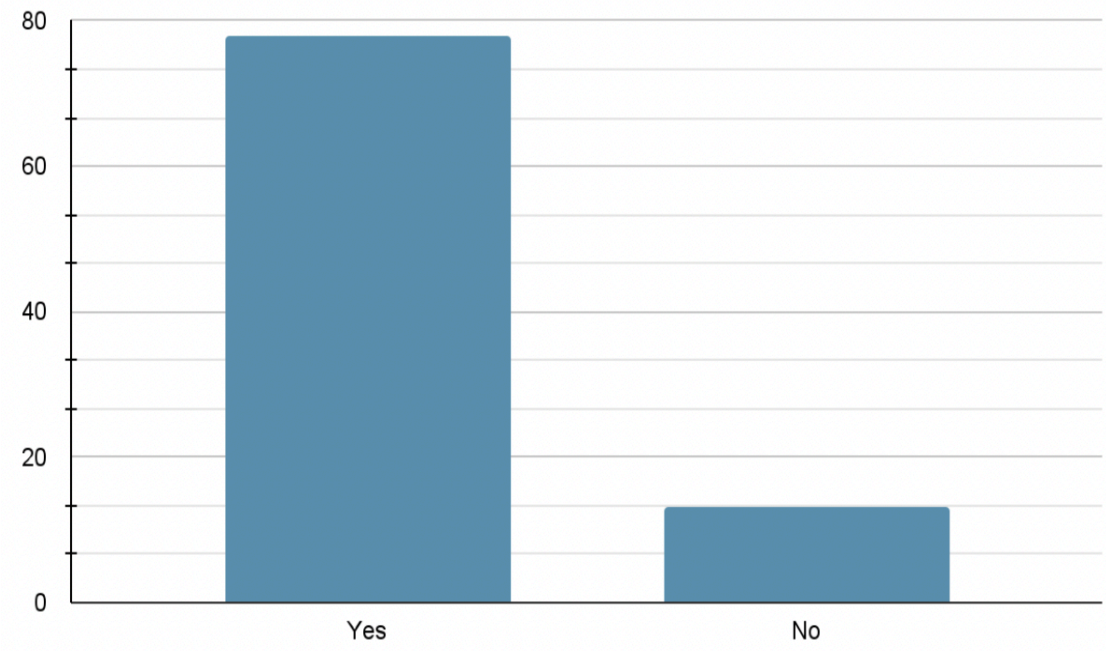
The purpose of this chapter is to present findings related to my final research `question: *how does authentic pedagogy shape learner engagement in the study about religions and systems of belief?* As defined in Chapter One, engagement for the purpose of this study is "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning" (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 38). Learning is as cognitive as it is emotional since emotional processing affects learning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). Emotional connection to personal religious beliefs can affect a student's engagement with learning about other religions and systems of belief. Additionally, during the middle years, learners begin to question the relevance of content they are being taught. However, students can become motivated to learn if they are emotionally interested in the content or deem it applicable to their life (Daniels, 2020). This chapter includes discussion of learner responses to specific questions on the survey (Appendix A) provided at the beginning and end of the academic year, unit post-questionnaires (Appendix B), and Likert scale surveys (Appendix C) completed after the assigned task. The accounts discussed here are intended to aid the reader in forming a better understanding of the types of emotional and social engagements and challenges this specific group of middle level learners experienced in their eighth grade course as they engaged with units of instruction about world religions and systems of beliefs.

Beginning of Year Survey

Because previous research indicated students sometimes object to the learning about religions other than their own (Barton & James, 2010; Torres, 2019), I felt it was

important to determine if my students were open to learning about religions and systems of belief during this course. I presented the following question to students on their beginning of the year survey (Appendix A), "Can we and should we learn about other cultures with world religions and systems of beliefs in a public school?" Students responded yes or no as shown in Table 5.1. Of the 91 students that completed the pre-questionnaire, 88 responded to this question. I hypothesized the majority of students would say yes based on having civics the school year prior. A total of 75 students, or 85.2%, believed that students can and should learn about other world religions and systems of beliefs in a public school. My hypothesis was supported.

Table 5.1: Student Responses to "Can we and should we learn about other cultures with world religions and systems of beliefs in a public school?"



Students were asked to explain their selected response. The majority of students seemed interested in learning about other religions as a way to promote tolerance. Of those who responded yes, 35 students vocalized it would increase understanding and better relations between groups who believed differently. One wrote, "when we learn about different beliefs we aren't as judgmental when we meet others with those beliefs." Another stated, "I say yes, the reason being that understanding of people of other groups in a very good thing for humanity as a whole, because one group not understanding another can be the root of senseless hatred between the two groups." Five students expressed that learning about world religions and systems of beliefs was part of history. Another three respondents used the word Christianity as support for their "yes" responses. The first simply stated "I wish that Christianity was brought back to public schools." The other two felt the teaching of world religions, particularly Christianity, would possibly be beneficial in converting other students to their faith. One of those two students wrote, "I think we should because there may be someone who believes in something such as the Buddha person, and they might never want to go to a Baptist church because they only believe in the Buddha person, but if they learn about Christianity then maybe they would go to a church that has the religion I believe in which is Christianity." The other learner stated yes because "then we can teach them to worship the right religion which is my religion Christianity."

On the other side, 13 students, or 14.8%, believed that discussion of world religions and systems of beliefs should not be included. I had hypothesized that the majority of students who responded "no" would do so with the belief that it was against the law, but my hypothesis was not supported in student responses. Only one student's

response was along the lines of my hypothesis. They stated, “that is too much work, and you aren’t supposed to teach religion in school.” The majority of learners who responded “no” seemed hesitant as they felt it would be offensive and trigger emotions or arguments if religions and systems of beliefs were discussed inside the classroom. These responses seemed to care about the feelings of their classmates who may have a variety of beliefs. One of these five students wrote “I don’t really think you should because it may bother others and may trigger emotions. The speaker [or] teacher may say something not true of that particular religion and it may make others upset.” The remaining learners gave a variety of different responses. One learner based their response on location. They wrote “I don’t see why we should if we don’t live there.” This response seemed unaware of the wide variety of religious beliefs that are practiced by a minority of students within the school community.

Overall, the majority of my students believed instruction about world religions and systems of belief should be included in school. They believed this content was applicable to their life because it would increase their understanding of others. Applicability to personal lives is important for student engagement and their motivation to learn content. With this knowledge, I hypothesized that students would be more engaged as we moved through each of the six units of instruction about a world religion or systems of belief.

Likert Scale Surveys

In order to measure learner engagement, students completed a Likert scale survey (Appendix C) at the end of each task assigned. The Likert scale asked students to adjust the face of an emoji to best show their perceived level of engagement and enjoyment

during the unit and project. The emoji face as originally shown before adjustment equaled a three and neither engaged nor disengaged. An open smile emoji equaled a score of five and fully engaged. A frowning emoji equaled a score of one and fully disengaged. Table 5.2 is a comprehensive display of the Likert scale emoji responses recorded for each unit of instruction. Units of instruction are listed in chronological teaching order.

Table 5.2: Comprehensive Likert Scale Survey Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Hinduism	2	1	8	37	13
Chinese Philosophies	0	2	6	31	24
Shinto	1	0	4	33	25
Judaism	3	1	8	30	40
Islam	4	3	3	21	18
Christianity	1	2	8	24	33

Students were also asked to explain the emoji face they selected. Their responses will be discussed in greater detail with each unit below. The responses for students who stated they were engaged and fully engaged were combined into a percentage for each unit based on the number of students who responded to the Likert scale survey. The percentages and number of students who completed the survey can be seen in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Percentages of Students Who Felt Engaged or Fully Engaged During Units of Instruction Based on Likert Scale Surveys

	Hinduism	Chinese Philosophies	Shinto	Judaism	Islam	Christianity
Percentages	81.97%	87.3%	92.06%	86.41%	79.59%	83.82%
Number of students who completed Likert scale	61	63	63	81	49	68

These percentages were compared to the unit's composite AIW scores, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, to analyze any correlation between the cognitive requirements of the unit of instruction and the learner's perceived engagement. Table 5.4 displays the AIW composite scores and percentages of students who determined themselves engaged for each unit. The units are arranged in order of highest AIW composite score to lowest which is how the units will be presented throughout the remainder of the chapter.

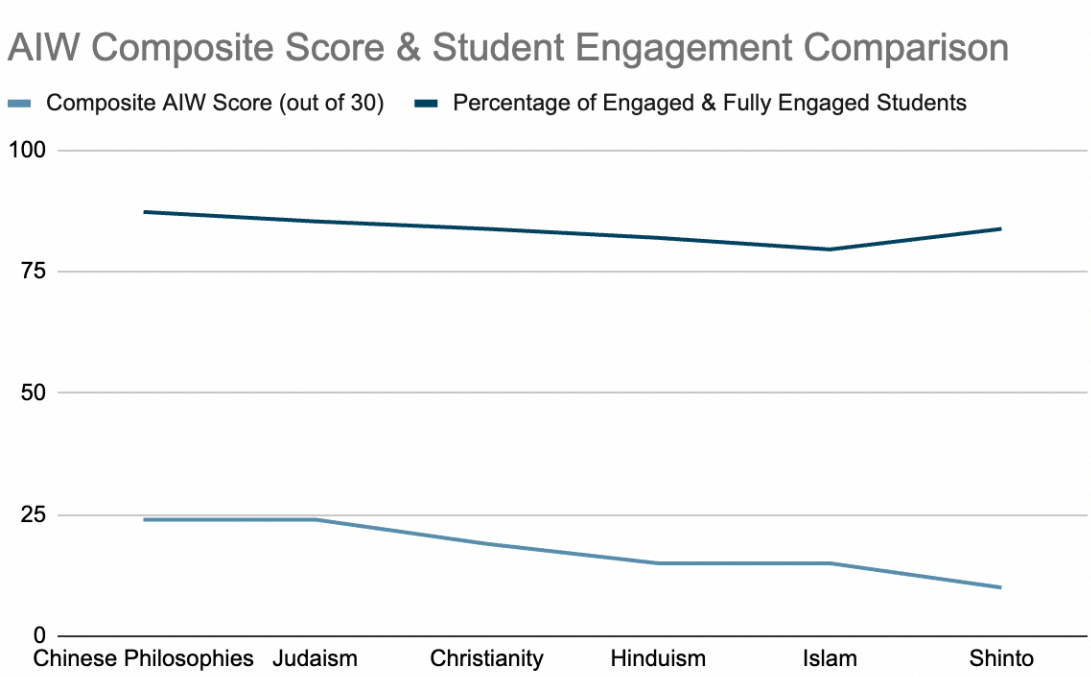
Table 5.4: Comparison of AIW Composite Scores & Student Engagement Percentages

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged & Fully Engaged
Chinese Philosophies	24	87.3
Judaism	24	85.36
Christianity	19	83.82
Hinduism	15	81.97
Islam	15	79.59
Shinto	10	92.06

In order to provide a visual understanding of the relationship between the AIW composite score and the percentage of engaged and fully engaged students from each unit, numbers are presented on Table 5.5 in a comparative line graph. The data shown on Table 5.5

displays student engagement and the Composite AIW score are relational as the lines for both numbers decrease together with the exception of the unit of instruction about Shinto. These correlations will be discussed in greater detail throughout the rest of the chapter.

Table 5.5: Line Graph Comparison of AIW Composite Scores & Student Engagement Percentages



Units of Disciplined Civic Inquiry

Three units of instruction incorporated disciplined civic inquiry (DCI). These units included instruction about three Chinese philosophies, Judaism, and Christianity. The AIW composite scores for these three units scored the highest. DCI is more rigorous and requires students to deliberate over questions that have relevance and authenticity (Saye, 2017). However, by working together to construct answers to authentic questions, students can become actively engaged in instruction and assignments as they interact with

the events being considered (Pappas, 2007). The numbers of students who stated they were either engaged or fully engaged on the Likert scale surveys (Appendix C) for these units was also typically higher than the three units of DI which will be discussed later in the chapter. The AIW composite scores and combined percentage of students who reported being engaged or fully engaged in their Likert scale survey responses for the DCI units of instruction are shown on Table 5.6.

Table 5.6: AIW Composite Scores & Learner Engagement Percentages for DCI Units

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged or Fully Engaged
Chinese Philosophies	24	87.3
Judaism	24	85.36
Christianity	19	83.82

The third DCI unit taught about Christianity scored the lowest composite score out of the three units with a nineteen out of thirty possible points. It also had the lowest percentage of reported student engagement based on Likert scale survey responses for these three units with 83.83% of learners stating they felt engaged. The DCI units about the Chinese philosophies and Judaism tied for the highest score out of all six units totaling 24 points each. They also had the highest percentage of student engagement. A total of 87.3% of learners who responded to the Likert scale survey about the DCI unit and assignment about the Chinese philosophies reported engagement. On the Likert scale survey, 85.36% of learners reported engagement during the DCI unit about Judaism.

Chinese Philosophies

This first unit of DCI focused on the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. Instruction about these systems of belief included lecture, videos,

and a large group project. The assignment required students to collaborate and determine which philosophy would be best for the Qin emperor to use as the basis of his government. The project assigned is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. The overall composite AIW score for this unit totaled 24 points. It had a higher score for world connectedness than the other two DCI units of instruction.

Learners worked in jigsaw groups guided by the unit focus question "which philosophy is the best plan for a unified China?" In the first group, learners worked together to become an expert on one of the three philosophies studied during this unit. In their second and final group, students determined which of those beliefs should be marketed to the Qin emperor as the basis for his new government. After completing their assignment, 63 students completed a Likert scale survey (Appendix C) that asked them to change the face of an emoji to their perceived level of engagement. I hypothesized that more students would feel engaged with this particular DCI unit of instruction as it was covering systems of belief not world religions and because it had a higher AIW score which we believed would also lead to increased engagement among these middle level learners. As this was the only Likert scale where no students reported feeling fully disengaged, I believe my hypothesis was supported. As shown in Table 5.7, the majority of students, 31, stated they felt engaged in the assignment. A total of 24 learners felt fully engaged. Two students felt disengaged while six learners reported being neither engaged nor disengaged. No students reported being fully disengaged from this assignment.

Table 5.7: Chinese Philosophies Likert Scale Survey Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Chinese Philosophies	0	2	6	31	24

The number of students who reported being engaged and fully engaged were combined into a percentage score out of the total number of respondents to the unit's Likert scale survey (Appendix C). In Table 5.8, a total of 87.3% of students reported feeling either engaged or fully engaged during this unit of instruction and assignment as shown in comparison to the AIW composite score.

Table 5.8: Chinese Philosophies AIW Composite Score & Learner Engagement Percentage

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged or Fully Engaged
Chinese Philosophies	24	87.3

In addition to changing the emoji to their perceived level of engagement, students were asked to explain their choice. Most of the student explanations for their changed emoji on the Likert scale survey were simplistic responses such as "I enjoyed it." A student who was disengaged wrote, "I wasn't all that invested throughout the lesson. I enjoy history more than discussing beliefs and government." One who felt that they were neither engaged nor disengaged commented, "I mean it was a fun project to do, it just didn't really catch my attention that much." Many students who noted they were engaged or fully engaged also commented on the project being enjoyable, such as one engaged student who wrote "I give it a happy face as it was a fun topic to learn about and do a

project with friends on." A student who changed the emoji to fully engaged noted "I was very engaged because I learned so much about all of the government things except for Daoism. I do know Legalism is the most strict, Daoism is the less strict or the hippies, and Confucianism is in the middle." Another wrote, "my level of engagement during this lesson was very good. This was because I had to learn about the different beliefs for myself instead of being fed information."

Students also completed a post questionnaire (Appendix B) after the unit, which helped me further understand their thoughts and emotions while learning about the Chinese philosophies. A total of 80 students responded to the post questionnaire for this unit. When explaining the thoughts they had when learning about the three systems of belief, thirteen students found it "interesting" and five found it "cool". Most students were detailed about their thoughts. One learner wrote, "it's interesting because Daoism and Confucianism are pretty similar, yet, Legalism is completely different. It kind of like goes from 'be free, let your heart guide you' to 'you can do what you want but you have responsibilities you have to fulfill and rules to follow' to 'shut up and do what I say or I'll cut your fingers off.'" A few students connected their thoughts to today's society. One student noted, "I thought about the different styles and philosophies of ruling that are used today and their similarities and differences against the Chinese beliefs discussed. I also thought about how good of an idea it would be to use them instead of our current government." Another noted "I thought Daoism was like the movie Kung Fu Panda." A third student wrote "North Korea is Legalism." None of the student responses tended to lean negative when discussing the thoughts they had while learning about these three Chinese philosophies.

During this unit, 21 students stated they did not have any emotions. Twelve students skipped responding. Fifteen learners mentioned being excited while seven said they were curious. Fourteen students stated they felt shocked or angry while another ten discussed feeling bad or sad when learning about how harsh Legalism was towards people who lived in a legalist society. One student mentioned fear, writing "I felt fear, imagining that I was actually trying to convince the emperor how to lead and treat millions and millions of people. I felt a pit in my stomach just pretending. I could never bear the weight of knowing I let the punishments happen to those people, and even influenced it."

This first DCI unit had many positive responses in terms of engagement and thoughts. None of the thoughts discussed by students tended to lean negative toward learning. Many students, however, discussed negative emotions such as angry or sad when learning about the philosophy of Legalism because of how people who lived under a government utilizing that system of belief were treated. The thoughts and emotions students were reporting showed that they were empathizing with people who lived in a legalist society. Students who are able to do this possess combined intellectual and imaginative skills using a deep knowledge of the historical period under study (Yilmaz, 2007). This level of empathy was not seen in the thoughts and emotions they discussed after completing the other DCI units of instruction. Additionally, none of the students felt fully disengaged when completing the assignment. As shown in Table 5.2 and Table 5.7, two students reported being disengaged. The disciplined inquiry unit on Shinto was the only unit to have fewer disengaged students.

Judaism

The DCI unit of instruction about Judaism required students to determine a location of settlement for the Jewish community after their release from the Babylonian captivity. Students completed this project after learning about the basic beliefs of the Jewish faith and how it developed in the ancient world. In jigsaw groups, learners first became experts about one of the locations to settle Jerusalem, the island of Elephantine in Egypt, or remain in Babylon. They were then placed in their project groups where they deliberated over which location would be the best to preserve the Jewish community and faith. During this assignment, students were guided by the question "which location of settlement will ensure the continuity and protection of the Jewish community?" This unit is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

This unit had the most student participation as students had just come back from a two-week period of virtual learning due to a previous rise in Covid cases at the school. The Likert scale survey (Appendix C) for the unit of instruction about Judaism had 81 students respond. Even though this unit ultimately had a high AIW composite score which I believed would increase learner engagement, I had originally hypothesized that students would not be as engaged with this DCI unit due to our just returning to school when it occurred. However, as seen on Table 5.9, a total of 40 students stated they were fully engaged while 30 learners noted they felt engaged.

Table 5.9: Judaism Unit Student Engagement Likert Scale Survey Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Judaism	3	1	8	30	40

Eight students reported that they were neither engaged nor disengaged. Student numbers for disengaged and fully disengaged were one and three respectively.

The total of students that reported being engaged and fully engaged was combined to determine a percentage out of the number who responded to the survey. This percentage can be seen on Table 5.10 in comparison with the AIW composite score.

Table 5.10: Judaism AIW Composite Score & Learner Engagement Percentage

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged or Fully Engaged
Judaism	24	85.36

As the majority of students felt either engaged or fully engaged in this DCI unit of instruction, my hypothesis about learners not being engaged due to just returning from a period of virtual learning was not supported. However, it does align with the belief that students are more engaged during instruction that scores higher on the AIW rubrics.

For their explanations as to why they changed the emoji face as they did, very few learners gave descriptive responses. One of the students who stated they were fully disengaged wrote, "just another lesson I have to learn because it's the law, nothing special, did what I thought was appropriate." Another noted "I already knew about what we learned so it was boring." Two students who were fully engaged discussed they enjoyed working in a group setting. Another learner who said they were fully engaged wrote, "I loved learning about the history of Judaism cause my cousin is Jewish and I wanted to understand it better."

As Covid quarantines once again started rising, 64 students completed the post questionnaire survey (Appendix B) at the end of the unit. Their responses allowed me to

better understand their thoughts and emotions while learning about the basic beliefs and history of Judaism. When describing their thoughts, a total of 23 students used the word "interesting" while another four used the word "cool." For example, one student wrote "it's interesting to see different ways people live and the traditions they follow." Another stated, "I found it cool to learn about a religion that some of my relatives follow." Nineteen students said their thoughts were comparing Judaism to their personal faith or other religions we have studied. Five of those students stated that Judaism was similar to Christianity. One of them noted, "it reminded me of Christianity in a way because of Moses." Another five students said that learning about Judaism made them think about World War II and the Holocaust. Only three responses from students tended to be negative. All three said they thought Judaism was weird as they were learning about it.

Unlike other surveys, most students responding to this question about the emotions they had when learning about Judaism provided simplistic one-word responses. Additionally, the majority of learners, 39, stated they did not have any emotions while learning about Judaism. Three students wrote they were bored. Ten students stated that they were intrigued by what they learned. One student noted that they were shocked, writing, "I guess if anything shocked because I guess I didn't really know anything about it til now." Another learner stated, "I just felt happy I was learning about something I already know."

More students were present in class during this unit of instruction and the Likert scale survey (Appendix C). During this second unit of DCI, students stated they were more fully engaged than any other unit of instruction. By asking students to determine a location of settlement for the Jewish community after being released from the Babylonian

captivity, students were engaged in a real-life experience. Many adults deliberate where to live choosing among neighborhoods and cities as well as national or international locations. Learners become more engaged during instruction that includes real-life experiences (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). The majority of students were not descriptive in the emotions they felt while learning about Judaism in the post questionnaire. None of the learners expressed empathy during this DCI unit in either thought or emotion as they had in their responses after completing the Chinese philosophies task. However, most students thought instruction about Judaism was interesting.

Christianity

The final DCI unit included instruction about Christianity. After learning about the rise of Christianity and the early beliefs, students worked with a partner to investigate the turmoil between the Catholic Church and various Muslim factions over the Holy Land prior to the start of the First Crusade. They used this knowledge to create a reverse perspective poem to show why each side felt they had a rightful claim to the Holy Land. Students were guided by the focus question "Who believed their claim to the Holy land was stronger during the Crusades, Muslims or Christians?" Chapter Four holds more information about this assignment.

After finishing the assigned task of the reverse perspective poem, 68 students completed the Likert scale survey (Appendix C). I hypothesized that all students would be engaged in this lesson since Christianity was a religion that they were familiar with either due to personal beliefs or the uniqueness of the school's location in the geographical region known as the Bible Belt. Thirty-three learners reported being fully engaged and 24 stated they were engaged. Additionally, as shown in Table 5.11, one

student felt fully disengaged, two reported being disengaged and eight believed they were neither disengaged nor engaged.

Table 5.11: Christianity Student Engagement Likert Scale Survey Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Christianity	1	2	8	24	33

The number of learners who reported being engaged and fully engaged was combined to develop a percentage based on the number of students who completed the survey. Table 5.12 shows a comparison of the AIW composite score for this unit with the percentage of students who reported feeling engaged.

Table 5.12: Christianity AIW Composite Score & Learner Engagement Percentage

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged or Fully Engaged
Christianity	19	83.82

While the majority of students, 83.82%, reported engagement, my hypothesis was not supported as not all students were engaged. 83.82%, reported engagement, my hypothesis was not supported as not all students were engaged. This percentage of students engaged was the lowest among the three DCI units. However, engagement of these middle level learners during this unit was higher than the DI units of Hinduism and Islam.

Their explanations of their perceived level of engagement helped me further understand their feelings. The student who reported feeling full disengaged wrote, "I just don't like Christianity. It's a sensitive subject for me." One of the students who felt that

they were disengaged stated, "I was bored because I knew half of this stuff already." As I had hypothesized that most students would be engaged based on their cultural meaning system, I found their responses as to why they were not to be interesting. Several students came across as though they felt they did not need to learn more about Christianity as they determined their current knowledge of the faith was sufficient, while others portrayed that they had previous negative interactions with the religion. Personal beliefs about Christianity were also present in responses for students who felt their engagement remained neutral. A response from a learner who kept the emoji face in a neutral position claimed "this was kind of interesting to learn but I don't believe spiritually what they believe in." Another learner wrote, "I never really knew much about Christianity nor did I really try to learn anything about it. I don't go to church but I still believe in Jesus but I really wasn't interested in this lesson as all the others."

The majority of descriptive responses from students who changed the emoji to being engaged or fully engaged felt so because they personally believe in Christianity. One learner wrote, "I gave this lesson a really big smiley face because I am a Christian so I already knew a lot of the things and I found out a lot of new things about Christianity." Another stated, "I like learning about the religion of Christianity because it is a lot more interesting that religions that are not my own." Two students mentioned the project as to why they were engaged with one stating," the lesson was extremely engaging, and it introduced me to a perspective poem which was very interesting."

The post-questionnaire (Appendix B) for this unit was completed by 49 students. Their responses furthered my understanding of the thoughts and emotions they had while learning about Christianity. Sixteen students stated they did not have any prominent

thoughts during this DCI unit. In the remaining responses the word "interesting" was used 18 times to describe their thought processes while "cool" was used a total of seven times. One response stated, "I thought that Christianity is an interesting religion and that it's a good thing to believe." Four students commented on how different this unit was from what they knew about Christianity. A student wrote, "I mean as a Christian I never really look at it that way so it was different." Another stated they thought, "it is different from the modernized version." One learner commented that their thoughts were "Jesus will come back soon."

While learning about Christianity, 31 of the 49 students reported that they did not experience any emotions. While one learner simply reported being confused, seventeen students stated positive emotions. Five students reported feeling happy. Two of these students expanded on their being happy. One stated, "I felt happy that we were discussing my faith and beliefs in class." The other wrote "I was happy knowing that schools teach about this faith." The majority of emotional responses, however, did not expand on their meaning. These students provided simple, one-word answers such as positive, excited, and intrigued.

Overall, I found that students were interested in this final DCI unit of instruction about Christianity, but not all students felt engaged. The lower AIW composite score may be an influencing factor into lack of engagement as students did not deliberate to determine who should have had control of the Holy Land. Of the students who stated they were engaged or fully engaged, most claimed it was due to Christianity being their personal belief. Interestingly, one student stated being disengaged because it was their personal religion inferring that they had enough knowledge about Christianity already.

Seventeen learners discussed positive emotions while learning about Christianity with two students reporting being emotionally happy that they could learn about Christianity in school. None of the thought or emotional responses conveyed feelings towards the people from the time of the Crusades or the situation of whose claim for Holy Land was stronger.

Units of Disciplinary Inquiry

Three units of instruction were taught using disciplinary inquiry (DI) which engages students in inquiry by using tools of investigation of social scientists. While this is sometimes difficult work for middle level learners, it can increase student interest in the content being taught by having them develop a deeper understanding of the subject being studied as well as critical thinking and investigation skills. The world religions of Hinduism, Shinto, and Islam were taught as DI units of instruction. The AIW composite scores for these three units of instruction was lower than the DCI units. The combined percentage of students who reported being engaged or fully engaged on the Likert scale survey (Appendix C) for these three units were also lower with the exception of Shinto as seen in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13: AIW Composite Scores & Student Engagement Percentages for DI Units

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged & Fully Engaged
Hinduism	15	81.97
Islam	15	79.59
Shinto	10	92.06

Hinduism

For the DI unit about Hinduism, students completed an individual in-class project that required students to read about a variety of aspects of the religion and create a travel blog on Google Slides as if they were traveling through India and interacting with Hinduism. Learners were guided by the question "how did Hinduism arise, evolve, and impact Ancient India?" Students also participated in a lecture about Hinduism as well as ancient India through medieval times during this unit. Chapter Four includes greater detail about instruction and the assignment.

After completing their task, students were given a Likert scale survey (Appendix C) which asked them how engaged they felt with the assignment and learning about the religion. Sixty-one students completed the Likert scale survey for this unit. I hypothesized that most students would not be engaged or fully engaged in this lesson. Responses for the Likert scale survey are displayed in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14: Hinduism Student Engagement Likert Scale Survey Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Hinduism	2	1	8	37	13

I hypothesized that most students would not be engaged or fully engaged in this lesson. However, my hypothesis was not supported. As shown in Table 5.14, two learners stated they were fully disengaged while one noted they were disengaged. Eight stated they were neither engaged nor disengaged. The majority of students who responded, 37, stated they were engaged. Thirteen of the students noted they were fully engaged.

The numbers of students who reported being engaged and fully engaged were combined into a percent based off the total number of survey responses. Table 5.15 displays the percent of students who were overall engaged in comparison with the unit's AIW composite score.

Table 5.15: Hinduism AIW Composite Score & Learner Engagement Percentage

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged & Fully Engaged
Hinduism	15	81.97

The vast majority of the class, 81.97%, reported being engaged while learning about Hinduism. However, this percentage of engagement is lower than the three DCI units. While the AIW composite score for the unit about Hinduism tied with the DI unit about Islam, this total was also lower than the three DCI units.

Students also explained their chosen emoji. While most of the responses were simple statements such as "I enjoyed it," several students did expand on their selection. One student who moved the emoji to represent fully engaged wrote "I enjoyed it very much being able to learn about Hinduism and their lifestyle. I also enjoyed being able to read about how they spoke and did their rituals. Hinduism is a very interesting topic and I would recommend it to anyone that is trying to learn something new." Another fully engaged learner stated, "I have really enjoyed learning about Hinduism and think it is really cool, however it is different from my opinions." A student who noted that they were engaged noted "I was very engaged but I didn't especially enjoy Hinduism. Hinduism is weird." A student who left the emoji in the neutral position wrote "I mean I'm a Christian. I don't think these things are right and I don't like learning about it that

much but at the same time I do because it gives me room to know how to grow and ways to prove what I believe is correct." Of those who were disengaged to fully disengaged, one learner noted "it's just boring like I don't think anybody wants to sit here and be like 'let's learn about Hinduism' and them get excited." These responses helped me better understand student engagement but also their thoughts of learning about Hinduism.

In an attempt to further understand my students' learning processes during instruction about Hinduism, I provided a post questionnaire (Appendix B) for them to complete to at the end of the unit on India. Due to a significant spike in Covid positive cases and quarantines within the school, 44 of the 99 students assigned to my history classes responded. In an attempt to understand how their social and emotional constructs affected their learning, I asked about their thoughts and emotions. Of the respondents, 34 students held positive thoughts when learning about Hinduism. Thirteen students felt learning about Hinduism was "interesting" while another four stated it was "cool". Several of these students provided simplistic answers such as "I thought it was cool." Others expanded on their thoughts such as one student who wrote, "I thought that the Hinduism beliefs are interesting. I was trying to imagine myself participating in this religion." Another noted, "I honestly had a different idea of what Hinduism was. It is so much different from what I expected. I actually enjoyed learning about Hinduism and its beliefs because it is very interesting and there is a lot of history behind what you can learn." A third student stated, "I had the reoccurring thought of how complex and interesting this religion is." Other positive responses included discussion of their deities, art, and rituals.

Ten learners tended to lean negative when discussing what they thought when learning about Hinduism. One student explained in their response that he thought he did not need to learn about Hinduism because he wasn't ever going to use it. The remaining nine negative responses came across as non-accepting of the basic beliefs of Hinduism. One student stated the religion was weird. He wrote "this religion is weird. Why do they believe taking a bath in 'holy' water would cleanse their sins? Why do they have so many gods? They don't need that many. I don't want to go to India." Another found Hinduism silly due to their personal religious beliefs. She stated, "I mean to me being a Christian I find it very silly to me that they believe in all these gods and how they have a different god for everything."

While learning about Hinduism, 19 of the 44 students felt that the did not have any emotions throughout the unit. Ten skipped answering this question and three stated they were confused. The remaining twelve responses were emotionally positive using words such as happy and excited. One learner stated that she felt happy for the Hindu people because they enjoyed their religion. Another student wrote "I was excited because it was so pretty and different."

Overall, I found 81.97% students were inherently interested in learning about Hinduism. A total of 18.03% of students, however, were skeptical toward learning about Hinduism due to its unique features that contrast against their personal beliefs or because they felt it was unnecessary knowledge. Having the majority of learners interested and engaged in learning about Hinduism was a positive, but surprising finding as I expected students would not be as motivated to learn about Hinduism since it was not their personal culture or a majority faith within their community. Additionally, 27.27%

students discussed feeling positive emotions such as happy and excited during instruction about Hinduism. While most of their emotions were personal reflections, one learner mentioned positive feelings for the religious other. This level of empathy, which was portrayed by several students during the DCI unit about the Chinese philosophies, was not seen in any of the other DI units.

Islam

This unit of DI focused on the Abrahamic religion of Islam. The hook activity sought to engage students on the first day of instruction by having learners work in small groups to analyze a variety of images depicting areas within a mosque. After discussing their ideas with their peers, the groups were brought together as a whole class to share their thoughts and gain additional information from me. Learners were guided by the question "what can we learn about Islam through its architecture and art?" This unit also included teacher-led lecture about the basic beliefs of Islam as well as its spread over Asia, Africa, and Europe. Students also completed a virtual assignment during an ELearning Day. Further discussion about this DI unit can be found in Chapter Four.

Many students were not present for this unit due to rising numbers of Covid-19 quarantines. Therefore, only 49 learners completed the Likert scale survey (Appendix C). As shown in Table 5.16, four learners changed the emoji to show they were fully disengaged while three students reported being disengaged. During this DI unit about Islam, the numbers of fully disengaged and disengaged learners were higher than any of the other unit of instruction about a world religion or philosophy.

Table 5.16: Islam Student Engagement Likert Scale Survey Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Islam	4	3	3	21	18

Even with a higher number of disengaged and fully disengaged students than any other unit, the majority of respondents still reported that they were either engaged or fully engaged, with 21 and 18 respectively. These numbers were combined to create a percentage of engaged students based off the total number of respondents to the Likert scale survey. The percentage is displayed alongside the AIW composite score in Table 5.17.

Table 5.17: Islam AIW Composite Score & Student Engagement Percentage

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged & Fully Engaged
Islam	15	79.59

This unit tied with the one about Hinduism for the highest DI unit composite score and third highest composite score overall.

The majority of explanations from students who changed the emoji to neutral, disengaged or fully disengaged as to their level of engagement were simple statements such as “it was boring” or “it wasn’t interesting.” One learner who changed the emoji to disengaged stated “I really couldn’t get into it and couldn’t really engage into the activity.” A total of 79.59% stated they felt either engaged or fully engaged. Of the 42.86% who stated they were engaged and the 36.73% who were fully engaged, several commented that the activity was fun. One student who was engaged wrote “it was very

fun to guess what each image was for. It was nice to hear what everyone's imagination thought about the image and it was funny to hear some of the responses especially when the door looked like a guillotine." A fully engaged learner stated, "it was fun learning about how they pray and where they pray and other stuff about their culture." Other students simply stated they had fun describing the photos. One learner who changed the emoji to fully engaged stated "I learned a lot about Islam. I think I learn better with looking at pictures."

Students completed the post questionnaire (Appendix B) about Islam when they returned to school after the ELearning Day. Their responses to the post questionnaire were also helpful in furthering my understanding of my students' thoughts and emotions while learning about the religion of Islam. Sixty-two students completed the post questionnaire. Fourteen students stated learning about Islam was interesting while another thirteen found it "cool." Most answers were simplistic such as "it was interesting" or "I found it cool to learn about." Several students did expand on their thoughts. One student wrote "I thought it was very cool but different to what I'm used to." Another noted, "it was very interesting learning about this religion other than my own." Five students stated that their thoughts were caught up in comparing Islam to their personal faith. One learner, however, questioned "why would someone actually believe this" as the thought they held when learning about Islam.

Students were also asked what emotions they may have had, if any, while learning about Islam. The majority of students who responded, 36, stated that they did not have any emotions. Nine students stated they were intrigued or interested in what they were learning. Three learners stated they were shocked. About being shocked, one learner

wrote, “just like wow, there are so many religions that we don’t know about, but once you learn it is really cool to see other people’s perspectives.” One student stated that they were bored while four others said they were confused the entire time. Nine students did not respond to this question.

Overall, this DI unit of instruction had 79.59% of students note that they were either engaged or fully engaged in learning about Islam. This percentage was lower than any of the other DI and DCI units taught over the school year. This unit also had the highest number of students report that they were disengaged or fully disengaged during instruction than any other unit. As shown in Table 5.2 and Table 5.16, four learners noted being fully disengaged and three students stated they were disengaged. I found this information intriguing as I felt students had appeared actively engaged in the classroom from my interactions with them as a teacher as well as later when watching the recorded videos. However, this form of engagement, behavioral engagement, can occur even though students are not invested or cognitively engaged with instruction (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Additionally, this unit also had more students who felt they did not personally experience any emotions throughout instruction.

Shinto

The traditional Japanese faith of Shinto was also taught about using DI. Students listened to a teacher-led lecture about ancient Japan and the Shinto religion during this unit. They also completed a WebQuest as well as wrote haiku about nature while sitting outside and folded paper cranes. Students worked with a partner to complete the WebQuest. This unit was discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

After completing the lessons about Shinto, students completed a Likert scale survey (Appendix C) to show their perceived level of engagement during instruction. Sixty-three students completed the Likert scale survey for this unit. I had hypothesized that student responses would show mostly disengaged due to the selected activities. However, as shown in Table 5.18, none of the students reported themselves as disengaged and only one student felt fully disengaged. This unit had less students report that they felt disengaged than any of the other six units taught this year.

Table 5.18: Shinto Student Engagement Likert Scale Responses

	Fully Disengaged 1	Disengaged 2	Neither 3	Engaged 4	Fully Engaged 5
Shinto	1	0	4	33	25

The number of students who reported themselves as engaged and fully engaged were combined to create a percentage based on the total number of students who completed the Likert scale survey (Appendix C). As shown in Table 5.19, the vast majority of students, 92.06% of students felt they were either engaged or fully engaged during the DI unit of instruction about Shinto. This percentage is shown beside the AIW composite score for the unit.

Table 5.19: Shinto AIW Composite Score & Student Engagement Percentage

	AIW Composite Score (out of 30)	Percent of Students Engaged & Fully Engaged
Shinto	10	92.06

The AIW composite score for this unit was the lowest out of the DI units and DCI units. However, the percentage of engaged and fully engaged students was the highest out of the six units taught over the school year.

In their explanations as to how they changed the emoji to depict their level of engagement, most responses were simple statements. Twelve students did not write an explanation including the student who changed the emoji to depict fully disengaged. One of the four students who said they were neither disengaged or engaged wrote, "I guess I have just never had an interest in Japan so I have never really understood it." Another wrote "I was not that much into it but it was a fun thing to learn about." A student who changed the face to engaged stated "I was very interested in this lesson because I always thought that people in Japan were Buddhist so when we were learning about Shinto I was very excited because I was learning something new." Of the students who were fully engaged, the activities were mentioned several times. The activities included completing a WebQuest with a partner to learn various aspects of the Shinto faith, writing haiku about nature while sitting outside, and learning to fold origami cranes. One fully engaged student wrote, "I think that learning about different things is best for students instead of learning the same stuff that they have heard of for 7 years of school. I think Japan has a unique history and learning about it is very fun and the activities is very fun as well." Another stated, "I really liked the stuff we did for Shinto. It helped us learn way better than doing the exact same thing every day." The explanations provided by the students enabled me to better understand learner engagement and thoughts of learning about Shinto.

The post questionnaire (Appendix B) that students completed after the Japan unit of instruction also furthered my understanding of my students' thoughts and emotions while learning about the Shinto religion. Sixty students completed the post questionnaire. Four students gave a simple neutral response of "it was ok." The remaining five student responses tended to lean negative. Only one came across as non-accepting. That particular student wrote "the animism is a bit extreme and loving nature that much is weird."

Fifty-one of the learners, or 85%, who responded discussed learning about the Shinto faith in a positive manner. The word "interesting" was used by 22 students to describe their thoughts when learning about Shinto. Another 19 students thought learning about Shinto was "cool." While most of the responses were simple statements such as "it was interesting to read about." Several students, however, expanded on their thoughts. One learner wrote "I think the Shinto faith was fun to learn about because they had some different things that seemed unique than other faiths. I found it interesting how people follow this faith because the faith seems beautiful in its own way." Another stated "I thought that it was cool that they believed in animism so that every natural thing is considered a kami." Seven students commented that they thought Shinto was a very calm or peaceful religion.

Students were also asked what emotions they had when learning about the Japanese religion of Shinto. Five students did not respond to the question. Thirty-six stated they did not have any emotions. Most of the responses were one word, however eleven expanded on the emotions they felt. Nine students stated they felt either calm, peaceful, or relaxed. One student wrote "I don't know how to explain it but it gave me a

relaxing feeling." Two students stated that they felt inspired with one writing "I felt inspired to try to be more welcoming and accepting." Another learner stated "I guess I felt happy/neutral. It wasn't bad and I only had good emotions as we were learning about the faith." None of the student who responded felt an emotion that could be considered negative.

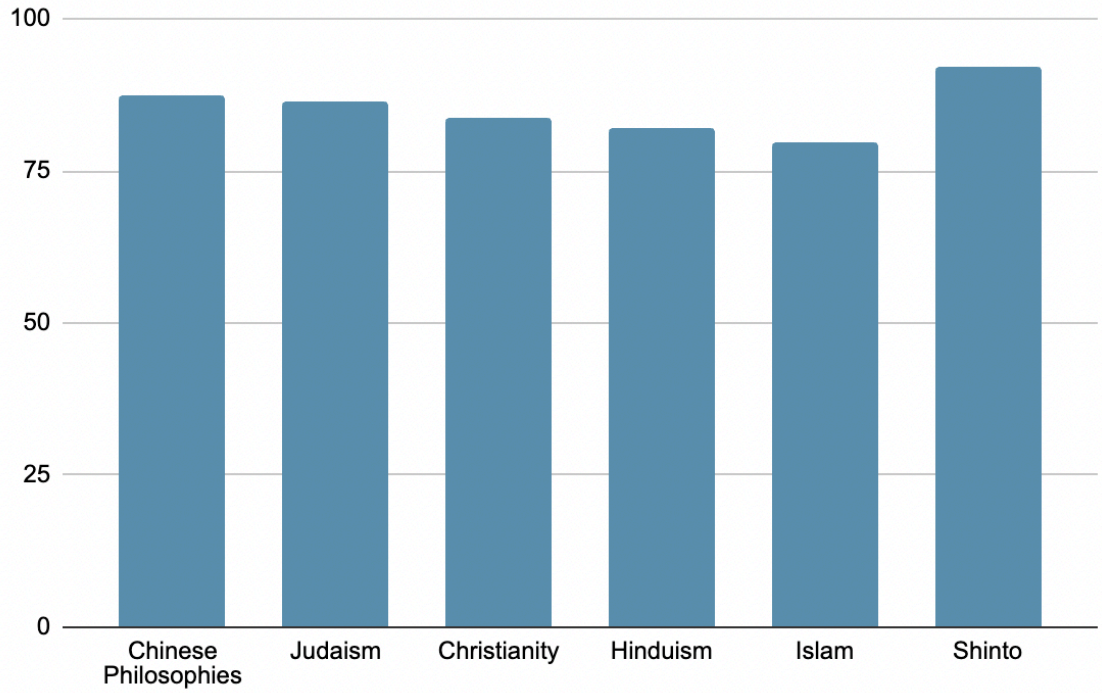
From this information, I found students were more engaged while learning about the basic beliefs Shinto through this unit of DI than any of the other six units taught over the school year. Of the 63 students who completed the Likert scale survey (Appendix C), 92.06% noted that they were either engaged or fully engaged during instruction about Shinto and while completing the corresponding activities. Even though the religion was not familiar to the majority of them based off the pre-questionnaire responses discussed in Chapter Four, students who were felt engaged connected with the unit because they found the activities during the lessons about Shinto to be fun according to their Likert scale explanation. The activities of completing a WebQuest with a peer, sitting outside to write Haiku about nature, and folding origami cranes could have been deemed by these middle level learners as play, which would intensify feelings of pleasure in their brain (Daniels, 2020) and ultimately lead to more engagement. On the Likert scale survey, as shown on Table 5.2 and 5.18, instruction about Shinto saw the least number of students reporting that they felt disengaged or fully disengaged out of all six units. Only one student reported feeling fully disengaged. None of the learners reported feeling disengaged. Additionally, while several students had negative thoughts about Shinto during instruction, 85% of students discussed having positive thoughts. Student emotions

when learning about Shinto were also positive. Nine learners stated that they found themselves to be either calm, peaceful or relaxed during this unit of instruction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Likert scale survey (Appendix C) gave students the opportunity to consider whether or not they were engaged in the units of instruction as well as the reason behind how engaged they felt. The Likert scale surveys showed the majority of students believed they were engaged or fully engaged across all six units of instruction about world religions and systems of beliefs. Table 5.20 displays learner engagement based on the percentages developed from the Likert scale surveys.

Table 5.20: Percentages of Students Who Felt Engaged or Fully Engaged During Units of Instruction



The DI unit of Shinto had the highest percentage of student engagement across all six units. The other DI units, Hinduism and Islam, ranked below the three DCI units. The DI unit about Islam, while having the least number of respondents, also saw the lowest percentage of student engagement across all six units.

The unit on Chinese philosophies had the highest percentage of student engagement across the three DCI units which also included Judaism and Christianity. This unit of DCI instruction about the Chinese philosophies allowed students to experience the role religion has in civic life by deliberating over an authentic problem. While the DCI unit about Judaism had the same AIW composite score as the unit about the Chinese philosophies, it saw a slightly lower percentage of engaged and fully engaged students. This DCI unit about Judaism also asked students to deliberate over an authentic problem of resettling the Jewish community after their release from the Babylonian captivity. Christianity scored lower than the units about the Chinese philosophies and Judaism on the AIW composite score and percentage of students engaged. The focus question of this unit played a role in the lower AIW composite score as student did not deliberate to solve an authentic problem. The focus question could possibly also have influenced the lower learner engagement percentage. However, most students noted that their lack of engagement during that particular unit was due their interactions with Christianity in their cultural meaning system, either negative experiences or personally practicing the faith and feeling as though they did not need to learn more.

This trend of lower AIW composite score and learner engagement percentage continued with two of the DI units. While all three DI units scored lower AIW composite scores than they DCI units, Hinduism and Islam also had lower percentages of learners

who felt engaged and fully engaged during instruction. Additionally, the DI unit about Islam had the highest number of students reporting disengagement overall. While both of these faiths are present in the community in which the school is located, the surrounding area is predominately Evangelical Protestant. Students are typically more motivated to learn about topics that have a personal cultural meaning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). Students who are typically always engaged can also sometimes disengage from instruction (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Both of these units also experienced greater pressures of learners being placed in Covid-19 quarantines. The rising numbers of learners quarantined during these units may have impacted the stress levels of students in school and ultimately made them cognitively disengage even though they appeared behaviorally engaged.

The DI unit about Shinto was interesting as it did not follow the trend of lower AIW composite scores having lower learner engagement percentages. The unit about Shinto had the lowest AIW composite score, but the highest percentage of students, 92.06%, reporting engagement during instruction. Only one learner reported being disengaged. In responses defending their engagement selection on the Likert scale survey, learners kept claiming the assignments were fun. The tasks included completing a WebQuest with a partner, writing haiku about nature outside, and folding paper origami cranes. Since learners associated these tasks as being fun, the brain may have intensified feelings associated with rewards and pleasure (Daniels, 2020), which ultimately increased students feeling that they were engaged.

The post questionnaire surveys (Appendix B) discussed in this chapter allowed students to self-reflect on their thoughts and emotions during the various units of

instruction about world religions and systems of belief. The thoughts students shared showed that most were inherently interested in the world religions and philosophies presented in this study. The words 'interesting' and 'cool' were consistently used by the students in their explanations of what they thought while learning about each of the religions and the Chinese philosophies. Negative thoughts tended to claim a particular belief or aspect of religion was "weird." One learner stressed that the Shinto concepts of animism and nature were weird while several found the polytheistic belief of Hinduism to be difficult to understand and in turn claimed it was also weird. Overall, however, learners were more positive in terms of the thoughts they shared than negative during each unit of instruction.

Students who are emotionally interested in content are also more motivated to learn (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). While many did not expand on their responses to the post questionnaire inquiry of their personal emotions during the unit of study, what the students wrote allowed me to understand how they engaged with each unit of instruction in addition to their emotional processes. Nine of the middle level learners in this study reported feeling calm, relaxed, and peaceful when learning about the Japanese faith of Shinto. Seventeen students reported positive emotions during the unit about Christianity including one student who stated they were happy this religion could be taught in public schools.

The DCI unit about the Chinese philosophies saw the middle level learners discussing empathy towards those who lived under a legalist regime in ancient China. Students reported being mad and upset that a government could rule their people in such a harsh manner. The unit of Hinduism saw one student state they were happy for those

who believed in that faith. However, the other units did not bring out historical empathy in learner responses.

Chapter Six: Summary, Limitations, & Thoughts for Future Research

As discussed in the literature review, all learners have significant cognitive, social, and emotional experiences when learning new knowledge (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). Middle level learners experience significant developmental changes as their brain undergoes the changes necessary for adulthood. These changes affect how middle level students learn and engage with academic content, particularly that which is not deemed part of their personal culture or future life goals. There is a need to balance cognitive academic content with the social and emotional processes middle level learners experience (Daniels, 2020). In the Bible Belt of America's Deep South, learners can disengage during instruction about world religions and philosophies due to strong emotional and social ties to their cultural systems. However, religious education allows learners to understand the world as well as how the majority of its population is vastly different from their specific cultural system. According to Panjwani (2005), teaching students about a variety of religions "facilitates mutual understanding and promotes respect and tolerance." (p. 387) Additionally, education about a variety of religions is necessary in a democratic and global society for students to develop the skills necessary for citizenship (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007). Teachers can promote learner engagement in topics that do not apply to their cultural systems or future goals by utilizing instruction that incorporates authentic learning and real-life experiences (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). Previous research conducted by Saye (2017) and others advocate for the use of authentic pedagogical practices through disciplined civic inquiry (DCI) in the history classroom to engage learners in instruction

that promotes democratic and global citizenship. Based on previous research, this study incorporated authentic pedagogical units of instruction as part of an effort to better understand the experiences middle level students had learning about religions and philosophies. This action research study also sought to better understand the cognitive, social, and emotional processes of middle level learners during units of authentic instruction about world religions and philosophies.

Over the course of the 2021-2022 year, I taught six units that each encompassed instruction about a world religion or several philosophies. Three DI units incorporated instruction about Hinduism, Shinto and Islam. The remaining units utilized DCI to engage students during the instruction about three Chinese philosophies, Judaism and Christianity. As an action researcher in my classroom with my students, I aimed to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional experiences they had during this units of instruction while also improving myself professionally.

At the start of the academic year, students were provided a questionnaire (Appendix A) which sought understanding of how their prior knowledge and cultural system affected their understanding of religion and its place in public schools. On this survey, students were asked to define religion in their own words. Learners were also asked whether or not instruction about various world religions and philosophies should be included in a public school. Their responses to this questionnaire allowed me to understand part of their cultural system and how it affected their knowledge as well as understanding as they entered my classroom.

At the start of each unit of instruction, students completed pre-questionnaires (Appendix B) that asked a variety of questions about the world religion or philosophies

being covered in order to understand the knowledges they held when they entered my history class about the topic being covered. Learners were asked what knowledge they had if any about the religion or philosophies in question. Students were asked if they had heard or learned about the religion or philosophies before this class, and if so, where.

All units were scored with AIW rubrics for Classroom Instruction (Appendix D) and Social Science Tasks (Appendix E) to determine the level of authentic pedagogy they provided to students through instruction and assignments. Instruction was scored using video recorded class sessions or a specific class throughout the school year. Dr. Kohlmeier and I individually scored the recordings using the AIW rubrics and then met to discuss our findings and determine consensus scores. These scores allowed me to analyze how students cognitively experienced these units of authentic instruction through higher order thinking (HOT), deep knowledge, conversation, and connectedness. The post questionnaire (Appendix B) provided at the end of each of the six units helped develop my understanding of how students felt they would best use this new knowledge. Their responses were divided into five categories using words directly from the student responses which included: understanding, tolerance/respect, teaching others, travel, or unsure.

Their cognitive experiences and the knowledge they gained from these units of instruction was also exhibited in the work that they completed during the unit as well as peer and class discussions during the recordings and throughout the year as observed by me, the teacher researcher. Their social and emotional experiences were also present in learner discussions recorded and observed. Additionally, their responses to the post

questionnaire (Appendix B) also provided a window into the thoughts and emotions they personally experienced during instruction.

Learners also responded to Likert scale surveys (Appendix C) at the end of instruction and completion of the task. The Likert scale survey provided insight into how my students felt they engaged with the task they were assigned during the unit. Students depicted their perceived level of engagement with an emoji icon to show either fully disengaged, disengaged, neither disengaged or engaged, engaged, or fully engaged. Learners then explained why they chose to depict the emoji icon in that manner. Their explanations also provided insight to their social, emotional, and cognitive processes that relate to engagement.

In previous chapters, I have discussed the inspiration and literary basis for this study as well as its methodology and findings. This final chapter presents a continued discussion of some of my findings. Limitations and thoughts for future research are also outlined.

Summary

This study included three research questions. The first research question was: *what knowledges about religions and philosophies do students bring to an eighth grade classroom?* I found that among my students during the 2021-2022 academic year, most students had a basic understanding of how to define religion. Additionally, the majority held prior knowledge about Christianity. Prior knowledge about the other world religions and philosophies, however, was limited. Students were least knowledgeable about eastern beliefs, particularly Shinto, as well as the Abrahamic faith of Islam. Misconceptions were also present in the prior knowledge students discussed, notably about the Chinese

philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. While prior knowledge about Christianity came mainly from a religious setting followed by family and friends, learners had previously gained knowledge about the other religions and systems of belief from either school or history class. Online was also a popular response to where students gained prior knowledge as they frequently engaged with YouTube and TikTok videos placed on the internet by people of different cultures.

The second research question presented in this study focused on the units of instruction. The question asked: *how do units of authentic pedagogy in an eighth grade course influence student knowledges about religions?* I analyzed this question in several ways including scores of both instruction and the task using the AIW rubrics (Appendix D and Appendix E), student work, the post questionnaire (Appendix B), and classroom observations. This study examined both the task and instruction with AIW rubrics to determine consensus scores of the authentic pedagogies. These scores allowed me to understand the authenticity of instruction and task. I was also able to use the consensus scores to compare the units to each other. Inter-rater agreement was substantial for instruction and near perfect on the task. The scores also provided insight into what ways instruction and task both increased student knowledge during that unit of instruction.

Students displayed the knowledge they gained in each of these units during peer deliberations, whole class discussions, and the task they completed. All tasks assigned to students during the units of instruction were graded. This incentive was put in place in an attempt to ensure the students would put forth their best effort in completing the assignment. After each unit of instruction, the majority of students reported on the post questionnaire (Appendix B) that they were now more understanding of others who

practiced either the religion or system of belief based on their new knowledge. In fact, the three DCI units of instruction had higher numbers of students who felt more understanding after instruction than the three DI units.

The third and final question sought to examine learner engagement during each unit. This question asked: *how does authentic pedagogy shape learner engagement in the study about religions and philosophies?* I analyzed student responses on the post questionnaires (Appendix B) and the Likert scale survey (Appendix C) for this question. Observations of students during the video recordings and in class also contributed to understanding student engagement. Across all six units of instruction the majority of students reported feeling either engaged or fully engaged on the Likert scale surveys. Additionally, the student responses to the post-questionnaire questions about their thoughts and emotions while engaging with the units of instruction were mainly positive.

The DCI units of instruction about the Chinese philosophies and Judaism tied for the highest composite AIW rubric scores out of all six units of instruction because they asked students to solve an authentic problem. For both of these units, students created marketing campaigns to present to the class. The DCI unit about the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, asked learners to decide which philosophy would be best suited for the Qin emperor to govern a united China in 221 BCE. This unit had the second highest number of learners report feelings of engagement on the Likert scale survey. Students initially worked in expert groups to learn about the three philosophies before being divided into project groups where they were guided by the question "which philosophy is the best plan for a unified China" to deliberate a solution. Once a philosophy was chosen, the group created a marketing plan for that system of

belief. Student projects represented more accurate understandings of Confucianism and Legalism than Daoism. In the post questionnaire (Appendix B), however, learners connected what they had learned to the world they live in and showed a deeper understanding of the three philosophies. Interestingly, this particular unit was continuously brought up by students throughout the academic year during class discussions and peer conversations. These middle level learners tried to relate the knowledge they had learned about Legalism to the Russian invasion of the Ukraine as well as to teachers that assigned them break detention.

Students reported being able to understand the religious other after the completion of this DCI unit about the Chinese philosophies more than any other unit on the post questionnaire. Additionally, when discussing their thoughts and emotions, learners also displayed a high level of historical empathy towards those who lived under a legalist society in ancient China. While this was one of two units where students displayed this perspective taking on the past, more students expressed empathy in this unit.

The unit about Judaism better engaged students in higher order thinking (HOT) and substantive conversation, scoring five out of five for each of those categories on the AIW rubric for Classroom Instruction (Appendix D). Similar to the unit about the Chinese philosophies, this assignment utilized jigsaw groups. However, for this project, learners deliberated over a place for the Jewish community to settle upon release from the Babylonian captivity. This unit was authentic as deciding on where to move is an issue deliberated by adults in our modern world for job security or an overall better standard of living. Students were guided by the question "which location of settlement will ensure the continuity and protection of the Jewish community?" Learners were initially placed in an

expert group to learn about a specific location of settlement, Jerusalem, the Egyptian island of Elephantine, or remaining in Babylon. After one day in expert groups, the middle level learners were then moved to their project group where they debated which location would best serve the Jewish community before creating a poster to influence class members to make the same decision. While students were very open about the thoughts they had while learning about Judaism in the post questionnaire (Appendix B), very few expanded on their emotions instead utilizing simplistic, one word responses.

This unit about Judaism had the third highest percentage of students report engagement. This high level of engagement could be tied to the high AIW score. Learners also typically become more engaged in academic work that mimics a real life experience (Caskey & Anfara, 2020). This unit also had the second largest number of learners who felt they were now more understanding of the religious other after instruction.

The third and final DCI unit focused on instruction about Christianity. Students worked with a partner to create a reverse perspective poem showing the Muslim and Christian points of view on claiming the Holy Land during the time of the Crusades. Learners were guided by the question "Who believed their claim to the Holy Land was stronger during the Crusades, Muslims or Christians?" Instruction during the unit of Christianity scored a five out of five for HOT on the AIW rubric for Classroom Instruction (Appendix D). However, it had a lower composite score than the DCI units about Judaism and Chinese philosophies. Its lower scores on deep knowledge and substantive conversation can be attributed to students not deliberating over which group, Christians or Muslims, had the right to own the Holy Land in the Middle Ages. Engaging

learners in that kind of investigation and debate would have been more authentic and ethical.

My hypothesis that all learners would be engaged in this unit about Christianity based on the location of our school in the Bible Belt of the Deep South, was incorrect. This unit had the fourth highest percentage of learner engagement. Its lower AIW composite score may have influenced learner cognitive engagement. The majority of learners who reported engagement in their Likert scale survey (Appendix C) stated it was due to Christianity being their personal faith. However, other learners noted that they were disinterested because they felt as if they already knew all they needed to about the faith since it was their personal religion.

The instructional units about Hinduism and Islam tied for the highest composite scores among the DI units but did not out score the three DCI units. The instruction during the unit about Hinduism scored highest among the three DI units for deep knowledge. The tasks for the DI unit about Hinduism engaged students in creating a travel style blog as if they were traveling through ancient India and encountering aspects of the Hindu faith. The travel blog task completed by students during the unit about Hinduism scored highest among the three DI units for elaborated communication on the AIW rubric for Social Science Tasks.

The unit about Islam involved learners in image analysis of photos taken from various international mosques. Islam had the highest DI unit score for HOT on the AIW rubric for Classroom Instruction. The DI unit about Islam recorded the lowest percentage of student engagement with 79.59% of learners stating they were either engaged or fully engaged.

The DI unit about Shinto, which consisted of a WebQuest, writing haiku about nature while sitting outside and folding origami cranes, had the lowest composite score across all six units. However, students reported feeling most engaged on the Likert scale survey with the DI unit about Shinto during which students completed a WebQuest, wrote haiku and folded origami paper cranes.

Discussion

The practical side of this action research is based in concerns about a lack of engagement during instruction about world religions and systems of belief among the middle level learners in my classroom. The study itself developed from previous experiences with students showing resistance during instruction about religions and philosophies during their eighth grade world history class due to the strength of their personal beliefs. While there were a variety of ways this research could have been approached, it was designed as action research for a couple of reasons. Foremost, I wanted to better understand the cognitive, social, and emotional experiences my students had when learning about world religions and philosophies over the 2021-2022 academic year. I also desired to improve my practice as an educator and the experiences of the middle level learners that walk through the door of my classroom. I feel that both of these aims were achieved during this study.

Puberty greatly effects the cognitive, social, and emotional lives of middle level learners as the brain goes through intense, significant changes for adulthood (Armstrong, 2006; Daniels, 2020). These learners are additionally affected by their conflicting desires for independence and acceptance as well as their "cultural meaning system" which develops from their home and community experiences (National Academies of Science,

Engineering, and Medicine, 2018, p. 139). In this middle stage, many students become disengaged in school as they question the benefits of learning new content that they feel will not personally benefit them immediately or in their future aspirations. Like many action researchers, I was inspired to better understand how my students had been shaped by their cultural meaning system. As pointed out by Efron & Ravid (2020), it is important to understand the social circumstances of leaners to gain insight into their world. Therefore, one of the leading aspects of this study was to understand the prior knowledge my students held about world religions and philosophies as well as from where this knowledge came. As this study was conducted with middle level learners in the Bible Belt of America's Deep South, my hypothesis that these students would be more knowledgeable about Christianity than other world religion or system of belief was supported in the findings. Their knowledge of Christianity was formed in their cultural meaning systems of the religious setting as well as family and friends. Interestingly, even with the large number of students announcing Christianity as their personal faith and the school's embedment within the surrounding Evangelical Protestant community, I found that the majority middle level learners who participated in this study were emotionally and cognitively open to studying about other religions and philosophies during this course as shown in their statements that education about world religions should be included in public school.

Scholars of religious literacy (Haynes, 2019; Jackson, 2009; James, 2010; James, 2015; Passe & Wilcox, 2009; Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007) and those of both disciplinary inquiry and disciplined civic inquiry (Kohlmeier, 2005; Maddox & Saye, 2017; Saye, 2019; VanSledright, 2004) promote the goal of civic education in the history classroom.

This action research study was unique as it combined these two schools of thought to understand how authentic pedagogy shaped middle level learner knowledges and engagement during the study about religions and philosophies. The final two facets of this study focused on those two aspects, the cognitive learning process and the social and emotional engagement of learners during units of authentic pedagogical instruction. Saye et al. (2018) determined that more classrooms need to utilize tasks that score high on the AIW rubrics as this allows for deeper learning and increased engagement, which both benefit students. The unit of instruction about the Chinese philosophies tied for the highest consensus AIW rubric score with Judaism. However, students continuously discussed the knowledge they gained about the Chinese philosophies long after the unit was finished. In line with beliefs about religious education facilitating mutual understanding (James, 2010; James, 2015; Nash & Crabtree, n.d.; Panjwani, 2005; Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007), the majority of students felt that the knowledge they learned during both the DI and DCI units would now make them more understanding of the religious other.

Interestingly, while the DI unit about Shinto scored the lowest on the consensus AIW rubric scores, it had the highest percentage score on the Likert scale survey for number of students who felt they were either engaged or fully engaged. This contrasts with some scholars who state that higher scoring tasks show increased learner engagement. The unit about Shinto outscored the units on the Chinese philosophies and Judaism, which ranked second and third respectively, for learner engagement. This anomaly may be due to learners defining engagement differently. However, on the Likert scales for all six units the majority of learners who responded stated they felt either

engaged or fully engaged in the task and instruction. Additionally, an extremely minimal amount of resistance was shown as the majority of learners discussed positive emotions and thoughts in the post questionnaires.

Action research is also an empowering tool to promote change in the classroom. From the findings of this study, I have found areas for professional growth as well as reflect on ways to improve my practices. Over the 2022-2023 school year, I plan to implement changes to several of the lessons taught to see if there is an increase in student engagement. For the units of instruction about Hinduism and Islam, I plan to rearrange the structure of the units. For the unit about Hinduism, I want to see if beginning with a teacher-led lecture about the religion will help address misconceptions from pre-questionnaires and further aid student understanding while completing their travel blog assignment. I also want to see if students will be more engaged in the image analysis of various parts of the Mosque during the unit about Islam if they receive some background knowledge about the faith before looking at the photos in small groups. Additionally, I plan to increase the authenticity of the unit about Christianity, which was the lowest scoring DCI unit on the AIW rubrics. I plan to implement a question that promotes student deliberation such as "who do you think has a rightful claim to the Holy Land?" The Jewish perspective would also be a welcome addition to this unit.

However, not all units of instruction will change. I plan to keep the carry out the unit about the Chinese philosophies and Judaism just as they were taught over the 2021-2022 academic year. I feel that these two units were authentic and had high levels of learner engagement. Therefore, I want to determine if this year's students will feel similarly engaged throughout these lessons.

Limitations

At times educational action research can be messy (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Despite conducting this research in my classroom with the support of my administration and district office, some limitations existed in this study. First, Covid-19 was still an ongoing issue during the 2021-2022 academic year. While the district where the study was conducted had relaxed many of its pandemic guidelines, such as required masking, strict ten-day quarantine policies in accordance with CDC guidelines were still in place in an attempt to slow the spread. Due to these regulations, quarantines greatly affected the number of students present during the six units of instruction. All questionnaires and surveys had varying numbers of responses based on the numbers of students in class and present for each part of the unit of instruction. For example, a student who completed the pre-questionnaire in class may have been placed on quarantine shortly afterwards which then led them to missing the majority of instruction, the task, Likert scale survey and post questionnaire. This example could also be vice versa with learners in quarantine for the pre-questionnaire but in class for the remainder of the unit. The units about Hinduism and Islam saw the largest number of student quarantines. The unit about Judaism saw the most participation as the district had just returned from a two-week virtual period in a system-wide effort to slow post-winter break spread. In an attempt to ensure that the Likert scale survey and post questionnaire data was not affected by students who had not been present due to quarantine, I asked only the learners who had been in attendance for the task and the majority of instruction to respond.

Second, as a teacher researcher conducting action research, I am intimately involved with the instruction in my classroom. I scored instruction and tasks that I

provided and at times personally developed. Therefore, the potential for subjectivity certainly exists. Additionally, Dr. Kohlmeier, who served as the second observer has known me for several years as a student during my graduate level course work. However, funding resources were unavailable to bring in an outside researcher for observations to score both instruction and task. Instead, Dr. Kohlmeier and I came to a mutual understanding of how the rubrics would be used and applied to both instruction and task. We rated the video recordings of instruction and tasks individually before meeting to deliberate over a consensus.

Third, while surveys are beneficial in gathering information about people's opinions and perceptions (Efron & Ravid, 2020), student responses may have been a limitation to this study. I developed teacher-student relationships with my learners over the course of the year. My association with my students may have had an effect. According to Efron and Ravid (2020), respondents "may choose their response choices that they believe are expected, rather than express their true opinions, attitudes, or beliefs" (p. 113). Therefore, the learners in my classroom may have submitted responses on the questionnaires or Likert scale survey that they felt I would like instead of being truly honest. Students also skipped questions in the pre- and post-questionnaire surveys. It is difficult to know the true cause of why they chose not to answer these questions. One can guess that they either had no knowledge of the subject matter or that they had knowledge but were unsure if it was correct of not. Many students also did not give detailed responses. Responses on open-ended or unstructured questions that require one or more sentences, "depend to a large extent on the writing skills of the respondents" (Efron & Ravid, 2020, p. 128). As their simplistic responses were often only one word or

a fragmented statement, my interpretations of their social and emotional thoughts and feelings were limited. Additionally, surveys and questionnaires also lack the rich data that can be gained via a personal interview (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Interviews can also lead to a deeper understanding of student learning.

Thoughts for Future Research

In this study, I have sought to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional processes of middle level learners when they participate and engage in units of authentic pedagogy about world religion and philosophies. However, more research is necessary to expand and refine my findings. Future research could continue investigating the connection of authentic pedagogy with units of instruction about world religions and philosophies. Such research could contribute to creating professional development for history educators who are seeking to increase learner knowledge and engagement when learning about religions or philosophies that students do not deem personally relevant to their cultural system and future goals.

As I was concerned more about the students' personal emotional process, I did not engage the topics of historical empathy and perceptive recognition. However, my learners reported being angry and upset in their post-questionnaire unit survey (Appendix B) about the Chinese philosophies with how ancient Chinese people suffered in a legalist society. These emotions and thoughts show that the importance of understanding student learning in accordance with these topics. Therefore, future studies could focus more on the historical empathy and perceptive recognition felt by middle level learners during these units of instruction. This research could look to answer questions such as how to increase perspective recognition in middle level history classes or how do we make

middle level learners feel as though they are an inside person in the context of past events.

While my students did become more understanding of the religious other throughout these six units of instruction, I believe it is important for future research to look at the various aspects of understanding. Why do learners feel that they are more understanding? What exactly do the now understand about the religious other? How do they plan to use their understanding?

It would be nice to know if there were connections between the instruction about world religions and philosophies that occurred within my classroom and the actions/behaviors of my students outside the classroom. Our school has a small population of learners who practice a variety of world religions besides Christianity. These religious beliefs include Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. We also have the privilege of hosting students from a variety of countries each year which also believe in the listed faiths. Did the students in my classroom use what they learned to truly understand the religious other within their school or community? Were they more accepting of the few female students who wear hijabs in accordance with their faith?

Studies in the Bible Belt of America's Deep South that use interviews instead of surveys would also be beneficial to further understanding the social, emotional, and cognitive experiences of middle level learners. Interviews would allow a deeper analysis of student learning and provide the researcher the opportunity to delve into students' responses that were limited or confusing in the surveys.

In understanding middle level learner engagement, it would also be important to further develop insight into their depth of thinking. In this study, my students equated the

"fun" unit of instruction about Shinto with academic engagement. Their perception of engagement was different from how I define it. Further use of AIW rubrics as well as more detailed small group observations and interviews would benefit understanding middle level learner engagement and depth of thinking. A new line of inquiry with interviews also provides the opportunity to study learner engagement beyond the Likert scale surveys. Do students perceive engagement in the same way teachers or researchers or is their understanding of engagement different?

Conclusion

While there are numerous studies about students engaging with instruction about religion at a variety of academic levels and in major cities, very few exist with a focus on middle level learners within the Bible Belt of America's Deep South. This study sought to contribute to that particular area by examining the cognitive, social and emotional complexities students experience in a world history class in the Bible Belt region when learning about world religions and philosophies through authentic pedagogy. The results of this study suggest that authentic pedagogy has a positive impact on the cognitive knowledge middle level learners gain and on how they socially and emotionally process instruction about topics, such as religion, that can otherwise cause them to disengage. Units of both DI and DCI can engage students in the study about religions while also further promoting learner understanding of the religious other which is essential in our modern, global society. Hopefully, my research will contribute to improving efforts for religious literacy and authentic pedagogy at the middle level.

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Appendix A: Student Questionnaire

Provided Start and End of School Year

1. What is culture?
2. What does culture mean to people?
3. Describe your culture.
4. What is religion?
5. How does religion shape or enforce cultures and people?
6. Would it be important to understand people may not believe in a religion or system of belief, or that they may believe in a religion or system of belief different than you do? Explain why or why not.
7. Can we and should we learn about other cultures with world religions and systems of beliefs in a public school? Explain why or why not.
8. As an American citizen and member of a global community, is it part of our responsibility to learn about other world cultures and their beliefs? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Unit Questionnaires

Pre-Questionnaire – Provided Before Unit of Study

1. What do you know about this religion and its beliefs?
2. Where have you learned what you know about this religion and its beliefs?
3. How would you compare this religion to your spiritual outlook?
4. What does this look like in the world today?

Post Questionnaire – Provided After Unit of Study

1. What thoughts did you have while learning about this world religion and its beliefs?
2. What emotions did you feel while learning about it?
3. How would you now compare this religion to your spiritual outlook?
4. How would you now describe this religion in the world today?
5. How can you take what you learned about this and use it to better understand its followers?

Appendix C: Likert Scale Survey

Adjust the emoji to best describe your level of engagement during this lesson. For example, a sad face would be disengaged while an extremely happy face would be fully engaged.

Defend your emoji rating of your level of engagement during this lesson. Make sure to be very descriptive!

What ideas do you have to make this lesson more engaging or even better for the next time it is taught? Make sure to be very descriptive!

Protocol-1

Scoring Criteria for Classroom Instruction

Scoring instructions: To determine scores for the four standards, follow the technical scoring criteria as outlined in the tips below. Consider the descriptions for scores 1-5 on each standard to constitute the *minimum* criteria for that score. If you find yourself between scores, make the decision by asking whether the minimum conditions of the higher score have been met. If not, use the lower score. In determining scores for each standard, the observer should **consider only the evidence observed** during the lesson observation. **"Many" students refers to at least 1/3 of the students in a class; "most" refers to more than half; "almost all" is not specified numerically but should be interpreted as "all but a few."**

Date:_____ **Class Observed:**_____ **Observer:**_____

Score	HOTS *To what extent do students use lower order thinking processes? To what extent do students use higher order thinking processes?* Lower Order / Higher Order thinking only 1 2 3 4 5 thinking is central	Deep Knowledge *To what extent is knowledge deep? To what extent is knowledge shallow and superficial?* knowledge is shallow 1 2 3 4 5 knowledge is deep
5	Almost all students, almost all of the time, are performing HOT.	Knowledge is very deep because the teacher successfully structures the lesson so that almost all students sustain a focus on a significant topic and do at least one of the following: demonstrate their understanding of the problematic nature of information and/or ideas; demonstrate complex understanding by arriving at a reasoned, supported conclusion; or explain how they solved a complex problem. In general, students' reasoning, explanations and arguments demonstrate fullness and complexity of understanding.
4	Students are engaged in at least one major activity during the lesson in which they perform HOT operations, and this activity occupies a substantial portion (**at least 1/3**) of the lesson and many students are performing HOT.	Knowledge is relatively deep because either the teacher or the students provide information, arguments or reasoning that demonstrate the complexity of an important idea. The teacher structures the lesson so that **many** students **sustain** a focus on a significant topic for a period of time **and do** at least one of the following: demonstrate their understanding of the problematic nature of information and/or ideas; demonstrate understanding by arriving at a reasoned, supported conclusion; or explain how they solved a relatively complex problem.
3	Students are primarily engaged in routine LOT operations a good share of the lesson. There is at least one significant question or activity in which some students perform some HOT operations.	Knowledge is treated unevenly during instruction; i.e., deep understanding of something is countered by superficial understanding of other ideas. At least one significant idea may be presented in depth and its significance grasped, but in general the focus is not sustained.
2	Students are primarily engaged in LOT, but at some point they perform HOT as a minor diversion within the lesson.	Knowledge remains superficial and fragmented; while some key concepts and ideas are mentioned or covered, only a superficial acquaintance or trivialized understanding of these complex ideas is evident.
1	Students are engaged only LOT operation; i.e., they either receive, or recite, or participate in routine practice and in no activities during the lesson do students go beyond LOT.	Knowledge is very thin because it does not deal with significant topics or ideas; teacher and students are involved in the coverage of simple information which they are to remember.

Tips for Scoring HOTS

- Lower order thinking (LOT) occurs when students are asked to receive or recite factual information or to employ rules and algorithms through repetitive routines. As information receivers, students are given pre-specified knowledge ranging from simple facts and information to more complex concepts. Such knowledge is conveyed to students through a reading, work sheet, lecture or other direct instructional medium. Students are not required to do much intellectual work since the purpose of the instructional process is to simply transmit knowledge or to practice procedural routines. Students are in a similar role when they are reciting previously acquired knowledge; i.e., responding to test-type questions that require recall of pre-specified knowledge. More complex activities still may involve LOT when students only need to follow pre-specified steps and routines or employ algorithms in a rote fashion.
- Higher order thinking (HOT) requires students to manipulate information and ideas in ways that transfer their meaning and implications. This transformation occurs when students combine facts and ideas in order to synthesize, generalize, explain, hypothesize or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation. Manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems and discover new (for them) meanings and understandings.
- When students engage in HOT, an element of uncertainty is introduced into the instructional process and makes instructional outcomes not always predictable; i.e., the teacher is not certain what will be produced by students. In helping students become producers of knowledge, the teacher's main instructional task is to create activities or environments that allow them opportunities to engage in HOT.

Tips for Scoring Deep Knowledge

- Knowledge is shallow, thin or superficial when it does not deal with significant concepts or central ideas of a topic or discipline. Knowledge is also shallow when important, central ideas have been trivialized, or when it is presented as non-problematic. Knowledge is thin when students' understanding of important concepts or issues is superficial such as when ideas are covered in a way that gives them only a surface acquaintance with their meaning. This superficiality can be due, in part, to instructional strategies such as when teachers cover large quantities of fragmented ideas and bits of information that are unconnected to other knowledge.
- Evidence of shallow understanding by students exists when they do not or can not use knowledge to make clear distinctions, arguments, solve problems and develop more complex understanding of other related phenomena.
- Knowledge is deep or thick when it concerns the central ideas of a topic or discipline and because such knowledge is judged to be crucial to a topic or discipline.
- For students, knowledge is deep when they develop relatively complex understandings of these central concepts. Instead of being able to recite only fragmented pieces of information, students develop relatively systematic, integrated or holistic understanding. Mastery is demonstrated by their success in producing new knowledge by discovering relationships, solving problems, constructing explanations, and drawing conclusions.
- In scoring this item, observers should note that depth of knowledge and understanding refers to the substantive character of the ideas that the teacher presents in the lesson, or to the level of understanding that students demonstrate as they consider these ideas. It is possible to have a lesson that contains substantively important, deep knowledge, but students do not become engaged or they fail to show understanding of the complexity or the significance of the ideas. Observers' ratings can reflect either the depth of the teacher's knowledge or the depth of understanding that students develop of that content.

Protocol-2

Score	Substantive Conversation *To what extent is classroom discourse devoted to creating or negotiating understandings of subject matter?* **no substantive conversation** 1 2 3 4 5 **high level substantive conversation**	Connectedness to the Real World *To what extent is the lesson, activity, or task connected to comprehension or concerns beyond the classroom?* **no connection** 1 2 3 4 5 **connected**
5	All features of substantive conversation occur, with at least one example of sustained conversation, and almost all students participate.	Students study or work on a topic, problem or issue that the teacher and students see as connected to their personal experiences or actual contemporary or persistent public issues. Students recognize the connection between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom. They explore these connections in ways that create personal meaning and significance for the knowledge. This meaning and significance is strong enough to lead students to become involved in an effort to affect or influence a larger audience beyond their classroom in one of the following ways: by communicating knowledge to others (including within the school), advocating solutions to social problems, providing assistance to people, creating performances or products with utilitarian or aesthetic value.
4	All features of substantive conversation occur, with at least one example of sustained conversation, and many students participate in some substantive conversation (even if not part of the sustained conversation).	Students study or work on a topic, problem or issue that the teacher and students see as connected to their personal experiences or actual contemporary or persistent public issues. Students recognize the connection between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom. They explore these connections in ways that create personal meaning and significance for the knowledge. However, there is no effort to use the knowledge in ways that go beyond the classroom to actually influence a larger audience.
3	Substantive Conversation Feature # 2 (sharing) and/or #3 (coherent promotion of collective understanding) occur and involve at least one example of sustained conversation (i.e., at least 3 consecutive interchanges).	Students study a topic, problem or issue that the teacher succeeds in connecting to students' actual experiences or to actual contemporary or persistent public issues. Students recognize some connection between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom, but they do not explore the implications of these connections which remain abstract or hypothetical. There is no effort to actually influence a larger audience.
2	Substantive Conversation Feature # 2 (sharing) and/or # 3 (coherent promotion of collective understanding) occur briefly and involve at least one example of two consecutive interchanges.	Students encounter a topic, problem or issue that the teacher tries to connect to students' experiences or to actual contemporary or persistent public issues; i.e., the teacher informs students that there is potential value in the knowledge being studied because it relates to the world beyond the classroom. For example, students are told that understanding Middle East history is important for politicians trying to bring peace to the region; however, the connection is weak and there is no evidence that students make the connection.
1	Virtually no features of substantive conversation occur during the lesson.	Lesson topic and activities have no clear connection to anything beyond itself; the teacher offers no justification beyond the need to perform well in class.

Tips for Scoring Substantive Conversation

- This scale measures the extent of talking to learn and to understand in the classroom. There are two dimensions to this construct: one is the substance of subject matter, and the other is the character of dialogue.
- In classes where there is little or no substantive conversation, teacher-student interaction typically consists of a lecture with recitation where the teacher deviates very little from delivering a preplanned body of information and set of questions; students typically give very short answers. Because the teacher's questions are motivated principally by a preplanned checklist of questions, facts, and concepts, the discourse is frequently choppy, rather than coherent; there is often little or no follow-up of student responses. Such discourse is the oral equivalent of fill-in-the-blank or short-answer study questions.
- In classes characterized by high levels of substantive conversation there is considerable teacher-student and student-student interaction about the ideas of a topic; the interaction is reciprocal, and it promotes coherent shared understanding. (1) The talk is about subject matter in the discipline and includes higher order thinking such as making distinctions, applying ideas, forming generalizations, raising questions; not just reporting of experiences, facts, definitions, or procedures. (2) The conversation involves sharing of ideas and is not completely scripted or controlled by one party (as in teacher-led recitation). Sharing is best illustrated when participants explain themselves or ask questions in complete sentences, and when they respond directly to comments of previous speakers. (3) The dialogue builds coherently on participants' ideas to promote improved collective understanding of a theme or topic (which does not necessarily require an explicit summary statement). In short, substantive conversation resembles the kind of sustained exploration of content characteristic of a good seminar where student contributions lead to shared understandings.
- To recognize sustained conversations, we define an interchange as a statement by one person and a response by another. Interchanges can occur between teacher and student or student and student. Sustained conversation is defined as at least three consecutive interchanges. The interchanges need not be between the same two people, but they must be linked substantively as consecutive responses. Consecutive responses should demonstrate sensitivity either by responding directly to the ideas of another speaker or by making an explicit transition that shows the speaker is aware he/she is shifting the conversation. Substantive conversation includes the 3 features described above. Each of the features requires interchange between two or more people. None can be illustrated through monologue by one person.

Tips for Scoring Value Beyond School

- This scale measures the extent to which the class has value and meaning beyond the instructional context. In a class with little or no value beyond, activities are deemed important for success only in school (now or later), but for no other aspects of life. Student work has no impact on others and serves only to certify their level of competence or compliance with the norms and routines of formal schooling.
- A lesson gains in authenticity the more there is a connection to the larger social context within which students live. Two areas in which student work can exhibit some degree of connectedness are: (a) a real world public problem; i.e., students confront an actual contemporary or persistent issue or problem, such as applying statistical analysis in preparing a report to the city council on the homeless, (b) students' personal experiences; i.e., the lesson focuses directly or builds upon students' actual experiences or situations. High scores can be achieved when the lesson entails one or both of these.

Protocol-3

Scoring Criteria for Social Science Tasks

General Rules

The main point here is to estimate the extent to which successful completion of the task requires the kind of cognitive work indicated by each of the three standards: Construction of Knowledge, Elaborated Communication, and Connections to Students' Lives. Each standard will be scored according to different rules, but the following apply to all three standards.

- If a task has different parts that imply different expectations (e.g., worksheet/short answer questions and a question asking for explanations of some conclusions), the **score should reflect the teacher's apparent dominant or overall expectations**. Overall expectations are indicated by the proportion of time or effort spent on different parts of the task and criteria for evaluation, if stated by the teacher.
- **Take into account what students can reasonably be expected to do at the grade level.**
- When it is difficult to decide between two scores, give the higher score only when a persuasive case can be made that the task meets minimal criteria for the higher score.
- If the specific wording of the criteria is not helpful in making judgments, base the score on the general intent or spirit of the standard described in the tips for scoring a particular AIW standard.

	Construction of Knowledge	Elaborated Communication	Connection to Students' Lives
4	N/A	Analysis / Persuasion / Theory. Explicit call for generalization AND support. The task requires explanations of generalizations, classifications and relationships relevant to a situation, problem, or theme, AND requires the student to substantiate them with examples, summaries, illustrations, details, or reasons. Examples include attempts to argue, convince or persuade and to develop and test hypotheses.	N/A
3	The task's **dominant expectation** is for students to interpret, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate information, rather than merely to reproduce information. To score high the task should call for interpretation of nuances of a topic that go deeper than surface exposure or familiarity.	Report / Summary. Call for generalization OR support. The task asks students **either** to draw conclusions **or** make generalizations or arguments, OR to offer examples, summaries, illustrations, details, or reasons, but not both.	The question, issue, or problem clearly resembles one that students have encountered or might encounter in their lives. The task explicitly asks students to connect the topic to experiences, observations, feelings, or situations significant in their lives.
2	There is some expectation for students to interpret, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate information, rather than merely to reproduce information.	Short-answer exercises. The task or its parts can be answered with only one or two sentences, clauses, or phrasal fragments that complete a thought.	The question, issue, or problem bears some resemblance to one that students have encountered or might encounter in their lives, but the connections are not immediately apparent. The task offers the opportunity for students to connect the topic to experiences, observations, feelings, or situations significant in their lives, but does not explicitly call for them to do so.
1	There is very little or no expectation for students to interpret, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate information. The dominant expectation is that students will merely reproduce information gained by reading, listening, or observing.	Fill-in-the-blank or multiple choice exercises.	The problem has virtually no resemblance to questions, issues, or problems that students have encountered or might encounter in their lives. The task offers very minimal or no opportunity for students to connect the topic to experiences, observations, feelings, or situations significant in their lives.

AIW Scoring Criteria for Social Science Tasks (Cont.)