

ABSTRACT

This is a mixed method study of the effects of active learning techniques on dropout prevention students within a semester-long course on the History of the Vietnam War. The results of the qualitative study are confirmed by data on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, Grade Point Averages and absences over the semester and the following semester.

The findings show that one teacher in one class can have a effect on student academic achievement by introducing a student-centered, active curriculum to replace the worksheet and textbook focus that permeates many Dropout Prevention classrooms. The use of email, classroom guests and service learning in a nursing home extends this change to other classes and life outside of school. Students become engaged by active learning techniques, including oral history, demonstrated academic and school behavior changes beyond the semester of the class. Academic success in the class produced greater confidence in school and in the students' lives.

The connection to human beings in the curriculum rather than just books and worksheets established an emotional connection to learning that these students had not previously experienced. The emotional connection and the relationships form the basis for the students' success.

This study allows Dropout Prevention students to speak in their own voices about their educational experiences before and during the course. The students reflect on the effects of the course on their lives outside of the classroom.

Of the thirteen students who participated in the last twelve weeks of the semester, twelve had a cumulative high school Grade Point Average below 2.0. For the semester, twelve earned a GPA over 2.0 in all classes and eleven earned GPAs over 3.0 in all classes. This success was sustained over the following semester. All students earned over a 2.0 GPA and seven earned over a 3.0. Six students who had not passed FCAT and were not going to graduate with a regular diploma did pass FCAT during the spring semester. FCAT scores increased an average of 42 points with some students increasing 82, 67, 58 and 55 points.