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RUNNING HEAD: ARTS-INTEGRATION & SOCIAL STUDIES

*Arts-Integration in a Middle Grades Social Studies Classroom*

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for Honors in the College of Education

**By**

Stephanie J. Dorminey

Under the mentorship of Drs. Yasar Bodur, Lina Soares, & Meca Williams-Johnson

Abstract

Many middle grades students are not engaged in their Social Studies classrooms, and history teachers are faced with the task of finding an effective way to engage students and help them remember the required content. The purpose of this study was to investigate how integrating the arts in a middle grades history classroom influences student learning and student satisfaction in social studies. The study is mixed-methods; therefore, data collected are both quantitative and qualitative. Participants are two classes of middle grades students at a rural school in the Southeastern United States. This study will benefit educators who are interested in learning specifically about arts-integration in the middle grades history classroom and how this method affects student achievement and satisfaction in the Social Studies classroom.

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April 2015  
*College of Education*  
University Honors Program  
Georgia Southern University

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express gratitude to my thesis mentors in the College of Education at Georgia Southern University. Without their help, I would not have been able to successfully complete this project.

To Dr. Meca Williams-Johnson, thank you for helping me pinpoint my passion and carry that forward into my research. Also, thank you for helping me navigate the initial intricacies of writing a formal research paper, something I had not done previously in my academic career.

To Dr. Lina Soares, thank you for working with me during a transition period. You proofread my paper multiple times and helped me formalize a working draft before collecting my research data. Your guidance was extremely valuable.

To Dr. Yasar Bodur, thank you for helping me finalize my paper during my final undergraduate semester. Also, thank you for being more than willing to work around the time constraints of student teaching and study abroad. Your enthusiasm for research and willingness to help has had a lasting impact on me.

To Dr. Michelle Reidel, thank you for sparking my passion for arts-integration as well as helping me locate resources while I was initially researching literature on my topic. You have been available whenever I have needed guidance, and for that I am grateful.

In addition, I would like to express gratitude to others with whom I have worked during the completion of my research.

To Dr. Torian White, thank you for allowing me to conduct research in your school. Without your support, I would have been unable to collect data needed for my research.

To Mrs. Jennifer Hill, thank you for working with me to implement my research project in your classroom. You have graciously worked around my schedule in order to ensure I would be able to successfully complete this project. Your support and flexibility have been invaluable resources, especially when I was collecting data in the classroom.

Finally, I would like to thank the University Honors Program at Georgia Southern for encouraging my pursuit of undergraduate research and for providing me with the opportunity to present my research at the Georgia Education Research Association conference in Fall of 2014.

### **Introduction**

“It is the most boring class ever. I can’t remember all of those people and dates.”

Unfortunately, middle graders’ opinions regarding their Social Studies classes often echo the sentiments of previous students before (Gibson, 2012; Percy & Duplas, 2011). Frustrated with the overload of information, many students become dissatisfied with the subject and lose motivation to participate in the classroom. What if there was a method middle grades Social Studies teachers could use to encourage students to engage with content material and to provide students a way of learning (and remembering) history? A method that has shown promising results is “arts-integration.” The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts adheres to the definition of arts-integration as “an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form [and] students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area” (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, p.1). While multiple definitions of “arts-integration” exist, the majority of definitions share this common idea.

Keeping the arts in schools has been a matter of serious debate with the recent economic downturn and subsequent educational budget cuts. Having been a beneficiary of my middle school’s band and choral programs, I am a proponent for keeping the arts in schools. It was also during middle school that I developed a deep admiration and fascination for History. However, prior to this study, I had never considered the implications of using art in the history classroom as a tool for increasing student achievement. Oddleifson (1994) states, “Parents and educators should...embrace the concept that the arts can enhance the true understanding of a content area (as cited in Gullatt, 2008, p. 16). In my own personal experience, history lessons in which the arts were incorporated are the lessons I still remember today.

Unfortunately, Martin (1998, as cited in Gullatt, 2008) asserts that the arts are not

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considered as a valuable teaching resource beyond the elementary school classroom. Martin also mentions that elementary school students are encouraged to use the arts as a way to express themselves – “dramatiz[ing], draw[ing], danc[ing], and sing[ing] about new material presented to them” (p.20). Middle school students do not frequently draw, dance, dramatize, and sing about new material that is presented in the classroom. Curriculum becomes stagnant as students progress through the public school system. Many teachers, faced with a daunting class size, rigid standards, and standardized testing, could find arts-integration in the classroom to be difficult and time-consuming.

Multiple studies have been conducted and have shown the correlation between incorporating the arts in schools and improved academic achievement of students (Diket, 2003; Gullatt, 2008). However, few studies examine the correlation between arts-integrated curriculum and student learning in Social Studies. Even fewer studies have been conducted to target this correlation in the specific context of a middle grades history classroom. This fact emphasizes the importance of this study. This study sought to identify whether integrating art in middle grades social studies classroom influences student retention of the material learned and whether students enjoy or do not enjoy this method of teaching social studies.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how integrating the arts in a middle grades history classroom influences student learning and student satisfaction in social studies. When referencing “the arts,” I am referring specifically to the visual arts - which is similar to other studies exploring this technique (Gibson & Larson, 2007). The goal of this study was to further this investigation by researching if using the visual arts to teach history content in a middle

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grades history classroom correlates to a better retention of the content by students and an overall increased satisfaction with the course.

For purposes of this study, I used a quasi-experimental design. I taught a unit using no arts-integration to one class period (control group), and I taught an arts-integrated unit to a different class period (experimental group). The content of both units was the same; however, the way in which the material was taught was different. Before teaching the units, I administered a pre-test to determine prior student knowledge of concepts being taught. After the unit was taught, I administered a post-test to see what students had learned from the unit. After the unit was taught, I also administered a student questionnaire to the experimental group to determine students' attitudes towards the arts-integrated unit. This study may provide a basis for incorporating arts in curriculum for middle grades history teachers who are in search of different methods of instruction.

### **Literature Review**

A review of the literature indicated that behind the premise of arts-integration in a middle grades social studies classroom lie multiple issues that must be considered. Issues discussed in the literature include social studies curriculum choice, the high-stakes testing environment, the purpose for social studies in schools, adolescent developmental needs, and the role of the arts in schools. Without a proper understanding of the reason why we teach, what we teach, where we teach, and who we teach, we cannot hope to be effective in implementing an arts-integrated approach to teaching social studies. The literature provides a foundational knowledge base for the current study and underscores the importance of the current study's investigation of the relationships between arts-integration and student achievement and satisfaction in the social studies classroom.

## HIGH STAKES TESTING

### **High-Stakes Testing Environment & S.S. Curriculum**

The teacher who would consider integrating arts in the social studies classroom may potentially face obstacles. One obstacle includes the environment in schools due to high-stakes testing. Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) state, “large amounts of classroom time are devoted to test taking preparation” (as cited in Mora, 2011, p. 1). This leaves little room for integrating approaches that may take up valuable test preparation time; as a result, the arts are marginalized (Brewer & Brown, 2009). In his ethnographic study, “School is So Boring: High Stakes Testing and Boredom in an Urban Middle School,” Mora (2011) investigates the relationship between high stakes test preparation and student boredom. By following thirty urban Latino(a) students in a Northeastern public school for two and a half years, Mora determines that a “testing culture” could be contributing to the boredom middle school students experience. High stakes testing has led to a curriculum that is lecture-driven and irrelevant for students (Mora, 2011). Mora concludes that by listening to students and their call for “less tedious” classroom activity and more social interaction, teachers could address student boredom in class.

While this portrays the negative effects of testing, Carpenter, Pashler, and Cepeda (2009) claim that testing has positive effects. The researchers conducted their study with eighth grade U.S. History students from a charter school in San Diego. Students were tested, and were either given a review directly after the test, sometime after the test, or were not given a review. Students were then re-tested nine months later to determine whether the information they learned had been retained. Carpenter et al. (2009) concluded that testing improved retention of content. However, little research exists to document testing and retention within more diverse educational settings. The majority of research indicates that testing, specifically high-stakes testing, ha

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negatively influenced curriculum choice and student satisfaction (Mora, 2011; Musoleno & White, 2010).

### **Purpose of Social Studies**

Musoleno and White (2010) claim that “associated with middle grades education is the commitment to young adolescents and their unique qualities” (p. 1). Through a survey of middle grades educators in Pennsylvania, Musoleno et. al (2010) determined that middle schools have altered curriculum to the point where it is no longer developmentally appropriate for adolescents and to the point where electives (the arts included) have been “sacrificed.” The sacrifice of electives has been evident in the debate over keeping the arts in schools. Many middle grades music and art teachers are finding themselves without a job. Musoleno and White (2010) admit that their findings could have been influenced by the amount of time the new curriculum had been implemented in the Pennsylvania schools and by the middle school practices already in place before implementation of the new curriculum. However, their findings are applicable to school settings across the nation.

Brown and Knowles (2007) define curriculum as everything that occurs during the course of a school day. In this sense, the “curriculum” is more than just what teachers teach in the classroom. However, when referring to curriculum, many people are simply referring to what is taught in the classroom. Brown et al. (2007) state that many of the discussions about curriculum “center around what people think the purpose of schooling is” (p.116). The purpose for schooling is directly tied to what will be taught in the classroom. In 1922 Seymour Stone wrote an article declaring “the inclusive aim and the final measure of the value and effectiveness of the social science studies and activities during the junior high school period are their fruition in right



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conduct” (p. 2). He defined right conduct as being that which contributes to the greater good of mankind. In connection to this *purpose* for social studies, he also advocates for a problem/issue based curriculum that will suit the social and emotional development of the young adolescent. Again, the connection between purpose and curriculum is apparent even in the early twentieth century.

Gibson (2012) notes that many pre-service teachers are unaware as to why social studies is even being taught. In her interview of elementary school teachers in Alberta, Canada, she discovered that the majority of the teachers were unaware that preparing students to be good citizens was originally the intended goal of the social studies curriculum (Gibson, 2012). Gibson took this a step further by conducting research with students to determine whether students were aware of the purpose of social studies. To students, social studies was viewed as the subject that “helped prepare them for their future; taught them about geography, history, and society or was important for success in school” (Gibson, 2012, p. 14). No mention of citizenship was made. In reference to the current study, this research may seem to be unrelated; however, even in the United States debates over curriculum choice and the purpose of social studies ensue.

In her article, “Fighting over History in our Schools,” Vail (2004) presents both sides of the debate. The “Contrarians” claim that social studies is hyper-critical and too negative, while the opposing faction claims that students receive a balanced view of history (Vail, 2004). Summarizing Columbia professor Thornton’s view of the issue (as opposed to Contrarianism), Vail (2004) declares:

[S]ocial studies teachers present different sides of history, hoping to get students to draw their own conclusions, a skill they hope young people will develop into adulthood. He finds “some people resist getting kids to think for themselves [arguing] kids should be

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exposed to the traditions and values the United States stands for. Yes, they should be, but at the center of American values is the right to speak up and think for yourself. If we are serious about our professions, we have to give kids the opportunities to think for themselves (p. 5).

Thornton is not alone in his interpretation of how social studies should be presented to young adolescents – as a means for producing critical thinking skills.

### **Adolescent Developmental Needs & Curriculum**

In response to the retraction of “best practice” (Musoleno & White, 2010) in middle schools across the nation, many educators and other individuals involved in education have been seeking to reform the middle school curriculum. Anderman, Maehr, and Midgley (1999, as cited in Meece, 2003) affirm that a “decline in self-esteem, motivation, achievement and emotional well-being” exists among middle grades students. Multiple studies affirm that middle grades students are not getting what they need from their middle school experience (Mora, 2011; Gibson et al., 2007). Meece (2003) presents a solution to the issue – a Learner-Centered framework. Of this framework Meece (2003) states:

Teachers are encouraged to take their students’ individual and developmental characteristics into account when planning lessons. Learning activities help promote the development of conceptual understanding and higher order thinking skills.

Opportunities for authentic learning are evident...When implemented, learner-centered practices help create a learning environment that is well matched to the developmental needs of young adolescents (p. 4).

In this model, students are seen as active participants in learning, as co-constructors of knowledge (Meece, 2003).

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If research states that middle school students are not receiving what they need from their middle school experience (Anderman et al., 1999), then what is authentic learning and what does that look like in the context of a social studies classroom? Meece's (2003) Learner-Centered Framework provides an authentic learning experience. Are there any other solutions, specifically with regards to the Social Studies classroom? Scheurman and Newmann (2008) believe two approaches to social studies education exist: the constructivist approach and the transmission approach. Scheurman et al. (2008) contend that any teaching method [including the two above] can be employed and still result in weak intellectual achievement. Scheurman et al. (2008) provide the following three criteria that they believe must be in place for authentic intellectual achievement: 1) Construction of Knowledge, 2) Disciplined Inquiry, and 3) Value Beyond School. Students must analyze, interpret, and negotiate meaning from the material they are taught in social studies classrooms if they are to gain knowledge of history. Percy and Duplas (2011) further this assertion by qualifying historical knowledge as being that which employs "modes of reasoning", a term coined by John Dewey. The modes of reasoning include "chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis, historical research, and historical issues" (Percy & Duplas, 2011, p. 5). Through these modes, students are able to gain a deeper understanding of history and go beyond simply memorizing the material.

### **Arts-Integration and Social Studies**

Barton and Levstik (2003) build upon this foundation by claiming that students' encounters with history should center on historical interpretation which involves using multiple perspectives, investigation, and interpretation of what is being taught. Barton et al. (2003) likewise affirm that social studies teachers need a new sense of purpose in teaching (primarily one that seeks to prepare students for active citizenship). Even more applicable to the current study's investigation

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of arts-integration, Barton et al. (2003) state that “[a] teacher who wants her students to understand the emotional as well as the intellectual side of history...will use simulations and role plays to get at feelings and reactions” (p. 2). Berry, Schmied, and Schrock (2008) also affirm role-play as a powerful emotional medium for teaching social studies.

Berry et al. (2008) simply pinpoint one aspect of arts-integration as providing students an emotional medium for connecting with social studies. Diket (2003) declares as a whole that, “The arts offer the most compelling and accessible representations of what people desire, pursue, hold dear, revere, and reject” (p.1). If the arts are so closely tied to human desire and emotion, it stands to reason, that the arts enable students to emotionally and personally become involved with history. Also, since “the arts allow for direct human expression” they reach a wide range of students. This makes sense when considering Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory. Students all learn in different ways. Gullatt (2008) claims that Gardner’s theory is rooted in the arts. Diket (2003) affirms that the “youth culture emphasizes and relies on visual, auditory, and kinesthetic involvement”. This is evident simply by observing the effect of pop-culture and technology on the upcoming generation of young adolescents. If a student-centered approach to learning is to be employed, we must meet students where they are and artistic integration seems to be a way to accomplish that goal. While Diket (2003) and Gullatt (2008) affirm that the arts can be integrated into core subjects, Eisner (1999) reminds readers that the arts cannot be seen as merely means to an end – the end being academic achievement. He warns that by regarding the arts as simply a tool for increased academic achievement, the arts are left vulnerable, able to be overtaken by anything that can accomplish the same goal in a faster, better way. Eisner (1999) is not saying that the arts cannot be integrated into core subjects; rather, he claims that the arts must be appreciated for their own value, outstanding of any contribution to other subject areas.

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### Summary Research Question

In summation, teachers may find enacting an arts-integrated approach in the social studies classroom to be difficult. High-stakes testing has led to a marginalization of the arts and a narrowed curriculum. Furthermore, a debate over the purpose of social studies, and what should be taught in social studies classrooms may become an ideological stumbling block for teachers before teachers ever even approach pedagogical methods for the classroom. However, a push for reform of middle grades curriculum and prior research into arts-integration has shown promising results for the future. The arts may indeed prove to make history more real for students than ever before. U.S. History National Assessment of Education Progress (2007, as cited in DiCamillo et al., 2012) data suggests that when teachers use a variety of teaching approaches, students outperform their peers in traditional classrooms. These findings provide motivation for using an arts-integration approach to teaching social studies. However, teachers must be willing to battle obstacles if they intend to creatively and engagingly teach their students.

While prior research has been done documenting the connection between increased student achievement and art in a school curriculum, little to no research exists to document whether a specific connection exists between student achievement and *arts-integration* in a middle grades social studies classroom. Also, little research exists to definitively document whether students actually enjoy arts-integrated lessons as compared to “traditional” approaches to teaching social studies. The current study sought to fill this void in the research.

Pursuant to the purpose of this study and my own interest, the following research questions will guide this study:

1. What is the impact of arts-integration on middle grades students’ Social Studies achievement?

2. How do students perceive art integration lessons in their Social Studies classes?

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

Research has shown that students, faced with high-stakes testing and a restrictive curriculum, often view Social Studies as a boring subject (Gibson, 2012). The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to determine whether using arts-integration in the Social Studies classroom will increase student achievement and satisfaction in the Social Studies classroom. I administered a pre-test at the beginning of the two Social Studies units being taught (an arts-integrated unit and a non-arts-integrated unit). I then administered a post-test at the end of both units. I analyzed the difference in scores respectively within the units and then between the two units. I administered a five question, open-ended questionnaire to the experimental group at the end of the instructional unit to examine students' opinions of the arts-integrated unit. Using these tools, I specifically addressed the following questions:

1. What is the impact of arts-integration on middle grades students' Social Studies achievement?
2. How do students perceive art integration lessons in their Social Studies classes?

The study used a quasi-experimental design. The independent variable in the study was the type of unit being taught (arts-integrated versus non-arts-integrated). Students' Social Studies achievement as measured by the pre and posttests was the dependent variable. Student opinions of the arts-integrated and non-arts-integrated units as measured by the student questionnaire were also a dependent variable. The time frame of the study was eight days.

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### **Participants**

The research sample was a convenience sample (a group of students pre-assigned to the researcher). The participants were two Social Studies classes of middle school students in a Southeastern United States middle school. All students enrolled in the class were counted upon to participate in the study; however, not all students returned the Minor and Parental Consent forms. Consequently, the sample size was thirty students – seventeen in the treatment group and thirteen in the control group. In the treatment group there were seven white female students, one black female student, and eight white male students. In the control group there were eight white female students, one black male student, and four white male students. Students' academic abilities varied – two participants in the treatment group were classified as gifted students and three participants in the control group were classified as gifted students at the time of the study.

### **Instrumentation**

***Pre and Post-Tests.*** For the instructional unit I administered a pre and post-test (See Appendix A). The post-test was modeled exactly after the pre-test. Each test consisted of thirty questions with ten matching, seventeen multiple-choice, and three short-answer. Tests were graded on a one-hundred point scale. The test was prepared by examining content from the standard and incorporating that content. I modeled many of the questions after the classroom teacher's unit test from the previous year. The test was reviewed by my classroom teacher and by my university supervisor to ensure grammatical accuracy, appropriate questioning strategies, and depth of content.

***Student Questionnaire.*** The treatment group received a five-question, open-ended questionnaire focused upon student perception of the arts-integrated unit (See Appendix B). Questions were

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developed after discussions with a history professor who has researched arts-integration and after discussion with my thesis advisor. Questions included:

1. Did the use of primary sources (specifically images) throughout the unit interest you more than if you would have read the information in a textbook? Why?
2. What did you enjoy the most about the activities where the arts were integrated? Which aspect of the activity did you like the least?
3. Would you rather examine primary source artwork or primary source documents from different time periods? Why?
4. Did the use of art throughout the unit help you learn the social studies content better? How so? If not, why not?
5. Would you enjoy your social studies class more if artwork was used more often to teach content?

Students were given the questionnaire after their post-test, and they responded to each question in writing.

### **Procedures**

I conducted this study during my student teaching practicum in the month of February. One month prior to conducting the study, I informed my classroom teacher of my desire to conduct research in the classroom. The teacher approved the arts-integrated and non-arts-integrated units to be taught. At the beginning of the semester I provided students with a letter describing the study and a minor consent/parental consent form to be taken home (Appendix C). I explained the purpose of the study to the class and reminded students that they would not be penalized should they choose to not participate in the study. All students who volunteered to



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participate in the study and whose parents signed the consent forms became the subjects for my research.

At the beginning of teaching the non-arts-integrated unit I gave a pre-test to the control group to gauge student knowledge of content being taught. At the conclusion of the unit I administered a post-test. Pre and post-test scores for the non-arts-integrated unit were analyzed to determine student knowledge gained during the teaching of the unit. I repeated this process for the treatment group prior to and after teaching the arts-integrated unit. Students in the treatment group also received the Arts-Integration Questionnaire.

### **Findings**

Scores obtained from the pretest and post-tests for each unit were first analyzed using descriptive statistics. Differences in pre and post-test scores respectively within each unit and between the arts-integrated and non-arts-integrated units were analyzed using ANCOVA. I analyzed the student questionnaire by reading and coding student responses - identifying patterns within the data. The patterns observed were used to identify themes in student responses to the arts-integrated unit. Quantitative findings are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Qualitative findings are found in the student questionnaires section.

### **Quantitative Findings**

Table 1 below provides an overview of the pre and post-test scores from the treatment and control groups. The average pre-test score for the treatment group was 41 out of 100. The average pre-test score for the control group was 31. Scores on the pre-test ranged from a 7 to a 63. The average score on the post-test for the treatment group and control group was a 97. Scores on the post-test ranged from an 88 to a 100. Within eight days, both the treatment group and control group's scores improved markedly. No student scored lower than a letter grade of "B" on the post-test.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics on Pre and Post Test Scores*

Group	N	Pretest				Posttest			
		M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max
Treatment	17	41.1	14.1	17	63	97.4	3.6	88	100
Control	13	31	13.4	7	50	96.8	3.5	90	100

Table 2 below presents the results of the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the post-test scores using the pre-test scores as the covariate. According to the data, there was no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores for the treatment and control group.

**Table 2**

*ANCOVA Results on Post Test Scores*

Groups		Post test scores			
		Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	SD	N
Treatment		97.41	97.34	3.61	17
Control		96.85	96.94	3.48	13
Source	SS	Df	MS	F	
Pretest	1.29	1	1.29	.09	
Group	1.07	1	1.07	.08	
Error	352.52	27	13.06		

Note.  $R^2 = .010$  (Adjusted  $R^2 = -.063$ )

### **Qualitative Findings**

At the end of the unit of instruction, the treatment group responded individually to a set of five questions. Out of the seventeen participants, only fifteen students provided responses on the questionnaire. I read student responses on the open-ended questionnaire and coded the data to aid in the establishment of common themes throughout the data. After the codes were written, I analyzed how frequently a code appeared in order to determine whether or not it should be included as a theme (Creswell, 2013). . Some of my codes included “DIV” to indicate when the arts helped diverse learners, “SE” for references to student enjoyment of the arts, “HL” for references to higher-level learning skills facilitated by the use of the arts, and “SSC” for references to Social Studies content. Four themes originated from coding the questionnaire and are described below.

#### ***Visual Learning***

Nine out of fifteen students referenced the visual nature of the artwork and how it aided their learning. Five participants specifically stated that they “enjoyed the art-work” more because they were “visual learners” and the artwork was primarily visual. A couple of participants mentioned that they were slow readers so using the pictures to learn social studies was helpful. One individual stated that looking at artwork helped because “[They] did not get bogged down reading the textbook.”

#### ***Interest***

Multiple participants indicated that the artwork interested them more than if they would have read the information in a textbook. All fifteen respondents agreed that they would enjoy their social studies class more if artwork were used more often to teach content. One individual stated that “[Art is] more appealing to the eye and mind. Another student declared, “All we do is look in textbooks. I think that the pictures help a lot.” Frequently participants used terms such as

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“enjoy” and “like” to describe their experience with using artwork in the social studies classroom.

### *Perspective*

Participants also mentioned how the artwork enabled them to “picture” what the past would have been like. One student stated, “I have the potential to determine the importance [of events in history] better” if I use artwork. More than one participant said that the artwork “showed me what really happened”. A key aid in the development of this theme was one participant’s response which said that the artwork “[showed] the perspective of the people in that time.”

### *Content Understanding*

Five students responded to the questionnaire indicating that the artwork helped them understand the social studies content better. One student specifically said that the art “helped me understand the concept better.” Another keyword was “understanding”. Multiple students said that using the artwork helped them gain a “better understanding” of the content being taught. The visual learners understood the information better because the artwork was visual. A student who generally struggles stated, “I wouldn’t have gotten the facts I had if I was just using the textbook.”

## **Discussion**

Research question one asked: “What is the impact of arts-integration on middle grades students’ Social Studies achievement?” Based on the data, using arts-integration to teach social studies did not have a significant impact on students’ test scores. Both the control and treatment group’s post-test scores were comparable as were their pre-test scores. There may be multiple reasons for why both groups’ scores improved so markedly from pre-test to post-test.

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First, both groups were exposed to content-based primary sources throughout the course of the unit. The treatment group examined primary sources that were visual arts-based, while the control group examined primary source documents. In planning the unit I purposefully included primary sources that would convey critical content to the students in order to help them be successful on the summative assessment. Also, by including the primary sources and incorporating activities where students had to analyze primary sources, both groups of students were able to employ historical modes of reasoning including historical comprehension and historical analysis, two skills which Percy and Duplas (2011) advocated for students to use in order to have authentic experiences in the history classroom. In addition, both groups received the same content though it was conveyed differently. For example, presentations given to the treatment group were supplemented with visual images whereas presentations given to the control group were solely text-based.

Secondly, both the treatment and control groups were given multiple opportunities through review games and quizzes to review content that would be on the summative assessment. Carpenter et. al (2009) found that reviews and testing helped students remember information more easily. Before planning my instructional strategies, I wrote the summative assessment in order to ensure that the information on the test would be covered in class during instructional activities. Two days before the test students were quizzed over content and were asked to complete study guides for the test. On the day before the test, each group participated in a review that tested individual students' knowledge of the concepts from the unit. On the day of the test, many participants expressed confidence in their ability to do well on the test because of the in-class activities and their personal study efforts.

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Thirdly, and finally, the content covered in the unit was not overtly complex or difficult to learn. I had observed prior to the study that the students who chose to participate in the research project were able to quickly appropriate information learned in class. Students who volunteered for the study were generally the academically adept students. Sample selection for this study was consequently a limitation. Subjects for the study were not randomly selected but were pre-assigned based upon the rosters for my practicum classes and student willingness to participate making my sample a convenience sample.

While the data showed no statistically significant difference between the control and treatment groups' pre-test and post-test scores, I contend that arts-integration also did not hinder student learning during the arts-integrated social studies unit. As discussed in the literature review there are many hindrances to incorporating the arts within the social studies curriculum including concern over whether students will receive crucial content knowledge within an arts-integrated approach to teaching (Abrams, Pedulla, & Medaus, 2003; Brewer & Brown, 2009; Mora, 2011). No participants in either the control or treatment group passed the pre-test; the minimum score was seven percent and the maximum score was sixty-three percent. By the end of the instructional period for the arts-integrated and non-arts integrated units all participants had passed the summative assessment with either a low "B" or high "A". This study shows that students who received arts-integrated instruction did no worse than their peers who did not receive arts-integrated instruction. In a high-stakes testing environment where student success and teacher evaluation largely depends upon test scores, as evidenced in the studies by Abrams et. al (2003) and Musoleno and White (2010), comparable student performance and grade improvement within the control and treatment groups proves promising.

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Another factor that necessitates consideration within this study is student opinion.

Research question two asked: “How do students perceive arts-integration lessons in their social studies classes?” Student opinions were gathered from the student questionnaires and were analyzed. The four themes – visual learning, interest, perspective, and content understanding – which emerged from the qualitative data collected in this study, addressed many of the issues surrounding arts-integration.

One obstacle is the fear that students will not learn the content if the arts are integrated. Oddleifson (1994) states, “Parents and educators...should embrace the concept that the arts can enhance the true understanding of a content area” (as cited in Gullatt, 2008, p.16). Many of the students indicated that they learned more about the topics in the unit because the arts were used, indication that Oddleifson’s (1994) assertion is true. Another consideration is the purpose of the social studies curriculum. Vail (2004) states, “[S]ocial studies teachers present different sides of history, hoping to get students to draw their own conclusions.” In their responses, participants specifically stated that the artwork helped them picture what it must have been like in the past. One participant said that artwork “shows the perspective of people in that time.” Students were able to examine multiple perspectives from the era being studied through investigation and interpretation of the visual primary sources rather than simply receiving content through a transmission approach to teaching history.

Scheurmann and Newmann (2008) did state that authentic learning may be impaired regardless of the approach used (transmission or constructivist); however, the implementation of the constructivist approach, where students analyzed the artwork to construct meaning for the historical time period, made their learning experience in the Social Studies classroom more authentic. My main goal as a social studies teacher is to encourage my students to analyze the

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world around them and think for themselves. Using the artwork enabled me as the teacher to present a complex history to my students. I was able to watch the students wrestle through the emotions presented in the visual art and watch them analyze the art, formulate opinions about a historical time period, and support those opinions with the primary source visual art.

An additional consideration is student engagement in the social studies classroom. I wanted to see if implementing arts-integration would increase student engagement in the unit. I could immediately tell that participants in the treatment group were more interested in the unit than students from the control group. On the day when both groups analyzed primary sources, the students in the treatment group were able to get to five stations analyzing primary source artwork, whereas students in the control group were only able to complete three or four stations analyzing primary source documents. The students in the control group became quickly bored with reading the documents, while, in contrast, students in the treatment group stayed engaged nearly the entire class period – asking questions about the artwork and discussing the artwork with their peers.

Multiple studies examined during the literature review noted the discontinuity between student developmental needs and school curriculum due to high stakes testing (Mora, 2011; Muselena and White, 2010). Although the primary source activity with visual art took longer to plan, the activity did interest students more helping to counteract, albeit temporarily, what Anderman, Maehr, and Midgley (1999) noticed as a “decline in self-esteem, motivation, achievement, and emotional well-being...among middle grades students.” On the questionnaires students from the treatment group indicated that they would enjoy social studies more if artwork was used more often to teach content. They believed the artwork was more interesting than if they would have had to read the information in a textbook. One participant stated that the visual



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art was “more appealing to the eye and mind,” a sentiment expressed by Diket (2003) who stated, “The arts provide the most compelling and accessible representations of what people desire, pursue, hold dear, revere, and reject.” Moreover, of the Learner-Centered Framework, Meece (2010) declares, “Teachers are encouraged to take their students’ individual and developmental characteristics into account when planning lessons.” When planning the arts-integration, I purposefully took into account my students who struggle with reading and are visual learners. Both groups indicated on the questionnaires that the artwork made the content more accessible to them.

My goal as an educator is to engage my students in the learning process. I believe that arts integration is one method, among many, that can be used in the social studies classroom to effectively reach students and challenge their conception of historical people, places, and events. While the difference in control and treatment group test scores for this study was not statistically significant, I believe, based upon classroom observation and the responses from the students that arts-integration did not hinder student learning. Additionally, arts-integration – while more challenging than the conventional lecture approach to teaching history – allowed me to present different perspectives of history to my students and enabled me to guide my students in using key historical skills such as the analysis of primary sources, the formulation of evidence-based arguments, and the consideration of perspective or bias in history.

### **Conclusion**

Although there are obstacles to the implementation of an arts-integrated curriculum in social studies, based upon the findings of this study, arts-integration is a worthwhile approach to teaching history. Ways to advance the scope of this study include: expanding the study to include a larger, randomized sample size; studying arts-integration in social studies classrooms within a

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variety of settings including various grades, schools, states, and countries; and, analyzing the impact of an arts-integrated curriculum on student performance and satisfaction in history for a variety of historical topics.

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## Reconstruction Pre/Post Test

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

### Matching – match the letter to the correct definition.

- |          |  |   |
|----------|--|---|
| 1) _____ | Farming system where landowner provided land, house, tools, etc. to laborer in exchange for portion of harvest | a) Reconstruction <input type="checkbox"/>          |
| 2) _____ | Former slaves <input type="checkbox"/>   | b) Military Reconstruction <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) _____ | To separate by race  | c) sharecropping <input type="checkbox"/>           |
| 4) _____ | the second phase of Reconstruction   | d) Presidential Reconstruction                      |
| 5) _____ | the third phase of Reconstruction  | e) impeach  |
| 6) _____ | To charge an elected official with wrongdoing  | f) segregation <input type="checkbox"/>             |
| 7) _____ | To lose the right to vote  | g) tenant farming <input type="checkbox"/>          |
| 8) _____ | period of rebuilding Southern political, economic, and social structures                                       | h) Congressional Reconstruction                     |
| 9) _____ | the first phase of Reconstruction  | i) disfranchise                                     |
|          |  | j) freedmen   |

**Multiple Choice – circle the correct answer.**

11) What was the name given to Northerners who took advantage of the South's condition after the Civil War?

- a) carpetbaggers
- b) Democrats
- c) scalawags
- d) Republicans

12) What ended slavery in the United States?

- a) The Bill of Rights
- b) The Emancipation Proclamation
- c) 13th Amendment
- d) 14th Amendment

13) Who were Southerners that were against secession and helped the Republicans during Reconstruction?

- a) carpetbaggers
- b) freedmen
- c) scalawags
- d) Democrats

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14) What law put Georgia under military rule until it ratified the 15th Amendment and agreed to the requirements for readmission to the Union?

- a) Military Occupation Act
- b) Georgia Act
- c) Martial Law
- d) Black Code

15) During Reconstruction, Atlanta was rebuilt and became...

- a) The state capital
- b) The center of transportation
- c) The center of industry
- d) All of the above

16) The Freedman's Bureau helped...

- a) freedmen
- b) poor whites
- c) wealthy white Southerners
- d) A & B

17) How many phases of Reconstruction did GA have to go through?

- a) 1
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4

18) A long-term effect of the destruction of the war and the practices of tenant farming and sharecropping was...

- a) public school segregation
- b) rural poverty
- c) a strong Southern Republican Party
- d) urban development

19) Which political party had the most control of Congress during Reconstruction?

- a) Republican
- b) Democratic
- c) Independent
- d) Whigs

20) What was the white supremacist group that was begun during Reconstruction and used violence and terror to deny blacks their civil rights?

- a) Freedmen's Bureau
- b) Radical Republicans
- c) Skin Heads
- d) Ku Klux Klan



21) What right did women gain during Reconstruction?

- a) the right to vote
- b) the right to own property
- c) the right to divorce their husband
- d) the right to join the GA General Assembly

22) Who was the black state legislator and a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church)?

- a) Tom Watson
- b) Andrew Johnson
- c) Henry McNeal Turner
- d) Alexander Stephens

23) What crop helped Georgia's economic recovery and brought industry to the state?

- a) tobacco
- b) cotton
- c) peanuts
- d) corn

24) What is the name of the U.S. legislative body?

- a) Congress
- b) Senate
- c) Cabinet
- d) House of Representatives

25) The Freedman's Bureau provided many services after the war to people in the South, some of which included:

- a) building hospitals & schools
- b) providing rations to individuals and families who were without food
- c) settling legal disputes
- d) all of the above

26) Who was the president during Reconstruction?

- a) Jefferson Davis
- b) Abraham Lincoln
- c) Andrew Johnson
- d) Alexander Stephens

27) Northern investors stimulated GA's economy by investing in what industry?

- a) railroad
- b) housing
- c) textile
- d) paper

**Short Answer**  - provide your answer in the space below the question.

28) What did the 13th Amendment say?

29) What did the 14th Amendment say?

30) What did the 15th Amendment say?

## Appendix B

### **Arts-Integration Student Survey**

1. Did the use of primary sources throughout the unit (specifically images) interest you more than if you would have read the information in a textbook? Why?
2. What did you enjoy the most about the activity where the arts were integrated? Which aspect of the activity did you like the least?
3. Would you rather examine primary source artwork or primary source documents from different time periods? Why?
4. Did the use of art throughout the unit help you learn the social studies content better? How so? If not, why not?
5. Would you enjoy your social studies class more if artwork was used more often to teach content?

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**DEPARTMENT of Middle Grades Education**

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**MINOR'S ASSENT**

Hello,

I am Miss Stephanie Dorminey, an undergraduate student at Georgia Southern University, and I am conducting a study on using the arts in middle grades Social Studies classrooms.

You are being asked to participate in a project that will be used to learn about using the arts (visual arts) to teach Social Studies. All students will participate in the teaching of the units as part of the regular classroom schedule. However, if you agree to be part of the project, your pre-test scores and post-test scores will be used to see how much you learned during the unit being taught. You will also complete a short questionnaire about your opinions of the unit which was taught. The unit will last between five to ten days. The pre-test and post-test should only take twenty minutes. The questionnaire should only take ten to fifteen minutes.

You do not have to do this project. You can stop whenever you want. If you do not want me to use your scores or opinions on the questionnaire, it is ok. You will not be penalized. You can refuse to do the project even if your parents have said you can participate.

None of the teachers or other people at your school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet in a room at Georgia Southern University, and only I or my professor will see your answers. We are not going to put your name on the answers that you give us, so no one will be able to know which answers were yours.

If you or your parent/guardian has any questions about this form or the project, please contact my advisor, Dr. Yasar Bodur, at (912)478-7285 or email [ybodur@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ybodur@georgiasouthern.edu).

If you understand the information above and want to do the project, please sign your name on the line below:

**Yes, I will participate in this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**COLLEGE of Education**

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**DEPARTMENT of Middle Grades Education**

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**PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT**

Dear Parent or Guardian:

A study will be conducted at your child's school in the next few weeks. Its purpose is to determine whether using visual arts in middle grades Social Studies classrooms improves student memory of concepts being learned in class and student satisfaction in the class. In particular, the researcher will be teaching either an arts-integrated or non-arts-integrated to your child's class as part of the normal curriculum.

All students will participate during the teaching of the units as part of the normal classroom routine. However, if you give permission, your child's pre-test scores, post-test scores, and answers to a student questionnaire will also be used by the researcher to determine whether the arts-integrated unit, in comparison to the non-arts-integrated unit, impacted student learning and satisfaction in the class. This study will take roughly two weeks, depending on the length of the unit being taught.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. The risks from participating in this study are no more than would be encountered in everyday life; however, your child will be told that he or she may stop participating at any time without any penalty. Your child may choose to not answer any question(s) he/she does not wish to for any reason. Your child may refuse to participate even if you agree to her/his participation.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the child, a number and not the child's name will appear on all of the information recorded during the study. All information pertaining to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office at Georgia Southern University. No one at your child's school will see the information recorded about your child.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Yasar Bodur at (912)478-7285 or [ybodur@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ybodur@georgiasouthern.edu).

To contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs for answers to questions about the rights of research participants please email [IRB@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:IRB@georgiasouthern.edu) or call (912) 478-0843.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Georgia Southern University IRB under the tracking number H15070.

(Please refer to the other side of this form.)

## Appendix C

If you are giving permission for your child to participate in the experiment, please sign the form below and return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time.

Stephanie Dorminey

Middle Grades Education

Dr. Yasar Bodur

COE Honors Faculty Advisor

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_