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## THE EFFECTS OF THEMATIC SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION ON EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS' HISTORICAL REASONING ABILITY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL STUDIES RELATED TASKS

Andrew R. Cloutier

*Western Connecticut State University*, [aclout27@gmail.com](mailto:aclout27@gmail.com)

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THE EFFECTS OF THEMATIC SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION ON  
EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS' HISTORICAL REASONING ABILITY AND  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL STUDIES RELATED TASKS

Andrew R. Cloutier

Master of Science, Western Connecticut State University, 2005

Bachelor of Arts, Providence College, 1997

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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in the

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at

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2013

THE EFFECTS OF THEMATIC SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION ON  
EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS' HISTORICAL REASONING ABILITY AND  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL STUDIES RELATED TASKS

This study examined the potential benefits of thematic-based social studies instruction on middle school students' historical reasoning ability and attitudes towards social studies related tasks. Thematic instruction refers to a curriculum delivery that is based on themes in history, such as: wealth, discovery, and conflict. Using a sample of convenience ( $n = 211$ ) from two suburban New England middle schools, this quasi-experimental study included a pretest and posttest of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks (Interest in Science, Technology, Writing Tasks, Interest in Social Studies, and Student Perspective Taking) and an analysis of student writing.

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, where students from a thematic-based social studies program ( $n = 98$ ) were compared to those in nonthematic-based program ( $n = 113$ ). During the course of the research three writing prompts were given and scored via a rubric to measure students' historical reasoning ability. A focus group of students was created from each condition to define the attitudes and perceptions of students in the two different programs. The results indicated that students in the thematic-based social studies program had significantly higher attitudes towards social studies as compared to their peers in the nonthematic-based program (Pillai's trace = .118,  $F(6,203) = 4.541$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There were no significant differences between groups regarding historical reasoning skills. Student comments about the program were related to the themes of: (a) Attitudes Towards Social Studies, (b) Curriculum Strategies, Organization and Procedures, and (c) Higher Level Thinking Skills. Educational implications

include insights into classroom activities that promote historical reasoning and writing in relation to assessment in social studies.

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2013

APPROVAL PAGE



*School of Professional Studies  
Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership*

Doctor of Education Dissertation

THE EFFECTS OF THEMATIC SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION ON EIGHTH  
GRADE STUDENTS' HISTORICAL REASONING ABILITY AND ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS SOCIAL STUDIES RELATED TASKS

Presented by

Andrew R. Cloutier, Ed.D.

|  |   |                        |
|--|---|------------------------|
| <u>Marcia A.B. Delcourt, PhD</u><br>Primary Advisor                    | <u><i>Marcia A.B. Delcourt</i></u><br>Signature | <u>4/11/13</u><br>Date |
| <u>Scott W. Brown, PhD</u><br>Secondary Advisor Committee Member       | <u><i>Scott W. Brown</i></u><br>Signature       | <u>4/11/13</u><br>Date |
| <u>Nancy H. Heilbronner, PhD</u><br>Secondary Advisor Committee Member | <u><i>Nancy H. Heilbronner</i></u><br>Signature | <u>4/11/13</u><br>Date |

2013

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Your love and support have allowed me to persevere, and together we did it!

To my wife, Amy, thank you for your sacrifice, your guidance, and your confidence in me. For so many Wednesday nights you took on the all of the responsibilities at home. Then, Wednesday nights turned into nearly every night and weekends too, and yet you remained strong so I complete this challenge. I cannot express the amount of love and gratitude I have for you and the unconditional love and support that you have provided. It was your strength and belief in me that got us to the finish line.

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To my parents, you have instilled in me the love of learning and knowledge that through hard work anything is possible. You have been my inspiration throughout this journey. Thank you!



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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) described the effective delivery of a social studies curriculum as being “meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active” (NCSS, 2008, p. 1). Creating a program that addresses the NCSS mission has been a challenge in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The intent of NCLB, when it was first issued in January of 2002, was to “close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so no child is left behind” (NCLB, 2002, p. 1). The high-stakes testing requirements of this law have significantly impacted social studies instruction in the United States by taking both time and money away from the teaching of social studies (NCSS, 2007) in order to place a greater focus on the teaching of language arts and mathematics (Jennings & Rentner, 2006).

Middle school social studies instruction lies outside of the realm of required standardized testing throughout much of the United States (O’Connor, Heafner, & Groce, 2007). Also, the number of states that mandate students pass a social studies test as a graduation requirement has declined from 34 states in 2001 to only 21 states in 2012 (Fleming, 2012). When the NCLB legislation was first introduced, the testing debate divided the social studies community; there were those who did not favor standardized testing in social studies and those who did (NCSS, 2007). Social studies educators who were not in favor of standardized testing in social studies were concerned that established national assessment procedures could prevent an accurate measure of the objectives used to assess student achievement and were concerned that a multiple choice and short answer test would not provide a meaningful assessment of social studies achievement. Educators who believed testing was a necessity argued that without a standardized testing program, social studies would pale in importance compared to school subject areas that

were on the national testing agenda. The unintended consequences of NCLB have demonstrated that both views on the issue were accurate (NCSS, 2007).

A major cost of this legislation was the loss of instructional time in social studies, especially in the elementary grades. Schools across the nation have cut back on social studies to create additional time for instruction in literacy and numeracy (Manzo, 2005). In the era of NCLB, 71% of school districts have reported a reduction in time for subjects other than reading and math in elementary school education. Social studies instruction was the subject most affected by the loss of time (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). In North Carolina, it was reported that students in grades K-2 received only a total of 30-90 minutes of social studies instruction per week (O'Connor, Heafner, & Groce, 2007). An analysis of NCLB's impact data released from a federal survey conducted during the 2003-2004 academic year revealed that in grades 1-4 social studies instruction was reduced by 30 minutes per day when compared to the early 1990s (Cavanagh, 2007). Referencing a 2007 Center on Education Policy report, Zamosky (2008) stated that of the approximately 350 school districts surveyed across the country, 44% of district personnel admitted to cutting time from subjects, including social studies, at the elementary school level. In Washington state for example, teachers spent only 1-3 hours on social studies instruction in an entire week (O'Connor et al., 2007). And in Indiana, elementary school teachers averaged only 12 minutes of social studies instruction per week (O'Connor et al., 2007). In some low performing schools, the subject has been dropped completely; students may reach the age of 15 or 16 before they take a single social studies course (Manzo, 2005).

Using a dataset compiled from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the Schools and Public School Teacher Staffing Survey (SASS), an analysis of 17 years of national data revealed that the decline in social studies instructional time was verified after data

was collected both before and as a result of NCLB (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Instructional time in social studies was diminished over the course of the implementation of NCLB legislation. This study reported that average instructional time “decreased by 30 minutes [per week] between 1999/2000 and 2003/2004. Over the course of a nine-month school year, that discrepancy amounts to approximately 18 hours of social studies time lost” (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010, p. 124).

A 2005 article written by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, citing an interview with Theodore K. Rabb, founder and board member of the National Council for History Education, described the unintended impact of NCLB “has been to put history into an even more marginal position” (p. 1). He added, “It is clear that, with some notable exceptions nationwide, the amount of class time given to history, especially in the first eight grades, has been shrinking almost by the month” (Manzo, 2005, p. 1). The loss of time in the elementary schools has had an impact on social studies education in middle and high school, as teachers are now met with students who are unprepared for history courses at the secondary level (Manzo, 2005). A policy statement issued in 2007 by the NCSS described the increasing level of anecdotal evidence documenting the decline of student exposure to the core elements of social studies instruction across the nation. More and more students are getting less exposure to civics, geography, economics, and history. Without adequate exposure to government, economy, and geography instruction in grades K-4 students are reaching middle school without the necessary background knowledge to comprehend what they are reading when they are presented with social studies-related materials (Zamosky, 2008).

In spite of the loss of instructional time, social studies instruction is a vital aspect of the education system. According to the NCSS (2008), one of the essential purposes of teaching this



content area is to prepare students for a lifetime of informed citizenship. Although increased time is a major focus for social studies educators, quality needs to be emphasized over quantity. Research has suggested that states, such as Delaware, Massachusetts, and Ohio, with mandated assessments in social studies, have shown an increase in instructional time, but in some cases it is at the expense of teachers abandoning best practices to utilize methods that are simply aimed at improving test scores (O'Connor et al., 2007). Considering the loss of instructional time in social studies, it is now even more essential that what time remains be used wisely. Social Studies instruction should include critical thinking skills while promoting an appreciation and understanding of the past that students can use to enrich the world around them. In their vision for the teaching and learning of social studies, members of the NCSS (2008) described authentic instruction as "...meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active" (p. 1). Instructional time should not be used for the sole purpose of having students memorize facts in isolation. Rather, as recommended by the NCSS in 1991, social studies in the middle school should include the opportunity for debate, role play, research, and discussion of controversial issues. This message, however, continues to be overshadowed. In general, students in middle school and high school are not developing historical arguments (Zamosky, 2008). Noted historical researcher, Sam Wineburg (2001) wrote, "the role of history as a tool for changing how we think, for promoting literacy not of names and dates but of discernment, judgment, and caution, does not receive the prime billing in the public sphere" (p. ix).

One important means to promote civic literacy that also enhances critical thinking skills as described by the NCSS (2010) and Wineburg (2004) is the incorporation of a thematic curriculum into a social studies program. A thematic approach does not rely solely on one source or textbook and does not necessarily follow a chronological timeline. This method relies

on multiple sources of information and students' abilities to examine and think critically about history. Traditionally, social studies instructional programs have been anecdotally described as being dependent on a lecture format that relies heavily on following a textbook (Gewertz, 2012). This type of survey course includes a wide range of topics and long spans of history. Although many topics are included, this method does not allow for the development of historical themes that become meaningful to the student. Typically, students learn history by simply repeating facts that were read in a single source or heard in a lecture and not through the analysis or examination of the information that is being studied (Calder, 2006). A thematic approach requires that students question and connect multiple aspects and interpretations of the past. This method of instruction incorporates the use of small group discussion, relevant and contemporary materials, simulations, and project-based learning (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). A thematic delivery is used to explore themes that are present throughout history and can be applied to any era. Examples of these themes include: law, discovery, wealth, and conflict. This approach encourages historical reasoning; a process through which a student "organizes information about the past in order to describe, compare, and/or explain historical phenomena" (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008, p. 89).

Engaging students in activities that promote thinking skills will create students who enjoy social studies and build upon their ability to think historically (Beyer, 2008). Recent efforts, such as the Task Force Report on Social Studies Education in Maryland (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010), have attempted to create a new foundation for how social studies is taught. The goal of these reforms was to determine the most effective ways to develop a long-lasting understanding of the past in the minds of students (Banner, 2009).

The intent of the present research was to examine the effects of one such method, thematic instruction. More specifically, this research focused on the application of the themes of wealth and conflict in eighth grade 20<sup>th</sup>-century United States history and how this thematic method of instruction impacted students' attitudes towards social studies related tasks and historical reasoning abilities, by comparing this treatment method to a traditional nonthematic approach.

### **Rationale**

In June of 2011 the U.S. Department of Education released the results of the 2010 National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card. The results of the American History portion of the test were the lowest in the seven subject areas that were tested and clearly indicated that student performance was low. Less than one quarter of the nation's students in grade 4 (20%), grade 8 (17%), and grade 12 (12%) tested at or above the Proficient level (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Although the NAEP results appear to be alarming, they are not new. Wineburg (2004) noted that a pattern of poor testing results in American history is a recurring theme. He (2004) pointed to headlines in the New York Times, "Ignorance of U.S. History Shown by College Freshman" on April 4, 1943 and May 2, 1976 "Test Shows Knowledge of American History Limited" as evidence to this claim. NAEP results from 1987, 1994, and 2001 published by the U.S. Department of Education (1988, 1995, 2002) tell a similar story. With each report and headline that claimed the lack of historical knowledge of students in the United States, there were devastating effects on attempts to implement inquiry in social studies. The political backlash focused on the teaching of history had many teachers retreating to the methods of memorizing names and dates with the hope of demonstrating improvement on the next national

assessment instead of teaching students to think like historians (VanSledright, 2002). Teachers continued to place an emphasis on the product of factual knowledge and not on the process of historical thinking even when the validity of the assessments were called into question.

Wineburg (2001) contended that tests measuring one aspect of historical knowledge, particularly factual information, include only questions that test-makers and politicians feel students should know and do not accurately measure what students have actually learned.

In recent development, a 2010 Task Force Report on Social Studies Education in Maryland was a state led effort that researched the current status of social studies education in Maryland and across the nation. The task force developed recommendations intended to “promote high quality social studies education in Maryland and to establish Maryland as a U.S. model for social studies education” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). This reform movement is designed to propel social studies education towards a curriculum that promotes higher-level thinking (Maryland Department of Education, 2010), there remains a limited amount of empirical research related to specific interventions that are targeting reform recommendations in the teaching of historical thinking (VanSledright, 2002).

Higher-level thinking skills are directly related to critical elements of historical sense (Bell, 1917). They emphasize students’ ability to reason with the past and view historical events in the context in which they occurred. Few studies in the United States have explored this avenue, and there are limited ways to define and measure historical thinking (Peck & Seixas, 2008).

The official definition of social studies, as adopted in 1992 by the NCSS, proposes that the main purpose of social studies education is to assist students in making informed and reasoned decisions. The question of how to accomplish this goal remains unanswered. To truly examine

history there must be a dialogue that includes engaging in essential elements of the inquiry process and using critical thinking skills to better understand the multitude of layers of historical events (VanSledright, 2002). Historical knowledge is complex and students have been placed under the impression that history is easily explained through textbooks (Cohen, 2005). In 2010 the NCSS released the latest draft of the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. The new standards are based on 10 essential themes. The NCSS President, Steven A. Goldberg, stated that “this updated framework retains the central emphasis on supporting students becoming active participants in the learning process” (NCSS, 2010, p. 7).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) which have been adopted by all but four states, also place an emphasis on literacy and mathematics. In contrast to NCLB the CCSS may offer an opportunity to improve social studies instruction (Fleming, 2012). The Common Core’s focus on nonfiction reading has required a shift in thinking and placed an emphasis on historical thinking (Gewertz, 2012). To accomplish this goal, the focus of social studies should be less on knowing facts of history and instead on promoting problem-solving and a deeper understanding of the past (Fleming, 2012). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the challenge presented by thinking like a historian has also led to an increased interest in social studies (Gewertz, 2012). A thematic-based social studies program offers students the ability to engage in historical thinking activities and become invested in the curriculum (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). By using a thematic style students are able to focus on essential elements of history and not solely on the memorization of names and dates. Student research, technology, inquiry, and collaboration are key elements of this delivery. There are many opportunities for students to learn and produce outstanding work, but an important question remains, “Are the students learning?” This present study, focused on students’ attitudes towards social studies related tasks and historical reasoning

by examining the impact of a thematic-based curriculum on students' attitudes and abilities in social studies, is an effort to determine an answer to that question and to measure the extent of the learning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Maintaining a nation of informed and active citizens is the best way to guarantee a free and functioning democratic form of government (NCSS, 2008). Social studies instruction remains a relevant issue in education today because of the importance of cultivating students who are engaged citizens. Preparing the youth of America to take the reins of a democracy is an essential mission of schools and must remain a priority in our schools and classrooms. Teaching the virtues of our democracy is a fundamental element of a social studies classroom. Students do not learn to be active and engaged members of society on their own (NCSS, 2007).

In May of 2008, the NCSS adopted a new position statement on the vision of teaching and learning in social studies. The position statement outlines the goals of social studies programs and highlights the importance of teaching citizenship; "Social studies programs prepare students to identify, understand, and work to solve the challenges facing our diverse nation in an increasingly interdependent world" (NCSS, 2008, p. 1). Too many teachers have encouraged memorization of facts instead of fostering an in-depth analysis of important issues, events, and trends that can be achieved when students go beyond the textbook and examine primary sources and engage in independent research (Cavanagh, 2007).

Therefore, the goal of this study was to support the claim that students can apply knowledge learned from the study of historical events to make decisions and take positions on contemporary issues. This type of learning environment was created to inspire and challenge students, thus supporting the vision of social studies instruction according to the NCSS.

Most social studies instruction is textbook driven (Cohen, 2005). Simply following the facts laid out in the textbook and not providing students with multiple accounts of history will offer little cognitive challenge and will not teach students to reason historically (VanSledright, 2011). It has also been reported that students describe social studies as boring and irrelevant and tend to have negative attitudes towards the class (Ioannou, Brown, Hannafin, & Boyer, 2009). A program that places a heavy emphasis on a large amount of fact-based knowledge may cause students to lose interest in the subject (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). There is a lack of research into the domain-specific methods of instruction in the field, especially the models that are related to high-level strategies to analyze, interpret, and communicate historical information (De La Paz, 2005). This study was intended to begin to fill the void that exists in this area as it investigated the relationship between thematic instruction, attitudes towards social studies, and historical thinking.

The thematic program, used as a treatment in this research, examined student learning in an environment that allows students to collaborate on real-world problems and was designed to encourage students to engage in social issues throughout their lives. The treatment condition was focused on the themes of Wealth and Conflict in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the United States. Through the investigation of challenging and relevant themes in history, students can learn to work together and become socially responsible.

### **Potential Benefits of this Study**

It is essential that students in today's classrooms are provided with an instructional style that encourages historical thinking and makes social studies relevant. The process of thematic investigation allows students to explore historical events in an authentic way (Jewett, 2007). This method of instruction organizes several tools of inquiry such as analysis, synthesis,

research, and questioning. It can create a meaningful investigation into history rather than produce a simplistic overview of historical facts, producing a sustained interest in the study of history.

This study was intended to provide a rationale for a social studies instructional program that is rich in content and student participation. In this study, a thematic-based instructional approach was used which examines historical thinking and student attitudes towards social studies instruction. There is emerging research into thematic social studies instruction and this study intends to add to this contemporary body of research. This study examined a grade 8 program that promoted active involvement, higher-level thinking, and student collaboration. With the many limitations placed upon social studies instruction in the NCLB era, a program that promotes interest in the subject today will help create the active and engaged citizens of tomorrow.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are relevant to this study and are defined to establish a common understanding of important concepts and operational definitions of terms used within this study.

1. **Attitudes**, as defined by Allport (1935), are “individual mental processes which determine both the actual and potential responses of each person in the social world” (p. 810).
2. **Convergent parallel design** is a mixed methods design “in which the researcher uses concurrent timing to implement the quantitative and qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process, prioritizes the methods equally, and keeps strands independent during analysis, and then mixes the results during overall interpretation of the data” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 410).



3. **Focus Groups** are “group interviews that are structured to foster talk among the participants about particular issues” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 109).
4. **Fully teamed middle school** refers to the concept of creating teams of teachers where “staff have daily interactions with a subset of the student population, making the middle school experience less intimidating and creating a stronger sense of belonging. Student teams also interact with the same group of teachers, helping to develop a stronger team identity” (Callicoatte Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2004, p. 4).
5. **Generic qualitative studies** are focused on the understanding of an event. These types of studies are defined as those that “exhibit some or all of the characteristics of qualitative endeavor but rather than focusing the study through the lens of a known methodology they seek to do one of two things: either they combine several methodologies or approaches, or claim to particular viewpoint at all” (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003, p. 2).
6. **Historical reasoning (also referred to as historical thinking)** is defined as, “an activity in which a person organizes information about the past in order to describe, compare, and/or explain historical phenomena” (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008, p. 89).
7. The essential elements of the **Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM)** are defined as “offering a curriculum that is advanced, emphasizing higher level thinking and problem solving, and exposing students to the world of great ideas, issues, and themes” (VanTassel-Baska, 2008, p. 3).

8. **Open coding** is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101).
9. **Problem-based Learning (PBL)** is “an instructional (and curricular) learner-centered approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem” (Savery, 2006, p. 12).
10. **Social studies** as defined by the NCSS (2010) is the “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 3).
11. **Thematic delivery** refers to social studies instruction through the study of themes in history such as law, wealth, discovery, and conflict. This involves the use of small group discussions, the use of relevant materials, simulations, consideration of problems, project-based learning, and connections to the modern world (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009).
12. **Traditional delivery** is defined as social studies instruction through a predominantly textbook guided course that covers a large time period and the mastery of facts (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009).
13. The **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as a gap that exists between what children can accomplish on their own and what can be achieved through either adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter served as an introduction to a study to investigate the effects of thematic instruction in social studies on grade 8 students' historical reasoning abilities and attitudes towards social studies related tasks. The chapter began with an introduction to the study and continued with the rationale for the study. The rationale reported the drop in historical knowledge in the United States and described efforts to make improvements. Next, the statement of the problem was used to argue that the teaching of citizenship remains an essential goal of social studies education. This section also included a brief explanation of how a thematic-based social studies curriculum could help obtain this goal. Then, the potential benefits of this study were described which outlined the intent of this study to add to the existing body of research. Finally, the chapter concluded with the definition of terms applicable to this study. Chapter two will report the review of related literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter will include the following four sections: (a) the theoretical framework, (b) the curricular framework, (c) perspectives on historical thinking, and (d) chapter summary and conclusion. This chapter will provide a description of the theoretical and curricular philosophies related to a thematic-based social studies curriculum. The chapter will also describe a chronological review of studies related to historical thinking.

The first section, the theoretical framework, is presented to provide a summary of the educational theories and constructs that are connected to historical thinking. Within this section the theories of Vgotsky (1978), Bruner (1960, 1966) and Allport (1935) will be reviewed and the key components within a thematic-based curriculum will be described. Connections between these theories, social studies instruction, and historical thinking will be established.

The next section of the review of literature will provide a description of the teaching methods and strategies that are incorporated in a thematic-based social studies program. The curricular framework section will review and describe Problem-based Learning (Savery & Duffy, 1995), the Integrated Curriculum Model (VanTassel-Baska, 1992), and the framework for historical thinking (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008). Also within this section, a review of the work of seminal researchers and writers on social studies education will be summarized and related to the curriculum framework. The historians utilized for this portion of the literature review are Peter Seixas (2000), Sam Wineberg (1997, 2000, 2001), and Bruce VanSledright (2002, 2004, 2011).

This final section will establish a broad overview of the development of research and methodology in social studies instruction that spans roughly 100 years. Within this section, seminal studies will be reviewed and described. Studies included in this review follow a

chronological approach and document the shift from achievement-based to concept-based research. A chapter conclusion and summary will complete the chapter.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The amount of current, primary, research about critical social studies instruction is somewhat limited (Barton, 2006.). In this present study, emerging research related to thematic instruction, historical reasoning, and attitudes towards social studies is linked to the work of educational theorist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) and his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as well as Jerome Bruner's theory of cognitive development (1960, 1966). Their perspectives which support the constructivist theory of guided inquiry are used as a framework for this research. Important links between the work of these two theorists and thematic-based social studies instruction were examined. This section was concluded with a review of Allport's (1935) research related to attitudes. His theory on attitudes is applied to provide a basis for understanding students' attitudes towards a thematic-based curriculum.

#### **Vygotsky's Social Learning Structure**

Vygotsky's (1978) theory on the process of development emphasized that social interaction plays a major role in the development of cognition. There are two developmental levels within this theory: the actual level is what a student can obtain on his or her own, and the potential level is what a learner may obtain when paired with a more highly skilled individual (Vygotsky, 1978). The difference between these mental levels was termed the zone of proximal development. In describing his theory, Vygotsky (1978) wrote ZPD "is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Vygotsky concluded that learning is a social process and that collaboration and interaction are essential for cognitive growth. He believed

that the delivery of new concepts through lecture or individual activities does not allow for adult guidance or collaboration with peers, therefore student development is not as advanced as it should be (Vygotsky, 1978).

ZPD is supported by the teacher-to-student guidance and peer-peer collaboration that takes place in a social studies program that engages students in activities that are relevant, challenging, and thought-provoking (NCSS, 2010). A thematic-based curriculum provides learners the opportunity to work in groups and explore problems in history.

### **Bruner's Concept of Cognitive Development**

The work of Bruner also supports a program based on social learning and a developmental approach to thinking. Bruner's theory of cognitive development is based on discovery learning, and inquiry learning leading to cognitive growth. A key element of Bruner's theory is that learners are viewed as problem solvers and should be provided the opportunity to explore material that is challenging (Bruner, 1960). Bruner's work was critical of an educational system that delays the exposure of students to complex subjects based on the notion that some concepts may be too difficult. He theorized that the basic themes that underlie these difficult concepts are both simple and powerful and should be revisited often. Bruner (1960) wrote that the early instruction of science, social studies, mathematics, and literature "should be designed to teach these subjects with scrupulous intellectual honesty, but with an emphasis upon the intuitive grasp of ideas and upon the use of these basic ideas" (p. 13). He was an advocate of sequential learning and that through these processes students would achieve mastery. Bruner (1966) believed that the nature of instruction and the instructor is to create a learner who is a self-sufficient problem solver.

There are direct applications of the concepts and theories of Bruner to classroom instruction. Within Bruner's theory, the task of the educator is defined as providing challenging material in a manner in which the learner can understand the complex concepts. Bruner (1960) also believed motivation for learning should go beyond grades or a competitive advantage and instead be based on an interest in the material being presented.

The application of Bruner's theories can be found in a thematic curriculum that provides relevant and complex material to students. Exploring topics such as discovery and conflict allows learners to develop a high level of interest and engage in high level thinking. A thematic-based program also encourages student collaboration and challenges learners to focus on the process of historical thinking and not just on the content that is presented. A social studies program that allows students to study problems of history and become engaged with the material tends to create motivated students who learn to become independent thinkers.

### **Allport's Research Related to Attitudes**

The history of defining and documenting attitudes has not been without controversy in the field of psychology. Allport (1935) defined attitudes as the "individual mental processes which determine both the actual and potential responses of each person in the social world" (p. 810). Important precepts of Allport's framework are that attitudes are formed and organized through experience, and they have a direct influence on behavior (Allport, 1935).

This theory has faced a great deal of scrutiny since its debut in 1935. Schwarz (2007) documented the criticism citing Wicker (1969) and Ross (1977). Wicker deemed Allport's attitude theory as less than impressive, claiming that attitudes are not major influences on behavior. Ross (1977) described attitudes as attributes of other psychological theories, rather than being a unique psychological trait. The concept that attitudes have a direct influence on

behavior has been a topic of much discussion. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) have added more traction to Allport's theory. They concluded that attitudes influence behavior, but the relationship was not direct and within their theory of reasoned action, subjective norms and environmental factors, must also be considered. In a 1995 meta-study that analyzed the correlation between attitude and future behavior, Kraus stated that his meta-analysis of 88 attitude-behavior studies suggested that a significant relationship between these variables does exist ( $p < .001$ ).

Although a controversy exists about whether or not attitude has a direct impact on behavior, the theory that attitude and behavior are related is supported. In summary, the work of Allport (1935) and of Kraus (1990) provided information that students with positive attitudes towards an area of study would demonstrate positive behaviors in that area of study. Relating this conclusion to this current research into social studies instruction, student attitudes towards a thematic social studies program should have an influence on performance. More specifically, a favorable attitude should result in a positive performance. In conclusion, the literature supported the concept that because attitudes are a function of experience, a student's experience in a thematic program should have an influence his or her attitude towards social studies (Allport, 1935; Kraus, 1990).

### **Curricular Framework**

Thematic-based social studies instruction incorporates the use of small group discussions, the use of relevant materials, simulations, consideration of problems, project-based learning, and connections to the modern world (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). This section describes three central elements that form the curricular framework related to thematic-based social studies: Problem-based Learning (Savery & Duffy, 1996), the Integrated Curriculum Model



(VanTassel-Baska, 1987), and the framework for historical thinking (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008).

### **Problem-based Learning (PBL)**

PBL is a learner-centered approach that integrates critical thinking, cooperative learning, communication skills, knowledge, and intellect to solve complex real-world problems (Savery, 2006). This approach is rooted in constructivism which is characterized by a connection between content and context, providing a stimulus for learning, and social collaboration is the key to testing understanding (Savery & Duffy, 1995). In a PBL environment, students are asked to assume responsibility for their own learning, collaborate with one another on problems that require inquiry, and demonstrate the ability to clearly articulate their findings to each other (Savery, 2006).

Duffy has developed the PBL approach into an Inquiry-based Learning (IBL) platform (Duffy & Raymer, 2010). This incorporates the PBL (Savery & Duffy, 1995) method as well as several other research-based practices including project-based learning (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, et al., 1991), learning by design (Hmelo, Holden, & Kolodner, 2000; Kolodner et al., 2003) and learning through invention (Schwartz & Martin, 2004). Duffy and Raymer (2010) defined the three key components of IBL as learning that is centered on: problem-solving, ownership of a problem, and student-supported rather than teacher-directed instruction. Based on the work of Dewey (1910), the inquiry process begins with the need to solve a problem. This would serve not only as a motivation but also as a basis for application throughout the process (Duffy & Raymer, 2010). Instruction begins with a high level and multifaceted problem and ends with the learner's explanation and analysis of a solution. During this process, the learner assumes the responsibility of owning the information. Then, he or she processes and organizes information

from a variety of sources that are relevant to the problem being solved. Also, within the IBL process, learners develop the necessary perspective that will allow them to comprehend the relevant material they need to know to solve the problem. As learners are guided through the inquiry process, they have gained a greater appreciation for the information they have learned at a level of depth that is far greater than if the material was simply included in a lecture or a reading (Duffy & Raymer, 2010).

Thematic instruction incorporates the principles of constructivism and relies on student conducted research and solution finding. The concepts of PBL and IBL are found in the activities and simulations within a thematic curriculum that engage students as active participants in learning.

**Social studies instruction as an investigative act.** Among others (Seixas 2000; Wineberg, 1997, 2000, 2001) Bruce VanSledright (2002, 2004, 2011) has also challenged the notion that the teaching of history should be centered on dates and names. He contended that, typically, history has been taught in a relatively passive way, a system that he argued is largely broken. VanSledright (2011) claimed that teaching history is an investigative act that should incorporate an inquiry-orientated approach. He wrote, “learners develop deeper levels of historical understanding when they have opportunities to consciously use their prior knowledge and assumptions about the past (regardless of how limited and naïve) to investigate it in depth” (VanSledright, 2002, p. 1092).

In a 4- month study conducted in 2002, VanSledright examined historical investigations of 23 fifth graders in an urban, ethnically mixed, mid-Atlantic, K-5 school. Prior to the study, the class was taught using a survey approach to history. The study aimed to support an approach to social studies education that incorporated historical investigation and student production of

historical products. Data were collected through videotaping, audiotaping, and archiving detailed lesson plans as well as maintaining a journal, and field notes. The lessons observed in this study were centered on the first permanent English settlement in North America, Jamestown, Virginia. Three sequential Starving Time lessons were used in this study (VanSledright, 2002). Starving Time refers the struggles faced by Jamestown colonists in 1607.

At the onset of the study it was noted that the participants, similar to most elementary school students, had complete trust in the textbook that was provided. The students were operating under the assumption that what was in the textbook was what really happened. One of the initial goals of the researcher was to move the students from this position to one that seeks multiple sources of information when investigating the past. VanSledright used the approach that the students were to behave as detectives, solving the mysteries of the past. Several sources were provided and the students were placed in groups. The meanings of primary and secondary sources were explained to the students as well as problems encountered with both types of sources. Small group discussions and document studies were held and each group shared their ideas in large group discussions.

The findings led the researcher to an important point, that the past is an interpretative undertaking. A focus of the study became how students dealt with what VanSledright (2002) described as history's "interpretive paradox" (p. 1090). This paradox was defined as the connection between reality and interpretation, the meaning the learner brings to the topic being studied. The findings described the dilemma created by this paradox and its connection to reform movements in the instruction of history (VanSledright, 2002). The paradox revealed itself as an unanticipated outcome of this research. When faced with varying points of view, several students developed a mistrust of the textbooks and believed that people distorted the truth.

According to VanSledright (2002), confronting this paradox could result in a loss of content coverage and test preparation. Even with the negative effects of content loss and less test preparation, the overall results of teaching students to interpret the past were positive.

VanSledright reported that the practice of historical inquiry provided valuable experience which helped students make real life decisions about interpreting everyday information. It also allowed students to discuss how knowledge is constructed and shared as a society. VanSledright concluded that although coverage and test prep may suffer when teaching historical thinking, it is well worth the investment.

### **The Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) and Thematic-based Social Studies**

John Dewey (1910) advocated for a curriculum that was useful and had a real-life relevancy to students where learning was accomplished by completing authentic activities. There are several models that support this type of curriculum format. For example, the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) as described by VanTassel-Baska (1992) is based on problem-solving and higher order thinking, and incorporates contemporary issues and themes.

The ICM model of curriculum delivery was originally developed as a model for gifted education. Common goals of a curriculum for the gifted include the promotion of critical thinking skills and reasoning abilities as well as divergent thinking (VanTassel-Baska, 1988). VanTassel-Baska wrote “gifted students need to become proficient in thinking and problem-solving strategies that examine concepts central to specific disciplines, but are also common to different fields of study” (2008, p. 10). Quality curriculum focuses on thinking skills, abstract concepts, advanced level concepts, interdisciplinary studies, thematic approaches, and a blending of content, process, and product (Renzulli & De Wet, 2010). A thematic social studies

curriculum is based on the same intentions, to promote complex thinking through content, process, products, and concepts.

In all areas of content the ICM attempts to eliminate the emphasis on the idea of coverage and replace it with an approach centered on more rigorous material (VanTassel-Baska, 2008). In social studies the content would include units that emphasize primary source analysis, with a process and product that promotes higher level thinking skills, and produces products that demonstrate the development of research and discussion skills (Bracken, Stambaugh, & VanTassel-Baska, 2008). Concepts provide the connections between different disciplines, prior knowledge, and intellectual curiosity and allow the learner to integrate information and perform higher level thinking tasks (VanTassel-Baska, 2008). When applied to social studies, concepts such as nationalism, perspective-taking, and cause and effect allow learners to understand that history is not a series of inevitable events, but an examination of multiple interpretations of past events (VanTassel-Baska, 2003).

**Application of ICM in social studies.** Project Phoenix was a quasi-experimental study that was created to examine the effectiveness of ICM in social studies (Little, Feng, VanTassel-Baska, Rogers, & Avery, 2007). The study included a sample of 1,200 students in grades 2, 4, and 7 from heterogeneous classrooms in 6 suburban Virginia schools. The sample was divided into two intact groups, those who were provided with specific curriculum interventions in social studies and those who were not provided with curriculum interventions. Instrumentation used in the study included; a conceptual thinking assessment, a critical thinking assessment, unit-specific content tests, and the Classroom Observation Scale (COS).

The study included 1 to 4 days of training for teachers in the intervention group and pre-tests and post-tests for both groups. An ANOVA and paired sample-tests were conducted. A

significance level of .007 was established after a Bonferroni correction was used to limit a Type I error. The analysis of the data revealed significant improvement for the treatment group in specific areas of conceptual reasoning and critical thinking assessment in comparison to the control group (Little et al., 2007). In the area of content learning statistically significant differences in students' post-assessment scores were registered ( $p < .007$ ), partial eta squared indicated a small effect (Cohen, 1988) of the treatment of .11 (Little et al., 2007). In addition to the gains made by the students in the area of critical thinking, external observers that utilized the COS scales noted that teachers also demonstrated gains in the category of critical thinking strategies (Little et al., 2007).

In this present study, thematic-based social studies instruction was employed. It included content focused on higher level thinking skills and problem solving. Students produced original products that were based on real-world situations in such forms as debate, discussion, and written arguments. The content of the thematic-based social studies program was based upon themes and concepts that were applied to multiple periods in history.

### **A Framework for Historical Thinking**

Researchers Jannet van Drie and Carla van Boxtel (2008) created a framework to define the process of historical thinking. Their research included a review of empirical literature about students' thinking and reasoning towards history. They proposed a six-component framework to be utilized in social studies instruction that included the following: "(a) asking historical questions, (b) using sources, (c) contextualization, (d) argumentation, (e) using substantive concepts, and (f) using meta-concepts" (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008, p. 89).

The researchers detailed each of the six components of the concept. The first concept, asking historical questions, was defined as the development of questions that are "descriptive,

causal, comparative, or evaluative questions about historical phenomena and about the sources that give information about the past” (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008, p. 92). The researchers described the second component of using sources as the selection, evaluation, interpretation, and corroboration of information from sources. The third aspect of the framework, contextualization, referred to placing a primary source, object, statement, image, or text, into the correct social and spatial context with the ability to analyze, describe, and evaluate it. The fourth component, argumentation, was described as the ability to put forth a claim and support it with sound and accurate evidence. Fifth, using substantive concepts is the learner’s ability to name historical phenomena, historical figures, and time periods when organizing information about the past to describe, explain, and evaluate events from history. The final component is using meta-concepts. This referred to the combination of comparing historical phenomena, explaining historical events, and the use of sources to provide information about the past. The level of historical reasoning reached is dependent upon these six components as well as the complexity of the topic being taught. Teaching via this framework can produce students with the ability to comprehend the relationship between history and their daily lives and not simply the ability to repeat important historical facts (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008).

**The complex nature of social studies instruction.** According to Sam Wineburg (2000), the concept of teaching history as a collection of facts, and its legacy, have contributed to the current lack of knowledge about how students learn history. With a lack of contemporary research focused on how students create historical contexts there have been few changes in the methods to deliver instruction. The works of theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1960, 1966) have changed educators’ beliefs about learning, which have changed the collective definition of instruction (Wineburg, 2000). Wineburg described the distinction between

knowing history and having knowledge of historical information. A person who knows history demonstrates this knowledge through the understanding of strengths and weaknesses of a historical claim, comprehending the reliability of evidence, and constructing an argument based on information from multiple sources as opposed to someone who has the ability of recalling historical information (Wineburg, 1997). In an effort to articulate what this may look like in the classroom, Wineburg and fellow researcher Suzanne Wilson detailed the accounts of two teachers as they taught and thought about the teaching of history.

Wineberg and Wilson (1992) observed and interviewed 11 experienced high school social studies teachers. The research was guided by the researchers' belief that "good teaching never finds its way into the professional literature, remaining instead in the minds of good teachers" (Wineburg & Wilson, 1992, p. 396). The accounts of the two teachers were discussed in a study that was a part of a larger series of 23 essays titled *Wisdom of Practice*. This series was based on the analysis of the findings from Stanford University's Teacher Assessment Project (Shulman, 1987). One aspect of the study described two grade 11 U.S. history teachers from urban schools located 20 minutes apart from one another. The first teacher was a female, given the pseudonym Elizabeth Jenson, in her mid-thirties who taught an ethnically diverse group of 32 honor students. The second teacher, a male, given the pseudonym John Price, was in his forties. His class of 35 ethnically diverse students opted to take his course. Both Jenson and Price had a reputation among their peers and students of being challenging teachers and quality educators. The two teachers used different methods to deliver instruction that were based on a similar belief about the teaching of history. Both teachers were skilled and knowledgeable and viewed history as a human construction. Jenson and Price used the textbooks as a source or account to add to



the information presented and to assist in following the storyline of history, but they did not serve as the sole basis for interpreting the past.

In Jenson's class, the students worked in groups and were observed to be actively engaged in role-play. She believed that history was a series of connected ideas and themes and that the making of history was a dynamic process. This vision guided her instruction and provided the framework for her classroom activities. The class was often engaged in research, debate, and historical role-play. Her role in the classroom was observed as being a coach, facilitator, troubleshooter, and monitor as she helped each group prepare for the debate on the American Revolution.

In Price's classroom, he was at the center of the conversation on the Intolerable Acts at the onset of the observation. He incorporated primary source readings into his discussion and kept the students' interest throughout the period. Price was described as a masterful performer and relied on his 17-years of experience to deliver lessons that kept his students engaged. His goal was for the students to learn history as a collection of human events. He sought to engage students in the stories of history and to have the students examine the multiple perspectives that surrounded historical events.

The research conducted by Wineberg and Wilson (1992), focused on the examination of experienced teachers and was viewed as an initial step in analyzing the expertise of instruction in history. In an analysis of the observations, they concluded that content knowledge was important, but not the sole factor in quality instruction in history. The researchers used the accounts of Jensen and Price to illustrate the need for a varied approach to history instruction that provided depth and understanding to the complex nature of history.

**The teaching and learning of history.** Peter Seixas (2000) has examined the challenges faced by educators as teachers, historians, and students by exploring the teaching and learning of history. Seixas has observed the variety of methods used to teach history. He has advocated for a program that goes beyond having students simply engaged in the subject and committing facts to memory, but instead has encouraged each student to take an active role as a historian (Seixas, 2000). Seixas has articulated key elements in the evolution in social studies instruction.

In summarizing the Progression Study conducted in Great Britain by researchers Lee and Ashby (2000), Peck and Seixas (2008) described the progression from basic thinking to higher level thinking skills that leads to student understanding of historical thinking. In the Progression Study, Lee and Ashby (2000) connected two ideas that had emerged from the English National Curriculum and the Schools History Project to help shape the way students are engaged in the learning of history. Seixas provided an overview of their work and described the difference between first-order and second-order concepts. First-order or substantive concepts were defined as practical concepts, or what history is about, “concepts like peasant, friar, and president, particulars like the Battle of Hastings, the French Revolution...and individuals like Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie...” (Lee & Ashby, 2000, p.199). Second-order concepts were applied concepts such as “change, cause, and evidence” (Peck & Seixas, 2008, p. 1021). Second-order concepts provide the tools to think historically and these concepts become increasingly sophisticated, which would provide a model for student learning (Peck & Seixas, 2008). A focus on the progression to second-order concepts would place the emphasis on the tools of historical thinking and would highlight how to handle conflicting versions of the past. The concentration on the understanding of major themes of history, second-order concepts, fosters a progression in historical thinking where students begin to understand the tools of doing history and reaching a

conclusion based on several historical accounts (Peck & Seixas, 2008). The work of Lee and Ashby (2000) on the Progression Study in Great Britain also suggested that “as students become aware of the power of new ideas, history is increasingly valued as a difficult but worthwhile subject” (p. 213).

Seixas has also evaluated methods in which history is presented to students. He described three different approaches to the delivery of social studies instruction. The three methods are: the collective memory approach, disciplinary approach, and postmodernist approach (Seixas, 2000). Collective memory was defined by Seixas (2000) as the knowledge of the past through tradition. He referred to the disciplinary approach as providing students with the tools to conduct inquiry, investigation, and debate. The postmodernist approach embraces the idea that history is a collection of several narratives of the past that have been interpreted by historians. The postmodernist view uses the theme of progress to have students not only inquire into the history that is being presented, but to investigate the reasons why they are exposed to this history (Seixas, 2000). Although all three methods of instruction have merit, Seixas (2000; Peck & Seixas, 2008) argues that students should be taught to think as historians. In doing so, students would view the past through the many interpretations that have been provided while acknowledging the limits of the understanding people have of the past (Seixas, 2000).

**Connections between the curricular framework and seminal researchers.** The work of VanSledright (2002, 2004, 2011), Wineburg (1997, 2000, 2001) and Seixas (2000) described history education as much more than reciting events of the past. Thinking and learning about the past involves the examination of multiple perspectives and may lead to more questions than answers. The application of the thinking skills that are incorporated in the historical thinking framework (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008) demonstrates the difference between reciting past

events and evaluating the past. Social studies education should allow students to use problem solving techniques to investigate the past in a way that does not rely on a single source resulting in one version a historical event. VanSledright (2002, 2004, 2011), Wineburg (1997, 2000, 2001) and Seixas (2000; Peck & Seixas, 2008) have provided a context for the instruction of history and examined several perspectives for teaching history. The common thread that connects their work is the call for an instructional focus on an inquiry-based approach that allows students to investigate the past in a way that would make the study of history more meaningful.

### **Perspectives on Historical Thinking**

Efforts to determine the best way to deliver and assess instruction in history have been long debated. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century research into history instruction faced the same obstacles that contemporary researchers do. The main difficulty was that the concept of historical ability is “...so vague, so ill-defined that it would be difficult to subject to scientific examination” (Bell & McCollum, 1917, p. 257). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century reforms in social studies education evolved from fact-based assessments to attempts to define and pinpoint historical thinking skills. Early research efforts were aimed at assessing historical information (Bell & McCollum, 1917) and comparing study techniques in using historical textbooks (Arnold, 1942). After the mid-century point, studies focused on increasing inquiry techniques in social studies instruction (Committee on the Study of History, 1971), developing an understanding of the meanings and methods of history (Shemilt, 1983) and establishing a connection between student attitudes and historical thinking (Booth, 1983).

More recent studies were focused on student collaboration, the use of technology, and the analysis of primary source materials. All of the studies were related methods to improve historical thinking or student’s attitudes towards social studies. The work of van Drie et al.

(2005) analyzed the effect of student collaboration in a computer supported environment on historical thinking. De La Paz (2005) conducted an analysis that examined the relationship between writing skills and historical understanding. The research of Tally and Goldenberg (2005) described student attitudes towards history and the use of primary sources to enhance instruction. Finally, Hernández-Ramos and De La Paz (2009) studied computer aided instruction in a thematic social studies classroom. Table 1 provides a summary of the studies included in this section.

Table 1

*Summary of Perspectives on Historical Thinking*

| Researcher(s)                            | Sample  | Study   | Summary of the Finding(s)   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Bell and McCollum (1917)                 | $n = 1,500$<br>Grade 5 to University students           | Content knowledge of basic United States history  | Students at all levels did not show a mastery of basic historical facts.  |
| Arnold (1942)                            | $n = 370$<br>University freshman and sophomores         | Study techniques to measure factual recall and basic thought processes such as cause and effect | None of the study methods demonstrated a significant increase in the retention of factual knowledge or thought processes. |
| Committee on the Study of History (1971) | University professors, secondary teachers, and students | Historical understanding and writing skills   | The final report established a program that was focused on inquiry-based learning and historical thinking.                |
| Shemilt (1983)                           | $n = 156$ students; 15 years old                        | Teaching history as one of the forms of knowledge   | Students who utilized this approach were capable of a more complex and sophisticated level of historical understanding.   |

Table 1 (continued)

*Summary of Perspectives on Historical Thinking*

| Researcher(s)   | Sample                                  | Concepts  | Finding   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Booth<br>(1983)   | $n = 95$ students; 13 -14<br>years old  | Historical thinking<br>and student attitudes<br>towards history   | Students should be engaged<br>in the active learning of<br>history.   |
| van Drie, van<br>Boxtel, Erkens,<br>& Kanselaar<br>(2005) | $n = 72$<br>Students 16-17 years<br>old | Creating a<br>collaborative<br>argument and its<br>effect on the amount<br>of co-elaborated<br>historical reasoning | Historical reasoning does<br>not take place in the<br>context of the interaction<br>but in the products that are<br>produced.   |
| De La Paz<br>(2005)                                       | $n = 132$<br>Middle school students     | Historical<br>understanding and<br>writing skills   | Students in experimental<br>group were better able to<br>support an argument<br>( $p = .001$ ) and were more<br>persuasive ( $p < .001$ ) than<br>students in the control<br>group. |

Table 1 (continued)

*Summary of Perspectives on Historical Thinking*

| Researcher(s)                      | Sample                                 | Concepts   | Finding  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Tally & Goldenberg (2005)          | <i>n</i> = 159 students<br>Grades 6-12 | A qualitative analysis of historical thinking and students attitudes towards social studies for students that analyzed primary source images | 68% of the students reported a difference in the type of instruction. 87% of the students reported they learned more history and 72% said they enjoyed history more. |
| Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz (2009) | <i>n</i> = 170<br>Grade 8 students     | Content knowledge tests, group projects, and student attitudes in a project-based learning environment                                       | An increase in content knowledge ( <i>p</i> = .017) and positive attitudes towards social studies ( <i>p</i> < .05) was found in the treatment group.                |

**Historical Sense**

As early as 1917 the concept of historic sense was discussed and questioned. Bell (1917) described it as having the ability to deliver a well-articulated and clear account of a historical event with proper perspective and details as opposed to providing a list of unrelated historical events. As the authors of a 1917 Texas Study, Bell and McCollum described aspects of historical sense in an article that was released with their study. The five areas of historical sense



identified by Bell and McCollum and summarized by Wineburg (2004) are the understanding of present ideas with respect to past events, reading and comprehending primary sources, enhancing the appreciation of historical narrative, developing in-depth answers to higher-level questions on historical events, and answering fact-based questions. Although he was on a quest to define historic sense, he and his colleague McCollum resolved to evaluate students' abilities to recall historical facts. The researchers explained that measuring this type of historical knowledge was "the narrowest...and the least important type of historical ability" (Bell & McCollum, 1917, p. 258) and was, at the time, the easiest to assess. Bell and McCollum (1917) wrote that connecting past events to present day situations, evaluating sources, demonstrating an appreciation for historical narratives, and reflecting on thought questions were all more important to developing a historical sense, but less accessible to experimental evaluation.

In their 1917 study, the two researchers developed a list of questions related to United States history that were compiled and evaluated by high school and college teachers of history. The sample for this project included 1500 Texas students who ranged from grade 5 to university level students. The questions ranged from easy to difficult and included historic terms, dates, people, and a map study. All participants in the study were asked the same questions. The results of the study indicated a lack of mastery of basic historical facts. Students in grades 5-7 answered only 16% of the questions correctly, high school aged participants (grades 8-11 at the time of the study) answered 33% of the questions accurately, grade 12 students responded correctly on 43% of the questions, and university level students were correct on 49% of their responses (Bell & McCollum, 1917). It was anticipated that historical recall would increase as grade level increased, but the number of correct responses at each level does not demonstrate a mastery of basic historical facts (Bell & McCollum, 1917). The lasting importance of this study was a focus

on improving the basic knowledge that was clearly unknown by the study participants rather than on exploring the higher level thinking aspects of historical thinking.

### **Study Methods to Recall Historical Facts**

Following in the footsteps of the work of Bell and McCollum (1917) was Arnold's (1942) investigation into study methods to recall historical facts addressed in textbooks. This study compared four study techniques and included a sample of 242 freshman college students and 128 college sophomores. Students' scores on immediate and delayed recall achievement tests were measured and compared. The four study techniques under investigation were: (a) repetitive reading (no writing), (b) underlining and minimal note-taking on the text page, (c) outlining the material, and (d) creating a summary of the material that was just studied. A standardized intelligence test was used to create four groups that demonstrated an equal range of ability. A reading comprehension test and a standardized social studies test (Test of General Proficiency in the Field of the Social Studies 1940 edition) were administered to all participants. Students also completed a survey to determine if they had previously learned any of the materials that were used in the research. The 15-week investigation included 3 weeks of instruction in the four study techniques and 12 weekly class study sessions. The intent of the research was to measure factual recall and thought processes such as "chronological, cause and effect, and main and subordinate relationships" (Arnold, 1942, p. 451).

During the 12 weekly class sessions, subjects read excerpts from a college-level textbook on Latin American history. Participants were divided into four groups. The groups rotated through the study techniques over the course of the research project. For the first 30 to 40 minute session, each group applied the following techniques: Group A, outlining; Group B, summary writing; Group C, underlining; and Group D, repetitive reading. Each group applied a

different technique at the next session. To assess immediate-recall, an objective recall test was administered at the end of each session. The same test was taken 5-weeks later to measure delayed recall. The analysis of the data included determining the mean difference and *t*-score on the results of the immediate and delayed recall assessments for each group and study technique.

The research findings determined that given the conditions of the research, students performed equally as well regardless of which study technique was utilized. However, a trend that was observed indicated that the outlining method demonstrated the tendency to produce the lowest scores for most students, while the reading and underlining method produced superior scores. The Arnold study reflected a focus on the recall and reciting of historical facts from a textbook and not on historical inquiry. As previously mentioned, Wineburg (2000) stated that the reliance on fact-based learning in the early to mid-1900s had a profound effect on the teaching of social studies and research into instructional methods. Arnold's (1942) study provides support for this assumption and demonstrates the lack of research about historical thinking in the first half of the twentieth century.

### **The Amherst Project**

Launched in 1959, the Amherst Project was a “research and development project devoted to fostering the newer inquiry approaches in the study of history” (Committee on the Study of History, 1971, p. 2). The Amherst Project developed units, piloted material, and provided in-service workshops designed to assist history teachers in implementing inquiry methods into the social studies curriculum. The inquiry approach included student collaboration, the use of relevant materials, and problem-solving. The Project lasted for over a decade and had its main focus on secondary schools, but was applied to social studies education ranging from junior high to adult (Committee on the Study of History, 1971).

The developers of the Amherst Project proposed to design assessments and provide training workshops that were aimed at assisting teachers in using the materials created by the committee. Throughout the action research project, teacher participants evaluated program materials and maintained journals that were used to examine the effectiveness of the program initiatives. Teachers were invited to select units to pilot and to use these modules in any way they wanted. The participants were observed by trained supervisors from the Project.

An additional goal of the project was to integrate the units into a new American history course. This goal was altered and a new approach was developed that called for the creation of modules or building blocks that could be used and adopted by teachers in existing courses. This approach was in lieu of creating a stand-alone course. The module approach was preferred by the Secondary School History Committee, because it was more flexible and was consistent with key components of inquiry learning: it allowed teachers at the local level to make curriculum decisions based on the needs of students in their classrooms.

The results of the action research project created a new format for social studies education. The materials developed became the final product of the research study. The members of the Amherst Project investigated how people learn, the roles of teachers in fostering learning, and the problem of bringing about educational reform (Committee on the Study of History, 1971).

An editorial that examined the Project's problem of creating a teacher's manual was included in the Project's final report. The issue that developed was that teachers who held the belief that history was the study of a set of conclusions and that it was a course that should be covered and not investigated were not likely to use the manual. At the opposite end of the spectrum were teachers who believed that history was the study of infinite questions. They were

comfortable with ambiguity and thus, those who needed the manual least, used the manual more effectively (Committee on the Study of History, 1971). The Amherst Project demonstrated the shift from instruction based upon the principles of a teacher-centered, fact-based model to one that included many of the guided inquiry components based on learning as a student-centered process. In a 1965 talk by Richard Brown at the Conference of National Defense Education Act (NDEA), he described this as a seminal moment. Brown stated:

In one way or another, and I can't stress this enough, discovery learning is the very basis of the revolution now going on in schools. It is based on new work in the psychology of learning. It had its impact first, as you all know, in mathematics and the natural sciences. It now bids fair to produce major changes in history and social studies. (Committee on the Study of History, 1971, Appendix F, p. 37)

The implications of the Amherst Project were to continue to create social studies units that were relevant and meaningful. The Project formed a group that included teachers, secondary-level students, university professors, and members of a national research center to develop curriculum units. The anticipated impact of the Project was to replace the model of fact-based social studies instruction with a model that incorporated collaborative problem-solving.

### **History as a Form of Knowledge**

History 13-16, established in 1972, was an effort similar to the Amherst Project. It was conducted in Great Britain by the Schools Council and was the first curriculum project devoted specifically to history (Shemilt, 1983). The project utilized the forms of knowledge approach that was developed by Hirst (1973, 1979). This approach characterized forms of knowledge by identifying four distinct features. According to Hirst (1973, 1979) all forms of knowledge (a) revolved around specific central concepts, (b) maintained a distinct logical structure, (c) had

methods by which ideas may be tested against experience to increase the body of knowledge, and (d) developed specific techniques to amass knowledge. The relationship between the features of the forms of knowledge and their application to social studies classroom instruction led to practical questions regarding the teaching and learning of history. Shemilt (1983) discussed the difficulty of understanding the highly abstract concepts of this method and wondered if adolescents would be developmentally able to take any meaning away from this type of instruction. To inform his opinion on this important question, he analyzed the data produced by the History 13-16 project.

The School Council had four main objectives when they launched History 13-16. The project's philosophy included the premise that history will be taught using the forms of knowledge approach. The forms of knowledge approach refers to any area of study that has its own logic, methods, and perspectives (Shemilt, 1983). Therefore, in an application to learning history it required the development of logical reasoning skills where the curriculum met the needs of adolescents, and it provided a framework that was sustained for a long period of time (Shemilt, 1983).

The research project that was used to examine the forms of knowledge approach included a sample of 156 students all 15 years old. There were 78 pairs matched for, IQ, sex, and socioeconomic background. One member of each pair was placed in the experimental group and enrolled in the History 13-16 course, and the other member of the pair followed a traditional course that varied in content but was similar in approach. Data collected from a construct based pencil and paper test were used to inform a series of interviews that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes to explore students' own ideas regarding history. The researchers utilized a

phenomenological technique with respect to the qualitative data. Responses were categorized and the data were organized to make formal comparisons between the two groups.

Four models, or levels, of the development of historical narrative were created based on the interview data. The first level was represented by students who lacked an inner logic. This was displayed by students who reported history by simply writing down what happened. At this level students thought of historical facts as just being there without any application of cause and effect. Students at level two understood the idea of continuity but only in a basic concrete and mechanical way. Most students at this level did not make high level assumptions, but they did demonstrate a general logic regarding the understanding of history. At level three, students began to grasp the idea that historical events were unique and involved a complex confluence of events. They began to see that history was not inevitable but instead unpredictable. Although students demonstrated complex thoughts and arguments, these were not without error. In level four, students were capable of placing events into context and understood that events took place in a period of history, an understanding beyond the chronology of history. The comprehension of periods of history provided meaning for students and required the application of logic to determine if events within a period of history were considered acceptable or unacceptable.

The data revealed that students derived very different opinions of historical narrative than their teachers. A generalization revealed that students are capable of understanding highly abstract questions when the questions are presented appropriately using the methods presented in the History 13-16 project. The comparison between the two groups revealed that students who were in the History 13-16 group were observed developing a higher level of understanding of history than those students who were in the conventional curriculum.

The History 13-16 project demonstrated that students who were engaged in a course about history as a form of knowledge exhibited a more “sophisticated grasp of history than [did] children following a conventional content-based course” (Shemilt, 1983, p. 15). This does not mean that all students in such a program will produce knowledge at level 4, but a curriculum that utilizes Bruner’s spiral approach can embed the basic ideas and concepts to produce higher level thinking. The results that were observed suggested that a course constructed around the form of knowledge approach led students at each of the four levels to increase their understanding of history. Shemilt (1983) suggested that this research indicated that teachers should not expect to create a classroom of future historians, but instead have students develop a sense and value of history.

### **The Development of Historical Thinking Skills**

In 1975 a 17-month study about students’ ability to develop historical thinking skills was launched (Booth, 1983). The study was conducted in the United Kingdom and intended to measure the attitude of students in a course that was based on the theories of Bloom and Bruner (Booth, 1983). This study was designed to contradict prior research in the United Kingdom based on Piaget’s stage theory of development, that students should be instructed in a textbook-driven, concrete manor until the formal operational stage. Booth’s research was an effort to lend support to the theories of Bloom and Bruner with an application to history. The study provided support to the ideas that students aged 13 and 14 could demonstrate elements of historical thinking and benefit from exposure to a historical thinking framework.

The study was designed to measure students’ abilities to comprehend primary sources, make deductions, and analyze and evaluate documents. Student scores on an end-of-course assessment that tested the use of historical evidence were measured, along with an attitude



toward history questionnaire, and an open ended questionnaire that surveyed their reactions to the course they had just completed. Additionally, students' abilities to utilize a wide range of concepts that were demonstrated in a variety of assignments and conducted over the length of the study were investigated.

The experimental group for this research included 53 male and female students of various ability levels. The students were 14 years of age and taught by the same teacher during the study. The curriculum followed by the experimental group was a two-year modern world history course that included the topics of Europe, America, the Far East and new nations in the twentieth century. Student involvement and discussion along with project work were emphasized during instruction for this group. A second group of 42 students was used as a control group. This group was from the same school, were of similar age and intelligence; however, they did not participate in the history course. Both the experimental and the control group completed all of the tests and questionnaires.

The history students, the experimental group, also participated in oral assessment interviews designed to measure the extent of historical thought each student could demonstrate. The interviews were held individually on two separate occasions. The first oral assessment had students create groups from 12 uncaptioned photographs. In the second meeting, students were given the task of grouping 12 short quotations from famous speeches or documents from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Results from the oral assessments revealed two distinct methods of grouping the photographs and quotations. The first type of grouping that emerged demonstrated a surface or concrete method for clustering the photographs and quotations that contained the same words or phrases from the quotations. The other form of grouping displayed a higher level of comprehension and important components of historical thought. This second

method of grouping resulted in themes using knowledge of historical concepts to group the quotations and photographs. These themes included the concepts such as conquest and expansion.

The results of the longitudinal study indicated that the students in the history course, the experimental group, made significant improvements on a documentary skills tests ( $p < .001$ ) and the concepts test ( $p < .001$ ) in comparison to the criterion scores that they established 17 months earlier at the onset of the study. The attitude towards history of students in the experimental group remained favorable and there was a significant difference between the two groups ( $p < .001$ ) with the attitude towards history in the control group being less favorable than that of the students enrolled in the history course.

The results of the study indicated that learning history in a course that is based on discussion, student created projects, and the use of multiple sources is an important aspect of cognitive and social development (Booth, 1983). Other conclusions supported the widely accepted notion that active learning was more favorable than passive learning. An additional finding described the importance of teacher expectations and described the role of the classroom teacher as a manager of learning and not a lecturer (Booth, 1983). Finally, because of the significant cognitive growth, Booth argued that the data examined in this study provided support and justification that history should remain as an essential element of the curriculum.

### **Collaboration and Social Studies Instruction**

Van Drie, Van Boxtel, Erkens, and Kanselaar (2005) examined the elements of a Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) environment and its impact on historical reasoning. They defined historical reasoning as the ability to “describe and explain historical phenomena, distinguish processes of change and continuity, consider [the] trustworthiness and

[the] value of sources and [provide] support [for] their viewpoints or opinions with arguments” (p. 26). Based on the work of Van Boxtel (2004) the authors theorized that studying the interaction process from different perspectives would give more insight into the relationship between collaborative learning tasks, interaction processes, and learning outcomes. The researchers also incorporated the concept of collaboration and its impact on elaboration of an argument into student essay writing. This relationship between working together and the development of an essay was based on the premise that elaboration was emphasized in peer-to-peer interactions. The researchers hypothesized that students working in pairs to complete an essay would be more likely to evaluate multiple perspectives and be forced to provide more support for an argument in this collaborative environment. They referred to this concept as co-elaborate historical reasoning. This means that students who work on a common task must form a mutual understanding that is sustained throughout the collaborative process (Roschelle, 1992).

In this study, conducted in the Netherlands, Van Drie et.al (2005) compared two different supportive tools that allowed learners to work together and create an argument. Students’ ability to create a collaborative argument was compared by placing students into two different conditions. The experimental group created arguments using a graphical representation (diagram group) and was compared to a control group that used a non-graphical model (list group). The intent was to gain an understanding of how different collaboration tools may or may not better elicit historical reasoning between students in an online chat environment and in student writing assignments. The findings were determined by the quality of essays produced and individual learning outcomes. Students in both groups utilized an online chat dialogue to communicate with one another throughout the research study. The quality of essays produced was used to measure historical reasoning abilities of students in both methods under investigation.

Subjects in this study were selected from a sample of 72 students who were 16-17 years old. The study lasted for six, 50-minute lessons. Students were randomly assigned to pairs and the pairs were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. There were 16 pairs of students assigned to an argument diagram group and 14 pairs assigned to an argument list group. The argument diagram group members created a visual that represented pros and cons of an argument and connected concepts using arrows. Students in the argument list group simply had a list of the arguments and were not asked to make connections between the arguments. Both groups participated in the CSCL environment. The researchers hypothesized that the diagram group would exhibit greater elaboration and historical reasoning skills. This expectation was based on the belief that the graphical representation would allow this group to have more interactions and an argument that was more visible to the participants when compared to the list group.

The authors described the chief focus of their research as an effort to elicit and encourage co-elaborated historical reasoning (Van Drie et. al., 2005). Students performed historical inquiry tasks that included studying historical sources, participating in chat rooms as a means of collaboration, and writing a 1000-word essay about the Dutch youth revolution in the 1960s. A pre-test and post-test focused on subject knowledge including seven open-answer questions and questions that could be answered with a single word or phrase.

The analysis of the essay was conducted using the following six aspects of historical reasoning: time references, changes and continuity, explanations, use of sources, argumentation, and the use of historical concepts. A maximum score of 60 was established. Two researchers independently assessed the essays and then discussed any differences until a consensus was reached. Both groups' responses on the diagrams or lists were assessed by measuring the number of pro and con arguments that were included in the chat entries. The researchers chose

12 samples at random and established an inter-rater reliability of .89 for the pro argument and .78 for the counter argument.

The study revealed that a collaborative writing task in a CSCL environment was a useful task to engage students in historical reasoning (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2004). The research also suggested that historical reasoning does not take place in the context of the interaction, but through the products that are being produced. The investigation indicated that the list model was more suited to present large amounts of information and the graphic diagram promoted better organization of the information. The researchers concluded that historical thinking, as determined by the analysis of the writing scores on the 1,000-word essays, were not influenced by the treatment and that historical thinking took place in both groups as a result of collaboration and discussion. The researchers observed that the collaboration tools (the chat room) used in this study functioned as a learning tool and communication tool that promoted collaboration. Therefore, this research demonstrated the importance of collaboration on historical reasoning tasks and indicated that it was necessary to conduct more research into the tools used to promote and assess inquiry.

### **Writing Skills and Historical Thinking**

De La Paz (2005) also studied the effects of an integrated language arts and social studies unit on historical understanding and writing skills. This study was based on the perception that students are ill-prepared to handle documents that contain varying points of view and tend to rely on the interpretation of a textbook to learn history. The research consisted of 132 students in a Northern California middle school. Seventy students who were placed in an experimental group were provided with 12 days of historical reasoning instruction and 10 days of writing instruction. This group was then compared to a control group of 62 students who continued to receive the

traditional curriculum. Students in the experimental condition applied historical reasoning strategies when examining documents related to westward expansion and learned to plan an argumentative essay related to a historical event.

De La Paz hypothesized that students in the historical reasoning condition would be better equipped to interpret the documents containing conflicting points of view and better able to express their point of view in a written assignment than students in the control group. After establishing an inter-rater reliability for historical accuracy of .84 (Pearson product-moment correlation), a one-way ANOVA conducted on historical accuracy determined that there was a significant difference between groups,  $F(1, 131) = 11.092$ ,  $MSE(\text{mean squared error}) = 0.545$ ,  $p = .001$  with the treatment group having the higher mean scores than the control group (De La Paz, 2005). Students in the experimental group also wrote essays with a greater number of arguments ( $F(1,131) = 50.642$ ,  $MSE = .216$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and were rated as being more persuasive ( $F(1, 131) = 58.259$ ,  $MSE = 1.352$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results of the research supported the hypothesis.

Suggested future research that emerged from this study included a recommendation to examine historical reasoning with a focus on multiple perspectives. The study also revealed that these middle school social studies students did not yet realize that history was a subjective interpretation of past events and that one, definite, and accurate truth may not be possible (De La Paz, 2005).

### **Historical Thinking and Primary Sources**

A 2005 pilot study that examined how students learned history using new technologies was conducted by Tally and Goldenberg. The treatment incorporated the use of visual primary sources and investigated students' historical thinking abilities when effective supports, teacher guidance, and scaffolded computer software were provided. The study also measured student

attitudes towards social studies and assessed attitude changes that occurred as a result of the treatment.

The pilot study included 159 students, grades 6 – 12, from 5 intact middle and high school classrooms. The data collected during this study consisted of responses to an activity and questionnaire. The activity placed the student in role of a detective of history where the student was provided with an online primary source image. The students were asked to gather clues and draw conclusions based on observations of the images. The data gathered in this process were collected and analyzed by the researchers. A questionnaire based on their experience during the activity was completed by the students. The questionnaire asked students to compare the experience in this history class to previous classes.

As a result of this pilot study, 68% of the students reported that the treatment class was different when compared to previous history classes they had taken. The three most consistently reported differences were (a) the use of technologies to learn in new ways, (b) working with primary sources to gain a more in-depth understanding of history, and (c) learning independently as well as in small groups (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). The students described previous social studies classes as lecture-based with few opportunities for discussion or debate. The students reported that the treatment involved more work, but they also reported that it was more enjoyable. A large majority of the students surveyed, 87%, indicated that they had learned more history in the treatment class when compared to previous history classes. Also, 72% of the students reported they now liked history more as a result of the more in-depth method of studying history. Historical thinking skills that were documented by the researchers during the study included: observing, drawing inferences, posing questions, collaborating, and citing evidence. The level of historical thinking found in individual responses was determined through

an analysis of the responses students provided to the digital images. The responses were coded and analyzed. The analysis suggested that students at all levels displayed good historical thinking skills (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005).

This study presented important conclusions related to historical thinking and student attitudes towards social studies. This research supported the idea that a social studies program based on historical thinking can provide more rigor compared to program based on lectures and textbook work. An additional benefit of this type of program was that students viewed it as an enjoyable alternative to lecture-based social studies instruction. This pilot study was limited in scale, but it did provide relevant information in the development of historical thinking skills and attitudes towards social studies in middle and high school aged students.

### **Thematic Social Studies and Computer Aided Instruction**

Hernández-Ramos and De La Paz (2009) conducted a study in which 170 grade 8 students created multimedia mini-documentaries in a six-week study. Relying upon the theoretical framework of constructivism and project-based learning, the authors advocated an instructional approach in social studies that integrated technology and meaningful learning experiences into the curriculum. The intent was to compare the amount of historical content, historical thinking, and beliefs towards social studies between students in a technology-assisted project-based program and those who were not. The researchers examined: content knowledge tests, group projects, and student attitudes in a project-based learning environment.

This study, situated in a Northern California school district, included 170 students and 3 teachers. The experimental group, which included computer aided instruction, contained 100 students and the comparison group, using the traditional district curriculum, totaled 70 students. Students in both groups studied westward expansion over the course of the research period. The



treatment group (computer aided instruction) was provided with a digital set of primary and secondary resources. They utilized computer aided instruction and created multimedia presentations. The comparison group (traditional district curriculum) continued with the yearlong curriculum. The teachers in both groups taught thematically and incorporated multiple perspectives into their instruction (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009).

The findings of this quasi-experimental study revealed the treatment group had significantly higher content knowledge than the comparison group ( $F(1, 168) = 5.84, p = .017$ ). Historical reasoning was assessed at the conclusion of the study using a rubric to examine the student created multi-media projects. This analysis was limited to the experimental group. Trained evaluators used a four-level rubric to score the group projects completed by the experimental group. The evaluators agreed on 82% of their scores and the overall difference between their scores were not statistically significant. Using the four-level rubric, the projects averaged a 3.88 (SD = .34) for Citing Sources, 2.92 (SD = .50) for Curriculum Alignment, and 3.21 (SD = .42) for Subject Knowledge (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). The researchers concluded that a level of historical thinking was evident in each of the 24 projects completed by the experimental group, although it varied in depth from project to project. A final aspect of the study revealed a significant difference in positive attitudes towards social studies. Students in the computer aided instruction group had significantly higher attitudes towards social studies when compared to the traditional curriculum group ( $p < .05$ ) as assessed on a seven item 5-point Likert survey.

This study highlighted the importance of both the integration of technology and project-based learning. The authors showcased the benefits of a program that was grounded in a learning-by-doing strategy. The researchers suggested that future research should focus on

methods that provide more permanent gains in historical reasoning and deeper appreciation of history (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009).

### **Perspectives on Historical Thinking Summary**

The intent of this section was to document the evolution of social studies instruction, or the movement from the recall of facts and little in-depth analysis of students' thinking to a student centered and inquiry-based approach to learning history. The teaching of history has followed a logical progression that initially emphasized a fact-based knowledge approach at the onset of the twentieth century to an approach that increasingly has adopted an inquiry-based model of student learning.

Beginning in the early 1900s the examination of history education was based on concrete evidence of factual knowledge (Bell & McCollum, 1917). Prior to 1950, the research maintained a focus on techniques and study skills but not on thinking skills. Arnold's (1942) research was centered on techniques to memorize historical facts but placed little to no focus on how to think historically. The Amherst study (1971) was a major leap forward in creating a history course that was based on thinking skills and not content coverage. Shemilt (1983) and Booth (1983) continued the transformation of teaching of history and the incorporation of historical thinking skills based on constructivist theories.

Although the literature has called for further examination of inquiry practices and applying historical thinking in social studies, few examples of contemporary research into this field are available. The debate between historians and philosophers has continued over the theory, methods, and purpose of what constitutes historical knowledge (Kelly, Meuwissen, & VanSledright, 2007). The research into building an accepted historical method has been generally successful. However, many different interpretations on what it means to really

understand and interact with history in the classroom still exist, which have yet to be defined by the research community (Kelly, Meuwissen, & VanSledright, 2007).

The literature that was reviewed for this study provides strong evidence for a social studies program that allows for student collaboration, includes embedded technologies, and stresses the importance of historical reasoning. The need to provide curricula that are focused on themes in history and deepen students' knowledge of the past has been supported. This delivery would have students doing more than just memorizing dates and names; it would provide for important insights to be made into the events of history. A challenging curriculum that provides students with the opportunity to collaborate on inquiry-based tasks can promote historical reasoning. The research reviewed has also indicated that students who are in a social studies program that focuses on the growth of historical thinking have better attitudes towards social studies when compared to students who are not in a program that fosters historical thinking skills.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter included the theoretical framework that utilized the work of Bruner (1960, 1966) and Vygotsky (1978) related to this study and described the critical elements of a theme-based social studies curriculum. Allport's (1935) definition of attitudes was used as it applies to this present study. A curricular framework for historical thinking was described. This included the description of Problem-based Learning (Savery & Duffy, 1985), the research of VanTassel-Baska (1988) into curriculum for the gifted, and an overview of the historical thinking framework (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008). This chapter explored and reviewed both historical and contemporary research related to thematic social studies and historical thinking. Chapter

three will describe the research questions and the research design and methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This study was designed to determine the effect of a thematic social studies program on grade 8 students' historical reasoning ability and attitudes towards social studies related tasks. This chapter will begin with the research questions and hypotheses that were developed to guide this study. Also included in this chapter are the descriptions of the settings and the participants, the research design and procedures, the instrumentation, the data collection procedure, and the explanation of data analysis that was conducted.

### **Research Questions**

The study included two questions that were addressed through quantitative analysis and one question that involved qualitative research. The following questions were addressed in this study and a non-directional hypothesis is included for each quantitative question:

1. Is there a significant difference in holistic scores for social studies achievement in historical reasoning and the five subscales of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks between eighth grade students who were taught using a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not taught using a thematic-based curriculum?

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference in holistic scores for social studies achievement in historical reasoning and the five subscales of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks between eighth grade students who were taught using a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not taught using a thematic-based curriculum.

2. Is there a significant difference in the change over time in the rubric scores assessing historical reasoning of students who were in a thematic-based classroom and those who were not taught in a thematic-based program?

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference in the change over time in the rubric scores assessing historical reasoning of student who were in a thematic-based classroom and those who were in a non-thematic-based social studies classroom.

3. How do students who are taught utilizing a thematic-based curriculum perceive this curriculum in comparison to students who are taught utilizing a non-thematic-based curriculum?

### **Description of Settings and Participants**

The target population for this study was grade 8 social studies students. The participants in this study were a sample of convenience selected to suit the purpose of this study. The sample was drawn from four eighth grade classes from two comparable public New England middle schools. Students from one school served as the experimental group, (thematic-based social studies curriculum) and students from the other school participated in the comparison group (nonthematic-based social studies curriculum). The combined enrollment of grade 8 students from both schools who were eligible to be selected to take part in this study was 427 students. This included 233 students from the school that housed the thematic-based group and 194 students from the school that housed the nonthematic-based group. A total of four teachers, two from each school, and 211 students subsequently participated in the research study.

The two schools were from two separate, but neighboring, towns. Each town had a population under 25,000 and was classified as upper middle class. The town which housed the experimental school had a 2011 population of 18,079, compared to 23,562 residents in the comparison town (Connecticut Economic Resource Center, 2011). The town which housed the thematic-based group (the experimental group) had a 2010 median household income of \$170,711, which is well above the county average of \$77,620 and state level of \$65,686 with

72% of the residents holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. The town which housed the comparison school reported a 2010 median household income of \$131,677 with 67% of the town's residents having earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. A majority of the school-aged children in each town were enrolled in the public school system. The experimental school had 4,378 students enrolled in the district's four schools. There were 5,538 students enrolled in the comparison school district's six public schools.

### **Student and Teacher Participants**

**Thematic-based group.** Students from the experimental group attended a middle school (grades 6-8) which had an enrollment of 1,010 according to its 2008-2009 Strategic School Profile. Being a fully teamed middle school, each grade had three teams of six teachers with between 105 and 120 students per team. Each team included two language arts teachers, a math teacher, a science teacher, a social studies teacher, and a world language teacher. Four students enrolled in this school were eligible for free or reduced lunch and 70 students were identified as gifted and/or talented. The school required 123 hours of social studies instruction each academic year compared to the state average of 143 hours (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2009). This averaged out to slightly less than 40 minutes per day over the course of a 181-day school year.

All staff members from this school had an average experience level of 14.2 years and 80.2% of the staff had a Master's degree or above. The ethnic make-up of the student body was primarily White (923 students) and the largest minority group was Asian-American (59 students). The remainder of the student body was comprised of 11 Black students and 17 Hispanic students (Connecticut Department of Education, 2009). Standardized test scores for the eighth grade exceeded both state and national goals in reading, writing, science, and math.

See Table 2 for the percent of grade 8 students who had reached the goal for the state’s required achievement test, in the spring of 2008.

Table 2

*Experimental School: Percent of Grade 8 Students Meeting the State Goal on the State Achievement Test in 2008*

| Subject Area | School | State |
|--------------|--------|-------|
| Reading      | 93.2   | 68.4  |
| Writing      | 88.6   | 66.5  |
| Mathematics  | 91.2   | 64.5  |
| Science      | 88.9   | 60.6  |

**Nonthematic-based group.** The school that housed the comparison group had an enrollment of 592 students in grades 6 through 8 as reported in its 2008-2009 Strategic School Profile. This comparison school also utilized a team approach, each grade had two teams of 4 content area teachers. Each team consisted of a language arts teacher, a math teacher, a science teacher, and a social studies teacher. The comparison school offered a total of 162 hours of social studies instruction, which was 19 hours above the state average. An average of over 53 minutes per day over the course of a 182-day school year was reported. Two students from the comparison school were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Although neither school involved in this study had an Enrichment program, the nonthematic school did have many more students identified as gifted. A total of 138 students were identified as gifted and/or talented. The school’s population was primarily White (553 students). The remainder of the population was comprised



of 20 Hispanic students, 17 Asian Americans students, and 2 Black students (Connecticut Department of Education, 2009).

The teachers at this comparison site had an average experience of 13.9 years and 86.7% of the staff members had earned a Master’s degree or higher. Students from the school had also performed well above the state average on the state’s achievement test. See Table 3 for percentages of grade 8 students who achieved the state goal on the required exams.

Table 3

*Comparison School: Percent of Grade 8 Students Meeting the State Goal on the State Achievement Test in 2008*

| Subject Area | School | State |
|--------------|--------|-------|
| Reading      | 93.3   | 68.4  |
| Writing      | 91.8   | 66.5  |
| Mathematics  | 94.3   | 64.5  |
| Science      | 90.8   | 60.6  |

**Overview of subjects.** Subjects included in the data analysis for this study totaled 211. The participants were divided between four classrooms, two in each school. There were 98 students in this study who were enrolled in the experimental school and the remaining 113 students were from the comparison school. Students remained in the classroom in which they were already enrolled. All of the classes included within this study were heterogeneously mixed. See Table 4 for an analysis of participation according to Group, Teacher, and Gender.

Additionally, two teachers from each school participated in the study. The teachers from the experimental group each taught five social studies classes daily. The average level of

experience at the time of the study was 6.5 years between the two teachers in the thematic-based social studies group, both teachers had recently earned their Master’s degree. The two teachers from the comparison condition, nonthematic-based social studies curriculum, had an average experience level of six years, one of the teachers held a Master’s degree and the other held a Sixth Year degree (Master’s plus 30 credits). The teachers in the comparison school taught four social studies classes daily.

Table 4

*Participation Based on Group, Teacher, Gender, and Percent of Grade 8 Students*

| Group | Teacher | Accessible Population |        |       | Sample Population |        |       |                                     |
|-------|---------|-----------------------|--------|-------|-------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------------------|
|       |         | Male                  | Female | Total | Male              | Female | Total | Percentage of Accessible Population |
| A     | 1       | 62                    | 55     | 117   | 22                | 28     | 50    | 43                                  |
| A     | 2       | 61                    | 55     | 116   | 24                | 24     | 48    | 41                                  |
| B     | 3       | 51                    | 47     | 98    | 22                | 27     | 49    | 50                                  |
| B     | 4       | 46                    | 50     | 96    | 34                | 30     | 64    | 67                                  |
| Total |         | 220                   | 207    | 427   | 102               | 109    | 211   | 49                                  |

*Note.* Group A = thematic-based social studies; Group B = nonthematic-based social studies

### **Explanation of Research Design**

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used in this study. This approach incorporated the collecting and analyzing of quantitative data while independently collecting and analyzing qualitative data and relating the findings of each for interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Within this design, there was a quantitative priority. Creswell and Clark (2011)

described this as having a greater emphasis placed on the quantitative methods and the qualitative methods had a secondary role.

A quantitative pretest, posttest design, utilizing a quasi-experimental method, was performed for this research. The study included one independent variable (IV), program type, with two levels. The two levels of the IV consisted of students who were enrolled in a thematic-based social studies program and those who were enrolled in non-thematic-based social studies curriculum. For research question one, there were six dependent variables derived from five of the subscales of the attitudes towards social studies inventory and the holistic score from the historical reasoning rubric. Research question two also employed the historical reasoning rubric, where scores between groups were analyzed over time. Qualitative analysis of focus group data was also utilized to examine student perceptions of social studies instruction for research question three.

### **Overview of the Research Timeline**

The 16-week study was conducted during the months of March – June of 2011. Consent was obtained in two phases; the first phase included the collection of pretest data and the second phase included permission to collect the posttest and focus group data. These forms are located in Appendix A. After consent was obtained from district personnel, parents, and students, the Social Studies Questionnaire was administered as a pretest to both groups in early March to measure five subscales of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks prior to any observation or treatment. In March of 2011 the first of three writing prompts was given. The second prompt was administered after eight weeks, in mid-May, and the final prompt was given in June of 2011. Throughout the research period the experimental and comparison groups were engaged in similar topics of study. Table 5 includes a brief description of the units of

instruction. The posttest, Social Studies Questionnaire was conducted 16 academic weeks after the pretest, in June of 2011. Throughout the study the researcher conducted 10 classroom observations, received weekly lesson reports from each teacher, and kept a journal to maintain fidelity of the research process.

Table 5

*Units of Instruction During the Research Study*

| Weeks      | Group        | Unit  | Content  |
|------------|--------------|---|--|
| 1-5        | Experimental | Wealth: Development of the  | Rise of Big Business   |
|            |              | Modern American Economy   | Imperialism: America becomes a World Power<br><br>Boom to Bust: A simulation of Life in the Roaring 20s through the Great Depression   |
| Comparison |              | Unit 5: Boom to Bust Hard Times (1919 - 1938)                             | Prosperity of the 1920s<br><br>Social Implications<br><br>Roaring Twenties<br><br>Trouble below the Surface<br><br>Causes of the Stock Market Crash<br><br>Great Depression impact on society<br><br>Government Response to the Depression |
| 6-10       | Experimental | Discovery: Immigration and Innovation in 20 <sup>th</sup> Century America | Immigration: Push and Pull Factors<br><br>The Changing Face of America<br><br>Immigration Law: Past and Present<br><br>Creation of Immigration Bill<br><br>Innovations and inventions that change the way we live                          |

Table 5 (continued)

*Units of Instruction During the Research Study*

| Weeks | Group        | Unit  | Content   |
|-------|--------------|---|---|
| 6-10  | Comparison   | Unit 6: World War II<br>(1939 - 1945)   | Sources of Conflict<br>Roots of American Involvement<br>War at Home<br>Turning the Tide of War<br>Atomic Age<br>Human Cost of War |
|       |              | Unit 7: The Cold War Era<br>(1945 - 1962)   | Booming Postwar World<br>Rising Tensions in the Postwar world<br>Cold War Battlegrounds   |
| 11-16 | Experimental | Conflict  | Elements of conflict<br>Morals and Ethics of conflict<br>Impacts of conflict on rights and freedoms                               |
|       | Comparison   | Unit 8: Years of Crisis and Change (1963 - 1975)<br>Unit 9: Prosperity and Reform<br>(1976 - present) | Domestic Issues<br>Foreign Issues<br>End of the Cold War<br>Challenges faced by Americans in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century         |

## **Description of the Treatment**

The treatment group was immersed in a thematic-based curriculum. The instructors in the experimental group were each in their fifth year of teaching a thematic-based curriculum. Training for this type of curriculum delivery method included observing and meeting with experienced mentors who had used this form of instruction. The teachers who implemented the treatment also developed their skills through repeated application. This approach contained a variety of instructional strategies that provided for an in-depth analysis of events related to the content of study, 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. history. The study of history was not necessarily conducted in a chronological manner; instead the themes of law, discovery, wealth, and conflict were embedded in the curriculum. This instructional method stressed the research process and utilized a variety of resources. It was an inquiry-based model that engaged the students and challenged the learners to act as historians. Students were engaged in Problem-based Learning (PBL) activities. These activities included simulations, debates, and classroom discussions that were designed to have students involved in real-world problem solving activities. The curriculum revolved around the research process and there was at least one large-scale research project assigned each quarter of the school year. There was a direct application of knowledge through debates, simulations, online discussions, and presentations. Technology that included the use of online discussion threads, teacher created web-pages, and online research was an essential aspect of this method. Collaboration was also an important aspect of this approach. Students worked together both in face-to-face classroom assignments and in an online environment. Within this model, students were active participants on blogs and wikis. The implementation of the thematic-based curriculum was monitored through the exchange of emails, classroom observations, meetings with the participating teachers, and training sessions to calibrate essay-grading.

## **Description of the Comparison Group**

The comparison group was taught utilizing non-thematic instructional methods and followed the district's social studies curriculum for US history. The two teachers, from the comparison school, had an average of four years of experience in this school and they were both in their first year of teaching the eighth grade. The program in grade 8 was a chronological study of United States history that began with westward expansion and ended with the present day, outlining the years 1865-2000. Ten units of study were addressed over the course of the academic year; they included time periods described as: manifest destiny, woman's suffrage, and imperialism. During this research project the students in the comparison group studied early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century United States history. The units included a four-week study of the Great Depression, four-weeks on World War II, the Cold War for two-weeks, and four-weeks that concluded with the present day. The traditional textbook curriculum was supplemented with critical readings, videos, writing assignments, and primary source documents. Each unit included written pieces that were required by the district's K-12 writing program. The program included a focus on persuasive writing where students created graphic organizers, planned, drafted, and revised writing assignments for each unit. Critical readings and primary source documents included analysis and discussion of speeches and videos. Specific examples included quotations from President Franklin D. Roosevelt and video accounts of life during the Great Depression. Students in this condition also engaged in cooperative learning activities, individual projects, and classroom discussions. Emails, several site visits, face to face meetings, and classroom observations were used to monitor the fidelity of the instructional program throughout the research period.



## **Instrumentation**

This study utilized three instruments: Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks questionnaire (GlobalEd, 2010), which had two forms, one for pretesting and another for posttesting, Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric (GlobalEd 2, 2010), and an interview protocol. Five of the subscales from the pre and post Student Attitude inventories were used as measures of students' attitudes towards social studies related tasks. The holistic score that was obtained through the Social Studies Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric was utilized as a measure of students' historical reasoning ability. A series of questions were asked of a subset of students using a focus group format.

### **Attitudes Towards Social Studies**

This construct was measured using the Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks questionnaire (SATSSRT) adapted from the GlobalEd Pre-simulation, 2010. The GlobalEd Pre-simulation (2010) was designed by researchers from the University of Connecticut and adapted with permission for this research. The attitudes questionnaire was first used in the GlobalEd project and included the following seven subscales: Section A, Demographic Data (8 items); Section B, Interest in Science (8 items); Section C, Technology (6 items); Section D, Writing Tasks (5 items); Section E, Interest in Social Studies (6 items); Section F, Social Perspective Taking Skills (7 items); and Section G, U.S. History content (12 multiple choice questions). Refer to Appendix B for a copy of the instrument. The last section was included in the SATSSRT in an effort to direct the focus of subjects to social studies, ensuring more accurate responses on the other subsection. The content in this section was related to social studies, but not directly related to the areas of study that were included in the research. The responses were not included in the data analysis, instead the data were analyzed and described as separately.

Subsections B through F of the instrument were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with a score of 1 representing *Almost Never* and a score of 5 representing *Almost Always*. The individual means of each subscale were used to calculate student scores for each section and therefore also ranged from 1-5.

Each of the five subscales, interest in science, writing tasks, technology, interest in social studies, and student perspective-taking, supports elements of social studies instruction. By referring to the instrument in Appendix B, one can readily see that the interest in social studies subscale retains a clear connection to the delivery of social studies instruction as it directly measures students' attitudes towards social studies tasks. It is also understandable that students need to communicate their ideas in social studies through writing (Van Drie et. al., 2005, De La Paz, 2005) and use various forms of technology as they conduct research and collaborate online. The ability to take another's point of view is an essential aspect of historical perspective. This important variable, perspective-taking, is related to recommendations of the NCSS curriculum standards (2010) that students make connections to multiple cultures to better understand the complex nature of society. A less obvious relationship is found between attitudes towards social studies related tasks and the subscale of interest in science. Both science and social studies provide the means for students to engage in activities that incorporate creative problem-solving and higher-level thinking skills (DeHaan, 2009).

A posttest of the questionnaire (see Appendix C) to measure attitudes towards social studies was given in the spring of 2011 and contained the same subsections as the pretest, but in a different order (Global Ed, 2010a). The content questions had been moved to the beginning of the instrument to elicit the most reliable responses for the attitudes section of the questionnaire. The remaining subsections were organized as follows: interest in science, technology, writing

tasks, interest in social studies, and student perspective taking.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of previous versions of this instrument. An earlier version of the instrument utilized internal consistency to measure reliability. It produced reliability estimates greater than .80 for each subscale used in this present study (Yukhymenko et al., 2010). This indicated a high level of reliability for each subscale. Gehlbach et al (2008) reported an  $\alpha > .85$  for the pretest and  $\alpha = .87$  for the posttest on the *Interest in Social Studies* scale.

### **Social Studies Multiple Choice Content Questions**

The SATSSRT pretest and posttest each contained 12 multiple choice questions related to social studies content. The questions were used with permission from a national social studies assessment. This assessment included a total of 50 questions that were based on topics in American studies, geography of the United States, and United States government that were appropriate to each grade level (National Social Studies League, 2010). The multiple choice content questions included in the SATSSRT were related United States History, however, the questions were not directly related to units of study from either group under investigation.

### **Social Studies Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric**

The researcher also utilized a rubric that was created by the GlobalEd project researchers (GlobalEd 2, 2010), titled *Social Studies Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric*. The rubric was originally titled *GlobalEd 2 Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric* (GlobalEd, 2, 2010). The title of the instrument was changed with author permission to align with the purpose of this present research. The tool is an overall scoring rubric for persuasive writing (see Appendix D). It was used with permission from GlobalEd 2 simulations, 2010, where it was adapted for their use

from Midgette, Haria & MacAuthur (2007). The purpose of this instrument was to measure historical reasoning.

Students were supplied with writing prompts that focused on a recent area of study. All of the prompts were created with the collaboration of the four teachers involved in the study. The prompts were developed to accurately reflect the information that was being studied in all four classrooms. The first writing prompt addressed the legacy of the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the second prompt was centered on conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the third prompt was about the role of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Appendix E). A set of instructions for the administration of each essay (see Appendix F) was developed by the researcher for the delivery of each prompt ensuring that the students in each group were being investigated under similar conditions. This protocol allowed teachers to introduce and discuss the prompts the day before the 40-minute writing period. The four teachers in the study read, agreed to, and followed the conditions outlined in the instructions.

The rubric used to score the three prompts (see Table 6) included a scale from 0 to 5 measuring student's abilities to support their writing with appropriate evidence and to elaborate on the information provided. The total score for each essay was based on the guidelines established for each holistic score on the rubric. The key used to evaluate each response examined the students' ability to employ elements of historical thinking. Scoring is based on the degree to which the response includes a claim, similar to a thesis statement; provides valid evidence to support the claim; and demonstrates reasoning; a logical analysis of the claim and the evidence. Elements of the historical thinking framework created by van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) such as providing contextualization, argumentation, and substantive concepts, support the

connection of the skills addressed and measured by the Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric.

The essays were scored by the teachers in the study, all of whom had received training from the researcher. The essays were not scored blindly, however, they were scored according to the agreed instructions that were established by the researcher and teacher participants (Appendix F). The training included a critical review of the rubric and analysis of essays at each scoring level on the rubric. The highest score was reserved for writers who provided support for a claim, analyzed the evidence, elaborated upon it, and then refuted alternatives.

Table 6

*Social Studies Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric to Provide a Holistic Score*

| Score | Category            | Definition   |
|-------|---------------------|--|
| 0     | Incomplete Response | <u>No Claim Provided</u><br>There is a response to the topic some way but it does not provide a claim related to the issue.  |
| 1     | Undeveloped         | <u>Claim Provided but No Evidence</u><br>Undeveloped argument: The response provides a claim but no evidence is given to support the claim, or the evidence given is unrelated to or inconsistent with the claim, or it is incoherent.   |
| 2     | Minimal Response    | <u>Clear Claim + some Evidence</u><br>Minimally developed argument: The response states a clear claim and gives one or two pieces of evidence to support the claim, but reasoning is not provided linking the claim to the evidence or is underdeveloped.  |
| 3     | Partial Response    | <u>Clear Claim + Evidence +incomplete reasoning</u><br>Partially developed argument: The response states a claim and gives evidence to support the claim plus some explanation or elaboration of the reasons. The reasons are generally plausible though not enough information is provided to convince a reader (audience awareness) (3A). There may be some inconsistency, irrelevant information, or problems with the organization and clarity (3B). |

Table 6 (continued)

*Social Studies Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric to Provide a Holistic Score*

| Score | Category           | Definition   |
|-------|--------------------|--|
| 4     | Good Response      | <p><u>Claim + Evidence + Reasoning</u></p> <p>Well-developed argument: The response states a clear claim and gives evidence to support the claim. The reasons are explained clearly and elaborated upon using information that could be convincing to the reader. The response is generally well organized and may include a concluding statement. The posting is free of inconsistencies and irrelevancies that will weaken the argument.</p> |
| 5     | Excellent Response | <p><u>Claim + Evidence + Reasoning PLUS opposing opinions or alternate solutions.</u></p> <p>Elaborated and addresses opposition: The response meets the criteria for the previous level. In addition, the response deals with opposing opinions, even with refutations or alternative solutions. Overall, the response is persuasive.</p>   |

A random sample of 40 essays from each group and each question were selected and were rescored by a separate group of trained educators who were otherwise not connected to this study. Guilford's (1954) reliability of raters formula (see Figure 1), was used to assess the reliability of the scores that were collected from the trained group of assessors (inter-rater reliability of .90). Table 7 contains the reliability data for each of the three essays as well as the inter-rater reliability score.

$$r_{kk} = \frac{V_p - V_e}{V_p}$$

Where:

$r_{kk}$  = reliability for  $k$  raters

$V_p$  =variance for persons (such as a total value for all rubrics for all people or all people's scores for 1 item on a rubric)

$V_e$  =variance for error

*Figure 1.* The equation for Guilford's Reliability of Raters. Adapted from *Psychometric methods* by J.P. Guilford, 1954, p. 395.

Table 7

*Inter-rater Reliability Scores for Each Essay*

| Essay   | Inter-rater Reliability Alpha Level |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| Essay 1 | .87                                 |
| Essay 2 | .92                                 |
| Essay 3 | .92                                 |
| Total   | .90                                 |

**Focus Group Questions**

A purposeful sample of eight students was selected from each condition to participate in two separate focus groups. The intent of each focus group was to discuss student perceptions of the curriculum. Responses to the questions and follow-up questions were audio and video recorded as well as scripted by the researcher for each meeting. The same main questions were addressed to both groups (see Appendix G). Additional questions were asked as themes



developed within the context of the focus group. The questions provided below guided the discussion and allowed each participant to tell the story of he/she perceives the social studies curriculum.

General questions regarding all subjects:

1. What are your favorite subjects in school?
2. What aspects of these subjects make them your favorite?

Questions regarding students' experience in social studies:

3. What do you remember about your experiences in social studies in grades 6-8?
4. Do you think about the types of assignments you were asked to do in social studies this year?

Question regarding the skills and content of social studies:

5. What are examples of the skills and content knowledge you have learned this year in social studies?

Questions regarding students' perception of social studies:

6. What do you wish you could do more of in social studies this year?
7. Do you enjoy social studies more or less this year?
8. What would you like to do less of in social studies this year?
9. Do you feel you are growing as a learner in social studies?

In addition to recording student responses, a reflection journal was maintained by the researcher to record the initial thoughts about and reactions to each session.

### **Observations**

Between sessions field notes were taken that included brief observations of the implementation of the curriculum to maintain the integrity of the study.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were collected and maintained by the researcher throughout the study. Data collection included the attitudes questionnaire, both pre and post, the multiple choice content area questions, also pre and post, the three writing prompts, and focus group data. The teachers involved in the study proctored all of the assessments and followed a set of data collection procedures that was designed by the researcher.

### **Research Question One**

The quasi-experimental level data from research question one were analyzed through a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). See Table 8 which represents the design that was used in this analysis. There was one independent variable, curriculum type, with two levels. The two levels were: those students instructed in a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not. The six DVs were the means of each of the five subscales of the attitudes towards social studies inventory (interest in science, technology, writing tasks, interest in social studies, and student perspective taking) and the holistic score from the historical reasoning rubric. A Bonferroni correction was necessary for interpretation of the analysis because simultaneous tests were performed on the dependent variables employed in research questions one and two (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The significance level was established by dividing the probability value of .05 by the number of comparisons being made ( $.05/2, p < .025$ ).

Table 8

*Research Design Research Question One*

| Group   | Pretest | Treatment | Posttest |
|---|---------|-----------|----------|
| Experimental Group<br>(Thematic-based instruction)  | O       | X         | O        |
| Comparison Group<br>(Nonthematic-based instruction) | O       |           | O        |

Note: Adapted from *Educational Research: An Introduction* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.) (p. 432), by M.D. Gall, J.P. Gall, and W.R. Borg, 2007. Copyright 2007 by Allyn & Bacon.

**Social Studies Multiple Choice Content Questions**

The 12 multiple choice content questions that were included in the pretest and posttest forms of the SATSSRT questionnaire were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean scores of students on the 12 questions (pre and post) from the thematic-based group with the mean scores of students in the nonthematic based group.

**Research Question Two**

The second research question utilized writing prompts given to both groups on three occasions. A scoring rubric was used to analyze student’s writing and historical reasoning ability providing a holistic score for each prompt. The writing prompt was administered at the beginning of the research period, in the middle, and at the end of the 16 weeks. Each prompt addressed an area of study that was common to the curriculum for both conditions being researched (see Appendix D for the description of each prompt). The interval level data were

analyzed (see Table 9) by conducting a two-way, mixed methods Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure to compare historical reasoning scores of each subject over time and between groups (Huck, 2008). The within-subjects factor in this design was represented by each time the essays were administered. The between-subjects factor was curriculum type, thematic-based and nonthematic-based. This type of analysis was conducted to limit the reaction between the rubric and the student scores. Rubrics are teaching tools that provide a student writer with goals and repeated exposure to the same rubric may lead to an improvement in writing unrelated to this study (Moskal, & Leydens, 2000). Therefore, the rubric was administered to both groups to assess changes over time and the historical reasoning level of each group. After the Bonferroni correction was applied the significance level of  $p < .025$  was established for the evaluation of data for research question two.

Table 9

*Research Design: Research Question Two*

| Group   | Rubric | Treatment | Rubric | Treatment | Rubric |
|---|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|
| Experimental Group<br>(Thematic-based instruction)  | O      | X         | O      | X         | O      |
| Comparison Group<br>(Nonthematic-based instruction) | O      |           | O      |           | O      |

Note: Adapted from *Educational Research: An Introduction* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.) (p. 433), by M.D. Gall, J.P. Gall, and W.R. Borg, 2007. Copyright 2007 by Allyn & Bacon.

**Research Question Three**

To address the third research question, focus groups were conducted by the researcher for each condition. Each teacher who participated in the study was asked to recommend two male

and two female students, who were able to make informed contributions to a group discussion. The researcher placed an emphasis on not providing a selection of students with high-achievement in social studies, but instead a group that best represented all subjects under observation. Based on teacher recommendations, permission was requested for students to join the focus group. This method of purposeful sampling was favored because it would most likely provide participants who were information rich and representative of the entire sample (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Teachers then informed the researcher of the list of participants. Students did not miss academic time when they were interviewed and were not provided an incentive to join the focus group.

Each focus group met three times during the course of the study, for 30-40 minutes each session. Students discussed perceptions of their social studies program. Utilizing a generic qualitative approach the perspectives of participants from two conditions (thematic and nonthematic), towards these programs were analyzed (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). This type of approach is appropriate because the intent of the researcher was to conduct an analysis and description of an experience that represented the major themes of an instructional program (Creswell, 2007).

The data about activities and attitudes relating to the social studies curriculum were gathered from the focus group meetings, recorded, coded, and analyzed. Data were recorded using a digital audio recorder, a Flip camera, and hand notes taken by the researcher. Participants were asked questions relating to their favorite classes, memorable experiences in social studies, and the types of assignments they completed in social studies. Data were categorized into related units that were more manageable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Patterns that developed and described student perceptions of each instructional model were developed.

Ideas related to students' perceptions were developed into broader concepts and themes. During the analysis stage the data were organized and coded. Data from the two focus groups were compared and the differences described.

**Focus group procedures.** The experimental group met during the 30-minute lunch period in a social studies classroom. The three meetings were held approximately 3 weeks apart from one another and coincided with the delivery of the essay prompts. The group consisted of eight students, four males and four females. The focus group was equally divided among the two teachers in the experimental group.

The comparison focus group was also comprised of eight students, two male and two female students from each teacher's classroom in this condition. This group met in a conference room adjacent to the school's main office. The three meetings were held approximately 3 weeks apart and conducted shortly after the students had completed each of the essay assessments. The 30-40 minute meetings were held after lunch and students were excused from a reading/writing tutorial time to meet with the researcher.

### **Monitor of the Implementation of Units of Study**

Discussions regarding the delivery of the curriculum were held. The intent of these communications was to ensure the curriculum was delivered as described. The conversations were noted in a log book maintained by the researcher.

### **Statement of Ethics and Confidentiality**

Approval to conduct the study was sought through Western Connecticut State University's IRB. Permission to participate in this research study was obtained from each superintendent, building principal, teacher, and parent/guardian. Students involved in the research granted their assent to participate in the study. At the onset of each meeting, the

subjects involved in the two focus groups, were informed that their participation in the discussions was not mandatory and reminded that they may leave the study at any time.

Student confidentiality was maintained. Data were coded numerically and reported in group format. All data collected were securely stored. Upon request, these results will be available to participating district personnel and subjects.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

A convergent parallel (Creswell & Clark, 2011) mixed-methods approach was used to implement this study. It included a quantitative analysis, using a quasi-experimental pretest posttest design and a qualitative case study analysis. This chapter provided an outlined of the methods employed by the researcher to investigate the effects of thematic instruction in social studies on grade 8 students' historical reasoning abilities and attitudes towards social studies related tasks. The chapter began with an introduction to the methodology and continued with the research questions and hypotheses used by the researcher. Next, the setting and participants were described followed by a description of the research design. Then, instrumentation and data collection and analysis were explained. Finally, the chapter concluded with a statement of ethics. Chapter Four will report the results of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND AN EXPLANATION OF THE FINDINGS**

Three research questions were addressed in this chapter. The results are organized by research question and presented in eight sections: (a) overview of the study, (b) data preparation for research question one, (c) data analyses for research question one, (d) data preparation for research question two, (e) data analyses for research question two, (f) research question three, and (g) triangulation of data. The final section provides the chapter conclusion.

#### **Overview of the Study**

This section provides a brief summary of the study. It includes the research questions and hypotheses, and an overview of the population, sample, and participants under investigation.

#### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research question one.** The first research question addressed in this study was: Is there a significant difference in holistic scores for social studies achievement in historical reasoning and the five subscales of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks between 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who were taught using a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not taught using a thematic-based curriculum? The hypothesis for this research question was: There is a significant difference in holistic scores for social studies achievement in historical reasoning and the five subscales of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks between eighth grade students who were taught using a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not taught using a thematic-based curriculum.

This question was assessed using five subscales from the Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks questionnaire (SATSSRT; GlobalEd, 2010) and the holistic score from the Social Studies Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric (GlobalEd 2, 2010). The subscales of Interest in Science, Technology, Writing Tasks, Interest in Social Studies, and Student



Perspective Taking were applied to measure student interest in social studies. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. The five subscales of the SATSSRT questionnaire and the single rubric score from the rubric were utilized as the multiple dependent variables. The independent variable, program type, contained two levels: (a) students who were in a thematic-based social studies program and (b) those who were not.

**Research question two.** The second research question was: Is there a significant difference in the change over time in the rubric scores assessing historical reasoning of students who were in a thematic-based classroom and those who were not taught in a thematic-based program? The hypothesis for this question was: There is a significant difference in the change over time in the rubric scores assessing historical reasoning of student who were in a thematic-based classroom and those who were in a non-thematic-based social studies classroom.

Research question two, which compared student holistic scores on three essay prompts, was measured through the application of the Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric (GlobalEd 2, 2010) to student essays. This question was assessed through the application of a two-way, mixed measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). This test was used to determine if the rubric scores varied over time for either group. All subjects included in the study were assessed by the rubric three times during the course of the study.

**Research question three.** The final research question under investigation for this study was: How do students who are taught utilizing a thematic-based curriculum perceive this curriculum in comparison to students who are taught utilizing a non-thematic-based curriculum? This was addressed utilizing an analysis of focus group data that were gathered from both conditions. Each of the focus group members were interviewed three times by the researcher.

The same scripted questions were asked of both groups. The conversations during these meetings were recorded and transcribed. Data from the meetings were then coded and analyzed.

### **Population, Sample, and Participants**

The subjects included in the research included a sample of convenience that was represented by intact groups from two comparable schools. The groups included students who participated in a thematic-based social studies curriculum and those who did not. The research was conducted in a school setting, where unfortunately, random assignment to group was not practical.

A total population of 427 subjects was available for this study. The sample consisted of 211 grade 8 students. Participants were grouped into classrooms based on their current social studies course. Four teachers, from two schools, participated in the study. The experimental group ( $n = 98$ ) included two teachers and was housed in one school. The comparison group ( $n = 113$ ) also consisted of two teachers and was housed in a separate school.

### **Data Preparation for Research Question One**

#### **Initial Screening Process**

The initial screening process consisted of code and value cleaning. This verification process was conducted to evaluate the “appropriateness of numerical codes for the values of each variable under study” (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006, p. 44). The process begins with an overview of the research project’s unit of analysis. In this case, the unit of analysis is the student. Scores provided by each participant were recorded in the data file. Each score was reviewed and frequencies were examined to ensure that the data collected fell within the acceptable range of the response format (Meyers et al., 2006). In the present study, the acceptable range was 1-5 on the Student Attitudes inventory and 0-5 on the essay rubric.

The first step in the data cleaning was to conduct a visual inspection of the data. The data set was examined for missing values. It was determined that listwise deletions would be performed on any case where more than 1 score was missing for any individual subscale. In the listwise deletion method of data cleansing, missing values within a case resulted in the deletion of the entire case from the statistical analysis (Meyers et al., 2006). Missing information within subscales for individual subjects was filled in by using the mean of the remaining data from the subscale. No more than 1 missing entry was allowed for each subscale before the entire case was deleted. This procedure required 18 values to be filled in. Once the missing data were addressed, the researcher targeted cases with multiple missing scores for removal. The first case that was removed had 3 missing entries in the Post-test Interest in Social Studies subscale, 4 additional subjects were removed because of missing scores on essays 2 and 3. The loss of the 5 cases had a minimal impact. Even with the deletion of these data the sample size remained large enough to apply the multivariate procedures necessary to investigate research question one. Following the visual inspection, a sample of 219 subjects remained to be inspected using SPSS statistical software (IBM, 2010).

### **Multivariate Statistical Assumptions for a MANOVA**

Six assumptions that underlie the analysis of a MANOVA were examined. The first assumption that was tested was the assumption of normality. Normality refers to the shape of the distribution of the data in relation to the standard bell-shaped curve (Meyers et al., 2006). Statistical measures that test the normality of data include measures for skewness, the symmetry of a distribution, and kurtosis, the peakedness of a distribution. The second assumption that was tested was the assumption of independence. This assumption is met when a score for any one subject is independent from the scores on this variable for all other subjects (Green & Salkind,

2008). The next assumption that was examined was the correlations of dependent variables. This analysis examined was conducted to determine the relationship between the dependent variables Meyers et al., 2006). The fourth assumption that was assessed was the assumption of linearity. This assumes that the data are related to each other in a linear manner (Meyers et al., 2006). The next assumption tested was the homogeneity of variances. This assumption tests whether the variance-covariance matrices are equal (Green & Salkind, 2008). The final assumption that was investigated was Bartlett's test of sphericity. This was used to test if a significant correlation was present between the dependent variables (Meyers et al., 2006).

### **Preliminary Analysis of Pretest and Posttest Data**

The SPSS statistical software was used to test the normality of the entire data set. The generally acceptable level of skewness and kurtosis is between -1 and +1 (Huck, 2008).

A preliminary analysis of all data from the pretests, posttests, and essays resulted in a data set of 219 cases. After the visual inspection was completed the data were examined for outliers. In this process a candidate could be a target of elimination if the case is viewed as not being representative of the target population under study (Meyers et al., 2006). Possible causes of outliers include: "data entry errors...functions of extraordinary events or unusual circumstances...[or because of a] certain pattern of values on several variables" (Meyers et al., 2006, p. 66).

Skewness and kurtosis for most of the dependent variables for the data set used to analyze research question one fell into the acceptable range between -1.0 and 1.0. A degree of kurtosis outside of the acceptable range was revealed in the comparison group for the Technology subscale pretest. An outlier score was determined to be one that fell between 1.5 and 3 box lengths away from the upper or lower limits of the box (Huck, 2008). The skewness

was measured at -1.102 and the kurtosis was determined to be 1.376 for the variable of technology. A box plot was created and used to inspect for individual cases that were outliers. The inspection of the box plot revealed two outliers that fell outside of acceptable limits of 1.5 box lengths from the mean on the Technology variable. These two cases were removed.

The initial screening process of the posttest data for research question one began with a visual inspection of the data. The data were visually inspected to ensure that all cases fell within the acceptable range for all variables. During this process it was observed that the number 15 was entered for a case. The case was rechecked and it was established that a data entry error had occurred. The correct score was entered and the case remained in the study. Once the initial screening was complete, the researcher started the data cleansing process.

Analysis of the posttest data for research question one indicated a similar problem of skewness (3.27) was present on the Technology posttest variable. A box-plot was created for this variable. This examination revealed six outliers that were more than 2.5 standard deviations from the mean. These six scores were targets of deletion.

After eliminating these 8 cases, a total of 211 cases remained. This sample included 98 cases from the thematic-based group and 113 subjects from the nonthematic-based group. Meyers et al. (2006) recommend a sample size that is 50 more than 8 times the number of variables under investigation. The decisions to eliminate cases throughout the screening processes were dictated by this guideline. The equation provided by Meyers et al. (2006) places a lower bound of 98 cases for the sample size. In this current research, the total sample not only achieved this criterion, but each group also had at least 98 participants once the screening and data cleansing processes were completed.

## **Pretest Data Preparation and Analyses for Research Question One**

### **Multivariate Statistical Assumptions**

Using the data set of 211 cases, six assumptions related to the analysis of a MANOVA were conducted and analyzed.

**Assumption of normality.** The frequency tables revealed that the normality of the data for all variables, including the Pretest Technology mean variable, were within the acceptable limits for kurtosis and skewness (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Pretest Descriptive Statistics (n = 211)*

|                       | Interest in |            | Writing | Interest  | Student     |         |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----------|-------------|---------|
|                       | Science     | Technology | Tasks   | in Social | Perspective |         |
|                       |             |            |         | Studies   | Taking      | Essay 1 |
| <i>Mean</i>           | 2.679       | 4.288      | 3.753   | 3.569     | 3.232       | 3.588   |
| <i>Median</i>         | 2.500       | 4.333      | 3.800   | 3.500     | 3.143       | 4.000   |
| <i>Mode</i>           | 2.500       | 4.670      | 3.600   | 3.500     | 4.000       | 4.000   |
| <i>Std. Deviation</i> | 0.892       | 0.520      | 0.665   | 0.642     | 0.815       | 0.865   |
| <i>Variance</i>       | 0.796       | 0.270      | 0.443   | 0.412     | 0.665       | 0.748   |
| <i>Skewness</i>       | 0.593       | -0.837     | -0.513  | -0.157    | -0.117      | -0.469  |
| <i>SE of Skewness</i> | 0.167       | 0.167      | 0.167   | 0.167     | 0.167       | 0.167   |
| <i>Kurtosis</i>       | -0.253      | 0.236      | 0.234   | -0.171    | -0.448      | -0.275  |
| <i>SE of Kurtosis</i> | 0.333       | 0.333      | 0.333   | 0.333     | 0.333       | 0.333   |
| <i>Minimum</i>        | 1.125       | 2.833      | 1.400   | 1.833     | 1.143       | 1.000   |
| <i>Maximum</i>        | 5.000       | 5.000      | 5.000   | 5.000     | 5.000       | 5.000   |

*Note:* SE = Standard Error

**Assumption of independence.** The 211 cases were checked to confirm that the data set met the assumption of independence. The two groups remained independent throughout this research because they were contained in two separate schools.

**Correlations of dependent variables.** Pearson product-moment correlation (PPMC) were analyzed to determine the relationship between the dependent variables. Refer to Table 11

for the PPMC values of the pretest data. Meyers et al. (2006) recommend an efficient MANOVA maintain threshold of .6, or a moderate correlation among the dependent variables.

Table 11

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations between Dependent Variables of Pretest Data (n = 211)*

|                            | Interest in Science |      | Writing Tasks | Interest in Social Studies | Student Perspective Taking Essay 1 |        |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------|---------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------|
| Interest in Science        | -                   | .007 | .157          | .173                       | .070                               | .162   |
| Technology                 |                     | -    | .408**        | .261**                     | .290**                             | .177   |
| Writing Tasks              |                     |      | -             | .378**                     | .362**                             | .349** |
| Interest in Social Studies |                     |      |               | -                          | .313**                             | .176   |
| Student Perspective Taking |                     |      |               |                            | -                                  | .074   |
| Essay 1                    |                     |      |               |                            |                                    | -      |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Assumption of linearity.** Linearity of the data set was examined through of a scatterplot of the data for each variable. This analysis was conducted to reduce the Type II error rate for the independent variable that could result in an underestimation of the true relationship (Meyers et al., 2006). This analysis revealed a linear relationship.

**Homogeneity of variance.** An analysis of Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices (Box’s *M* test) was necessary to test homoscedasticity. This test is sensitive to any



departures from normality. Box's  $M$  test was utilized to determine the statistical hypothesis that the variance – covariance matrices were equal.

**Bartlett's test of sphericity.** Bartlett's test was used to test if a significant correlation existed between the dependent variables. A significant correlation ( $p < .001$ ) was found which indicated that the dependent variables were correlated enough to continue with the multivariate analysis (Meyers et al., 2006).

### **Pretest Data Analyses**

**Means and standard deviations.** The data cleansing for research question one resulted in a data set of 211 cases. Table 12 presents the means and standard deviations of each subscale for the treatment and comparison groups. This data set contained no missing values and met all of the assumptions in order to conduct multivariate procedures.

Table 12

*Research Question One: Pretest Means and Standard Deviations for Each Subscale*

|                            | Type of Curriculum | Mean  | Std. Deviation | N   |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------|----------------|-----|
| Interest in Science        | Thematic-based     | 2.620 | 0.876          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 2.731 | 0.907          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 2.679 | 0.892          | 211 |
| Technology                 | Thematic-based     | 4.289 | 0.515          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 4.286 | 0.526          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 4.288 | 0.520          | 211 |
| Writing Tasks              | Thematic-based     | 3.657 | 0.653          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.835 | 0.668          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.753 | 0.665          | 211 |
| Interest in Social Studies | Thematic-based     | 3.663 | 0.597          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.487 | 0.671          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.569 | 0.642          | 211 |
| Student Perspective Taking | Thematic-based     | 3.248 | 0.829          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.219 | 0.807          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.232 | 0.815          | 211 |
| Essay 1                    | Thematic-based     | 3.434 | 0.924          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.721 | 0.790          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.588 | 0.865          | 211 |

**Pretest effects of the dependent variables on the two conditions.** To examine the initial differences between groups prior to the initiation of the treatment, a MANOVA was performed to determine the effect of the independent variable, type of curriculum, with two levels being (a) Thematic-based social studies curriculum and (b) Nonthematic-based social studies curriculum on the six dependent variables (Interest in Science, Technology, Writing Tasks, Interest in Social Studies, Student Perspective Taking, and historical reasoning as measured by using a rubric that assessed student essays).

An analysis of Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices (Box’s *M* test) was necessary to test homoscedasticity (see Table 13). A statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) result indicated that this assumption was violated. The presence of heteroscedasticity necessitated the use of further analysis to determine if the data set was appropriate to be used for comparison purposes.

Table 13

*Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Measures for Research Question One Pretest Data*

| Statistic      | Value      |
|----------------|------------|
| <i>Box's M</i> | 40.798     |
| <i>F</i>       | 1.883      |
| <i>df1</i>     | 21         |
| <i>df2</i>     | 153976.763 |
| <i>P</i>       | .008       |

Meyers et al. (2006) detailed a means to proceed with the data analysis in this situation were heterogeneity of variance-covariance matrices is present, without using procedures to

transform the dependent measures. Although Wilks' lambda is the most common test for the evaluation of the differences between the independent and dependent variables, in this case, Pillai's Trace was a reasonable alternative.

Therefore, using Pillai's trace multivariate test, the result was statistically significant at  $p < .025$ . Refer to Table 14 for the complete results of this analysis.

Table 14

*Multivariate Test Comparing Experimental and Comparison Pretest Scores*

| Effect    | Value                      | Hypothesis            |    |          | p    | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----|----------|------|---------------------|
|           |                            | F                     | df | Error df |      |                     |
| Intercept | <i>Pillai's Trace</i> .989 | 3081.229 <sup>a</sup> | 6  | 204      | .000 | .989                |
| Group     | <i>Pillai's Trace</i> .083 | 3.067 <sup>a</sup>    | 6  | 204      | .007 | .083                |

Note: <sup>a</sup>Exact statistic

Due to the fact that the multivariate test results were statistically significant, the analysis proceeded with a separate assessment of each dependent measure. Table 15 displays the results of the Levene's Test of Equality of Variances. None of the dependent measures were statistically significant, indicating equal variances among the groups on each dependent measure (Meyers et al., 2006). The decision, therefore, was made to proceed with the data analysis.

Table 15

*Levene's Test of Equality of Variances on Pretest Means and Essay 1*

|                            | <i>F</i> | <i>df1</i> | <i>df2</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Interest in Science        | .070     | 1          | 209        | .792        |
| Technology                 | .091     | 1          | 209        | .763        |
| Writing Tasks              | .015     | 1          | 209        | .902        |
| Interest in Social Studies | .607     | 1          | 209        | .437        |
| Student Perspective Taking | .916     | 1          | 209        | .340        |
| Essay 1                    | 3.381    | 1          | 209        | .067        |

The individual ANOVAs were checked to determine which of the measured variables produced a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the groups that were studied (Gall, et al., 2007). The results were presented in tests of between-subjects effects (Table 16).

Table 16

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Pretest data for Curriculum Type*

| Dependent Variable         | Type III Sum |           | Mean   |          | <i>p</i> | Partial Eta Squared |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|----------|----------|---------------------|
|                            | of Squares   | <i>df</i> | Square | <i>F</i> |          |                     |
| Technology                 | .000         | 1         | .000   | .002     | .967     | .000                |
| Writing Tasks              | 1.668        | 1         | 1.668  | 3.818    | .052     | .018                |
| Interest in Social Studies | 1.636        | 1         | 1.636  | 4.024    | .046     | .019                |
| Student Perspective        | .044         | 1         | .044   | .067     | .797     | .000                |
| Taking                     |              |           |        |          |          |                     |
| Interest in Science        | .653         | 1         | .653   | .820     | .366     | .004                |
| Essay 1                    | 4.340        | 1         | 4.340  | 5.937    | .016     | .028                |

The results of the follow-up tests indicated that a significant difference between groups occurred on the Essay 1 variable ( $F(1, 209) = 5.937, p = .016, M = 3.588$ ) where  $p < 0.025$ . The nonthematic-based group had a higher mean ( $M = 3.721$ ) for Essay 1 when compared to the thematic-based group ( $M = 3.434$ ). Because of the difference between the two groups on this variable, it was decided that it should be used as a covariate for examination of the posttest data.

### **Posttest Data Preparation and Analyses for Research Question One**

#### **Multivariate Statistical Assumptions**

Using the same data set of 211 cases used for the analysis of the pretest data, six assumptions related to the analysis of a MANCOVA were conducted and analyzed.

**Assumption of normality.** The frequency tables revealed that the normality of the data for all variables were within the acceptable limits for kurtosis and skewness (see Table 17).

Table 17

*Posttest Descriptive Statistics (n = 211)*

|                       | Interest in |            | Writing | Interest  | Student     |         |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|---------|-----------|-------------|---------|
|                       | Science     | Technology | Tasks   | in Social | Perspective |         |
|                       |             |            |         | Studies   | Taking      | Essay 3 |
| <i>Mean</i>           | 2.741       | 4.348      | 3.769   | 3.589     | 3.524       | 3.550   |
| <i>Median</i>         | 2.500       | 4.500      | 3.800   | 3.500     | 3.571       | 3.500   |
| <i>Mode</i>           | 2.250       | 4.833      | 4.000   | 3.333     | 3.143       | 4.000   |
| <i>Std. Deviation</i> | 0.986       | 0.496      | 0.737   | 0.702     | 0.758       | 0.979   |
| <i>Variance</i>       | 0.972       | 0.246      | 0.542   | 0.493     | 0.574       | 0.958   |
| <i>Skewness</i>       | 0.569       | -0.712     | -0.556  | -0.126    | -0.501      | -0.456  |
| <i>SE of Skewness</i> | 0.167       | 0.167      | 0.167   | 0.167     | 0.167       | 0.167   |
| <i>Kurtosis</i>       | -0.381      | 0.196      | 0.639   | 0.030     | 0.510       | -0.094  |
| <i>SE of Kurtosis</i> | 0.333       | 0.333      | 0.333   | 0.333     | 0.333       | 0.333   |
| <i>Minimum</i>        | 1.000       | 2.667      | 1.000   | 1.333     | 1.143       | 1.000   |
| <i>Maximum</i>        | 5.000       | 5.000      | 5.000   | 5.000     | 5.000       | 5.000   |

*Note:* SE = Standard Error

**Assumption of independence.** The 211 cases were checked to confirm that the data set met the assumption of independence. The two groups continued to be independent throughout the posttest phase of this research because they were contained in two separate schools.

**Correlations of dependent variables.** Pearson product-moment correlation (PPMC) were analyzed to determine the relationship between the posttest dependent variables. Refer to Table 18 for the PPMC values of this data. The recommendation for an efficient MANOVA is to establish a threshold of .6, or a moderate correlation among the dependent variables (Meyers, et al., 2006).

Table 18

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations between Dependent Variables of Posttest Data (n = 211)*

|                            | Interest in Science |      | Writing Tasks | Interest in Social Studies | Student Perspective Taking | Essay 1 |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Interest in Science        | -                   | .051 | .205**        | .165                       | .110                       | .043    |
| Technology                 |                     | -    | .402**        | .198**                     | .250**                     | .176    |
| Writing Tasks              |                     |      | -             | .330**                     | .355**                     | .387**  |
| Interest in Social Studies |                     |      |               | -                          | .408**                     | .143    |
| Student Perspective Taking |                     |      |               |                            | -                          | .017    |
| Essay 1                    |                     |      |               |                            |                            | -       |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Assumption of linearity.** Linearity of the posttest data set was examined through of a scatterplot of the data for each variable. The analysis was conducted to reduce the possibility of a Type II error for the independent variable (Meyers et al., 2006). This analysis revealed a linear relationship.



**Homogeneity of variance.** Box's *M* test was utilized to determine the statistical hypothesis that the variance – covariance matrices of the posttest data were equal.

**Bartlett's test of sphericity.** Bartlett's test was used to test if a significant correlation existed between the posttest dependent variables. A significant correlation ( $p < .001$ ) was found which indicated that the dependent variables were correlated enough to continue with the multivariate analysis (Meyers et al., 2006).

### **Posttest Data Analyses**

**Means and standard deviations.** Table 19 contains the means and standard deviations for the 211 cases analyzed on each of the subscales of the SATSSRT and Essay 3 between the two groups. The cases included in the analyses contained no missing data.

Table 19

*Research Question One: Posttest Means and Standard Deviations for Each Subscale*

|                            | Type of Curriculum | Mean  | Std. Deviation | N   |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------|----------------|-----|
| Interest in Science        | Thematic-based     | 2.631 | 0.934          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 2.835 | 1.023          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 2.741 | 0.986          | 211 |
| Technology                 | Thematic-based     | 4.313 | 0.541          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 4.379 | 0.454          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 4.348 | 0.496          | 211 |
| Writing Tasks              | Thematic-based     | 3.643 | 0.765          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.878 | 0.696          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.769 | 0.737          | 211 |
| Interest in Social Studies | Thematic-based     | 3.735 | 0.654          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.463 | 0.722          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.589 | 0.702          | 211 |
| Student Perspective        | Thematic-based     | 3.513 | 0.808          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.534 | 0.715          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.524 | 0.758          | 211 |
| Essay 3                    | Thematic-based     | 3.316 | 0.921          | 98  |
|                            | Nonthematic-based  | 3.752 | 0.987          | 113 |
|                            | Total              | 3.550 | 0.979          | 211 |

**Posttest effects of the dependent variables on the two conditions.** The posttest analysis of the differences between the two groups was conducted using Essay 1 as a covariate. The MANCOVA required the examination of Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices to test for homogeneity. This test addressed the assumption that the population variances and covariances among the dependent variables were the same across each of the levels of the factor (Green & Salkind, 2008). Refer to Table 20 for the results of this analysis.

Table 20

*Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Measures for Research Question One Posttest data*

| Statistic      | Value      |
|----------------|------------|
| <i>Box's M</i> | 36.170     |
| <i>F</i>       | 1.669      |
| <i>df1</i>     | 21         |
| <i>df2</i>     | 153976.763 |
| <i>P</i>       | .028       |

A significance value of  $p = .028$  was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) and indicated a violation of the assumption of homoscedascity. To test for posttest differences in attitudes towards social studies and historical reasoning ability between the experimental group and the control groups after the treatment, a MANCOVA of posttest data was conducted. Pillai’s trace was used for the evaluation of the differences between the independent and dependent variables. The independent variable was curriculum type, with two levels: (a) students enrolled in a thematic-based social studies curriculum and (b) students enrolled in a nonthematic-based social

studies curriculum. The six dependent variables were: (a) Interest in Science, (b) Writing Tasks, (c) Technology, (d) Interest in Social Studies, (e) Student Perspective Taking, and (f) Essay 3.

An analysis of the multivariate test using Essay 1 as a covariate, indicated a significant difference between the posttest means of the two groups, Pillai's trace = .118,  $F(6, 203) = 4.541$ ,  $p < .001$ . The partial eta-squared value indicated that the independent variable of curriculum type accounted for a small amount of the total variance (Meyers et al., 2006). These results revealed that there was a significant difference between the two groups, thematic-based social studies curriculum and the nonthematic-based curriculum for the dependent variable of attitudes towards social studies when Essay 1 was applied as a covariate. Refer to Table 21 for complete results.

Table 21

*Multivariate Test Comparing the Posttest Scores of Both Groups*

| Effect    |                       | Value | Hypothesis           |           |                 | Partial Eta |                |
|-----------|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|
|           |                       |       | <i>F</i>             | <i>df</i> | <i>Error df</i> | <i>p</i>    | <i>Squared</i> |
| Intercept | <i>Pillai's Trace</i> | .822  | 156.074 <sup>a</sup> | 6         | 203             | .000        | .822           |
| Essay 1   | <i>Pillai's Trace</i> | .432  | 25.690 <sup>a</sup>  | 6         | 203             | .000        | .432           |
| Group     | <i>Pillai's Trace</i> | .118  | 4.541 <sup>a</sup>   | 6         | 203             | .000        | .118           |

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> Exact statistic

**Follow-up analyses.** Next, because the multivariate test results were statistically significant, the effect of each dependent measure was determined. Table 22 displays the nonsignificant results of the Levene's Test of Equality of Variances.

Table 22

*Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances on Posttest Means and Essay 3*

|                            | <i>F</i> | <i>df1</i> | <i>df2</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Interest in Science        | 2.365    | 1          | 209        | .126        |
| Technology                 | 2.747    | 1          | 209        | .099        |
| Writing Tasks              | 1.504    | 1          | 209        | .221        |
| Interest in Social Studies | .159     | 1          | 209        | .691        |
| Student Perspective Taking | 1.228    | 1          | 209        | .269        |
| Essay 3                    | .193     | 1          | 209        | .661        |

The final step was to determine the source and significance level of the differences between the two groups for each dependent variable. Table 23 presents the tests of between subjects effects for Research Question One. The table indicates a significant difference between groups ( $p < .025$ ) occurred on the subscale of Interest in Social Studies,  $F(1, 209) = 9.015$ ,  $p = .003$ , partial eta squared = .042. Students in the thematic-based curriculum group ( $M = 3.745$ ) had significantly higher posttest scores than students enrolled in the nonthematic-based curriculum ( $M = 3.455$ ).

Table 23

*A Comparison of Curriculum Type Across Six Dependent Variables with Essay 1 applied as a Covariate*

| Dependent Variable         | <i>Type III Sum</i> |           | <i>Mean</i>   |          | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Partial Eta Squared</i> |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
|                            | <i>of Squares</i>   | <i>df</i> | <i>Square</i> | <i>F</i> |          |          |                            |
| Interest in Science        | 1.495               | 1         | 1.495         | 1.555    | .214     | .007     |                            |
| Technology                 | .129                | 1         | .129          | .527     | .469     | .003     |                            |
| Writing Tasks              | 1.256               | 1         | 1.256         | 2.619    | .107     | .012     |                            |
| Interest in Social Studies | 4.296               | 1         | 4.296         | 9.015    | .003     | .042     |                            |
| Student Perspective Taking | .008                | 1         | .008          | .014     | .905     | .000     |                            |
| Essay 3                    | 2.706               | 1         | 2.706         | 4.975    | .027     | .023     |                            |

### **Multiple Choice Content Questions**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze the results of the multiple choice content questions. The same data set of 211 cases was used in the analysis of the multiple choice content area questions.

### **Pretest Assumptions and Analyses**

**Statistical assumptions.** The data for the multiple choice content questions met all statistical assumptions related to the analysis of a one-way ANOVA including; normality, independence, and homogeneity of variance. Table 24 contains the descriptive statistics for the pretest form of these data.

Table 24

*Multiple Choice Content (MCC) Data Pretest Descriptive Statistics (n = 211)*

| MCC Pretest           |       |
|-----------------------|-------|
| <i>Mean</i>           | 7.970 |
| <i>Std. Deviation</i> | 2.190 |
| <i>Variance</i>       | 4.794 |
| <i>Skewness</i>       | -.243 |
| <i>SE of Skewness</i> | .167  |
| <i>Kurtosis</i>       | -.578 |
| <i>SE of Kurtosis</i> | .333  |
| <i>Range</i>          | 10    |
| <i>Minimum</i>        | 2     |
| <i>Maximum</i>        | 12    |

*Note:* SE = Standard Error

**Analysis of the pretest multiple choice content questions.** A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of the results from the two groups on the multiple choice questions. Table 25 presents the means and standard deviations of the multiple choice content data for the thematic and the nonthematic groups. The data set contained no missing variables and met all of the assumptions in order to conduct the univariate analysis.

Table 25

*Multiple Choice Content Questions: Pretest Means and Standard Deviations*

| Type of Curriculum           | Mean | Std. Deviation | N   |
|------------------------------|------|----------------|-----|
| Thematic-based Curriculum    | 8.23 | 2.050          | 98  |
| Nonthematic-based Curriculum | 7.73 | 2.287          | 113 |
| Total                        | 7.97 | 2.190          | 211 |

The Levene's *F* test for equality of variances was used to test the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Using a significance level of  $p > .05$ , the result was not significant ( $p = .407$ ), therefore it was concluded that the assumption of homogeneity was met (Meyers et al., 2006). The results of the follow-up test indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the multiple choice content data (see Table 26).

Table 26

*Tests of Between Subject Effects for the Multiple Choice Content Questions*

|       | Type III Sum of |    | Mean   |       |      | Partial Eta |
|-------|-----------------|----|--------|-------|------|-------------|
|       | Squares         | df | Square | F     | p    | Squared     |
| Group | 13.130          | 1  | 13.130 | 2.762 | .098 | .013        |

**Posttest Assumptions and Analyses**

**Statistical assumptions.** The data for the posttest multiple choice content questions met all statistical assumptions related to the analysis of a one-way ANOVA including; normality, independence, and homogeneity of variance. Table 27 contains the descriptive statistics for the posttest form of these data.



Table 27

*Multiple Choice Content (MCC) Data Posttest Descriptive Statistics (n = 211)*

| MCC Posttest          |       |
|-----------------------|-------|
| <i>Mean</i>           | 8.050 |
| <i>Std. Deviation</i> | 2.036 |
| <i>Variance</i>       | 4.145 |
| <i>Skewness</i>       | -.649 |
| <i>SE Skewness</i>    | .167  |
| <i>Kurtosis</i>       | .647  |
| <i>SE of Kurtosis</i> | .333  |
| <i>Range</i>          | 11    |
| <i>Minimum</i>        | 1     |
| <i>Maximum</i>        | 12    |

*Note:* SE = Standard Error

**Analysis of the posttest multiple choice content questions.** A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of the results from the two groups on the posttest form of the multiple choice content questions. Table 28 presents the means and standard deviations of the multiple choice content data for the thematic and the nonthematic groups. The data set contained no missing variables and met all of the assumptions in order to conduct the univariate analysis.

Table 28

*Multiple Choice Content Questions: Posttest Means and Standard Deviations*

| Type of Curriculum           | Mean | Std. Deviation | N   |
|------------------------------|------|----------------|-----|
| Thematic-based Curriculum    | 8.08 | 2.024          | 98  |
| Nonthematic-based Curriculum | 8.03 | 2.055          | 113 |
| Total                        | 8.05 | 2.036          | 211 |

The Levene's  $F$  test for equality of variances was used to test the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Using a significance level of  $p > .05$ , the result was not significant ( $p = .092$ ), therefore it was concluded that the assumption of homogeneity was met (Meyers et al., 2006). The results of the follow-up test indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the multiple choice content data (see Table 29).

Table 29

*Tests of Between Subject Effects for the Multiple Choice Content Questions*

|       | Type III Sum of |    | Mean   |      |      | Partial Eta |
|-------|-----------------|----|--------|------|------|-------------|
|       | Squares         | df | Square | F    | p    | Squared     |
| Group | .159            | 1  | .159   | .038 | .845 | .000        |

The results of the multiple choice content questions were not an area under investigation, however the data may prove to be an important area of future research. Table 30 contains the means and standard deviations for the pretest and posttest forms of the data. It is important to note that there was no significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) between the two groups. Analysis of the mean scores indicated that the thematic-based group had higher mean scores on both the pretest

and the posttest. An important additional observation was that the nonthematic-based group demonstrated a higher mean score on the posttest compared with the group's pretest results, where the thematic-based group produced a higher mean score on the pretest when compared to the posttest.

Table 30

*Means and Standard Deviations for the Pretest and Posttest Multiple Choice Content (MCC)*

|          |                              | <i>Std.</i> |                  |          |
|----------|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|----------|
|          | Type of Curriculum           | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Deviation</i> | <i>N</i> |
| Pretest  | Thematic-based Curriculum    | 8.23        | 2.050            | 98       |
| MCC      | Nonthematic-based Curriculum | 7.73        | 2.287            | 113      |
|          | Total                        | 7.97        | 2.190            | 211      |
| Posttest | Thematic-based Curriculum    | 8.08        | 2.024            | 98       |
| MCC      | Nonthematic-based Curriculum | 8.03        | 2.055            | 113      |
|          | Total                        | 8.05        | 2.036            | 211      |

### **Data Preparation for Research Question Two**

A two-way, mixed design Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to analyze the data for research question two. Research question two addressed the following question: Is there a significant difference in the change over time in the rubric scores assessing historical reasoning of students who were in a thematic-based classroom and those who were not taught in a thematic-based program?

Research question two compared the level of historical reasoning of students in each group as measured through a rubric that was applied to student essays. The two-way mixed

design ANCOVA was utilized to determine the difference between groups on the three essays, the difference within groups based on the three times the assessments were administered, and the interaction effect between time and curriculum type. The two levels of curriculum type, thematic-based and nonthematic-based served as the between-subjects factor. Time, the three occasions that the essays were administered, constituted the within-subjects factor (Meyers et al., 2006). Each of three essays addressed different topics that were relevant to the curriculum under investigation. The essays were scored with a rubric, Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric (GlobalEd 2, 2010). Rubric scores ranged from 0 to 5, where a score of 0 indicated no useful response and a score of 5 was an excellent response that included all relevant elements (refer to Table 6 for an explanation of the scoring). Because a difference between groups on Essay 1 at the onset of the treatment was detected, the pretest variable Writing Tasks was used as a covariate for the analysis of research question two. This variable was chosen because it best represented the source of the difference, a writing program that was in effect for the duration of the study in the school that housed the students participating in the nonthematic-based social studies curriculum.

### **Initial Screening Process**

The data set of 211 cases utilized for research question one was used to conduct the data analysis for research question two. The sample included 98 students from the thematic-based social studies curriculum and 113 students enrolled in nonthematic-based social studies curriculum. A visual inspection of the data revealed no missing values for the scores on Essay 1, Essay 2, and Essay 3. All of the data were consistent with the scale of the rubric and each score ranged between 0 and 5.

## **Assumptions Underlying a Two-way Mixed Design Analysis of Variance**

Assumptions related to a two-way mixed design analysis of variance include those for both univariate and multivariate tests. The first univariate assumption concerned the normal distribution of the dependent variable in the population for each combination of levels of the within-subjects factors (Green & Salkind, 2008). The second univariate assumption was the sphericity assumption which measures whether the population variances of the difference variables are equal (Huck, 2008). The assumption of independence is an assumption that is applied to both the univariate and multivariate tests. The remaining multivariate assumption was that the difference scores are multivariately normally distributed (Green & Salkind, 2008).

**Assumption of normality.** The normal distribution of the data was tested through the analysis of the skewness and kurtosis of the data (see Table 31). The data set met all of the assumptions for normality, the skewness and kurtosis of the distribution of the data were within the acceptable limits of  $-1.0 - 1.0$ .

Table 31

*Descriptive Statistics for All Essay Scores (n= 211)*

|                | Essay 1 | Essay 2 | Essay 3 |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Mean           | 3.588   | 3.737   | 3.550   |
| Median         | 4.000   | 4.000   | 3.500   |
| Std. Deviation | .865    | .907    | .979    |
| Variance       | .748    | .822    | .958    |
| Skewness       | -.469   | -.516   | -.456   |
| SE of Skewness | .167    | .167    | .167    |
| Kurtosis       | -.275   | -.074   | -.094   |
| SE of Kurtosis | .333    | .333    | .333    |
| Minimum        | 1.0     | 1.0     | 1.0     |
| Maximum        | 5.0     | 5.0     | 5.0     |

*Note:* SE = Standard Error

**Assumption of heterogeneity.** Box's M test was used to test the null hypothesis that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables were equal across the two groups. The results of the test (Table 32) were not statistically significant ( $p = .266$ ) and indicated that the covariance matrices of the dependent variables were equal across the groups.

Table 32

*Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices<sup>a</sup> for Research Question Two*

| Statistic      | Value      |
|----------------|------------|
| <i>Box's M</i> | 7.754      |
| <i>F</i>       | 1.272      |
| <i>df1</i>     | 6.000      |
| <i>df2</i>     | 299788.867 |
| <i>Sig.</i>    | 0.266      |

*Note:* <sup>a</sup>Design: Intercept + PreWTmean + CurriculumType; Within Subjects Design: Essay

**Assumption of sphericity.** Mauchly's test was used to test for a violation of the assumption of sphericity. This test determines if two assumptions are met: (a) whether or not the homogeneity of variance for a within-subjects design is significant and (b) whether or not the correlations between the levels of the within-subjects variable are comparable (Meyers et al., 2006). The result of Mauchly's test of sphericity was not significant (approximate chi square = .694,  $p = .707$ ), which indicated that it was not necessary to adjust the degrees of freedom in the interpretation of the within-subjects *F* tests (Meyers et al., 2006).

**Assumption of independence.** As previously stated, the assumption of independence was met throughout this study because the two groups that were sampled were housed in two different schools and remained independent from one another during the research period.

### **Data Analyses for Research Question Two**

#### **Means and Standard Deviations**

Table 33 contains the means and standard deviations of each subscale for the treatment and comparison groups.

Table 33

*Research Question Two Means and Standard Deviations*

|         | Type of Curriculum | Mean  | Std. Deviation | N   |
|---------|--------------------|-------|----------------|-----|
| Essay 1 | Thematic-based     | 3.434 | .9240          | 98  |
|         | Nonthematic-based  | 3.721 | .7904          | 113 |
|         | Total              | 3.588 | .8650          | 211 |
| Essay 2 | Thematic-based     | 3.464 | .8350          | 98  |
|         | Nonthematic-based  | 3.973 | .9035          | 113 |
|         | Total              | 3.737 | .9067          | 211 |
| Essay 3 | Thematic-based     | 3.316 | .9205          | 98  |
|         | Nonthematic-based  | 3.752 | .9868          | 113 |
|         | Total              | 3.550 | .9789          | 211 |

**Test of Significance**

Wilk's lambda was used to test for significant differences between the groups on the variables of time and curriculum type with the pretest writing tasks as a covariate. Table 34 contains the results of this test. An analysis of Wilk's Lambda revealed that there was no significant difference, therefore, the between-subjects effect, within-subjects effects, and the interaction between the time the essays and curriculum type were not examined.



Table 34

*Research Question Two: Comparison of Essays Over Time by Group*

| Effect        | Value         | Hypothesis |                    |                 | Partial Eta |                |      |
|---------------|---------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|------|
|               |               | <i>F</i>   | <i>df</i>          | <i>Error df</i> | <i>Sig.</i> | <i>Squared</i> |      |
| Time          | <i>Wilks'</i> | .973       | 2.839 <sup>a</sup> | 2               | 207         | .061           | .027 |
|               | <i>Lambda</i> |            |                    |                 |             |                |      |
| Time x        | <i>Wilks'</i> | .979       | 2.230 <sup>a</sup> | 2               | 207         | .110           | .021 |
| Pretest       | <i>Lambda</i> |            |                    |                 |             |                |      |
| Writing Tasks |               |            |                    |                 |             |                |      |
| Time x        | <i>Wilks'</i> | .981       | 1.990 <sup>a</sup> | 2               | 207         | .139           | .019 |
| Curriculum    | <i>Lambda</i> |            |                    |                 |             |                |      |
| Type          |               |            |                    |                 |             |                |      |

*Note:* <sup>a</sup> Exact statistic and Design: Intercept + Pretest Writing Tasks + Curriculum Type; Within Subjects Design: Time

**Research Question Three**

The following question was posed: How do students who are taught utilizing a thematic-based curriculum perceive this curriculum in comparison to students who are taught utilizing a non-thematic-based curriculum? It was addressed utilizing an analysis of focus group data gathered from both conditions. The students in the focus groups were interviewed by the researcher on three occasions during the 16-week research period. The same initial questions were asked of members of both groups during the meetings. The questions appear in Appendix G. The conversations during the meetings were transcribed and recorded. Data from the meetings were coded and analyzed.

## **Brief Overview of Focus Group Meetings**

**Thematic-based curriculum group.** The researcher facilitated the discussions, recorded each session using audio and video devices, and also took notes during the meetings. The group members were observed to be energetic and talkative at each meeting. The group consisted of four males and four females. They continuously elaborated on their answers and painted a vivid picture of their social studies experience. Seven of the eight students in the focus group had attended the school since grade 6 and one had moved to the district at the start of the current academic year. Members of the group were familiar with one another and appeared excited to be included in this research. A positive rapport with the researcher was quickly established and the students answered the questions without reservation.

**Nonthematic-based curriculum group.** All eight of the students in the comparison focus group had attended the school since the start of the sixth grade. The group consisted of four males and four females. The meetings were recorded with the same devices that were used to record the experimental group's responses. The members of the group appeared to be immediately comfortable with one another and with the researcher. These students were also observed to be energetic and talkative; the time was easily filled with very few questions asked by the researcher. They answered the questions posed by the researcher and often provided important details beyond the initial question.

## **Overview of the Focus Group Coding**

All data were first transferred to an Excel file for the purpose of coding. Excel was chosen as the program for coding and sorting data because of the relatively small amount of data that were collected and the simplicity of the qualitative design used in this study.

Responses were first sorted by group, session, and question. Each response was assigned a numeric code that included the group, session number, question, response number, and student number. Open coding was used by conducting a line-by-line analysis which allowed for a quick development of initial categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Responses were assigned initial codes that were a summary of the question. This helped the researcher collapse the questions into 11 codes (Creswell, 2007). These final codes were assigned to the themes of: (a) Attitudes Towards Social Studies, (b) Curriculum Strategies, Organization, and Procedures, and (c) Higher Level Thinking Skills. The theme of Attitudes Towards Social Studies included the codes of Favorable and Less Favorable. The codes of Assessment: Process, Assessment: Product, Collaboration, Fact-based Knowledge, Teacher, and Writing were included in the theme of Curriculum Strategies, Organization, and Procedures. The theme of Higher Level Thinking Skills included: Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Problem-solving. The 11 codes were expanded to include subordinate codes that provided a richer description of each code and theme. Table 35 displays the frequency data for each theme, code, and subordinate code.

Table 35

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme          | Code      | Subordinate code                 | Group    |             | Total |
|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|                |           |                                  | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Attitudes      | Favorable | Benefits of cooperative learning | 4        | 0           | 4     |
| Towards Social |           | Enjoyed depth                    | 8        | 1           | 9     |
| Studies        |           | Enjoyed Projects                 | 15       | 2           | 17    |
|                |           | Enjoyed subject matter           | 9        | 10          | 19    |
|                |           | Favored interaction over tests   | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                |           | Style of teacher                 | 0        | 3           | 3     |
|                |           | Variety of subject matter        | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                | Total     |                                  | 40       | 16          | 56    |

Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme          | Code      | Subordinate code                         | Group    |             | Total |
|----------------|-----------|--|----------|-------------|-------|
|                |           |  | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Attitudes      | Less      | Class was not interesting/challenging    | 0        | 3           | 3     |
| Towards Social | Favorable | Disliked essays                          | 0        | 1           | 1     |
| Studies        |           | Learned just for the test                | 0        | 3           | 3     |
|                |           | More creativity wanted                   | 0        | 4           | 4     |
|                |           | Repetition                               | 0        | 3           | 3     |
|                |           | Too many projects at the end of the year | 0        | 2           | 2     |
|                |           | Type of test                             | 0        | 1           | 1     |
|                |           | Wanted more dates                        | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                |           | Wanted more depth                        | 1        | 3           | 4     |
|                |           | Wanted more technology                   | 1        | 0           | 1     |
|                |           | Total                                    |          | 4           | 20    |
| Total          |           |  | 44       | 36          | 80    |

Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme             | Code        | Subordinate code                | Group    |             | Total |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|                   |             |                                 | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Curriculum        | Assessment: | Learning style- self-assessment | 4        | 0           | 4     |
| Strategies,       | Process     | Project instead of tests        | 0        | 1           | 1     |
| Organization, and |             | Study skills                    | 0        | 7           | 7     |
| Procedures        | Total       |                                 | 4        | 8           | 12    |
|                   | Assessment: | Essay tests                     | 0        | 1           | 1     |
|                   | Product     | Less written work               | 1        | 1           | 2     |
|                   |             | More variety in test question   | 0        | 1           | 1     |
|                   |             | Note-taking                     | 0        | 2           | 2     |
|                   |             | Project                         | 8        | 3           | 11    |
|                   |             | Test                            | 0        | 5           | 5     |
|                   | Total       |                                 | 9        | 13          | 22    |

Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme             | Code          | Subordinate code         | Group    |             | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|                   |               |                          | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Curriculum        | Collaboration | Interaction              | 3        | 2           | 5     |
| Strategies,       |               | Leadership               | 2        | 0           | 2     |
| Organization, and |               | Learned about myself     | 1        | 0           | 1     |
| Procedures        |               | Problems with group work | 2        | 1           | 3     |
|                   |               | Role of collaboration    | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                   |               | Role play                | 1        | 0           | 1     |
|                   | Total         |                          | 11       | 3           | 14    |

Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme  | Code       | Subordinate code        | Group    |             | Total |
|--|------------|-------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|  |            |                         | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Curriculum                                     | Fact-based | Fact recall             | 1        | 1           | 2     |
| Strategies,<br>Organization, and<br>Procedures | Knowledge  | Identify patterns       | 2        | 1           | 3     |
|  |            | Learn just for the test | 0        | 1           | 1     |
|  |            | Chronology              | 3        | 5           | 8     |
|  |            | Note taking             | 0        | 14          | 14    |
|  |            | Study skills            | 0        | 4           | 4     |
|  |            | Too much information    | 0        | 1           | 1     |
|  |            | Type of assignment      | 0        | 3           | 3     |
|  |            | Type of quiz or test    | 0        | 7           | 7     |
|  |            | Use of textbook         | 3        | 6           | 9     |
|  | Total      |                         | 9        | 43          | 52    |



Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme             | Code    | Subordinate code       | Group    |             | Total |
|-------------------|---------|------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|                   |         |                        | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Curriculum        | Teacher | Liked teacher          | 1        | 1           | 2     |
| Strategies,       |         | Role of teacher        | 0        | 4           | 4     |
| Organization, and |         | Teacher centered       | 0        | 2           | 2     |
| Procedures        |         | Teacher feedback       | 0        | 1           | 1     |
|                   |         | Teacher made class fun | 0        | 3           | 3     |
|                   | Total   |                        | 1        | 11          | 12    |
|                   | Writing | Like to write          | 0        | 3           | 3     |
|                   |         | Not a good writer      | 1        | 0           | 1     |
|                   |         | Too many essays        | 0        | 8           | 8     |
|                   |         | Writing Process        | 0        | 2           | 2     |
|                   | Total   |                        | 1        | 13          | 14    |
| Total             |         |                        | 35       | 91          | 126   |

Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme           | Code              | Subordinate code            | Group    |             | Total |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|                 |                   |                             | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Higher Level    | Creativity        | Ability to express yourself | 1        | 4           | 5     |
| Thinking Skills |                   | Project                     | 2        | 1           | 3     |
|                 | Total             |                             | 3        | 5           | 8     |
|                 | Critical Thinking | Application                 | 3        | 1           | 4     |
|                 |                   | Comprehension               | 3        | 0           | 3     |
|                 |                   | Defending Ideas             | 6        | 0           | 6     |
|                 |                   | Historical Reasoning        | 20       | 7           | 27    |
|                 |                   | Synthesize                  | 3        | 0           | 3     |
|                 | Total             |                             | 35       | 8           | 43    |

Table 35 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses*

| Theme           | Code            | Subordinate code         | Group    |             | Total |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|                 |                 |                          | Thematic | Nonthematic |       |
| Higher Level    | Problem-solving | Analysis                 | 3        | 0           | 3     |
| Thinking Skills |                 | Debating                 | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                 |                 | Establishing connections | 0        | 2           | 2     |
|                 |                 | Interesting/engaging     | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                 |                 | Learn by doing           | 6        | 2           | 8     |
|                 |                 | Self-assessment          | 2        | 0           | 2     |
|                 |                 | Use of technology        | 3        | 0           | 3     |
|                 | Total           |                          | 18       | 4           | 22    |
| Total           |                 |                          | 56       | 17          | 73    |
| Grand Total     |                 |                          | 135      | 144         | 279   |

## **Attitudes Towards Social Studies**

This theme included responses that related to the likes and dislikes of students from each group. Students referred to the type of skills they were taught, technology used, and the way instruction was delivered in each curriculum type.

**Favorable.** Many of the comments included within this code from the thematic group were focused on projects, the subject matter, and the level of depth this type of curriculum delivery provided. A sample response from Student 7 of the thematic group when describing growth as a social studies learner in the second session was “I like the way social studies is taught here because we have to think.” In the nonthematic group, favorable comments were mostly related to how the students enjoyed the subject matter. For example, Student 6 in session 1 said, “Social Studies just clicks for me. I watch the history channel and [enjoy learning] how things progressed into what we see today.”

**Less Favorable.** In the first session with the nonthematic group, Student 1 described his attitude towards social studies as “what I feel is a lot more time could be utilized better. [For example, use] some videos or questions instead. We could get the big picture instead of taking notes on rather insignificant [topics].” Most comments coded as less favorable from the thematic-based group were in reference to more specific dates being included in the curriculum. Student 5 in the first session with this group said, “more timelines [would help me] to see how everything fits together.”

## **Curriculum Strategies, Organization, and Procedures**

This theme incorporated the methods and styles of instruction that were described by members of the focus groups. Students provided information about classwork and homework assignments as well as specific teacher attributes.

**Assessment: Process.** Students described the process of assessment as it related to working with others and even engaged in self-assessment. For example, in the first session, Student 6 in the thematic group described the difference between tests and projects as, "...what I have learned about myself is that when you take a test you learn it just for the test, this way is more memorable and you are not forcing yourself to just learn it. A presentation helps you teach and explain it to others."

**Assessment: Product.** The types of assignments and measures were described by each group as the products of assessment. The students from each curriculum type described their perceptions toward projects, tests, skills, and the type of content that was assessed in social studies. During session one, Student 8 of the nonthematic group stated, "projects have a creative outlet and more resources and have more information like the movie for a project, [however] in school [there are] mainly tests and essays. If creativity was spread out more it would allow students to put [their] own spin on things."

**Collaboration.** The code of collaboration was related to the concept of cooperative learning and included projects and classroom assignments. The thematic-based group expressed more examples of collaboration through long-term assignments and the nonthematic-based group provided examples such as think-pair-share opportunities from classwork assignments. Student 7 from the thematic-based group described the experience as, "I have really worked on my people skills and most projects have involved working in groups." Student 4 from the nonthematic-based group discussed the benefits of group work "Think-pair-shares-(TPS) we did weapons in WWII, I like doing that before I didn't like [it] but reteaching it and spreading the knowledge is helpful, discussing with others, I like learning that way."

**Fact-based Knowledge.** The code of fact-based knowledge was based on comments related to the use of the textbook, note-taking skills, chronology, and types of classwork and homework assignments. Some members of the thematic-based group expressed that the use of the textbook to locate specific facts was the least favorite aspect of the class. Student 1 expressed this by saying “[my] least favorite [social studies assignments] have been the textbook ones, while it is easy and quick I don’t feel I learn anything.” Student 3, from the same school, continued this sentiment and added “reading from a book gives me only one point of view, hearing what others think might help me give deeper thought [to the topic].” The nonthematic-based group was more focused on skills such as note-taking. Student 4 said, “it is a lot of note-taking and [then the] next day discussing and connecting your note taking to a movie or a primary source. It is not about learning something but making connections to your life,” when asked to describe the delivery of social studies. Student 6 expressed that the fact-based knowledge that was learned was beneficial when he stated, “we learned things, but we gained knowledge because we covered the mid-1860s to the 1960/70s. I learned a lot this year.”

There were also comments made by members of each focus group specifically related to chronology. One student who was in the thematic-based group expressed some need for more chronology while students in the nonthematic-based group discussed how mini-units based on themes were viewed as difficult to follow. Student 5 in session two of the meetings with the thematic group said “I think we should take a little bit more [time] on dates because you don’t know when and how they fit together,” when asked about the understanding of history. In the third session, Student 8 from the nonthematic group described the benefits of a chronological approach as “In my opinion, last year we went by category and bounced back and forth, but I

think a timeline is more stable. That way we can get a better point of view on what happened when.”

**Teacher.** The code of teacher grew out of comments that were made by students in the nonthematic-based group. The concept of teacher was linked to several questions and appeared in each session with the nonthematic-based group. The code was only applied once to the thematic-based group and was made in reference to a teacher of a class other than social studies. The nonthematic-based group expressed that the teacher adds to the enjoyment of the class. One example of this perception was found in Student 2’s response of “this year I think I have a better understanding . . . I still don’t like the subject [but] my teacher made it a little more fun,” when asked about his appreciation of social studies.

**Writing.** The final code that was developed during the analysis of the focus group data was writing. This code was also found predominantly in the nonthematic-based group. The theme of writing was mainly related to students’ least favorite aspect of social studies. Only one student response in the thematic-based group was coded for writing. Student 7 made the comment, “[my] least favorite [type of assignments] are the writing prompts because I am not a very good writer.” Students in the nonthematic-based group provided comments that reflected the amount of writing that was incorporated into their social studies program. For example, Student 5 said, “I could have done a little less of the writing we have done a lot.” Student 6 added “in English all the writing makes sense but [not] in social studies.”

### **Higher Level Thinking Skills**

The theme included codes that were related to higher order thinking skills that go beyond teaching the basic facts or concepts. These skills were aligned with the complex reasoning and extended reasoning tasks found as described in Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (Hess, 2005).

**Creativity.** This code emerged from student descriptions of projects and the delivery of the content, knowledge, and skills in the social studies classroom. Both groups had a favorable view of creativity and commented on the level it was encouraged within each curriculum. When asked what he thought about the curriculum, Student 5 in the thematic-based group said, “creative because I thought the projects were really fun because we learned the [different perspectives].” Student 3 from the nonthematic-based group described a perspective on creative projects in social studies, “projects are a lot more creative and I think it is a lot better and since opinions are not shared we are using our own thoughts.”

**Critical Thinking.** The code of Critical Thinking developed from the themes of historical reasoning, cooperative learning, and the communicating of learning through projects and presentations. The thematic-based group described higher-level thinking skills such as perspective-taking and contextualization. Examples of this included Student 6’s response to the question about the skills and content knowledge that were learned in grade 8 social studies. Student 6 said, “The generalizations made about people in certain time periods don’t apply to everyone.” He was expressing his ideas related to the complex nature of the study of history and that historical thinking involves perspective taking and an understanding of the events that surround a historical account. In another response to the same question, Student 3 said, “The great depression project made us think about how people experience history and [we] put ourselves into people’s heads . . . from the time period.” This response implies that historical thinking was taking place and this student was incorporating the concept of contextualization. In the nonthematic group there was a focus on comparing the past to the present. Student 1, in describing the experience in social studies over the last three years said, “. . .this year we learned a lot more about connections and learning from past mistakes.” Student 6, from the nonthematic-



based group, reached the conclusion that "...a component of social studies is to compare the past to the present."

**Problem-solving.** This emerged as a code through collapsing codes that included types of projects and presentations. When asked about their perspective on the types of assignments they had completed in Social Studies, students in the thematic-based group described experiences such as using technology, debating, presenting, and working in groups. Student 2 summarized the experience and said "I definitely think I am so much better with technology because we have done a lot on the computer and [with] public speaking and debating. In [one] project there was a whole section on debating and it incorporated skills of research and speaking." There were fewer comments that were coded for problem-solving from the nonthematic-based group. Student 6 added "[I] really enjoyed projects because I like to be creative. [Projects such as] scrapbooks, journals instead of writing a report . . . [I] got to make up my own character and put myself into a situation [in history]."

### **Summary of the Focus Group Findings**

**Thematic-based social studies group.** The data indicated that students in the thematic-based program demonstrated a positive attitude towards social studies. Many comments were focused on their positive attitudes towards social studies and displayed a high level of critical thinking and historical understanding. However, there were comments made that referenced a need for the delivery of the curriculum to be grounded in facts and chronology. This group also described the type of assignments that promoted cooperative learning and problem-solving.

**Nonthematic-based social studies group.** The nonthematic-based group demonstrated a strong fact-based knowledge and included many comments that focused on the teacher and not the method used to deliver the curriculum. This group also described a writing program that was

incorporated into the curriculum that was not described by students in the thematic-based curriculum.

An analysis of the frequency data, as seen previously in Table 28, indicated that the group of students that represented the thematic-based social studies curriculum had more comments that were classified within the themes of Higher Level Thinking Skills ( $n = 56$ ) and Attitudes Towards Social Studies ( $n = 44$ ) than the group of students from the nonthematic-based curriculum school (Higher Level Thinking Skills,  $n = 17$  and Attitudes Towards Social Studies,  $n = 36$ ). Within the theme of Higher Level Thinking Skills, a total of 35 comments made by members of the thematic group were classified with the code Critical Thinking in comparison to 8 comments made by the nonthematic group. Of the 35 comments contained in this code, 20 were categorized under the subordinate code of Historical Reasoning. The nonthematic group had more comments that were focused on the codes within the theme of Curriculum Strategies, Organization, and Procedures ( $n = 91$ ) as compared to those in the thematic group ( $n = 35$ ). The only exception to this trend was the code of collaboration, where the students from the thematic-based group had a frequency of 11 comments compared to only 3 from the nonthematic-based focus group. Appendix H contains the frequency analysis of comments made by each participant according to theme, code, and subordinate code. A chi-square table is included in Appendix I to demonstrate the significance of the number of comments made for each code.

### **Triangulation of the Data**

Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods to collect data about a phenomenon and can enhance the validity of case study findings (Gall et al., 2007). For the purposes of this present study, the findings from the quantitative analysis utilized in research questions one and

two were compared and contrasted with the results of the analysis of the focus group data from research question three.

The findings of research question one indicated that the students from the thematic-based curriculum had a significantly higher Interest in Social Studies ( $p = .003$ ) when compared to students who were enrolled in a nonthematic-based curriculum. The analysis of the focus group data revealed that a total of 80 comments were classified under the theme of Attitudes Towards Social Studies. Of these 80 comments, 44 of them were from the Thematic-based group. An overwhelming majority of the comments, 40 out of 44, demonstrated a positive attitude towards social studies. Analysis of the comments confirmed the results of research question one as measured by the Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks questionnaire. The findings of research question one did not reveal a statistically significant difference between groups on the subscale of historical reasoning. This was measured through the application of a holistic scoring rubric that was applied to student essays. Although there was no statistical significance detected, the review of the case study data did indicate that when the students in the thematic-based group reflected on their course experience, they commented on many aspects of higher level thinking skills ( $n = 56$ ) when compared to the nonthematic-based group ( $n = 17$ ).

Analysis of data collected for research question two indicated that the means of the essay scores did not differ significantly between groups and students in the nonthematic-based group ( $M = 3.773$ ) compared to students enrolled in the thematic based program ( $M = 3.454$ ). However, the slightly higher mean for the nonthematic-based group corroborated the evidence collected from the focus groups. Students from the nonthematic-based focus group made more comments that referenced the codes of Writing ( $n = 13$ ) and assessment (Assessment: Process,  $n = 8$  and Assessment: Product,  $n = 13$ ) than students who represented the thematic-based group

(Writing,  $n = 1$ ; Assessment: Process,  $n = 4$ ; and Assessment: Product  $n = 9$ ). While students in the nonthematic-based group sometimes commented in negative terms that there was too much writing in their program, it appears that this focus on writing produces positive results. This was also confirmed with the analysis of district-wide writing program that was employed in the nonthematic-based school.

Miscellaneous results that were of interest from the focus group data included the frequency of the codes of teacher and fact-based knowledge. Both of these codes were found predominantly within the nonthematic-based group. One theory that would explain this phenomenon indicated a focus on the teacher delivered content of the nonthematic program.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter described the data that were analyzed through a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011). This incorporated quantitative and qualitative research objectives. The quantitative analysis utilized a quasi-experimental pretest posttest design. The qualitative analysis that was conducted was a case study of a group of students selected from each condition, thematic-based social studies instruction and nonthematic-based social studies instruction. The two research methods were conducted at the same time but remained independent from one another during the research and analysis phases. The quantitative and qualitative data were merged for interpretation of the results.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

There are seven sections of chapter five. The summary of the research study provides an overview of the present study and includes the problem that was investigated and the methods used to collect and analyze data. The findings section provides an evaluation of the results of the study that were reported in chapter four. The next section, discussion of the literature, draws connections between the research findings of this study and previous literature. The implications section provides an analysis of the impact this study will have on education. The limitations section examines specific issues that were raised over the course of the study and provides guidelines as to how this research could be applied to future studies. The next section, suggestions for future research, offers five areas of inquiry for additional research. A chapter conclusion completes chapter five.

### **Summary of the Study**

The premise of the research was to investigate the impact of the treatment, a thematic social studies program, on students' attitudes towards social studies related tasks and historical reasoning abilities. The study was conducted in the context of the loss of social studies instructional time that has occurred because of the intense national focus on language arts and mathematics. The intent of this study was to describe a program that incorporated challenging and relevant themes in history. The social studies program that was used as a treatment in this research allowed for the examination of student learning in an environment that supported student collaboration and problem-based learning. The study was conducted to provide support for the idea that through the application of knowledge learned from the study of historical events students would gain the ability to make decisions and take positions on contemporary issues, thus improving their attitudes towards social studies.

A convergent parallel design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) that incorporated three research questions guided this investigation. Two of the research questions were addressed using quantitative measures and the third utilized a qualitative approach. Within this convergent parallel design, a priority was placed on the quantitative measures (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The first research question was: Is there a significant difference in holistic scores for social studies achievement in historical reasoning and the five subscales of student attitudes towards social studies related tasks between eighth grade students who were taught using a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not taught using a thematic-based curriculum? Research question two was: Is there a significant difference in the change over time in the rubric scores assessing historical reasoning of students who were in a thematic-based classroom and those who were not taught in a thematic-based program? The final research question under investigation was: How do students who are taught utilizing a thematic-based curriculum perceive this curriculum in comparison to students who are taught utilizing a non-thematic-based curriculum?

The research compared two conditions, students enrolled in a thematic-based social studies program and those who were not. The treatment condition was focused on the themes of Wealth and Conflict in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the United States during the course of the 16-week research period. A total population size of 427 students was available for this study. A sample of convenience was selected from intact classrooms housed in 2 separate, comparable schools. The sample investigated was 211 cases and was comprised of 98 students in the treatment group and 113 students in the comparison group. A total of 4 teachers were included in the research, 2 from each condition.

Data were collected in three forms: (a) student attitudes towards social studies were assessed using the Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks Questionnaire (GlobalEd,

2010), (b) historical reasoning was assessed through student essays there were evaluated through the use of a rubric, Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric (GlobalEd 2, 2010), and (c) focus group data were coded and analyzed.

The data for research question one were evaluated using a MANCOVA where five of the subscales of the SATSSRT (Interest in Science, Technology, Writing Tasks, Attitude Towards Social Studies, and Student Perspective Taking) and rubric scores on Essay 3 served as the dependent variables, Essay 1 was used as a covariate. The quasi-experimental research design utilized to investigate this research question employed quantitative procedures to investigate research question one using a pretest-posttest nonequivalent group design.

The data for research question two were analyzed using a two-way, mixed methods ANCOVA. The three occasions when the essays were administered served as the within-subjects effects (Time) and the type of curriculum served as the between-subjects effects (Curriculum). The Pretest Writing Tasks variable from the SATSSRT was used as a covariate to account for the initial differences in writing performance between the two groups on Essay 1.

The data for research question three were gathered through focus group meetings conducted with students from each condition. Each of the two focus groups consisted of eight students, four males and four females. The four teachers who were involved in the study, each selected four students based on a criteria provided by the researcher. The teachers were requested to select a purposeful sample of students who represented the groups under investigation, but were also students who had demonstrated the ability to add to group discussions in the classroom. The focus groups were comprised of students who were articulate and were able to provide thorough and complete answers to the scripted questions.

The data from each group were collected, coded, and analyzed. The collection process included the use of a handheld digital camera, digital sound recording, and researcher notes. The questions for each meeting were scripted and both groups were asked the same questions. The three meetings per group coincided with the delivery of the three essay prompts. The data were coded by group, session, question, and response. Codes were developed and recorded in a spreadsheet. Codes were expanded and collapsed as the data were analyzed. The final analysis revealed a total of 11 codes that emerged. The researcher maintained a journal throughout the entire process of data collection, analysis, and synthesis of the findings.

## **Findings**

### **Research Question One**

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), with Essay 1 serving as the covariate, was applied where the five subscales of the Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks questionnaire (Interest in Science, Technology, Writing Tasks, Interest in Social Studies, and Student Perspective Taking) and the results of Essay 3 that was scored using a rubric served as the dependent variables. Essay 1 was used as a covariate because of the significant differences between the two groups that were detected during the analysis of the pretest data. The independent variable of curriculum type had two levels: thematic-based instruction and nonthematic-based instruction.

The multivariate effect of the independent variable, curriculum type was reported through an evaluation of Pillai's Trace. To control for alpha inflation, (type I errors) a Bonferroni adjustment was performed. The new alpha level was set at .025. The multivariate test revealed a significant difference between groups existed on the subscale of Interest in Social Studies Pillai's trace = .118, ( $F(6, 203) = 9.015, p = .003$ ) as measured on the SATSSRT. Follow-up procedures



determined that curriculum type had an effect on the dependent variable Interest in Social Studies. Students in a thematic-based program demonstrated a higher level of interest in social studies when compared to students in a nonthematic program. No other statistically significant differences between groups were detected.

### **Research Question Two**

A two-way, mixed design Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to analyze the data for research question two. The pretest variable of Writing Tasks was applied as a covariate for this analysis. The results of essays that were administered on three separate occasions during the research period served as the three levels of the within-subjects factor. The essays were scored using a rubric on a scale of 0 – 5. The two levels of curriculum type, thematic-based instruction and nonthematic-based instruction, served as the between-subjects factors.

Analysis of the results of Wilk's lambda revealed that there were no differences between the two groups. The results of this test dictated that no further analyses were necessary. However, it was observed that members of the nonthematic group had higher mean scores on each essay and this result corresponded with the group's higher mean score on the Writing Tasks subscale of the SATSSRT questionnaire (refer to Table 23 for details of each mean).

### **Research Question Three**

For research question three, qualitative methods were applied to address students' perceptions of social studies curriculum. Two focus groups were created, one that included students who are taught utilizing a thematic-based curriculum and another that consisted of students who were taught utilizing a non-thematic-based curriculum. An overview of the analysis of the focus group data revealed that these schools had two high quality social studies programs.

The 3 themes that emerged from the data analysis were: (a) Attitudes Towards Social Studies, (b) Curriculum Strategies, Organization, and Procedures, and (c) Higher Level Thinking Skills. A total of 11 codes were included within the themes. The theme of Attitudes Towards Social Studies was comprised of the codes of (a) Favorable and (b) Less Favorable. The theme of Curriculum Strategies, Organization, and Procedures included 6 codes: (a) Assessment: Process, (b) Assessment: Product, (c) Collaboration, (d), Fact-based Knowledge, (e) Teacher, and (f) Writing. The codes of (a) Creativity, (b) Critical Thinking, and (c) Problem-solving made up the theme of Higher Level Thinking Skills. One finding indicated that the students enrolled in the thematic-based program made more favorable comments about Attitudes Towards Social Studies ( $n = 40$ ) when compared to students in the nonthematic group ( $n = 16$ ).

Additional findings revealed that students in the thematic program were more focused on the delivery of the curriculum. The number of responses coded as Critical Thinking in social studies instruction ( $n = 35$ ) was greater than the number of responses for the nonthematic-based group ( $n = 8$ ). The thematic-based group referenced several aspects of the curriculum that they described as enjoyable and rewarding. Individuals in this group provided responses to describe their positive experiences with projects ( $n = 15$ ) that promoted cooperative learning ( $n = 11$ ), and problem solving ( $n = 18$ ). In comparison, the nonthematic-based group made fewer comments that were related to the enjoyment of projects ( $n = 2$ ), cooperative learning ( $n = 3$ ), and problem solving ( $n = 4$ ).

The students from the thematic-based curriculum group also demonstrated an understanding of key concepts of historical reasoning ( $n = 20$ ), while their counterparts provided fewer responses ( $n = 7$ ). Therefore, the focus group data revealed a connection between the experimental group and the code of Critical Thinking.

Three important findings that emerged from the nonthematic-based group were that they acquired a strong fact-based knowledge, focused on the teacher as the classroom leader, and provided commentary about the school's writing program. The code of Teacher was attributed to 11 comments made by individuals from the nonthematic group. In comparison, only 1 reference to teacher was found in the thematic group, and that reference was in response to what made a language arts class one of the student's favorite classes. This difference was hypothesized to mean that students in the comparison were more focused on the teacher delivering the content rather than the way the content was delivered. This group also made 13 comments about a writing program that was incorporated into the curriculum. This type of program was not described by students in the thematic-based curriculum.

When the findings were triangulated with the results of the quantitative measures that were used to collect data on each program, the students in the thematic program were perceived to have more favorable attitudes towards social studies, which compared favorably with the significant results found in the analysis of research question one. The students in the nonthematic group described a writing program that was embedded into the curriculum which provided them with routine practice in essay writing. The focus group data analysis indicated that students in the thematic-based group made several more references to higher level thinking skills when compared to the students from the nonthematic-based group. These differences will be addressed in the implications for future research section of this chapter.

### **Findings Related to Literature**

The theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two established a connection between thematic-based social studies curriculum and the constructs of Lev Vgotsky (1978) and Jerome Bruner (1960, 1966). Vgotsky's Zone of Promixal Development (1978) and Bruner's theory of

cognitive development (1960, 1966) have been applied to various educational settings and programs. Seminal thinkers related to the teaching and learning of history such as Peter Sexias (2000), Sam Wineberg (1997, 2000), and Bruce VanSledright (2002, 2004, 2011), have described the importance of developing critical thinking skills related to social studies based upon the work of theorists including Vgotsky (1978) and Bruner (1960, 1966). Even with these efforts, the amount of contemporary research related to critical thinking in social studies instruction is relatively limited (Barton, 2006).

An overview of research about historical thinking that documented nearly 100 years of research is provided in Chapter Two. It demonstrates the divide between theory and application, highlighted by the Bell and McCollum (1917) study, whose research was focused on factual recall rather than critical thinking. The Amherst Project (1971) and the History 13-17 project (Shemilt, 1983) from the United Kingdom in the 1970s detailed a history curriculum that included guided inquiry and student collaboration. While these studies illustrated a shift in thinking towards social studies instruction, subsequent initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) have prevented a real change from occurring in this subject area due to the focus on mathematics and language arts (Manzo, 2005; Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Zamosky, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010).

### **Research Question One**

Previous research related to students' attitudes towards social studies was conducted by De La Paz (2005). Her study indicated that students who engaged in a program that emphasized historical thinking had more positive attitudes towards social studies when compared to students who relied on a textbook-based method. The findings of this current study support those results and demonstrate that students can find value in a program that encourages historical thinking

through PBL and IBL. However, the gap between pedagogy and practice remains. Cohen (2005) reported that most social studies instruction is still textbook driven. This type of delivery causes students to lose interest in the subject (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009).

The Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) as described by VanTassel-Baska (1987) incorporates content focused on higher level thinking skills and problem-solving. The thematic-based social studies program included in this research was developed around themes and concepts that could be applied to multiple periods in history. Unfortunately, the findings of this study did not demonstrate significantly higher historical reasoning abilities for students engaged in this curriculum.

### **Research Question Two**

Research question two was used to investigate the relationship between three assessments of historical reasoning abilities of students who were engaged in a thematic-based curriculum and those who were not. The findings indicated that there were no differences between the two groups and no differences on rubric scores over time. However, further analysis of the mean scores for each group indicated that the students in the nonthematic-based curriculum had higher mean scores on each essay than those in the thematic-based group. As previously stated, the higher mean scores may have been due to the extra amount of time spent on writing skills at the school using the nonthematic-based approach.

A previous study that incorporated historical thinking and student collaboration using an essay prompt to measure student growth demonstrated similar results when compared to this present study. Research into collaborated historical reasoning (Van Drie, et. al, 2009), which included students working together using different graphic organizers for presenting an argument (a diagram group and a nondiagram group) to complete a 1,000-word essay concluded that no

significant difference between groups existed. The researchers hypothesized that writing scores were not influenced by the treatment and that historical thinking took place in both groups as a result of collaboration and discussion.

An additional study that related student writing to assess historical thinking was conducted by De La Paz (2005). This researcher studied the effects of an integrated language arts and social studies unit on historical understanding and writing skills. The work of De La Paz demonstrated the importance of a writing program to help foster student historical thinking. The present study did not incorporate a writing program as a treatment, yet the presence of a clearly articulated writing program in the school that housed the nonthematic-based group may have influenced the results of this study. Further discussions related to this are included in the Limitations and the Implications section of this chapter.

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three was a qualitative analysis of student perceptions towards a thematic-based curriculum. This question included the collection and comparison of focus group data from both conditions under investigation. The coding and analysis of the data revealed that students from the experimental condition demonstrated positive attitudes towards social studies and a deeper understanding of the historical thinking framework.

There are many connections between the findings of research question one and the results of research question three. The focus group findings helped to construct an understanding of the thematic-based curriculum from the perspective of the students involved in the curriculum. Project Phoenix (Little, et. al, 2007) which examined the effectiveness of the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) in social studies demonstrated that students could make significant growth in areas of conceptual reasoning, critical thinking, and content knowledge. The findings

from the thematic-based instruction focus group supported these results. Students in this condition were able to identify thematic-based social studies as an “interesting and effective way of learning” (Student 6). This is in comparison to a comment made by Student 8 in the nonthematic group “[the] courses are good but [they are] more about the teachers if [the content is] not expressed to students in right fashion you will not get the most out of it.”

This present research into thematic-based social studies instruction demonstrated that students who are motivated by intellectually challenging curriculum demonstrate positive attitudes towards work that was based on problem-solving and analysis. Students often commented about the amount of collaboration within the thematic-based program. The processes of working together to solve problems that are incorporated into this curriculum are supported by Vgotsky’s (1978) assertion that students can exceed their current level of understanding through social interaction.

### **Implications for Education**

This study provided support for the use of a thematic-based social studies curriculum to increase student interest in social studies related tasks and provide essential skills related to critical thinking and collaboration. The application of this curriculum had a significant effect on students’ attitudes towards social studies related tasks as measured by the Student Attitude Towards Social Studies Related Tasks questionnaire (GlobalEd, 2010; GlobalEd, 2010a). Additional findings from this study have also concluded that students in a thematic-based curriculum reported and described aspects of historical thinking and working together that they have experienced in this curriculum. The NCSS (2007, 2010) has advocated for social studies instruction that is challenging and meaningful. Thematic-based instruction provides a method to

deliver content in a way that incorporates critical thinking, historical reasoning, and maintains positive attitudes towards social studies.

### **Research Question One**

In the current situation where social studies instruction is losing out to instruction into literacy and numeracy (Manzo, 2005; Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Groce et al., 2007; Zamosky, 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010) it is even more essential that a social studies program be relevant and meaningful. The NCSS (2008) has declared the essential mission of social studies rests in preparing students to become active members of a democratic society. A thematic-based program, described in Chapter Three, is meaningful, relevant, and focused on depth not breadth.

The significant finding from the analysis of the data collected for research question one was that students in the thematic-based curriculum group had significantly higher interest in social studies related tasks when compared to the non-thematic group ( $p < .025$ ). This may indicate that students prefer this method of social studies instruction. The implications for education of this finding would be to incorporate the elements of a thematic-based curriculum into social studies instruction.

This study can add to the research that demonstrates the incorporation of historical thinking into the middle school social studies curriculum. The common focus of social studies instruction is on a narrative of history that is based on the concepts and chapters found in the textbook (VanSledright, 2011). This research has attempted to go beyond that and demonstrate that students are interested in a challenging social studies course that is based on themes in history.

The conclusions reached from the first research question addressed in the study produced a hopeful result, that historical thinking can be addressed through thematic social studies and that



the students favor this method. The transferability of these results may be dependent on teacher training programs that could be developed to allow more teachers to feel comfortable leaving the textbook behind and challenging students to think historically using themes. Themes could be created based on national standards that would address the need for a more in-depth analysis of history.

### **Research Question Two**

The findings of research question two indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. However, it was evident, through the analysis of the mean essay scores, that the nonthematic-based group ( $M = 3.773$ ) had higher scores when compared to the thematic-based group ( $M = 3.454$ ). These scores may have been influenced by a writing program that was already in place at the comparison school. This district writing program was established to assist students in the organization and composition of their writing and may have affected the findings in this study.

An important implication that resulted from this analysis is that the thematic-based program should seek to incorporate a strong writing program within it or perhaps dovetail with a language arts curriculum that would foster student writing with respect to social studies.

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three incorporated the analysis of focus group data to determine student perspectives towards social studies. Important findings that emerged included confirmation of the data gathered in research question one, students engaged in the treatment group demonstrated a positive attitude towards social studies when compared to students in the nonthematic-based group. The students in the thematic-based group also provided rich data that displayed a high level of historical thinking ability.

The focus group data provided evidence that the thematic-based program was perceived as both challenging and rewarding. Students demonstrated an interest in social studies and articulated a sophisticated level of critical thinking skills. This suggested that inquiry-based programs can produce interest and enthusiasm. The thematic-based group referenced several of the elements of the historical thinking framework (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008). These references included student directed research, contextualization, and argumentation. Students in the nonthematic group demonstrated historical thinking skills as well. Their use of historical thinking was often related to connecting the past to the present. They provided responses that indicated they did not engage in student-directed research. The responses from students in the nonthematic group did not incorporate as many elements of the historical thinking framework as those in the thematic-based group did. The nonthematic-based group did not demonstrate the same high level of enthusiasm towards social studies in comparison to the thematic-based group. The implications support the concept that history does not have to be driven by a textbook and grade 8 students have the ability to comprehend history when taught in an investigative way.

Responses by each group differed greatly regarding what aspects of social studies they enjoyed the most. A comparison of the responses from the two groups revealed that the focus of the thematic-based social studies group was on the content and activities of the course while the nonthematic-based group was much more focused on the teacher as the classroom leader. In this study students showed a greater level of interest in a social studies curriculum that used small group instruction, simulations, and problem-solving.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This present study utilized a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest research design. The study was a convergent parallel design that incorporated quantitative and qualitative research

objectives. Therefore, this section will describe quantitative threats to internal and external validity and issues of trustworthiness that are common in qualitative research.

### **Research Questions One and Two**

**Internal validity.** In quantitative research, the internal validity of an experiment is defined as “the extent to which extraneous variables have been controlled by the researcher, so that any observed effects can be attributed solely to the treatment variable” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 642). In this present study, there were internal threats because of the nature of the study. Threats included: subject characteristics, testing, compensatory rivalry, and resentful demoralization of the control group (Gall et al., 2007).

Subject characteristics are a threat to all studies. This refers to differences among the subjects that are unknown to the researcher that are present from the onset of the research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). This threat was controlled for through the gathering of detailed information about the characteristics of the subjects included in the study and relating the characteristics of both groups. In an effort to control for this limitation the researcher included groups from comparable school districts in the study. The two schools that housed the groups that participated in the research were similar in most aspects with the notable exception of the type of social studies instruction that was offered. The two schools were from the same geographic vicinity and housed similar populations in terms of demographics about the town and school.

The testing threat occurs when the pretest is followed by a similar posttest where students may become familiar with the measurement and show improvement simply based on their experience (Gall et al., 2007). Utilizing a pretest and a posttest measure for student attitudes may have allowed students to become test-wise, thus influencing the results. In this instance, the

threat was reduced because of the extended time between administrations, 12-weeks for the pretest and posttest, and the fact that the order of the presentation of the subscales was altered from the pretest to the posttest.

To measure historical reasoning ability a rubric was used to assess student writing. Students were provided with the scoring rubric when they were asked to complete each essay. Because the rubric was used three times over the course of the study, students may have made improvements based on a better understanding of the rubric. This threat was minimized by the focus that was placed within the rubric on historical content of the writing. Although the same rubric was applied to each essay, each prompt targeted a different historical topic. The first essay was about the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the second prompt was on military conflicts of twentieth century America, and the third prompt was on the role the United States should have in the twenty-first century. The examination of historical knowledge and not an examination of writing skills limited the test-wise threat. Writing style may have improved, but the rubric measured elements of historical reasoning, which is less likely to improve simply based on repeated exposure to the rubric. The testing threat was also reduced because of the four weeks between the administrations of each writing sample.

The threats of compensatory rivalry and resentful demoralization of the comparison group are both based on the perceptions of students in their group. Compensatory rivalry, or the John Henry effect, may occur when the comparison group becomes motivated to perform by what they perceive is a rivalry with the experimental group (Gall et al., 2007.). The resentful demoralization of the comparison group is described by Gall et al (2007) as the effect that occurs when a comparison group becomes discouraged by what is perceived to be the lack of a desirable treatment that is available to the experimental group. Both of these threats were minimized

because the research was conducted in two separate schools where the two groups under investigation did not have knowledge of each other.

The methods used to score the essays may also be considered a limitation. The essays were not blindly scored and therefore the teacher-participants may have been influenced in their scoring of the essays. To limit this threat, 40 essays were chosen at random and scored by a group of trained educators with no connection to the study.

**External validity.** Gall et al. (2007) define external validity “as the extent to which the results of a research study can be generalized to individuals and situations beyond those involved in the study” (p. 640). Threats to external validity are centered on the population that was under investigation and the environmental conditions that were present throughout the research.

In this study, population validity could be an issue for future researchers. The population that was selected for this study was a sample of convenience that was drawn from intact eighth grade groups within two upper-middle class communities. The results are only applicable to the specific sample within these two upper-middle class communities. The findings from this study may be generalized to this local population, however, applying these findings beyond the local communities or grade level might not produce similar results. In order to make such an assumption, this study may need to be replicated with the incorporation of different grade levels and students from various socio-economic populations.

Ecological validity is concerned with the extent that the results of the study can be generalized from the environmental factors that were created during the research to different environmental conditions (Gall et al., 2007). Threats to ecological validity will be reduced if future researchers parallel the environmental characteristics of this study.

The most significant limitation that emerged from this research was the threat of multiple-treatment interference. This threat occurs when participants are exposed to more than one experimental treatment (Gall et. al., 2007). During the analysis of the data collected from this research it became apparent that the writing scores from the nonthematic-based group were significantly higher than the scores for the treatment group. An investigation into these scores revealed that the comparison group was additionally involved with a systemic writing program. The writing program was not an aspect of the social studies curriculum, but provided students with time and support to improve writing skills. The means of the pre and post test data on the subscale of Writing Tasks from the SATSSRT and the information shared during the focus group meetings confirmed that essay writing was a more routine aspect of the instruction for the nonthematic-based group than for the treatment group. To address this threat, the dependent variable Essay 1 was used as a covariate for the comparison of posttest results for research question one and the Writing Tasks variable was used as a covariate in the analysis of research question two.

### **Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research**

Common issues of trustworthiness of qualitative research may have been evidenced within this study when addressing the third research question. These include: truth value of the information obtained, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2007). The truth value refers to the extent to which the information is credible. Methods to establish truth value include prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources (Creswell, 2007). To establish transferability the researcher must supply a detailed description of the research to guide future investigators. “It is... not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the database that

makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). The limitations of dependability and confirmability are best addressed through the independent review of the research process (Creswell, 2007).

**Truth value.** To establish the truth value of the focus group data the researcher utilized persistent observation and prolonged engagement with the subjects to establish trust with the individuals who were under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To obtain persistent observation, the researcher conducted at least 10 site visits to each of the groups. The researcher held three meetings of each focus group in an attempt to establish prolonged engagement. In a focus group setting the data may be influenced by the group situation and group dynamics. It is possible that the composition of the group may influence what individual subjects may say, or not say (Vicsek, 2010). To limit conformity, Morgan and Kruger (1993), described the importance of the researcher establishing trust and openness through the initial group instructions and subsequent questions that emphasize a wide range of experience .

In addition to prolonged engagement, the triangulation of data was accomplished by converging different forms of data collection techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this method of different data collection modes may include “...questionnaire, observation, testing or different designs” (p.306). This present study used a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) which allowed the researcher to use quantitative data from a pre-post questionnaire and the assessment of writing samples and converge it with the data obtained through the focus group interviews. The consistency of specific and factual data items were cross-checked (Holtzhausen, 2001). For example, the statistically significant results of research question one were cross checked with the frequency data and specific responses from the focus group data.

**Transferability.** To establish transferability, a rich description of the methods and procedures were provided. A background description of the sample, setting, and questions used in the focus group interviews were included.

**Dependability and confirmability.** Dependability and confirmability are established through the audit of the research process. Examining the process of the inquiry establishes the dependability where an examination of the data obtained attests to the confirmability of the research. The independent auditor followed the audit trail process that was described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The process included the employment of an auditor or second party who became familiar with the study and its methodology, findings, and conclusions in order to audit the research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The auditor examined the raw data, notes, data reduction, analysis, and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). See Appendix J for a diagram of the audit trail.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

There are many who have advocated for an increased focus on critical thinking skills in education (Marzano, 2010). With the intense focus on improving writing and math scores it is vital that future research continue to investigate how to effectively increase students' ability to analyze and synthesize information. In a world in which information is available in a constant stream it is more important than ever to equip students with the necessary tools to process and evaluate it. With limited research into social studies programs that provide students with these tools, it is important that future studies remain focused on keeping social studies relevant. The findings from this current study provide a compelling argument for thematic instruction that may guide future investigations into social studies instruction. A lack of research exists that is specific



to the incorporation of high-level strategies to analyze, interpret, and communicate information about the past (De La Paz, 2005).

Research always captures a moment in time. Obvious areas of future research include a study that includes a larger sample, different grade levels, and is longitudinal in design. The remainder of this section will discuss specific implications that emerged as a result of this research. Recommendations in this section are focused on investigations into: specific classroom activities that promote historical thinking, a measure of content knowledge, a writing program that could be incorporated into a thematic-based curriculum, teacher attributes that foster historical understanding, and qualitative studies that focus on the delivery of the curriculum.

### **Specific Classroom Activities that Promote Historical Thinking**

The findings that were described in research question one provided support for continued investigation into the effects of thematic-based social studies programs. Research question one evaluated students' attitudes towards social studies related tasks and historical reasoning abilities. Although students from the thematic-based group demonstrated attitudes towards social studies that were more positive compared to the nonthematic-based group, these attitudes did not lead significantly higher historical reasoning abilities. Areas of future research that emerged from this inquiry would include the investigation into specific aspects of the thematic-based curriculum that encouraged positive attitudes.

Based on the data gathered and analyzed for research question three, student responses indicated that those in the thematic-based group more often related critical thinking skills to the curriculum than the students from the nonthematic-based group. A future study could focus on specific types of critical thinking that are related to this form of instruction. It was hypothesized that the thematic-based delivery would produce students with higher levels of historical thinking, unfortunately, when the essay tests were used as a measure, this hypothesis was not supported.

Therefore, future research could investigate the specific assignments and routines within a thematic-based social studies curriculum that do promote historical reasoning by using a measure that reflects a variety of characteristics associated with historical reasoning.

Evidence from the focus group data suggested that students in the experimental condition were involved in several performance-based assessments. These assessments may have led to high levels of discourse and an increased level of historical thinking, but no specific measure was available. The identification of these specific elements could lead to the creation of instrumentation that could isolate the skill of writing from historical reasoning.

### **A Measure of Content Knowledge**

The multiple choice tests that were included in this research contained questions that were related to but not directly connected to the units of study that were analyzed in this study. The findings from the multiple choice tests revealed no statistical difference between the two groups. A future study that examined a thematic approach for social studies instruction and the effect on content knowledge would answer an important question related to this curriculum. Does a focus on themes impact students' content knowledge in social studies?

### **A Writing Program Incorporated into a Thematic-based Curriculum**

The unanticipated findings related to the writing program that was in place in the school which housed the comparison group provided another area of future research. An investigation into a writing program that could support a thematic-based social studies program could offer a way to foster both writing skills and thematic-based social studies.

### **Teacher Attributes that Foster Historical Thinking**

The theme of teacher emerged from the nonthematic-based focus group but was hardly mentioned by members of the thematic-based group. There is an extensive body of research that

exists that supports the importance of quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999, Marzano, 2007), therefore, it would be interesting to examine differences between student-based and teacher-based classrooms especially since previous research has pointed to the fact that most social studies teachers use a textbook centered approach (VanSledright, 2011). Some aspects of the treatment required the teacher to be a facilitator of knowledge rather than the owner of the information. Determining if specific teacher attributes are necessary to teach in a thematic-based curriculum would be essential in the efforts to create a teacher training program. An investigation into this phenomenon could reveal interesting and important results.

A teacher training program that is based on the work of Project Phoenix (Little et. al, 2007) could be incorporated to train teachers who have not yet utilized a thematic-based approach. A comparison study that includes these newly trained with those who have been trained using a traditional approach would help to determine the success of the training program and identify areas of weakness.

### **In-depth Qualitative Studies**

Future qualitative researchers could examine multiple aspects of a thematic curriculum. The present research included participants from both the thematic-based and nonthematic-based groups, future research could be dedicated to specific analysis of the thematic-based group. Research objectives could examine the perspective of teachers in a thematic curriculum, the role of the teacher, and how student interactions in a thematic-based setting influence historical thinking.

The research possibilities could include teacher interviews and observations. Future investigations should incorporate formal classroom observations that would target interactions between students and teachers. Classroom observations would also be utilized to collect data

related to student collaboration with the intent of determining how student interaction fosters historical thinking. Focus group members could also be observed in classes other than social studies. This would allow the researcher to develop a deeper description of the students included in the focus group.

### **Chapter Summary**

The chapter described the investigation of thematic social studies instruction on grade 8 students' historical reasoning abilities and attitudes towards social studies related tasks. Chapter five concluded this research study with an overview of the research, discussion of the findings, connections to literature, a description of the limitations, and implications for education and future research.

Since social studies instruction is an essential aspect of the development of active citizens, the goal of this study was to provide support for a thematic-based social studies program that would inspire and challenge students. Through the applications of themes such as wealth and conflict, this study analyzed a learning environment designed to promote historical thinking. Areas of future research include investigations into specific classroom activities that promote historical thinking, a writing program that would be incorporated into a thematic-based curriculum, teacher attributes that influence historical understanding, and in-depth qualitative studies focused on thematic social studies instruction.

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## **Appendix A. Letters of Consent**



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear (Superintendent's name):

I have been a teacher for eight years and am currently beginning my fourth year in a doctoral program at Western Connecticut State University. I am in the process of completing the necessary coursework to earn my degree. An essential aspect of my course work is my doctoral dissertation. I am seeking your permission to allow your students to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I will be asking students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contains six sections and can be completed in 20 minutes. The survey will be conducted during school hours. I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and educators of your school. After these data are received, Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. I will be sending out a second permission letter explaining that aspect of the study in early 2011.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your district's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to allow the students of \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from the questionnaires will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. Individual surveys will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students. Sincerely,

Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree that the study describe above can be conducted in \_\_\_\_\_ Public Schools.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear Principal \_\_\_\_\_,

I have been a teacher for eight years and am currently beginning my fourth year in a doctoral program at Western Connecticut State University. I am in the process of completing the necessary coursework to earn my degree. An essential aspect of my course work is my doctoral dissertation. I am seeking your permission to allow your students to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I will be asking students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contains six sections and can be completed in 20 minutes. The survey will be conducted during school hours. I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and educators of your school. After these data are received, Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. I will be sending out a second permission letter explaining that aspect of the study in early 2011.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your school's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to allow your school to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from the questionnaires will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. Individual surveys will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students.

Sincerely,

Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree to allow the students of \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear (Teacher),

I have been a teacher for eight years and am currently beginning my fourth year in a doctoral program at Western Connecticut State University. I am in the process of completing the necessary coursework to earn my degree. An essential aspect of my course work is my doctoral dissertation. I am seeking your permission to allow your students to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I will be asking students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contains six sections and can be completed in 20 minutes. The survey will be conducted during school hours. I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and educators of your school. After these data are received, Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. I will be sending out a second permission letter explaining that aspect of the study in early 2011.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to allow your classroom to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from the questionnaires will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. The information gathered from this research will not be used to evaluate or assess any individuals. Individual surveys will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students.

Sincerely,

Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree to allow my classes to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I have been a teacher at Middlebrook School in Wilton, Connecticut for eight years and am currently beginning my fourth year in a doctoral program at Western Connecticut State University. I am in the process of completing the necessary coursework to earn my degree. An essential aspect of my course work is my doctoral dissertation. I am seeking your permission to allow your child to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I will be asking students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contains six sections and can be completed in 20 minutes. The survey will be conducted during school hours. After these data are received, Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. I will be sending out a second permission letter explaining that aspect of the study in early 2011.

I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and educators of the school. I believe that there are no known risks related to participating in this research study, since participation in this project resembles participating in regular classroom activities.

Your child may or may not directly benefit from this study. At the very least, he/she will learn more about who he/she is as a learner and his/her perceptions towards social studies.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your child will also be receiving a letter and will be asked to assent to the study. If you agree to allow your student to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to your student's social studies teacher. Your child may agree to participate in all or part of the study and ask to be removed from the study at any time.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from questionnaires will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. Individual surveys will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students.

Sincerely,

Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree to allow my child to participate in the study.

|                             |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| _____                       | _____     |
| Please Print Name           | Signature |
| _____                       | _____     |
| Please Print Student's Name | Date      |



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Your parents may have already talked to you about being in a research study. This is part of a research project at Western Connecticut State University.

You are being asked to take part in a research study, because we are trying to learn more about how to improve students' social studies skills.

If you agree to be in this study, in your social studies class, you will participate in a questionnaire along with your usual social studies instruction. Mr. Cloutier will record the results of the survey including your social studies knowledge. You will be asked to respond to a short questionnaire regarding your knowledge in science and social studies, writing ability, and experiences with technology.

In Part 1 of this study, I will be you to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contains six sections and can be completed in 20 minutes. The survey will be conducted during school hours. After these data are received, Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about your growth in social studies and the social studies curriculum.

The research will take place in your social studies class during the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011. You will receive an additional letter prior to the start of Part 2 of the study.

We believe that there are no known risks relate to participating in this research study, since participation in this project resembles participating in regular classroom activities.

You may or may not directly benefit from this study. At the very least, you will learn more about yourself as a learner and work on your writing skills in social studies.

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say "yes" you can still decide not to do this.

If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop. The Social Studies research however, will be part of your regular classroom activities and you can still participate in the activities, even if you don't want

to be a part of the research study. Your individual results will not be shared with other students, teachers, school administrators, or parents.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call Mr. Cloutier @ (203)-762-8388, send him an email ([cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)), or ask him the next time you see him.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

|           |       |                 |
|-----------|-------|-----------------|
| _____     | _____ |                 |
| Name      | Date  |                 |
| _____     | _____ |                 |
| Signature | Age   | Grade in School |





Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear (Superintendent's name):

I am seeking your permission to allow your students to continue to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I asked students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contained six sections related to Self-Efficacy towards social studies. Now that this data has been received, I am seeking permission to begin Part 2 of the study.

Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. This data collection will involve the use of 3 writing prompts that will be given at 6 to 8 week intervals during the 20-week observation period. The prompts will be scored using a rubric created by researchers at UCONN. Training on this rubric will be provided by the researcher.

A focus group of eight students will also be included in this aspect of the study. This focus group will meet 3 times for 30-45 minutes during non-instructional time. The intent of this group is to define the attitudes of perceptions of students in social studies. These meetings will be videotaped for data collection purposes only.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your district's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to allow the students of \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from the writing prompts will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. Individual scores will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree that the study describe above can be conducted in \_\_\_\_\_ Public Schools.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear (Teacher),

I am seeking your permission to allow your students to continue to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I asked students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contained six sections related to Self-Efficacy towards social studies. Now that this data has been received, I am seeking permission to begin Part 2 of the study.

Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. This data collection will involve the use of 3 writing prompts that will be given at 6 to 8 week intervals during the 20-week observation period. The prompts will be scored using a rubric created by researchers at UCONN. Training on this rubric will be provided by the researcher.

A focus group of eight students, four from each teacher, will also be included in this aspect of the study. This focus group will meet 3 times for 30-45 minutes during non-instructional time. The intent of this group is to define the attitudes of perceptions of students in social studies. These meetings will be videotaped for data collection purposes only.

Follow-up meetings with the researcher may be requested for clarification of the implementation of the curriculum. A teacher demographic survey will also be administered to accurately describe the conditions of the research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to allow your classroom to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from the writing prompts will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. The information gathered from this research will not be used to evaluate or assess any individuals. Individual scores will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students.

Sincerely,

Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree to allow my classes to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_

|                   |           |      |
|-------------------|-----------|------|
| Please Print Name | Signature | Date |
|-------------------|-----------|------|

Certification Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of years teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years in current teaching assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest degree earned: \_\_\_\_\_



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am seeking your permission to allow your child to continue to participate in the study that is being conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ School. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University IRB.

This study is designed to examine attitudes towards and performance in social studies. In Part 1 of this study, I asked students to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. The questionnaire contained six sections related to Self-Efficacy towards social studies. Now that this data has been received, I am seeking permission to begin Part 2 of the study.

Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about student performance and the social studies curriculum. This data collection will involve the use of 3 writing prompts that will be given at 6 to 8 week intervals during the 20-week observation period. The prompts will be scored using a rubric created by researchers at UCONN. Training on this rubric will be provided by the researcher.

A focus group of eight students will also be included in this aspect of the study. This focus group will meet 3 times for 30-45 minutes during non-instructional time. The intent of this group is to define the attitudes of perceptions of students in social studies. These meetings will be videotaped for data collection purposes only. Your child may or may not be selected to participate in the focus group. If your child is selected to join the group you may allow him/her to opt out of the focus group but continue with the other aspects of the study.

I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and educators of the school. I believe that there are no known risks related to participating in this research study, since participation in this project resembles participating in regular classroom activities.

Your child may or may not directly benefit from this study. At the very least, he/she will learn more about who he/she is as a learner and his/her perceptions towards social studies.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your child will also be receiving a letter and will be asked to

ascent to the study. If you agree to allow your student to participate in this study, please sign the form and return it to your student's social studies teacher. Your child may agree to participate in all or part of the study and ask to be removed from the study at any time.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality is guaranteed; all responses from the writing prompt and the focus meetings will be coded to be sure that all data is held in the strictest confidence. Individual scores on the prompts and responses will not be shared with teachers, administrators, parents, or other students.

Sincerely,

Andrew Cloutier  
[cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)  
Middlebrook School  
131 School Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

I agree to allow my child to participate Part II of the study.

|                             |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| _____                       | _____     |
| Please Print Name           | Signature |
| _____                       | _____     |
| Please Print Student's Name | Date      |



Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Your parents may have already talked to you about being in a research study. This is part of research project at Western Connecticut State University.

You are being asked to take part in a research study, because we are trying to learn more about how to improve students' social studies skills.

If you agree to be in this study, in your social studies class, you will participate in a questionnaire along with your usual social studies instruction. In Part 1 of this study, I asked you to complete a brief questionnaire about social studies. Now that this data has been received, I am seeking your permission to participate in Part 2 of the study. Mr. Cloutier will record the results of your scores on 3 writing prompts that will be scored by your teacher.

Part 2 of the study will involve collecting information about your growth in social studies and the social studies curriculum. This research will take place in your social studies class during the winter of 2011 to the spring of 2011.

A focus group of eight students will also be included in this aspect of the study. This focus group will meet 3 times for 30-45 minutes during non-instructional time. The intent of this group is to define the attitudes of perceptions of students in social studies. These meetings will be videotaped for data collection purposes only. You may or may not be selected to participate in the focus group. If you are selected to join the group you may choose to opt out of the focus group but continue with the other aspects of the study.

We believe that there are no known risks relate to participating in this research study, since participation in this project resembles participating in regular classroom activities.

You may or may not directly benefit from this study. At the very least, you will learn more about yourself as a learner and work on your writing skills in social studies.

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say “yes” you can still decide not to do this.

If you don’t want to be in this study, you don’t have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don’t want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop. The Social Studies research however, will be part of your regular classroom activities and you can still participate in the activities, even if you don’t want to be a part of the research study. Your individual results will not be shared with other students, teachers, school administrators, or parents.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can call Mr. Cloutier @ (203)-762-8388, send him an email ([cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us](mailto:cloutiera@wilton.k12.ct.us)), or ask him the next time you see him.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| _____     | _____           |
| Name      | Date            |
| _____     | _____           |
| Signature | Age             |
|           | Grade in School |



**Appendix B. Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks**  
**Pre Study Questionnaire**

**Student Attitudes  
Towards Social Studies Related Tasks  
Pre-Study Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is being administered to all students participating in the Social Studies Research Study. Your responses are confidential and will not be associated with your name or identity. Only the researchers will know your answers to the questions and they will not be shared with your teachers, parents or other students.

You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to, just skip it and go to the next question. Only group responses will be reported.

**Section A – Student Information**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. School \_\_\_\_\_
3. Grade \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your date of birth? Year \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_
5. Gender(please circle one): Male / Female
6. Race/Ethnicity (please circle one):
  - a) White
  - b) Black
  - c) Hispanic
  - d) Asian or Pacific Islander
  - e) American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - f) Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_
- 7a. Do you plan to go to college?    \_\_\_No                    \_\_\_Maybe/Not sure                    \_\_\_Yes
- 7b. If yes, what do you plan to study? \_\_\_\_\_
- 8a. Do you have access to a computer at home?    \_\_\_No    \_\_\_Sometimes    \_\_\_ Yes
- 8b. If you do have access to a computer at home, does it have access to the Internet?  
      \_\_\_ No                    \_\_\_ Yes

## Section B – Interest in science

### Instructions

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the response scale *Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Undecided (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your opinion.

|   | Strongly<br>Disagree |   |   |   | Strongly<br>Agree |
|---|----------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| 1. I enjoy going to science class.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 2. I like learning about science in my free time.                                     | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 3. Learning about science topics interests me.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 4. I plan to become a scientist when I graduate.                                      | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 5. When I graduate, I would like to work with people who make discoveries in science. | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 6. A career in science interests me.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 7. I am interested in pursuing a science career in the future.                        | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 8. I am interested in pursuing a college degree in science.                           | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |

## Section C - Technology

### Instructions

Please indicate your level of confidence in performing each of the tasks below. Use this scale to indicate your level of confidence - *Not Confident (1), Slightly Confident (2), Moderately Confident (3), Quite Confident (4), Extremely Confident (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your confidence level.

*How confident are you that you can...*

|  | Not<br>Confident |   |   |   | Extremely<br>Confident |
|--|------------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. complete your homework using computers?         | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 2. search for information in the Internet?         | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 3. learn how to use a new technology?              | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 4. complete a computer task assigned in school?    | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 5. judge the accuracy of information on a website? | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 6. communicate effectively using technology?       | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |

## Section D - Writing tasks

*How confident are you that you can...*

|   | Not<br>Confident |   |   |   | Extremely<br>Confident |
|---|------------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. write a well organized essay on a given topic? | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 2. draft a persuasive position on a given topic?  | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 3. incorporate data into your essays?             | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 4. write about science topics?                    | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 5. write a convincing argument?                   | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |

## Section E - Interest in social studies

### Instructions

Please indicate your level of interest for each of the statements below. Use the following scale to indicate your level of interest - *Not interesting (1)*, *Slightly interesting (2)*, *Moderately interesting (3)*, *Quite interesting (4)*, *Extremely interesting (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your confidence level.

|  | Not<br>Interesting |   |   |   | Extremely<br>Interesting |
|--|--------------------|---|---|---|--------------------------|
|  | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |
| 1. Overall, how interesting do you find your social studies class?                   | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |
| 2. When you hear about current events in the news, how interesting do you find them? | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |
| 3. How interesting do you find learning about other countries?                       | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |
| 4. How interesting are the different topics you study in this class?                 | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |
| 5. How interesting are the assignments you are given for this class?                 | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |
| 6. How interesting do you find learning about international conflicts?               | 1                  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                        |

## Section F - Social perspective taking skills

### Instructions

Please indicate how often you do each of the behaviors below using the response scale - *Almost never (1)*, *Once in a while (2)*, *Sometimes (3)*, *Often (4)*, *Almost all the time (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your confidence level.

|  |   | Almost<br>Never |   |   | Almost<br>All the Time |
|--|---|-----------------|---|---|------------------------|
|  | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 1. How often do you try to figure out how the people around you view different situations?                   | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 2. If you are having a disagreement with your friends, how often do you try to imagine how they are feeling? | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 3. How often do you try to look at everybody's side of a problem before you make a decision?                 | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 4. When you are upset at someone, how often do you try to "put yourself in his or her shoes"?                | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 5. How often do you try to understand your classmates better by trying to figure out what they are thinking? | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 6. Before criticizing others, how often do you imagine how you would feel if you were in their place?        | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 7. To understand your friends better, how often do you imagine how things look from their perspective?       | 1 | 2               | 3 | 4 | 5                      |

## Section G – U.S. History Multiple Choice Questions

### Instructions

*Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People who live in urban areas are residents of \_\_\_\_\_.
- rural communities
  - small towns
  - cities
  - country villages
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What term best describes a person who organizes and operates a new business and takes greater than normal financial risks in order to do so?
- boss
  - entrepreneur
  - economist
  - landlord
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. In 1910, a Model T costs \$850 but by 1926 it costs only \$290. What is the most likely reason for the drop in price?
- The Ford Motor Company moved all its factories overseas.
  - Company managers paid workers lower wages in 1926 than they did in 1910.
  - The designers used cheaper materials in the manufacturing of the cars.
  - Between 1910 and 1926, Henry Ford introduced the assembly line to make his cars.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What is the most valuable and abundant natural resource in the Middle East?
- nuclear energy
  - coal
  - iron ore
  - petroleum
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What are the three branches or parts of the United States government?
- executive, legislative, judicial
  - congress, president, courts
  - local, national, international
  - county, state, federal

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. In the 1840s, Dorothea Dix, a New England teacher, led the movement to improve the awful conditions common then in prisons, insane asylums, and almshouses for the poor. Her work resulted in important legislation that did much to improve those institutions. How can Ms. Dix be best classified?
- as a civil rights activist
  - as a social reformer
  - as a war protester
  - as a lawmaker
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Ed's father recently invented a new electric barbecue grill that is more energy-efficient and easier to use than any now being sold. To protect his invention, what must Ed's father do?
- get it patented
  - start an ad campaign
  - keep it a secret
  - find investors for it
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The United States, Canada, and Mexico operate as federal systems. So do eight other countries around the world. Since there are many more than eleven countries, federalism is not the typical way most nations organize their governments. Which of the following best identifies federalism?
- a system where all power is placed in the central government
  - a system where the local, state, and national governments share equal power
  - a system with a weak central government with most of the power in the hands of the nation's states, counties, and cities
  - a system of shared power between units of government at the national and state levels
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Which of the following lists identifies Native American tribes?
- Cherokee, Seminole, Iroquois, and Navaho
  - Iraqi, Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite
  - Hawaiian, Alaskan, Puerto Rican, and Nebraskan
  - Bears, Colts, Raiders, and Eagles
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. In the United States, which of the following groups has the authority to declare a law unconstitutional?
- Supreme Court
  - Joint Chiefs of Staff
  - Senate
  - House of Representatives

- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Which of the following is the central bank of the United States that oversees all the other banks across the country?
- a. Federal Reserve
  - b. Internal Revenue Service
  - c. Treasury Department
  - d. Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Which of the following is an example of a pandemic?
- a. an outbreak of measles in the fifth grade at Oak Street School
  - b. a program to immunize pre-school children with a flu vaccine
  - c. a contagious disease that spreads to all parts of the world
  - d. a plan to improve student health by eliminating junk food

*Thank you for your time!*

The Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies  
Related Tasks Pre-study questionnaire  
was adapted with permission from

**The GlobalEd 2 Project**  
**Global Climate Change**  
**Student Pre-simulation Questionnaire 2010©**

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and

**The National Social Studies League 2009**

Grades 7-8-9

**Appendix C. Student Attitudes Towards Social Studies Related Tasks Post-Study  
Questionnaire**



**Student Attitudes Towards  
Social Studies Related Tasks  
Student Post-Study Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is being administered to all students participating in the Social Studies Research Study. Your responses are confidential and will not be associated with your name or identity. Only the researcher will know your answers to the questions and they will not be shared with your teachers, parents or other students.

You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to, just skip it and go to the next question. Only group responses will be reported.

**Section A– Student Information**

1. Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. School \_\_\_\_\_
3. Grade \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you plan to go to college?      \_\_\_No                      \_\_\_Maybe/Not sure                      \_\_\_Yes
- 4b. if yes, what do you plan to study? \_\_\_\_\_

**Section B- Multiple Choice Questions**

**Instructions**

*Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What are the two major political parties in the United States today?
  - a. Liberals and Conservatives
  - b. Whigs and Federalists
  - c. Democrats and Republicans
  - d. Populists and Progressives
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Under the federal Constitution, which of the following is an example of a concurrent power?
  - a. coining money
  - b. negotiating treaties
  - c. levying taxes
  - d. operating a postal service
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What role does the United States Supreme Court play in the federal government?
  - a. It approves all the federal judges appointed by the President.
  - b. It reviews all the tax legislation passed by Congress.
  - c. The Court interprets the constitutionality of laws involved in cases it reviews.
  - d. The nine judges administer the Department of Justice.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The purpose of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 was to \_\_\_\_\_.
- tighten regulations for adopting children
  - promote basic education reform in public schools
  - improve housing opportunities for low income families
  - establish safety standards for imported toys
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. How are features such as roads, airports, electric grids, and sewage systems identified when describing how they support the economy of a region?
- as a natural resource base
  - as a tax free zone
  - as an historic site
  - as infrastructure
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What does it mean when one country places an *embargo* on the goods of another?
- It places an official ban on trade.
  - It places a tax on imported goods.
  - It agrees to negotiate on trade policies.
  - It declares war over trade issues.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What is the Gross National Product (GNP) of a country?
- its annual national debt
  - value of its natural resources
  - profits from its largest businesses
  - value of its goods and services in a single year
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following is an example of lobbying?
- writing a letter to the head of the local library requesting longer Sunday hours
  - visiting a state lawmaker as a paid employee of a highway construction company to encourage her support for a new toll road
  - hosting a lunch for a relative who is running for the city council
  - talking with your parents about the high price of gasoline as a result of increased demand

- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Each of the following statements is an observation about the American presidency. Which one is a fact, not an opinion?
- The presidents of the United States were all great men.
  - The president of the United States is required by the Constitution to give a State of the Union message from time to time.
  - Men who served as members of Congress before becoming presidents have been the most successful presidents.
  - Candidates from larger states such as Texas and New York make better presidents than people from smaller states such as New Hampshire and Massachusetts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. President Woodrow Wilson viewed America's entry into World War I as an opportunity for the United States to \_\_\_\_\_.
- reshape the map of Europe so that the Allies would dominate
  - assert itself as the world's major military and naval power
  - shape a new international order based on the ideals of democracy
  - acquire territory in Europe from the defeated Germans and Austrians
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Which of the following is an *economic principle*?
- the law of supply and demand
  - a government system of checks and balances
  - a legal position arguing a person is innocent until proven guilty
  - the spatial concept that form follows function
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Soon after becoming President in 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt proposed a series of government programs that became known as \_\_\_\_\_.
- The Great Society
  - The Square Deal
  - The New Frontier
  - The New Deal

## Section C – Interest in science

### **Instructions**

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the response scale *Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Undecided (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your opinion.

|   | Strongly<br>Disagree |   |   |   | Strongly<br>Agree |
|---|----------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| 1. I enjoy going to science class.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 2. I like learning about science in my free time.                                     | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 3. Learning about science topics interests me.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 4. I plan to become a scientist when I graduate.                                      | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 5. When I graduate, I would like to work with people who make discoveries in science. | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 6. A career in science interests me.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 7. I am interested in pursuing a science career in the future.                        | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 8. I am interested in pursuing a college degree in science.                           | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |

## Section D - Technology

### **Instructions**

Please indicate your level of confidence in performing each of the tasks below. Use this scale to indicate your level of confidence - *Not Confident (1), Slightly Confident (2), Moderately Confident (3), Quite Confident (4), Extremely Confident (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your confidence level.

#### ***How confident are you that you can...***

|  | Not<br>Confident |   |   |   | Extremely<br>Confident |
|--|------------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. complete your homework using computers?         | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 2. search for information in the Internet?         | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 3. learn how to use a new technology?              | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 4. complete a computer task assigned in school?    | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 5. judge the accuracy of information on a website? | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 6. communicate effectively using technology?       | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |

## Section E - Writing tasks

| <i>How confident are you that you can...</i>      | Not<br>Confident |          |          | Extremely<br>Confident |          |
|---|------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|----------|
| 1. write a well organized essay on a given topic? | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>               | <b>5</b> |
| 2. draft a persuasive position on a given topic?  | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>               | <b>5</b> |
| 3. incorporate data into your essays?             | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>               | <b>5</b> |
| 4. write about science topics?                    | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>               | <b>5</b> |
| 10. write a convincing argument?                  | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>               | <b>5</b> |

## Section F - Interest in social studies

### Instructions

Please indicate your level of interest for each of the statements below. Use the following scale to indicate your level of interest - *Not interesting (1), Slightly interesting (2), Moderately interesting (3), Quite interesting (4), Extremely interesting (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your confidence level.

|  | Not<br>Interesting |          |          | Extremely<br>Interesting |          |
|--|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| 1. Overall, how interesting do you find your social studies class?                   | <b>1</b>           | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b> |
| 2. When you hear about current events in the news, how interesting do you find them? | <b>1</b>           | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b> |
| 3. How interesting do you find learning about other countries?                       | <b>1</b>           | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b> |
| 4. How interesting are the different topics you study in this class?                 | <b>1</b>           | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b> |
| 5. How interesting are the assignments you are given for this class?                 | <b>1</b>           | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b> |
| 6. How interesting do you find learning about international conflicts?               | <b>1</b>           | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b> |

## Section G - Social perspective taking skills

**Instructions**

Please indicate how often you do each of the behaviors below using the response scale - *Almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), Almost all the time (5)*. Circle the response that best represents your confidence level.

|  | Almost<br>Never |   |   |   | Almost<br>All the Time |
|--|-----------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. How often do you try to figure out how the people around you view different situations?                   | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 2. If you are having a disagreement with your friends, how often do you try to imagine how they are feeling? | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 3. How often do you try to look at everybody's side of a problem before you make a decision?                 | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 4. When you are upset at someone, how often do you try to “put yourself in his or her shoes”?                | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 5. How often do you try to understand your classmates better by trying to figure out what they are thinking? | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 6. Before criticizing others, how often do you imagine how you would feel if you were in their place?        | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |
| 7. To understand your friends better, how often do you imagine how things look from their perspective?       | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                      |

*Thank you for your time!*

Student Attitudes Towards  
 Social Studies Related Tasks  
 Student Post-Study Questionnaire  
 was adapted with permission from  
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**Global Climate Change**  
**Student Post-simulation Questionnaire 2010©**  
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 and  
**The National Social Studies League 2009**  
 Grades 7-8-9

**Appendix D. Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric**

## Social Studies Research Study Writing Prompt Scoring Rubric

Overall scoring rubric for persuasive writing posted within Social Studies Research Study  
Used with permission from GlobalEd 2 simulations, 2010 (adapted from Midgette, Haria & MacAthur, 2007)

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Category</i>            | <i>Definition</i>   |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|
| 0            | <b>Incomplete Response</b> | <u>No Claim Provided</u><br>Response to topic. The essay responds to the topic in some way but does not provide a claim related to the issue.   |
| 1            | <b>Undeveloped</b>         | <u>Claim Provided but No Evidence</u><br>Undeveloped argument. The essay provides a claim but no evidence is given to support the claim, or the evidence given is unrelated to or inconsistent with the claim, or it is incoherent.   |
| 2            | <b>Minimal Response</b>    | <u>Clear Claim + some Evidence</u><br>Minimally developed argument. The essay states a clear claim and gives one or two pieces of evidence to support the claim, but reasoning is not provided linking the claim to the evidence or is underdeveloped.  |
| 3            | <b>Partial Response</b>    | <u>Clear Claim + Evidence +incomplete reasoning</u><br>Partially developed argument. The essay states a claim and gives evidence to support the claim plus some explanation or elaboration of the reasons. The reasons are generally plausible though not enough information is provided to convince a reader (audience awareness) (3A). There may be some inconsistency, irrelevant information, or problems with organization and clarity (3B). |
| 4            | <b>Good Response</b>       | <u>Claim + Evidence + Reasoning</u><br>Well-developed argument. The essay states a clear claim and gives evidence to support the claim. The reasons are explained clearly and elaborated using information that could be convincing to the reader. The essay is generally well organized and may include a concluding statement. The posting is free of inconsistencies and irrelevancies that will weaken the argument.                          |
| 5            | <b>Excellent Response</b>  | <u>Claim + Evidence + Reasoning PLUS opposing opinions or alternate solutions.</u><br>Elaborated and addresses opposition. Meets the criteria for previous level. In addition, the essay deals with opposing opinions, even with refutations or alternative solutions. Overall, the posting is persuasive.  |



## **Appendix E. Writing Prompts**

## Persuasive Essay on Social Studies: Prompt 1

**Prompt:** The presidency of FDR has positively changed the way we live as Americans. In essay form, defend or deny this statement. You may include aspects of his domestic economic policy (New Deal) and foreign policy (involvement in WWII) **or** focus on one or the other. Include specific historical evidence to support your claim. Be sure to provide the reasoning that explains and/or interprets the evidence you have provided. You may also make connections to current economic situations and international issues that are related.

**Assignment:** Write a **persuasive** essay stating your point of view on the prompt above. Give evidence to support your answer and provide your reasoning why this evidence supports your claim. Use your knowledge about history, the New Deal, World War II, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century to help you write your response. You will have a total of 40 minutes to complete your essay.

### **Directions**

Take a few minutes to plan your paper. Make notes on the other side of this page. An outline or a graphic organizer may help you plan as well.

1. Decide if you **agree** or **disagree** that FDR has positively changed the way we live as Americans. Take **one** position.
2. Think of evidence that supports your position. You may include both the New Deal and WWII or focus on one of the two.
3. Think of reasons why this evidence supports your position.
4. Organize your ideas carefully.
5. Manage your time to allow for **writing** a closing statement.

After you have planned the paper, begin to write. Finally, proofread your finished paper to check for correct sentences, punctuation, and spelling.

Format courtesy GlobalEd, 2010

## **Persuasive Essay on Social Studies: Prompt 2**

**Prompt:** The United States was involved in several military conflicts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From World War I to the Gulf War the United States has used its military power to improve the way we live today. Your task for this prompt will be to choose **one** 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict (example: WWI or WWII) and describe how it improved (or not) the way we live. Include specific historical information as well as evidence to support your claim that the conflict made a positive (or negative) difference in the way we live today.

**Assignment:** Write a **persuasive** essay stating your point of view on the prompt above. Give evidence to support your answer and provide your reasoning why this evidence supports your claim. Use your knowledge about history, conflicts and wars, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century to help you write your response. You will have a total of 40 minutes to complete your essay.

### **Directions**

Take a few minutes to plan your paper. Make notes on the other side of this page. An outline or a graphic organizer may help you plan as well.

1. Decide if you **agree** or **disagree** that the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict has made a positive difference in the way we live today. Take **one** position.
2. Think of evidence that supports your position. Include evidence from **ONE** 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.
3. Think of reasons why this evidence supports your position.
4. Organize your ideas carefully.
5. Manage your time to allow for **writing** a closing statement.

After you have planned the paper, begin to write. Finally, proofread your finished paper to check for correct sentences, punctuation, and spelling.

Format courtesy GlobalEd, 2010

### **Persuasive Essay on Social Studies: Prompt 3**

**Prompt:** Following World War II the United States emerged as one of the world’s Super Powers. After achieving a victory in the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the U.S. became the world’s sole Super Power. As the only major power, the United States has a moral responsibility to be a world leader. Your task for this prompt will be to agree or disagree with that role and discuss the role of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Include specific historical information as well as evidence to support your claim that the United States has (or does not have) the moral responsibility to be a world leader.

**Assignment:** Write a **persuasive** essay stating your point of view on the prompt above. Give evidence to support your answer and provide your reasoning why this evidence supports your claim. Use your knowledge about history, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century to help you write your response.

#### **Questions to consider**

- How active should the United States be in world events that do not directly impact or involve the United States?
- Should the United States maintain the role of “World’s Policeman?” or Should the United States adopt a more isolationist policy?
- Does the United States have a moral responsibility to be a world leader?

You will have a total of 40 minutes to complete your essay.

#### **Directions**

Take a few minutes to plan your paper. Make notes on the other side of this page. An outline or a graphic organizer may help you plan as well.

1. Decide if you **agree** or **disagree** that the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict has made a positive difference in the way we live today. Take **one** position.
2. Think of evidence that supports your position. Include evidence from **ONE** 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.
3. Think of reasons why this evidence supports your position.
4. Organize your ideas carefully.
5. Manage your time to allow for **writing** a closing statement.

After you have planned the paper, begin to write. Finally, proofread your finished paper to check for correct sentences, punctuation, and spelling.

Format courtesy GlobalEd, 2010

**Appendix F. Instructions for Administering Writing Prompts**



## **Appendix G: Focus Group Questions**

## Focus Group Questions

The questions below were asked by the researcher during each of the focus groups meetings. Additional questions were asked as themes developed within the context of the focus group. The questions provided guided the discussion and allowed each participant to tell the story of his/her social studies curriculum as he/she perceived it.

1. What are your favorite subjects in school?
2. What aspects of these subjects make them your favorite?
3. What do you remember about your experiences in social studies in grades 6-8?
4. What do you think about the types of assignments you were asked to do in social studies this year?
5. What are examples of the skills and content knowledge you have learned this year in social studies?
6. Do you enjoy social studies more or less this year compared to previous years?
7. What do you wish you could do more of in social studies this year?
8. What would you like to do less of in social studies this year?
9. Do you feel you are growing as a learner in social studies?



**Appendix H. Frequency of Comments by Subjects in each Focus Group**

Table 36

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme     | Code      | Subordinate code                 | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-----------|-----------|----------------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|           |           |                                  | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Attitudes | Favorable | Benefits of cooperative learning | 0       | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4     |
| Towards   |           | Enjoyed depth                    | 0       | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 8     |
| Social    |           | Enjoyed Projects                 | 3       | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 15    |
| Studies   |           | Enjoyed subject matter           | 2       | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 9     |
|           |           | Favored interaction over tests   | 1       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|           |           | Style of teacher                 | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|           |           | Variety of subject matter        | 1       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|           | Total     |                                  | 7       | 7 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 40    |

Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme          | Code      | Subordinate code                         | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|----------------|-----------|--|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                |           |  | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Attitudes      | Less      | Class was not interesting/challenging    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Towards Social | Favorable | Disliked essays                          | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Studies        |           | Learned just for the test                | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | More creativity wanted                   | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Repetition                               | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Too many projects at the end of the year | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Type of test                             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Wanted more dates                        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|                |           | Wanted more depth                        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1     |
|                |           | Wanted more technology                   | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                |           | Total                                    |         | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0     |
| Total          |           |  | 7       | 7 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 44    |

Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme         | Code        | Subordinate code                | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|               |             |                                 | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum    | Assessment: | Learning style- self-assessment | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4     |
| Strategies,   | Process     | Project instead of tests        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Organization, |             | Study skills                    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| and           | Total       |                                 | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4     |
| Procedures    | Assessment: | Essay tests                     | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|               | Product     | Less written work               | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|               |             | More variety in test question   | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|               |             | Note-taking                     | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|               |             | Project                         | 1       | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 8     |
|               |             | Test                            | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|               | Total       |                                 | 1       | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 9     |

Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme             | Code          | Subordinate code         | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                   |               |                          | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum        | Collaboration | Interaction              | 0       | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3     |
| Strategies,       |               | Leadership               | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2     |
| Organization, and |               | Learned about myself     | 1       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Procedures        |               | Problems with group work | 0       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|                   |               | Role of collaboration    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2     |
|                   |               | Role play                | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                   | Total         |                          | 1       | 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 11    |

Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme             | Code       | Subordinate code        | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                   |            |                         | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum        | Fact-based | Fact recall             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Strategies,       | Knowledge  | Identify patterns       | 0       | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
| Organization, and |            | Learn just for the test | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Procedures        |            | Chronology              | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3     |
|                   |            | Note taking             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   |            | Study skills            | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   |            | Too much information    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   |            | Type of assignment      | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   |            | Type of quiz or test    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   |            | Use of textbook         | 1       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3     |
|                   |            | Total                   |         | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0     |

Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme  | Code    | Subordinate code       | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|--|---------|------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|  |         |                        | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum<br>Strategies,<br>Organization, and<br>Procedures | Teacher | Liked teacher          | 0       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|  |         | Role of teacher        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  |         | Teacher centered       | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  |         | Teacher feedback       | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  |         | Teacher made class fun | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  | Total   |                        | 0       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|  | Writing | Like to write          | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  |         | Not a good writer      | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1     |
|  |         | Too many essays        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  |         | Writing Process        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|  |         | Total                  |         | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0     |
| Total  |         |                        | 3       | 2 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 35    |

Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme           | Code              | Subordinate code            | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                 |                   |                             | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Higher Level    | Creativity        | Ability to express yourself | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1     |
| Thinking Skills |                   | Project                     | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|                 | Total             |                             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3     |
|                 | Critical Thinking | Application                 | 1       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3     |
|                 |                   | Comprehension               | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3     |
|                 |                   | Defending Ideas             | 1       | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6     |
|                 |                   | Historical Reasoning        | 5       | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 20    |
|                 |                   | Synthesize                  | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3     |
|                 | Total             |                             | 7       | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 35    |



Table 36 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme              | Code            | Subordinate code         | Student   |           |           |           |           |           |           |           | Total      |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
|                    |                 |                          | 1         | 2         | 3         | 4         | 5         | 6         | 7         | 8         |            |
| Higher Level       | Problem-solving | Analysis                 | 2         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0          |
| Thinking Skills    |                 | Debating                 | 2         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2          |
|                    |                 | Establishing connections | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0          |
|                    |                 | Interesting/engaging     | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 2          |
|                    |                 | Learn by doing           | 1         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 6          |
|                    |                 | Self-assessment          | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 2          |
|                    |                 | Use of technology        | 0         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 3          |
|                    | <b>Total</b>    |                          | <b>5</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>6</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>18</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>       |                 |                          | <b>12</b> | <b>6</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>13</b> | <b>6</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>56</b>  |
| <b>Grand Total</b> |                 |                          | <b>22</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>28</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>135</b> |

Table 37

*Themes, Codes, and Percentage of Responses from the Thematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme         | Code                 | Student |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | Total |
|---------------|----------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
|               |                      | 1       | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |       |
| Attitudes     | Favorable            | 7       | 7  | 5  | 3  | 3  | 7  | 4  | 4  | 40    |
| Towards S.S.  | Less Favorable       | 0       | 0  | 0  | 2  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 4     |
| Total         |                      | 7       | 7  | 5  | 5  | 4  | 7  | 5  | 4  | 44    |
| % of total    |                      | 16      | 16 | 11 | 11 | 9  | 16 | 11 | 9  |       |
| Curriculum    | Assessment: Process  | 0       | 0  | 1  | 0  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 0  | 4     |
| Strategies,   | Assessment: Product  | 1       | 0  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 1  | 0  | 9     |
| Organization, | Collaboration        | 1       | 0  | 4  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 11    |
| and           | Fact-based knowledge | 1       | 1  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 9     |
| Procedures    | Teacher              | 0       | 1  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 1     |
|               | Writing              | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1     |
| Total         |                      | 3       | 2  | 8  | 3  | 6  | 8  | 4  | 1  | 35    |
| % of total    |                      | 9       | 6  | 23 | 9  | 17 | 23 | 11 | 3  |       |
| Higher Level  | Creativity           | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 2  | 0  | 1  | 3     |
| Thinking      | Critical Thinking    | 7       | 4  | 4  | 3  | 3  | 5  | 5  | 4  | 35    |
| Skills        | Problem-solving      | 5       | 2  | 1  | 1  | 2  | 6  | 1  | 0  | 18    |
| Total         |                      | 12      | 6  | 5  | 4  | 5  | 13 | 6  | 5  | 56    |
| % of total    |                      | 21      | 11 | 9  | 7  | 9  | 23 | 11 | 9  |       |
| Grand Total   |                      | 22      | 15 | 18 | 12 | 15 | 28 | 15 | 10 | 135   |
| Total %       |                      | 16      | 11 | 13 | 9  | 11 | 21 | 11 | 7  |       |

Table 38

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme          | Code      | Subordinate code                 | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                |           |                                  | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Attitudes      | Favorable | Benefits of cooperative learning | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Towards Social |           | Enjoyed depth                    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Studies        |           | Enjoyed Projects                 | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2     |
|                |           | Enjoyed subject matter           | 2       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 10    |
|                |           | Favored interaction over tests   | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Style of teacher                 | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3     |
|                |           | Variety of subject matter        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                | Total     |                                  | 2       | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 16    |

Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme          | Code      | Subordinate code                         | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|----------------|-----------|--|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                |           |  | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Attitudes      | Less      | Class was not interesting/challenging    | 0       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3     |
| Towards Social | Favorable | Disliked essays                          | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Studies        |           | Learned just for the test                | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3     |
|                |           | More creativity wanted                   | 0       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4     |
|                |           | Repetition                               | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3     |
|                |           | Too many projects at the end of the year | 0       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|                |           | Type of test                             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                |           | Wanted more dates                        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Wanted more depth                        | 1       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3     |
|                |           | Wanted more technology                   | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                |           | Total                                    |         | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 3     |
| Total          |           |  | 3       | 2 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 5 | 36    |

Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme             | Code        | Subordinate code                | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                   |             |                                 | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum        | Assessment: | Learning style- self-assessment | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Strategies,       | Process     | Project instead of tests        | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Organization, and |             | Study skills                    | 0       | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7     |
| Procedures        | Total       |                                 | 0       | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8     |
|                   | Assessment: | Essay tests                     | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                   | Product     | Less written work               | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                   |             | More variety in test question   | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                   |             | Note-taking                     | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2     |
|                   |             | Project                         | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3     |
|                   |             | Test                            | 1       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5     |
|                   | Total       |                                 | 1       | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 13    |

Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme             | Code          | Subordinate code         | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                   |               |                          | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum        | Collaboration | Interaction              | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2     |
| Strategies,       |               | Leadership               | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Organization, and |               | Learned about myself     | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
| Procedures        |               | Problems with group work | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                   |               | Role of collaboration    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   |               | Role play                | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                   | Total         |                          | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3     |

Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme             | Code       | Subordinate code        | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                   |            |                         | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Curriculum        | Fact-based | Fact recall             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Strategies,       | Knowledge  | Identify patterns       | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1     |
| Organization, and |            | Learn just for the test | 0       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
| Procedures        |            | Chronology              | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5     |
|                   |            | Note taking             | 1       | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 14    |
|                   |            | Study skills            | 1       | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4     |
|                   |            | Too much information    | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                   |            | Type of assignment      | 2       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3     |
|                   |            | Type of quiz or test    | 2       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7     |
|                   |            | Use of textbook         | 1       | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6     |
|                   | Total      |                         | 7       | 5 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 43    |

Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme  | Code                   | Subordinate code  | Student |   |    |    |    |    |   |    | Total |
|--|------------------------|-------------------|---------|---|----|----|----|----|---|----|-------|
|  |                        |                   | 1       | 2 | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7 | 8  |       |
| Curriculum<br>Strategies,<br>Organization,<br>and Procedures | Teacher                | Liked teacher     | 0       | 0 | 1  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0 | 0  | 1     |
|  |                        | Role of teacher   | 0       | 0 | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 2 | 0  | 4     |
|  |                        | Teacher centered  | 0       | 0 | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 0 | 1  | 2     |
|  |                        | Teacher feedback  | 0       | 0 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0 | 1  | 1     |
|  | Teacher made class fun | 2                 | 0       | 0 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0 | 3  |       |
|  | Total                  |                   | 2       | 0 | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 3 | 2  | 11    |
|  | Writing                | Like to write     | 0       | 1 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0 | 2  | 3     |
|  |                        | Not a good writer | 0       | 0 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0 | 0  | 0     |
|  |                        | Too many essays   | 0       | 1 | 1  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1 | 1  | 8     |
|  |                        | Writing Process   | 0       | 0 | 0  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 0 | 0  | 2     |
|  | Total                  |                   | 0       | 2 | 1  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 1 | 3  | 13    |
| Total  |                        |                   | 10      | 9 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 17 | 9 | 11 | 91    |



Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme           | Code              | Subordinate code            | Student |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Total |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
|                 |                   |                             | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |       |
| Higher Level    | Creativity        | Ability to express yourself | 0       | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4     |
| Thinking Skills |                   | Project                     | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                 | Total             |                             | 0       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5     |
|                 | Critical Thinking | Application                 | 0       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1     |
|                 |                   | Comprehension               | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                 |                   | Defending Ideas             | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                 |                   | Historical Reasoning        | 1       | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 7     |
|                 |                   | Synthesize                  | 0       | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0     |
|                 | Total             |                             | 1       | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 8     |

Table 38 (continued)

*Themes, Codes, Subordinate Codes and Frequency of Responses of each Subject in the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

| Theme              | Code            | Subordinate code         | Student |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | Total |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
|                    |                 |                          | 1       | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |       |
| Higher Level       | Problem-solving | Analysis                 | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| Thinking Skills    |                 | Debating                 | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
|                    |                 | Establishing connections | 1       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 1  | 2     |
|                    |                 | Interesting/engaging     | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
|                    |                 | Learn by doing           | 0       | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 0  | 2     |
|                    |                 | Self-assessment          | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
|                    |                 | Use of technology        | 0       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
|                    | <b>Total</b>    |                          | 1       | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 4     |
| <b>Total</b>       |                 |                          | 2       | 0  | 2  | 4  | 0  | 3  | 1  | 5  | 17    |
| <b>Grand Total</b> |                 |                          | 15      | 11 | 17 | 19 | 19 | 29 | 13 | 21 | 144   |

Table 39

*Themes, Codes, and Percentage of Responses from the Nonthematic-based Focus Group*

|               |                      | Student |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | Total |
|---------------|----------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
|               | Code                 | 1       | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |       |
| Attitudes     | Favorable            | 2       | 0  | 2  | 1  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 2  | 16    |
| Towards S.S.  | Less Favorable       | 1       | 2  | 2  | 3  | 2  | 6  | 1  | 3  | 20    |
| Total         |                      | 3       | 2  | 4  | 4  | 6  | 9  | 3  | 5  | 36    |
| % of total    |                      | 8       | 6  | 11 | 11 | 17 | 25 | 8  | 14 |       |
| Curriculum    | Assessment: Process  | 0       | 2  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 0  | 8     |
| Strategies,   | Assessment: Product  | 1       | 0  | 2  | 2  | 2  | 4  | 1  | 1  | 13    |
| Organization, | Collaboration        | 0       | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 3     |
| and           | Fact-based knowledge | 7       | 5  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 8  | 4  | 4  | 43    |
| Procedures    | Teacher              | 2       | 0  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 11    |
|               | Writing              | 0       | 2  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 1  | 3  | 13    |
| Total         |                      | 10      | 9  | 11 | 11 | 13 | 17 | 9  | 11 | 91    |
| % of total    |                      | 11      | 10 | 12 | 12 | 14 | 19 | 10 | 12 |       |
| Higher Level  | Creativity           | 0       | 0  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 5     |
| Thinking      | Critical Thinking    | 1       | 0  | 1  | 2  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 3  | 7     |
| Skills        | Problem-solving      | 1       | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 4     |
| Total         |                      | 2       | 0  | 2  | 4  | 0  | 3  | 1  | 5  | 17    |
| % of total    |                      | 12      | 0  | 12 | 24 | 0  | 18 | 6  | 29 |       |
| Grand Total   |                      | 15      | 11 | 17 | 19 | 19 | 29 | 13 | 21 | 144   |
| Total %       |                      | 10      | 8  | 12 | 13 | 13 | 20 | 9  | 15 |       |

**Appendix I. Chi Square Table for Focus Group Data**

Table 40

*Chi-square data for the Thematic and Nonthematic focus group responses*

| Theme   | Code           | Group       | <i>O</i> | <i>E</i> | <i>O-E</i> | $(O-E)^2$ | <i>R</i>      |                |
|---|----------------|-------------|----------|----------|------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
|   |                |             |          |          |            |           | $((O-E)^2)/E$ | $(O-E)/SQRT E$ |
| Theme 1:<br>Attitudes<br>toward Social<br>Studies | Favorable      | Thematic    | 40       | 27.1942  | 12.8058    | 163.9874  | 6.0302        | 2.4557         |
|   |                | Nonthematic | 16       | 29.0072  | -13.0072   | 169.1871  | 5.8326        | -2.4151        |
|   | Less Favorable | Thematic    | 4        | 11.6547  | -7.6547    | 58.5941   | 5.0275        | -2.2422        |
|   |                | Nonthematic | 20       | 12.4317  | 7.5683     | 57.2799   | 4.6076        | 2.1465         |

*Note:* CV = 18.307, *df* = 10 (Meyers et al., 2006)

Table 40 (continued)

*Chi-square data for the Thematic and Nonthematic focus group responses*

| Theme          | Code          | Group       | <i>O</i> | <i>E</i> | <i>O-E</i> | $(O-E)^2$ | <i>R</i>                   |                        |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------|------------|-----------|----------------------------|------------------------|
|                |               |             |          |          |            |           | $\sqrt{\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}}$ | $\frac{O-E}{\sqrt{E}}$ |
| Theme 2:       | Assessment:   | Thematic    | 4        | 5.8273   | -1.8273    | 3.3392    | 0.5730                     | -0.7570                |
| Curriculum     | Process       | Nonthematic | 8        | 6.2158   | 1.7842     | 3.1833    | 0.5121                     | 0.7156                 |
| Strategies,    | Assessment:   | Thematic    | 9        | 10.6835  | -1.6835    | 2.8340    | 0.2653                     | -0.5150                |
| Organization,  | Product       | Nonthematic | 13       | 11.3957  | 1.6043     | 2.5738    | 0.2259                     | 0.4752                 |
| and Procedures | Collaboration | Thematic    | 11       | 6.7986   | 4.2014     | 17.6521   | 2.5964                     | 1.6113                 |
| in Social      |               | Nonthematic | 3        | 7.2518   | -4.2518    | 18.0778   | 2.4929                     | -1.5789                |
| Studies        | Fact-based    | Thematic    | 9        | 25.2518  | -16.2518   | 264.1210  | 10.4595                    | -3.2341                |
|                | knowledge     | Nonthematic | 43       | 26.9353  | 16.0647    | 258.0761  | 9.5814                     | 3.0954                 |
|                | Teacher       | Thematic    | 1        | 5.8273   | -4.8273    | 23.3032   | 3.9989                     | -1.9997                |
|                |               | Nonthematic | 11       | 6.2158   | 4.7842     | 22.8883   | 3.6823                     | 1.9189                 |

*Note:* CV = 18.307, *df* = 10 (Meyers et al., 2006)

Table 40 (continued)

*Chi-square data for the Thematic and Nonthematic focus group responses*

| Theme                                       | Code                 | Group       | <i>O</i> | <i>E</i> | <i>O-E</i> | $(O-E)^2$ | <i>R</i>              |                          |
|---|----------------------|-------------|----------|----------|------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
|   |                      |             |          |          |            |           | $\frac{((O-E)^2)}{E}$ | $\frac{(O-E)}{\sqrt{E}}$ |
| Theme 2<br>continued                        | Writing              | Thematic    | 1        | 6.3129   | -5.3129    | 28.2274   | 4.4714                | -2.1146                  |
|   |                      | Nonthematic | 13       | 6.7338   | 6.2662     | 39.2651   | 5.8310                | 2.4148                   |
| Theme 3:<br>Higher Level<br>Thinking Skills | Creativity           | Thematic    | 3        | 3.8849   | -0.8849    | 0.7830    | 0.2016                | -0.4490                  |
|   |                      | Nonthematic | 5        | 4.1439   | 0.8561     | 0.7329    | 0.1769                | 0.4206                   |
|   | Critical<br>Thinking | Thematic    | 35       | 20.8813  | 14.1187    | 199.3378  | 9.5462                | 3.0897                   |
|   |                      | Nonthematic | 8        | 22.2734  | -14.2734   | 203.7294  | 9.1468                | -3.0244                  |
|   | Problem<br>Solving   | Thematic    | 18       | 10.6835  | 7.3165     | 53.5319   | 5.0107                | 2.2385                   |
|   |                      | Nonthematic | 4        | 11.3957  | -7.3957    | 54.6961   | 4.7997                | -2.1908                  |
|   |                      |             |          |          |            |           | 95.0698               |                          |

*Note:* CV = 18.307, *df* = 10 (Meyers et al., 2006)

**Appendix J. Audit Trial Diagram**



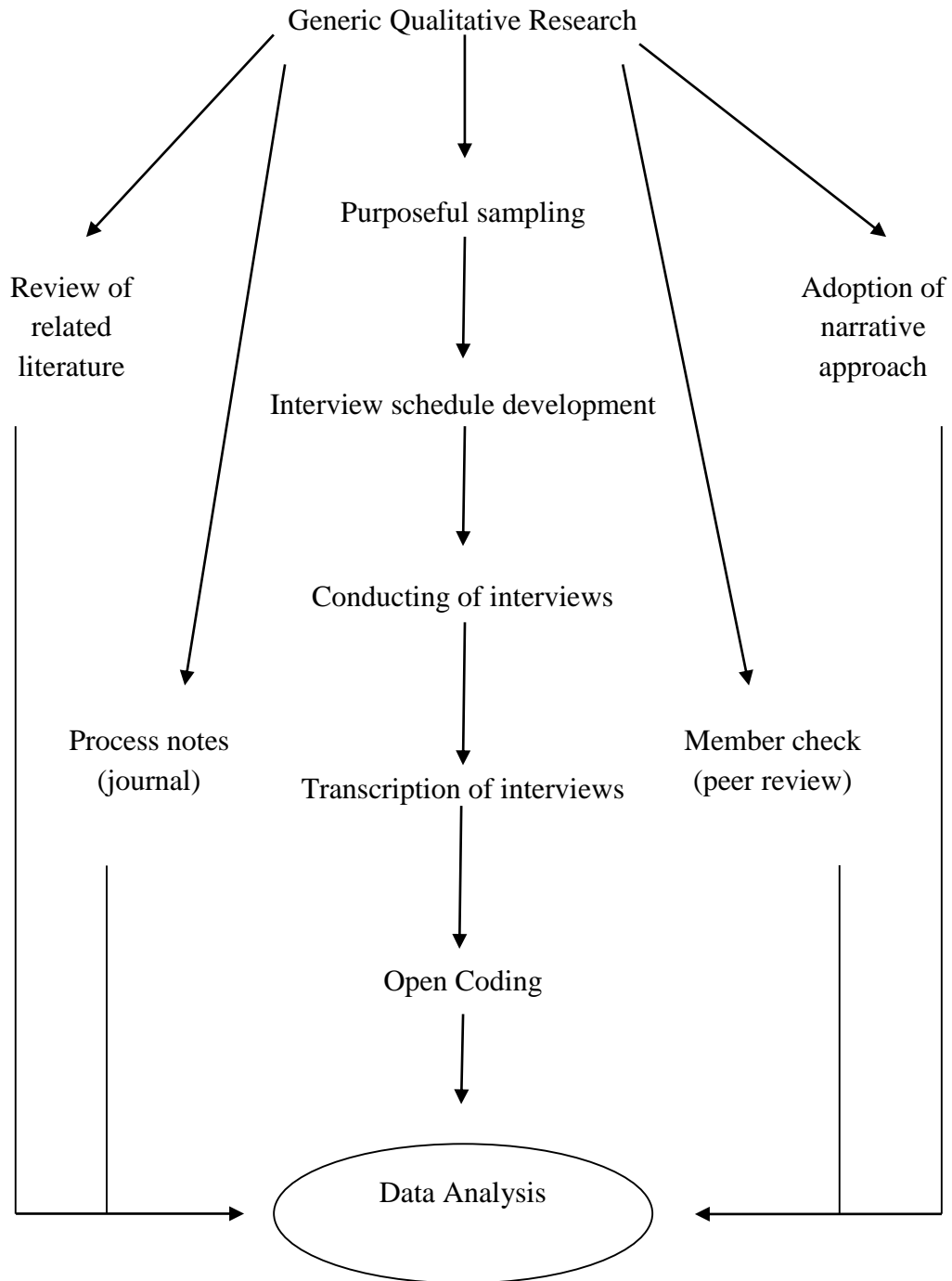


Figure 2. Research Question 3: Audit Trail Diagram. Adapted from: “The Research Audit Trail: Enhancing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Inquiry,” by M. Carcary, 2009, *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 7(1), 11-24. Copyright 2009 Academic Conferences Ltd.