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# Implementation of Document Based Question Essays in Regular Education History Classes

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

IMPLEMENTATION OF DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION ESSAYS IN  
REGULAR EDUCATION HISTORY CLASSES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

CHRISTINE R. BERRONG

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all of my students, past, present, and future. May history come alive for you as it has for me.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate what strategies high school teachers are using to teach Document Based Question essays (DBQs) in non-Advanced Placement (AP) history classes. DBQs are essays in which students are given a question and a set of primary and secondary sources that they must use to support an argument in answering the question. They must write a well-developed five-paragraph essay that includes a thesis statement in the introduction and must analyze the primary sources, not simply mention them in the essay. In the researcher's experience, many students in non-AP history classes have difficulty with this task; the research literature supports this theory.

The study used a cross-sectional survey design; the researcher developed a survey instrument for the study. The survey was posted online, and teachers from eight high schools in northern Illinois were emailed an invitation to take the survey. Out of a possible sample of around 100 teachers, there were twenty-seven completed surveys.

Almost half of the respondents reported using DBQs three to four times a year, and most used them as a summative assessment with the purpose of developing critical thinking, writing, and document analysis skills. The most successful strategies that teachers reported using were cultivating students' background knowledge before writing, explicit instruction in writing, and having students use graphic organizers before writing. For students who read below grade level, slowing down the process and one-on-one instruction were reported as the most successful strategies. Pre-service training seems to

be keeping up with the changes in history assessment: teachers with ten or fewer years of experience were found to be significantly more likely to have learned about primary source document analysis and DBQs than were teachers who had been teaching eleven years or more.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The work of historians consists of examining and analyzing historical documents and then connecting the new information to that which is already known. It involves validation and analysis of both primary and secondary sources, comparison and synthesis of the information from these sources, and the creation of a narrative of history. Historians use expertly honed skills of analysis and knowledge of theory to create this narrative, and they enter into a dialogue with the past and with other historians with whom they debate their ideas. Consequently, in wanting to assess students authentically, history teachers have utilized the Document Based Question Essay (DBQ) in which students use primary and secondary sources to answer an essay question. These essays, along with a multiple choice component, comprise part of the Advanced Placement (AP) History exam. In the late 1990s, these essays began to be used more prevalently in non-AP history classes as well, with students of all ability levels; the state of New York includes a DBQ on its Regents examination for all students (Rothschild, 2000). Students in AP classes have had some success with the DBQ on AP exams since the mid-1970s (Rothschild, 2000), but studies have shown that overall, student success on DBQ-like tasks is very limited (Monte-Sano, 2006; Young & Leinhardt, 1998).

Answering a DBQ requires the student to create an argument and use the primary and secondary source documents they are given to support their argument. They are to write a well-constructed essay consisting of an introduction, several body paragraphs, and a conclusion; the introduction must also contain a well-written thesis statement that contains the crux of their argument. The essay is typically five paragraphs long, but length may vary to fit the question or to satisfy the instructor's requirements. The number of documents the student is given may also vary; students are usually provided with a range of eight to twelve documents and are instructed to use a minimum number in their essay. They represent multiple points of view and vary in type to include excerpts of newspaper articles, speeches and diaries, political cartoons, maps, photographs, paintings, and secondary sources such as charts and graphs. Students are limited to the primary and secondary sources that are included with the DBQ and may not use any others of their choosing. It is intended that the documents be grouped in order to answer the question. For example, the DBQ on the August 2008 Regents Exam was "Discuss the political, economic, *and/or* social impacts of the automobile on the United States" (New York State Education Department, 2008; see Appendix A); the student would read the ten documents, group them into categories of political, economic, and social, and come up with an argument for each category. Each category would then become a body paragraph. The essay must include background content information about the historical era not found in the documents and must be more analytical than descriptive. The directions usually state a minimum number of documents the student must use (for the Regents Exam example, the minimum was five documents).



One high school in a suburb of Chicago that the researcher works with has been grappling with how to successfully teach the DBQ to students of all ability levels and especially to students who read below grade level. Frustrated with low scores and insufficient time to cover the writing of the DBQ, they have turned to the feeder middle schools for help and have hosted professional development on the topic. It continues to be a topic at articulation meetings. Examination of student work indicates that although some progress has been made, students are still struggling with mastering the DBQ. The high school has enlisted the help of The DBQ Project, an organization based in Evanston, Illinois, that provides materials and training on how to teach the DBQ to students in regular history classes. Their philosophy is that writing is the impetus for critical thinking about history; thus, their program focuses on writing that leads to the learning of history (Roden & Brady, 2000). This focus is not based on results of research, but rather on the founders' experience teaching high school history classes.

So why continue implementing something that is not successful? Part of what the DBQ measures are *discipline-specific skills*, such as analyzing a primary source and making connections between it and other sources and to what is already known about the topic from secondary sources. This is what historians do and what makes the DBQ an authentic assessment. A second reason is to develop *critical thinking skills*, something that the education system is often criticized for not doing for our students. Critical thinking skills are widely regarded as necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and for preparation for the workforce. Finally, the DBQ prepares students for the academic writing they will do in college. Although not all students will attend college, high schools aspire to prepare

all students for this next step in order that no one is denied the opportunity. Ultimately, the DBQ requires *interdisciplinary skills*, skills that transcend the discipline, are complex, and are useful in the real world (Drake & Burns, 2004). In teaching the DBQ herself and in reading hundreds of student essays, the researcher can see the value in the DBQ assessment.

Very little research exists on implementation of the DBQ, and what is available consists mostly of research on AP level courses. However, teachers of regular history courses are justified in wanting to implement this assessment with students of all ability levels. This study explores what strategies teachers are using to teach the DBQ and how DBQs are being used in the classroom.

### **Background of the Problem**

The DBQ first appeared on the AP United States History exam in 1973, reflecting a change in college history courses to using more primary source material and including more social history (i.e., focusing on the lives of the everyday people and their contributions toward shaping a nation; the history of groups of people such as women and African Americans; how these groups relate to each other and how this dynamic shifted throughout history) along with political history (i.e., the history of how countries developed politically) (Rothschild, 2000). Students were required to read a number of documents (the first year there were eleven, the second there were twenty-one) and write an essay based solely on those documents. The only effect on teaching was the inclusion of more primary source material in the curriculum; in many classrooms the basic curriculum remained the same, and teachers were not able to cover the entire curriculum.

In 1982, the DBQ was redesigned to use fewer documents and to require the student to include background information on the topic. This required teachers to at least attempt to cover the entire curriculum as any topic was fair game. The change dramatically affected the way AP U.S. History was taught as teachers tried to guess what topic would be on the exam; they were also forced to teach at least some social history, as the DBQ occasionally focused on a social topic such as women's history. In 1996, in response to teachers' complaints about not having enough time to cover the entire curriculum, the College Board began publishing the 50-year period that would be covered on the DBQ, and in 2001, the New York Regents Examination, a graduation requirement for all students in the state of New York, began to include a DBQ on the social sciences portion of the exam. Since then, high school social studies departments have been implementing them at all levels in regular history classes.

The DBQ was devised to be an authentic assessment, or a sort of "real world" task such as a historian would perform (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). It is supposed to encourage the transfer of knowledge and skills from the classroom to an authentic task. If students are to do this successfully, they will have learned some of the disciplinary skills of historians: how to analyze a primary source; take historical context into account; and deliberate the validity of the sources. They will also have learned something of what it means to think historically, or understanding the thoughts and actions of people in the past as they were thought and acted in the time period, not as we view them in the present (Wineburg, 1998). Historians create a narrative of history from these reconstructed thoughts and actions that fits within the framework of what is already known (P. J. Lee,

2005; Mink, 1987). The authenticity of the DBQ has been called into question (Grant, Gradwell, & Cimbricz, 2004); it is given in a classroom which is far from a real world context, and students are limited in that they are not able to choose the primary sources they use to answer the question (in addition, some of the sources have been heavily edited for student use). Even the fact that they are given the question violates the standard of authenticity because historians investigate topics of their choosing and develop their own questions. However, it is not the purpose of this study to challenge the authenticity of the DBQ, and it is clear that it is an assessment that is currently being used in many classrooms across the United States. The benefits of doing a DBQ include not only learning critical thinking and disciplinary skills, but learning how to read and analyze material important to a citizenry (such as political speeches and accounts of events), question actions and motives, develop arguments, and understand complex situations. These are all skills that one would hope good citizens would be capable of carrying out. Therefore, it is argued, the DBQ, along with the study of history, is a worthwhile activity (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; Goodlad, 2004; Monte-Sano, 2008; VanSledright, 1996; VanSledright & Limon, 2006).

The example of the DBQ from the 2008 New York Regents Exam would not be considered by the DBQ Project to be a true DBQ because the question does not compel the student to create an argument. The question itself asks the student to *discuss* the impact of the automobile on the American landscape, not to argue whether or not the automobile had an impact or to argue that it had a greater impact than another inventions (such as the Internet) on American life. According to the founders of the DBQ Project, a

good quality DBQ would require the student to argue a position; however, the researcher has seen many examples of DBQs that do not have this requirement. For this study, the use of the term “DBQ” will be intended to mean a task where the student is given an essay question and a set of primary and secondary source documents and expected to write a well-developed essay using a minimum number of the documents, as is the format of the DBQ on the AP exam.

The great advantage of using the DBQ in regular history classes is that it can be used at any time during the year with any unit of study; instructors are not required to guess what it will cover because they can use a subject-specific DBQ with any unit they choose. It can be used to teach content or as an assessment at the end of a unit. The difficulty lies in teaching underclassmen to perform what was formerly a task meant for advanced upperclassmen: read primary sources that are not typically written at a ninth or tenth grade level; analyze them; and use them to support a well-developed argument. Unfortunately, according to the literature, even the top students struggle with the task (Monte-Sano, 2006; Young & Leinhardt, 1998).

### **Purpose of the Study**

In Rothschild’s (2000) opinion, many students are unable to effectively analyze the primary source documents, even at the AP level. He reports that students take “each document at face value” and are “simply memorizing data from the fifty-year period and regurgitating it on the DBQ” (p. 499-500). He attributes these failures not to students’ abilities but to the fact that teachers had not yet mastered the teaching of the DBQ. The great benefit, he asserts, is the dramatic change in the teaching of U.S. History to include

social history and the use of primary sources at all levels, not just in AP classes. He believes that the teachers will, in time, learn better strategies to teach the DBQ.

This study was carried out under the premise that the DBQ is a valuable assessment or activity that should be continued in high school history classes. Its purpose is not to prove that the DBQ is valuable or to prove that it works; rather, the purpose is to find out how teachers are using the DBQ and what strategies they are using to help their students master it, particularly students who are not in AP classes. Participants were asked whether or not they have attended training specifically for teaching the DBQ; this would allow the researcher to compare the use of strategies between teachers who have and have not attended training. It is the hope of the researcher that the strategies reported are useful to practicing teachers and will increase success on the DBQ for all students. At the present time, the research specifically on DBQs is limited (Young & Leinhardt, 1998), although there have been some studies that focus on writing with documents (Greene, 2001; Monte-Sano, 2006; Monte-Sano, 2008; Paxton, 2002; Rouet, Britt, Mason, & Perfetti, 1996; Voss & Wiley, 1997; Wiley & Voss, 1996; Wiley & Voss, 1999). The present study provides data specifically on DBQs.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. For what purposes do teachers use the DBQ?
2. What strategies do teachers use to teach the DBQ?
  - a. What skills do the strategies focus on?

3. How successful do teachers feel these strategies are, especially with students who read below grade level?
  - a. Do teachers modify DBQs for students who read below grade level, and, if so, how?
4. Have teachers attended professional development on how to teach the DBQ?
  - a. If so, how has this training affected their teaching methods?

The research instrument was a survey consisting of multiple-choice type questions, Likert scale type questions and open-ended questions. No existing instrument could be found, therefore one was created for this study based on the research literature on historical thinking and on writing an argument with primary and secondary sources. A review of the literature is presented in chapter two. The research methodology is explained in chapter three, including a description of how the instrument was created and efforts to validate the instrument. The results of the survey and statistical analysis are presented in chapter four and discussed in chapter five.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Analysis:* The dissection of an issue or source in order to find meaning and/or a relationship between the parts (Leinhardt, Stainton, Virji, & Odoroff, 1994; Stovel, 2000).

*Argumentation:* The action or process of reasoning systematically in support of an idea, action, or theory.

*Authentic Assessment:* According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005),

An assessment task, problem, or project is authentic if it

- Is realistically contextualized. The task is set in a scenario that replicates or simulates the ways in which a person’s knowledge and abilities are tested in real-world situations.
- Requires judgment and innovation.
- Asks the student to “do” the subject.
- Replicates key challenging situations in which adults are truly “tested” in the workplace, in civic life, and in personal life.
- Assesses the student’s ability to efficiently and effectively use a repertoire of knowledge and skill to negotiate a complex and multistage task.
- Allows appropriate opportunities to rehearse, practice, consult resources, and get feedback on and refine performances and products. (pp. 153-154)

*Disciplinary Skills:* Skills used in the production of knowledge in a specific discipline. In the discipline of history, the skills would include the ability to analyze quantitative and qualitative information, interpret that information, and construct a narrative based on the interpretation of the information (Leinhardt, Stainton, & Virji, 1994). Also cited as “metahistorical” knowledge (P. J. Lee, 2005, p. 32), “historical literacy” (Perfetti, Britt, Rouet, Georgi, & Mason, 1994, p. 258), and “procedural knowledge” (VanSledright & Limon, 2006, p. 547).

*Document Based Question Essay (DBQ):* An essay in which a student is required to analyze primary and secondary sources (called documents) to substantiate their point of view (see Appendix A for example).



*Historical Literacy:* Knowledge of how to use interpretive reasoning to analyze historical events (disciplinary knowledge) in addition to having knowledge of historical events (Perfetti et al., 1994).

*Historical Thinking:* The ability to reconstruct and develop explanations for events in history in the context within which they occurred. According to VanSledright (2002a), the skills required to do this “include the capacity (a) to make sense of many differing sources of information from the past, (b) to corroborate evidence by carefully comparing and contrasting it, (c) to construct evidenced-based interpretations, and (d) to assess an author's position in an account. These capacities are exercised while taking into account the way the investigator herself is by necessity also imposing her own view as she interprets the evidence” (p. 134).

*History:* As a result of a study designed specifically to define the term history, Leinhardt, Stainton, and Virji (1994) formulated the following definition:

History is a process of constructing, reconstructing, and interpreting past events, ideas, and institutions from surviving or inferential evidence to understand and make meaningful who and what we are today. The process involves dialogues with alternative voices from the past itself, with recorders of the past, and with present interpreters. The process also involves constructing coherent, powerful narratives that describe and interpret the events, as well as skillful analyses of quantitative and qualitative information from a theoretical perspective. (p. 88)

*Primary Source:* A document or object that is from the time period being studied,

the purpose of the creation of the document being other than historical study; examples include newspaper articles, speeches, diaries, political cartoons, maps, photographs, and paintings.

*Secondary Source:* Information from the past that is rewritten or compiled, sometimes in a quantifiable form; examples include charts and graphs. A history textbook would be another example (unless it is the unit being studied, such as in a study of history textbooks from 19<sup>th</sup> century classrooms; it would then be considered a primary source).

*Teaching Strategy:* Ways of presenting instructional materials or conducting instructional activities in order to maximize learning.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Document Based Question (DBQ) was first implemented in high school Advanced Placement (AP) classes in 1973 in response to changes in the way history was being taught at the college level (Rothschild, 2000). College instructors were placing more emphasis on social history and on analyzing primary sources, so that students were “doing” history as a historian would do as opposed to simply learning the facts. Therefore, AP classes were required to follow suit. The inclusion of a DBQ essay question on the AP test was a way to ensure that high school teachers were doing this. It undoubtedly had an effect on how these teachers taught their regular history classes as well, so that all students began to experience increased exposure to primary sources. DBQs began to creep their way into the regular history classrooms, and, in 2001, New York began to include a DBQ essay question on their state assessment, the Regents Exam. This has pushed the DBQ down into the lower grades; in New York, the fifth- and eighth-grade assessments also include a DBQ essay question (Grant, 2003).

Even with the increase in the number of students that write DBQ essays, there is very little research on the subject. A few studies focus on writing with primary and secondary sources and perspective taking, but nothing was found on what teachers are actually doing to prepare students to write these essays or on how they are being used in the classroom. Rothschild (2000), an experienced AP History teacher and AP exam

evaluator, admits that even most AP students do little actual analysis of the primary sources in their essays. If these essays continue to be implemented, more research is needed on how to best help students to be successful. It is the intent of this study to help fill in this gap. The existing studies, along with the literature that provides justification for implementation of DBQs, are presented here.

### **DBQs as Authentic Assessment**

The most often cited reason for studying history is probably to develop traits of responsible citizenship (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; Goodlad, 2004; VanSledright, 1996; VanSledright & Limon, 2006); others include: developing higher level cognitive skills in order to be able to solve problems (Cuban, 1991; Wineburg, 2001); understanding the goals and strategies used to politically manipulate (Yilmaz, 2008); taking others' perspectives in a diverse society (Wineburg, 2001); Americanizing immigrants by teaching them a "U.S. nation-building story" intended to develop loyalty to the country (Kelly, Meuwissen, & VanSledright, 2007, p. 136); and analyzing and interpreting information, a basic skill of citizenship (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Barton & Levstik, 2004). One group of researchers define history as "a process of constructing, reconstructing, and interpreting past events, ideas, and institutions from surviving or inferential evidence to understand and make meaningful who and what we are today" (Leinhardt, Stainton, & Virji, 1994, p. 88); another group argues that historical literacy requires using interpretive strategies in using evidence to create an argument (Perfetti et al., 1994). According to Barton and Levstik (2003), most history education reform advocates, although from varying backgrounds, believe that the process of

historical interpretation should be central in history education. These are all skills required by the DBQ, so one could argue that the DBQ is valuable in that it requires students to develop skills that comply with the argument of why we study history. Another argument is that it is an authentic assessment.

One rationale for using DBQs is that students are acting like historians and “doing” history, or engaging in historical thinking and understanding. An authentic assessment is a “real world” task in which students actually “do” the subject, face the kinds of challenges that professionals face, use the same skills and knowledge, and require higher level thinking and decision making (Frey & Schmitt, 2007; Nickell, 1992; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), this type of assessment requires the transfer of knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to a real world type of problem; the student must be flexible and figure out which skills the situation demands. If students are able to transfer their knowledge and skills, then the teacher knows that learning has occurred. When applied to the discipline of history, this means knowledge not only of historical events, but also disciplinary knowledge of how historians do what they do: how they analyze sources, what questions to ask, how to reconstruct the past, and how to understand others by taking their perspective in their historical context (Bain, 2000; P. J. Lee, 2005; Wineburg, 2001). Wiggins (1993) asserts that this is something that all students are capable of, not just the top, or AP, students. To accomplish this, teachers need to be explicit about the task, show them examples of excellent work, and guide them in self-assessment. Failures should be used as opportunities to learn about the use of evidence and its limitations (VanSledright, 2002b).

As Wiggins points out, “What you test is what you get; if you don’t test it, you won’t get it.” In other words, if we want students to perform higher level, real world tasks, then authentic assessments must be used.

To social studies scholars and reformers, the addition of authentic assessments is a welcome change. Although national standards now call for teaching for historical understanding in schools (Kelly et al., 2007; J. Lee & Weiss, 2007; National Center for History in the Schools, 2005; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995), the prevailing teaching method continues to be lecture and the preferred assessment method multiple-choice tests that emphasize factual recall, with a reliance on textbooks (Bolinger & Warren, 2007; Cuban, 1991; Levstik, 2008). Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that, while students are doing better overall, there are still a much larger number of students at or below the “basic” level of understanding U.S. history (47% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders at the “basic level” and about 40% below) and a small number of students at the “proficient” and “advanced” levels (14% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders) (J. Lee & Weiss, 2007, pp. 8-9). “Basic” indicates that the student demonstrates “partial mastery of the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade” (p. 4). These tests claim to assess historical understanding, but one must question how well a multiple-choice type exam can do this. Thus there is a strong call for the inclusion of authentic assessments in social studies classrooms and on state and national assessments (Grant, 2003; Newmann, 1988; VanSledright, 1996; Wiggins, 1993; Williams, 2006), which is being partially realized with the use of DBQs as classroom assessments and the inclusion of a DBQ on New York’s Regents Exam.

It is here that we encounter the depth versus coverage debate and the demand for accountability that is at the core of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Schoen, 2008). In preparing their students for the standardized tests given in compliance with NCLB, teachers are forced to reduce the amount of time teaching authentically in order to cover all that is needed for their students to do well on the tests (Bolinger & Warren, 2007; Levstik, 2008; VanSledright & James, 2002). Geisler (1994) points out that, “In general, then, students and teachers in school appear to be justified in not assigning very much extended analytic writing. In fact, this kind of writing seems to distract students from learning the broad range of content required by the tests they take” (p. 47). Another hindrance to giving performance type assessments is cost; multiple-choice tests are simply less expensive to score and can save the state money (Kelly et al., 2007; VanSledright & James, 2002). As policymakers focus on accountability, administrators relinquish support for more authentic tasks and teaching for depth in the classroom. Even in states where the assessments have an authentic component (e.g. New York), accountability is still present in that students must pass the test in order to pass their history class and graduate from high school (Grant, 2003). Indeed, although the National History Standards put forth in 1996 advocate teaching for historical thinking and inclusion of primary sources in history classes, research on teaching methods indicate that most teachers, especially at the secondary level, continued to prefer passive methods of instruction such as lecture (Bolinger & Warren, 2007). In such a climate, this study investigates just how prevalent the use of DBQs as an authentic assessment is in high school history classes.

It must be noted here that it is acknowledged that the purpose of teaching in this manner is not to make historians out of students (Grant et al., 2004; P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001; P. J. Lee, 2005; Perfetti et al., 1994). The purpose is to teach students something of the discipline of history. Teachers must remember that they are in a classroom and must carefully construct learning experiences that challenge students' thinking rather than simply teach them the core aspects of the discipline, which will not automatically develop historical understanding (Bain, 2000, 2005). When teaching authentically in younger classrooms, VanSledright (2002b) questioned the practice of teaching 10-year-olds to be suspicious of the truthfulness of their textbooks. Others question the teaching of disciplines in school (Barton & Levstik, 2003), whether or not teaching a discipline can be regarded as authentic (Bain, 2000; Greene, 2001), the validity of performance-based assessments as authentic (Frey & Schmitt, 2007), and point out that not many children aspire to become historians (Wineburg, 1998).

Grant, Gradwell, and Cimbricz (2004) evaluated a DBQ prompt and supporting primary and secondary source documents for qualification as an authentic task as outlined by Wiggins and McTighe. They concluded that a task such as the DBQ cannot be truly authentic, mostly because of the context it is performed in: the classroom as opposed to the real world. In their opinion, the question itself is inauthentic in that historians do not begin with a research question and that they work in an area of personal interest, where students are given a structured task that is not of their choice. Another problem lies in the primary sources provided to students: they have been selected by others and are often heavily edited, for length or for readability, and sometimes reflect the editors' bias



instead of the original authors'. Historians rely on the fact that they are interpreting the original authors' work and have the freedom to search out additional sources to help them understand authors' perspectives; students do not have this luxury. Additionally, some identifying information may be left out or students may not recognize the origin, which inevitably affects students' interpretation of particular primary sources. Another criticism is that DBQs are written in isolation from other students, while historians regularly share their work and engage in debate with other historians, which often results in revision of their work. In considering these points, it seems that the DBQ is not really very authentic compared to the work of actual historians. Does this mean that history teachers should abandon its use? Grant, Gradwell, and Cimbricz (2004) do not advocate this and instead argue that the task should be made more authentic. They question the authenticity of any type of classroom assessment in history and call for a re-examination of the relationship between historians' work and classroom learning.

Barton and Levstik (2004) advocate the strategy of inquiry in history classes, and, for them, the DBQ does not qualify as an activity for inquiry. They state that the DBQ only incorporates one aspect of inquiry: primary source analysis. They concur with Grant, Gradwell, and Cimbricz (2004) on the point that when the teacher (or another authority) chooses the primary sources for the students, the activity is not authentic (p. 197). To them, authenticity occurs when students are allowed to form their own questions and reach their own conclusions, where the DBQ is a structured exercise that asks students to come up with a specific answer (i.e., the one right answer). To others, these types of activities are meaningful, and they find that engaging in historical thought as required by

the DBQ results in such favorable results as greater self-understanding (VanSledright, 2001), the ability to analyze and interpret information (Barton & Levstik, 2003), and the ability to understand others by taking different perspectives (Wineburg, 2001). Perhaps Monte-Sano (2008) said it best:

Developing the capacity to express a historical argument in writing teaches students that they have the power to make their own interpretations and to do so based on evidence rather than uncritical acceptance of other people's claims. Such skills prepare students to understand the complexities of our social world, evaluate information responsibly, ask difficult questions, and succeed in college. Learning about evidence-based historical writing is the foundation of studying the past and to promoting a literate citizenry capable of analysis and reasoned argument in its own behalf. (p. 1074)

### **The Discipline of History**

Leinhardt, Stainton, and Virji (1994) came up with a definition of history by synthesizing definitions from historians and from history teachers:

History is a process of constructing, reconstructing, and interpreting past events, ideas and institutions from surviving or inferential evidence to understand and make meaningful who and what we are today. The process involves dialogues with alternative voices from the past itself, with recorders of the past, and with present interpreters. The process also involves constructing coherent, powerful narratives that describe and interpret the events, as well as skillful analyses of quantitative and qualitative information from a theoretical perspective. (p. 88)

This definition represents a significant change from the way students experienced history in the past, which typically represented the social and political interests of the day (Mink, 1987). Current theory holds that thinking and learning about history is a task that is cognitively different than thinking and learning about other subjects (Bain, 2000; Collingwood, 1946; Mink, 1987; Wineburg, 1991a, 2001) in which the historian (or student) is required to also have a mental schemata of the processes of history (Bain, 2005; Collingwood, 1946; P. J. Lee, 2005; Seixas, 1999; VanSledright & Limon, 2006; Wineburg, 1991a, 1998), or how to “do” the discipline of history. Since 1996, historical thinking in the classroom has been included in the National History Standards (Nash, 1997). The implementation of DBQs represents an attempt to address the standards: in analyzing primary sources and constructing a historical argument, students are engaging in historical thinking and “doing” the discipline of history. This section addresses the theory behind the strategy.

### **Historical Thinking**

The theory of thinking historically seems to have come first from philosophers of history who were trying to answer questions such as “What is history?” and “How do we really know about history?” (Collingwood, 1946; Mink, 1987). Rather than viewing the past through their own thoughts and perspectives (known as “presentism” – Wineburg, 1998, 2001), these philosophers stated that historians must instead re-think the thoughts that historical agents had when they performed an action, that thoughts lay behind all actions, and that historians needed to focus on the thoughts and not the emotions of the agents (Collingwood, 1946; P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001; Mink, 1987). In particular, P. J.

Lee and Ashby point out that the historian should assume that historical agents had the appropriate emotions and not try to experience those emotions himself, but instead try to take the perspective of how the agents thought. At the same time, historians in the present do have a different understanding of events simply because they know the outcomes (P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001; Mink, 1987). One must be careful to avoid “presentism,” which is “the act of viewing the past through the lens of the present,” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 90), the mode of thought that humans normally fall into, in order to achieve true historical understanding. Historically, historians have had great power to classify entire eras in ways that cast them in a negative light (Collingwood gives the example of the Dark Ages, p. 218), and in this way pass judgment on historical events. In a similar way, textbooks that students read in school reflect what the authors of those textbooks were thinking at the time they wrote them, not theories of current historians (Collingwood, 1946). Thus, mature historical understanding requires a resistance to “presentism” and a real effort to understand the thoughts of people in other time periods. In other words, it is of utmost importance that the historian take context into account when considering primary sources and re-enacting historical thought (Monte-Sano, 2006; Wineburg, 1998). These reconstructions must be woven together into a narrative that fits into a framework of history if the significance of the events is to be effectively conveyed (P. J. Lee, 2005; Mink, 1987).

There are lessons to be learned here for our schools. Even if true historical understanding may be difficult, if not impossible to achieve, learning to take others’ perspectives and be less judgmental of our contemporaries is a valuable lesson for

schoolchildren (VanSledright, 2001). Learning to think historically will also help students learn about themselves and their own thinking, for, “we, no less than the people we study, are historical beings” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 10) and “all knowledge of mind is historical” (Collingwood, 1946, p. 219).

### **Empathy and Imagination**

A condition for historical thinking is historical empathy (Davis, 2001; P. J. Lee, 1984). This is not empathy as we know it in the common sense, but a special type of empathy that is required for the historian to reconstruct (or rethink) the thoughts of a person in history (Shemilt, 1984). It is important to be able to take the perspective of others (Davis, 2001) and to try to understand how that perspective led to the person’s actions (P. J. Lee, 1984; P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001). However, this empathy is developed by looking at evidence, which is essential to the craft of the historian (P. J. Lee, 1984; P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001; Shemilt, 1984). It is by having historical empathy and analyzing evidence that historians make connections between thoughts and actions in history. Imagination also plays a role in empathy; it is not creative imagination as in the arts, but an imagination in working with the evidence (P. J. Lee, 1984; VanSledright, 2001) that brings life to the historical narrative (Collingwood, 1946). As VanSledright (2002b) puts it, one must “imaginatively fill in missing pieces” of what is missing from historical accounts (p. 1095).

### **History as a System of Knowledge**

Historical thinking / understanding also involves a knowledge of the methods used to form a historical narrative from the evidence that exists. Various scholars have

different names for this: a “system of knowledge” (Collingwood, 1946, p. 3); “metahistorical” knowledge, “ ‘second-order’ knowledge,” “ ‘disciplinary’ knowledge” (P. J. Lee, 2005, p. 32); “historical literacy” (Perfetti et al., 1994, p. 258); and “procedural knowledge” (VanSledright & Limon, 2006, p. 547). These procedures include developing hypotheses, analyzing and interpreting the evidence (Leinhardt, Stainton, Virji, & Odoroff, 1994; Spoehr & Spoehr, 1994), and determining the value and reliability of evidence (VanSledright & Limon, 2006). A historian must also have knowledge of what VanSledright and Limon (2006) call “second-order organizing concepts,” or knowledge of the general broad themes of history that allow one to be able to organize what is gleaned from the evidence into a coherent narrative. Examples of this include “change over time, causation, and progress/decline” (p. 546).

Two studies by Wineburg illustrate this point. In the first study he had a group of historians and a group of high school students read and interpret the same set of primary source documents on the Battle of Lexington and then compared the actions and thoughts of the participants in the two groups (1991). He found that the historians were able to build a more complete explanation not because they called up a discipline-specific set of skills (which did happen), but because they were able to build a case specifically for this event. They did not have a “Lexington” schema to call up because they were not experts on that particular battle, yet they used their disciplinary knowledge to build one. The students, on the other hand, tended to take the primary sources more at face value, did not pay much attention to the sourcing information (as the historians did), and seemed to be looking for the “right” answer. In a follow-up study (1998), Wineburg focused on how

expert historians practiced their craft. He compared the way historians who specialized in the Civil War and historians who had other specializations built a historical case for Lincoln's feelings about slavery before the war. Each group investigated primary sources on Lincoln and then reasoned through the case. Of interest was the way the non-specialist approached the case:

Once he became immersed in these documents, it was what he didn't know that came to the fore: his way of asking questions, of reserving judgment, of monitoring affective responses and revisiting earlier assessments, his ability to stick with confusion long enough to let an interpretation emerge. It was how he responded in the face of what he didn't know that allowed him, in short, to learn something new. (p. 340)

Therefore, historians must have knowledge of the disciplinary skills needed to analyze and interpret evidence and build a context-specific narrative.

Another piece of the puzzle is offered by Leinhardt (1994), who interviewed practicing historians about their profession. Several "clusters of ideas" emerged, rather than a step-by-step guide on how they developed historical cases. According to the historians, there is a sense of purpose of why they do history, and the historical narrative that is created must be compelling and be the result of the weaving together of evidence in a coherent manner. The case is built around a hypothesis, and a theoretical framework guides the historian in his interpretation of the evidence. Taking the historical context into consideration, the interpretation is based on a dialogue entered into with the historical agents and can form another basis for analysis as a form of historical reasoning.

Finally, of importance is the ability to debate the case with other historians who have their own unique interpretations; new interpretations may come to light during the process of the debate. These explanations portray the discipline of history as a kind of an art as well as a science.

Historical thinking incorporates both the empathetic reconstruction of historical thought and actions and the knowledge of how to “do” the discipline of history. The task of the DBQ aims to cultivate historical thinking in high school students. One of the purposes of this study is to investigate if teachers are using it for this purpose, what strategies they are using to get students to think historically, and if they think students are achieving it in any way. As we have seen, whether or not students should be doing this to the extent of historians (and whether they are capable of it) has been questioned by some scholars. In VanSledright’s (2004b) opinion, teaching students to think historically is worthwhile because it teaches them to take different perspectives in a diverse society, to be critical of political agendas, and to construct and defend an argument based on evidence. However, in order to accomplish this type of learning, schools must significantly rewrite curriculum and add to teachers’ and curriculum developers’ training to include teaching for historical thinking, resolve the depth versus breadth issue, and implement authentic assessments (e.g. the DBQ) (VanSledright, 1995, 1996).

### **Historical Thinking in the Classroom**

The goal of fostering students’ critical thinking dates back to the Progressive Movement in education and experienced a revival in the 1930s. Teachers were encouraged to do more student-centered activities that encourage a higher level of



thinking skills. Most social studies teachers, however, did not embrace this type of teaching (Cuban, 1991). Even before this, beginning in the 1880s, social scientists began lobbying for a separate place for their disciplines in the curriculum (Hiner, 1973), which eventually led to social studies as a curricular subject, which included history along with the other social sciences. Teachers of history and the social sciences continued on throughout the 1940s and 1950s with the status quo of lecture, textbook reading, and class discussion (Cuban, 1991), until the events of the Cold War in the 1950s and the 1960s brought about the New Social Studies (Penna, 1995). This reform movement advocated an inquiry method of learning based on how each of the social science disciplines worked (Barton & Levstik, 2004). The New Social Studies encouraged academics to redefine why history was taught in schools: to “learn the process involved in creating historical narratives” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 82). Teachers were encouraged to use “raw data,” or primary sources, to teach history (Betts, 1967). The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s also led academics to realize that marginalized groups, such as African Americans, had been largely left out of the teaching of history, and curricula began to be revised to include more social history (Gleason, 1968). The Advanced Placement (AP) program was born during this era as well (1957-1958), as an attempt to upgrade education in the United States in order to compete with communist countries during the Cold War (Rothschild, 1999).

The teaching methods of the New Social Studies were not without their critics (Betts, 1967; Dawe, 1968), and the evidence suggests that high school teachers did not embrace these methods but rather stuck with the tried and true methods of lecture and

class discussion (Cuban, 1991), even though there were a few college education professors training pre-service teachers to use the inquiry method in their classrooms (Lord, 1969). However, college history professors were starting to use more primary sources in their teaching, which led to the inclusion of a DBQ on the American History AP exam in 1973 and on the European History AP exam in 1975 (Rothschild, 1999).

The quality of our schools was once again questioned in the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, which targeted the core academic areas, including history (Brown, 2006). In response, The Bradley Commission on History in Schools was formed in 1987. This group of respected history professors recommended the inclusion of more social history and the history of previously marginalized groups, such as women and minorities, in the history curriculum (Jackson, 1989). However, it would take almost another decade before the National History Standards were written and published by a group of elementary and secondary teachers and historians (Nash, 1997). In addition to content standards, the new standards included standards for five strands of historical thinking: 1) Chronological Thinking; 2) Historical Comprehension; 3) Historical Analysis and Interpretation; 4) Historical Research Capabilities; and 5) Historical Issues – Analysis and Decision-making (National Center for History in the Schools, 2005). The use of primary sources is recommended throughout these standards. Unfortunately, even with these efforts to change the way history is taught in the classroom, evidence suggests that the old passive methods of lecture and textbook reading prevail (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Bolinger & Warren, 2007), perhaps because the demands placed on teachers to cover the curriculum

and to control student behavior are valued highly by administrators (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

One attempt to remedy this situation in the classroom is the Teaching American History grant program from the U.S. Department of Education. The program is part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and came about because of Senator Robert Byrd's (West Virginia) concern about students' lack of knowledge of United States history. The grant addresses the deficiencies in the curriculum (that it focuses more on social studies and less on history) and in teacher preparation. School districts that receive this competitive grant are partnered with a university or museum to design professional development for the history teachers in the district (Stein, 2003). The original goal of the professional development was to provide teachers with more content area knowledge, as it has been found that approximately half of history teachers do not have a college major or minor in history (Ingersoll, 1999), and even those who do may not have a broad overall view of history because college history departments are offering specialized classes instead of survey of history classes (Jackson, 1989). However, it has been found that the projects do tend to focus on historical thinking skills as well as content (Humphrey et al., 2005; Ragland, 2009).

The results of studies done on the Teaching American History (TAH) program have been mixed. While the 2005 U.S. Department of Education report on the program reported that two-thirds (67%) of program directors indicated that the program improved participants' content knowledge and that over half (59%) of the teachers that participated reported that they were better able to use strategies for historical thinking as a result of

the program, it was also revealed that teachers had a limited ability to analyze primary sources and interpret historical data (Humphrey et al., 2005). Lofstrom (2007) found that in a TAH program in Tennessee, achievement was higher on an end-of-course test in history for students of teachers who did not participate in the program. However, other studies have found that teachers in the program utilized a greater variety of teaching strategies (Ragland, 2009; Ryan & Valadez, 2009), and that there was a greater amount of primary source analysis being done in these classrooms as well (Ragland, 2007; Ragland, 2009; Ryan & Valadez, 2009). Increased use of DBQs was also reported (Ragland, 2007; Ragland, 2009). While this increase in use of strategies intended to promote historical thinking is a positive development, Westhoff, a trained historian, has observed that even though use of primary sources increased, teachers “did not always use them in a way that promoted historical thinking” (Westhoff, 2009, p. 65) and that teachers often succumbed to presentism when analyzing the sources. She cites the pressures on teachers to teach for coverage as a deterrent to this type of teaching. Although the TAH program represents a big step toward preparing teachers to teach historical thinking, more research must be done to analyze its outcomes.

Teaching students to think historically is a daunting task, but it can be accomplished to some degree (Foster & Yeager, 1999; Perfetti et al., 1994; VanSledright, 2002a). There is evidence that there is a developmental progression that students move through in their learning (P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001; P. J. Lee & Shemilt, 2003; Levstik & Pappas, 1987; Young & Leinhardt, 1998) and that specific teaching strategies lead to this development (Bain, 2005; Doppen, 2000; Monte-Sano, 2006; Reed, 1998; Stahl, Hynd,

Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996; VanSledright, 2002a). Perhaps the first task of educators is to understand students' prior knowledge and beliefs, much of which runs counter to thinking historically.

### **Student Characteristics and Abilities**

A number of student characteristics must be considered if teachers are to effectively instruct students on how to think historically (P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001). One characteristic that is usually instilled in them by their teachers from a very young age is a reliance on textbooks as presenting the true story (Collingwood, 1946; Paxton, 2002; Wineburg, 1991a); another is that there is one "right" answer (Wineburg, 1991a). When faced with the complexities of constructing a historical narrative, they tend to simplify the concepts and use understandings of their current world to understand the past (P. J. Lee & Ashby, 2001; P. J. Lee, 2005). For example, they might see a historical account as a "copy of the past," or classify as opinion a statement that cannot be clearly classified as true or untrue (P. J. Lee, 2005, p. 60). They can easily be led to understand that the construction of history is a complex process, one that requires the asking of questions and that might not lead to a definitive answer (Foster & Yeager, 1999; P. J. Lee, 2005; Spoehr & Spoehr, 1994).

Students' cultural experiences and families also have a great effect on how they approach history (Seixas, 1993). Not unsurprisingly, they sometimes have difficulty putting themselves into the context of the historical situation they are studying (VanSledright, 1996) and tend to conform the historical information they learn to what they already believe (i.e., they don't question others' motives in the context of the

situation) (Wineburg, 2001). While they may have a basic understanding of bias, this does not mean that they are able to critically analyze the meaning of a historical statement; they are more likely to take the statement at face value (P. J. Lee, 2005; Seixas, 1993). In order to effectively construct a historical argument, they must learn the academic skills necessary for primary and secondary source analysis (Young & Leinhardt, 1998).

Findings indicate that students from fifth grade through college are capable of historical thought in varying degrees (Foster & Yeager, 1999; Perfetti et al., 1994; VanSledright, 2002a). However, there is evidence that without specific teaching strategies, historical thinking remains a mystery for many students. One reason for this may be the difficulty of understanding historical context, a lack of background information about the time period under study (Davis, 2001; Foster & Yeager, 1999), or simply a deficit in the disciplinary skills needed to construct a historical case (Wineburg, 1991a). Rothschild (2000), in decades of experience in teaching students to write DBQs, concluded that some students still were not capable of critical primary source analysis. Monte-Sano (2008) created her own historical writing tasks for her study because she felt that the DBQ format was too difficult for many of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students participating in the study; yet, students of varying ability levels are asked to write DBQs as early as freshman year in many high schools (e.g., New York). The teachers of these classes do indeed face a difficult task in preparing their students to perform this type of writing.

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

Several researchers have found that historical thinking develops in flexible stages throughout the school years (P. J. Lee & Shemilt, 2003; Levstik & Pappas, 1987; Monte-Sano, 2006; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Levstik and Pappas (1987) found that two concurrent themes emerged from their data on the retelling of historical narratives: *differences of kind*, where older and younger children tended to include different facts from the same stories; and *differences of degree*, where the descriptions were qualitatively different from the various grade levels (2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders). Although compelling, this data was generated from a pilot study with a small sample size, and the findings need to be validated by further research. P. J. Lee and Shemilt (2003) have proposed a progression based on many years of research in which students move from history as stories to history as understanding primary sources in context. They resist using the term “stages” because there is evidence that growth is uneven and that there is a seven-year gap in thinking (i.e., a 14-year-old may think the same way as a 7-year-old). Rather than teaching skills in a set sequence, therefore, teachers should continue to develop students’ disciplinary skills as they move through various units of study and make note of student progress along the way.

Other researchers have also noted the uneven development of historical thinking in students. Vansledright (1995) noted that there was a difference in the abilities of fifth and eighth graders in his studies, and Monte-Sano (2006) reported that student abilities in the high school classes she studied developed independently and unevenly. Young and Leinhardt (1998) concluded that growth occurred on two dimensions: the content of

history, or knowledge of historical periods, and the rhetoric of history, or knowledge of the discipline. They also note that growth along these dimensions occurs unevenly. These studies consisted of very small sample sizes, so more research is needed to confirm these findings; however, the results do seem to concur. VanSledright (1995) cautions that more research is needed about the “sense students make of American history” (p. 343) because some historical periods may be more difficult for students to understand than others, and students at different grade levels may need different learning experiences in order to develop historical understanding (based on his experience with students at different grade levels).

### **Perspective**

One of the most difficult concepts for students to learn is the idea of multiple perspectives. P. J. Lee (2005) states that young students frequently think of multiple perspectives as simply differences of opinion and miss the complexities of historical accounts. In his study on multiple perspectives with high school students, Doppen (2000) found that although students could recognize multiple perspectives and incorporate them into a report on the dropping of the atomic bomb, most students saw the primary sources from an American, us vs. them point of view.

According to P. J. Lee (2005), it is essential that multiple perspectives be taught in history classes because “perspective-free accounts are not possible” (p. 60) and will be encountered as students look at primary sources. It is important that students are taught that historical accounts are complex and do not necessarily tell the whole story (nor were they intended to), and that one can ask questions of sources “that those sources were not



designed to answer” (p. 37). P. J. Lee also points out that there is a uniqueness in substantive concepts in history in that “their meaning shifts over time as well as space” (p. 61). He gives the example that kings of different eras are likely to have different powers and behave in different ways. Thus, teaching multiple perspectives is a complicated endeavor, but one that is necessary for students to develop historical thinking. Learning multiple perspectives requires looking at primary sources and reading text, another skill that some students find difficult.

Related to perspective is the identification of bias in text. Perfetti, Britt, Rouet, Georgi, and Mason (1994) found that the college students in their study could identify bias in text, but failed to note biased language in the text. They concluded that the students were not actively looking for bias while reading and that while they were beginning to use some of the skills of historians, they were not yet near that level of understanding. Wineburg (1991a) notes that in his study, while students tended to view some texts as biased and some as not, historians did not question the presence of bias but rather questioned how the text’s bias affected the quality of the source. Finally, Geisler (1994) states that the ability to understand the abstract “rhetorical problem space” (p. 87), or the analysis of bias and subtext, is something not achieved until late undergraduate school or even later.

### **Text in Primary Sources**

Wineburg (1991b, 2001) identifies two “spheres” of subtext within text: text as rhetorical artifact and text as human artifact. When looking at text as rhetorical artifact, the historian looks for author’s intentions for writing the piece; the text as human artifact

is the subtext of what the author did not intend to say, their opinions or beliefs. Another distinction among types of text is between relic and record, relic being an artifact that was not intended to tell us about the past, and record being text written with the purpose of informing an audience about an event or occurrence (P. J. Lee, 2005). The historian finds value in both but must utilize different strategies to make inferences from each. As Wineburg (1991b) found in a study comparing students and historians, “What is most important to [the historian] is not what the text *says*, but what it *does*” (p. 498), in other words, what can be inferred about the author and/or time period being studied from the text. On the other hand, he also found that students were not likely to discover the subtext and instead saw a document as taking a “side.” They tended to search for the right answer and became frustrated when sources contradicted each other. He concludes that students need to be taught about subtext and that text is more than something to simply gather information from; students need to engage with text in addition to just processing it. In the same study, he observed that students did not take notice of the attribution of the primary source, while for the historians the attribution formed the foundation for inferences made from the text (1991a). In relation to this finding, Foster and Yeager (1999) reported that English students could not determine the validity of primary sources, something that historians are adept at. Paxton (2002) found in a study on author visibility that the more visible an author was in a text, the more that high school students engaged with the text. He acknowledges that the students did not transform knowledge from text in the manner that a historian would, but states that it is an important finding for teachers

nonetheless. This study was the first of its kind and used a very small sample of students, so further research is needed in this area.

### **Reading History Texts**

In a typical history classroom one will find students reading history textbooks. In classes where the teacher is teaching history as fact, and not teaching historical thinking, the textbook becomes the final authority on what happened in history for students (Paxton, 2002; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998; Wineburg, 1991a), perhaps because when textbooks are written for student readability, the authors leave out source and contextualizing information (Geisler, 1994; Wineburg, 1991b). There is evidence that, with guidance, students enjoy using primary sources (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998) and may trust them as much as textbooks (Rouet et al., 1996). However, reading multiple primary sources is a complex endeavor: one must consider the source of the document and the context in which it was written, contend with various and often conflicting stories, understand how the primary sources relate to one another, and decide what additional information is required to build the case. It involves true synthesis of information, not simply an accumulation of it (Britt, Rouet, Georgi, & Perfetti, 1994).

Comprehending historical texts requires much more than the reading comprehension strategies students are taught in reading classes can provide, more than reading and retelling facts from the text (Wineburg, 1991b). Studies with elementary, high school, and college age students indicate that students are deficient in these intertextual strategies (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Perfetti et al., 1994; Stahl et al.,

1996; Wineburg, 1991b), possibly because these are skills that are not being taught in many classrooms (Geisler, 1994). According to Wineburg (2001),

Text emerge as ‘speech acts,’ social interactions set down on paper that can be understood only by reconstructing the social context in which they occurred. The comprehension of text reaches beyond words and phrases to embrace intention, motive, purpose, and plan – the same set of concepts we use to decipher human action (pp. 66-67).

To comprehend such text, therefore, one must dialogue with the text, or “enter into” it (Wineburg, 1991b p. 503). When taught these specialized types of reading strategies, students are capable of understanding history texts in varying degrees (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Perfetti et al., 1994).

### **Writing a Historical Argument**

For many students, writing is not an easy task. In fact, studies have shown that students are capable of conveying higher-level thought in speech more easily than in writing (Dickinson & P. J. Lee, 1984; Foster & Yeager, 1999; Greene, 2001; Paxton, 2002). Writing a historical argument has proven to be unique when compared to writing an argument in other subject areas (Coffin, 2004; Monte-Sano, 2006), possibly because of the nature of historical thought, where the student must take context and perspective into consideration to understand the words and actions of historical agents. The DBQ is especially difficult because students are required to analyze primary and secondary source documents, relate the documents to each other, and use them to support an argument (Leinhardt, 2000). However, by practicing historical writing, students may

engage in “knowledge transformation” and come to know the subject matter at a deeper level (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

### **Knowledge-Transformation in Writing**

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) distinguish “knowledge-telling” from “knowledge-transforming.” Knowledge-telling is simply a regurgitation of information that has been learned, while knowledge-transformation involves taking information and creating something new with it; this is accomplished by proposing and solving a problem and through a process of creation and revision of text. It is a cognitive process that is not always evident in the text that is produced. For knowledge-transformation to occur, the topic must be relevant to the writer and connect to his or her prior knowledge and the conditions in which the writer encounters the topic (“on transitory states of feeling and concern, on what the young writer has been thinking or learning recently,” Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987, p. 360). This last condition is dependent on the teacher and what context is provided in the classroom. They report that their research indicates that knowledge-transformation is required in the pursuit of real learning. Voss and Wiley (1997) found that more skilled writers in a group of college students engaged in the types of processes involved in knowledge-transforming (i.e., integration and synthesis of information) while less skilled writers produced essays that simply retold information (i.e., knowledge-telling). In a preceding study, they also found that knowledge-transformation was promoted by the use of multiple primary sources in writing an argumentative essay (Wiley & Voss, 1996). The DBQ aims to be precisely this sort of task.

## **Argument Construction**

Voss and Wiley (1997) concluded that by writing arguments, students begin to see history as complicated and something to be debated and is therefore of value. Montecano (2006) found a distinction between historical argumentation and general argumentation in high school students' essays that developed over the course of a school year. General argumentation began with a thesis and used evidence to argue the point, while historical argumentation began with questions about evidence. The claims made in the historical argument are uncertain, because we can never truly reconstruct the past in certain terms. The relationship between the development of these two types of argumentation were not clear from her study, but the finding does indicate that while knowledge of how to create a basic argumentative essay is the basis for writing a historical argumentative essay, the latter requires historical reasoning that goes far beyond this basis. The students who were more successfully able to produce historical argumentation in essays attended classes where the teachers provided many opportunities for writing and guidance in the form of scaffolding skills, class discussion, and feedback.

In Australia, Coffin (2004) used linguistic analysis to determine how secondary school students develop causal explanations in their essay writing in history. She found that language that indicated causal relations was used more often in argumentative and explanatory essays than in autobiographical, biographical, or historical recount essays. The essays became more abstract and causation was more developed as students began writing more in the explanatory and argumentative forms. These essays were also more impersonal, as the writer was required to take a more objective stance in their argument

and do more interpretation and analysis. She concludes that one way to help students succeed in this type of writing is to teach them about the way “causality operates in history writing in a systematic way” and to have them “reflect critically on the nature of causality as it currently operates in historical discourse, rather than to be unreflectingly co-opted into the ideological assumptions of the discipline” (p. 285). However, it seems that if students were to be taught in this manner, they would miss the whole idea of historical thinking.

### **Writing With Primary Sources**

There have been relatively few studies that have dealt specifically with how students use primary sources in writing, which is the task of the DBQ. As we have seen, Wiley and Voss have found that college-age students write more analytic essays that displayed knowledge-transformation when instructed to write an argument (as opposed to a history or narrative) as a historian would from primary sources (Voss & Wiley, 1997; Wiley & Voss, 1996). They again replicated their findings in 1999 (Wiley & Voss, 1999) and suggest the possibility that the argument task produced more analytic writing because it is a more personal task than simply writing a narrative or explanation, but recommend further research. These studies are informative yet limited by their samples, which were taken from psychology classes at the University of Pittsburgh where the participants were most likely similar in background and intelligence. An interesting variation would be to replicate the studies with a more diverse sample.

Rouet, Britt, Mason, and Perfetti (1996) investigated college students’ ability to “reason with documents,” which they define as “the ability to use document information

when solving a problem” (p. 479). Students were asked to study primary and secondary source documents related to the Panama Canal, to write an essay on their opinion about a controversy, and finally to rate the documents in terms of usefulness and trustworthiness. The results showed that students were able to distinguish among the different document types (historian essays, textbook passages, participant accounts, and primary sources such as treaties) and to think about their origin and author when evaluating their usefulness and trustworthiness. The essays were evaluated quantitatively for claims and types of arguments, number of citations to documents, and the type of argument as related to the documents that were cited. They found that the students were able to construct different types of arguments and use the documents to support each type of argument and that, therefore, the students were “reasoning with documents.” Primary sources were the document type cited most frequently, and the textbook passage was never cited in the essays. The authors claim that this supports the theory of the development of a mental argument model when working with multiple sources. While this study may help explain how students cognitively deal with multiple documents, its findings fail to address the historical thinking involved in building a historical case, and the authors tend to treat the subject of history as any other academic subject. The consideration of the context of the time period appeared to be inconsequential to the authors as the study focused on how students reason with primary and secondary source documents; however, consideration of context is an essential component of historical thinking, and students writing historical essays should be taking context into account. This study also used students from the University of Pittsburgh as its participants.



Young and Leinhardt (1998) qualitatively analyzed five Advanced Placement students' essays for organizational patterns and document use over the course of a school year. They identified three overall patterns in the students' writing: list pattern, used most often, in which students randomly listed ideas and did not analyze documents or become argumentative; specified list pattern, in which students grouped lists by concept and typically did not analyze documents or use them to support an argument; and causal pattern, which were organized as a narrative and ideas were causally linked. Although perhaps more analytic than the list or specified list patterns of organization, authors using the causal pattern did not produce a historical argument and sometimes got lost in their causal links, failing to come to a definitive conclusion. All the students were able to use at least half of the documents, as recommended for an AP DBQ, and by the end of the year, most were integrating multiple documents in their essays (i.e., citing documents more than once and comparing documents), which, in the authors' opinion, indicated more knowledge transformation. However, most students had difficulty "writing from the documents," and instead wrote "about them" (p. 46). Writing from documents involves seeing the document as inherently biased and therefore "in need of interpretation" and presenting "interpreted content from within an argument" (pp. 46-47). Students were more likely to see the documents as reporting facts, especially in the beginning of the school year. Later in the year, they began to do more interpretation and integration of documents. However, it was concluded that this is a very difficult task for students, even at the AP level. In analyzing student choice of documents used in the essays, the researchers found that there was no set pattern of use, and theorize that document use was

affected by students' prior knowledge and the depth of interpretation the document required (i.e., the documents that required deeper analysis were not chosen). By the end of the year, the students still used the list pattern of organization in their writing, but it was more organized and detailed, and contained more document interpretation and use of multiple documents to make a single point. Although limited by the small sample size, this study presents a more in-depth look at the DBQ in the AP setting than previous studies. One of the purposes of this study is to provide a snapshot of the DBQ in a classroom with students of varying abilities at various ages (as young as freshman).

Greene (2001), in his study of a college-level history of science class, found that although students were able to write interpretive essays in which context was considered, they were somewhat uncomfortable taking the perspective of a historian and found it difficult to do so. He found that each student interpreted the task differently, which resulted in a variety of structure among the essays. He postulated that the variation was due to the lack of instruction in disciplinary writing, the focus of freshman writing classes being a more general form of writing. He questioned whether disciplinary writing should be taught as a separate course or handled within the courses where students are expected to do this sort of writing. Paxton (2002) found that high school students (in non-AP classes) responded differently to primary sources that had a "visible author" (i.e., wrote from the first person): they tended to write longer essays and to be more personally involved in their essays, exhibited by taking the first person in their writing, considering the motivation of the authors of the sources, and showing a greater awareness of their audience, than students who received primary sources where the author was anonymous.

The essays of the students in the anonymous author group tended to replicate the text found in history textbooks. Paxton does point out, however, that although the essays from the visible author group were more personal and argumentative, they did not remotely exhibit the type of historical thinking that historians do. He concluded that students were learning disciplinary discourse from textbooks, whereas this type of learning should be done from primary sources, and that adolescents learning how to think historically would benefit from examining sources with a visible author.

### **Speech and Writing**

In several cases, researchers found that students were able to articulate their ideas more easily in speech than in writing (Dickinson & P. J. Lee, 1984; Foster & Yeager, 1999; Greene, 2001; Paxton, 2002). Greene theorized that this is because there are certain expectations for writing to which students believe they must adhere, and that they are freer with their speech. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) believe that the absence of conversational partners while writing prevents students from writing more advanced text. Leinhardt (1993, 2000) noted that students who are exposed to a “complex and intricate system of instructional explanations” talk more in class over time and are able to “develop preliminary, discipline-based explanations” (1993, p. 72). She found that students’ speech developed as the school year went on: at the beginning of the year they were asking functional questions about the class and assignments; by the end of the year they were able to talk about historical issues in a detailed manner. In her investigation, one student’s writing developed concurrently with his speech, and she asserted that

analyzing speech is a complex endeavor, more so than analyzing writing. More research will be required to sort out the relationship between speech and writing.

In sum, these studies show that although historical writing is a complex task that is difficult for even advanced students, it can be accomplished to some degree with the right teaching methods. Grant (2003) concedes that we cannot establish a causal relationship between teaching and learning, however, the research does suggest a correlation between certain types of teaching and student performance. The next section addresses the research on teaching for historical thinking.

### **Teaching for Historical Thinking**

Seixas (2000) identified three ways of teaching history in the classroom: “enhancing collective memory,” or teaching history as one correct story; a “disciplinary” approach, or teaching students two versions of history and having them decide which one is better based on interpretation of evidence; and a “postmodern” approach, in which “students consider both versions with the supporting documentation but then relate the versions of the past to their political uses in the present” (p. 20). While the collective memory method is problematic in that it does not teach critical thinking, Seixas contends that the disciplinary approach has been the subject of the most research and publication, and that the postmodern approach, where students are essentially comparing different groups’ histories and the motivations for writing them as they were written, is rarely attempted. Indeed, it has been shown that students learn more and remember history much longer if they are asked to analyze and interpret primary sources (VanSledright & James, 2002), as required by the disciplinary approach. As it has been shown that history

at the disciplinary level is difficult for even the best students (Greene, 2001; Young & Leinhardt, 1998), it is unlikely that the postmodern approach will be implemented soon. The literature offers theories and advice on curriculum and instruction, as well as specific teaching strategies that may be helpful in teaching students to perform well on historical writing tasks.

### **Academic Literacy (Disciplinary Knowledge)**

Many education scholars have come to the conclusion that students must learn the historical processes (or how to “do” history) as well as historical facts (Bain, 2005; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brophy, 1990; P. J. Lee, 2005; Seixas, 1999; Seixas, 2000; VanSledright, 2002b; VanSledright & James, 2002; VanSledright & Limon, 2006; Young & Leinhardt, 1998); some claim that the two are mutually dependent (Bain, 2005; VanSledright & Limon, 2006). P. J. Lee (2005) identified this as an “intellectual toolkit” (p. 70) that students must be taught: the ability to analyze and interpret evidence, to consider the validity of primary sources and the context of the historical period, to debate the interpretation of primary sources, and to imaginatively fill in the gaps left by the evidence (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Kelly et al., 2007; VanSledright, 2002b). It is not something that students will learn in one lesson and be tested on, but rather something that must be developed in students (Dickinson & P. J. Lee, 1984). This is not to say that facts are not important in historical thinking and understanding; one must have some factual knowledge in order to reason about history (Bain, 2005; Davis, 2001; P. J. Lee, 2005). It is up to teachers to provide opportunities for students to have these experiences with evidence in the classroom in a variation of historians’ actual practice (VanSledright,

2002b). The most recent national history standards also call for historical thinking to be taught in the schools (National Center for History in the Schools, 2005), as previously discussed. VanSledright contends that it is also important to connect history to students' present-day lives (1996) and to make them aware of what he calls the "interpretive paradox" (2002b, p. 1090), or the tension between reality and interpretation in history.

As researchers studied historical understanding, it became apparent that educational psychologists may be better equipped to investigate the cognitive aspects of learning history (Seixas, 1994). Whereas students were traditionally expected to abandon their personal beliefs and simply learn what they were told (Geisler, 1994), it is now believed that an individual's epistemic beliefs play a significant part in how they learn history, which may have an impact on the way history is taught (Bain, 2000; VanSledright & Limon, 2006). While there are some inherent challenges in the interdisciplinary research of educational psychology and history in that "(a) the discipline under investigation (history) is not the discipline upon which the investigation is based (educational psychology) and (b) most educational psychologists are not particularly at home in the discipline of history" (Seixas, 1994, p. 107), it is acknowledged that more research is needed in the teaching and learning of history (Wineburg & Wilson, 2001a), for teaching history is about teaching that which we cannot see (Wineburg, 2001) and about assessing a thinking process in students that is not easily assessed (VanSledright, 2001).

## **School Curricula**

In VanSledright's opinion, the school history curriculum needs to be revamped to include teaching for historical thought (VanSledright, 1995; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998; VanSledright, 2004b). Study of the metacognitive practices of the discipline will require students to investigate primary sources that come from a variety of perspectives and to engage in discussions about the interpretation of those sources (Brophy, 1990; Rouet et al., 1996; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998). Students must be made aware that history is not a set of facts but a series of interpretations (VanSledright, 2002b), and that the development of empathy requires special consideration (Davis, 2001). While setting goals for the construction of student knowledge is important (VanSledright & James, 2002), curriculum developers need to be cautious because having an end goal does not always take cognitive processes, which are critical in thinking historically, into account (P. J. Lee, 2005). It is crucial that teachers create a context for learning that allows students to develop this type of thought (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Levstik & Pappas, 1987). The National History Standards, which emphasize historical thinking (National Center for History in the Schools, 2005), are evidence of a push toward a curriculum change, even though there is little evidence that the change is being made (Bolinger & Warren, 2007).

One of the difficulties in creating this type of curriculum is that some schools advocate broad coverage of history topics instead of in-depth historical investigations so that the students will do well on standardized tests (Grant, 2003; Kelly et al., 2007; VanSledright & James, 2002). VanSledright (2002) acknowledged that this created a

dilemma for him while conducting lessons that used an investigative approach, despite the fact that research has shown that students retain more knowledge when taught in this manner (Brophy, 1990). Teachers may be discouraged to teach in this manner, not only by curriculum guides, but by a lack of professional development opportunities and by state standards that fall short of providing strategies for teaching for historical thinking (Kelly et al., 2007). If the goal of school history curricula were changed to include historical thinking, teachers might feel freer to take the additional time needed to teach in the investigative manner (VanSledright, 1996) and to utilize some of the strategies suggested by the research.

### **Strategies for Teaching Historical Thinking**

When structuring learning tasks that are intended to lead to historical thinking, teachers must be careful to construct experiences that are complex enough so that students may question their meaning, leading to a transformation of knowledge (Foster & Yeager, 1999; VanSledright, 1997; Wineburg, 1991b). The danger here is that the limited number of primary sources might lead students to think that there is one “right” answer instead of realizing that what is presented is simply a selection of a larger number of materials available on the subject (Foster & Yeager, 1999). In order to elicit questions from students, it is suggested that the teacher present them with a dilemma faced by historians and invite them to “interrogate the past” (VanSledright, 1996, p. 136) or to take a position and defend it (Brophy, 1990). Class discussion provides a platform on which students can share their ideas and receive feedback (Dickinson & P. J. Lee, 1984; Doppin, 2000; Leinhardt, Stainton, Virji, & Odoroff, 1994). Teachers should encourage



students to regard the context of the historical period under study and cultivate some background knowledge in order to understand the context (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008). Perfetti, Britt, Rouet, Georgi, and Mason (1994) suggest that teachers take advantage of the mental schema of story already existing in most students, and teach history as a story, although this method has not been proven by research.

Some researchers suggest specific items to be learned or steps to be taken in learning. Leinhardt (1994) specifically addresses the skills needed for the DBQ: the “ability to (a) analyze events and themes; (b) synthesize trends, events, or concepts; and (c) construct a case” (p. 145). In order to accomplish this, she recommends that students inspect historical events or eras in light of “political, social, scientific, and economic conditions” (p. 146). For his study, VanSledright (2002b) constructed a step-by-step process for fifth graders to follow in a historical investigation of the Jamestown Starving Time, which he deemed somewhat successful (VanSledright, 2002a). The steps included: dig up evidence; check sources; check the reliability of the sources; judge the importance of each piece of evidence; build an idea of what happened; and make an argument for what happened (p. 1097). He concluded that learning the process of inquiry is just as important as learning the outcome of the inquiry, and that the ability to argue from evidence is central to the process (VanSledright & James, 2002). Of utmost importance is for teachers to decide what they expect students to be able to do as far as historical thinking is concerned, for it should not be expected that students perform exactly as historians do (Foster & Yeager, 1999). Indeed, there are different expectations in regard to knowledge for the two groups: students are expected to obtain and display knowledge

whereas historians are expected to produce it (Geisler, 1994). There is evidence that students do not construct historical cases to the extent of historians (Leinhardt, Stainton, Virji, & Odoroff, 1994).

### **Strategies for Interpreting Primary Sources**

In order for students to learn to think historically, they must have opportunities to inspect a variety of primary sources and have guidance in learning how to interpret them (VanSledright, 1996). Simply providing students with primary sources will not lead to historical thinking; students need to be taught the art of interpretation (Stahl et al., 1996). They must be taught how to evaluate a source's validity by analyzing its origin, take multiple perspectives into account, and learn that various sources relate to each other in various ways, which can be thought of as a network (Britt et al., 1994). According to VanSledright (2004b), "Assessing sources is a complex process involving at least four interrelated and interconnected cognitive acts – identification, attribution, perspective judgment, and reliability assessment" (p. 230). This includes identifying the author of a source and judging its reliability, considering the historical perspective, and judging the reliability of an account by comparing it to other accounts. Teachers must be careful, however, as the assessment of perspective frequently turns into a detection of bias. This can be problematic because students often see bias as a dichotomy, an either/or perspective, while historians see bias as inherent in text and instead assess the intent of the author (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; VanSledright, 2001, 2004b). One must also take care when teaching about reliability assessment; P. J. Lee (2005) pointed out that several pieces of evidence can be refuted by a single claim, and that students may look

specifically for that one claim in order to avoid grappling with a difficult argument. It is up to teachers to guide students carefully throughout the school year in interpretation of the evidence they encounter (Bain, 2005).

Specific strategies have been suggested for use in how to teach students about interpreting primary sources. Bain (2005) had success in teaching high school students linguistic devices to distinguish between events and accounts in history. Spoehr and Spoehr (1994) developed a hypermedia program that made primary sources more readily available to secondary students. They report that, as a result of exposure to their program, the students' writing indicated an enhanced ability to "(a) provide supporting evidence for conceptual arguments, (b) consider and evaluate a wider range of arguments, and (c) pursue lines of discussion more deeply than do students who have not used the technology" (p. 75). Another program developed to encourage the use of electronic resources is the Adventure of the American Mind project (AAM), aimed at training teachers to use the primary sources on the Library of Congress website. In their pilot study, Tally and Goldenberg (2005) found that students of varying age and ability level (AP and non-AP students) enjoyed learning history and learned historical thinking skills when using the primary sources on the Library of Congress website. An independent evaluation of the program in 2007 found that, although AAM had met its goals in developing professional development for pre-service and graduate in-service teachers, there had been less success developing programs for integrating AAM into K-12 classrooms (Oyer & Jarosewich, 2007).

VanSledright (2002a) reported that fifth grade students in his study were able to interpret evidence more effectively as a result of his step-by-step method, outlined in the previous section. Reisman and Wineburg (2008) suggested three strategies to help students develop contextualized thinking: “(1) providing background knowledge, (2) asking guiding questions, and (3) explicitly modeling contextualized thinking” (p. 203). They explained that guiding questions will help students comprehend sources and think about their meaning and perspective more thoroughly, and that contextual thinking is “by its very nature invisible” (p. 204) and needs to be modeled by the teacher. The interpretation of primary sources is a complex and challenging task for students, and teachers need to guide them carefully through learning this process.

### **Strategies for Historical Writing**

Several studies indicate that certain teaching methods lead to better historical writing from students than others (De La Paz, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2006; Voss & Wiley, 1997; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Students who receive instruction in historical thinking with an emphasis on primary source interpretation produce better historical essays (De La Paz, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2006; Monte-Sano, 2008; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Having students write from multiple documents (primary and secondary sources) also led to more interpretive essays (Voss & Wiley, 1997; Wiley & Voss, 1999), and class discussion where students debate document interpretations and evaluate their own work can develop historical writing skills (Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Reed (1998) found that Richard Paul’s critical thinking model had a positive effect on college students’ ability to interpret primary sources, as evidenced by scores on DBQs.

Explicit instruction in writing and multiple opportunities to write may also assist students in historical writing (De La Paz, 2005; Felton & Herko, 2004; Monte-Sano, 2006; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Specifically, students who receive specific instruction in writing argumentatively write better essays than students who do not receive this type of instruction (De La Paz, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2006). Felton and Herko (2004) suggested that teachers try to draw out skills of argumentation that students already possess, provide plenty of opportunities for practice and feedback, and have students use graphic organizers to structure their argument. Students with weak writing skills benefit from more detailed instruction, such as thesis writing (Monte-Sano, 2006); these students also benefit from a combination of writing instruction and practice in historical reasoning (Monte-Sano, 2008). Teacher feedback should occur throughout the writing process instead of at the end so that students have a chance to develop what they are writing (Gilstrap, 1991; Monte-Sano, 2008; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Students should also have multiple opportunities to write for a variety of purposes: annotating text (Monte-Sano, 2006), writing from primary sources, and writing to demonstrate learning may all be beneficial to students who are learning academic literacy (Young & Leinhardt, 1998).

### **Issues for Social Studies Education**

There are barriers that exist to teaching history in this more comprehensive manner. The first has to do with the climate of the school and curricula provided. Teaching for historical understanding is time consuming and may not be encouraged in schools that are focused on broad coverage of content in order to elicit excellent test scores (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Doppen, 2000; Greene, 2001; Kelly et al., 2007). Those

who teach in other disciplines might see the content as background information to be learned as part of a good general education and not advocate spending the time on the depth that this type of study requires (Brophy, 1990). Students may be pushed toward a certain interpretation of a primary source rather than encouraged to debate interpretations (Kelly et al., 2007). In VanSledright's (2002a) experience, the time required for teachers to assemble the needed primary sources and the subject matter expertise required may prove prohibitive for elementary school teachers. Finally, although the teaching strategies previously presented are suggested by research, the variety of experiences that students encounter throughout the school day prevent researchers from causally linking teaching and learning in these cases (Grant, 2003). One of the purposes of this study was to investigate whether or not teachers are using teaching strategies suggested by research when teaching the DBQ and if they received any training on teaching for historical thinking in their pre-service education courses or professional development.

### **Teachers**

Research on teaching in specific subject areas (as opposed to teaching in general) emerged in about 1985 (VanSledright & Limon, 2006), so it is only fairly recently that researchers have begun to take note of what constitutes good teaching in social studies. In the struggle between broad coverage of content for standardized tests and teaching for historical thinking, NCLB has ensured that coverage wins out in many cases (Grant, 2003; Kelly et al., 2007; VanSledright & James, 2002), however, this has not been the strategy shown to be the most effective for student learning (Brophy, 1990). This necessarily has implications for teacher education: while teachers are trained in

pedagogy, should they also be trained to be historians? Several scholars have noted that even when teachers are trained to teach for historical thinking, they are unlikely to utilize these methods (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Kelly et al., 2007). History professors have very different goals and processes than teachers do, yet for teachers to learn these processes, the gap must be bridged (Seixas, 1999).

Understanding disciplinary knowledge is the key to both developing historical thinking in students and to investigating ways in which improve instruction (Leinhardt, 1993; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). If students learn history more effectively when “the teacher acts as facilitator and they have to ‘do history’ themselves” (Doppen, 2000, p. 165), then teachers must be taught how to think historically (Wineburg, 2001). They must develop an appreciation for the various “schools of historical thought” (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 171) and know how to teach argumentative writing (Monte-Sano, 2006). An excellent history teacher will combine this knowledge of teaching with knowledge of her students and guide them in their development of historical thinking (Wineburg & Wilson, 2001b).

### **Teacher Training**

The research here is quite limited. What does exist indicates that new teachers typically did not see the disciplinary aspects of history (Bohan & Davis, 1998; Yilmaz, 2008), and that how they viewed the discipline influenced their teaching (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). Some did not receive any undergraduate instruction in historical thinking or interpretation of primary sources (Bohan & Davis, 1998; Seixas, 1998) and failed to take historical context into account during analysis of historical events (Bohan & Davis, 1998; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). An evaluation of the Teaching American

History grant program found that many teachers were unable to analyze primary sources effectively (Humphrey et al., 2005). Moreover, there is no evidence that majoring in history had an effect on a teacher's ability to think contextually (Wineburg & Wilson, 2001a). Literacy textbooks were found to be of little help, comparing the reading of history with that of other content areas, such as science (VanSledright, 2004a; Wineburg, 1991a). While some undergraduate courses did provide students with opportunities to engage in historical thinking and develop an awareness of the discipline, it was suggested that more history courses be required for education majors (Yeager & Wilson, 1997).

Some of the difficulty in training students to teach history lies in the fact that history teachers must know content, pedagogy, and historical thinking (Bain, 2005; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). The social studies are made up of a variety of areas such as geography and sociology, and, as daunting as that sounds, a student can retain vast amounts of content knowledge while knowing little of the actual discipline (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). If student teachers have difficulty composing historical essays that display historical thinking, as Bohan and Davis (1998) found, how are they to teach their students to perform this task? Another complication is the fact that teaching and learning history is influenced by one's beliefs about the acquisition of knowledge and the nature of history (Maggioni, VanSledright, & Alexander, 2009; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988; Wineburg & Wilson, 2001a). The findings reported on here are the results of small, mostly qualitative studies; more research is needed on how teachers learn how to teach history. One of the purposes of this study is to find out how teachers' learning experiences influenced their teaching.



## Summary

Implementation of the DBQ is an attempt at authentically assessing historical thinking and reasoning in students. While learning the facts of history is still considered important, learning the disciplinary skills used by historians to interpret primary sources is deemed equally important for students to learn. Students can and do learn these skills, however, and teachers must construct learning opportunities that specifically develop them. Therefore, it is important for history teachers to be trained in the discipline as well as to learn content; programs such as the Teaching American History grant program are aimed at doing just that. It is also helpful for teachers to be able to teach argumentative writing because this type of writing leads to more transformation of knowledge. Although these are skills that historians use in their discipline, there is agreement that the purpose of history classes is not to create “mini-historians.”

While there is a fair amount of literature on the development of historical thinking, little exists specifically on writing the DBQ. It appears that students write more analytically when asked to write an argument as opposed to a history or narrative, and that access to multiple documents may aid students in making historical arguments. It is important that students have many opportunities to analyze primary source documents and debate interpretations before and during the writing process. Even with excellent teaching, however, writing “from the documents” instead of “about the documents” proved difficult even for AP History students (Young & Leinhardt, 1998, p. 46). Monte-Sano (2006) provided her own writing task and materials for her study because she deemed the DBQ too difficult for her 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. If students in regular

classrooms at a variety of grade levels in middle and high schools are to be writing DBQs (e.g., to prepare for the New York Regents exam), more research needs to be done on this subject.

It was the aim of this study to add to this sparse area of research. It was an attempt to find out what teachers are doing in classrooms where the DBQ is implemented: if they are teaching students to think historically; consider context and multiple perspectives; and write argumentatively. The evidence that has been compiled on how these teachers help struggling students develop these skills will hopefully help other teachers with their instruction. Information about what type of training the teachers have received and their judgment of its value in implementing the DBQ in the classroom may have implications for social studies methods courses. Justifications and purposes for implementation of the DBQ are also examined. History is unlike any other school subject area in that it requires a different type of thinking and understanding; hopefully, teachers appreciate the nuances of the discipline.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to inform the practice of high school teachers who are implementing or attempting to implement Document Based Question essays (DBQs) in history classes. A DBQ is an essay question about a particular topic in history. Answering the question requires the student to create an argument and use the provided primary and secondary source documents to support their argument. They are to write a well-constructed essay consisting of an introduction, several body paragraphs, and a conclusion; the introduction must also contain a well-written thesis statement. The essay is typically five paragraphs long, but length may vary according to the questions and the instructor's wishes. The number of documents may also vary; students are usually provided with a range of eight to twelve documents and are instructed to use a minimum number in their essay. The documents represent multiple points of view and vary in type to include primary sources such as excerpts of newspaper articles, speeches and diaries, political cartoons, maps, photographs, paintings, and secondary source documents such as charts and graphs. It is intended that the documents be grouped in order to answer the question. For example, the DBQ on the August 2008 Regents Exam was "Discuss the political, economic, *and/or* social impacts of the automobile on the United States" (New York State Education Department, 2008). The student would read the ten documents, group them into categories of political, economic, and social, and come up with an

argument for each category. Each category would then become a body paragraph. The essay must also include information not found in the documents and must be more analytical than descriptive. The directions usually state a minimum number of documents the student must use (for the Regents Exam example, the minimum was five documents). The DBQ from the 2008 New York Regents Exam may be found in Appendix A.

The DBQ was meant to be an authentic assessment, or a real-world task, that would simulate the type of work that historians do (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Although the authenticity of the DBQ is questionable (Grant et al., 2004), the skills required to write a DBQ, such as primary source analysis, synthesis of information, and the development of an argument, are considered to be of value in today's world (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; Goodlad, 2004; Monte-Sano, 2008; VanSledright, 1996; VanSledright & Limon, 2006). It is not the purpose of this study to investigate the merit of the DBQ. The presence of a DBQ on a state examination (New York) is evidence that thousands of students of all ability levels are required to learn how to write this type of essay; thus, research on the DBQ is warranted.

In the researcher's experience, lower level learners, who are included in the general education (non-AP) history classes in which the DBQ is now implemented, have great difficulty achieving success in writing these essays. The literature supports this, noting that even the top students struggle with the task (Monte-Sano, 2006; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). However, the literature does not provide much insight into strategies that are successfully used specifically to teach the DBQ. This study investigated what strategies teachers are using to teach the DBQ that they believe are successful with

students and for what purposes the DBQ is being used in classrooms. It looked at what teachers who have received training from the DBQ Project do compared to what teachers who have not received the training do in their classrooms. The results will hopefully help teachers who are struggling with the task of teaching students how to write these types of essays.

To obtain this information, a survey was administered to high school history teachers who implement DBQs inquiring about strategies they use to teach students how to write a DBQ. According to Babbie (1990), surveys may be used for exploration of a topic. He explains that cross-sectional surveys are used to gain information on a construct at one point in time. This study used a cross-sectional survey design in order to obtain information about how teachers currently implement DBQs in their classrooms. No existing survey instrument could be found, so one was created for this study.

This chapter discusses the research questions guiding the study, the sampling methods, and methods for data collection and analysis. The process that was used to create the survey instrument is explained as well as the steps taken to validate the instrument. Finally, possible limitations to the results are discussed.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. For what purposes do teachers use the DBQ?
2. What strategies do teachers use to teach the DBQ?
  - a. What skills do the strategies focus on?

3. How successful do teachers feel these strategies are, especially with students who read below grade level?
  - a. Do teachers modify DBQs for students who read below grade level, and, if so, how?
4. Have teachers attended professional development on how to teach the DBQ?
  - a. If so, how has this training affected their teaching methods?

These questions were formulated based on the review of the literature and on discussions the researcher has had with high school teachers who implement the DBQ. Question four was based on the researcher's knowledge of professional development provided by the DBQ Project. The training for AP history teachers provided by The College Board also covers DBQs.

### **Sample**

The population targeted for this study was high school teachers who teach World or U. S. History classes and who use DBQs in these classes. Many teachers who use DBQs have received training from The DBQ Project. The DBQ Project is an organization based in Evanston, Illinois, that provides materials and training on how to teach the DBQ to students in regular history classes. Their philosophy is that writing is the impetus for critical thinking about history; thus, their program focuses on writing that leads to the learning of history (Roden & Brady, 2000). They have either provided workshops or materials (or both) to many middle and high school history teachers across the nation. DBQ use has also been encouraged in schools that have received the Teaching American History grant (Ragland, 2007). Although not all high schools implement the DBQ in non-

AP history classes, the number of teachers who do use it is increasing due to these influences.

Purposive sampling was used in order to get a sample that includes teachers who teach the DBQ and have had various types of DBQ training or possibly none at all. According to Shadish, Cook and Campbell (2002), purposive sampling of heterogeneous instances may be used when the researcher wants diversity on a specific characteristic; the characteristic that the researcher sought diversity on in this study is whether or not teachers have had training on DBQs. The researcher sought a regional sample of teachers in northern Illinois for reasons of convenience. The decision was made to use a regional sample because of the location of the DBQ Project in Evanston, Illinois; high schools in this area were more likely to have had training from the DBQ Project because of its proximity. The DBQ Project provided contact information for both high schools that have participated in their training and for those who have purchased their materials, but did not participate in the training. In addition, Dr. Rachel Ragland of Lake Forest College, who recently conducted a study on the Teaching American History grant in Lake County, Illinois, provided contact information for several area high schools. The researcher also contacted several other high schools in northern Illinois that possibly implemented the DBQ in their non-AP classes. This was done to allow for a comparison group to the participants who have had training from the DBQ Project. The heads of the social studies departments of each school were contacted and asked to send the researcher a letter of cooperation indicating their willingness and permission to have their staffs participate in the study. The researcher had hoped that her queries would result in a pool of about 200

possible participants, however, not all schools that were contacted used DBQs, and in some schools only a few teachers were using DBQs; therefore the number of possible participants was around 100.

Most of the schools were located in Lake County, Illinois, which has a somewhat diverse population. In the 2000 census, it was reported that Lake County had a total population of 678,749, with 76% of the population being white, 6.6% African American, 3.7% Asian, and 13.7% Latino. The median income was reported as \$66,973 (Lake County Planning & Support Services Division, n.d.). Lake County consists of rural and urban areas, with some affluent areas and some areas where many families live below the poverty line (Lake County, n.d.).

Seven high schools and one district containing several high schools agreed to participate. The district had received the Teaching American History grant, and therefore some of the teachers from various schools in the district had had training from the DBQ Project and were invited to participate. To preserve anonymity, the researcher did not receive any names or email addresses from the school department heads, but rather asked the department heads to send the survey link to their staffs. Demographic information for the participating schools, taken from Illinois school report cards, is presented in Table 1.

The schools that were represented in this study vary in the extent of their diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status. Several of the schools had a high percentage of white students and a low percentage of low income students, while one school and the district that was surveyed had a lower percentage of white students and a higher percentage of low income students. In order to protect anonymity, the



researcher was unable to separate the responses from each high school, so comparisons between schools were not made in the this study. As stated previously, these schools were at various stages of DBQ implementation: some had been using DBQs for many years in their non-AP classes; some had been using them for a shorter period of time; and some only had a few teachers in the department using DBQs. Several schools that were contacted declined to participate because they do not use DBQs at all, and at one school, teachers were working on the skills necessary for writing a DBQ but had not actually used full DBQs as of yet. This school also declined to participate.

Table 1

*Demographic Information for Participating High Schools*

School	Total enrolled	Racial/ethnic background				Limited english proficient	Low income	Dept . size
		White	Black	Hispanic	Other			
A	1,719	92.3	0.6	2.6	4.5	0.0	0.7	16
B	1,266	71.4	4.9	12.0	11.7	1.3	9.0	11
C	2,222	57.8	2.9	30.8	8.5	3.6	24.2	17
D	2,115	45.4	6.8	9.1	38.8	4.5	22.4	16
E	2,474	49.2	4.9	9.8	36.2	6.2	22.4	17
F	4,419	76.1	1.5	4.8	17.6	2.8	3.5	37
G	4,232	7.8	21.4	68.0	2.8	9.2	61.6	4 <sup>a</sup>
District								
H	26,990	38.0	29.9	22.8	9.3	9.8	73.7	20 <sup>a</sup>

*Note.* Department size denotes the total number of teachers in the social studies department as listed on the school's website, not necessarily the number of teachers eligible to take the survey.

<sup>a</sup>Number communicated to the researcher of how many teachers used DBQs from that school or district.

## **Survey Development and Validation**

### **Development of Survey Questions**

As previously stated, Babbie (1990) indicates that cross-sectional surveys are used to gain information on a construct at one point in time. Therefore, the first step in forming the survey questions was to identify the constructs for the study. The constructs indicated by the research questions are as follows:

1. Use of DBQs. The purpose of this construct is to identify how teachers use DBQs in the classroom.
2. Skills. The purpose of this construct is to identify what skills teachers perceive as necessary to write a successful DBQ and how they teach these skills.
3. Success of teaching strategies. The purpose of this construct is to identify teaching strategies that teachers felt lead to student success in writing the DBQ.
4. Effect of professional development on teaching methods. The purpose of this construct is to investigate differences in how teachers who had and had not had professional development in teaching the DBQ implemented the essay.
5. Demographics. This information may also be used to break participants into comparison groups.

Once the constructs were identified, the literature regarding writing with documents and teaching for historical understanding was reviewed, and questions were created for each construct based on the literature and on the researcher's personal experience in teaching the DBQ and in talking with high school teachers about teaching the DBQ. The resulting survey consisted of seventy-three questions: eight multiple-choice questions, three of which contain an open-ended option ("other"); sixty-three Likert scale type questions; and two open-ended questions. Of the sixty-three Likert scale type questions, thirty-two asked for a rating on two scales, frequency of use of a teaching strategy and the perceived success of that strategy with students. Participants were only asked about the success rate of the strategies that they indicate that they use. The questions can further be broken down by construct. Table 1 gives the number of each type of question per construct.

Table 2

*Number of Questions per Construct*

Construct	Multiple choice	Open-ended	Likert scale
Use of DBQs	3	3 (as a multiple choice option)	
Skills			21
Use and success of teaching strategies		2	32
Professional development	1		10
Pre-service training	1		
Demographics	3		

According to Rea and Parker (2005), open-ended questions can be problematic in that they are more difficult to interpret and often elicit answers that are difficult to understand or are irrelevant. However, the goal of this study was to find teaching strategies that lead to student success in writing the DBQ, and some teachers may have found strategies that work that are not mentioned in the literature. Including open-ended response questions ensured that all possible teaching strategies could be mentioned on the survey.

### **Pretesting and Validation**

As previously stated, a survey instrument had to be created for this study. Babbie (1990) presents three types of validity that apply to surveys: criterion-related validity, or the extent to which the survey predicts a respondent's performance or behavior; content validity, or the degree to which a survey measures the constructs it was intended to measure; and construct validity, or how well the measurement from the survey aligns to theory about the constructs measured. As there was no existing survey instrument on the subject of DBQs, it was impossible to ascertain the criterion-related validity or the construct validity of the instrument; those types of validity can only be established by further research. However, according to Fink (2009), content validity may be established by consulting experts about the quality of the survey questions as well as by consulting existing theory. Therefore, three experts were asked to review the survey: two social studies department heads at local high schools and one of the creators of the DBQ Project, who teaches workshops on how to implement DBQs. Feedback on the quality of the survey questions as well as the format of the questions was solicited from these

experts. Revisions were then made based on feedback received from the experts. The feedback was very positive; the only major revision to the questions was the deletion of “writing a historical essay” in the two skills questions, as the experts felt that all of the skills listed underneath were part of writing a historical essay, and it was therefore redundant. All other revisions were minor revisions in the wording of the items. This reduced the number of items to seventy-one overall, with nineteen relating to the skills necessary to teach the DBQ.

Due to time constraints, it was recommended that the researcher not do a full pilot of the survey, but do a pretest instead. The survey was therefore pretested with teachers from the researcher’s school. These teachers taught social studies but not necessarily the DBQ; however, all of the teachers who pretested the survey had an understanding of what the DBQ is. The main suggestion from these teachers was to sort the strategy questions into categories in order to break them up a bit. Consequently, the researcher created the following categories for the strategy questions: Historical Thinking; Writing with Documents; Assessment / Feedback; and Document Analysis. Another suggestion was to provide definitions of “pre-service” and for “summative” and “formative” assessments; these definitions were added to the survey in the appropriate places. The survey instrument is presented as Appendix C. The research protocol and survey instrument was then submitted to Loyola’s Institutional Review Board for approval and received exempt status. The IRB approval is included as Appendix D, and the request for waiver of documented consent, which is appropriate for online surveys because participants are unable to sign a consent form, is included as Appendix E.

The survey was then converted to an online format using a service called SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>). According to recent research, there is an increased response rate for Web-based surveys as opposed to mailed paper-based surveys (Greenlaw & Brown-Welty, 2009). Dillman (2000) points out that there may be a greater chance of sampling coverage error when using this format because there is a chance that some respondents will not have access to the Internet. However, the sample for this study is made up completely of high school teachers, and most, if not all, high schools now have Internet access. Research suggests that respondents to web-based surveys provide better quality and longer responses to open-ended questions as compared to responses on paper-and-pencil surveys; in addition, web-based surveys have the capability of providing certain prompts to motivate respondents to provide better answers to open-ended questions.

SurveyMonkey was chosen because it is a low-cost service that provides many options for question formats and security to guarantee confidentiality of respondents. There are twenty different types of questions to choose from including open-ended response, and each type of question is capable of being formatted to meet individual needs. The color of the survey is customizable, and they allow the user to upload their own logo. An e-mail list may be maintained on their server, and invitations to complete the survey may be e-mailed using their interface. The results may be downloaded in an Excel spreadsheet that may then be imported into the statistical software program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which may reduce data entry error.

Once the survey is converted to an online format, it was previewed by the researcher on various computer platforms (i.e., Mac OS and Windows) and browsers, and screenshots were taken of each page, as suggested by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009). Figure 1 is a screenshot of questions five and six of the survey.

The Use of DBQs in Non-AP History Classes					<a href="#">Exit this survey</a>
Skills.					
<b>5. In your experience, how do students typically perform on each skill when writing a DBQ?</b>					
	Few students do this well	Some students do this well	Many students do this well	Most students do this well	
writing an argumentative essay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
writing an effective thesis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
using evidence to back up a claim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
analyzing a primary source	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
identifying bias in a document	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
determining the value and reliability of evidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
<b>6. How important do you believe each skill is for students to be able to write a DBQ?</b>					
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Essential	
write an argumentative essay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
write an effective thesis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
use evidence to back up a claim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
analyze a primary source document	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
identify bias in a document	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
determine the value and reliability of evidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 60%; height: 10px; background-color: black;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">36%</div> </div>					
<input type="button" value="Prev"/> <input type="button" value="Next"/>					

Figure 1. Screenshot of survey questions.

### Survey Administration

After the final revisions to the survey have been made, an e-mail was sent in the spring of 2010 from high school social studies department heads to their teachers inviting them to participate in the survey. The e-mail contained an introduction and a link to the survey which participants could either click or copy and paste into a browser to access the survey. The e-mail solicitation is included as Appendix G. Each participant was presented with a consent page that explained the purpose of the study, that participation is

voluntary, and that all results will be kept confidential; the consent page is included as Appendix F. Consent to participate was given by clicking the “submit” button at the end of the survey. A study by Crawford, Couper, and Lamias (2001) found that a follow-up email increased the rate of response, therefore, the researcher sent an email to the department chairs requesting that they send a reminder e-mail approximately one week after the initial email. A final reminder was requested one week before the survey was taken off-line.

Unfortunately, response rates were low, possibly due to the timing of the distribution of the survey, which was about a month before the end of the school year. The data shows that forty-five participants began the survey, but that only twenty-seven finished all of the questions. Many participants did not answer the strategy questions, which were a double scale for frequency of use and for rate of success. The researcher had thought that she would be able to “branch” these questions, so that if a respondent indicated that they did not use a strategy, he or she would not be asked about its success. However, this was not the case, and these questions had to be presented on the same line, which could have made them seem cumbersome. The researcher also initially made an error in the coding of these questions so that only one response per line was allowed; a kind participant emailed the researcher alerting her to this problem, and it was fixed in the first week of distribution. About six participants had abandoned the survey due to this error; an email was sent out explaining that the error had been fixed, but the researcher was unable to ascertain whether or not any of these six participants went back and completed the survey.



All data from the survey was downloaded from SurveyMonkey and saved on the researcher's computer, which is password protected, and on a flash drive which was secured at the researcher's home. The data had to be rearranged in Excel in order to be imported into SPSS for analysis, which mostly consisted of consolidating data into one column from multiple columns. The strategy questions for rate of success were originally coded on a scale of five through eight: not successful (5), successful with some students (6), successful with many students (7), or successful with nearly all students (8). This was done because the frequency of use scale, which was one through four, was on the same line as the rate of success scale, and it was impossible to use the same coding for both. Therefore, in order to keep the results consistent, the scale for rate of success was recoded in SPSS to be a scale of one through four.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

SPSS statistical software was used for the calculations. After the data from the survey had been collected, it was downloaded into Excel from SurveyMonkey, reformatted, and imported into SPSS. An advantage of using a Web-based survey is the reduction of data entry error, resulting in a relatively clean set of data (Fink, 2009). A codebook was kept throughout the process, as suggested by Fink (2009). Descriptive statistics were computed (i.e., mean and standard deviation) for demographic items and Likert scale items; checklist items such as questions on particular types of teaching strategies implemented are reported as percentages.

For Research Question one, the purposes for which teachers use the DBQ are reported as percentages, as are the skills identified as important for Research Question two(a). The degree to which teachers feel the skills are important (on a Likert scale) are presented as a mean for each skill, as are teachers' reports of student success on each skill.

For Research Question two, the frequency of use of each strategy is reported as a mean, as is the degree of success with students. Data pertaining to skills needed by lower-ability readers and their success is reported in a like manner for Research Question three. Additional tests were run to look for correlations between the frequency of use of teaching strategies to how successful each strategy is with students.

For Research Question four, the frequency of strategy use and perceived effectiveness of the strategies are reported as means for each type of training. In order to analyze the relationship between attending DBQ training and use of teaching strategies, it was planned that a multiple regression analysis be performed in which training attendance will be the independent variable and number of strategies reported as being "used several times" or "used each time the DBQ is taught" is the dependent variable. However, there were not enough responses for each training category to yield valid results, so this test was not run.

The literature suggests that new teachers are less likely to see the disciplinary aspects of history and teach for historical thinking (Bohan & Davis, 1998; Yilmaz, 2008). Therefore, it was planned that a multiple regression analysis be performed to see if number of years of teaching (the independent variable) predicts the number or type of

strategies used for teaching the DBQ (the dependent variable). There was only enough data to break the participants into two groups: those who had been teaching ten or fewer years and those who had been teaching eleven or more years. The researcher ran *t*-tests comparing these groups on purposes for using the DBQ, strategy use and success, and for working with lower-level learners.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Some survey items had an option of “other,” for which the participant was able to write in an answer not specifically mentioned in the research literature. Maxwell (2005) states that the methods of analysis of qualitative data should be planned out in the proposal of a qualitative study. He also recommends that analysis should begin at the beginning of data collection instead of at the end. This prevents the researcher having to face a possibly overwhelming amount of data to be analyzed. Miles and Huberman (1994), who call the process of data analysis “data reduction” (p. 10), also state that this process should be ongoing throughout the research project. Data from the surveys was accessible from SurveyMonkey throughout the time period of data collection, so ongoing analysis was possible.

According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative data may be coded and categorized into “‘organizational,’ ‘substantive’ or ‘theoretical’ categories” (p. 97). Organizational categories are categories that are established before the data has been collected. In this study, the organizational categories correspond to the survey question that each pertains to: reasons for using DBQs; purposes for using DBQs; skills or content the teacher hopes students will learn by doing a DBQ; other strategies used to teach the DBQ; and other

strategies used with lower-level readers. It was planned that the data would be coded and put into substantive categories within each organizational category. Maxwell defines a substantive category as descriptive in that it “includes description of participants’ concepts and beliefs” and do not “inherently imply a more abstract theory” (p. 97). He explains that theoretical categories relate participants’ responses to a corresponding theory. As the purpose of this study is to identify successful teaching strategies for the DBQ and not to form or prove a theory, this type of categorization is not appropriate for the data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that while it is common to formulate codes prior to data analysis, inductive formulation of categories may be done if the researcher is not sure what categories may emerge from the data. This process was appropriate for the data in this study as the researcher had no prior knowledge of what types of teaching strategies were being implemented other than strategies mentioned in the research literature. Pattern coding was used to group answers that are similar for a certain construct (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the answers to the open-ended questions were to be reviewed, coded, and grouped into subcategories (or themes) under each organizational category. However, there were very few answers given to open-ended questions, and the answers given were easily grouped into subcategories. Coding was not necessary.

The researcher had proposed that the data be reported in a matrix depending on whether or not there was enough qualitative data to report in this fashion. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify matrices as an excellent way to convey data visually and force

the researcher to organize data in a coherent manner that can then be fully analyzed in correspondence with the research questions. However, there was insufficient data for matrix reporting.

While efforts will be made to validate the entire instrument, special attention must be paid to the validation of the qualitative portion of the study. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) contend that “validation does not belong to a separate stage of an investigation, but permeates the entire research process” (p. 248). They outline seven stages of a study and how validation takes place at each stage of a qualitative study, several of which apply here. At the first stage, *thematizing*, the theoretical basis for the study must be sound and the research questions should be logically derived from the theory. The theoretical basis for this study is grounded in research on historical thinking and on using primary source documents to write an argumentative essay. Research questions one and two are derived from the researcher’s experience in teaching the DBQ and in interacting with high school teachers who teach the DBQ; research questions three and four are derived from the literature. At the second stage, *design*, the researcher must ensure that the design of the study and methods used to obtain data are adequate and appropriate for the purpose of the study. This is an exploratory study, and as has been explained, the literature supports surveys as an appropriate method for exploring an issue. Additionally, the research literature was consulted in the creation of the survey items.

Another way to confirm findings is to check for outliers and assess their meaning in comparison with the rest of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Given the purpose of this study, an outlier may have turned out to be an innovative teaching strategy that is

highly successful and may be replicated in other schools, however, the researcher would need to investigate the circumstances of the outlier in order to find out if implementation in different school settings would be possible. There did not appear to be any outliers.

### **Limitations**

As previously stated, this study was limited by the validity issues inherent in creating a new survey instrument. Another limitation lies in the sample: the entire sample was from northern Illinois. Therefore, one must question what teachers in other regions of the state or country would report, especially in New York State. In addition, there is always a margin of error when asking participants to self-report. The data on the success of the strategies is based on teachers' perceptions of success, not on scores earned on actual DBQ essays.

There is also a threat of researcher bias, or subjectivity (Maxwell, 2005), because the researcher is a middle school social studies teacher who teaches the DBQ and has received training from the DBQ Project. The researcher is also very familiar with the region in which the research is being conducted, having spent almost thirty years attending school and working in Lake County. She also works closely with two of the high schools involved in the study and has other contacts in the area schools. While some of the ideas in this study have come from the researcher's experience, she has made every effort to remain unbiased and base the foundations of the study on the existing research.

By being aware of these threats throughout the research process and by taking the steps outlined above, efforts were made to minimize them. However, there is no doubt that many students are asked to perform this task and many students struggle with it. As

there is no existing research on this particular aspect of the implementation of DBQs (specific teaching strategies), this study may serve as a starting point for future research.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the research methodology, information about the sample, data collection procedures, and a description of how the data was analyzed. This study used a cross-sectional survey design in order to obtain information on how teachers use DBQs in their classrooms. A survey was created based on the constructs gleaned from the research questions. Data was gathered from seven high schools and one larger school district in northern Illinois and analyzed using SPSS software. Chapter Four presents the results of these analyses.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of Document Based Question essays (DBQs) in non-Advanced Placement (AP) history classes. DBQs are essays in which students are asked to use a number of primary source documents that are provided to them to support an argument in response to the essay question. An example of a DBQ can be found in Appendix A. The study used a cross-sectional survey design in order to obtain information on how teachers are using DBQs in their classrooms. The researcher created a survey for the study that was tested and then posted online for administration. SurveyMonkey was used for the online survey. Most of the survey questions were quantitative, Likert scale type questions; several open-ended, qualitative questions were included as well in an attempt to gather all possible responses. Participants were also asked to respond to several demographic questions. The survey instrument is presented as Appendix C.

The heads of social studies departments from seven high schools and one school district in northern Illinois then administered the survey to their staffs through e-mail. The researcher anticipated the sample to be around 100, however, forty-six teachers began the survey and around twenty-seven completed it. As a result of the manner in which the survey was administered, the researcher had no way of identifying the participants or even which schools the participants were from; this was done to protect



the identity of the participants. The results of the survey were analyzed in SPSS and are presented in this chapter, which is organized by research question. Descriptive statistics reported by the participants are presented first.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The population targeted for this study was high school teachers who teach World or U. S. History classes and who use DBQs in these classes. The researcher sought a regional sample of teachers in northern Illinois for reasons of convenience. The researcher contacted various schools in northern Illinois; seven high schools and one district containing several high schools agreed to participate. These schools were at various stages of DBQ implementation: some had been using DBQs for many years in their non-AP classes; some had been using them for a shorter period of time; and some only had a few teachers in the department using DBQs. The researcher had hoped that her queries would result in a pool of about 200 possible participants, however, not all schools that were contacted used DBQs, and in some schools only a few teachers were using DBQs; therefore the number of possible participants was around 100. Of the 100 possible participants, forty-seven began the survey and twenty-eight completed it.

The survey was distributed to teachers by the social studies department heads at the participating schools in the spring of 2010. Participants reported what grade levels and classes they taught. Seventy-five percent of twenty-eight respondents reported that they teach freshmen, 54% teach sophomores, 61% teach juniors, and 36% teach seniors; many teachers reported teaching multiple grade levels. Classes the participants reported teaching were as follows: 79% teach World History; 61% teach U.S. History; and 11%

teach an AP History class. In this category, participants also reported teaching more than one type of class. The mean number of years of teaching experience was 11.75, with the highest frequencies in years four through nine; one teacher reported forty years of experience, which raised the mean.

### **Research Question 1:**

#### **For What Purposes Do Teachers Use the DBQ?**

Almost half of the teachers who participated in the survey use DBQs in their classroom three to four times a year (48.9%), with the remaining teachers split between using DBQs one or two times a year (22.2%) or five or more times a year (26.7%). One respondent reported that they never used DBQs and did not complete any of the other questions except for the demographic questions at the end.

The next two survey questions focused on teachers' purposes for using DBQs in their history classes. The first question asked "Why do you use DBQs in your classroom?" and focused more on specific classroom use. The results are presented in Table 3. Most of the respondents reported using the DBQ in order to develop critical thinking skills, primary source analysis skills, and historical thinking in their students. Only a third report using the DBQ because it was required by the department. Open-ended responses included "help with organization of thoughts," as a path for "further resources that I can peruse with my students," and as practice for the AP exam.

The second question asked "For what purposes do you use the DBQ in your classroom?" and focused more on overall curricular purposes for using the DBQ. The results for this question are presented in Table 4. While most of the teachers use DBQs as

Table 3

*Purposes for Using DBQ Essays in the Classroom*

Classroom Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
To develop critical thinking skills	42	93.3
To develop writing skills	39	86.7
To develop primary source analysis skills	39	86.7
To develop historical thinking	32	71.1
So that students learn more about history	22	48.9
Because it is an authentic assessment	19	42.2
Because it is required by my department	15	33.3
Other	4	8.9

Note.  $N = 45$ .

Table 4

*Curricular Purposes for Using DBQ Essays in the Classroom*

General curricular purpose	Frequency	Percentage
As a summative assessment	30	65.2
To introduce a unit	10	21.7
As a formative assessment	9	19.6
Other	8	17.8
In place of a unit	6	13.0

Note.  $N = 45$ .

a summative assessment, about twenty percent use it to introduce a unit or as a formative assessment. Almost twenty percent of forty-five respondents reported other uses, which could be distributed into three main categories: to provide enrichment on a topic; to encourage historical thinking and analysis; and to promote writing skills.

### **Research Question 2:**

#### **What Strategies Do Teachers Use to Teach the DBQ?**

The possible strategies used to teach the DBQ were categorized into four groups: Historical Thinking Skills; Writing with Documents; Assessment / Feedback; and Document Analysis. There was also an open-ended question provided so that teachers could write in any other strategies that they use. For each strategy, teachers answered on a four-point Likert scale: not used (1); used once or twice (2); used several times (3); and used each time the DBQ is taught (4). The results of the strategy ratings are presented by category in tables five through eight. Teachers also reported on the success of each strategy as not successful (1), successful with some students (2), successful with many students (3), or successful with nearly all students (4); the results of these analyses are presented in the same tables. These ratings were originally coded by SurveyMonkey as five through eight points because they were on the same lines as the frequency of use options; the success scale was recoded in SPSS to one through four points for all such questions.

Results for the Historical Thinking Strategies are presented in Table 5. Many teachers reported using these teaching strategies quite frequently, with cultivating background knowledge in students and explicit instruction in writing skills reported as

Table 5

*Teaching Strategies for Historical Thinking and Writing Skills*

Historical thinking strategies	Frequency of use		Degree of success	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cultivate background knowledge	3.63	0.48	3.06	0.73
Explicit instruction in writing	3.54	0.69	3.00	0.79
Explicit instruction and practice in writing a thesis	3.31	0.60	2.76	0.83
Have students practice historical reasoning	3.30	0.84	2.44	0.71
Model how to consider the context	3.27	0.80	2.94	0.54
Provide opportunities to write for a variety of purposes	3.27	0.71	2.53	0.87
Scaffold writing skills	3.17	1.05	2.65	0.93
Instruct students to defend an argument	3.12	0.90	2.71	0.59
Have students use graphic organizers to structure their argument	2.87	1.13	3.06	0.83
Provide students with sources with a visible author	2.86	0.88	2.61	0.70
Have students take a position and defend it without documents	2.71	0.85	2.35	0.79
Have students debate a dilemma	2.70	0.92	2.44	0.86
Have students talk about their argument before writing	2.61	1.17	2.78	0.81

*Note.*  $N = 28$ .

the most frequently used. The means for rates of success with students tended to be slightly lower, with the most successful strategies reported as cultivating background knowledge and having students use graphic organizers to structure an argument. Both of the strategies for Writing with Documents, presented in Table 6, were reported to be used quite frequently with a moderate rate of success with students. Strategies of having students assess their own work and providing students with multiple opportunities for practice and feedback were only moderately used, with providing multiple opportunities for practice and feedback reported as slightly more successful.

Table 6

*Teaching Strategies for Writing With Documents*

Writing with documents	Frequency of use		Degree of success	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Have students write from multiple documents	3.55	0.67	2.72	0.59
Explicit instruction in how to use evidence to back up a claim	3.38	0.76	2.59	0.78

*Note.*  $N = 29$ .

The results for Assessment / Feedback Strategies are presented in Table 7; strategies in this category were used less frequently as shown by a mean under 3.0. In the category of Document Analysis, four teaching strategies stood out as being used more frequently than others: explicit instruction in how to interpret documents; asking guiding questions about primary sources; having students investigate primary sources that come from a variety of perspectives; and engaging students in discussions about the

Table 7

*Strategies Using Assessment and Feedback to Students*

Assessment / feedback	Frequency of use		Degree of success	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Provide multiple opportunities for practice and feedback	2.78	0.69	2.82	0.66
Have students evaluate their own work	2.21	0.90	2.27	0.70

*Note.*  $N = 29$ .

interpretation of documents. Asking guiding questions about primary sources was reported as the most successful strategy with a mean score of 2.93. These results are presented in Table 8.

### **Other Strategies**

Five participants responded to the open-ended question inquiring about any other strategies they use in teaching the DBQ. Three of these responses addressed scaffolding the skills necessary to write the DBQ and indicated that breaking down the skills assisted the students in an effective manner. One respondent wrote about an activity called “List, Group, Label” in which students are presented with a list of terms and asked to group them. This activity helped this teacher’s students with grouping the documents for the essay. Another respondent wrote that many of the strategies listed did not apply because there simply is not enough time to edit papers and rewrite them as in an English class.

Table 8

*Teaching Strategies for Document Analysis Skills*

Document analysis	Frequency of use		Degree of success	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Ask guiding questions about primary sources	3.61	0.58	2.93	0.70
Have students investigate primary sources that come from a variety of perspectives	3.39	0.72	2.73	0.70
Explicit instruction in how to interpret documents	3.30	0.77	2.87	0.64
Engage students in discussions about the interpretation of documents	3.25	0.81	2.53	0.83
Explicit instruction in identification of bias	2.86	0.71	2.60	0.73
Instruction in assessing the intent of the author	2.80	0.96	2.20	0.68
Have students debate the interpretation of a single source	2.68	1.09	2.67	0.82
Explicit instruction in how to consider the validity of sources	2.61	1.02	2.47	0.74

*Note.*  $N = 22$ .

### **Correlations Between Frequency of Use and Perceived Success Rate**

Correlation coefficients were performed for each strategy between the frequency of use and the rate of success as perceived by the participants. Several correlations were found to be significant at the .05 level. The significant correlations are presented in Table



9. The strategies for which the frequency of use and success rate are significantly correlated are mostly from the assessment and document analysis categories. Explicit instruction in how to interpret documents showed the strongest correlation (0.60) and was significant at the 0.005 level.

Table 9

*Significant Correlations for Teaching Strategies Between Frequency of Use and Rate of Success*

Teaching strategy	Pearson correlation	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>
Have students talk about their argument before writing	0.51	0.02	20
Have students evaluate their own work	0.51	0.02	21
Provide multiple opportunities for practice and feedback	0.46	0.02	25
Explicit instruction in how to interpret documents	0.60	0.002*	24
Have students debate the interpretation of a single source	0.47	0.04	20
Engage students in discussions about the interpretation of documents	0.41	0.05	24
Instruction in assessing the intent of the author	0.49	0.03	21
Explicit instruction in how to consider the validity of sources	0.53	0.03	18

\**p* < .005 (all other correlations, *p* < .05, 2-tailed)

### Research Question 2a:

#### What Skills Do the Strategies Focus on?

Participants were also asked questions about the skills students are asked to use when writing a DBQ. Skills that participants hope that students learn while writing DBQs are presented in Table 10; critical thinking skills and primary source analysis topped this list. The lone “other” response was “The ability to perform well on the AP Exam.”

Table 10

#### *Skills Participants Want Students to Learn When Writing a DBQ*

Knowledge or skill	Frequency	Percentage
Primary source analysis	41	89.1
Critical thinking skills	40	87.0
Writing a thesis	37	80.4
Using evidence to back up a claim	35	76.1
Writing an argument	34	73.9
Historical thinking skills	32	69.6
Writing a historical essay	29	63.0
Content information about a particular era in history	27	58.7
The ability to identify bias in a document	27	58.7
Other	1	2.2

*Note.*  $N = 45$ .

Participants were also asked to rate the importance of skills used in writing a DBQ and to rate how they feel students typically perform on these skills. The importance of each skill was rated on a four point Likert scale as follow: not important (1); somewhat

important (2); important (3); and essential (4). Student performance was also rated on a four point Likert scale for each skill: few students do this well (1); some students do this well (2); many students do this well (3); and most students do this well (4). The results for both scales are presented as means in Table 11. Overall, teachers felt that students turned in the best performance on analyzing a primary source, which they also rated as one of the most important skills.

Table 11

*Importance and Performance Ratings on DBQ Skills*

DBQ skills	Importance		Success rate	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Using evidence to back up a claim	3.77	0.43	2.33	0.80
Writing an effective thesis	3.65	0.55	2.37	0.77
Analyzing a primary source	3.65	0.55	2.40	0.89
Writing an argumentative essay	3.42	0.62	2.07	0.69
Determining the value and reliability of evidence	3.19	0.70	1.60	0.62
Identifying bias in a document	3.06	0.81	1.73	0.83

*Note.*  $N = 30$ .

### **Research Question 3: How Successful Do Teachers Feel**

#### **These Strategies Are, Especially With Students Who Read Below Grade Level?**

Participants were also asked about how successful students who read at a lower grade level perform on DBQ skills. These questions garnered fewer responses than the others, and it is assumed that participants who skipped these questions do not have lower-

level readers in their classes. As for performance of students who are average readers, student success for lower level readers was rated on a four point Likert scale for each skill: few students do this well (1); some students do this well (2); many students do this well (3); and most students do this well (4). In addition, participants had the option of “does not apply,” which was not scored, however, only one participant chose this option. Means for each skill are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

*Perceived Success Rate of Lower Level Readers on DBQ Skills*

Knowledge or skill	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General writing skills	2.24	0.72
Ability to read the documents	2.20	0.76
Writing a thesis	2.16	0.90
Using evidence to back up a claim	2.16	0.94
Writing an argument	2.08	0.91
Document interpretation / analysis	2.00	0.76
Lack of background content area knowledge	1.60	1.04

*Note.*  $N = 25$ .

**Research Question 3a: Do teachers modify DBQs**

**for students who read below grade level, and, if so, how?**

Modifications were reported on the same four point Likert scale as the DBQ teaching strategies, with the frequency of use scale ranging from not used (1) to used each time DBQ is taught (4) and the degree of success with students scale ranging from not successful (1) to successful with nearly all students (4). For this group of questions,

there was no “does not apply” option, which may have been why they were skipped by many participants. Results for the frequency of use and success rate of modifications used by teachers are presented in Table 13. The two modifications used most often, slowing down the process and providing more one-on-one instruction to lower level students, were also reported as the most successful. Three participants responded to the open-ended question about other modifications they use. One teacher has the students create their own graphic organizers, and another wrote that the length of the essay is scaffolded so that students begin by writing three paragraphs and work up to a five paragraph essay. The third commented that he or she does not have lower level students in class, but qualifies that by stating “Even my regular kids can be low readers however.”

Table 13

*Frequency of Use and Degree of Success of Modifications Made on DBQ Tasks*

Modifications	Frequency of use		Degree of success	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Slow down the process	3.00	1.02	2.81	0.68
Provide more one-on-one instruction	3.00	0.98	2.85	0.59
Use graphic organizers before writing	2.71	1.30	2.71	0.99
Allow students to use fewer documents in the essay	2.37	1.17	2.33	0.91
Modify the question	2.28	1.24	2.62	0.65
Modify the documents to a more appropriate reading level	1.70	1.02	2.44	0.88

*Note.*  $N = 22$  for frequency of use; if respondents indicated they did not use a skill, they did not rate its success, resulting in a smaller number of responses for Degree of Success.

### Correlations Between Frequency of Use and Perceived Success Rate

As for teaching strategies used for average level students, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were performed to see if there were any significant correlations between frequency of use of the modifications and their reported rates of success. No significant correlations were found. However, significant correlations were found between frequency of use scores; teachers tend to modify the DBQ question, use fewer documents, and employ one on one instruction together when working with lower level readers, as reported in Table 14.

Table 14

#### *Correlations Between Frequency of Use Scores for Modifications*

	Slow down process	One on one instruction	Modify question	Use fewer documents	Modify documents
Slow down process		0.837**			
One on one instruction	0.837**		0.537**	0.496*	
Modify question		0.537**		0.755**	0.664**
Use fewer documents		0.496*	0.755**		0.587**
Modify documents			0.664**	0.587**	

Note.  $N = 22$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed) \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed)

### Research Question 4: Have Teachers Attended

#### Professional Development on How to Teach the DBQ?

Finally, participants were asked about their participation in professional development for the DBQ. The results of what type of professional development they attended are presented in Table 15 (participants were asked to check all that applied). Unfortunately, many of the participants had abandoned the survey at this point, resulting in a lower number of responses for these questions (twenty-seven responses as opposed to forty-six that had started the survey).

Table 15

#### *Participation in Professional Development for the DBQ*

Professional development	Frequency	Percentage
DBQ project workshop	13	28.3
In-house staff development	10	21.7
Other workshop on teaching writing	8	17.4
No training	6	13.0
AP course training	5	10.9
Workshop by another provider	4	8.7

*Note.*  $N = 27$ .

#### Research Question 4a: If Teachers Have Attended Professional Development on the DBQ, How Has This Training Affected Their Teaching Methods?

Participants were then asked how often they used the strategies presented in the training that they attended. They were asked to rate the frequency of use of the strategies

on a four point Likert scale: not at all (1); I use a few strategies from the training every once in a while (2); I use the strategies from the training consistently (3); the training completely changed the way I teach the DBQ (4); or not applicable (not scored). The results are presented in Table 16. The number for each figure varies depending on how many participants attended that type of training.

Table 16

*Frequency of Use of Strategies Learned at Professional Development*

Professional Development	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
In-house staff development	2.62	0.87
DBQ project workshop	2.56	0.73
Workshop by another provider	2.44	0.88
Other workshop on teaching writing	2.40	0.97
AP course training	2.33	0.87

*Note.*  $N = 27$ .

Participants were also asked about how they felt the professional development they attended influenced their effectiveness in teaching the DBQ. They were asked to respond on a four point Likert scale: not at all (1); the training made me somewhat more effective (2); the training made me more effective (3); the training made me much more effective (4); or not applicable (not scored). The results are presented in Table 17. Training provided by the DBQ Project and in-house were reported to be the most effective, both in how many strategies teachers report using and in increased teaching effectiveness.

The last question regarding training asked teachers to identify the topics that were covered in their pre-service social studies methods courses. Pre-service was defined as an



Table 17

*Perceived Changes in Teaching Effectiveness as a Result of Professional Development*

Professional development	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DBQ project workshop	2.88	1.05
In-house staff development	2.83	0.83
AP course training	2.44	1.01
Other workshop on teaching writing	2.44	1.01
Workshop by another provider	2.22	0.97

*Note.*  $N = 27$ .

undergraduate program or a training program for teacher certification. The results are as follows (out of 27 responses): primary source analysis,  $N = 16$ , 34.8%; DBQs,  $N = 8$ , 17.4%; and essay writing for social studies classes,  $N = 15$ , 32.6%. Seven participants, or 15.2%, reported learning about none of these topics in their social studies methods classes.

### **Comparisons Between Training Groups**

The participants were then divided into two groups for comparison purposes: those who had attended some type of DBQ training (DBQ Project, AP training course, DBQ training by another provider, or in-house staff development) and those who had no training (which included those who had attended another workshop on teaching writing). There were not enough participants in the no training group ( $N = 6$ ) to perform statistical tests, however, some interesting observations can be made by perusing the mean comparisons. In the category of Historical Thinking Strategies (which also included some writing strategies), teachers with no training were more likely to have students scaffold

writing skills ( $M = 3.50$ ) than teachers in the training group ( $M = 2.97$ ). Other strategies used slightly more often by teachers with no training include having students defend a position without documents, instructing students to defend an argument as opposed to writing a history or narrative, instructing students in how to write a thesis statement, and providing students opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. Two strategies that were used more by teachers who had had some type of training ( $N = 19$ ) were using primary sources with a visible author (training  $M = 3.11$ , non-training  $M = 2.50$ ) and having students use graphic organizers before writing (training  $M = 3.03$ , non-training  $M = 2.33$ ). Teachers who had had training were also more likely to have students evaluate their own work ( $M = 2.42$ ) than teachers with no training ( $M = 1.33$ ). Differences between the groups on the Document Analysis Strategies appear to be minimal.

### **Teaching Experience and Teaching the DBQ**

There were enough participants to form two age groups: those who had taught ten or fewer years ( $N = 17$ ) and those who had taught eleven or more years ( $N = 11$ ). Independent  $t$  tests were performed to see if there were significant differences in the answers from these two groups. Looking at the purposes for teaching the DBQ, the only difference that was significant was for “required by the department,”  $t(16) = 3.77$ ,  $p = .002$ . Teachers who had taught ten years or less chose this as an option almost half of the time ( $M = .47$ ,  $SD = .51$ ), and none of the teachers who had taught eleven or more years indicated that they taught the DBQ because it was required. The groups differed significantly on only one strategy: frequency of use of thesis instruction,  $t(24) = 2.32$ ,  $p = .03$ . Teachers with less experience were more likely to give instruction on how to write a

thesis ( $M = 3.57, SD = .50$ ) than teachers with more experience ( $M = 3.05, SD = .65$ ).

When working with lower level learners, teachers with less experience were much more likely to use graphic organizers ( $M = 3.29, SD = 1.20$ ) than teachers with more experience ( $M = 1.90, SD = .99$ ),  $t(21) = 3.08, p = .006$ .

The question about methods learned in pre-service training also yielded significant results. The teachers with less experience reported that they learned about primary source analysis and DBQs more often than teachers with more experience, and teachers with more experience were more likely to report that they had learned about none of the topics presented (although the latter finding was not significant). The results are presented in Table 18.

Table 18

*Mean Differences Between Age Groups on Pre-Service Training Topics*

Topic	10 or fewer years	11 or more years	<i>t</i>
Primary source document analysis	0.81	0.27	3.12*
DBQs	0.44	0.09	2.21**
Essay writing for social studies	0.56	0.55	0.08
None of the above	0.19	0.36	-0.97

*Note.* 10 or fewer years ( $N = 15$ ); 11 or more years ( $N = 11$ )

\*  $p < .01$  \*\* $p < .05$

### Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the methods used to carry out the study and descriptive statistics for the participant sample. Data analysis results for each of the research questions were also presented. These results are discussed in Chapter Five,

which also presents implications for practice, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gather data on how teachers are using DBQ essays in non-Advanced Placement (AP) high school history classes. Increasingly, students in non-AP classes are being asked to perform this task, as evidenced by the fact that the DBQ is now a part of the Regents exam, which all students must pass in order to graduate from high school in the state of New York. Students of all levels are required to write DBQs; another goal of this study was to find out how teachers teach the DBQ to students whose reading level is below grade level. A third goal was to find what effect professional development on the DBQ had on teaching. A survey was created and administered to high school social studies teachers in seven high schools and from various schools in one district that had taken part in the Teaching American History grant program.

In this chapter, the sample is presented and discussed. The results are then discussed for each research question in light of the research literature. Implications for practice are presented, and limitations of the study are delineated. Finally, recommendations are made for further research.

#### **Sample Demographics**

The participants from this study came from high schools located in northeastern Illinois. Schools that utilize the DBQ in non-AP classes were sought out for this study, so

it was assumed that all possible participants taught the DBQ. Demographic questions included questions on what classes and grade levels the participants taught. About three quarters of the participants reported teaching freshmen, 54% sophomores, 61% juniors, and 36% seniors, with most teachers teaching multiple grade levels. This shows that many freshmen and sophomores are being required to perform a task that was formerly meant for upper-level advanced students only. It is assumed that the required World History and U.S. History courses are taken mostly by freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, which would explain the low reporting rate for teachers who teach seniors. Seniors are also more likely to take AP classes, and these teachers were not targeted for this study. Three teachers did report teaching AP classes, however, many teachers reported teaching more than one type of class and / or grade level, so it is assumed that these teachers teach non-AP classes as well. This may translate into quite a heavy teaching load for many teachers; one teacher commented that it was difficult to take graduate classes because “education assumes much of teachers.”

### **Research Question 1:**

#### **For What Purposes Do Teachers Use the DBQ?**

Two questions were asked for the purpose of finding out why teachers use DBQs. The first focused more on skill development and the second focused more on general curricular purposes for using the DBQ. The choices that were selected most often were “to develop critical thinking skills” (93.3%), “to develop writing skills” (86.7%), “to develop primary source analysis skills” (86.7%), and “to develop historical thinking” (71.1%). Several of these are reasons cited in the literature: students should be able to use

higher level thinking skills (i.e. critical thinking skills) in order to solve problems (Cuban, 1991; Wineburg, 2001) and analyze and interpret information (i.e. analyze primary sources) in order to be good citizens (Barton & Levstik, 2003). Historical thinking is now included in the national standards for social studies (Kelly et al., 2007; J. Lee & Weiss, 2007; Newmann et al., 1995). Only 42.2% reported using DBQs because they are authentic assessments, which is contrary to the idea that an assessment that evaluates historical thinking is by nature an authentic assessment. Perhaps these teachers question the authenticity of the DBQ as Grant, Gradwell, and Cimbricz (2004) did in their study. Only a third of respondents reported using the DBQ because it was required by their department. This may indicate that teachers see the value in the DBQ and are attempting this daunting task simply to help their students develop these skills. Four responses were given for the write-in choice of “other”: two participants said that they use the DBQ as practice for the AP exam; one wrote that they use it to help with organization of thoughts; and one wrote that it “provides me with a ‘start’ – avenues for further resources that I can peruse with my students.” For this teacher, DBQs seem to provide additional resources in the form of primary sources for her students to work with.

Participants were also asked about the curricular purposes for which they use the DBQ in their classes. The most common use was as a summative assessment (65.2%), and a few participants reported using the DBQ to introduce a unit (21.7%) or as a formative assessment (19.6%). There were also nine open-ended responses that could be sorted into two categories: use as enrichment; and use to develop historical thinking and critical thinking skills. Two of these responses mentioned writing skills along with the

thinking skills. One teacher wrote that she has her students create their own DBQs “in order to simulate the experience of a historian.” While the most common use remains as a summative assessment, other uses are becoming more prevalent. One participant wrote that the choices for the question were too limiting and indicated that a unit should not be comprised of a DBQ only; however, with limits on time and an ever-growing curriculum, it may be appropriate to use a DBQ in place of certain units of study.

### **Research Question 2:**

#### **What Strategies Do Teachers Use to Teach the DBQ?**

Participants were asked to rate how often they used certain teaching strategies when teaching the DBQ. These strategies were grouped into four categories: Historical Thinking; Writing with Documents; Assessment / Feedback; and Document Analysis. In the category of Historical Thinking, participants reported cultivating background knowledge and explicitly instructing students in writing as the strategies they used the most often. Background knowledge has been cited as a prerequisite for being able to reason about history (Bain, 2005; Davis, 2001; P. J. Lee, 2005) and for being able to understand historical context (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008) and is therefore necessary for writing a DBQ. In this category, having students practice historical reasoning and modeling how to consider context also had a mean score of over 3.0, indicating that teachers are concerned about having their students learn to think historically. Providing students with primary sources that have a visible author (i.e. a first person account) had a mean score of 2.86, indicating that, although teachers have used this strategy, it is not a strategy that is typically used each time the DBQ is taught. Paxton (2002) found that



students who were given primary sources with a visible author were more insightful in their historical thinking and became producers of knowledge rather than reproducers of history; perhaps students would benefit from more frequent use of this strategy.

Teachers seem to be equally concerned with students' writing. Along with explicit instruction in writing, instructing students on how to write a thesis and providing opportunities to write for a variety of purposes also received high scores. Giving students explicit instruction in writing has been recommended by De La Paz (2005), Felton and Herko (2004), Monte-Sano (2006), and Young and Leinhardt (1998); explicit instruction in writing a thesis fits with this strategy and was mentioned by one teacher in the write-in space as being difficult for students. Scaffolding writing skills has been identified by Monte-Sano (2006) as an important component of instruction; participants reported using this strategy frequently, and three participants wrote about scaffolding in the write-in space provided for other responses. The strategy of having students write for a variety of purposes also received a high score; Monte-Sano recommends having students write for multiple purposes, and Young and Leinhardt (1998) identify these types of writing as "writing to assess," "writing to learn," and "learning to write" (p. 60).

One strategy that may improve students' writing is having students talk about their ideas or arguments before writing. Studies have found that children's thought is more complex than what they actually write (Dickinson & P. J. Lee, 1984; Foster & Yeager, 1999; Greene, 2001; Paxton, 2002), yet this is not a strategy that participants reported using as frequently as other strategies. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) state that it is the support provided by "conversational partners" that keep students focused on their

topic and cognizant of the audience they are writing for (p. 7). This was also one of two strategies for which the success rate mean was higher than the frequency of use mean, indicating that the teachers that did have students discuss their ideas saw more success on the DBQs. One may conclude that teachers should be encouraged to have students talk about their arguments before and/or during the writing process.

Under the category of Writing with Documents, participants reported using both strategies quite frequently: having students write from multiple documents and explicit instruction in how to use evidence to back up a claim. Wiley and Voss (1999) found that students who used multiple sources consisting of primary sources and textbooks when they wrote produced more complex and insightful essays than students who used a single source (a textbook), which validates the use of this strategy. Participants reported using the strategies under Assessment / Feedback less frequently. Having students evaluate their own work is a skill cited by Wiggins (1993) as being important for students to advance in their learning. Gilstrap (1991) criticizes teachers for not providing feedback to students until after the paper has been turned in for a grade; the feedback is apparently given so that students may improve next time. Practice and feedback are essential for students to be able to improve their performance on the DBQ, and teachers should provide these opportunities for them.

Under the category of Document Analysis strategies, four received a mean score of over 3.0: explicit instruction in how to interpret documents; asking guiding questions about primary sources; having students investigate primary sources that come from a variety of perspectives; and engaging students in discussions about the interpretation of

documents. The content of a DBQ is dependent on how well students can analyze primary sources, and Wineburg (1991a) found that this is necessary as students in his study (comparing students with expert historians) seemed to look for a correct answer rather than seeing the complexities of the documents. It is therefore not surprising that teachers are using these strategies. Guiding questions are one way to teach students how to analyze primary sources, as suggested by Doppen (2000) and by Reisman and Wineburg (2008). These questions may lead to class discussions, which Leinhardt (1994) found to lead to greater student learning; Dickinson and P. J. Lee (1984) found that small group discussions were also beneficial in helping students to think historically.

The strategy reported to be the least frequently used (but was still used, with a mean of 2.61) addresses a skill identified as essential to the work of historians (VanSledright, 2004b): explicit instruction in how to consider the validity of sources. Two important processes of assessing a primary source are documenting the attribution and corroborating the information with other sources. Wineburg (1991a) found that students in his study paid little or no attention to the attribution, while for the historians, the attribution was essential to the interpretation of the document. In addition, Foster and Yeager (1999) found that the twelve-year-olds in their study were not concerned about assessing the reliability of the source. Perhaps it may be helpful to teachers to break down this important analysis into four parts, as VanSledright (2004b) does: identification, or knowing what a source is; attribution, or identifying the author and their purposes for creating the source; perspective judgment, or assessing the author's social, cultural, and political position within the context of the time; and reliability assessment, or

corroborating the source with other sources. Students could evaluate a primary source according to each of the four parts and then make a judgment as to its reliability.

Participants were asked about strategies they use to teach identification of bias and the intent of the author, which is one of the parts of reliability assessment identified by VanSledright. While participants did report frequently using primary sources that come from a variety of perspectives with students ( $M = 3.39$ ), they reported instructing students in assessing the intent of the author less frequently ( $M = 2.80$ ). It would seem that these are two strategies that would be likely to occur together but apparently are not. P. J. Lee (2005) states that young students frequently think of multiple perspectives as simply differences of opinion and miss the complexities of historical accounts. Therefore, while it is positive that teachers are using primary sources that have a variety of perspectives, it is important that they also address how to assess perspective with students. With regard to bias, Wineburg (1991a) found that historians do not attempt to identify whether or not a text contains bias because historians assume that all texts contain bias because no account is free of perspective. This is an argument for teaching students about perspective as historians see it. Perfetti, Britt, Rouet, Georgi, and Mason (1994) found that students had great difficulty in detecting bias in documents, and Geisler (1994) found that students were not able to consider an author's intent until late undergraduate levels. However, students can be introduced to perspective and bias at the junior high and high school levels, and teachers can model the detection of these for students. It is important in today's diverse world to push students to be able to see these

differences rather than to look for the “one right answer,” as Wineburg (1991a) found that they are prone to do.

The open-ended question about additional strategies participants use was answered by five respondents. Three of these responses focused on scaffolding, or breaking down the skills used in writing the DBQ. Two respondents wrote about having students practice sorting the documents into groups, one mentioning the activity “List, Group, Label,” where “students are presented with any list of terms, asked to group them multiple ways, then label those groups.” Two respondents wrote about the difficulty in teaching students to produce well-written essays, especially as there is little time in a social studies class for revisions like there would be in an English class. This suggests that students may benefit if social studies teachers teamed up with English teachers to teach the DBQ, or perhaps that students need more experience with expository writing throughout their schooling. The other respondent wrote that he or she has students focus on writing paragraphs as that is what they have the most experience in, as opposed to writing a complete essay. These comments indicate that scaffolding writing skills is important for students at this level.

### **Research Question 2a:**

#### **What Skills Do the Strategies Focus On?**

Participants were asked what skills or content they hoped students would learn by writing a DBQ. Primary source analysis skills (89%) and critical thinking skills (87%) were chosen most often, which is in agreement with the reasons why teachers use the DBQ (Research Question 1). Writing a thesis (80%) and using evidence to back up a

claim (76%) were also chosen quite frequently. While composing a thesis would be considered a writing skill, using evidence to back up a claim is part of the skill set for historical thinking, which, along with primary source analysis, shows that teachers are concerned about having students learn the skills of historians.

Participants were then asked to rate the importance of certain skills and to rate how well they felt students performed them. While all of the skills had a mean of over 3.0 for importance (3 being important and 4 being essential), perceived student performance was rated lower, between 1.6 and 2.4, with the rating scale as: few students do this well (1); some students do this well (2); many students do this well (3); and most students do this well (4). For example, using evidence to back up a claim, which teacher felt was an important skill, received a mean rating of 2.33 for perceived student performance. These results highlight the importance of finding effective strategies with which to teach these skills. The success of some of these strategies is discussed in the next section.

In looking at the frequency of use of the teaching strategies, many concur with how important the skills were rated by participants. For example, writing a thesis was a skill that was identified as important for students to learn, and explicit instruction in writing a thesis was rated highly for frequency of use. The strategies for primary source analysis and for historical thinking skills were also reported as being used quite frequently. The ability to identify bias in a document was not chosen as important by as much of the sample as the other skills were (59%), but among those that chose it as an important skill, it was rated as fairly important (3.06). However, the strategy of explicit instruction in identification of bias had a lower frequency rating than most of the other

strategies; this could be due to the fact that not all participants who began the survey finished it, and perhaps the participants to whom bias detection was important did not answer the strategy questions. Similarly, determining the value and reliability of evidence was rated as an important skill for students to learn, but the strategy of teaching it had a lower frequency rating. It is acknowledged that this is an essential part of the construction of the historical narrative (Britt et al., 1994) and a skill that students must learn in order to interpret primary sources (VanSledright, 2004b). It is important for teachers to teach this to students if they are to debate the meaning of the sources or question the source as historians do.

### **Research Question 3: How Successful Do Teachers Feel**

#### **These Strategies Are, Especially With Students Who Read Below Grade Level?**

In addition to rating perceived student performance on each DBQ skill, participants were also asked to rate how successful they felt each teaching strategy was with students on a scale of one to four, with one being the least successful and four being the most successful. In the category of Historical Thinking strategies, cultivating background knowledge, having students use graphic organizers to structure their writing, and explicit instruction in writing were rated as the most successful. These strategies may be more concrete for students which lead to their success: learning background knowledge may mean learning facts about history as opposed to a task that would require critical thinking; graphic organizers are a visual way for students to organize their thoughts; and writing instruction may include teaching students tricks or formulas in how to structure paragraphs. Use of graphic organizers was suggested by Felton and Herko

(2004) as an effective strategy. Two of the strategies rated as less successful were having students practice historical reasoning and having students debate a dilemma, both of which require higher level thinking skills and which may be more difficult for students. The strategy that was rated as the least successful, have students take a position and defend it without documents, was also not used as frequently. Teachers may not have the time to implement this strategy, as lack of time was mentioned by two written comments in the survey, or perhaps teachers perceive this as a beginning strategy that should be implemented in the middle schools.

For the remaining three strategy categories, Writing with Documents, Assessment / Feedback, and Document Analysis, none of the success rates had a mean above 3.0. The strategies that had the highest reported success rates were explicit instruction in how to interpret primary sources and asking guiding questions about primary sources. These are teacher led strategies as opposed to strategies in which students are more on their own, such as having students debate the interpretation of a single primary source, which was rated as slightly less successful. This may indicate that it is the perception of the teachers that students need more teacher-led instruction when dealing with primary sources. Providing multiple opportunities for practice and feedback also received a higher score relative to the other strategies, although it received a lower score for frequency of use. The lower frequency of use score may indicate that teachers are using DBQs more often as summative assessments and less often for practice. These results show that it is important for students to be able to practice and receive feedback on DBQs before they



are required to write one for an assessment, as suggested by Gilstrap (1991), Young and Leinhardt (1998), and Monte-Sano (2008).

The correlations showed that several strategies' frequency of use was correlated significantly with rate of success. However, many of these strategies' frequency of use means were between 2 (used once or twice) and 3 (used several times), which means that the rate of success was not rated very highly. Explicit instruction in how to interpret primary sources and engaging students in discussions about the interpretation of primary sources had the most significant correlations and relatively high rates of use, indicating that these are effective strategies.

### **Success with Lower Level Readers**

Participants who teach students who read at a level lower than grade level were asked to rate the success rate of these students on some of the DBQ skills. The ratings ranged from 1 (not successful) to 4 (very successful). None of the skills were rated as very successful for students; the highest mean was 2.24 for general writing skills. However, these means were not all that lower than the success ratings for the students who read at grade level on the same skills. For example, the mean score for students reading at grade level for writing a thesis was 2.37 and the mean for the lower level readers was 2.16. The mean scores for writing an argument were very close: the mean for students reading at grade level was 2.07 and the mean for lower level readers was 2.08. For the skill of using evidence to back up a claim, the lower level readers scored higher than the students reading at grade level with a mean of 2.33 (as opposed to a mean of 2.16). This would indicate that many students are having trouble mastering these skills,

not just the lower level students. Participants indicated that a lack of background knowledge was common among the lower level readers; this may be the biggest hindrance to these students' success as knowing the background on the topic is essential for writing a DBQ (Bain, 2005; Davis, 2001; P. J. Lee, 2005).

### **Research Question 3a: Do Teachers Modify DBQs**

#### **For Students Who Read Below Grade Level, and, If So, How?**

Participants who teach lower level readers were asked how they modify the DBQ for these students. The two modifications rated as used most frequently were slowing down the process and providing more one-on-one instruction; these modifications were also rated as the most successful. One participant wrote in the "other" text box that teachers "scaffold the length expectations," having students begin with writing a three paragraph essay and work their way up to a five paragraph essay. Having students use graphic organizers before they write was also used as a modification quite frequently, and one participant wrote that he or she has students create their own graphic organizers. Use of graphic organizers for structuring an argument as been suggested for students of all levels (Felton & Herko, 2004). Modifying the question and allowing students to use fewer documents in the essay were used to a moderate degree, with ten participants answering that they never modify the question for lower level students. All strategies were rated at moderate success levels, with means between two and three. There is very little literature on modifying the DBQ, however, these modifications may help lower level students succeed on the DBQ, as some teachers have reported. There were significant correlations found between frequency of use of one-on-one instruction,

modifying the question, and using fewer documents. This may indicate that the lower level readers need multiple modifications in order to succeed on the DBQ.

The modification used the least often was modifying the primary sources to a more appropriate reading level. This strategy has been suggested by Wineburg and Martin (2009) as an effective way to ensure that lower level readers can understand the material. They advocate showing the students both versions of the primary source and having them do comparisons; by having them do this, they are exposed to the original source yet are able to understand the difficult text. They outline three procedures for modifying text: *focusing*, or shortening the document so that only relevant parts are shown; *simplification*, or revising grammar and spelling to a lower reading level; and *presentation*, or presenting the text in a way that will not intimidate students, such as enlarging the font size (p. 214). Although some teachers may be hesitant to modify the documents because it would compromise the authenticity of the task, this modification should be tried in order to enable lower level readers to succeed. Teachers may consider modifying extremely difficult text for readers of all levels.

#### **Research Question 4: Have Teachers Attended**

##### **Professional Development on How to Teach the DBQ?**

Unfortunately, not all participants who had started the survey answered the questions about professional development. Of the participants that did answer the questions, nineteen indicated that they had had some type of DBQ training as opposed to six who answered that they had had no training. Almost half of the respondents had attended training by The DBQ Project and a little over a third had attended in-house

training. The in-house training may have been conducted by a few staff members who had attended outside professional development and were sharing what they had learned with their colleagues; this is often a cost-efficient manner of training staff. In all, almost eighty percent of the participants reported having some type of training, which is probably a lower percentage than in a state such as New York, where the DBQ is a requirement on the state exam, but very positive nonetheless. The literature indicates that teachers lack the knowledge of how to do the discipline of history (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Bohan & Davis, 1998; Yilmaz, 2008) even though it has been shown that students have more success when the teacher practices and models historical thinking themselves (Doppen, 2000). In addition, it has been found that teachers lack detailed knowledge of the historical eras they are teaching (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988); increasing teachers' content knowledge of history is one of the goals of the Teaching American History project (Ingersoll, 1999). DBQ training is often included in the professional development funded by this grant and complements it nicely.

**Research Question 4a: If Teachers Have Attended Training  
on the DBQ, How Has This Training Affected Their Teaching Methods?**

Participants were asked how often they use the strategies presented in the workshops they had attended on a scale of one to four: one represented "not at all"; and four represented "the training completely changed the way I teach the DBQ." The use of strategies was moderate for all training types, with very few responses in category four. This indicates that teachers are using some of the strategies they learn at the workshops, but still either use their own strategies or mix strategies from different types of training. It

also may be possible that as students have more practice writing DBQs, they don't need the strategies as much, and the teachers phase them out over the course of the school year.

Participants were then asked how much more effective they felt the training made them on a scale of one to four: one represented not at all; and four represented much more effective. Teachers rated The DBQ Project or in-house training as enabling them to be more effective teachers than did the other training types, although the means were only slightly higher. About two-thirds of the teachers who had had training by The DBQ Project chose either "more effective" or "much more effective." This would indicate that although all of the training types were somewhat effective, The DBQ Project workshop seemed to help teachers the most in their teaching of the DBQ.

There were a few differences in how often teachers with DBQ training used the teaching strategies as opposed to teachers who had not had DBQ training. Teachers who had attended training used graphic organizers and primary sources with a visible author more often, indicating that these may be strategies that are presented at workshops. However, the teachers who had not attended DBQ training tended to employ writing strategies more often, such as scaffolding writing, teaching students how to write a thesis statement, or providing opportunities for students to write for a variety of purposes. This may indicate that teachers who have had no DBQ training do not see the value in the historical thinking component of the DBQ and focus on the writing component instead, or perhaps their students need so much help with writing that they never quite make it to the

historical thinking component. This is unfortunate because these students are missing out on the critical thinking skills they could learn by writing a DBQ.

### **Teaching Experience and Teaching the DBQ**

Survey answers from more experienced teachers (those teaching eleven or more years) were compared with answers from less experienced teachers (those teaching ten or fewer years). Almost half of the less experienced teachers reported that they taught the DBQ because it was required by their department, while none of the more experienced teachers reported this as a reason for teaching the DBQ. Perhaps the more experienced teachers see the value in the DBQ as a tool for teaching historical thinking and critical thinking skills or are more in tune with the trends in their profession. However, it may be true that less experienced teachers may have used DBQs in their classroom regardless of whether it was required by the department.

On the topic of pre-service training, teachers with less experience were significantly more likely to have learned about primary source analysis and about DBQs in their social studies methods classes than teachers with more experience. Both groups were equally likely to have learned about essay writing for social studies courses, and more experienced teachers were more likely to report that they did not learn any of these strategies (although not significantly more likely). This seems to indicate that social studies methods classes have changed over the years to include more strategies for historical thinking. Two studies in the late 1990s had opposite findings on this: Yeager and Wilson (1997) found that a methods course they evaluated provided multiple opportunities for undergraduate students to learn about and practice historical thinking,

while Seixas (1998) found that this type of training was lacking for the student teachers he worked with. Reviews of content area literacy textbooks for social studies methods courses have also revealed insufficient coverage of historical thinking skills (VanSledright, 2004a; Wineburg, 1991b). However, with the inclusion of historical thinking skills in the social studies standards issued by both the National Center for History in the Schools (2005) and by the National Council for the Social Studies (2010), one would expect more strategies for historical thinking, such as primary source analysis and DBQs, to be covered in pre-service courses and in methods textbooks. The lack of this pre-service coverage makes DBQ training all the more important for teachers with more experience.

### **Implications for Practice**

It is clear from the results of the survey that teachers are employing a variety of strategies in teaching students to write a DBQ. According to the participants, explicit instruction in writing the essay and in interpreting primary sources seem to be the most successful strategies, along with cultivating background knowledge. However, several effective strategies can be gleaned from the literature as well.

There are two components to writing a DBQ: historical thinking (primary source interpretation) and writing. The most successful strategies for teaching students how to interpret primary sources were explicit instruction in interpretation and asking guiding questions. Teachers should continue employing these strategies. However, VanSledright (2004b) was correct in suggesting a method for teaching students how to assess the validity and reliability of sources. To illustrate the importance of assessing the source,

one may consider an example described by Wineburg and Schneider (2010) in which an AP high school student was asked to interpret a declaration by President Benjamin Harrison regarding the proclamation of Discovery Day, honoring Christopher Columbus, in 1892. The student immediately focused on the fact that Columbus was hardly the “discoverer” of America and not the nice guy history books have traditionally portrayed him to be and deduced that it was questionable as to whether dedicating a day to him was a good idea. Wineburg and Schneider point out that, although this student brought much of his background knowledge about Columbus to the document, he missed the point that it was written 400 years later by President Harrison and failed to consider what President Harrison’s motives were for making the proclamation. It turns out that the proclamation was most likely a bid to gain more Catholic Italian voters, and Wineburg and Schneider admit that the student was not likely to know about this. The point is that the student completely discounted the primary source attribution and simply analyzed the content in the context of the present, illustrating how important assessing the source is for historical thinking. Even if the student had no knowledge of Harrison’s motives, the attribution should have at least led him to question what his motives were for declaring a Discover Day. Students need to learn that assessing the source is essential for primary source analysis.

For the writing component of the DBQ, explicit instruction in writing and the use of graphic organizers were the most successful strategies used by participants. These strategies have also been suggested in the literature as effective (Young & Leinhardt, 1998) and are recommended for use in the classroom. However, there is a strong



argument for having students talk about their argument before they write it: although it was not a strategy that was used as frequently, it had a fairly high reported success rate among those who did use it. In addition, there is evidence that students are able to articulate more complex thoughts and ideas in speech as opposed to in writing, and that students should be given opportunities to talk about their ideas (Paxton, 2002).

In working with lower level readers, slowing down the process of writing the DBQ and working with students one-on-one were perceived to be the most successful strategies with students. Although modifying the primary sources has been recommended by Wineburg and Martin (2009), over half of the participants had not tried this strategy. Teachers should be reassured that as long as the original primary source is presented with the modified document for comparison, they are not compromising the authenticity of the task. This strategy may be helpful for many students who read at grade level as well.

Overall, it seems clear that what will help students the most is to scaffold the skills that are necessary for writing a DBQ. The answers to the questions posed on the survey indicate that students struggle with higher level thinking skills. By breaking down the skills for both historical thinking and for writing, students will be able to learn the skills more quickly and feel more confident in the task. When the basics have been mastered, teachers will be able to work with students on going to the next level in their thinking. With practice, students will be able to achieve some degree of historical thinking. In order for these strategies to be implemented, it is recommended that professional development be designed to train teachers in how to use them effectively.

### **Limitations**

This study had several limitations. First, the sample size turned out to be smaller than anticipated. This was partially due to the fact that not as many high schools in northern Illinois were using the DBQ as the researcher was led to believe at the start of the study. A number of the possible participants did not take the survey, further reducing the sample size. Furthermore, the researcher was relying on the social studies department heads at the participating high schools to send reminders and had little control over distribution of the survey. Personalizing survey invitations was found to be effective in increasing the number of respondents (Heerwegh & Loosveldt, 2006), however, the researcher was unable to do this.

A second limitation of this study was missing data. Forty-six participants began the survey, yet only twenty-eight completed it. Five participants abandoned the survey at question five, and it was discovered that there was an error in the question coding, which was corrected immediately. Other participants abandoned the survey at the beginning of the strategy questions, which had a double rating for frequency of use and for degree of success. These participants may have found these questions to be too confusing. If this study were replicated, the researcher would recommend the use of more complex survey software that would be capable of simplifying these confusing questions.

A third limitation was that much of the data collected was on teachers' perceptions of how successful students were on the DBQ. This was a non-experimental study that used a cross-sectional survey design. An experimental study with a control

group would be necessary to test the success rate of each of the strategies inquired about in the survey.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Very little research exists on the implementation of DBQs in non-AP classrooms, despite the fact that they are being used widely in this setting. There are therefore many possibilities for future research. The sample size for this study was very small, and the survey could be used with a larger population, perhaps in the state of New York. Replication would also serve to further validate the survey instrument. Gathering qualitative data would strengthen the results as well; teacher interviews could be conducted and classrooms could be observed. This would provide a detailed description of what is occurring in non-AP classrooms with regard to the DBQ.

Another possibility would be to investigate the individual teaching strategies for effectiveness. One high school that the researcher works with has entered the students' rubric scores into a database for analysis. With such a system, it would be possible to use a pre-test/post-test design with various teaching strategies as the treatment conditions.

Finally, it may be beneficial for researchers of social studies methods to team up with researchers of writing methods. The DBQ seems to be a marriage of writing and of historical thinking, therefore, the two should be studied together. Historical thinking is studied both by professors of history education, such as VanSledright, and by professors of educational psychology, such as Wineburg. It may be beneficial if professors of history education teamed up with professors of language arts education to study this topic.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the study and a description of the sample. The results were discussed for each research question. Limitations of the study and implications for practice and recommendations for further research were presented.

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF A DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

In developing your answers to Part III, be sure to keep this general definition in mind:

**discuss** means “to make observations about something using facts, reasoning, and argument; to present in some detail”

Part III

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

This question is based on the accompanying documents. The question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. Some of the documents have been edited for the purposes of the question. As you analyze the documents, take into account the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.

**Historical Context:**

The automobile has had an important influence on the United States since the early 20th century. Perhaps no other invention has had such a significant impact on production methods, the American landscape, the environment, and American values.

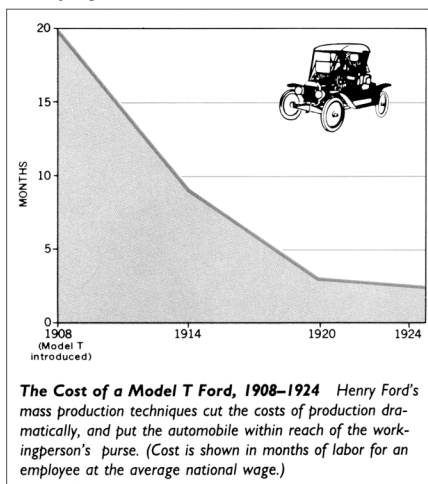
**Task:** Using information from the documents and your knowledge of United States history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay, in which you will be asked to

- Discuss the political, economic, *and/or* social impacts of the automobile on the United States

**Part A**  
**Short-Answer Questions**

**Document 1**

**Length of Time an Average American Employee Must Work to Purchase a Car**



Source: Bailey and Kennedy, *The American Pageant*, D.C. Heath and Company, 1987

- 1 According to Bailey and Kennedy, how did Henry Ford's mass production techniques influence the cost of the automobile? [1]

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Score

## Document 2

... The result [of buying a car] upon the individual is to break down his sense of values. Whether he will or no, he must spend money at every turn. Having succumbed [given in] to the lure of the car, he is quite helpless thereafter. If a new device will make his automobile run smoother or look better, he attaches that device. If a new polish will make it shine brighter, he buys that polish. If a new idea will give more mileage, or remove carbon, he adopts that new idea. These little costs quickly mount up and in many instances represent the margin of safety between income and outgo. The over-plus [surplus] in the pay envelope, instead of going into the bank as a reserve-fund, goes into automobile expense. Many families live on the brink of danger all the time. They are car-poor. Saving is impossible. The joy of security in the future is sacrificed for the pleasure of the moment. And with the pleasure of the moment is mingled the constant anxiety entailed by living beyond one's means. . . .

Source: William Ashdown, "Confessions of an Automobilst," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1925

2 According to William Ashdown, what were *two* negative impacts of automobile ownership in 1925? [2]

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Score

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Score



## Document 3

... Massive and internationally competitive, the automobile industry is the largest single manufacturing enterprise in the United States in terms of total value of products and number of employees. One out of every six U.S. businesses depends on the manufacture, distribution, servicing, or use of motor vehicles. The industry is primarily responsible for the growth of steel and rubber production, and is the largest user of machine tools. Specialized manufacturing requirements have driven advances in petroleum refining, paint and plate-glass manufacturing, and other industrial processes. Gasoline, once a waste product to be burned off, is now one of the most valuable commodities in the world. . . .

Source: National Academy of Engineering, 2000

3 Based on this article, state *two* ways the automobile industry has had an impact on the American economy. [2]

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Score

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Score

**Document 4a**

. . . The automobile allowed a completely different pattern. Today there is often a semi-void of residential population at the heart of a large city, surrounded by rings of less and less densely settled suburbs. These suburbs, primarily dependent on the automobile to function, are where the majority of the country's population lives, a fact that has transformed our politics. Every city that had a major-league baseball team in 1950, with the exception only of New York—ever the exception—has had a drastic loss in population within its city limits over the last four and a half decades, sometimes by as much as 50 percent as people have moved outward, thanks to the automobile.

In more recent years the automobile has had a similar effect on the retail commercial sectors of smaller cities and towns, as shopping malls and superstores such as the Home Depot and Wal-Mart have sucked commerce off Main Street and into the surrounding countryside. . . .

Source: John Steele Gordon, "Engine of Liberation," *American Heritage*, November 1996

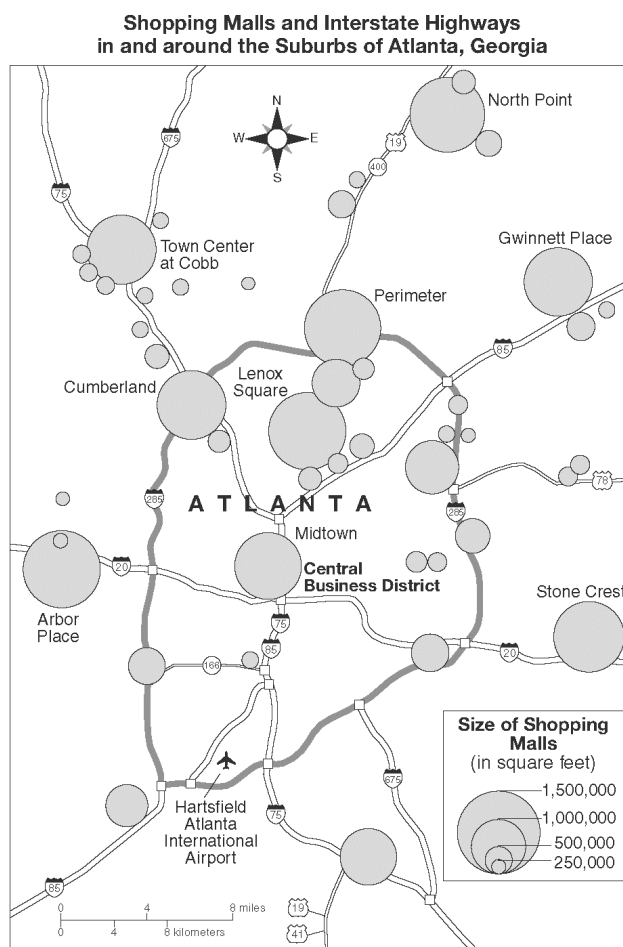
4a According to John Steele Gordon, what has been **one** impact of the automobile on cities? [1]

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Score

Document 4b



Source: James M. Rubenstein, *The Cultural Landscape: An Introduction to Human Geography*, Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005 (adapted)

4b Based on the information on this map, what is **one** impact of the automobile on suburbs? [1]

---



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Score

**Document 5**

. . . What did the automobile mean for the housewife? Unlike public transportation systems, it was convenient. Located right at her doorstep, it could deposit her at the doorstep that she wanted or needed to visit. And unlike the bicycle or her own two feet, the automobile could carry bulky packages as well as several additional people. Acquisition of an automobile therefore meant that a housewife, once she had learned how to drive, could become her own door-to-door delivery service. And as more housewives acquired automobiles, more businessmen discovered the joys of dispensing with [eliminating] delivery services—particularly during the Depression. . . .

Source: Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Less Work for Mother?," *American Heritage*, September/October 1987

- 5 According to Ruth Schwartz Cowan, what was **one** way life changed for the American housewife as a result of the automobile? [1]

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Score

Document 6

**The Influence of the Automobile, 1923–1960 (Selected Years)**

**1923** Country Club Plaza, the first shopping center, opens in Kansas City.

**1924** In November, 16,833 cars cross the St. John’s River into Florida, the beginning of winter motor pilgrimages to Florida.

**1930** Census data suggest that southern cities are becoming more racially segregated as car-owning whites move to suburbs that have no public transportation.

King Kullen, first supermarket, Queens, New York City. Supermarkets are an outgrowth of the auto age, because pedestrians cannot carry large amounts of groceries home.

**1932** One-room rural schools decline because school districts operate 63,000 school buses in the United States.

**1956** Car pools enable Montgomery, Alabama, blacks [African Americans] to boycott successfully the local bus company, beginning the modern civil rights movement.

National Defense and Interstate Highway Act passed. President Eisenhower argues: “In case of atomic attack on our cities, the road net [network] must allow quick evacuation of target areas.”

**1957** Sixty-six-year-old gas station operator Harlan Sanders, facing bankruptcy because the interstate has bypassed him, decides to franchise his Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant.

**1960** Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) formed.

Source: Clay McShane, *The Automobile: A Chronology of Its Antecedents, Development, and Impact*, Greenwood Press, 1997 (adapted)

6a According to Clay McShane, what were *two* economic impacts of the automobile on the United States? [2]

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

Score

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

Score

b According to Clay McShane, what was *one* impact of the automobile on race relations in the United States? [1]

\_\_\_\_\_

Score

## Document 7

Minor disruptions have begun to appear in the world oil trade in the wake of the renewal of hostilities between the Arabs and the Israelis, and industry executives and Government officials in many countries are waiting to see whether the Arab states will make a serious attempt to use oil as a weapon in the conflict or any political confrontation that follows. The Egyptians are reported to have attacked Israeli-held oil fields in the occupied Sinai, and if true it would be the most ominous event so far in the oil situation. It would be the first direct attack by either side on oil production facilities in any of the conflicts thus far. If the Israelis retaliate it could mean major disruptions of supplies. . . .

Source: William D. Smith, "Conflict Brings Minor Disruptions in Oil Industry: Arab States' Moves Studied for Clues to Intentions," *New York Times*, October 9, 1973

- 7 According to William D. Smith, what could be *one* impact of the conflicts in the Middle East on the United States? [1]

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Score

## Document 8

WASHINGTON, July 17—President Reagan, appealing for cooperation in ending the "crazy quilt of different states' drinking laws," today signed legislation that would deny some Federal highway funds to states that keep their drinking age under 21.

At a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, Mr. Reagan praised as "a great national movement" the efforts to raise the drinking age that began years ago among students and parents.

"We know that drinking, plus driving, spell death and disaster," Mr. Reagan told visitors on a sweltering afternoon. "We know that people in the 18-to-20 age group are more likely to be in alcohol-related accidents than those in any other age group."

Mr. Reagan indirectly acknowledged that he once had reservations about a measure that, in effect, seeks to force states to change their policies. In the past, Mr. Reagan has taken the view that certain matters of concern to the states should not be subject to the dictates of the Federal Government.

But in the case of drunken driving, Mr. Reagan said, "The problem is bigger than the individual states." . . .

Source: Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan Signs Law Linking Federal Aid to Drinking Age," *New York Times*, July 18, 1984

- 8 According to Steven R. Weisman, what was *one* reason President Reagan signed the law linking federal highway funds to the drinking age? [1]

---



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Score

**Document 9**

... After a long and bitter debate, lawmakers in California today [July 2, 2002] passed the nation's strongest legislation to regulate emissions of the main pollutant that can cause warming of the planet's climate, a step that would require automakers to sell cars that give off the least possible amount of heat-trapping gases. . . .

California is the largest market for automobiles in the United States, as well as the state with more serious air pollution problems than any other. Under federal clean air legislation, the state's air quality regulators are allowed to set standards for automobile pollution that are stricter than those imposed by federal law. In the past, many other states have followed California's lead in setting pollution rules on vehicles, and ultimately American automakers have been forced to build cars that meet California's standards and to sell them nationwide. . . .

Source: John H. Cushman Jr., "California Lawmakers Vote to Lower Auto Emissions,"  
*New York Times*, July 2, 2002

9 According to John H. Cushman Jr., what is *one* impact of the automobile on the United States? [1]

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Score

**Part B**  
**Essay**

*Directions:* Write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs, and a conclusion. Use evidence from *at least five* documents in the body of the essay. Support your response with relevant facts, examples, and details. Include additional outside information.

**Historical Context:**

The automobile has had an important influence on the United States since the early 20th century. Perhaps no other invention has had such a significant impact on production methods, the American landscape, the environment, and American values.

**Task:** Using information from the documents and your knowledge of United States history, write an essay in which you

- Discuss the political, economic, *and/or* social impacts of the automobile on the United States

**Guidelines:****In your essay, be sure to**

- Develop all aspects of the task
- Incorporate information from *at least five* documents
- Incorporate relevant outside information
- Support the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Use a logical and clear plan of organization, including an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme



APPENDIX B  
DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION RUBRIC

**United States History and Government**  
**Content-Specific Rubric**  
**Document-Based Question**  
**August 2008**

**Historical Context:** The automobile has had an important influence on the United States since the early 20th century. Perhaps no other invention has had such a significant impact on production methods, the American landscape, the environment, and American values.

**Task:** Discuss the political, economic, *and/or* social impacts of the automobile on the United States

**Scoring Notes:**

1. The response to this document-based question should discuss *at least two* political, economic and/or social impacts of the automobile on the United States.
2. To incorporate the minimum number of documents, most responses will discuss more than two impacts.
3. Any combination of political, economic, and social impacts may be used to address the task.
4. The classification of impacts as political, economic, or social does not need to be specifically identified.
5. In some cases, the same information could be used to address different types of impacts, e.g., the social and economic impact of the automobile on the mobility of the population.
6. For the purposes of meeting the criteria of using *at least five* documents in the response, documents 4a and 4b may be considered as separate documents if the response uses specific facts from each individual document.

**Score of 5:**

- Thoroughly develops the task evenly and in depth by discussing political, economic, and/or social impacts of the automobile on the United States
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information), e.g., connects widespread ownership of the automobile to environmental activism that led to the passage of the Clean Air Act and the continuation of a national discussion about automobile emissions and their connection to global warming; connects widespread ownership of the automobile and increased gasoline consumption to the effects of foreign policy objectives in the Middle East and the energy crises of the 1970s and 2008 and an increased awareness of the need to explore alternative fuel sources to help decrease United States dependence on foreign sources
- Incorporates relevant information from *at least five* documents (see Key Ideas Chart)
- Incorporates substantial relevant outside information related to impacts of the automobile (see Outside Information Chart)
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details, e.g., pollution; Environmental Protection Agency; OPEC; gas lines; oil embargo; 55-mile-per-hour speed limit; ethanol; Amtrak; “park-and-ride” programs
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme

**Score of 4:**

- Develops the task by discussing political, economic, and/or social impacts of the automobile on the United States but may do so somewhat unevenly such as discussing some impacts more thoroughly than other impacts
- Is both descriptive and analytical (applies, analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information), e.g., discusses expanding ownership of the automobile and concern about the impact of automobile emissions on cities such as Los Angeles and increasing public interest in the passage of environmental legislation; discusses increasing ownership of the automobile as it relates to gasoline consumption and public awareness of the benefits of fuel-efficient automobiles and finding alternative fuel sources
- Incorporates relevant information from *at least five* documents
- Incorporates relevant outside information
- Supports the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme

**Score of 3:**

- Develops the task with little depth
- Is more descriptive than analytical (applies, may analyze and/or evaluate information)
- Incorporates some relevant information from some of the documents
- Incorporates limited relevant outside information
- Includes some relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some minor inaccuracies
- Demonstrates a satisfactory plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that may be a restatement of the theme

**Score of 2:**

- Minimally develops the task
- Is primarily descriptive; may include faulty, weak, or isolated application or analysis
- Incorporates limited relevant information from the documents *or* consists primarily of relevant information copied from the documents
- Presents little or no relevant outside information
- Includes few relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some inaccuracies
- Demonstrates a general plan of organization; may lack focus; may contain digressions; may not clearly identify which aspect of the task is being addressed; may lack an introduction and/or a conclusion

**Score of 1:**

- Minimally develops the task
- Is descriptive; may lack understanding, application, or analysis
- Makes vague, unclear references to the documents *or* consists primarily of relevant and irrelevant information copied from the documents
- Presents no relevant outside information
- Includes few relevant facts, examples, or details; may include inaccuracies
- May demonstrate a weakness in organization; may lack focus; may contain digressions; may not clearly identify which aspect of the task is being addressed; may lack an introduction and/or a conclusion

**Score of 0:**

Fails to develop the task or may only refer to the theme in a general way; *OR* includes no relevant facts, examples, or details; *OR* includes only the historical context and/or task as copied from the test booklet; *OR* includes only entire documents copied from the test booklet; *OR* is illegible; *OR* is a blank paper

APPENDIX C  
SURVEY ITEMS

## Survey Items

Please answer all items as they apply to non-AP classes that you teach.

### *Use of DBQs.*

Item:

How many times a year do you use a DBQ in your classroom? (If you are on block scheduling and cover a year's worth of content in a semester, answer per semester.)

- Never
- 1 – 2 times
- 3 – 4 times
- 5 or more times

Item:

Why do you use DBQs in your classroom? (Choose all that apply.)

- So that students learn more about history.
- To develop critical thinking skills.
- To develop writing skills.
- To develop primary source document analysis skills.
- To develop historical thinking.
- Because it is an authentic assessment.
- Because it is required by my department.
- Other:

Item:

For what purposes do you use the DBQ in your classroom? (Choose all that apply.)

- Introducing a topic
- Formative assessment (to determine what students need to learn)
- Summative assessment (to determine what students have learned)
- In place of a unit
- Other:

Item:

What skills and/or content do you hope students learn by writing a DBQ? (Choose all that apply.)

- Content information about a particular era in history
- Critical thinking skills
- Writing a thesis
- Writing a historical essay
- Writing an argument (i.e. defending the thesis)
- Primary source document analysis
- The ability to identify bias in a document
- Using evidence to back up a claim
- Historical thinking skills (thinking like a historian)
- Other:

*Skills.*

## Item:

In your experience, how do students typically perform on each skill when writing a DBQ?

Skill	Few students do this well	Some students do this well	Many students do this well	Most students do this well
Writing an argumentative essay				
Writing an effective thesis				
Using evidence to back up a claim				
Analyzing a primary source				
Identifying bias in a document				
Determining the value and reliability of evidence				

## Item:

How important do you believe each skill is for students to be able to write a DBQ?

The ability to:	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Essential
Write an argumentative essay				
Write an effective thesis				
Use evidence to back up a claim				
Analyze a primary source document				
Identify bias in a document				
Determine the value and reliability of evidence				

*Strategies for learning the skills*

Item:

Please rate how often you use these teaching strategies and, if you use them, how successful you believe they are in aiding student achievement on the DBQ. (If you do not use a strategy, do not rate its success.) [Note: these questions will be “branched” online; in other words, if a participant indicates that he/she does not use a strategy, he/she will not be asked about the degree of success.]

Historical thinking skills	Frequency of use				Degree of success			
	Not used	Used once or twice	Used several times	Used each time DBQ is taught	Not successful	Successful with some students	Successful with many students	Successful with nearly all students
Have students practice historical reasoning								
Present a dilemma faced by historians and invite students to debate the conclusion								
Cultivate background knowledge in order to understand the context of the historical era								
Model how to consider the context								
Provide students with sources with a visible author (first person) in teaching multiple perspectives								

Writing strategies	Frequency of use				Degree of success			
	Not used	Used once or twice	Used several times	Used each time DBQ is taught	Not successful	Successful with some students	Successful with many students	Successful with nearly all students
Have students talk about their argument before writing								
Have students take a position and defend it without documents								
Instruct students to defend an argument (as opposed to a history or narrative)								
Have students use graphic organizers to structure their argument								
Explicit instruction in writing (paragraph structure, writing introductions and conclusions, etc.)								
Scaffold writing skills								
Explicit instruction and practice in writing a thesis								
Provide opportunities to write for a variety of purposes (annotating text,								
Writing from primary documents, and writing to demonstrate learning)								



Writing with documents	Frequency of use				Degree of success			
	Not used	Used once or twice	Used several times	Used each time DBQ is taught	Not successful	Successful with some students	Successful with many students	Successful with nearly all students
Have students write from multiple documents (primary and secondary sources)								
Explicit instruction in how to use evidence to back up a claim								

Assessment / feedback	Frequency of use				Degree of success			
	Not used	Used once or twice	Used several times	Used each time DBQ is taught	Not successful	Successful with some students	Successful with many students	Successful with nearly all students
Have students evaluate their own work								
Provide multiple opportunities for practice and feedback								

Document analysis	Frequency of use				Degree of success			
	Not used	Used once or twice	Used several times	Used each time DBQ is taught	Not successful	Successful with some students	Successful with many students	Successful with nearly all students
Explicit instruction in how to interpret documents rather than report from them								
Ask guiding questions about primary sources								
Have students debate the interpretation of a single source								
Have students investigate primary sources that come from a variety of perspectives								
Engage students in discussions about the interpretation of documents								
Explicit instruction in identification of bias								
Instruction in assessing the intent of the author								
Explicit instruction in how to consider the validity of sources (have students compare and/or relate a source to other accounts to establish validity)								

Please list any other strategies you use and explain how successful you believe them to be in teaching the DBQ.

Item:

How successful are **lower-level readers** on each of the following skills when writing a DBQ?

Skill	Not successful	Somewhat successful	Moderately successful	Very successful	Does not apply
Ability to read the documents					
Document interpretation / analysis					
Writing a thesis					
General writing skills					
Writing an argument					
Using evidence to back up a claim					
Lack of background content area knowledge					

Item:

Please rate how often you use these modifications **with lower-level readers** and, if you use them, how successful you believe they are in aiding student achievement on the DBQ. (If you do not use a strategy, do not rate its success.) [Note: these questions will be “branched” online; in other words, if a participant indicates that he/she does not use a strategy, he/she will not be asked about the degree of success.]

Teaching strategy	Frequency of use				Degree of success			
	Not used	Used once or twice	Used several times	Used each time DBQ is taught	Not successful	Successful with some students	Successful with many students	Successful with nearly all students
Slow down the process								
Provide more one-on-one instruction								
Modify the question								
Allow students to use fewer documents in the essay								
Modify the documents to a more appropriate reading level								
Use graphic organizers before writing								

Please list any other modifications you use **with lower-level readers** that you have found successful when teaching the DBQ.

*Professional Development*

Item:

What professional development have you attended that included information on how to teach the DBQ? Please check all that apply.

- Workshop conducted by the DBQ Project
- Training provided for Advanced Placement courses
- Workshop or class by another provider
- In-house staff development provided by the department
- Other workshop on teaching writing
- I have not participated in any training for the DBQ.

Item:

If you have attended professional development on the DBQ, how often do you use the strategies from the training? (Answer only for relevant types of training.)

Training type	Not at all	I use a few strategies from the training every once in a while	I use the strategies from the training consistently	The training completely changed the way I teach the DBQ
DBQ Project workshop				
Advanced Placement course training				
Workshop or class by another provider				
In-house staff development				
Other workshop on teaching writing				

Item:

If you have attended professional development on the DBQ, how do you feel the training changed your effectiveness in teaching the DBQ? (Answer only for relevant types of training.)

---

Training type	Not at all	The training made me somewhat more effective	The training made me more effective	The training made me much more effective
DBQ project workshop				
Advanced placement course training				
Workshop or class by another provider				
In-house staff development				
Other workshop on teaching writing				

---

Item:

What topics were covered in your *pre-service* (undergraduate or teacher training program) college methods courses? Please check all that apply.

- primary source analysis
- DBQs
- essay writing for social studies classes
- none of the above

*Demographic information.*

Item:

What grade levels do you teach? Check all that apply.

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Item:

In what classes do you teach the DBQ? Check all that apply.

- World History
- U.S. History
- AP courses

Item:

How many years have you been teaching?

APPENDIX D

APPROVAL FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD





**Research Services**  
**Institutional Review Board for The Protection of Human Subjects**  
Lakeside  
Lake Shore Campus  
1032 W. Sheridan Road | Chicago, Illinois 60660

April 21, 2010

Dear Ms. Christine Berrong,

Thank you very much for the submission of your Institutional Review Board application entitled, "Implementation of Document Based Question Essays in Regular Education History Classes." After careful examination of the materials you submitted, the IRB has determined that this project is **exempt** since it involves no risk to human subjects that would require further action by the IRB under 45 CFR 46. You are therefore under no obligation to submit applications for continuing review during the course of your work, as long as your research protocol remains identical to that submitted to us.

Please note, however, that should there be any plans to change your research design (e.g., the research population, the content of questionnaire forms, or the planned treatment of responses), you must complete the *Application for Amendment to Research Protocol* form, located on Loyola's website (\*address listed below), and submit it to the IRB for review.

As an investigator, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB of completion of this research and/or departure from the University. In all correspondence with the IRB regarding this project, please quote file number **#20168**.

Best wishes for your research,

Raymond H. Dye, Jr., Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**\*download the appropriate form at:** [http://www.luc.edu/ors/irb\\_home.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/ors/irb_home.shtml); go to the "Forms" section

CC: Dr. Ernestine Riggs - Education

APPENDIX E

REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT



Chicago's Jesuit University

**LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY  
CHICAGO**

## Form A

### Request for Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent

**Investigator's name:** Christine R. Berrong

**Title of Project:** Implementation of Document Based Question Essays in Regular Education History Classes

#### A. Waiver of Documentation of Consent

Documentation of consent means that participants are required to sign a consent form, thereby documenting their consent. A waiver of documentation means that the IRB is waiving the requirement to obtain the participant's signature. Even if this waiver is granted, a consent process must still be in place. The consent process must contain all the required elements of consent and usually consists consent form or a verbal script that is read aloud to them.

For the IRB to grant this waiver, your project must meet one of the following conditions. Check the appropriate condition and explain why your research meets the condition in the space provided.

- Condition 1-**The only record linking the participant and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be the potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern. This refers to instances where participants could be seriously harmed if it became known that they were participants in the research.

*Explanation:*

**OR**

- Condition 2-**The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. This refers to procedures such as mail surveys or brief interviews over the telephone or at public events/venues that elicit non-sensitive information.

*Explanation:* Data for this study will be collected through a web-based survey and will involve minimal risk of harm to participants.

Signature of Researcher Christine R. Berrong Date 2/8/10

If requesting this waiver, please attach this document to the end of the "Application for IRB Review" (after question #9).

APPENDIX F  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** *Implementation of Document Based Question Essays in Regular Education History Classes*

**Researcher:** *Christine R. Berrong*

**Faculty Sponsor:** *Dr. Ernestine Riggs*

### **Introduction:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Christine R. Berrong for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Ernestine Riggs in the School of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you have either participated in training or purchased materials from The DBQ Project. Because of this, it is assumed that you use or have used Document Based Question essays in your classroom.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to help classroom teachers who teach the DBQ by gathering and reporting data on successful teaching strategies used by teachers to teach the DBQ, especially with students who have lower than average reading levels. The research questions include:

5. For what purposes do teachers use the DBQ?
6. What strategies do teachers use to teach the DBQ, and what skills do these strategies focus on?
7. How successful do teachers feel these strategies are, especially with students who read below grade level? Do teachers modify DBQs for students who read below grade level, and, if so, how?
8. Have teachers attended professional development on how to teach the DBQ and, if so, how has this training affected their teaching methods?

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

- answer questions about your experience teaching the DBQ on a web-based survey. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The questions are multiple choice and Likert scale (i.e., strongly agree to strongly disagree type questions), with a few open-ended questions.
- voluntarily provide your contact information for follow-up on open-ended questions. This is strictly voluntary and no contact information needs to be provided if you wish to preserve your anonymity in the study.

- The survey will remain online until June 5, 2010. You may participate in the survey at any time until that date.

**Risks/Benefits:**

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

You may benefit from participating in this study by feeling good about contributing knowledge that may help others teach the DBQ, and possibly by learning about successful strategies to teach the DBQ from the results of the study.

**Confidentiality:**

- Efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality. The collected data will be stored on a secure server to which only the researcher and server administrators will have access and will also be stored on a secure external hard drive to which only the researcher will have access. The data will be encrypted to a high level of security and will be password protected.
- At the end of the study, the data will be deleted permanently off of the server and the hard drive.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Christine R. Berrong (the researcher) at [cberron@luc.edu](mailto:cberron@luc.edu), or Dr. Ernestine Riggs (the faculty sponsor) at [eriggs@luc.edu](mailto:eriggs@luc.edu) or at 312-915-7061.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Consent:**

By completing the survey and clicking “submit” at the end, you are indicating that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be giving me permission to publish aggregated findings in my dissertation and present findings in juried professional journals and at professional conferences.

APPENDIX G  
EMAIL SOLICITATION

### **Email Invitation to Participate**

Dear (name of potential participant),

My name is Christine Berrong, and I am a student at Loyola University Chicago in the Doctor of Education program, majoring in Curriculum and Instruction. The research project for my dissertation is entitled “Implementation of Document Based Question Essays (DBQs) in Regular Education History Classes.”

The purpose of this research is to find out how teachers are using DBQ essays in their classrooms, if they use any specific teaching strategies that are successful in student mastery of the DBQ, and if participation in training has an impact on how the DBQ is taught. As an 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teacher, I myself have struggled in preparing my students to be able to write DBQs in their high school social studies classes. My hope is to compile information that will help teachers be more successful in teaching the DBQ process.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Efforts will be made to ensure the anonymity of all participants who wish to remain anonymous. Findings from this survey will be presented in such a way that no individual will be identifiable. All responses will be kept confidential. By completing the online survey, you will be giving me permission to publish aggregated findings in my dissertation and present findings in juried professional journals and at professional conferences. If you choose to participate you will be adding to knowledge that may help you and other teachers in teaching the DBQ.

To participate in the survey:

Step 1 - Click on the link to the survey: [the link to survey will be here]

Step 2 - Follow the instructions and answer the questions, clicking “next” at the bottom of each screen.

Step 3 – Remember to click “done” at the end of the survey when you are finished.

If you wish to have a paper survey mailed to you, please contact me at [cberron@luc.edu](mailto:cberron@luc.edu) and provide a mailing address, and a survey and postage paid return envelope will be mailed to you.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely,  
Christine R. Berrong



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Young, K., & Leinhardt, G. (1998). Writing from primary documents: A way of knowing in history. *Written Communication*, 15(1), 25.

## VITA

Christine R. Berrong is the daughter of Sandra and Gerald Berrong. She was born in Flemington, New Jersey on October 8, 1968. She currently resides in Chicago, Illinois.

Christine attended Branchburg public schools in New Jersey for her K-8 education and graduated from Lake Zurich Senior High School in Lake Zurich, Illinois. She earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1990 from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois with a major in psychology and a concentration in music. In 1993, she was awarded the Masters of Arts in Teaching degree in elementary education from National-Louis University in Evanston, Illinois. She earned the Illinois administrative certificate in 2007 through Loyola University Chicago as part of the doctoral program.

Christine has worked as a middle school teacher since the fall of 1993 at West Oak Middle School in Mundelein, Illinois. She has taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade social studies as well as various other classes including general music and health. She is the original designer of the Diamond Lake School District 76 website and has served as webmaster since the site's inception. She has served on the district Technology Committee where she has assisted in writing the district technology plans. She has also assisted in writing the district social studies curriculum and the health curriculum.

Christine has conducted workshops on teacher websites, online projects, and Photoshop Elements for teachers. She is a member of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the Illinois Council for the Social Studies (ICSS) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The Dissertation submitted by Christine R. Berrong has been read and approved by the following committee:

Ernestine Riggs, Ph.D., Director  
Associate Professor, School of Education  
Loyola University Chicago

Ann Marie Ryan, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, School of Education  
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Barney Berlin, Ph.D.  
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