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Back Away From the Lecture Notes: Using a Simulation Game to Engage Social Studies Haters

Christopher D. Moore

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BACK AWAY FROM THE LECTURE NOTES:

USING A SIMULATION GAME TO ENGAGE SOCIAL STUDIES HATERS

by

Christopher D. Moore

ABSTRACT

        Simulation games may increase student engagement in the social studies classroom.

Papert (1991) states that constructionism allows students to build, whether tangible or intangible

objects, and that the building and conversation around the building allows student to learn best.

In this study, the researcher observed and interviewed participants, as well as wrote in a journal

about the experience, regarding playing a simulation game about the Electoral College. The

researcher utilized *en vivo* coding to facilitate data interpretation. The participants were 18 year-

old students at a suburban high school in a metropolitan area in the southeastern United States.

These participants were selected by self-identifying themselves as 'social studies haters.' The

researcher gathered data to determine if the simulation game has a relationship to engagement in

the social studies classroom and examined with the simulation game, eLECTIONS, exercised

elements of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) theory to engage the participants. The

researcher determined that self-identified social studies haters at this school more strongly

engaged in the social studies content when they participated in the simulation game on the

Electoral College. The research also determined UDL enhanced engagement in the simulation

game.

INDEX WORDS: Social students, Engagement, Simulation, Constructionism, Universal design
        for learning.

BACK AWAY FROM THE LECTURE NOTES:

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem

In 1992, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) voted on a statement that would define what "social studies" meant and determined its educational purpose. In this essential statement regarding the discipline, NCSS explicitly stated that "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people *develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions* for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (Drake & Nelson, 2005, p. 47). Within its own definition, the governing body of social studies education dependently links the discipline with the need for critical thinking. In 2008, as NCSS worked toward adopting new standards, their position for an informed and critical citizenry did not waver. In their position statement, "A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies: Building Social Understanding and Civic Efficacy" (2008), one element stated "challenging social studies includes the rigorous teaching of the core disciplines as influential and continually growing tools for inquiry.... Through…*simulations*, research, and other occasions for critical thinking and decision making, students learn to apply value-based reasoning when addressing problems and issues [italics for emphasis]."

However, social studies classes across the country still employ the same pedagogical methods that have been in place for decades (see Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Gee, 2007; Stephens, Feinberg & Zack, 2013). Teachers have made cursory changes, but avoided a paradigm shift that requires them to throw out the yellowed lecture notes and delete the worksheet with the decades-old copyright date. While educators have started to move away from the section questions at the end of a textbook chapter, there is no real challenge to the textbook's authority or perspective using critical thinking skills- and it is important for teachers to recognize this need. "Only by

fostering their own understanding of the literacy needed for critical inquiry in the 21st century

will educators be able to instruct students on the appropriate uses of emerging resources and

prepare them for civic involvement" (Berson & Berson, 2003, p. 164). Technological changes in

the classroom have included digitizing the textbook and shifting from overheads to PowerPoint

(and now Prezi). This sentiment was echoed by Doolittle and Hicks (2003) when they stated,

> If integrating technology means nothing more than enhancing the traditional delivery
>
> system of social studies content, where laptops replace notebooks for taking notes, where
>
> PowerPoint slides replace handwritten overheads, where e-textbooks replace hard copy
>
> textbooks, then we will be no closer to a vision of transformative, powerful social studies
>
> teaching and learning (p. 75).

This lack of technological and critical advancement in social studies classrooms can be

traced to teachers' unwillingness to learn new technology (or not being taught regarding usage)

and the mandate of high-stakes testing that requires students to regurgitate factoids to

demonstrate comprehension of the content. In other words, there is no real incentive for the

educator or the student to learn more than specific information, and any thinking about or

challenge of the content is superfluous and inconsequential. According to Wood (2011), "The

traditional social studies classroom discourages critical thinking and reinforces the idea that

knowledge is unchangeable and not open to interpretation or criticism. Students trapped in this

type of social studies classroom quickly find that they are powerless, bored, and instilled with the

viewpoint that social studies is simply a collection of useless trivial knowledge…." (p. 6). It

might also be traced to "the need for a clear philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical

framework to think about technology and social studies education" (Hicks, van Hover,

Washington & Lee, 2012, p. 477). As such, social studies requires the integration of critical

thinking skills across all components of social studies- political science, geography, world and United States history, the behavior sciences and economics- and one of the primary ways critical thinking can be incorporated is through games and simulations.

There is also difficulty in determining engagement. Engagement is seen as a consistent goal among researchers and educators because engaged students generally mean higher achieving students. However, how one assesses engagement differs greatly. In regards to engagement, it is important for me to include the opinions and deliberations of the participants as well as my own observations. I have been assessed using quantitative measures of engagement and I have attempted to assess others using this same tool. In fact, during my tenure at the school at which I taught in 2011-2012 that focused on engagement, the following implement was used to quantify engagement in classrooms within the school (Husby, personal communication, 2013).

Table 1

Engagement Quantification Tool

Check the following that were observed in student performance:					
Reading Writing Active Listening Speaking Basic Math Skills Prob. Solving Vocab. Dev. Critical Thinking					
Evident in Student Perform.	**Evident in Teacher Instruction**	**Quality Plus Instructional Strategy**	**Activity**		
		Assessment	Evaluated progress and make adjustments		
		Non-verbal Rep.	Use of graphic organizers, pictures, or other visual material to represent information		
		Modeling and Practice	Teacher provided example, students practice, teacher gives feedback regarding practice		
		Vocabulary	Used resources, context, or roots/word parts to identify meaning		
		Summarizing	Gave response or created product or performance to answer essential question or show mastery of key concepts		
		Collaboration	Worked with one or more partners to develop or demonstrate understanding of key concepts		
		Student Goal Set.	Established goal for performance prior to beginning project, assignment, etc.		

		Literacy	Engaged in reading, writing, listening, speaking, or vocabulary development that led to deeper understanding of concepts	
		Problem-solving & Comparison & Contrast	Applied concepts learned to do one or more of the following: **Application**: Use of information to solve new or different problem **Analysis**: Broke information into parts to understand information **Synthesis**: Put parts of information together to create something new **Evaluation**: Made and defended judgment using info. learned	
		Questioning	Posed questions to deepen understanding of key concepts	
		Background Knowledge	Used personal knowledge and previous learning as a link to understand new information	
		Technology	Used technology to learn or demonstrate knowledge of key concepts	

As an observer, it was my job to count the number of times these strategies were enacted during my 20 minute observation. I was encouraged to count the total number of students, and then tally the number of students who were engaged. We defined engagement in this context as writing down what the teacher was telling them or participating in a discussion. We were reminded not to just count the number of hands raised when a question was asked, as a student may not be volunteering to answer, but rather ask for permission to sharpen a pencil, use the restroom, etc. One constant source of discussion and disagreement with teachers and the lead evaluator was the ability for students to be able to write about the content while thinking about the something else: "zoning out." There was also the question of, to what extent are students being engaged if they are simply taking notes? Yes, they are participating, but to what degree? In contrast, I could not count a student as being engaged if they were sitting and listening to a discussion. However, a student's level of engagement might have been higher than the fastidious note taker because he or she was concentrating on the topic and contemplating the educational banter going across the room without necessarily participating with out loud remarks. Engagement is difficult (if not impossible) to quantify and it is imperative that the participants have the opportunity to determine their own level of engagement in this simulation game research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social studies-related simulations and games and student engagement. I use several simulations and games in my classroom. "Social studies lends itself well to…simulations, offering students opportunities to inhabit different worlds and assume the perspectives of others" (Stephens, Feinberg, & Zack, 2013, p. 257). The simulations and games I use in my class are U.S. History-related. When students begin examining English colonization in North America, I use a game called "Jamestown Online Adventure" by HistoryGlobe.com's Bob Dunn. In this computerized attempt to settle in the coastal region of what will be Virginia, students must make a variety of decisions: where to settle, how to interact with the American Indians, what kind of crops to grow, what kind of dwellings to establish and who among the settlers will work. All of these decisions are made by the students that can include assistance from sources within the game. Students can choose to read a settler's perspective, an American Indian's perspective or look at the charter for Jamestown, a primary source highlighted by the game. This game allows students to place themselves in the early 17th century to make decisions about their livelihood in a new place. I play this game with them before they study the content; they will not know the events that led to a successful colony and the struggle it took to become successful.

Another simulation game that I use is "Westward Trail" by the Global Games Network. For all intents and purposes, this game is an online version of "Oregon Trail." "Westward Trail" challenges students to examine the role of the men and women moving to the western part of the United States during the mid-1800s. Students again must make choices, this time revolving around what to buy (axels, food, clothing, oxen, etc.) and how to handle difficulties that arise

along their route, such as the best way to cross a river, the wagon breaking down or the death or an ox or member of the traveling party.

Finally, the simulation that is the focus of this study is "eLECTIONS: Your Adventure in Politics" (hereafter known as eLECTIONS), by Cable in the Classroom. As a researcher in a high school social studies classroom, I observed levels of engagement in eighteen-year-old, twelfth grade American Government students at a Title I high school in a suburban metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. Students were asked to participate in the playing of eLECTIONS, discussions and interviews about eLECTIONS, and allowed observations by the researcher during game play and in a traditional social studies classroom setting.

Overview of the Study

The goal of my research is to examine the relationship between students in social studies classrooms and simulations and games. I am also interested in determining if simulations engage students with the content more than traditional pedagogy, particularly for students who identify themselves as social studies haters. In chapter two, I present literature on simulations and games, simulations and games in the classroom, simulations and games in the social studies classroom, and the principles of UDL. In chapter three, I discuss the methodology (ethnography), method of data collection (interview, participant observation, and personal reflection), and method of data interpretation (Spradley's method of coding and seeking semantic relationship in the text) in my research. In chapter four, I present the data collected. In chapter five, I reveal the findings and discussion points created from the research. Specifically, I examined the following questions:

1. How do students who self-identify as 'social studies haters' experience playing social studies-related simulation games?

2. How do the components of Universal Design for Learning theory affect students' engagement in social studies-related simulations and games?

Significance of the Study

In the literature regarding using simulations and games in the classroom, a great deal of focus exists about the potential achievement these simulations and games can bring to various content areas. Researchers wonder about processes or data that can transfer; near and far transfer is also a topic of debate. Seemingly, a focus on engagement as it pertains to simulations and games is concentrated on using engagement as a means to an end; if students like the content, then they will learn more; ergo, they achieve more. The literature is mostly focused on achievement, whether directly or indirectly.

The idea of students being engaged by simulations and games is assumed (see Gee, Tobias, Fletcher, Dai & Wind, Prensky, all 2011). However, a large (and ever-increasing) discrepancy exists between the quality of games available at school and those available at GameStop®. Rarely do researchers examine the relationship between simulations and games and students. I will attempt to do just that in this study; examine the relationship between simulations and games and students and social studies. Students are also rarely the co-contributors of the research of which they are a part. Students are quantified and their data explicated to tell other researchers just how many points students' high-stakes test scores will rise if the educators use simulations and games over standard, traditional, lecture-based instruction. I hope to provide student insight though observation, interviews and reflective journaling.

The Role of Simulations and Games in the Social Studies

Simulations have been used in the social sciences since the early 1960s (Axelrod, 1997). According to Axelrod, simulations can be used for many purposes such as entertainment, prediction, and performance, but they can also be used for education and scientific discovery (1997). Within the educational learning from simulations, Axelrod argues that "a simulation need not be rich enough to suggest a complete real or imaginary world. The main use of simulation in education is to allow the users to learn…principles for themselves" (p. 2).

As technology progresses and, specifically as students become more computer savvy and technologically literate, educators can take advantage of programs and simulations that work online. This sentiment is true, whether referencing colonization games for American History, the Stock Market game for economics, or a game like eLECTIONS, designed to help American government students understand campaigns and Electoral College math. According to the standards set forth by NCSS, students are supposed to be able to "explain the purpose of government and how its powers are acquired, used, and justified," and "help learners identify and describe the basic features of the American political system, and identify representative leaders from various levels and branches of government" (1994).

In a recent issue of NCSS' *Social Education*, Editor Michael Simpson stated, "Young people are fascinated by technology, and teachers who find ways to convert their students' favorites devices into vehicles of instruction can look for exciting results" (2009). Somewhere, between the unrealized potential and the fascination of technology by students, there is a disconnect and Simpson is right: teachers that are able to harness technology and make it applicable and relevant and interesting to students might, in fact, find "exciting results." The

elements of this particular quote- that students are technologically confident and like to use technology- is key to the philosophies of constructionism and its founder, Seymour Papert.

Using Simulations and Games through Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design started out not as educational theory, but rather as an architectural one. In the 1970s, Roger L. Mace, an architect and wheelchair user, noticed that as he went into buildings, there was limited access or, in some cases, no access, for persons with handicaps. With this thought in mind, Mace began designing buildings that could accommodate those with handicaps: lower sinks, wider doors, ramps, lower light switches, etc. (Lewis & Sullivan, 2012). This idea spread from buildings to outdoor space, the creation of products and means of communication (Hall, Meyer & Rose, 2012.) Educational theorists, such as Meyer and Rose borrowed from the ideas of Universal Design and applied the idea of inclusion to create an opportunity for educators to utilized Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in their classroom.

Social studies has a strong emphasis in studying primary sources. Technology has been instrumental in the last ten years in allowing students to access for primary sources. For example, the National Archives provides all of its documents electronically and, in recent years, created a platform for teachers called "DocsTeach," which provides lesson plans based on various primary documents in American History. Digital texts are important for students because, "digital texts are malleable and flexible. They can be customized to meet an individual's needs or preferences. They allow for the inclusion of effective scaffolds and supports that can be activated or withdrawn with relative ease. In short, they can bend to the needs of diverse learners rather than requiring the readers to bend to them" (Gordon, Proctor & Dalton, 2012, p. 50).

Looking at documents and engaging in the content in social studies is a concept called "Doing History" (Wineburg, 2001). Robinson and Meyer (2012) argue that Doing History "requires not only close teacher involvement but also support for diverse learners" (p. 113). Doing History requires that students engage in the content and contexts of the era or subject that is being studied. UDL extends this opportunity by allowing students to learn about and present the content in a variety of ways (Robinson & Meyer, 2012). While UDL does not require the use of technology in order to implement its pedagogy, the digital world does provide arenas in which diverse students can thrive. These supports can come by way of online dictionaries, primary documents imbedded into the website for reference, a variety of text and images, without limitation concerns, and text-to-talk capabilities. The key is for students to be engaged. "Recent research shows that students learn best when they are actively engaged and motivated…." (Robinson & Meyer, 2012, p. 126).

One of the ways in which students can be engaged in education is through simulations and games. Simulations and games are firmly planted in the ideas of constructionism. Seymour Papert (1991) defined the concept. Papert's idea was that students learn best when they are actually constructing something, and particularly if it is on a computer. He created this idea while at MIT in the late 1970s and early 1980s, obviously long before mainstream internet usage. Although Papert's focus was in mathematics, the same elements can apply in social studies. If students build something on a computer, they learn better.

eLECTIONS is one example of an online game that demonstrates this idea of constructing via technology. The purpose of eLECTIONS is to teach students about the process of becoming president, including campaigning, issue platforms, the Electoral College and using secondary sources to make informed decisions. The student 'builds' her/his candidate by

choosing the following: the candidate's name, party, issues on which to campaign, key issues on which to focus, response to positive and negative news along the campaign trail, where to campaign, how much money to spend and where to spend it. The student has complete ownership of the candidate. Students can play against the computer or another classmate; they can throw in a third candidate or stay with two. These elements allow for the construction of a political figure that is uniquely theirs. The opportunity to operate at this level of independence increases student participation and engagement (Feinberg, Schewe, Moore, & Wood, 2012).

Two more examples of constructionist applications in social studies are the *Civilization* series and the *Sims* series. These simulations allow for students to use their content knowledge to develop what they consider to be a successful city or civilization, or for whatever idea or content the simulation is asking. Not only do students have the opportunity to develop their city based or their content knowledge, but the game teaches them as they move along. If students tax their citizens too much, the people complain and eventually revolt; if the student taxes them too little, there is not enough money to keep up civic services. If the student insists on engaging his citizens in constant warfare, his citizens complain and/or there aren't enough citizens to fight, let alone keep the citizenry happy and prosperous. On the other hand, if the student never engages in conflict, even when provoked, the citizens will want a new leader who defends them. Simulations provide for opportunities to engage in activities that cannot be mediated through discussion (Feinberg, et al, 2012).

One of the most popular games in the last five years is Mindcraft, a cross-platform experience that Microsoft bought in September 2014 for approximately $2.5 billion (Ovide & Rusli, 2014, para 2). Mindcraft, developed in Sweden, allows gamers to create their own world, including buildings, landscapes, and avatars and does not include storylines, objectives or

missions- usual stapes in games- for participants to complete. As of September 2014, Mindcraft had sold 54 million units of the game, and accounted for the most popular app downloaded on iPhones and the second most popular app downloaded on iPads (Wingfield, 2014, para 8). In fact, in an internal email to Microsoft employees, chief executive officer Satya Nadella stated that online games were "the single biggest digital life category, measured in both time and money spent" (Wingfield, 2014, para 10). While this cross-generational and cross-gender game was not designed for specific educational purposes, Mindcraft has been repackaged and resold to classroom teachers by such companies as TeacherGaming, which allows history educators to take their students through ancient cities or geography teachers to delve into city planning and building. Currently, there are over 2,700 schools worldwide that use some form of Mindcraft for teaching (Wingfield, 2014, para 17). Again, Papert's thoughts on computer-based constructionism are brought to fruition via this transformative game.

So, how does technology, and specifically social studies-related simulations and games, help facilitate a UDL-friendly classroom? Simulations are a means by which teachers can provide students with an opportunity to learn. The goal is for all students to be engaged because students learn more when they are engaged. Simulations can provide an opportunity for engagement and give teachers another tool to help bring in a larger group of students to learn the content. Simulations and games exemplify UDL concepts by providing another avenue for all three areas of UDL concern: they can learn the content of social studies through the game play itself, students can stay engaged due to their interest in digital representation of the content and, finally, students can represent what they have learned through the end result of the game or by the choices they make throughout the game or simulation itself.

Epistemology

It is my belief that all knowledge is constructed within context and through communication. This view of learning is labeled as **constructionism** [Note: I mark "**constructionism**" in bold in this paper when I am writing about the epistemology because I am employing another definition of the word to describe my learning theory]. Crotty (1998) describes **constructionism** as ""the view that *all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their worlds, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context* [italics original]" (p. 42). The concept of interacting with students in their own world opens the opportunity to concentrate on using video games and simulations. Gee (2007) makes the following case: In today's society, more students are engaged with video games than ever before. Over 90 percent of children under the age of 18 play some time of video game (Gee, 2007). While there is also assumed to be a gender gap in video game play, this myth has proven to be untrue. Girls are just as likely to play video games as boys; they just play different games. (Gee, 2007). While 90 percent does not cover literally every student, that number is about as close as one can come to a universal trademark of students. That figure is also from 2007, which is before the advent of popular smart phone games, such as "Angry Birds"; with the popularity of game app such as "Angry Birds," "Candy Crush," "Temple Run" and others, the percentage could actually be higher by now. Students are familiar with video games, which lead to a natural familiarity with educational simulations and games. These above mentioned games not only provide access for multiple learners, but also create an opportunity for students to learn about social studies content and not just about using the computer. eLECTIONS is predicated upon understanding the Electoral College and presidential campaigns; Civilization and Sims

contain sociological and geographical foci on cultures and civilizations. By using simulations and games, educators allow students to work in a social context in which they are comfortable. This approach is lacking in today's social studies classroom. "One good way to make people look stupid is to ask them to learn and think in terms of words and abstractions that they cannot connect in any useful way to images or situations in their embodied experiences in the world. Unfortunately, we do this regularly in schools" (Gee, 2007, p. 72).

This definition, that social communication creates learning within students' context, leaves **constructionism** uniquely situated between objectivism and subjectivism. **Constructionists** espouse the idea that there is not an absolute truth (little 't' or capital 'T'), as objectivists might promote; however, they also do not believe that they are creating meaning, as subjectivists believe. Instead, embedded in their name, is how **constructionists** believe people interact with meaning- they construct meaning (Crotty, 1998). **Constructionism** situates itself between these two epistemologies, caring both about the object and the subject. The object is in existence, regardless of the subject, therefore determining its place of importance. However, meaning is given to the object by the subject, within a social context. This notion implies the significance of the subject. **Constructionism** is a social epistemology, in that meaning for an object is created through culture, through context, through communication- through others (Crotty, p. 52-55). This statement is both the meaning of the epistemology and a limitation: **constructionism** depends upon social context in order to construct the meaning. However, the object whose meaning is being constructed exists with or without a subject's contextual definition.

Theoretical Framework

Situated in **constructionism** is symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1969, p. 2), symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework which is predicated upon the following assumptions:

- that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;

- that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;

- that these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters

Crotty (1998) notes that symbolic interactionism is born out of American, and particularly, Deweyian, pragmatism. That is, there is a focus on learning through one's culture and/or experience. Dewey believed that students learned though their surroundings and experience. "The principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). These experiences and definitions of objects, as mentioned previously, derive from conversation, or connection with others. Objects are given a cultural or societal framework within which to work. When students in a class participate in the same simulation and/or game, they create a shared experience which they can now communicate with their classmates. Their familiarity with video games and simulations brings them to the classroom with a similar context; the participation in the educational game adds an additional layer of context with which the educator lead discussions based on the content. Simulations assumedly raise levels of engagement, which allows for a greater understanding of the content.

In my observations, this shared experience provides a jumping off point for higher levels of learning. For example, in the Jamestown game, students must determine where to stop and set up the colony. Their choices include inland, a bay marsh, the sea coast or a bay island. There really is no wrong choice in the simulation; however, if students select inland, their challenge becomes greater. As students continue learning about the other colonies that are founded, the common theme of starting settlements close to water is identified by the students. When students study the French and Indian War a short time later, the importance of the Ohio River Valley in early North American trade is evident because of the understanding of the importance of waterways. When control of the Mississippi River is identified as part of the Union's strategy known as the Anaconda Plan, students independently point out the significance of that tactic. When the Transcontinental Railroad begins to connect one part of the continent to the other, students realize the impact of not needing to be near water all the time. These implications of learning are predicated upon one simulation game about colonization that involved a shared experience which students can carry with them transfer to later historical time periods.

Educators must also keep the shortcoming of symbolic interactionism in mind; there is no objective truth and that the experience that one is sharing with others may or may not be educative. In fact, Dewey argues that educators and students must be concerned with uneducative or miseducative experiences. "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience….An experience maybe immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude…" (1938, pp. 25-26). It is important that educators identify these miseducative and uneducative experiences and, with the help of other students that shared their experience, correct that experience to a properly

educative one. Having students participate in the same experience, such as a simulation, creates that sort of environment.

Learning Theory

Two of the learning theories that fall within **constructionism** and symbolic interactionism are social constructivism and constructionism. Social constructivism was defined by Doolittle and Hicks (2003) as theory that "shares the world view that an individual cannot come to know ontological reality in any meaningful way [and] emphasizes social interaction as the sources of knowledge, rather than individual cognizing" (p. 74). Social constructivism relies on communication from participants in learning in order to construct learning. Learning is relative to the learner.

Furthermore, Doolittle and Hicks draw a direct link to the use of technology within a constructivist theoretical framework. "The proposition that technology has a role to play in the fulfillment of social studies pedagogy in undeniable" (2003, p. 86).

In conjunction with constructivism, constructionism (Papert, 1991), also relies on the use of context and language to determine what students learn. It also is predicated upon the ideas that students learn with they are actually building something. That is to say, it is learning that the students are constructing. Papert states,

Constructionism--the N word as opposed to the V word--shares constructivism's connotation of learning as "building knowledge structures" irrespective of the circumstances of the learning. It then adds the idea that this happens especially felicitously in a context where the learner is consciously engaged in constructing a public entity, whether it's a sand castle on the beach or a theory of the universe (1991, p. 1)
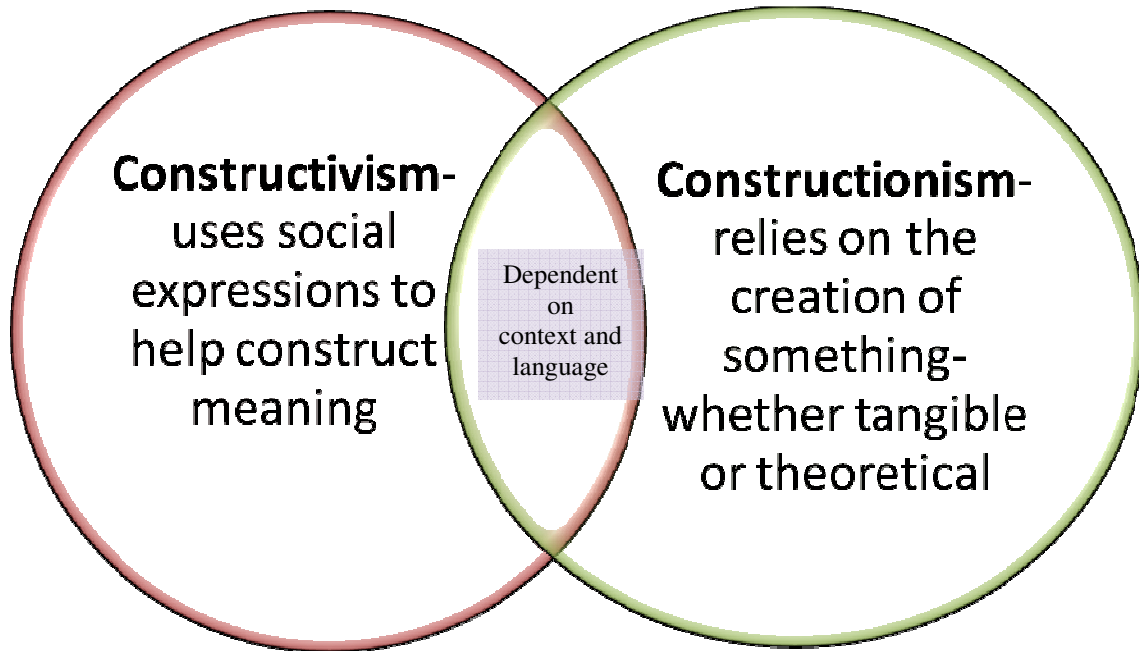
Figure 1. Constructivism and constructionism Venn diagram.

After working with Jean Piaget, Papert's research began in the 1970s at Massachusetts

Institute of Technology (MIT), where worked on the theory that students learn best when

building with new knowledge, and that much of this building or learning can be done on

computers. Constructionism, as a pedagogical theory, requires that students create or build

something: a project or set of software or model that demonstrates this new knowledge.

According to Papert's definition of constructionism, students should be given more freedom to

learn in their particular way, not the rigidly defined methods of the educational system.

Papert is frequently critical of the use of technology in schools. In a 1999 interview,

Papert explained:

I like to distinguish between that first phase of exploratory learning (home-style learning

or Piagetian [*sic*] learning), and school-style learning. What we've seen with most so-

called educational software is pushing school-style learning backward to earlier ages in

the home, which is almost the reverse of the way that I think the technology could be

used. And I think it's a very dangerous trend that people will buy this software because it looks schoolish [sic], and they think that makes it good, but maybe it makes it bad (Schwartz, 1999, ¶ 13).

Papert believes that when teachers are pressed to use technology, they turn to slide show programs, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, which, in Papert's view, does not take advantage of the tools available to them and simply coveys the information in an outdated pedagogical style, but in a new, flashier wrapping. Papert's goal is to have students learning in a way in which technology is the vehicle by which students create in order to learn. This sentiment is echoed by those researching and writing about technology in the social studies classroom (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Friedman & Hicks, 2006; Feinberg, et al, 2012).

It is important to differentiate these kinds of utilizations of the computer with the sort of usage that Papert proposes. Drilling and computer-assisting programs fall in line with the concept of instructional technological practice. Two types of instructionist approaches have emerged in the technological field: computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and intelligent tutoring system (ITS) (Bers, 2008). ITS is adaptive to its user's skill level whereas CAI is designed to help drill lower-level, knowledge-based information for students. In constructionism, on the other hand, the goal of the framework is for students to build their knowledge using the computer as a tool. "It offers the framework for developing a technology-rich design-based learning environment, in which learning happens best when learners are engaged in learning by making, creating, programming, and communicating" (Bers, 2008, p. 145). Simply because students are interacting with the computer does not mean they are participating in a constructionist framework of learning. The graph below shows the difference between the two technological strategies in a civics classroom.
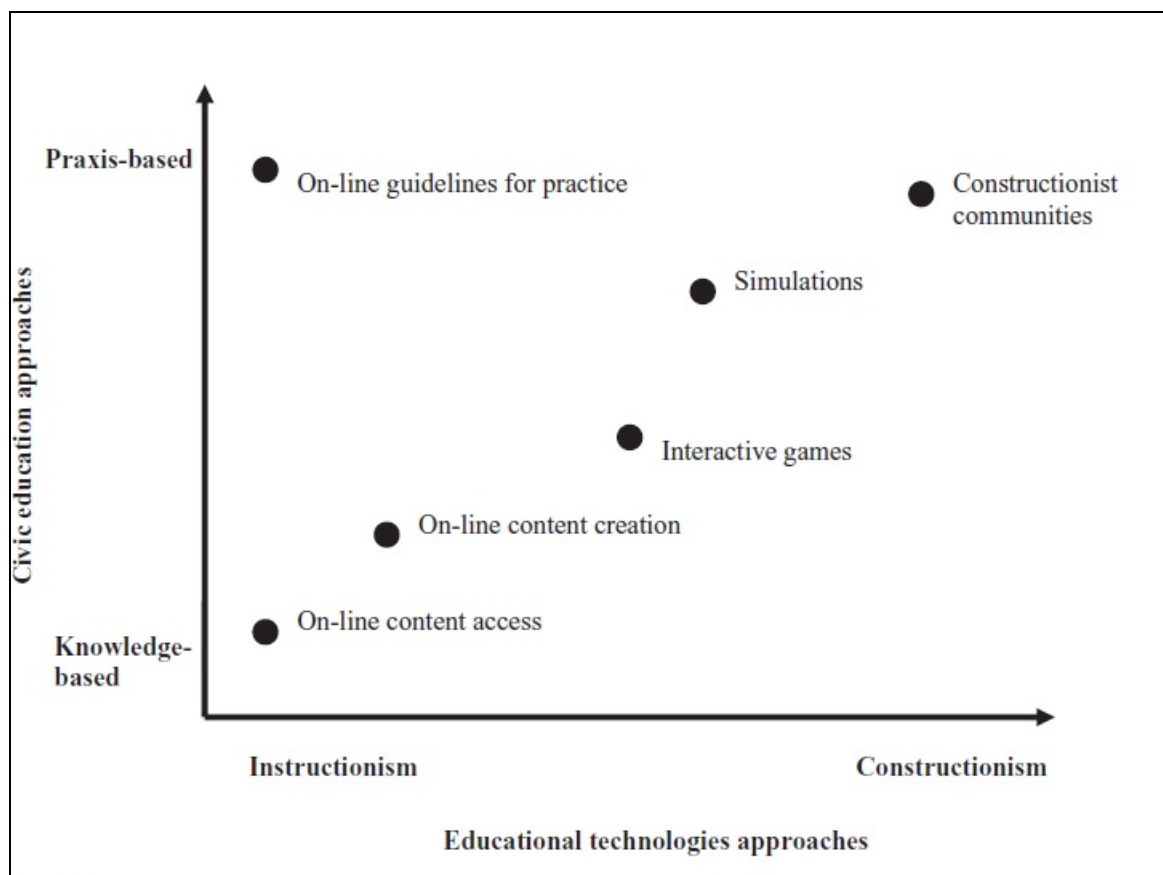
Figure 2. A typology for integrating approaches to civic education and educational technologies. (Bers, 2008. p. 146)

Note the placement of simulations on the graph. They are firmly planted on the constructionist side of the horizontal axis, as well as highly placed on the vertical axis pertaining to praxis-oriented learning. "While knowledge-based models pay attention to the teaching curriculum, praxis-based models are concerned with how young people can be given opportunities for engagement and decision making in their communities" (Bers, 2008, p. 145). Constructionism, as a learning theory, requires that students be given the chance to think on their own; to build, to communicate, to evaluate, and to respond with further thinking and doing.

Definitions

No clear cut, decided upon definition exists that separates simulations and games (Tobias & Fletcher, 2011). Randel, Morris, Wetzel and Whitehill (1992) defined simulations as

"interpersonal interactions, with and without computers, to achieve specified goals that are likely to depend on skill and may involve chance, competition and/or imaginary settings" (Tobias & Fletcher, 2011, p.7). Simulations are noted for creating learning environments that are much more cost-effective than the real life setting that they facsimile. Games involve some level of chance, but there are breakdowns even further in defining games based on the number of players: *Individual-player games, multi-player games* and *massive multi-player online games* (Richter & Livingstone, 2011). However, at its base, games involve chance in order to achieve a specific result. Games are also categorized as belonging to *serious games, instructional games, learning games*, or *computer games*, but, again, no hardline definition exists that genuinely separates these categories based upon researchers' agreed-to meanings (Tobias et al, 2011). Gee (2011) concurs this lack of classification in regards to *video games* and stated "…there are many different types of video games and the category of "video game" is not a unitary one with necessary and sufficient conditions [emphasis original]" p. 224). For the purpose of this study, I define video games as a computerized gaming image or images manipulated by the player for a designed purpose. I define student engagement as a mental investment in the educational activities within the class setting. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a pedagogical approach by which educators provide students with opportunities to learn and express their learning with the least amount of barriers possible. Constructionism is a theory that states all learning is done contextually through building, whether tangible or computerized. Social studies haters are students who self-identify themselves who dislike learning about social studies content or consider social studies to be their least favorite subject. Social studies content is defined as subject matter pertaining to disciplines in the social studies: History, political science, economics, civics, geography and the behavioral sciences.

Simulations and games in the social studies classroom can be pivotal pedagogical tools to engaging students, specifically those who do not like the subject matter. Can the simulation game eLECTIONS provide enough connect to the content for social studies haters to find social studies engaging?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I discuss several key areas pertaining to my research: technology in social studies, technology use specific to civics education, simulations and games, the implementation of simulations and games in education, student engagement and Understanding Design for Learning. The reading for this review started in spring of 2009, when I enrolled in a class about simulations and games in social studies, taught by Joseph Feinberg. In that class, I was exposed to several of the readings that appear in this dissertation, including those articles or book chapters by Doolittle and Hicks (2003), Squire, Prensky and others. That same semester, I joined Dr. Feinberg and other students to work on a manuscript that eventually became *Puttering, Tinkering, Building, and Making: A Constructionist Approach to Online Instructional Simulation Games* (2012). Dr. Feinberg charged us to find current research on simulations and games, which provided me with the opportunity to search for articles on nearly all the topics below, especially the use of technology in social studies and simulations and games in education. It was at this time that I started focusing my research on simulations and games, as well. When Dr. Feinberg taught this simulations class again a few years later, he found a new resource that he passed on to me: Tobias and Fletcher's Computer Games and Instruction (2011) which housed many of the sources I used in the section on simulations and games in education.

There were several other means by which I was able to gather sources: *Review of Educational Research* ran an article entitled "Our Princess is in Another Castle: A Review of Trends in Serious Games for Education" (Young et al, 2012) in which the authors shone the light on many references for me to view. A response to the Young et al article by Tobias and Fletcher (2012), "Reflections on 'A Review of Trends in Serious Gaming'" appeared in the next edition of the same publication and, again, provided a wealth of resources to review. Through various

search engines, such as ERIC and Google Scholar, I searched for articles using keywords such as 'simulations,' 'simulations and games,' 'technology in social studies,' "simulations and games in social studies," "student engagement in social studies," "Universal Design for Learning," "Universal Design for Learning in social studies" and variations of these keywords. I was also fortunate enough to have various people send me articles; other doctoral students, my wife, and family members would see an article related to my topic and send it to me so I could peruse it to determine if the information was applicable to my research.

The Use of Technology in Social Studies

In recent years, a continuous push for implementing technology in the social studies classroom has ensued. "From the novice to the master teacher, technology infusion into social studies is essential for instruction in the 21st century" (Bennett & Berson, 2007, p. 1). Simulations and games are just such an appropriate means of implementing constructionist learning theory. However, students and teachers can experience a technology information overload and it is important to steer clear of using technology for technology's sake. Unger (2007), argues that when teachers assess whether to incorporate technology into the classroom, they should ask this question: "Will this enable teaching or learning that is more effective, more efficient, or more engaging?" If not, "save your money and use a traditional method or material instead" (p. 179). In a recent published conversation between David Hicks of Virginia Tech and Adam Friedman of the University of North Carolina–Charlotte the two discussed the state of technology in the social studies (2006). After the two conversed about the glut of recent research over the topic of technology in the social studies, they focused on technology integration and teacher education. However, their attitude toward technology was tempered. As the discussion continued, Hicks stated,

For a while we were acting like kids in a candy shop. We were excited about the range of

technologies just in reach and how sweet they all looked; yet all they really did was give

us a quick rush and left us feeling a little bloated and overwhelmed. A result of this, I

think, is that the concept of marginal propensity to consume has taken hold with regard to

salivating over the potential of all the different types of digital technologies to reform the

social studies (2006, p. 248).

Hicks and Friedman (2006) concluded that more research is needed in regard to how

professors were working with preservice teachers on incorporating technology, as well as

research examining instructional design. Not all the research points positively toward the ever-

increasing influx of (and demand for the use of) technology in the classroom. In a study on the

problems integrating technology in the K-12 classroom, Hofer and Swan (2006), noted that there

are obstacles to promote this incorporation, and that "many authors advocate that teachers need

to explore this frontier without models of classroom success, examples of 'tried and true'

curricula, and evidence of increased student learning" (p. 86). Later, Hofer and Swan stated that

this notion also is evident in history education with the push toward the use of primary sources in

history classes, where students are supposed to apply the laws of historical thinking to

documents, but teachers are not shown how to access the documents nor how to use them online

(See Barton, 2011; Bohan & Davis, 1998; VanSledright, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). This point is

amplified by Sherman and Hicks (2000), who claimed that "research continues to suggest that

despite the perceived potential of technology, many social studies teachers are currently reluctant

or unable to utilize content specific uses of technology in their professional practice" (p. 244).

Another challenge is students' and teachers' lack of familiarity with the technology, so that

learning a software program can take up a great deal of class time.   This problem is compounded

by the fact that many state and local curriculum guides leave little room for in-depth projects and

activities not related to content standards, (Hofer & Swan, 2006).

Relatedly, similar concerns emerged when Gayle Thieman conducted a five-year study

on preservice teachers and their integration of technology in the classroom is that, even if they

did make technology skills a part of their pedagogical routine (which a reported 85% did):

"There is little evidence that K-12 students used technology to support critical thinking, problem

solving, and decision-making" (2008, p. 342). Although it is easier for teachers to principally

update their lessons from blackboard to SmartBoard and paper-pen homework assignment to

smart phone app, it would behoove teachers and benefit students if students were asked to do

more mentally demanding work. Students are going to use technology- whether or not it

involves critical thinking is a decision for the educator in the classroom.

Technology and Civics Education

At the time of the 2008 publication of *The Handbook of Research in Social Studies*

Education, Swan and Hofer found only one article on civics education and technology. Young et

al. (2012) had similar difficulties finding relevant research on simulations and games, and noted,

"No research of this type was identified in our review, suggesting the missing element may be a

more sophisticated approach to understanding learning and game play in the rich contexts of

home and school learning" (p. 84). The lone article was a study published by Tina Heafner at the

University of North Carolina–Charlotte in 2004.   Heafner's research focused on using

technology to motivate students to learn about the campaign process. According to Heafner, the

teacher who was selected for this case study had teaching experience, a master's degree in social

studies education, and incorporated traditional and constructivist pedagogical styles in her

instruction (2004).   Still, the students were uninterested in learning about campaigning and the

eLECTIONS process. Heafner worked with this teacher to create a computer-based project. "Just as children and teens learn about citizenship and their roles and responsibilities in the physical community, they should be given opportunities to relate this knowledge to their experiences in the cyber community" (Walpole, 2007, p. 177).

In Heafner's (2004) research, she found that by having students interact with the technology, they were already more interested in the work assigned to them. "All students reported enjoyment in the task because technology made their work easier and more fun to complete." Heafner also related that students enjoyed working on the project because it allowed them to do neater work, add graphics, videos, and sound bites, and made the PowerPoint look more "professional" (p. 46). Students were also able to tap into a skill set that they already possessed: the computer. Students were familiar with the Internet and other technological elements that went into their presentations. However, they were not bored by being asked to use the computer in a way that was remedial and disproportionate to their skills.

Students were able to develop confidence in ability, enjoyment in learning and the opportunity to learn new social studies information. Because of the creation of student work, the focus of the classroom shifted from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction (Heafner, 2004). "…Heafner concluded that "technology added value to social studies instruction by increasing motivation and engaging students in the learning process" (Sway & Hofer, 2008, p. 313).

Bers (2008) examined the use of Zora, a virtual city builder designed to allow students to build cities and interact with other students in this online environment. In her study, Bers discovered that Zora allowed students to critically think about civic-oriented issues through Zora, as well as interact with other students. The principle reason that students were able to grasp

these complex ideas about society was that they were interacting and building, in line with

Papert's theory of constructionism. "Educational technologies designed within this paradigm

[constructionism] take seriously the need to provide tools for community scaffolding of learning"

(Bers, 2008, p. 145). In her study, Bers examined the role of Zora's impact on the "six C's" of

adolescent civic development: competence, connection, character, confidence, caring, and

contribution to civic life. While she was careful not to draw absolute conclusions, her experience

demonstrated that students would take issues, bring them to the virtual community, and, while

discussing those, see a natural and organic progression to other topics and issues of civic life (p.

155). The students may not have reached a consensus on a particular issue, but, in our actual

society, a consensus is rarely reached. Importantly, the students exhibited aspects of growth in

the areas of the "six C's". Bers also suggests that technological fluency among educators and

students will increase- and with it bring in the ability of the computer to act as an instrument to

foster students' ability to think differently.

Simulations and Games in Education

The field of research on simulations and games is bourgeoning; in fact, it is so expansive

that it would be virtually impossible to have an up-to-date review of literature for any journal.

The publications on simulations and games come out so quickly that it is difficult to keep

current. Not only are the articles published at a rapid rate, but there is no consensus on the

benefits or lack thereof regarding games and simulations. Mayer summarizes his belief for this

area of research: "The goal of educational games is to harness the motivating power of games to

serve and educational purpose" (2011, p. 283). While most scholars can agree with that

sentiment, the research itself is in question. Gee (2011) stated "…the evidence for and against

video games as a tool for learning is not deep, especially for more modern sorts of games" (p.

223). Prensky echoes this sentiment in his work, *Comments on Research Comparing Games to Other Instructional Methods* in which he remarks, "…the results of these studies provide are, in the end, of little or no use in getting a sense of whether or not we should use games for instruction, for a large variety of reasons…."(2011, p. 253). Additionally, Hoffman and Nadelson (2010) note that "Simulation games have a goal of discovering causal relationships in a non-linear fashion...These games are usually used for training, and the motivation to engage in simulation games is based on the need to learn more about a situation, or is required for training and non-discretionary" (p. 246). Articles are published with the caveats such as the one stated above- that the literature is continuously changing- and the call seems to be for more empirical studies (see Tobias & Fletcher, 2011, Gee, 2011, Dede 2011). Dede (2011, p. 240-241) highlights some of the questions that need to be answered in the games and learning field:

Table 2

Questions about Simulations and Games

To what extend can educational games and simulations replicate various types of authentic practices learners can master?
To what extent can educational games and simulations engage guided, situated learning?
For learners who need direct instructional supports embedded in educational games and simulations, what are effective models for accomplishing this without undercutting engagement and flow?
What strategies are needed to make educational games and simulations scalable?
What new types of interfaces are emerging for educational games and simulations?

In their 2011 piece entitled "Searching for Fun in Learning," Games and Squire provide a history of simulations and games in education. The authors start with the 1960s, where early attempts to add computer-based simulations and games began. Creators of these games did not have a strong pedagogical structure, "but instead came for a general hope that computers might be powerful, motivating tools for learning" (p. 18). During this period, software designers were using a system called PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) (Computer History Museum, 2010). PLATO allowed multiple users to interface with the software at the same time. It was also at this time that the game *Oregon Trail* was created by students at Carleton College in Minnesota. Originally a text-based game, *Oregon Trail* received many make overs and sequels through the coming years and was quickly popular with educators (Games & Squire, 2011). With the creation of early consoles, the number of educational games vastly increased. Most of the games were drill-based, but "did suggest the potential for tying in-game rewards to in-game actions, a key principal for education and entertainment designers alike" (Games & Squire, 2011, p. 21).

However, in the 1980s, with early-console creating companies such as Atari generating games of low-quality, consumers looked at low-cost personal computers such as the Apple II, Texas Instruments machines and the Commodore 64 (Games & Squire, 2011). These systems introduced early forms of programming and ability to store data so that the market for games was open to virtually anyone. "Many innovations in game design took place during this period in both the gaming industry and academia" (p. 22). This flourishing field eventually was introduced to simulation games. One such game was *Pirates!*, which involved "situating players in a semi-realistic context in which they must use history, geography and political knowledge to succeed" (p. 24). Also introduced during the late 1980s and early 1990s were two pivotal simulation

games: *SimCity* (1989) and *Civilization* (1991). These two games provided players with multiple options to win, provided them with complex choices and gave them authentic problems with which to deal. Educators considered *SimCity* a "natural extension in the classroom" (Games & Squire, 2011, p. 26) and *Civilization* is in its fifth generation.

In the 1990s, the field of "edutainment" commenced in attempting to engage students in games while teaching them. The most popular of these games was *Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?* The game gave rise to "18 game sequels…, three television series, and nine books in addition to numerous other products" (Games & Squire, 2011, p. 29). However, the authors point out that, most importantly that "games could (and should) be educational and fun" (p. 29). Edutainment flourished during the late 1990s, especially when outfits such as Scholastic became involved in the simulation game business. However, by the end of the 1990s, the edutainment trend, which took off during the decade, slowed considerably because of two main factors: One, edutainment vendors sought to circumvent teacher input and undervalued the role teachers played in the distribution of time spent playing the games. Secondly, the games themselves could not complete with the complex graphic and plot improvements made in the console industry by such technological giants as Sony and Microsoft (Games & Squire, 2011).

In the 2000s, the focus shifted from the CD-ROM and software –based games of the 1990s to online, multiplayer interactive games. "As computer and Internet technologies have improved, so have our games. Video games are increasingly realistic, more sophisticated in terms of games play, more social, and more accessible across multiple devices and platforms" (Kirkley, Duffy, Kirkley & Kremer, 2011, p. 372). One such early example is *Virtual U*, where players run a university and decide the foci of their simulated university- athletics, scientific research, etc. Another popular online multiplayer game is *World of Warcraft*. The game is not

designed to be educational, but is currently the most popular Massive Multi-player Online

(MMO) game with over eleven million players (Richter & Livingstone, 2011). Researchers have

indicated that players are learning social interaction skills and that, while there is no educational

focus, "that while such games tend to be process intensive and use social rules, they can support

knowledge and skill transfer as well as more open-ended social learning" (Richter &

Livingstone, 2011, p. 109). This concept would also apply to MMO *Second Life*. Some

researchers examine *Second Life* and point to the opportunity for students to demonstrate what

they have learned through this type of platform. Players also have the opportunity to exhibit

elements of social engagement in MMOs.

> Massively multiplayer online games similarly seem to typify this potential for
>
> transforming relationships between products and consumers. In online worlds such as
>
> Second Life or World of Warcraft, players accumulate wealth, build on their own digital
>
> property, and engage in longitudinal campaigns with in-game alter egos. But they have an
>
> ownership in the game world that is more than symbolic, sometimes paying real money
>
> for rare in-game artifacts or abilities. Some stake further claims to their digital domains
>
> by petitioning game producers for enhancements and bug fixes (Earl & Schussman, 2008,
>
> p. 76).

The interactive nature of the environment would allow students to collaborate on multi-

faceted projects and participate in tutorials, language emersion, panels, role-plays and other

exhibits (Richter & Livingstone). While the increase in console gaming systems advanced,

coupled with the lack of profitability in edutainment games, the market of edu-games in the

2000s slowed. However, as Games and Squire (2011), point out, "the history of educational

games shows enduring affinity between play and learning, and this is an encouraging signal that

productive dialog that may lead to better ways of integrating games and education will continue" (p. 38).

One such example is a recent article from AERA's *Review of Educational Research* entitled "Our Princess is in Another Castle: A Review of Trends in Serious Gaming for Education" (Young et al, 2012). The authors take a meta-analysis approach to determine the role of games in the classroom. They break the date down by subject area, examining the areas of math, science, language learning, physical education and history. In the section on the playing of games in the history classroom, the authors reported finding data that games did, in fact, increase engagement among students (p. 77). However, despite this increase in engagement, the authors did not report any significant gains in knowledge attainment among students (p. 78). Young et al, continue in the article to point of the lack of evidence in the effectiveness of games in the classroom, but determine that, praise for games notwithstanding, high-stakes testing environments do not allow for rich, game-centric learning opportunities, but instead, more lecture-oriented pedagogies (p. 81). Surprisingly, the author only acknowledges research that involves games; there is absolutely no mention of simulations throughout the article, although the two are closely tied. The article tried to cover a great deal of ground and make a number of suggestions including assessments that are tied to games, a joint partnership between educational leaders and game makers and to conduct longitudinal studies (p. 82-84).

Almost immediately after the "Princess" article was published, a rebuttal was printed in *Review of Educational Research* by Tobias and Fletcher. ("Princess" was published in March 2012; Tobias and Fletcher's "Reflections" rebuttal was issued four months later.) In their reply, Tobias and Fletcher (2012) acknowledge that their findings in previous research were different. "Finally, it is remarkable how little overlap there is in the studies reviews by Tobias and Fletcher

(2011) and by Young et al (2012)" (p. 235). The authors also took issue with the fact that Young et al did not address simulations at all. Tobias and Fletcher (2012) noted that this lack of additional research could be due to the fact that there are multiple names for possibly the same items, including serious games, educational games, video games "with other labels probably waiting in the wings" (p. 235) and that we, as researchers need an agreed-upon nomenclature. Tobias and Fletcher were also critical of the lack of evidence in the Princess piece in regards to games' ability to demonstrate transferability of knowledge. In another work, Tobias et al (2011) stated:

> Transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes from games to tasks in school or training contexts or to activities in life generally, is of central significant for the effectiveness of games and in delivering instruction. If there is no evidence of transfer to these settings, games may be entertaining but can only be minimally useful for instructional purposes in either education or training (p. 161).

The ability for students to transfer from games to school subjects and processes is vastly important to any sustained support of using simulations and games in the classroom. For students processing information for near transfer, where tasks that students are asked to perform in real life are similar to those found in the game, those "that made personal references- that is, by using the first and second person ("I" or "You")- learned more and had higher transfer than those using third-person references (p. 165). In other quantitative experiments, students from kindergarten to medical students generally indicated the students who engaged with simulations and games outperformed their control-grouped peers across the board and, in some cases, "showed higher motivation toward the topic" (p. 166-167). On the other hand, students that were engaged in virtual environments using head-mounted displays did not retain as much information

(significantly) and did not transfer well (not significantly). It was thought that "the immersing virtual environment might have distracted players from the academic content" (p. 166).

Tobias et al (2011) summarized research findings on studies from 1966-1991 and the results, like those of later research indicates that the jury is still out in regards to the benefits of simulation and games. There were 68 studies reviewed, with over half determining that games had virtually no benefits over traditional instruction (p. 160). However, in regards to engagement, "in 12 of 14 studies, participants reported more interest in games than in classroom instruction…." (p. 160). Tobias et al (2011) further discusses the effect simulations have on students' cognitive processes. Recently, Education Week ran the report from the Games and Learning Publishing Council's study that indicated that three-quarters of K-8 teachers surveyed in the Fall of 2013 use games in their classroom, either to facilitate learning of mandated content or to assess learning (Harold, 2014, para 1-2). Young teachers, who are most often gamers themselves, are more likely to use games in the classroom (Herold, 2014, para 11). Below is a graphic that illustrates games that were used by teachers in their classrooms, including several previously mentioned in this literature review.
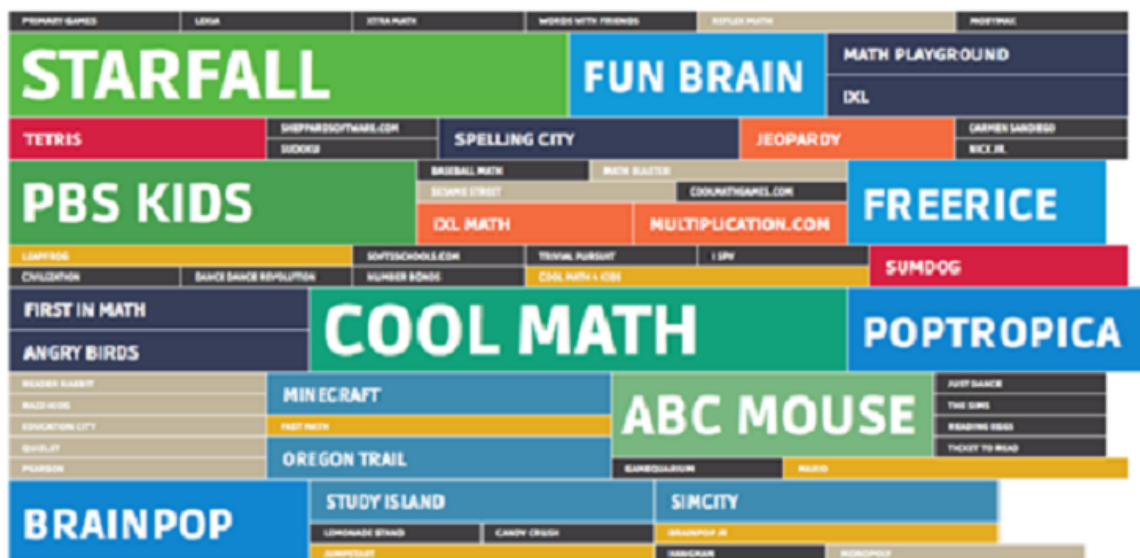
Figure 3: Games used by teachers in survey (Herold, 2014).

Simulations and Games

Game play is largely considered to be positively supported in relation to ability to motivate and engage students (Tobias et al, 2011, p. 188). Whether students are interested in escaping from reality or just enjoy the game itself, as long as the game was entertaining, students were interested in playing. Games, specifically video games, may provide students a much-needed break from their schooling. "playing video games for fun may present children and adolescents with a necessary respite from academic life much the same way that playing on the playground during recess may serve to enhance academic performance" (Blumberg & Altschuler, 2011, p. 102). Therefore, game designers and educators can capitalize on the appeal of games to students to engineer products that help students engage in their content while enhancing the authenticity of the learning process in games (Gee, 2011, p. 231). Looking at students again ranging from primary school aged to graduate level in studies led by de Jong and van Joolingen, Swaak and de Jong, and Anderson and Bevalier, the students consistently were more motivated and engaged by games over traditional (e.g., lecture) pedagogical presentations.

Some of the tasks in which the students were asked to participate were not necessarily educationally based; however, even in those non-educative tasks, students still outperformed students who did not play games. "In summary, the studies reviewed here indicated that games seem to engage and enhance cognitive processes in multiple ways, depending on how a particular game is designed and whether the game provides affordances…within the players cognitive constraints" (p.171). Prensky, in *Why Games Engage Us*, (2001b) also focused on engagement in simulations and games.

Table 3

Information about Games

Games are a form of fun. That gives us enjoyment and pleasure.
Games are form of play. That gives us intense and passionate involvement.
Games have rules. That gives us structure.
Games have goals. That gives us motivation.
Games are interactive. That gives us doing.
Games have outcomes and feedback. That gives us learning.
Games are adaptive. That gives us flow.
Games have win states. That gives us ego gratification.
Games have conflict/competition/challenge/opposition. That gives us adrenaline.
Games have problem solving. That sparks our creativity.
Games have interaction. That gives us social groups.
Games have representation and story. That gives us emotion.

(Prensky, 2001b)

Prensky insists that one of the issues with educational games is that they do not employ the same engaging qualities as commercial games (2011, p.270). Kirkley et al (2011) suggest that the designers should focus on engaging learners in the content area about which the student is supposed to be learning. One approach to try and accomplish this goal is to present the learner with the entire problem, as opposed to presenting the problem piecemeal, as traditional approaches tend to do and to make the problems cognitively authentic (p. 375-376). Competition is also a component of games that students enjoy and, as noted in the figure above, is a key element of any game; and video games are no exception. However, competition in the school setting frequently leads to negative, singular competition. In their research on games, Trespalacios, Chamberlin and Gallagher (2011) determined that students overwhelmingly wanted to play games alongside their peers (multi-player games). Seventy-two percent of students preferred multi-player games to single-player games and of those who preferred the multi-player games, 34 percent stated their reasoning was that they were able to play with friends and 30 percent because the game provided an opportunity to collaborate and work toward a common goal (p. 52). That is, students demonstrated that they preferred their learning to be collaborative and within a constructivist and constructionist framework. This environment also allowed the instructors to provide a positive, collaborative factor to the competition.

Students want to compete. Competition is inherent to our nature as human beings, and the education environment with its grading system and state exams promotes competition among students to be the best of their group, class, or school. This situation leads students to focus more on GPAs and test scores than on actual learning, creating sometimes anxiety and stressed students (Pope, 2003). But as instructors, we can channel students'

energy in a way that allows competition to be constructive (Trespalacios, Chamberlin & Gallagher, 2011, p. 52).

A simulation can be just the sort of paradigm shift that can move the focus of the classroom to the learning. "To teach a course using a simulation requires a major shift in classroom pedagogy to what Finkel (2000) terms 'inquiry based learning.' The instructor must identify a problem or issue that provides a strong platform for engaging the course material. Once this problem is introduced, the following investigation and discussion is where the learning takes place" (Auman, 2011, p. 155). Auman also mentioned that, just as instructors can be nervous about a varied classroom environment, students can also share anxiety about a non-traditional approach. In her study, Auman remarked that students were excited, but skeptical that the simulation would be engaging or produce the type of learning objectives to which they were accustomed; that is, would they still cover the same content with this simulation? However, in the post-class student reflections, students' feedback was overwhelmingly positive and, although they thought the learning was fun and they were engaged, they were still required to meet a high level of academic achievement. "The progression of these comments, from unsure and nervous to satisfaction with the game experience, is consistent with other qualitative assessments of role-play or game simulations" (Auman, 2011, p. 158). She also reported that, as an instructor, she found the engagement and enjoyment "infectious" (p. 160) and concluded that she could be counted among the beneficiaries of preparing more engaging classes through simulation. Poole, Berson, and Levine (2010) concurred. In their study on a civics-based simulation, they stated, "Computer gaming and technology, to include epistemic games and simulations… appear to offer educators innovative ways to expand their students' learning experiences and bring their civics classrooms to life" (p. 80).

Engagement

Student engagement is a buzz phrase in educational circles, from K-12 education to higher learning. The concept has been studied for decades, but it was research in the 1980s by Alexander Astin from which the current examination of student engagement derives (Axelson and Frick, 2011). There is debate about what engagement is; whether it is interchangeable with 'involvement' or if the term is better defined by examining student behavior in a classroom. Axelson and Frick (2011) specify their view on student engagement by asking the following question: "How do we engage (cognitively, behaviorally and/or emotionally) type X students most effectively in type Y learning processes/contexts so that they will attain knowledge, skill or disposition Z? [Italics original]" (p. 41) The *Handbook on Student Engagement* (2012) defined student engagement as

> …the student's active participation in academic and co-curricular or school-related
> activities, and commitment to educational goals and learning. Engaged students find
> learning meaningful, and are invested in their learning and future. It is a
> multidimensional construct that consists of behavioral (including academic), cognitive
> and affective subtypes. Student engagement drives learning; requires energy and effort; is
> affected by multiple influences; and can be achieved for all learners (Christensen,
> Reschly, & Wylie, 2012, p. 817).

Engagement has also been broken down into three major categories: Behavioral, Emotional and Cognitive (Christensen, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). Some researchers have attempted to quantify engagement. Still using the same types of engagement listed above, researchers compute school-aged student engagement based on attendance records, discipline records, extracurricular event attendance (behavioral), course competency, student-perceived

course relevance (cognitive), and/or "perceived connections to supportive others in school" (Appleton & Lawrenz, 2011, p. 245).

Engagement in social studies, especially, can be difficult due to the nature of the content. Every day, more information is added to historical content and it is difficult to help students see the importance of events that happened centuries ago. "In attempting to engage their students, history educators are faced with the unenviable task of making topics…not only interesting, but relevant to teenagers who also find these topics dry and disconnected to the reality in which they exist" (Kaiser, 2010, p. 228). As with technology in general, educators may be resistant to try new, more engaging pedagogies. Auman (2011) identifies these struggles as issues with suitability (the effectiveness of a particular pedagogy can be applied, given the materials and learning objectives), resources (time, materials, creative ability), and/or risk (giving up control of the classroom). Educators who have long been the head of their teacher-centered classroom, dispensing knowledge from the pedagogical pulpit certainly will be hesitant to allow the congregation of pupils to engage in a more democratic classroom environment.

In his 2006 bestseller, *Results Now* Dr. Michael Schmoker provided physical evidence for the mental component that is engaging.

Table 4

Teacher-Directed Learning Engagement Cues

Paying attention (alert, tracking with their eyes)
Taking notes (particularly Cornell)
Listening (as opposed to chatting, or sleeping)
Asking questions (content related, or in a game, like 21 questions or I-Spy)
Responding to questions (whole group, small group, four corners, Socratic

Seminar)
Following requests (participating, Total Physical Response (TPR), storytelling, Simon Says)
Reacting (laughing, crying, shouting, etc.)

Student-Directed Learning is also an indication that students are engaged with the content.

Table 5

Student-Directed Learning Engagement Cues

Reading critically (with pen in hand)
Writing to learn, creating, planning, problem solving, discussing, debating, and asking questions
Performing/presenting, inquiring, exploring, explaining, evaluating, and experimenting
Interacting with other students, gesturing and moving

Universal Design for Learning

UDL is concentrated on three main goals: presentation of content, engagement of students with the content and student demonstration of knowledge (Rose & Meyer, 2002). UDL, for the most part, is aimed at including exceptional learners by eliminating barriers that block them from demonstrating mastery of content and learning in general. Traditional classroom settings may hinder exceptional students, as well as general education students. Whether it be the physical space, the class time, the constraint of performances on standardized tests, or requirements that students all create a generic product (essay, worksheet, even discussion-based

work), UDL fundamentals may include allowances in time, creation of products, or an assortment of learning tools. In the last fifteen or twenty years, technology integration with UDL underpinnings has become fairly standard (See: Meyer & Rose, 2002; Hall, Meyer & Rose, 2012). These technological tools that help to eliminate barriers are known collectively as assistive technology. Assistive technological tools can include talk-to-text monitors, multifunctional wheelchairs, smart technology that presents choices for students to select, and read-aloud software (Lewis & Sullivan, 2012). However, UDL is not limited to assistive technology. In 2001, David Rose testified before the committee on Appropriation for the subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education in a Hearing on educational technology. In his testimony, Rose, considered to be an expert in the field of UDL, stated that it was dangerous to assume that the only technological needs of exceptional learners are assistive. Instead, he recommended that digital texts and other learning materials that are found on the computer make it easier for students with disabilities to learn. He also recommended that any new educational technology that was to be created should be required to be made with UDL principles in mind.

Because the concepts UDL promote a wide range of possibilities in learning products, means by which learning and mastery are reached, and demonstrations of that mastery, UDL should not be left in the special education (or even inclusion) classroom. General education students have long been asked to conform to specific pedagogical methodologies- possibly preferred by the teacher or required by an institution. For all the discussion of differentiation, students are still asked to perform in a singular (standardized?) way. The work of Howard Gardner has long been accepted in education as a means of allowing each student to learn- and demonstrate mastery- in a manner that fits their specific skill set or means of learning. Still,

differentiation, like UDL, is targeted towards students with disabilities or accommodations or modifications. Hall, Meyers and Rose (2012) argue that classes for students with disabilities were developed to ensure that that population was getting serviced at all. However, the rest of the students in the class- the general education students- are left to conform to whatever the 'primary' mode of instruction/production may be. Even recently in my own school, students are required to take common assessments- regardless of their ability level or language or origin. This assessment method is utilized in order to 'see the data' on an even scale, so that we can identify where English Language Learners or students with disabilities rank in the same assessment as every other student. Where is the differentiation in that sort of standardization? Why are students not allowed to demonstrate their knowledge of European colonization in whatever means that feel appropriate? Even more troubling is our new initiative (soon to be mandate) that required to not only provide students with the same summative assessments, but also the same formative assessments, as well.

Universal Design, however, helps teacher eliminate this bias towards any student. As previously mentioned, UDL has three principal concepts: "Provide multiple means of representation; Provide multiple means of Action and Expression; [and] Provide multiple means of engagement" (CAST, 2012). Within these three major headings UDL affords educators the ability to include all students in the learning process. Below are the areas of concentration within each concept:

Table 6

The Principles of Universal Design for Learning

Principle I. Provide Multiple Means of Representation
Guideline 1: Provide options for perception

Checkpoint 1.1: Offer ways of customizing the display of information
Checkpoint 1.2: Offer alternatives for auditory information
Checkpoint 1.3: Offer alternatives for visual information
Guideline 2: Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols
Checkpoint 2.1: Clarify vocabulary and symbols
Checkpoint 2.2: Clarify syntax and structure
Checkpoint 2.3: Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols
Checkpoint 2.4: Promote understanding across languages
Checkpoint 2.5: Illustrate through multiple media
Guideline 3: Provide options for comprehension
Checkpoint 3.1: Activate or supply background knowledge
Checkpoint 3.2: Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships
Checkpoint 3.3: Guide information processing, visualization, and manipulation
Checkpoint 3.4: Maximize transfer and generalization
Principle II. Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression
Guideline 4: Provide options for physical action
Checkpoint 4.1: Vary the methods for response and navigation
Checkpoint 4.2: Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies
Guideline 5: Provide options for expression and communication
Checkpoint 5.1: Use multiple media for communication
Checkpoint 5.2: Use multiple tools for construction and composition
Checkpoint 5.3: Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance

Guideline 6: Provide options for executive functions
Checkpoint 6.1: Guide appropriate goal-setting
Checkpoint 6.2: Support planning and strategy development
Checkpoint 6.3: Facilitate managing information and resources
Checkpoint 6.4: Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
Principle III. Provide Multiple Means of Engagement
Guideline 7: Provide options for recruiting interest
Checkpoint 7.1: Optimize individual choice and autonomy
Checkpoint 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
Checkpoint 7.3: Minimize threats and distractions
Guideline 8: Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence
Checkpoint 8.1: Heighten salience of goals and objectives
Checkpoint 8.2: Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge
Checkpoint 8.3: Foster collaboration and community
Checkpoint 8.4: Increase mastery-oriented feedback
Guideline 9: Provide options for self-regulation
Checkpoint 9.1: Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation
Checkpoint 9.2: Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies
Checkpoint 9.3: Develop self-assessment and reflection

(CAST, 2012).

In general, UDL generates an opportunity for teachers to be aware of the students; the whole students in their classroom. It allows students to bring their world and ways of learning into the classroom to share with other students and improve their own knowledge. It is important

to emphasize that the curriculum still needs to be covered and standards still need to be met; UDL does not attempt to circumvent these modern-day public educational truths. In explaining why UDL is an essential component of all classrooms, Hall, Meyer and Rose (2012) state:

> The principles of UDL enable us to recognize that variance across individuals is the norm [italics original], not the exception, wherever people are gathered…. Teachers…lack a guiding framework- one allowing for instructional design that is inclusive of the vast linguistic, cultural and cognitive variability within their classroom each year. UDL provides us with such a framework (p. 26-28).

An example of this type of opportunity might look like this: a project in U.S. History where students must relate the creation of American governing documents to the teachings of the Enlightenment, especially those of John Locke and Baron de Montesquieu. In essence, the standard only requires the student to understand how Locke and Montesquieu impacted the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence- that is it. So teachers might provide a variety of opportunities to learn the standard- direct instruction, student-paced video views, student-paced research, student-to-student interaction, small group, or inquire how in which way the students can learn the standard. Then, as the student demonstrates their understanding, they should be afforded the opportunity to show their mastery through a variety of means, as well- yes, possibly a paper and pen test or essay, but again, a variety of possibilities, driven by student understanding of early American formation. The standards of US History do not require students to produce a specific product- it is up to the teacher to ensure that students have learned the content.

In order for general education teachers to incorporate UDL practices in their classroom, they must look at the four major components of curriculum: goals, assessments, materials, and

methods (Hall, Meyer, and Rose, 2012). The key word in applying UDL to these four elements is "flexibility." "…if a goal is to learn the stages of photosynthesis, the statement of that goal should not prescribe the methods and material for accomplishing it (e.g. 'Read a chapter about photosynthesis'), since some otherwise capable learners may not be able to use those particular methods and materials" (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012, p. 28).

One of the ways in which students can be engaged in education is through simulations and games. Papert's theory, the idea was that students learn best when they are actually constructing something- and particularly if it is on a computer, is well-represented in UDL as technology can be an important asset in the UDL classroom. He created this idea while at MIT in the late 1970s and early 1980s- obviously long before mainstream internet usage. Although Papert's focus was in mathematics, the same elements can apply in social studies. If students build something on a computer, they learn better.

One example of an online game that demonstrates this idea is Cable in the Classroom's eLECTIONS. The purpose of eLECTIONS is to teach students about the process of becoming president, including campaigning, issue platforms, the Electoral College and using secondary sources to make informed decisions. The student 'builds' her/his candidate by choosing the following: the candidate's name, party, issues on which to campaign, key issues on which to focus, response to positive and negative news along the campaign trail, where to campaign, how much money to spend and where to spend it. The student has complete ownership of the candidate. Students can play against the computer or another classmate; they can throw in a third candidate or stay with two. These elements allow for the construction of a political figure that is uniquely theirs. The opportunity to operate at this level of independence increases student participation and engagement (Feinberg, et al, 2012).

Two more examples of constructionist applications in social studies are the Civilization series and the Sims series. These simulations allow for students to use their content knowledge to develop what they consider to be a successful city or civilization, or whatever the simulation is asking for. Not only do students have the opportunity to develop their city based or their content knowledge, but the game teaches them as they go along. If students tax their citizens too much, the people complain and eventually revolt; if the student taxes them too little, there is not enough money to keep up civic services. If the student insists on engaging his citizens in constant warfare, his citizens complain and/or there aren't enough citizens to fight, let alone keep the citizenry going. On the other hand, if the student never engages in conflict, even when provoked, the citizens will want a new leader that defends them. Simulations provide for opportunities to engage in activities that cannot be mediated through discussion (Feinberg, et al, 2012).

Summary

Technology in education, and specifically social studies education is not just a bourgeoning field; it is an explosive field that is nearly impossible to keep current. For decades, educators have tried to incorporate technology in the classroom, sometimes with success and sometimes without. As technology as become more readily available, so too has its usage become more widespread in schools. In social studies, technology is far too often incorporated by means of Microsoft Office Suite™ components or outdated webquests as compared to using the internet for research, discussion, and critical thinking.

There is a long history of simulations and games in the classroom. Vehicles such as *Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?* and *Oregon Trail* have offered students the opportunity to engage in social studies learning via computerized games. *Oregon Trail* is a

popular simulation that replicated the westward movement of frontiers people from the Mississippi River to the West Coast. While primitive in its gameplay and graphics, its popularity is undeniable. *SimCity* and *Civilization* followed in this same vein as *Oregon Trail*, offering students the opportunity to simulate various disciplines of social studies, including civics, economics, history, and geography.

Student engagement is generally viewed as academic, behavioral or emotional. Social studies can prove difficult to assess engagement as teachers of the content resist attempting new pedagogies and historical branch of social studies is forever expanding, lending a sense of never fully completing the subject. Michael Schmoker (2006) identified a variety of ways in which engagement can be physically identified, both in teacher-led classroom settings and student-led classroom settings.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) uses three major principles to provide students the greatest possibility to learn the content and demonstrate their understanding of that content. Those three principles are to provide students multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement. Within each of these three principles lies three guidelines designed to facilitate student learning. In general, UDL's major target are students with learning difficulties or disabilities, including those in the inclusive classroom, as well as the special education classroom. Assistive technology is nestled in UDL's opportunity for students to have barriers to learning and presenting their learning removed.

However, in the literature available about simulations and games and UDL, there are several gaps. First, there is no real study available about the relationship between simulations and games and student engagement, much less in the social studies classroom. Nearly all of the research about simulations and games examines the relationship between those pedagogical tools

and achievement. In that area, the results have been mixed. But there has been no study that removes the element of scoring learned content and examines on the how engagement is impacted by simulations and games. Additionally, there are several studies that examine student perceptions about social studies (see: Smith & Sanders, 1981; Stodolsky, Salk, & Glaessner, 1991; Ames & Archer, 1988), but none that specifically examine why students "hate" social studies and now to engage those students.

There is also a lack of research regarding the impact UDL has on the general education population. UDL, as mentioned previously, is designed to remove barriers for students with difficulties or disabilities, but not really any study as to how applying UDL could help (or hurt) students who do not qualify for special services in regard to engagement or performance.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For this research, I completed a case study and used ethnographic methods to examine my interview data. Case studies are used to examine a specific place, group of people and/or activity in a particular setting, which is the reason I chose a case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 60). I examined engagement in social studies via an electronic simulation (particular activity) among self-identified social studies haters (particular group of people) in a southeastern metropolitan area high school (particular setting). I chose to interpret the data through an ethnographic lens because, as Spradley notes, "Ethnography all begins with the same general problem: What are the cultural meanings people are using to organize their behavior and interpret their experience?" (1979, p. 93). Through this lens, I concentrated on the focus of my research; if there is a connection regarding engagement with students who typically dislike social studies when they use simulations and games in the social studies classroom. I followed Spradley's ideas on ethnography for one simple reason: it made sense to me. To look at all the data, try to find patterns and similarities through the context of semantic relationships and then base my findings and hypothesis on these semantic relationships seemed a very straightforward manner in which to proceed. Spradley states, "In each case, analysis proceeds by examining some phenomenon, dividing it into its constituent parts, then identifying the relationships among the parts and their relationship to the whole" (1979, p. 92). Unlike true ethnographies, case studies can focus on shorter periods of time, which is what I completed at the research site.

The site for this investigation was a suburban, metropolitan area high school in the Southeastern United States. The reason this site was selected is because it is the high school at which I worked. The students with whom I worked generally come from families that fall below the poverty line. The school is also racially and ethnically diverse. Although not part of the

selection process, the general demographics of the school, as provided for the 2010-11 school

year by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), include the following:

Table 7

Demographic Information

Over 63% free or reduced lunch
Title I school
State Focus School
42% Black, non-Hispanic
27% Hispanic
18%White, non-Hispanic
8%- Asian/Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander

Participants for this study were twelfth grade political science public school students.

These participants were selected because they are available as a sample of convenience. I am not

their teacher, so I held no sway over their grade. Students in this political science class who

indicate that they are "social studies haters" were not required to participate in the study. There

was no incentive given to them for participating or any punishment for not participating. The

students who are a part of the study voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, and signed an

informed consent form. There was no consideration for participation or exclusion based on race,

gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. The students selected were

eighteen or older, so parental consent was not necessary.

Subjectivity Statement

I am a white male. I was raised in the Christian religion. I was raised Southern Baptist,

but converted to Roman Catholicism in my early twenties. I am a heterosexual, married father of

two boys. I was born in Georgia and have lived in Georgia my entire life. Until I reached high school age, I could reach every member of my extended family by car in two hours or less. I was raised in a middle class socioeconomic status, and I continue to live in that class. I attended public school my entire life.

One of the most important events that helped define who I am was when my parents, who were religious and strict during my upbringing, separated when I entered college. While this is a traumatic event in and of itself, this experience left me with another focus: to question what is considered "sure" or "absolute." For my entire life, one notion that I never doubted was my parents' marriage. When I asked at an early age with whom I would live if my parents divorced, I was told that would never happen and not to worry about it. I took that statement at full face value. Upon starting my undergraduate program, I entered a world where all previously absolute ideas were available for questioning; and as horrible as an experience as it seemed at the time, I believe it shaped me to have the outlooks that I hold currently, as well as the idea that even my current beliefs can be shifted or changed. While I hold strong in my beliefs, I am open to discussion. At the beginning of my doctoral program, I took a philosophy of education class. This class, with Dr. Deron Boyles, required me to examine an a priori version of "Truth" versus a more malleable, adjustable account of "truth"; and then apply it to our interpretation of the purpose of education. I believe that the ultimate purpose in school is to try to provide opportunities for students to critique the world in which they in order to be critical, rational citizens. I use my discipline, social studies (and specifically history), to demonstrate how students can (and should) challenge what they know to be "true." One of the first activities I do at the beginning of the year sets the tone of challenging established facts. I ask the students to write down their life history in exactly one page. These are the only directions I give to them. I

tell the students that they cannot write more than one page, not even by one word. The questions inevitably arise as to whether they should highlight major events or discuss what is important to them or a combination of both. I refuse to answer the question directly, instead telling them that the decision about how to construct their life history is their choice, so long as it is exactly one page in length. When we reconvene, we discuss which route they took- and why- in writing their paper. We talk about what information they cut and why and the difficulty of scraping the lesser details of their lives. When we finish, I tell them that now their life history must be pared down to a half a page. They protest and tell me that there is "no way." This activity brings the class directly to their textbook: I tell them that their life story is the equivalent to our history textbook, except instead of covering the life of a high school-age student, they are remembering thousands of lives over thousands of years. If they (the students) are having difficulty completing this assignment as an older teenager, how difficult was it for the editors cut information from our text? This activity leads to several questions: What was cut? Why? Who determined what was important? What were the criteria?

This initial assignment demonstrates to the students my key responsibility as a teacher to communicate to them: information is subject to interpretation, and it is their duty as responsible, reasonable people, to question the information- even if it comes from me. They do not have to agree with television programs or internet news sources, or even textbooks and teachers. Citizens must critique everything. The field of history, by and large, is written by the winners. Where are other perspectives? What might they be? How can students make an educated guess about that? In questioning the subject and the materials, how can students translate that line of inquiry into their current lives and question the news, the government figures seen in the news, their religious beliefs and examine what they believe to be true for themselves.

In terms of my educational background, I attended public school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. For college, I entered Georgia State University and transferred to the University of Georgia (UGA) during my sophomore year. While at the UGA, I focused more on history than education, even though I knew I wanted to be a social studies teacher. I began working at an Archdiocese of Atlanta school. I immediately began working on my masters' degree at Piedmont College. Other than a few social studies education classes at UGA, I really started to focus on pedagogy at Piedmont.

Toward the end of my program, I took two classes that focused on educational theory: American high school, in which students examined the history of education in America and the prominent theories associated with those time periods; the other was critical thinking in social studies, which required me to look at the major writers in my field. This investigation intrigued me and, after talking with my wife, a doctor of philosophy in art education from UGA, I decided to pursue my doctorate at Georgia State University (GSU).

At the start of the 2011-12 school year, I attended new teacher orientation the week before school began. I was excited and also nervous, because I was new to teaching high school and to public education. From my graduate school classmates I had heard the demands of pacing guides, standardized tests and maintaining annual yearly progress (AYP). I was never faced with any of these requirements as a private school teacher. As the orientation progressed, our Assistant Principal (AP) in charge of staff development mentioned that during the previous year, our high school started a school-wide evaluation of student engagement. This process was begun by choosing teachers to monitor, teaching administrators and selected teachers how to observe student engagement, and then these identified individuals observed the designated teachers.

As I began my instruction with my students, I struggled with how to engage them, or how

to keep them engaged. Whereas I felt successful with regards to student engagement in my previous educational setting, in public school I found it difficult to stay on pace and march through the mandated curriculum while still maintaining students' attention. While the teachers were rated quantitatively on their ability to connect with their students and maintain engagement, the specific methods by which they engaged their students were slotted into generic categories (summarizing, critical thinking, etc.). I wondered what tools I could use to keep my students engaged in social studies.

I have always enjoyed playing video games. I can remember receiving video game consoles for Christmas and subsequently individual games for those consoles. I would frequently visit with friends who had different consoles or games and we would play video games for hours. At school, my friends and I would discuss what games we were playing and how to defeat a certain level. Social ranking was at stake in regards to what kind of system or game everyone owned and their proficiency level in those games. I specifically remember opportunities to play video game simulations in class: One was *Oregon Trail*; a reward for students who finished their work early during my seventh grade year. I made sure that I completed my work as early as possible. The other example was playing *SimCity* in my Economics class in high school. Even fifteen to twenty years later, I can recall playing those games and enjoying my time in those specific classes. I have one console now, a Nintendo Wii, and I occasionally play video games with my sons or wife. As a teacher, I use this interest in video games to connect with students; we talk about what games are coming out and how to play certain levels. I have incorporated video game simulations in my pedagogy and, anecdotally, I believe those are days that I achieve a higher level of student engagement.

Methods of Data Generation

I used participant observation, semi-structured interviews and personal reflection. I observed fifteen participants between three and five times, interviewed each of the students between two and three times, including an interview before and after participating in the game. I constantly reflected via journaling after observations and interviews.

Observation is imperative in case studies, "because the interaction of individuals cannot be understood without observation" (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 229). It was my goal to observe the participants and work with them to ensure that they were represented as accurately as possible. That means participants were allowed to look over my field notes and summations and I requested their feedback. It was not my goal to include quantitative elements in my observation. I was not interested in the number of mouse clicks for each student or the amount of times their eyes strayed from the screen. Instead, the research was based on looking at their experience in a somewhat holistic fashion.

 Interviews are the backbone of case study research, and, as a **constructionist**, my data was co-constructed with the interviewees. The reason that I chose a semi-structured interview format is because it was the style of interview provided me with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and engage the participant in the interview. Structured interview techniques require that questions be asked in a specific order and require participants to choose from pre-determined answer options created by the interviewer. The answers are then quantified (Roulston, 2010). Unstructured interviews act more as a free-flowing conversation and interviewees can also initiate questioning. However, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to create questions ahead of the interview, but provides the flexibility to create additional questions, move pre-determined questions around, and allows the interviewee to create their own terms- essential

in understanding the an investigation of which they are a part. I attempted to use highly developed listening skills due to the fact that, although the pre-determined questions are the same, the direction of the interview varied, as did the probes for each interviewee (Roulston, 2010). Below are some of the pre-determined questions that I asked students:

1. What does it mean to be someone who hates social studies?

2. Is there a particular event or set of events in a social studies classroom that made you dislike the subject?

3. Tell me about playing video games.

4. In the past, why kind of video games have you played? What draws you to those games in particular?

5. Tell me about playing eLECTIONS.

6. Was the game play easy or hard? Why? Was the user interface friendly?

The flexibility of semi-structured interviewing was essential to maximizing the organic feel of the interviews. I knew I needed some specific questions to guide the interview, but the unstructured time in the interview was when I gathered the richest data. The flow of the conversational style allowed the participants to be comfortable and engage in our discussion. The power dynamics (researcher: participant; teacher: student) lessened as the participants and I discussed their video game play, why they enjoyed video games, what types of video games they played and how they played these games. The interviews lasted anywhere between four and thirty minutes; most of the interviews were between fifteen and twenty minutes. When we discussed eLECTIONS, the conversational style allowed the students to participate without feeling as if I, as the researcher, was attempting to extract a particular answer. The participants offered me authentic answers. Still, when the conversational nature of the unstructured aspects of

the interview waned, the predetermined questions allowed me to stay focused and ensure that I gathered the data that was essential to the study.

In addition, I watched students as they engaged in the simulation or game to see if their eyes were on the screen, if they talked to the instructor/peers/out loud to no one in particular about the game, any physical reaction to an element in the game (mouth agape in shock, fist pound on the desk in frustration, arm pump in excitement, etc.) to demonstrate that they were, in fact, engaged in the game. These physical traits demonstrated a great deal about the participants' engagement in eLECTIONS and in the classroom. In the portable classroom room where the traditional learning took place, students provided many points of data through their actions and words: Some of the participants slept during class; some of them used their phone during class time, which was against the rules of the research site. Participants talked to their peers-sometimes about the content and sometimes about their personal lives- but almost never talked with the classroom teacher. Several of the participants disengaged from the instruction provided verbally in class by the classroom teacher, but engaged in the assignments required by completing them at their own pace, using the textbook instead of listening to a lecture. When the students then appeared in the computer lab to play eLECTIONS, their verbiage was generally much more centered on the task and content within the task. Participants frequently watched the computer screen, as opposed to their own mobile devices.

I also used personal reflection by means of journaling as recommended by Elizabeth St. Pierre (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). This journaling frequently took place after interviews with participants and while still at the research site. The goal of journaling at that time was the recall any emotion or visual cue that my audio recorder did not register. In addition to the post-interview journal entries, I was also afforded the opportunity to reflect and write after each of the

classroom visits and computer lab visits. I observed the classroom teacher's first, third, and sixth period classes; therefore, her schedule was such that there was at least one class period between each group of participants I observed, which allowed me to journal immediately after observations. St. Pierre gives data collected in the writing such titles as dream data, sensual data, emotional data, response data, and memory data. Because the interviewer is embedded in the field, it was important for me to collect my own data, as well. My thoughts, my reactions and my emotions played a role in my research and to not include that data would have affected the ability of the data to be crystallized (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). My thoughts, reactions and emotions were important to gauge because, as I explain in chapter four, I previously worked at the research site and previously taught several of the students, some of whom were participants in this study.

Methods of Data Analysis

During this case, I concentrated on the focus of my research- to examine the relationship between simulations and game and student engagement. Spradley focuses on finding patterns and using them to code based on semantic relationships. In choosing to follow Spradley's ideas on ethnography, my primary goal was to generate data via the words of the participants. Spradley states, "In each case, analysis proceeds by examining some phenomenon, dividing it into its constituent parts, then identifying the relationships among the parts and their relationship to the whole" (1979, p. 92). After conducting interviews, I initially coded the transcript using en vivo coding. It was important to me to be as true to the wording as possible with the participants. I wanted their voice that I portrayed in the research to be as close to his or her own words as possible. The importance of language is discussed in McCormick's (2000) "From Transcript to Story"- looking at what is said, how it is said and what remains unsaid. McCormick describes

points of data that the language lens provides to the ethnographer and how my participants

offered specific data. With McCormick's focus on language in mind, I looked for patterns in

order to create domains- means by which to organize the data into cover terms, semantic

relationships, and included terms (Spradley, 1979). Included terms are the exact words from the

interview. The semantic relationship describes the type of connection those words have to each

other. The cover term is the researcher's determination of how the words are associated in order

to create meaning.

I used this particular type of data analysis on a previous interview in a pilot study. My

participant was a 28-year-old high school teacher. I interviewed him regarding self-perception of

adult men playing video games. My goal was to look at his words and, by using the en vivo code,

determine what patterns emerged. Below is an excerpt of the interview and the part of the

analysis:

Table 8

Interview Transcript from Pilot Study

CM: Okay…which kind of leads to my next kind of series of question kind of series of thought, tell me about how you view yourself…so you said a "casual" gamer so what does that mean to you? How would you define that?	Casual gamer Define
TD: A casual gamer is to me somebody like, it'd be like me or you. Like we have a job that we have to do, we care about our job, we have family, we care about our family, we also like to play video games or I like to play video games. Uhmm…playing video games is a hobby, it's something that I do every now and then. It's not something that's going to take up so much of my time that I won't do other	Casual gamer Me and you Job Job, family Family Hobby Now and then Not put something else on hold

things…I'm not going to uh put something else on hold like a home improvement activity or going out or something important because I have to get to the next level or beat something. Uhh if I have to do something else, I won't play. Like for instance ever since my grad school started sin January 9th, I haven't picked up the joy stick at all because I have so much work to do. It doesn't necessarily bother me, I just thought about that yesterday, I just thought man I haven't played video games in a while and while I want to, there are other things that are that are important so …	Something important Grad school Haven't picked up the joy stick Other things that are important

Domain

Included Terms   Semantic Relationship   Cover Term

Causal gamer
dedicated to job
dedicated to family   **Is a type of**
dedicated to school   self-perception
doesn't allow video games to
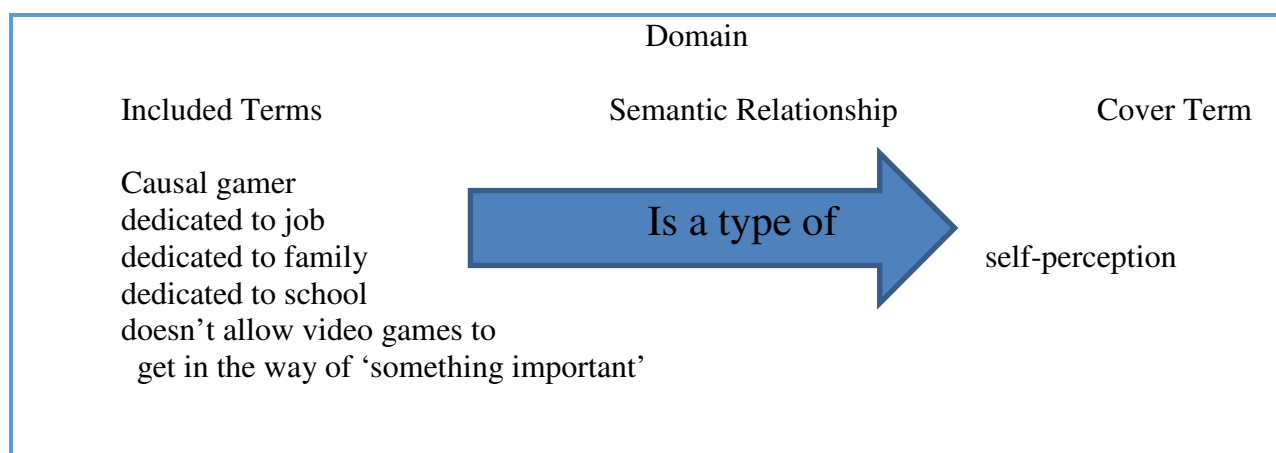 get in the way of 'something important'

Figure 4. Spradley's semantic relationship coding in a previous study.

As Spradley (1979) recommends, I examined my coding to come up with my included

terms. Spradley points out that there must be more than one included term in order to create a

singular semantic relationship (p. 100). Using this process to determine cover terms allowed me

to more closely examine data that helps me answer my research questions.

While the initial data was dominated by game play and Spradley's personal preference,

what I found most interesting is the idea of perception about gamers, especially self-perception.

From my view, the data was rich and the participant was passionate about the content. From the

information derived, I had to speculate to some degree. "A…component of theorizing requires speculating and making inferences. It is the basis of hypothesizing and involves the informed guesswork" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 247). What is the relationship between simulations and games and how engaged students are?

Although the pilot study used a professional adult as one of its participants, the same process applied in my research with teenaged students. I took the interviews from each participant and transcribed it, using en vivo coding. I examined the data to determine what patterns emerged; patterns within the individual's interview itself and combines with the interviews of the other participants, as well. The relationships that generated from the emerged patterns constituted the results and discussions for my study.

One of the most important components of my data analysis was the opportunity for me to discuss the study and data with my doctoral colleagues and, especially, my wife. During the data generating and analyzing portion of my study, Dr. Bohan created meetings for the seven students who had previously finished the prospectus class. The seven of us worked through our prospectus defenses together and, when we met for class during that initial year, we discussed among each other, and Dr. Bohan, how the prospectus writing was going and shared with each other our drafts and peer critiques. During research, we met as a group again several times, although less frequently, to discuss our status and receive feedback. It was during these sessions that I received great insight, as well as encouragement, from my doctoral peers and Dr. Bohan. In my discussions with previous doctoral students who reached the dissertation stage, they frequently described the process as lonely and difficult to stay focused because of the lack of imposed deadlines. Because of the meetings with our doctoral cohort, I did not find that

loneliness to be part of my experience. I am positive these meetings allowed me to stay focused during the last year of the dissertation process.

Finally, there were many times that I discussed my research with my wife, Karinna Riddett-Moore. She earned her Ph.D. in 2011 from the University of Georgia and, although her methodology and theoretical framework differed from mine, the qualitative nature of our dissertations allowed us to discuss this study openly and I was able to receive her guidance and critique as a trusted source. While there were many informal conversations about the research or the analysis in general, there were two lengthy discussions about data analysis that steered my thinking. Both of these conversations took place during times in which I was unsure how to proceed and, while she provided insight, she also guided my thinking by asking questions that required me to stay focused on the research topic and to clarify elements of the study that I found confusing. These conversations allowed my data analysis to continue when I reached difficult parts and provided me with guidance to determine of what the data was trying to tell me.

Game Play

I used eLECTIONS as an introductory unit to learning about the Electoral College, but it can also be used to discuss political parties or the eLECTIONS process. I implemented this game with students in a high school over a two day period, although it can also be used in a middle school setting, as well. One of the main reasons I am drawn to this game was that it allows students to create their own candidates while giving a realistic, yet simulated view of a presidential campaign. Students were asked to research the basic platforms of both political parties and to determine their stance on issues such as immigration, affirmative action, education, military spending, the economy, and healthcare (Moore, Beshke, & Bohan, 2014).

Figure 5. eLECTIONS opening graphic.

The game could have potentially facilitated students' understanding of their own political leanings and will allow students to select the key issues for their platforms, although that is not the focus of this study. Students did not have to agree with every ideological component of their chosen political party; they could choose their stance on every key issue. This political investigation could have greatly benefited the students in their game play and fostered pragmatic as well as disciplinary knowledge of civics. Game play preparation can be adjusted for groups in the future, depending on the time, age level, and technological abilities of the students.

Many researchers argue the need for more interactive, and particularly technologically interactive, approaches to teaching (See: Doolittle & Hicks (2003); Tobias & Fletcher (2011); Gee, 2007). Papert (1991) also argues that students make meaning by making. In this research study, students learned though their creation of a presidential candidate. The relevance of eLECTIONS in this process can be seen in each of Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) six pedagogical

tools that incorporate a constructivist approach to technology. As decisions are made and feedback is given in the form of money and electoral votes gained or lost, students begin to understand how choices made during the course of an eLECTIONS campaign affect the outcome (Moore, Beshke, & Bohan, 2014).

The game began as the players chose a slate of five "authentic, real-world" issues, such as education, health-care, immigration, and defense (see figures), fulfilling Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) third principle: "The construction of knowledge is fostered by authentic and real-world environments" (p. 11).

Figure 6. eELCTIONS' key topic for students to choose.

Students possibly selected topics that are talked about at home, relevant in their communities, or featured in the media. They might have chosen issues for which they had prior knowledge or an especial interest, which demonstrates the fourth principle described by Doolittle

and Hicks (2003): "The construction of knowledge takes place within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge and experience" (p. 11). The next step in the game was for students to decide upon the candidate's standing on each of the chosen issues, refining both the connection to an authentic, real-world environment and their particular prior knowledge and experience.

Once students determined the candidate's standing, at this point in the game, a map appeared on the screen indicating each state's position on political and social issues. These concerns included topics such as healthcare, education, immigration, and taxes.
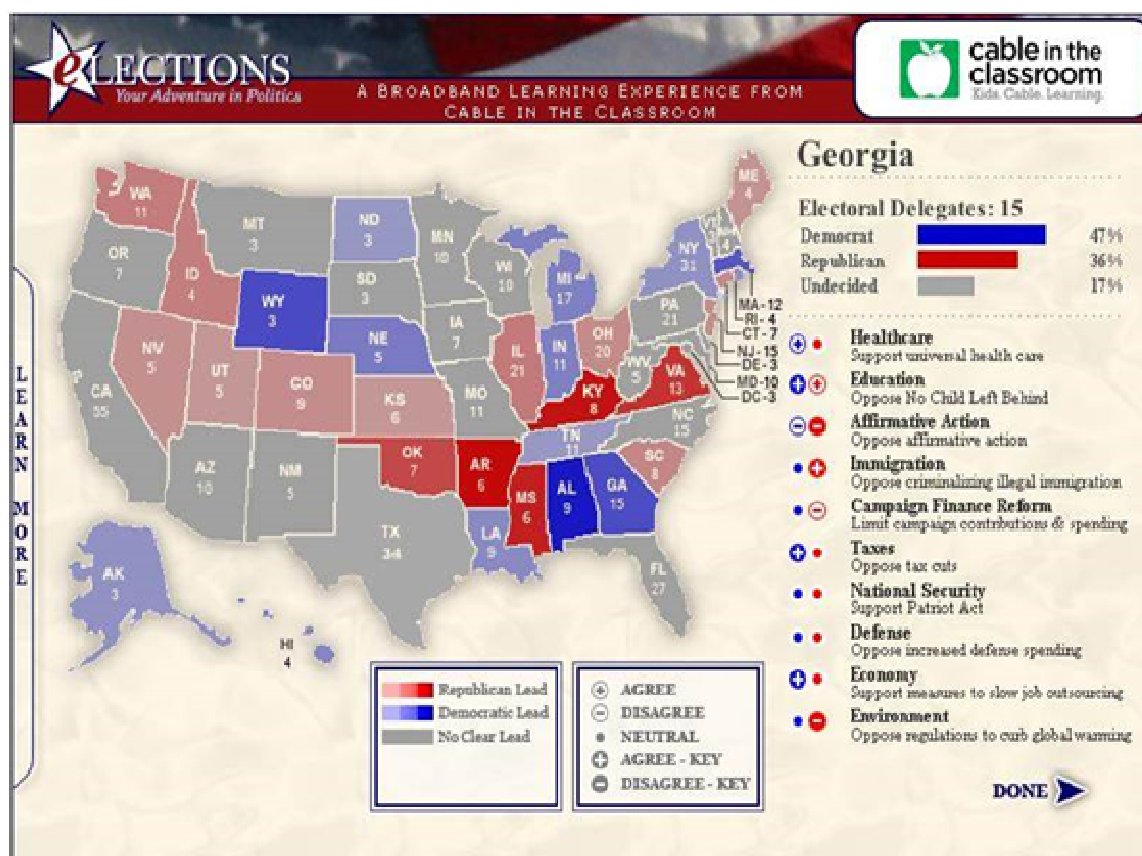

Figure 7. eLECTIONS' electoral vote map allowed decision on where to campaign.

Other candidates in the game also had positions on these issues, either assigned by the computer or by other game players. Thus, the game contained all of the complexities of a real campaign. Every decision that a player made affected the other candidates as well as fundraising and the gain or loss of electoral votes. This complex interaction of decisions and outcomes is a

perfect example of Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) second principle. "The construction of knowledge involves social mediation within cultural contexts" (p. 11). Students involved in an eLECTIONS game acted and reacted to events and decisions that are not always predictable or under their control, thus the interaction created a unique opportunity for constructing knowledge. "The individual, engaged in socially mediated activity, is transformed or constructed through this socially mediated activity, just as the social institution is transformed or constructed by the participation of the individual" (Doolittle and Hicks, 2003, p. 11). The game proceeded as a dial spins to determine the number of spaces to move on the virtual game board. Players landed on spaces that determine particular scenarios; they then chose how to respond.

Figure 8. eLECTIONS allowed students to handle surprise scenarios.

Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) fifth principle, that "[t]he construction of knowledge is integrated more deeply by engaging in multiple perspectives and representations of content,

skills, and social realms" (p. 12) is also apparent while playing eLECTIONS. With each spin of the dial, players were exposed to the other candidates' slate of issues and positions. Klopfer, Osterweil and Salen (2009) concur: "An educational game should put players in touch with what is fundamentally engaging about the subject, should help them build a scaffolding of core concepts, and should motivate them to go deeper" (p. 32).

Cable in the Classroom provides plenty of options for game play. The game setup demonstrates Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) first principle: "The construction of knowledge and the making of meaning are individually and socially active processes" (p. 10). Players are allowed to play against a computer or they can play against a classmate. If finding enough computers for students is a concern, students can double-up on one computer, or, the teacher can facilitate the game on one computer through a projector, thus allowing the candidates to be run by teams of students. If students work as a team, the possibility for students to collaborate and critically engage in discussions increases dramatically. According to Powell and Kalina (2009), "Cooperative learning is part of creating a social constructivist classroom. Students should not only work with teachers one-on-one, but they should also work with other students. Students have a lot to offer one another" (p. 244). A teacher might also assign a group of students to create a candidate with values and positions different from their own in order for students to develop a deeper understanding of the electoral process.

Thus, eLECTIONS provides teachers and students the opportunity to use technology in the classroom in a way that will transform the teaching and learning process. This idea is, however, assuming that students like the game and it does impact their learning positively. This assumption might not be true, however. Students may dislike the game. They may not learn as well through the game as they would by using another pedagogical strategy. Still, I will look to

see if that, by participating in the simulation, the experience fosters personal, social, and engaging experiences that exemplify a constructivist approach to learning. Students develop a sense of ownership for their candidate; they become invested in the outcome and, along the way, learn about the political parties, the Electoral College, and key issues in presidential elections.

Playing eLECTIONS provided a powerful learning experience for students. Rather than learning about civics through a traditional lecture format or reading a text and answering questions, students potentially constructed meaning through the process of making autonomous decisions and reacting to and reflecting upon the feedback provided in the game. This aspect of eLECTIONS demonstrates Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) sixth principle, that "[t]he construction of knowledge is fostered by students becoming self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware" (p. 12). Playing repeatedly increased a student's knowledge and leads to more sophisticated decision-making through the support of game feedback. The teacher was not a lecturer or a dispenser of knowledge but rather a facilitator, who was available to ask guiding questions as students strategize moves or to help students recognize and correct misconceptions.

Ethical issues

Ethical issues can take place before the point of data collection and it is important to acknowledge various stages at which ethics must be carefully considered (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). One of the first issues was making sure the proposal was eligible to proceed to the stage of research. This issue was resolved by ensuring that data collection did not take place until after Georgia State University IRB and the site's leadership gave approval. I also had to be willing to provide research findings, regardless of whether I think that they are positive or negative. In demonstrating sensitivity and ethical treatment of my participants, there were several important steps to take. First, I was truthful with the participants as to what I was researching and why I

was collecting the data. I protected them by not using the actual names of the site or the participants; even further anonymity was provided by creating composite sketches of several of the participants (Christians, 2010). Composite sketches provide the same data collected without specifying a particular student. This approach to research is not a problem of fact or fiction, in my view, because "Social science, and educational research is concerned with a world as it is. The problem, as Emmanuel Kant pointed out over two hundred years ago, is that only God can know the world as it is" (Riddett-Moore & Siegesmund, 2012, p. 110). Therefore, it was my responsibility to be as accurate as possible, while understanding that, again from a constructionist perspective, truth is not the same for everyone.

In order to create my composite participants, I first observed all participants in the traditional classroom setting. Many of the participants fell into one of three categories: Working independent of the lectures, working in conjunction with the aid of the teacher's lecture, or not paying attention to the lecture at all. However, what eventually separated students from these three general groups into specific categories were the answers to the initial interview questions. As I listened to the recordings of the interviews, I remembered hearing specific information that caught my attention the first time; specifically, the reasons that they hate social studies. From that initial interview, I was able to start seeing some emerging patterns. While most students said they hated social studies because it was "boring," their meanings behind the term boring started to overlap until I felt the students were represented consistently in the data.

Next, I looked at the ethnic and gender makeup of the class and was determined to make sure the voices of the participants in the study were the voices of the composite characters I created. For that purpose, I created three male characters and one female character, due to the fact that most of the participants in my study were males. Second, most of the participants were

Hispanic males, so I wanted them to have two characters to exhibit their numbers as participants. The other group of students that participated heavily in the study were African-American.

Finally, I examined the participants' attitude toward school in general and their motivation to come to school. Some students were on track to graduate on time and were taking this civics course because they passed previous social studies courses and this was the next class in the sequence. Some students had passed the preceding social studies classes, but were not on track to graduate. Some students did not care about school at all. These characteristics all factored in to creating the composite characters. It should be noted that, although the ethnicity and gender or the composites represent the students in the study, not all participants were of the particular ethnicity in which they were eventually amalgamated. That is, some of the data from African-American students is presented in Francisco or Miguel, two composites that are Hispanic. Hispanic and African-American participants were used to create Cierra. I want to emphasize again that it was important to me to represent the students who participated in the study, but I did not define them based solely on their race. It was more important to me to look at the character from a more holistic position that combined attitudes, answers, thoughts about school, their place in school, and, to some degree, their race and gender.

While some might argue that this approach fictionalized the research, "the word 'fiction' comes from the Latin word '*fictio*.' It is an act of fashioning. It is forming. Everything we do in this world is an act of forming" [italics original] (Riddett-Moore & Siegesmund, 2012, p. 110). Any information that I released or used in my study did not injure the participants. I am keeping the research in password-protected files on my personal computer (as opposed to my work-issued computer). I also changed the names of the participants in my interviews and coding so that their real names are not made available to the public. When my interviews were complete, I

provided an opportunity for the interviewees to examine the transcripts of the interviews to allow them to have the final determination whether or not they were comfortable with the words that were recorded going into the research (Christians, 2010).

I was also aware of the participants' vulnerability (Tisdale, 2004). The participants were students- I did not want them to feel obligated to participate in my study and I felt the need to make it crystal clear to them that their willingness or unwillingness to participate had no bearing on their grade in the class or their standing in the school. These students were predominately of low socioeconomic backgrounds and non-white. Because these groups have been vulnerable in historical contexts, they were susceptible to vulnerability during my research. These issues are referred to as 'a priori' factors (Tisdale, 2004).

It was my job as the researcher to also be aware of 'a posteriori' vulnerability (Tisdale, 2004). In essence, once I collected my data, it was my ethical obligation to attempt to use the information in worthwhile, positive fashions and never attempt to use the data to harm the participants. My goal in this research was to provide them with a voice as to how they feel they engaged with social studies-related simulations and games, not to try and put them in a position of harm.

Issues of Quality

In order to promote quality research, I crystalized my research. "In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate, we crystallize" (Richardson, 2000, p.934). It was important for me to examine the data I collect through a variety of lenses- my own, the participants, the literature, the theoretical lens of constructionism- and allow the data to show me the emerging elements on which to focus. Through my writing, I employed more than one type of writing. Certainly, I wrote this report of my findings, but that information came out of journaling. I also

represented the data via sketches of the room or other imagery that materialized, such as the educational standards for this unit and a graphic organizer designed to help students define aspects of the content, and a short essay prompt on political party identification, provided by the teacher that I acquired along the journey. While I had specific mediums and genres in mind for my research to represent my research ideas, I did not limit myself to only those listed above as others became available and seem like important options. "The scholar draws freely on his or her productions from literary, artistic, and scientific genres, often breaking the boundaries of each of those as well" (Richardson, 2000, p.934).

It was also important for me to make the interview available to the participant- either the transcript or the audio/video file for their review. The participant had the opportunity to see the information that the researcher is used as part of their analysis- as the researcher was seen as a member of the conversation, not acting as a static operative. As Roulston (2010) states

Detailed interviews show how the interviewers contribute to the generation of talk, and researchers generally refrain from separating particular sequences of the talk from the conversational environment in which they were generated by speakers. Thus, speakers' utterances are not viewed as expressions of 'interior perspectives,' but rather as co-produced with a particular interlocutor in response to whatever he or she has said. Thus, the interviewer's participation in the interview talk is subject to the same kind of analytic focus as talk generated by the interviewer and the interviewer's talk is included in the final report (p. 88).

Ethnography attempts to examine a particular culture and extract meaning about that culture (Crotty, 1998). In using this approach to research, I observed the learning culture of students who identified themselves as social studies haters in a social studies classroom. The

class they took is required in order to graduate. They were in the course, regardless of their interest or the importance (or lack thereof) they place on the course. Students in this class also belong to a generation that, by and large, plays video games with regularity. I examined whether this inundation of video games in their lives had any impact on their learning via a simulation game. I believe the best way to determine if the impact exists was by talking with the students, observing the students, and keeping track of my own data during this time

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Over the course of the semester that I conducted my research, fifteen students participated in the study. As mentioned previously, all of these students were 18 years old (with the exception of one 19 year old student), were from a large, Southeastern, metropolitan high school, and volunteered to participate in the study. As stated previously in Chapter Three, the

participants have been composited into four students. Because the predominate number of participants were Hispanic males, two composites are Hispanic males. One student composite is an African-American female and the last composite in an African-American male. This ethnic makeup represents the students who participated in the study. Students were also composited based upon their attitudes toward video games, school in general, and why they self-described themselves as "social studies haters." Below are the four composited students:

   Miguel- Miguel is a student of Hispanic descent. He is an American citizen, but his parents are illegal immigrants. This fact helps dictate some of his choices during game play. Miguel is almost on track to graduate. Miguel was part of the inaugural ninth grade academy created at this school specifically because of a trend that saw students struggle during their freshman year, which led to higher dropout rates. While he is still behind, he now sees the value in graduating high school and has plans to make up credits at a local alternative school. According to him, he has not previously taken school seriously in the past, but is looking to graduate and focus on work. Miguel dedicates approximately two hours a day on his video game console on weekdays, and can play between four and eight hours a day on the weekend. When asked about what games he liked to play, Miguel generally steered toward first-person shooter games and sports-themed games, particularly Electronic Arts' *FIFA*™ series. He dislikes social studies a great deal, due in great part to a particular teacher during his middle school years. The teacher was "mean" and "didn't like her job; she needed to retire."

   Cierra- Cierra is an African-American student whose dislike for social studies is lifelong, without a specific event to establish herself as a self-identified social studies hater. According to Cierra, her other middle school social studies teachers were "boring," but not as strict as the others. This year is her third taking social studies in high school. The courses

during her first two years were World History and American History, and she said that the teachers were "alright," but that social studies is just "boring and you always have to take a lot of notes and stuff." Cierra plays video games for two reasons: Video games allow her to be competitive with her friends and it provides her something to do to fill her time. Cierra partook in video games from an early age, and she is very comfortable with video game consoles. She also enjoys the *Call of Duty* series.

Francisco- Francisco is a student of Hispanic descent. He and his family are illegal immigrants. He came to the United States between fifth and sixth grades and, at the time, spoke no English. He is still enrolled in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The program designates an ESL student as a number one (almost none/no English) to six (fluent in reading, writing, and speaking English; slight monitoring necessary). Francisco is a six, which means he takes no language-sheltered academic classes and is not given any accommodations regarding his school work. He has been high school for three years, but is still considered a freshman due to the lack of credits he has earned. He is not particularly interested in school. Francisco plays video games at least twenty hours a week, although most of his game play is on the weekend. He is an avid Xbox fan, and particularly enjoys playing online with friends or strangers. Usually, he plays games that involve teamwork and strategy and have plot and character depth in the game.

Josh- Josh is an African-American student. His father is from a West African country and his mother is African-American. Josh works hard to be on track to graduate. He is not interested in trying to earn an A in a class, but rather just to pass. He thinks some areas of school are important, such as math and science, but social studies in not an area of interest or importance to him. In regards to game play, Josh prefers to play video games with other people

who are physically present, but he still plays games online. His main draw to video games is the competition, so Josh enjoys playing sports games, particularly basketball games.

When attempting to select a teacher with which to work, there was several criteria that I required. First, the teacher must teach senior level students. The reason for a senior level teacher was that the students would be 18 years of age or older and these students would be enrolled in the civics class. Second, I did not want this teacher to be new to teaching for the sheer fact that I did not want to burden her or him with doing research while she or he was learning her or his craft. Third, the teacher must not be new to the school that I selected as the research site for the same reason that I did not want to work with a neophyte teacher; I did not want to distract them while they were learning their way in a new environment. Based on this criteria, there were three eligible teachers at the research site. One was the head football coach. As I did my research in the fall, I did not want to bother him during the season. The second teacher was a woman with whom I had difficulty in terms of interpersonal communication. The third possible teacher was Ms. Lawson. So, she became the teacher who taught the class where I conducted my research.

I have known Ms. Lawson since 2006. We started our graduate program together and, in 2012, were both teaching at the same school. When I was still teaching at this school, I approached Ms. Lawson about allowing me to do my study with her students and she was happy to oblige. She is a veteran teacher with over ten years' experience and seemed well-liked within the social studies department.

Context

In this age of high risk teacher accountability, there is still a fundamental concern that the social studies classroom is still governed by a lecturer, spouting out knowledge while students take notes. I asked an administrator at the research cite, Dr. Baker, was in charge of the social

studies department during the previous school year, about this standard. Dr. Baker was required to work directly with teachers, including observing their teaching, evaluating them, discussing issues, attending meetings, and, in general, being aware of how teachers' classrooms worked. What this administrator mentioned regarding her observations was almost completely parallel with what colleagues and students had conveyed to me. In essence, Dr. Baker stated that, while they want dynamic teachers, they would not rid themselves of a teacher who could be counted on to always be supportive, not cause any trouble, always show up, always be punctual, be at meetings and generally do what was asked of her or him.

However, it was certainly noted which teachers were also seen as instructors who did not actively engage their students, struggled with content, and had classroom management issues. During her year in charge of the social studies department, Dr. Baker made announced and unannounced rounds to teachers' classrooms. Dr. Baker's assumption was that, because of large class sizes and lack of ability to engage the students in a class-wide setting, teachers were accustomed to dealing with being held responsible to engage students in order for the students to learn the content. An apt example might be that of a journeyman pitcher in Major League Baseball. They are never exciting to watch pitch and do not draw praise and adulation from fans or the media, but are frequently signed by teams to attempt to pitch a high number of innings, and thus, allow their star pitchers more rest between starts. These teachers "eat up" innings, but they are not a front of the rotation starting pitcher; and the primary reason for the lack of admiration is their inability to engage students in the classroom.

In the sections taught by these teachers, class can be boring and slow. PowerPoint presentations are still formatted in an older design model, do not have any graphics and look like they were created in the early 2000s and has not been updated. These PowerPoints do not

include any video clips or specific points of interest. It is no wonder that when teachers stop to check for understanding, they inquire, "Any questions?" or, "Is everybody with me?" and, are usually met with silence, which they take as a cue to keep lecturing. When students do interject, it is usually to ask the teacher to return to a slide so that they could finish copying the word or phrase needed for the graphic organizer or for help spelling a word. Students do not raise their hands to discuss or exclaim interest, debate a point or attempt to connect with the content. Eventually, the bell rings, but there was no real closing activity or connection.

The speed of any class, and particularly this social studies class, was set by the state in which this study took place. Teachers are not engaging in their class, but maybe one of the reasons they were not engaging was that they was required to teach a vast amount of information over an 18-week semester. Not only did the state enforce the standards that needed to be met, but, on top of these state standards, the county in which this study was conducted worked also added their own list of standards that were required to be taught, as well.

The pressure and scrutiny that teachers are under to meet these standards and objectives in a shortened time period, due to scheduled assessments, holidays, and other unforeseen events is enormous. The state in which the study took place required teachers to teach 61 standards in civics. Again, while there was some overlap, the local school system also placed more standards at the foot of the teacher to teach. At this particular school, teachers who taught the same subject met to make sure they were at the same spot as each other. While there was not a common lesson plan that teachers had to follow, the school required common summative assessments, common formative assessments, a pacing guide for all of the teachers to follow, benchmark tests to be given at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, and, of course, a certain percentage of students needed to pass the semester-end benchmark test. Instructors had to teach quickly

through the material in each class in order to maintain the pace of almost three-and-a-half

standards per week. When Cierra iterated that the class went too fast, this microcosm of her

inability to learn at the current pace demonstrated the countrywide, discipline-wide, practitioner-

wide issue of rapidity to teach through as much content as possible in order to be "on time"

according to the pacing guide.

Being a Social Studies Hater

The most resounding reason that the participants stated that they hated social studies is

because they found social studies classes boring. However, why they found the various social

studies classes boring differed.
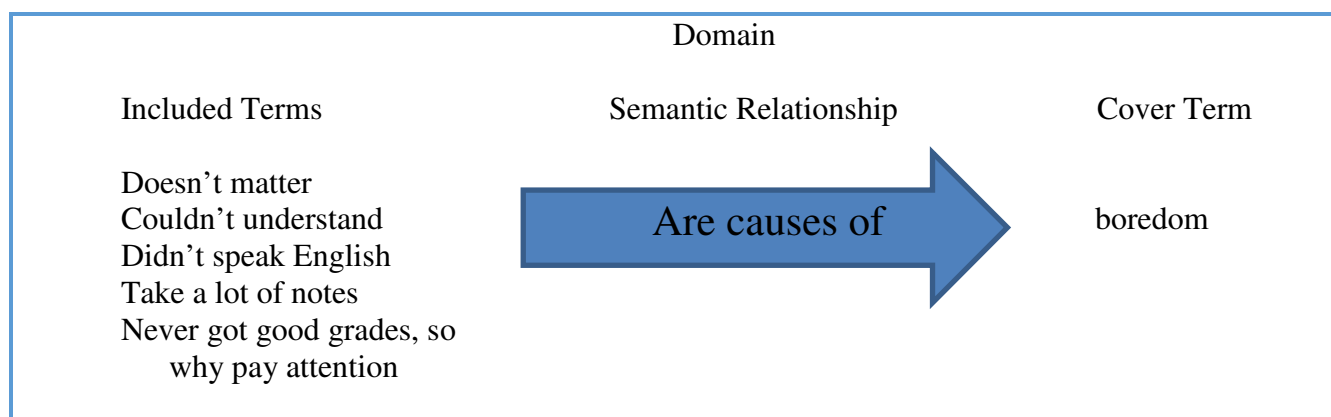
Figure 9. Semantic relationship: Social studies haters

Some of the terms that students described as reasons for their boredom in social studies

are listed in Figure 9. Again, boredom led to these students hating social studies. Several of the

students mentioned that they did not see the relevance in studying social studies. Although I

only referred to the discipline as social studies, most students equated that term with history

only, and based their answers with that specific content strand in mind. In fact, when discussing

why he did not think social studies was interesting, Francisco stated, "If it were more political or

financial, I could see it being important. But not, like, finding out what people used to do."

Ironically, the class that I am interviewing Francisco about is Political Systems and he will take

Economics next semester.

When prompted as to why she considers herself a social studies hater, Cierra stated,

> Not interested at all. Not at all. You just got to take a lot of notes. It's all about taking
>
> notes. We never watch any videos or anything like that. I do like World War II. That's
>
> with Hitler, right?
>
> **CM:** Yeah.
>
> **Cierra:** Yeah, I like that, but the rest- I mean, it's just, I don't know, boring, you know? I
>
> don't like just sitting in one spot and doing a worksheet and reading out of the book and
>
> dah de dah de dah- and we have a quiz. I just don't like that.

Francisco discussed his issue with social studies stems from a lack of understanding the

terminology and his struggle with learning English. Francisco came to the United States

approximately six years ago and, for all intents and purposes, is fluent in English. However, he

struggled with definition-laden courses, such as social studies and science. He does better at

math and also feels that math is more important than social studies.

> **Francisco:** Well, I feel that math is important to learn, but social studies isn't really one
>
> of those things. It's just more of uh, if it's your thing and you like to study it and you like
>
> it…I'm not that particular about social studies.
>
> **CM:** So you don't consider social studies to be important?
>
> **Francisco:** Not as important as math should be and stuff like science. I gotta be able to
>
> apply it.

This feeling that social studies lacks an ability to be applicable later, leads students to think that

social studies is just lists of facts and inconsequential. Cierra commented, "I'm not very good at

memorizing things, I guess, and that's what you do in history. You have to memorize things."

Miguel agreed. "I guess some of the facts don't really stick 'cause they're not really that

interesting. It was like, back in the day, nothing current. I really don't really care much about it,

'cause I'm not really going to use it in the future."

As the researcher, I was definitely surprised that there were not more cases of students

who had bad experiences with social studies teachers in their past. I drew from my own

experience of having science teachers that I did not like for a variety of reasons- strict, boring,

not consistent in behavior or grading- and transferred on to these students. However, besides

Miguel, no one had a teacher or experience that tainted their view of the subject matter and, even

in Miguel's case, the experience was not enough to sour him on the subject; it just made that

particular class unenjoyable. When pressed, Miguel's explanation about the teacher was that she

just "had a bad attitude toward everything. No one liked her. It was a big problem." Still, there

were no particular anecdotes or examples that he could give me to specifically identify why she

had a bad attitude toward everything.

Video Game Play in their Personal Lives

Without fail, every one of the students interviewed spends time playing video games.

While games are not necessarily put in defined categories, Gee (2011) provided a breakdown of

games.

> There are casual games and game splayed by non-casual gamers. There are what I call
>
> "problem games" and "world games," thought the distinction is not air tight. Problem
>
> games focus on solving a given problem or a single class of problems (e.g., Tetris, Diner
>
> Dash), while world games simulate a wider world within which the player must solve
>
> many different sorts of problems (e.g., Half-Life, Rise of Nations). There are different

genres of video games, such as real;-time-strategy games, first-person shooters, adventure games, sports games, god games, platform games, role-playing games, and others (p. 224).

In terms of total hours spent, the majority of students used their consoles (Sony's Playstation™ 3/4, or Microsoft's Xbox One™). However, some students did not have these consoles. What became evident, but really not surprising, is that the main access that students have to games is via their phones.

When discussing video game play with Josh, he at first said he did not play a lot of video games. However, as I pursued a line of questioning to determine what type of games he plays, for what reason he plays, and the amount of time he plays, his stance seemed to change. He had two games that he was really interested in: The *NBA2K*™ series created by Visual Concepts and the *Grand Theft Auto*™ series by Rockstar Games. Like a majority of the students who I interviewed, he played these games online, but preferred to play *NBA2K* with friends when they come over to his house. I asked him why his preferred to play with someone in the same vicinity as him, Josh stated:

> It's just that competitiveness of it. It's like this: Someone comes over, they'll say, "You want to play 2K?" and I'll say, "Bet." "Bet you won't beat me." "Alright, then, let's put some money on it," something like that. Of course the person that lose [sic] is going to be mad, but that's ok. We complete, just like we would compete at anything else.
>
> **CM:** So you talk a lot of smack, then?
>
> **Josh:** Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah! You know, it's a very competitive game. I'm gonna get after him and he gonna get after me. I don't ask them to come over and play, it just sorta

happens. We'll be bored or whatever and they'll say, "You wanna play 2K?" and then we

go. It's just something to do. It's just something we've been doing.

Cierra has been playing video games for a long time. While she plays Xbox One now,

she started playing on a Nintendo DS™ playing games like *MarioKart*™ or Barbie™ games.

When asked what it was about those games, Cierra pointed to the competitive element of

MarioKart, but also discussed another reason for playing video games: "Killing time." Like Josh,

it's something to do when she's bored, but still thinks of video games as engaging. At one point

during the initial interview, she discussed her level of video game interest and the time she

commits to the gaming world.

> **Cierra:** I love *Call of Duty!* I love killing zombies! I just think it's interesting. I'm really
>
> bad at it, but I still try. I mean, it's video games- who doesn't like video games? And I
>
> get into the game- I do. Because I don't want to die. I usually die, so I started just
>
> running around so they can't get me. I usually play with one friend while they're in the
>
> room with me.
>
> **CM:** What's happening when you guys are playing the game?
>
> **Cierra:** I can't really talk to her- I have to concentrate. Sometimes I get mad and I say,
>
> "What are you doing? You're supposed to have my back!" And then I like to argue with
>
> them about who won.

For Cierra, video games have been a part of her life for a far back as she can remember.

As a child born in the mid-1990s, video games' popularity and the influx of new systems,

computer games, internet gaming, graphics changes, role playing games and other elements of

gaming that have appeared in the last 20 years are not a phenomena or an interesting study in and

of itself; her world has always contained video games and, therefore, it is not surprising that she grew up with controllers and portable gaming systems in her hands.

The same can be said about Miguel. He also has had gaming systems from childhood on- and he is a brand-specific person: He only wants to play on Microsoft products. Miguel limits his game play to the weekend. His interest is in the social aspect of the game. "I don't like playing by myself. I mean, sometimes I play single player games, but most of the time I play online." This ending phrase indicates that his definition of socialization through video games differs from Josh and Cierra's definition. Whereas they really only play their console when there are other people physically present with them, Miguel feels connected to others when they are virtually present, and not necessarily even people he knows. "I like to play war games or adventure games. Right now I'm really into *Call of Duty: Ghosts*. I mostly play with my friends, but, like, if they're not available or whatever, I play with these random people. But I like playing online. I like talking to people." He went on to say that he talks to strangers in order to work as a team in the online games, again pointing to a comfort level of socializing via video games, via online interaction.

Like Cierra, Miguel also likes first-person shooter games and, as he mentioned earlier, he likes the Activision's™ *Call of Duty* series. He believes that the game designers do a great job and all the games in that particular series are stimulating graphically and have interesting storylines. Going back to Miguel's interest level in social studies, though, he does not think it's interesting. I challenge him about one of the games in that series by saying, "But some of those games are historically-based, right?" Miguel smiled for a minute and said, "Yeah. *[Call of Duty:] World at War* is. It's about World War II and the weapons in it were all from that time- machine guns and rifles and grenades." In my follow up question, I reminded him that, in that

particular game, the settings are the Pacific Theater and the Eastern Front, and the player is allowed to be a U.S. Marine. "Did any of that come to mind when you were studying World War II last year in U.S. History?" He responded in the negative, with a look on his face that he could not believe he did not make the connection before that moment.

Francisco was also primarily a weekend console player. His console of choice was Xbox and he surprised himself at the amount of time he dedicated to playing video games. He was not allowed to play video games during the week, so he did not think that he put that many hours into playing his Xbox.

CM: So you said you only play Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Francisco: Yeah.

CM: So how much time do you spend playing?

Francisco: Well, on Friday, I'll, like, get home from school and eat something, maybe watch a movie with my family and then play Xbox 'cause there's really nothing else to do. I'll play 'til, like, midnight. On Saturdays I wake up late, like at noon. That's what time my dad leaves so then I can play. And I'll play straight through 'til ten. Then on Sunday, well, I go to church, and then eat with my family, and then I'll play, but only 'til nine because I have to go to school the next day.

CM: Let's do some quick math. Ten hours on Saturday, right? You said about noon 'til ten, right?

Francisco: Yeah.

CM: And the on Friday, when you get home, that's like, what, four or five?

Francisco: About five, after I eat and rest and stuff.

CM: So from five to midnight, that's about seven hours there. So that's seventeen.

Francisco: Mm-hmm.

CM: And then what time do you get home from church and all that stuff?

Francisco: Probably about four.

CM: So that's another five hours. That's twenty-two hours over a three day span.

Francisco: [laughing] Yeah, I guess that's right. Damn, that's a lot. I didn't know. I didn't know that.

All of the students played video games on their phones, as well. When initially asked about the means by which they play video games, most only gave answers on their consoles or the consoles owned by their friends. The games that are some of the most popular, cross-platform games are available on mobile devices. For example, as of January 2014, the game *Angry Birds*™ had been downloaded over two billon times and still had two hundred million monthly active users (MAUs) (Hillier, 2014, ¶1). *Angry Birds* became a worldwide brand and not just to those who played video games. There were more than ten incarnations of the game, as well as merchandise that included clothing, plush toys, television programs, and even a full length feature film that is expected to be released in 2016.

Other games, such as *Candy Crush*™, *Fruit Ninja*™, the *Temple Run*™ series, and *Words with Friends*™ dominate application download rankings and games that rank highly in paid apps (Bisset, 2013, ¶1). Yet, surprisingly, these apps did not register with the participants as video games. However, once we identified these games as video games, they realized just how much time they spent playing these games. Francisco worked at a local fast food chain restaurant and is responsible for interacting with the customers. He did mention that when the restaurant is not very busy, he frequently pulled out his phone to play a game. All fifteen of the participants admitted to playing games on their phone on average at least once during the school day.

Sometimes they played during lunch or in the hallway, activities that are allowed at this particular school. In addition to that play time, though, students admitted to also playing in class during instruction time or even asking to go to the bathroom to have a few minutes to be on their cell phone.

Miguel: Sometimes I check my Facebook or my Instagram or something, but, yeah, sometimes I'll play *Candy Crush* or something. Or there's this game now called *Clash of Clans*™. You, like, build your own town, and defend it, and build castles.

CM: Is that interactive? Is that online?

Miguel: Yes. Sometimes you get a message that troops have come and burned your castle down and what do you want to do? So I'm playing against other people, yes, but, not like, at the same time.

CM: Are you concerned that you're going to get too caught up in the game and be gone too long?

Miguel: No, not really. [laughs] Teachers don't really ask me why I've been in the bathroom a long time.

Miguel and Francisco are not the only ones who played on their phones. Cierra claimed that she would frequently try and get through boring classes by playing video games on her phone. During the first interview, she showed me her phone and what game has her attention right now.

Cierra: See? [shows me her phone] I got this one a couple of days ago.

CM: What is it? Angry Birds?

Cierra: Yeah, it's the new one, *Epic*. They're so cute!

CM: Is it different that the other Angry Birds?

Cierra: Yeah, sorta. I mean, you can be these different birds and the mission are

different.

CM: And you play this during class?

Cierra: Sometimes. I mostly sit in the back, so it's ok.

CM: Have you been caught playing that game?

Cierra: Yeah.

CM: And what happened?

Cierra: She just told me to put it away. So I did.

In regard to engagement in the classroom, this missed connection is another example of a lost

opportunity to take a part of their actual lives (video game play) and connect it to content in

order to enhance the learning experience. These students play a lot of video games. However, the

reasons they play video games vary.

Domain

Included Terms	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
Competitive Kill time Hang out Stories Fun After a long day	Are reasons for →	playing video games
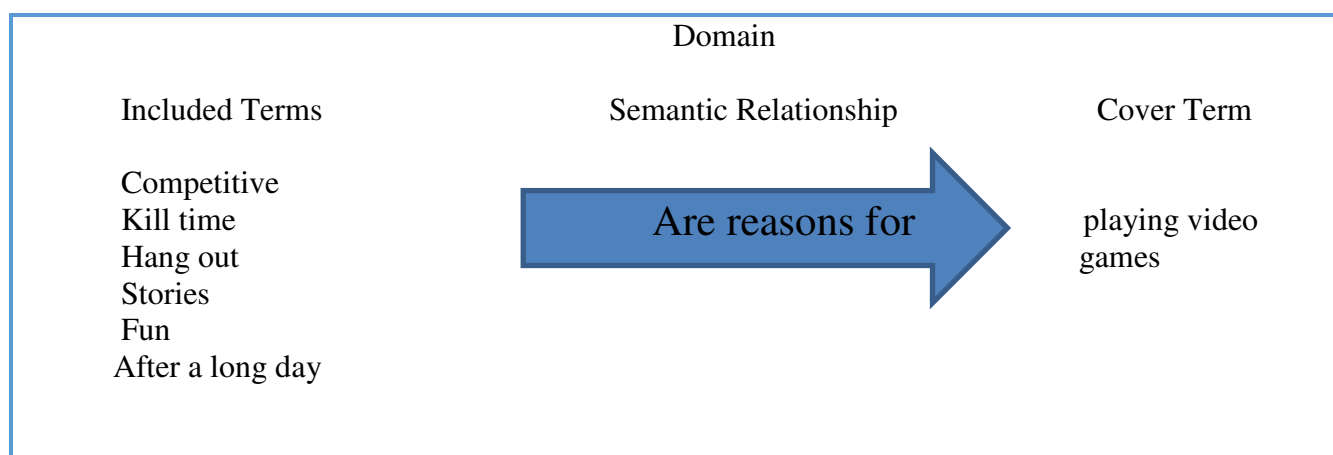
Figure 10. Semantic relationship: Rationale for playing video games

In examining these reasons as to why video games are a part of their lives, it made sense

that they there was not a specific rationale that defined them all. These students were

independent people and, despite occasional groups of concerned parents or educators or government officials decrying that children are "numbing out" with video games and not able to interact in reality, only one of the reasons students gave for playing video games was to "kill time."

First, students like to be competitive. Video games offer the opportunity to compete-against friends, against strangers, and against the machine. In school, students are often given the opportunity to be competitive; on the athletic playing fields, debate teams, or inter-class spirit awards. Competition is also present in the classroom. In social studies, competition is evident when studying events like war and, in civics particularly, in politics and elections. "Games involve a lot of social interaction. This is obvious for multiplayer games where gamers are playing competitively or cooperatively together. But many single-player games have multiplayer versions and even ones that do not often still inspire a good deal of discussion…." (Gee, 2011, p. 226).

Second, students do, in fact, want to come home and relax. Like adults coming home from work, these students go home, cook or clean, or prepare for the next day. However, like most adults, they are tired and do not necessarily want to continue laboring, mentally or physically. Many of the participants in this study also worked part time, besides going to school, so their personal time was even further reduced. As Josh stated, "I don't know; sometimes I just want to come home and not do anything. I don't want to talk to anybody or do nothing, so I play games."

Third, participants viewed the opportunity to play video games as a chance to interact with their friends and have fun. For some participants, video games were played when their friend was physically present in the same room as the participant. Their occasion to bond was

mediated by a video console. This vehicle is no different than friends getting together to watch a

sporting event, or walk around a shopping area or any number of social venues that create

opportunity for people to get together. Perhaps video games are even more advantageous than

traditional means of socializing in that gamers can interact online, which allowed my participants

to engage with their friends. Most of the students that attend this school did not have their own

vehicle and were limited to places where they could walk or where the school bus dropped them

off. Therefore, they used online gaming systems to interact with their friends when not at school.

While schools do not necessarily promote "hanging out with friends," there is certainly a push

for cooperative learning and, given the objectives of some of the video games such as *Halo* or

the *Call of Duty* series, collaborative efforts are mandatory in order to be successful in the game.

Undoubtedly, schools uphold the skill to collaborate as a necessary one for the 21st Century

learner.

Fourth, games have become more complex and, with them, narratives and missions have

evolved to become intricate and complex to add depth to the gaming experience. These

narratives have become so involved that well-known actors such as Gary Oldman, Bruce Willis,

Ellen Page, Christopher Walken, Samuel L. Jackson, and Michelle Rodriguez have voiced

characters in popular video games series (IMDb, 2014). Like movies, soundtracks were created

for these games and have featured Tom Petty, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, The Ramones, Johnny

Cash and Miles Davis, not to mention the incarnation of music series like *Rock Band™, Guitar

Hero™, Dance, Dance Revolution™* and *Just Dance™*. These video games are not the same as

they were twenty or even ten years ago. Some social studies teachers are missing a grand

opportunity with students. Subjects such as history, geography, and civics lend themselves to a

narrative. Participants like these games because they are not rote facts, but instead given anima and life through a story.

Finally, participants also commented that video games acted as a way to relieve stress after a long day. Assumedly, one of the elements that made the day long was the eight hour, multi-academic school day that required them to be prepared for six different subjects, not including any social interactions or teacher interactions that may have colored their day and made it stressful.

Undoubtedly, schools could take the elements that draw students to video games and allow them to work to the advantage of the teacher and the student in learning. Students mentioned collaboration on games, competition with their peers, and narratives in that medium as reasons why they played video games. If these characteristics of games could be transferred to the classroom, student engagement might increase, especially given a vehicle such as simulations. However, given my observations in the classroom, I doubt Miguel would have the opportunity to take the content he was learning and make connections to his life outside of school.

The Classroom
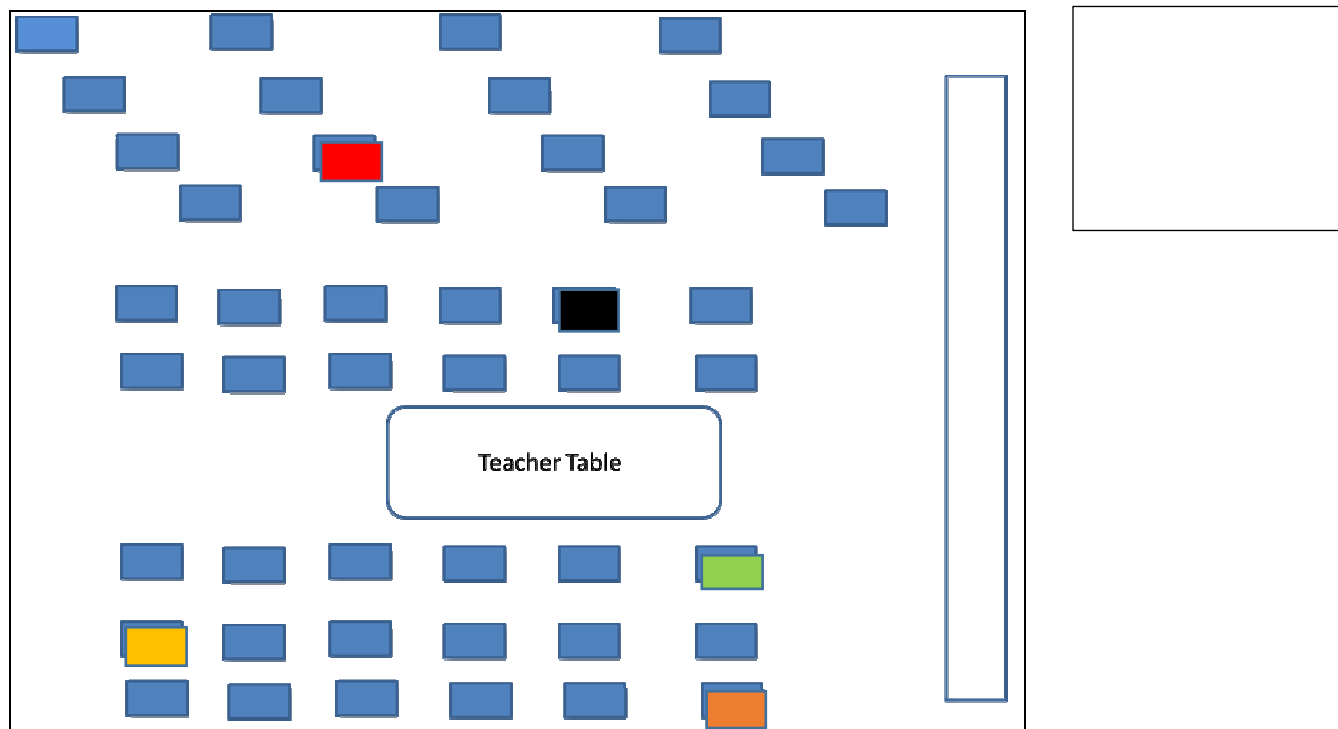
Figure 11. Teacher's room layout.

The teacher (Ms. Lawson) had her room laid out as indicated in Figure 11. Her classroom is not part of the main building, but is located in a trailer, which means the room is long and very narrow. There are two doors on the same wall, one on each side white board. In the "back" of the room, the desks were arranged in four diagonal rows of four. Five horizontal rows split by the teacher's workstation, which has her projector, computer, textbooks and other resources that she may need for the day.

When I first arrived on campus to begin the research study, I felt very nervous. My research began close to the start of the school year and I had recently started the new job that took me away from my research site. Walking in to the front office to sign in as a visitor and seeing the principal and support staff, I experienced a feeling of familiarity and distance at the same time. Ms. Lawson's trailer was housed on the complete other side of campus. In fact, I do

not think there is a greater distance in the school between the front office location and her classroom. This fact required me to walk through the commons area, past my old classroom, past my old co-workers and do the sort of glad-handing and small talk I feared I would have to do. I was well-liked at my previous school, both by fellow teachers and students, but I was still anxious to see them. Students met me with questions about why I left and what I was doing currently. In reflection, one of the primary reasons I felt anxious about going back was because I felt guilty about leaving the students. This research site is a rough, suburban school; there are drugs dealt and some gang affiliations that spill into the school hallways. The graduation rate is climbing, but, according to the latest data available from the Georgia Department of Education, the graduation rate was 67 percent (2014). There is a large number of students who struggle academically which can lead to frustration and apathy in a place that is compulsory to attend.

 I did connect with those students. We talked realistically about their individual situations and I tried my best to teach them in a way that they could learn. However, I came home exhausted and frustrated at the end of each day: Student apathy, constantly changing or additional initiatives from the school and county level, teachers who did not provide good opportunities for students all added up, on top of an hour commute each way. I was quickly reaching an extremely high level of teaching burnout when the opportunity to address several of these issues presented itself by means of a new employer.

 I accepted a job at a private K-8 school where my son attends. This new school is located in an affluent area and the students' families are upper middle class. I love to go to work much more than I did when I was at the research site. Still, I felt a sense that I abandoned these students for an easier career. As I walked through the hallway, I felt more and more guilty with every former student that I passed. Because I taught a junior-level class the year before, some of

my former students were now in Ms. Lawson's class and while they were happy to see me, I sensed some uneasiness on my part.

I sat on the side of the class, denoted by the orange rectangle in Figure 11. While all of their desks faced the white board, my desk faced them. From this vantage point, I was able to see all of the students' faces. The class began with a discussion of the previous day's topic: the *Articles of Confederation*. Ms. Lawson asked questions and the same two or three students answered them. Francisco sat in the back row, marked as the yellow rectangle in Figure 11. He leaned his head against the back wall, with is eyes closed and his ear buds in his ears. Early in the class, Ms. Lawson asked him to remove the ear buds, reminding him the policy against listening to music during class time. He removed them without arguing, but it was evident that this conversation was a daily occurrence between the two. Ms. Lawson turned on a PowerPoint presentation on the day's subject- moving from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution- and passed out a graphic organizer for the students to use to take notes.

As she began discussing the civics content, a smattering of talking started occurring between students at various locations in the classroom. While I observed from the side of the trailer, I picked up pieces of their conversations between gaps in the lecture. The students' discussions do not center on early American government. Some of the students were talking about their weekends, some of them conversed about how much they hate the class, and others discussed their phones. Some students ignored the lecture entirely, but took the graphic organizer and started working on it on their own. Josh took out a textbook and began to complete the work. He put in ear buds in, even though he heard Ms. Lawson tell Francisco to take them out. That same day, when I asked Josh about what they did during that class period, he proclaimed, "Today we was learning, we was filling out a chart on legislative, executive and, um, judicial

branch, like different types of branches, you know, I'm not really sure about it. And really, um, definitions on federalism and, um, anti-federalists, and that's all I really remember about that." Within a few short hours, he could not remember many specific details about what he had done in class. One of the nuggets I picked up in his conversation on this day was at the very beginning. When I asked him about class that day, he started with, "Today we was learning," but then quickly changed courses to state, "we was filling out a chart…." While I do not know if this change was a correction that he, in fact, was not so much learning as he was filling out paperwork, or if it was unintentional, Josh's comment, nonetheless, illuminated the issue for which I am conducting this study. In the social studies classrooms across the United States, and especially in this one on this day, students filled out worksheets and in a traditional classroom setting, did not learn the content. Josh's remark is even more revealing about the state of social studies if he did not intend self-correction, but rather sees social studies and filling out paperwork as synonymous, or at least two halves of a conjoined partnership.

Cierra sat in the front, just a couple of seats down from the teacher table and is identified by a green rectangle in Figure 11. Cierra is another one of the students who grabbed her book and began to work on the graphic organizer instead of waiting on the information to be shared via Ms. Lawson's presentation. Her view on the class is that it is a subject that she needs to graduate. "I'm on track to graduate so, I gotta do what I gotta do. I mean, last year, I would have been clownin' and joking around, but I don't want to mess up. Not this close. I gotta get out of this place." When asked to describe what they were working on in class, she was able to identify what the students were doing with relative ease.

Francisco, identified in the chart with a yellow rectangle in Figure 11, spent almost the entire class either with his head against the back wall of the trailer or looking down at his phone,

which he had hidden in his lap, underneath the desk. Later, he told me he was texting his

girlfriend and "played this game for a minute." When I asked him what the game was, he was

reluctant to tell me. Finally, he said,

> It's a game where you sell weed. I know it sounds bad, but it's not really. I mean, it's
>
> just about trying to get to the next level. You start out and you're selling at, like, your
>
> high school and shit, and then you move up when you're successful. And you have to buy
>
> stuff with the money you get. Like, you buy a safe so that when your boss or the cops
>
> come over, you can hide your money and weed in the safe. They beat you up, but you
>
> still got what you need. I'm on level 18.
>
> **CM:** What does that mean?
>
> **Francisco:** It means, I have people who work for me, but I'm not, like a boss yet.
>
> There's like, 40 levels, so I got a ways before I'm a boss.

Josh was one of the few students who tried to concentrate on the lecture with Ms.

Lawson. He wrote down the answers and, other than the quick glance at his phone, pretty much

stayed on track. "I gotta graduate. It's boring, but, it's ok. It's first thing in the morning and I

don't want to do a lot, anyways. I might as well just listen."

Miguel is represented in Figure 11 by the black rectangle. Like many of the students,

Miguel is drawn to his phone during the class. However, he spent a great deal of time put one

corner of the phone of his desk, held the opposite corner with a finger, and almost mindlessly

twirled the phone slowly, like a ballerina. Occasionally, he picked it up and "checked my

Instagram," which I counted him do four times. While he played with his phone, however, he did

stop to fill in notes that Ms. Lawson gives. I asked him if he wrote down all the notes or if he

missed anything while playing with his phone. "I got 'em. I mean, I had as many as [student

sitting next to him]. That class is just so damn boring. And it doesn't matter. I mean, when I turn it in, it'll be fine, so it's not like I really gotta pay attention the whole time, you know?"

Looking back at Table three in chapter two, I used these engagement cues to help me determine if students were engaged. Table 4 provided potential indications of engagement in regard to teacher-directed learning, which is what I witnessed on the days I observed. While it is impossible to know what was occurring in my participants' minds at the time, I saw some outward signs of engagement, such as note taking, listening, and asking questions. Most students participated in note taking, although, as mentioned, some students chose to complete the activities on their own, while others listened to Ms. Lawson and wrote down required information. Some students occasionally asked questions, but, again, mostly for clarification as opposed to deepening understanding.

Conversely, other displays of engagement were absolutely not present. Schmoker (2006) lists listening (as opposed to chatting or sleeping) as one of his cues. While some students did listen, a majority of students on their own conversations with people around them. There were a number of people on their phones, such as Miguel, who engaged enough to write down necessary notes and then, went back to his phone, or like Francisco, who put his head on the back of the wall. Cierra engaged with the content, but not with Ms. Lawson or Ms. Lawson's presentation. Schmoker (2006) also observed that, if students are engaged, they are paying attention by staying alert and tracking with their eyes. Practically no student looked up, except to write what was on the PowerPoint at the appropriate time. Likewise, students asked very few questions, provided very few response to questions and demonstrated little to no reaction to the content. Students knew that if Ms. Lawson asked a question and they stayed quiet long enough, she would give them the answer to their worksheet question and they would not need to interact with her.

Later, as I reflected about my time in Ms. Lawson's classroom, I also thought about what I would have done differently had I stayed at the school. Lecturing was what was reported to me by students as her primary pedagogical method. I taught approximately one-third to one-half of the students in the classes and knew how to reach most of these students. I thought about those students in my classes; asking questions, participating in discussion, not visibly tuning me out during PowerPoint presentations. So, what would I have done differently? First of all, I would have told jokes. As I taught, I liked to interject funny comments into the presentations. It was my experience that humor in the classroom helped students to stay engaged. Second, I would have involved the students by calling on them, volunteers and non-volunteers alike. I also liked to incorporate students into examples; making a shy student an absolute monarch or classroom leader the general of a regiment in the Revolutionary War. Third, I included students in examples class wide, such as having students create products in assembly lines that were their classroom rows, or unionizing against administration regarding unfair labor practices. I thought about my civics class in high school, when our teacher had us simulate the Constitutional Convention, assigned us delegations to research and argue from those respective delegates' perspectives at the Convention.

Again, I felt guilty leaving the school. What would I have been able to achieve with these same students in this same class? However, I was reminded that, if I stayed to teach at the research site, this same issue would still exist, as I would not be teaching this content or these students; they had moved on from my class and would be in Ms. Lawson's class regardless of my employment there. I once again found myself emotionally attached to the participants in the research and the other students in the classroom.
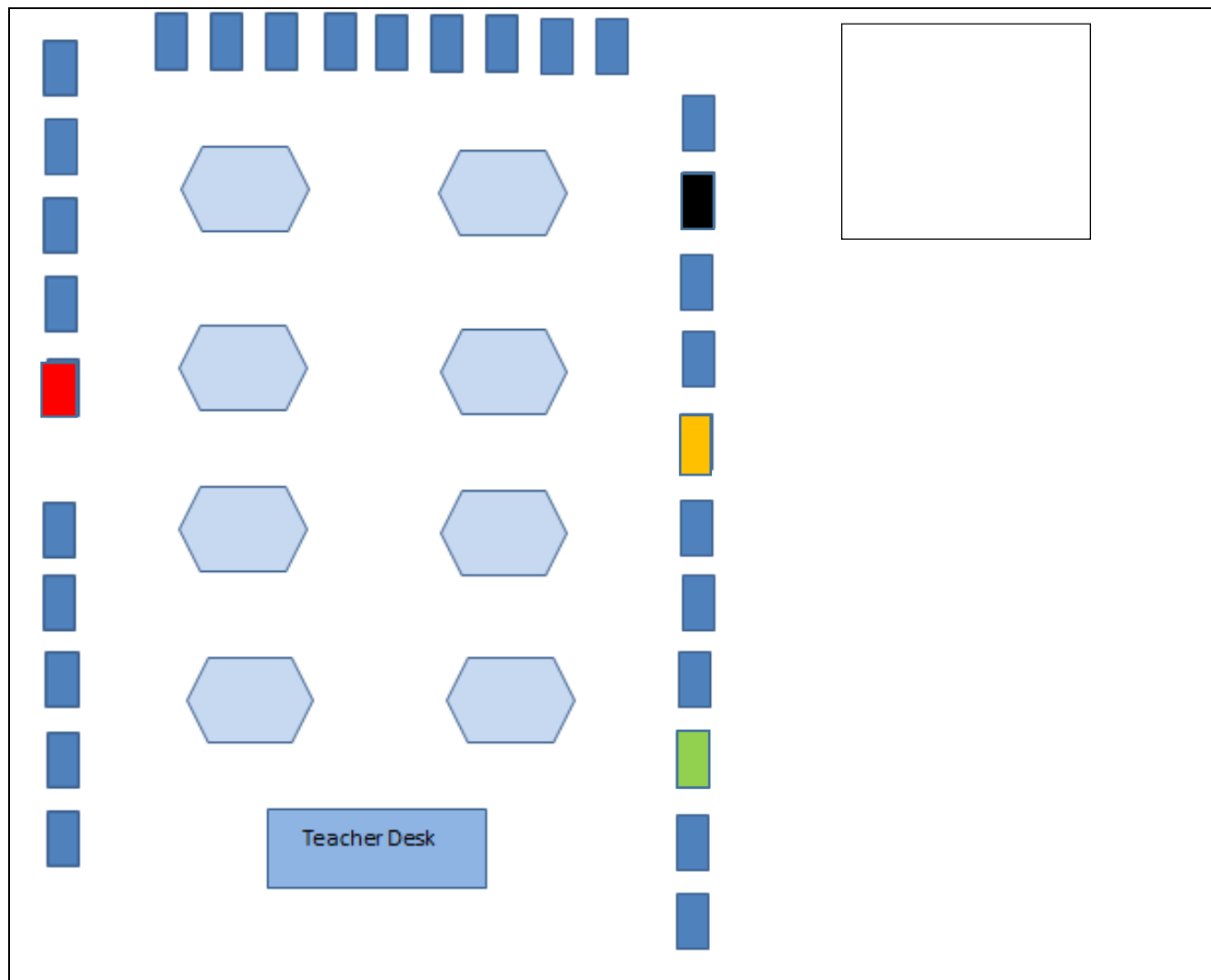
Playing eLECTIONS

Figure 12. Computer lab layout.

Students were made aware that they would play a game for this research, but that the

game would coincide with their state-mandated learning objectives. Ms. Lawson and I met at the

beginning of the semester to determine when her classes would be studying the Electoral

College. The optimal opportunity to implement the game was approximately one month into the

semester, and the game would be played over two days. Students would be provided some

background information by Ms. Lawson in the days prior to eLECTIONS. Leading up to the

game play, I was nervous about how the students would interact with the game. Would they like

it? Would they understand it? Would it interest them? Would they even play it? Still, I went back to the thoughts expressed by Jeremiah McCall (2011):

> The understanding of systems and contexts essential…that a…simulation game can generate goes beyond that created by many other kids of secondary sources. This is more than a matter of engagement, though game-based exercises are often highly engaging. It is a matter of putting students into dynamic recreations of roles and simulations….A simulation can place students at the center of complex systems where variety of variable factors ebb and flow simultaneously in ways that cannot be readily represented in other media (p. 13).

The class met in a computer lab. The room layout is depicted in Figure 12. In order to maintain my ability to observe student game play, I sat at various hexagonal tables and paced around the room. I knew that I would take on an emic role in my research to some degree, but, other than the interviews, I did not know how I would interact with students. When I walked, students occasionally asked me questions. While I was initially anxious about answering their questions, as I was concerned it would take away from my ability to observe, I quickly realized that I was a part of the research site myself. To disallow students to ask me questions would have been an unnatural occurrence in any learning environment. I am simultaneously a researcher and a teacher and I cannot compartmentalize myself into only one role around students. While I was asked questions by various students, the ability to walk around and move about the room allowed me a richer collection of data. Thus, I determined it was worth the occasional distraction of student inquiry, as it allowed for more authentic classroom data collection.

This example of answering the questions of students about the game perfectly demonstrated my role in the research, as well as part of the research itself. My experience

provided me an opportunity to more fully understand how eLECTIONS impacted the participants. Elliot Eisner (1998) explained,

> We can only appraise and interpret what we have been able to experience….We often tend to experience qualities as labeled objects: "tree," "chair," "classroom," "teacher," as so forth. That is, we move almost instantaneously from qualities we are able to see to their classification and labeling. We categorize. Of course, categorization can be useful….But categorization can also be a liability when it forecloses, as it often does, the exploration of the qualities that constitute *this* classroom, *that* student, *this* particular school. If our perceptual experience is aborted for the sake of classification, our experience is attenuated; we do not experience all that we can [italics original] (p. 17).

Of course, I did not answer questions only for those participating in this research. I talked with other students in the class. Students asked me questions regarding game play, such as, "What do I need to click on to go to a state?" while they were on the screen deciding where to campaign. They asked me questions about content within the game, such as, "What does it mean to support the Patriot Act?" and "What happens if I campaign in a state that doesn't support what I support?" Students also started asking more critical questions; for example, "Why would anyone ever go campaign in these states with so few Electoral votes? Why not just keep going to California, New York and Texas?" and "Why wouldn't states support universal health care in real life? That's when everyone has insurance, right?"

Not all of these questions came from my self-identified social studies haters; but some of them did. What is more, those students participating in the study were frequently engaged in conversations with those not in study; to think the participants played in a bubble outside an actual computer lab setting would be ludicrous and disingenuous. These interactions elicited

some of these queries from the participants, which demonstrated engagement in the game.

Schmoker (2006) determined that if students are asking questions regarding the content and

partaking in content-relevant or activity relevant conversations, there is a demonstration of

engagement from that student.

Students, those participating in the research and those not participating in the research

alike, would also attract my attention to their computer station to share with me what was going

on in their game. They would sometimes brag about a particular accomplishment, tell me how

they just made a strong move over their opponent or the computer, or show frustration at a

perceived slight in the game. These interactions were especially true with the participants. At one

point, Josh called me over to his station. "Yo, Mr. Moore; come here. You gotta see this. They

gave one of those 'Skeletons in the Closet' cards, right? So it [the game] asked me what I wanted

to do and I said, 'hold a press conference.' And I lost money. That's some bullshit." While at

first this quote may seem to push Josh towards disengagement, it is important to look at the

context. First, he was frustrated, but only a minor bit. Still that frustration indicated that he

wanted to do well in the game, again a sign of engagement. Second, as he said, "…this is

bullshit," he was laughing. That fact is important because it contextualized how he felt about the

game. "To understand what goes on in schools and classrooms requires sensitivity to how

something is said and done, not only what is said and done" (Eisner, 1998, p. 19). His frustration

was playful, not like when he described his confusion toward the class as it was taught by Ms.

Lawson.

The day prior to the scheduled days in the computer lab, Ms. Lawson gave the students

several graphic organizers, one of which is Appendix A. Appendix A is simply a list of terms

that are related to political identification, parties and elections. Some of the terms appeared

directly in eLECTIONS, including *two-party* and *multiparty systems, nominating conventions, primary election, general election, Electoral College* and *Electors*. Ms. Lawson informed me that these terms were taken directly from her required standards and are the terms she taught every year. In my interviews later that day and the next, I showed the students a copy of Appendix A and asked if they had seen the organizer and if it was useful. Several of the students had not seen it because they had been absent the previous day. Of the fifteen students who were interviewed for the study, two stated that it was helpful when playing the game and three said it was not helpful. The most common answer given about Appendix A was that they forgot they had it on them and/or did not relate organizer with eLECTIONS. Francisco was one of the few students who said the vocabulary organizer was helpful.

> **CM:** What vocabulary did you need to know to help you in this game?

> **Francisco:** Um, what was it? Most of the vocabularies. I didn't know any of them and I needed to know most of them to do good in the game.

> When I asked Miguel about the graphic organizer, he recognized it. I asked if it helped him at all. "That? No. I never pulled it out." Miguel's answers typified the response of most of the participants. However, having just received and worked on this graphic organizer the day before and then be asked to participate in an activity in which the graphic organizer was relevant, why did most students fail to connect the two activities together? In essence, there was no connection for the students because they did not connect with the graphic organizer during class. Just like on most instructional days, the students were given a graphic organizer and asked to complete it. These mundane tasks were now habitual and the lack of engagement in class or need for active participation made the graphic organizer serve three purposes: The standard was taught, a potential grade was entered into the grade book, and another fifty-five minute period of

time passed with a civics-oriented task. Chief among those purposes not served by the graphic organizer was to act as a learning guide to help the students better understand the material.

The goal during game play was to meet over two days in the same lab so the students could play eLECTIONS at least twice. When I arrived the first day, I was informed that there was a mandatory scheduled standardized test for two periods the next day one of which was during one of the periods when I planned to do my research. Admittedly, I was extremely frustrated upon finding out that one of my dedicated research days was going to be altered. At the beginning of the school year, I met with one of the assistant principals to examine potential days to research. My goal, of course, was to not schedule research on a day where there was a known conflict, such as a school assembly, or more likely, a standardized test. I was not given this test date as one that had a possible conflict. Once my research dates were cleared by the assistant principal, Ms. Lawson and I also conferred to ensure that the research dates did not conflict with her semester class schedule. Yet, despite these two meetings, this one standardized test was missed on the schedule and impacted my ability to observe and, therefore, gave me one less hour to observe game play. I was also unable to conduct any interviews during this time, as well, as students were all required to stay in their assigned classroom or designated spaces.

While this missed test certainly was a point of frustration for me, it was definitely understandable how a standardized test could be undetected by two different school personnel; standardized tests are so ubiquitous in today's public schools that one test could easily be unnoticed. As the American school system becomes further and further entrenched in the standardized test culture, quantifying the learning experience of students in to percentile ranks and scaled scores is routine. And, more and more instruction time is needed to administer these assessments. The merit of standardized testing has long been argued, both affirming its place in

the 21st century classroom and damning their existence as an unnecessary evil that prohibits actual learning (see Ravich, 2011; Sacks, 2000; Thompson, 2001). On this day, a standardized test replaced an opportunity for students to participate in a civics-oriented simulation that engaged students. Students reported that this simulation helped them learn the content, although this study was designed to research student engagement. Perhaps it was ironic that a genuine learning opportunity was replaced by a standardized test. However, my inclination is to see this substitution as business as usual in the current educational climate.

Still, I was able to observe enough students in enough classes to reach the saturation point of data, "the point of data collection where the information [the researcher] get[s] becomes redundant" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 69). Students were allowed to play by themselves or with a partner. For the most part, students chose to play by themselves for the first game. I observed was a high level of student-directed learning engagement. Across the lab, students conversed about the game, whether in competition or in signs of frustration and most played the game for the duration of the class period. There were definitely students who talked about non-academic issues, used their cell phones or had their heads down. However, only two or three students in each class demonstrated indicators of disengagement. Most students played against another student in subsequent games, which increased the level of competitiveness in the room. Once students gained an edge over their counterpart in their particular game, the winning students made sure that others around them knew of their success. These joyful outbursts led to other students asking what the commotion was about from the other side of the room, which allowed for all kinds of conversations to take place. In the subsequent sections of this report, I describe how students participated and interacted with eLECTIONS including the students

overall view of the game, what they did not like about the game, and how the game experience compared to regular class.

Overall Game Play

In general, the engagement level in the computer lab was much higher than the engagement level in the classroom. Students were able to construct, in Papert's constructionistic sense, a candidate and make decisions based on a multitude of factors ranging from surprises in the game to moves from their competitor to the change in Electoral votes from particular states.

Francisco: It was fun. It was enjoyable and at the same time we get to witness how all the political parties have to go through to get people's votes. How to get the popular, how to get the money, how they spend the money. So now we all get to see exactly how it is.

Cierra: Well, like I said, it was the fact that I actually got to read and I had to read like, what every state believed in just so I could win. To see which one I wanted to spend my money on, like for immigration or the environment, or education. I felt like I was involved in making the decision. [smiling] I liked it. I like it more because I actually got to read the stuff and actually pay attention. I had to actually read the things to know what to do to win, even though I lost.

Miguel: It was pretty fun. I learned a little bit more about elections. I was into it. The game style was kinda like the game Life™. It was good. It showed that not everything goes as planned. How easy it was. Like, it wasn't confusing. The information came clearly about what you had to do.

Josh: The game was fun. I actually learned some stuff that I didn't know. Like the Patriot Act. It was interesting. It was fun. I really wasn't that bored when I got the game.

Domain		
Included Terms	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term

Fun
Interesting
Into it
Liked
Learned
Involved
Competitive
Things I believe in
Interactive

Are attributes of → engagement
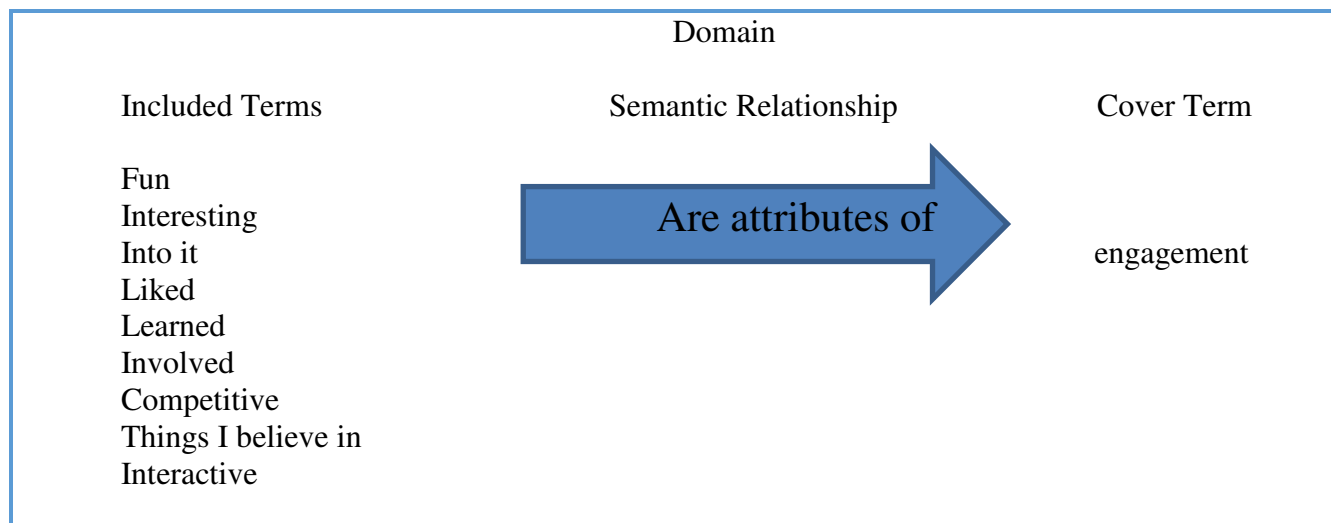
Figure 13. Semantic relationship: Attributes of engagement

In three of the overall responses, the word "fun" was chosen to describe the game. They were all asked about the game with the exact same question: "What were your overall thoughts about the game?" The word "fun" is important here, however small and expected as it may seem. In chapter two, I mentioned that Prensky (2007) stated that one of the elements of games is that "Games are fun." These comments demonstrated that the students were able to view the game as an actual game. They may have seen the game as a different computer activity, such as a skill development website, a content review activity, or a waste of time. Instead, they noted that the game was "fun," and even though Cierra did not use the word fun, she stated she "liked it." While an activity does not have to be fun to be liked, adding her response to the other three declarations of "fun" allows the assumption that the students were engaged in eLECTIONS. Miguel went so far as to say he "was into it," a substituted phrase for "engaged." Josh added that "it was interesting," which is necessary for students to stay engaged. There has to be an element of interest in order to keep students' attention. As summed up by McCall (2011) "That simulations offer engaging modern multimedia presentations…to today's students is clear….Games can spark learner interest and engagement, and promote learning through a

variety of modes. This point is reasonably self-evident and need only be touched upon briefly" (p. 19).

When asked about the political parties that they chose, all but one of the students I interviewed picked the Democratic Party. I asked Francisco why he selected the Democratic Party. "One of the issues was [to] oppose universal health care. I don't think universal health care should exist. I mean, everyone is entitled to their own health care and yeah it'll help those who aren't working to have health care but then they'll argue that those people who aren't working should be working for health care." This response is revealing in a number of ways. First of all, Francisco clearly did not know that the political party most likely to promote universal health care is the Democratic Party. However, he also did not like the idea of universal health care. When students picked their party and political positions, frequently the game randomized which party supports the chosen issues, as well as which states leaned politically in a particular direction. I wonder if, when Francisco started the game, the opposition to universal health care was listed under the Democratic Party, which led to his choice of that party.

Cierra also chose the Democratic Party.

CM: Why did you choose that political party?

Cierra: I like their views more than Republic [sic], especially for the immigration part, 'cause they support it, unlike Republics. [I also picked] education, um, also environment, um health care, let me think- what was my fifth one?- I think it was taxes.

CM: Is there any particular reasons why you chose those?

Cierra: Because it's things that I believe in. I chose something that, I like, I think is important.

Miguel noted that his selection of the Democratic Party was personal to him. When students are able to make that personal connection to the content, the opportunity for engagement is much higher. One of the elements of the game is the personalization of the candidate and their stances. While Miguel was competitive and enjoyed playing the game, the connectivity to real life allowed for his engagement.

CM: What political party did you pick?

Miguel: Democrat.

CM: Why?

Miguel: Well, I see Republicans as sort of the wealthy upper class and a majority of the lower class and middle class would be Democrat.

CM: Do you remember some of the issues that you picked?

Miguel: I was against criminalizing illegal immigrants. I was for affirmative action. Um…I forgot the rest.

CM: Ok. Is there a reason you picked those particular issues?

Miguel: Well, I come from, my mom is an illegal immigrant, so like, and I feel for others, like, if you have to split up their families it would be, you know, really traumatizing on the kids.

One of the common threads between video games that students played in the personal lives and the engagement in eLECTIONS was competition. I mentioned previously that the competitive level between the students was almost palpable. There was a lot of gamesmanship between opponents, especially verbally. Below are comments from the participants regarding competition.

Cierra: When I saw that I was losing, I didn't want to lose, so the competitive part kicked in. I was talking to friends.

CM: About the game?

Cierra: No, not about the game. I was getting distracted. But then I started losing and I could hear their conversations, but I just focused on the game. But competition, that's the thing that kept me going.

Other students echoed this feeling of competition.

CM: Did you get any "Skeletons in your Closet."

Miguel: Oh, yeah. The game cheated because I kept getting all the bad luck and my partner kept getting all the good luck. So he got more money.

CM: Sounds like you were a little competitive about it.

Miguel: Well, yeah! I wanted to win, but, oh well. I was just caught up with it at the time, you know?

Josh: It was fun to compete against somebody. I was mad when he was winning. I caught up at the end, but he still won.

Schmoker (2006) also denoted that an element of student-centered engagement is content or activity-related discussion. If students are talking about what they are studying or the work they are doing, it demonstrates that they are actively engaged in the class. Josh commented that he engaged with other students in a non-competitive fashion.

CM: Did you talk to anyone about the game?

Josh: A little bit. I talked to [student] because he was asking, "What are the fundraisers?" and we talked. And I asked [student] about getting started. And when I was mad, I was kinda cursing a little bit, so people heard me.

CM: I heard you say, "Expected return? What is that?" Did you get an answer?

Josh: Yeah, it's how much money you can get in the fundraisers, right?"

CM: Yeah. And you were able to explain that process to [student]?

Josh: Mmm-hmm. He was like, "How you make money?"

In summarizing their game experiences, each student indicated that he or she enjoyed the game, and enjoyed learning. It is possible that students told me the game was fun in order to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. However, I do not believe that response was thought to be somewhat obligatory from them. All of the participants read in the informed consent form that they were able to tell me their thoughts on the game, positive or negative and that there was no right answer. I reiterated that there was no right or wrong answer and to be honest about their game experiences. I also restated that neither I nor Ms. Lawson could grade them on their answers and that I would not tell anyone what they specifically said about the game or Ms. Lawson's class. I believe that their responses to the questions I asked and their positive engagement during the games was genuine. Indeed, below are their critiques about the game experience.

What was Not Good about the Game

The most common thread the students noted was the fact that it was not easy to start the game. Students had a difficult time understanding what to do after they created their candidate. Francisco offered an honest appraisal of his thoughts on getting started. "It was ok. At first, it was confusing. I didn't know what I was supposed to do and then I was like, 'Oh, I have to figure out what this party believes and what I should do at this fundraiser and try and get more money.'"

The students were given directions, but they were at the bottom of the page and, if students were not looking for them, they would probably not find them. The directions were also not very thorough. Once students arrived at the screen which allowed them to see what the Electoral Map would look like, there was a great deal of information and movement on the screen that made understanding how to proceed difficult.

Francisco: The fact that, in the beginning, it was kinda hard to understand.

Cierra: At first I really didn't know what I was supposed to do, but then you get the hang of it. I didn't think it was complicated. The graphics were not amazing. At first, I was like, "This is probably going to be boring. At first I wasn't too into it because of the graphics, but then, it [the graphics] was really simple.

CM: Was it tough to figure out?

Josh: Yeah. 'Cause I didn't know what to do- I was just clicking stuff- and then my partner showed me. There wasn't really nothing bad, I just couldn't figure it out at first.

Miguel: I would say, in the beginning, when you had to choose what the Democrats believed in and pick, you know, you're stances or whatever, it was a bit confusing. Me and my partner just split it up; what he liked and what I liked.

Me: How long did it take for you to figure it out?

Miguel: I would like, until the fourth turn, fifth turn. It kinda gives you the options, like, would you rather do this, like, little, um, concert or, like, I think it was a little barbeque. And you have to read the description to see which one goes with your point of view.

Playing the Game versus Regular Class

Not surprisingly, what the students dislike about social studies in general (boredom with the content) is exactly what they do not like about the social studies class specifically. In

contrast, because they found the game interesting and fun, it was obvious that they preferred the simulation to regular class.

> **Francisco:** The difference was that in class you're just looking at a board, you're taking notes and when you're playing the game you're just like, enjoying yourself on the computer. And at the same time you're learning the same information that you would learn from taking notes or something. You could've went in there without knowing anything and learn something, but at the same time, it would've helped if you learned the vocabulary before so you can actually understand what they're talking about. This was more interactive, you had to do more thinking.
>
> **CM:** Did you like that or not like that?
>
> **Francisco:** I liked it.
>
> **CM:** Did it keep you more occupied during the time you were playing the game or did you feel like you wanted to go do something else?
>
> **Francisco:** No, it kept me occupied. I was focused on the game.

Francisco mentioned two important elements that kept him engaged in the game. First, I understood his last statement, "No. it kept me occupied. I was focused on the game" to indicate that he was, in fact, engaged. Self-awareness about being occupied demonstrated engagement just as much as those who realized they were daydreaming during class were aware that they were disengaged in the class. Francisco also listed two reasons why he was engaged. First, the game was more interactive. As previously mentioned, there was not a great deal of interaction between students and Ms. Lawson during class time, as well as a lack of academic interaction between peers. In the classes I observed, the teacher utilized a format of lecture and worksheet where students tuned out the teacher to work independently, daydream, engage with their

phones, or engage with their peers. However, in this game, Francisco mentioned that the game was interactive. It required participation from him in order to continue to the next part of the content or lesson. If Francisco stared blankly at the computer screen while in the computer lab just as he stared blankly in Ms. Lawson's trailer, the screen and game would have been static. Instead, the game mandated his involvement, and Francisco chose to participate.

Reviewing Table 4 in chapter two, which highlights indicators of engagement in student-directed learning, there were several that I observed. First, students were reading critically. While they were not writing anything down and Schmoker (2006) indicates that active reading takes place with a writing utensil in hand, students were, in some cases, reading the content. One of the reasons Cierra puts forth as to why she likes the game is "I liked it. I like it more because I actually got to read the stuff and actually pay attention." Students also mentioned discussion and asking questions- but not to their teacher- to each other, as observed in the quote about Josh asking what a term from the game meant. He was not familiar with the term, he asked his classmates, who in turn responded with a correct definition, he applied the definition, and then was able to share his new-found knowledge with another student in the class who was struggling with the same concept.

Second, Francisco noted that, while playing the game, "you had to do more thinking." The cognitive connection between the game and Francisco attracted him to continue to play the game. In the general classroom, Francisco chose to participate or chose not to participate in class and his choice had very little outcome one way or the other. He knew he would get the information somehow- the PowerPoint presentation, copying a classmate's graphic organizer later, or working on his own- and in his thought process he discovered he had to produce almost nothing for the same result as an effort to try in class. Francisco, as noted at the beginning of this

chapter, was not a great student. He struggled to "get by" and was concerned with passing the class. However, he did like to think. The challenge to be cognitively active perpetuated his involvement in the game.

Cierra's comparison between class with Ms. Lawson and the eLECTIONS game brought out another critical reason about why was engaged in the game. Below is her follow-up on why she liked the game more than regular class.

> **Cierra:** Usually, with a regular class, you just take the notes and you don't really read through it yourself, unlike the game, I actually got time to read, like what I was supposed to do, or what it meant, you know? Unlike the notes, when you just take it and write it and don't really look at it. You just write fast and you don't really analyze it or think about it.

Cierra's engagement in class was slowed by the fact that she did not understand what she was learning. When in class, she would just write quickly and not be concerned to "really analyze it or think about it." Like Francisco, Cierra's disengagement in Ms. Lawson's class stemmed from not being able to understand the content; for her, the reason was due to speed. "You just write fast," she said about taking notes in the regular class.

Creating and planning are mentioned as signs of student-directed learning engagement. The entire process of the game is creating the candidate, creating their platform, and creating their stance on issues. Once chosen, students must plan which states to visit, how much money to spend, which fundraiser best suits their needs and how to solve problems when they arise. Finally, students interacted with each other, especially in the heat of competition. While some of their gestures and exchanges with other students may not be appropriate for a school

environment, these gestures and exchanges also demonstrate the level of engagement in the classroom.

However, while Cierra played eLECTIONS, she "actually got time to read, like what I was supposed to do, or what it meant…." Like Francisco, Cierra wanted to learn, but the inability to operate at the same reckless and excessive speed as the state required Ms. Lawson to teach prohibited her ability to learn. Ironically, the goal to teach Cierra the most amount of information possibly left her with a lack of opportunity to learn much at all. However, when working at her own pace, Cierra had time to understand the content, which kept her engaged in the game.

Josh: It was interesting, especially in, like, Ms. Lawson's class I get bored, and like, start to daydream, but with the game I was, like, into it. I was actually playing and having fun.

CM: Why are you bored in class?

Josh: I don't understand what she be doing, what we're supposed to be learning. I be lost most of the time.

CM: Did you feel like you understood what was going on in the game?

Josh: For the most part.

CM: When you came into the room, you said, "I hate this class." Why?

Josh: 'Cause I don't understand nothing. Like right now, I'm failing the class and I don't want to fail. I want to graduate. I just don't understand. I'm lost.

CM: Is it the content? Is it the teaching?

Josh: It might be the teaching. 'Cause at first when we started, she was giving us these guided notes, but it was like, all over the place. I was like, "Where we at?" Then she made us do some work from the book. It was like, fifteen questions. And you had to right the questions and then write, like, a paragraph for each one. It was like, OD [overdose].

Josh was extremely frustrated by his inability to understand what was happening in class. He wanted to graduate and he saw this class as an impediment to that process. Like Cierra and Francisco, Josh was inhibited in the regular class by Ms. Lawson's pedagogical approach of the lecture note method.

CM: How did the game compare to class?

Miguel: A lot more **engaged**. Most days, it's just PowerPoint and talking. Just waiting for her to get through. And everybody else is talking. Sometimes Ms. Lawson just gives up. That game was a lot more exciting and the information that needed to get through, got through. The game was more interactive [emphasis added].

Miguel verbalized the key word of this study without any prompt for that specific word: Engagement. In essence, Miguel demonstrated what the other participants vocalized with the other cover terms: Fun, Interesting, Into it, Liked, Learned, Involved, Competitive, Things I believe in, Interactive. He drew a direct contrast of the interaction and engagement that he found playing eLECTIONS to the everyday activities of the regular class. The last two sentences, "That game was a lot more exciting and the information that needed to get through, got through. The game was more interactive," succinctly summarized what was expressed from Josh, Cierra, and Francisco.

Summary

Students in the regular class were not provided with engaging instruction. The participants in this study disliked social studies, primarily because it was boring, and the class did nothing to suppress this dislike. Students saw the class as a waste of time because they did not perceive the subject matter to be relevant, or as obligation they needed to fulfill to graduate. Through eLECTIONS, many of the students engaged in the social studies content. The

participants shared that they engaged because they had time to read and understand the content, they enjoyed the competitive element of the game, and also worked at their own pace. The participants enjoyed playing video games in their personal time because it allowed them to interact and compete- sometimes with their friends and at other times, with unknown players online. Elements of the games that they enjoyed in their personal time were evident in eLECTIONS and, in general, the participants responded positively to the simulation game.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

While determining a relationship between social studies haters and engagement through eLECTIONS was a major component of this study, the second major question in this research was crafted to determine if elements of UDL theory also enhanced the learning experience for these participants. In this chapter, I discuss which elements of the UDL theory that were evident in eLECTIONS, as well as those components of the theory that are not found in the game. Later in the chapter, I provide limitations of the study, a critique of the game itself, and discoveries during research that could benefit from further investigation. Also included in this chapter are some of the major findings of the study, including the connection between eLECTIONS and the self-prescribed social studies haters, as well as how UDL theory connections were woven through the simulation game. While data were presented in the previous chapter, there are some data evident in this chapter for the purpose of summarizing these important findings. Finally, I provide a reflection on the study.

Connecting to Universal Design for Learning

As previously discussed in chapter two, Universal Design for Learning theory is focused on creating as wide an array as possible for students to learn and demonstrate how they learn. There are three major guiding principles. The first principle of UDL is to "Provide multiple means of representation" (CAST, 2012). Within each principle there are guidelines and checkpoints, which specify ways in which the principle is identified, as noted in Table 6 in chapter two.

The first guideline under this principle is to "provide multiple options for perception," specifically for auditory and visual information. Within eLECTIONS, students had a variety of means by which they could access data. First, the information was presented graphically. As

students viewed electoral maps of the U.S., the ability for each student to scroll over each state provided the learner with data regarding the views of that particular state, and the strength that a particular party displayed in that state.
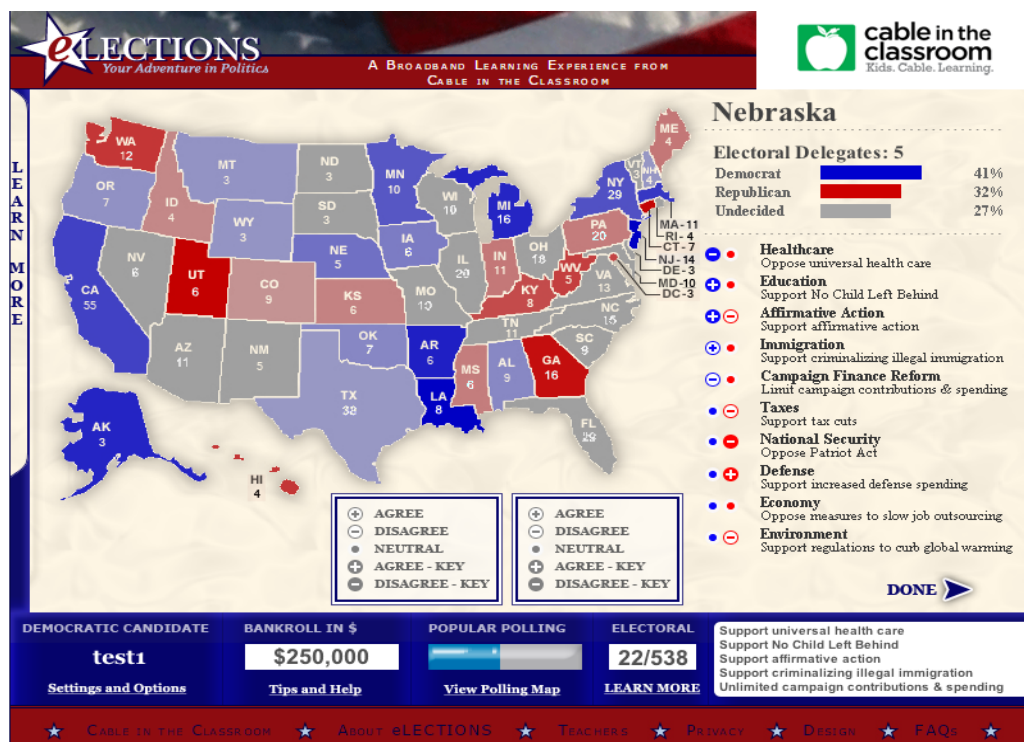
Figure 14. Visual display of information: Nebraska

In Figure 14, visual information about Nebraska is presented on the right-hand side of the screen. In this randomized scenario from the game, Nebraska is depicted as leaning toward a Democratic Electoral win, but the state is not fully committed to the Democratic platform; hence, the color of the state is light blue instead of dark blue. That color, and color variation, allowed students to more readily identify which states were inclined to vote in a particular fashion. However, there are other visual cues that helped identify key aspects of the simulation to the students. Students were provided a key in the bottom middle part of the screen to identify what the column on the right specified. Students could see that Nebraska had five electoral votes and, even though the state was light blue, indicating a soft Democratic stance, one of the first items

students had the opportunity to notice was that Nebraska's citizens strongly opposed universal health care. At the very bottom right of the screen eLECTIONS provided a reminder checklist of what each candidate's platform included. In Figure 14, this candidate supported universal health care. Students could have then astutely decided not to campaign on a pro-universal health care platform when they traveled to Nebraska. They could have also noted that Nebraska had five electoral votes and made a decision as to how much time they wanted to campaign in Nebraska.
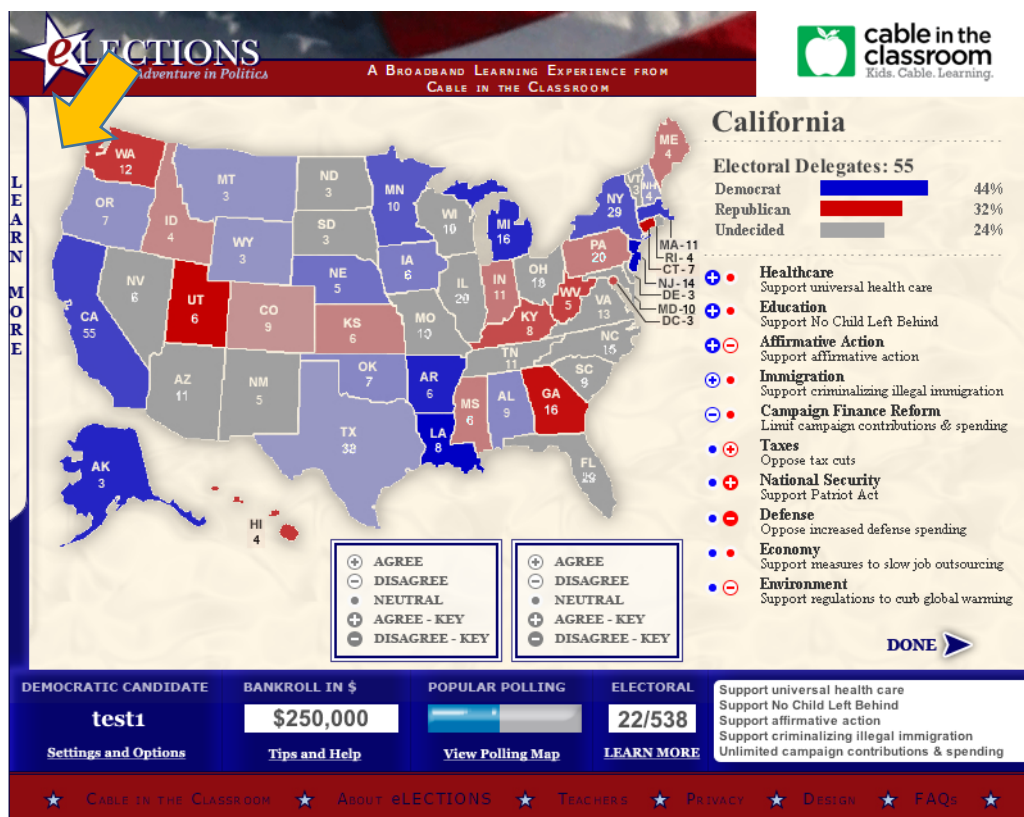
Figure 15. Visual display of information: California

In Figure 15, another light blue state is displayed; California. On the map California is not as light in color, which let the students know that California, while not as firm a Democratic stronghold as the dark blue states, such as Alaska and Michigan, was more congruent with the particular candidate's ideology than Nebraska. To wit: California does support universal health care, similar to this candidate, but unlike Nebraska. While both California and Nebraska support

Affirmative Action and No Child Left Behind, California represented 55 electoral votes. This

information, visually represented on the screen allowed the students to make critical decisions

about time, resources, and campaign strategy in regard to these two states. The goal of this

research was not to determine the critical thinking opportunities provided by the game for the

sake of learning; however, one of the reasons students gave for being engaged in the game was

the opportunity to learn the content. The engagement was in the learning.

In UDL guideline one there are provisions of alternative auditory information, as well.

On the left side of Figure 15, a yellow arrow points to the "Learn More" tab. When students

clicked on this tab, they accessed additional information, presented in video.

Figure 16. In-game explanation

Figure 16 displays what students saw when they clicked on the "Learn More" tab.

Students were able to access information presented by *The History Channel, C-SPAN,* and *CNN*

Student News. These videos directly correlated with the process students experienced during the game. On the top left, the orange arrow points to video selections that provide students information they might need to start playing the game, including topics such as polling and declaring their candidacy, as well as platform selections. Below those selections, the red arrow points to videos that detail primaries, which the students play in the first few rounds of the game. The green arrow points to information regarding political conventions, which generally mark the halfway point through the game. Students had the opportunity to select any number of these videos at any point during game play, which provided another means of access to information during game play to allow greater understanding. These options also highlight other subcategory checkpoints under principle one, including the opportunity to "activate or supply background knowledge (3.1), and "guide information processing, visualization and manipulation (3.3)" (CAST, 2012). Again, the focus on UDL is to create as much accessibility as possible and providing multiple means of visual and auditory learning differentiates eLECTIONS from the type of learning the students were accustomed to in Ms. Lawson's class.

Another guideline under principle one is to "Provide options for language, mathematical notation, and symbols" (CAST 2012). Included in this guideline are several checkpoints, which are covered by the game. First, checkpoint 2.1 states the pedagogy or output should "clarify vocabulary and symbols" (CAST 2012). In Figure 16, the purple arrow is directed at a list of terms students will find in the game. When a student scrolled over the term, the definition would appear in a small, white box to clarify any misunderstandings. Again looking at videos, considerable explanation of terminology is presented to the students, and not just for the game. Many of the terms that appeared in eLECTIONS' videos and linked definitions also appeared on the vocabulary sheet that Ms. Lawson gave them as required terms (Appendix A).

Symbols are frequently used in eLECTIONS, as well. The game pieces are a donkey and elephant, which represent the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively, and when the participants landed on specific spots, a symbol like a skull and crossbones would be used as imagery for a negative issue that the player had to address in the game. When participants landed on a "Lucky Break" board space, a four-leafed clover appeared. Audio symbols were evident, as well. When students made the correct decisions selecting their fundraising options, a cash register "cha-ching" sound was played. Guideline two also recommends illustrations through multiple media, which has already been demonstrated in the use of videos and the virtual game board.

Recommendations in principle two of UDL include that educators "provide multiple means of action and expression" (CAST 2012). One of the ways in which students can have opportunities to differentiate their action and expression is to work at their own pace. eLECTIONS does not have a set time to make a decision. In fact, during my research, I would leave a game open for multiple days, often time between decisions I was making as a player of the game and there was no lag or interruption of the game. Students who wanted to read every detail or needed the time to think about their decision had that opportunity. Again referring to Cierra, one of the ways in which she stayed engaged in the game was the fact that she read and worked at her own pace. While the class had a finite time, the game did not. Students could save the game on the computer station they played on and save it for a different day. If the students had internet access at home, they could also start a game at home and access it at any point, thereby eliminating any time constraint.

Another objective of principle two is found in guideline six; "guide appropriate goal setting" (CAST, 2012). One of the means of accomplishing this objective is by putting goals in

an obvious place (Gordon, Proctor, & Dalton, 2012). The bottom blue line in Figure 15 demonstrates an opportunity to realize that prospect. In that blue bottom line, participants were privy to specific, individualized information about how their game was progressing. On the far right side, the reminder of the participant's platform allowed her or him to remember her or his stance when making financial and traveling decisions. Left of that box is the total number of achieved electoral votes. This information changed as the game was played so the participant knew how many more votes they needed to try and reach the magical number of 270. Continuing left in the blue box, players saw their stance in the popular vote, and finally, their bankroll. Under the electoral vote, popular vote, and bankroll were even more links designed to educate and instruct students on game play and content knowledge.

Principle three- "Provide Multiple Means of Engagement"- is where UDL theory is most closely connected to this study. Guideline seven asks educators to "provide options for recruiting interest" and chief among the checkpoints under the guideline is to "optimize individual choice and autonomy" (CAST, 2012). Student choice is absolutely key in eLECTIONS. From almost the very beginning, participants were able to create their own personalized characteristics on to this game. In the construction of their candidate, the participants chose their political party, their platforms, their key issues, and even their candidate's name. This sort of constructionist building is Papert's theory transferred to the social studies. The participants did, in fact, build candidates; they constructed characters that gave the participants a stronger sense of engagement and even understanding of the content. Once the game began, student autonomy was escalated by the fact that students chose where they campaigned, how much money they spent, how they responded to various crises and obstacles, and how they campaigned. Because eLECTIONS is a game, it is randomized so that there is no definitive "right" answer on any given move. For example, if a

participant landed on an "Announcement" board space, she or he may have three options to respond to the announcement: First, the player might hold a press conference, go on a talk show to share views, release a statement, or simply do nothing. If the player chose to go on a talk show, their poll numbers may increase. If the student landed on an "Announcement" board space again and had the exact same options, going on a talk show may net them negative poll numbers because the public thought the candidate was piling on their opponent. This randomization is not only a characteristic of a game, but it requires that students make autonomous choices.

Guideline seven contains an emphasis on relevance, value, and authenticity (Gordon, Proctor, & Dalton, 2012). In Figure 9 in chapter four, one of included terms for boredom was that social studies "doesn't matter." Francisco also noted this perceived lack of relevance when he stated, "I gotta be able to apply it," remarking that math was much more applicable in his mind. Miguel concurred. "I really don't really care much about it, 'cause I'm not really going to use it in the future." However, this game allowed students to see the inner workings of a process in which, if they were American citizens, they could partake immediately. All of the participants were 18 years old. If they so desired, they could become registered voters.

Controversial issues certainly appeared in the game. Among the issues participants picked from was the Patriot Act, border patrol, affirmative action, No Child Left Behind, universal health care, and job outsourcing. As Miguel mentioned, some of these issues affected the participants personally such as immigration reform and No Child Left Behind. When the participants were able to make connections with these issues, the authenticity of the game was more evident.

One of the checkpoints under guideline eight is to "foster collaboration and community" (CAST, 2012). There certainly existed a sense of competition within the participants- their competitiveness was exemplified with their views on video games in chapter four- but a comradery developed with the students as they played the games. Students engaged in conversation about the content and about game play, extolling the aspects of the game they liked while also sharing their frustrations with other students. Around the computer lab, participants engaged in conversation. Once again, an example of this student exchange below captured this concept:

CM: Did you talk to anyone about the game?

Josh: A little bit. I talked to [student] because he was asking, "What are the fundraisers?" and we talked. And I asked [student] about getting started. And when I was mad, I was kinda cursing a little bit, so people heard me.

CM: I heard you say, "Expected return? What is that?" Did you get an answer?

Josh: Yeah, it's how much money you can get in the fundraisers, right?"

CM: Yeah. And you were able to explain that process to [student]?

Josh: Mmm-hmm. He was like, "How you make money?"

Other conversations around the lab took place that were similar in feel to this discussion. At one point, Miguel discussed the name of his candidate, Quavo, with Josh. Quavo is a member of the hip hop group Migos, a relatively new hip hop group from the American South. While this shared information may seem important only on the surface, it once again highlighted the autonomy each student had in various aspects of the game, including naming the candidate a moniker of their choice.

CM: Did I hear say you named your candidate Quavo?

Miguel: Yeah. (laughs) You know who Quavo is? Damn, Mr. Moore.

CM: Well, I kind of do. I had to ask someone about it. Don't give me too much credit.

Miguel: Aw, that's lame. You haven't heard Migos? They tight.

CM: I've heard of them, but I couldn't recognize any of their songs. But why did you name your candidate Quavo?

Miguel: I thought you could name him whatever I wanted.

CM: Yeah, you could. I was just curious.

Miguel: I don't know. It just popped in my head, I guess.

CM: You listen to their music a lot?

Miguel: Yeah. I was probably listening to them before I came in the class.

By constructing his candidate with a mark of his choice, Miguel created a figure with whom he identified. Had the game given the participants predetermined names, like Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, or even Player One, it would have stymied the buy-in from the student immediately upon beginning the game. However, by placing that choice on the participants, they automatically assume control of the candidate and make it their own, allowing for ownership of their destiny in the game. I noted this naming of characters reminded me of *Oregon Trail*, both when I played it as a student and when I facilitated game play as a teacher. The game was very straight forward. While different scenarios occurred during game play and choices had to be made, there were less opportunities for students to personalize the game in *Oregon Trail*. However, at the beginning, there was a screen which allowed students to pick the name of up to five passengers in the wagon. Frequently, my students and I chose others in the room to be passengers, as well as other teachers or administrators. These character names always induced a round of laughter when, later in the game, a message would flash on the screen that "Mr. Moore

has a snakebite" or, eventually, "Mr. Moore has died of dysentery." I doubt students would have

been as invested in the game if the message said, "Passenger Four has died of dysentery;" a lack

of investment would exist for Passenger Four. However, that personal connection to the

character created a collaborative and connected community as students later asked me in the

classroom, "How's that dysentery going?" or, even better for them, when they saw me in the

hallway and would loudly inquire, "Mr. Moore, you get that diarrhea under control?" The

community members were the ones who played the game. That game was the common thread.

Another checkpoint under guideline eight recommends an "increase [of] mastery-oriented

feedback" (CAST, 2012). In eLECTIONS, not only was the feedback available, but it was

instantaneous. Once a decision was made, the game provided prompt results.

Figure 17. Fundraiser options

In Figure 17, four fundraising options appeared: a concert promoting campaign finance reform, a picnic opposing No Child Left Behind, a teachers' luncheon supporting No Child Left Behind, or nothing. Each of the first three options provided the cost of the fundraiser and the potential monies earned. The player had the option to see her or his stances in the lower right hand corner of the screen and then make an informed decision.

Figure 18. Fundraiser outcome

Once the decision was made, the participant immediately received positive feedback and an update on her or his bankroll and had the ability to adjust expenditures. If the participant chose an option that went against her or his platform, however, they would immediately be shown the poor outcome of their choice, which provided them the opportunity to determine why she or he chose incorrectly and, if she or he chose, to learn more about the content or issue.

While not every principle, guideline, or checkpoint was satisfied by eLECTIONS, the game provided multiple ways for UDL conventions to be instituted and incorporated in to game play. UDL is designed to eliminate curricular and pedagogical obstacles that prevent students from learning. Although UDL is generally associated with learners with exceptionalities, the participants, self-identified social studies haters in general education classrooms, connected with these aspects of UDL, for the exact reason which UDL exists: The content and means of learning the material was made more flexible. In short, the information was accessed in a variety of ways, language and symbols were explained, background information was reviewed or instilled, goals were set by the participants and identified when they were met. Most importantly, the participants were engaged by the opportunity to exact choices and autonomous decisions, determine the relevance of the game to their personal lives, and created a learning community with their other students in the classroom.

Missed Connections between UDL and eLECTIONS

Despite the number of UDL principles that were evident in eLECTIONS, the game did not connect with every aspect of UDL theory. Perhaps the coding limitations of the game prohibited Cable in the Classroom from providing these opportunities for students. While there were many positive connections, there were certainly some missed opportunities.

Instantaneous feedback is a great aspect of the game for a number of students. The quick response allows players to see their move-by-move decisions and how those decisions are impacting their play. However, if students want to analyze the data further, the instant information may discourage students from taking the time to think through their next move. If game facilitators wanted to extend the learning experience to include deeper analysis, such as writing a journal entry or essay, students might not remember each move they made and how it

impacted their game play; however, with time, the student has the opportunity to continue their learning through eLECTIONS.

Another way in which UDL theory was not applied was the lack of promotion of understanding across languages, as suggested in principle one. Other than English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Bosnian, French, various dialects of western African countries, several additional languages were the primary voices heard in the homes of the students. While it might be impossible for eLECTIONS to provide alternative language options for all the above languages students heard in their homes, the opportunity for students to learn in their native tongue would allow greater understanding and eliminate another barrier in the learning process.

Finally, eLECTIONS would benefit from incorporating the UDL principle of varying the method of response and navigation. Part of the game's operation is the setup of piece movement, student decision, outcome, campaign selection, fundraising selection, and finally, the outcome to their fundraising choice. While this continuity allows students to learn and understand the game, some variation of how to navigate the game via different screens or game play options may increase student understanding for those players who have a tough time grasping this particular pattern of play, but could be better served by a different presentation of material and player option.

Limitations of the Study

Case studies are, by definition, limited because this type of research does not attempt to generalize the findings. The findings in this study are specific to a particular research site, a population of students within this site who are taught by one teacher, and selected participants within that population. Geographically, these students live in a suburban, metropolitan area in the southeastern United States; their perspective may have differed if this study was conducted in a

rural or urban setting, or had taken place in the Pacific Northwest or Great Plains region of the

United States. These students were attendees at a secondary school with highly diversified

student population and a majority of the students qualified for Title I funds. Perhaps the findings

might have differed if the participants were part of a school that was predominately African-

American or predominately white; similarly, if the socioeconomic status of the majority of the

students differed significantly, that change may impact the findings, as well. Finally, within this

institution, the participants of my study were specifically defined as 18 year olds (or older), self-

identified social studies haters, and were students in Ms. Lawson's class. Potentially, the

outcomes of the study may have fluctuated if the participants in my study had been younger. If,

instead, the teacher identified who she perceived were social studies haters instead of having

those participants self-identify, the students who participated in the study may have been totally

different. The study could have also examined the connection of engagement between

eLECTIONS and other students- maybe those that like social studies, or all students 18 years old

or older- and the data provided would have been altered. Finally, the population was confined to

those randomly enrolled in Ms. Lawson's class; students in a different teacher's class or on an

academic track that Ms. Lawson does not teach may have provided varied data not present in this

study.

     In my findings, I uncovered a positive connection between self-identified social studies

haters and eLECTIONS, a simulation game. Students felt more engaged in the game than they

did in their regular class. There were several reasons for that connection. First, the students

claimed to be uninterested by the way Ms. Lawson presented the material in her trailer.

Therefore, when they had the chance to play eLECTIONS, the novelty of playing a game in

social studies already created more attentiveness than a lecture, the usual method of delivery in

Ms. Lawson's class during my observations. However, the results may have been different if a variety of factors were changed. If Ms. Lawson was, in general, an engaging teacher in the classroom, would the students have been just as vocal about their engagement in the game? Would their level of hatred for social studies have been softened if their teacher encouraged them to pay attention or changed the manner in which content was delivered? Would there be such a stark contrast between the levels of engagement during game play versus regular class if Ms. Lawson had a stronger sense of classroom management?

What if my observations had occurred on days on which she did not lecture? If she had stations or group collaborations on the days I was in the classroom, would I have seen students constantly checking their phones, working independently, or ignoring their instructor completely? Her primary pedagogical tool was lecturing, so I doubt that I would have seen much else had I come in on different days. On the other hand, what if I had observed another teacher entirely? That teacher surely would have possessed different pedagogical approaches and classroom management strategies. The students expressed genuine loathing for the way in which Ms. Lawson taught. This aversion was, of course, a continuation of dislike of social studies and not a relative new notion to them; ergo, they are social studies haters. Still, could twelve years of social studies hatred been turned around by an engaged twelfth grade civics teacher?

The participants would not be considered "good students" in the traditional sense of earning good grades and not causing issues in the school community. I believe my research may have differed if I selected students who excelled in the school setting. On the other hand, this study is not about achievement, but engagement, and there are sure to be social studies haters across the school, regardless if they are in the Advanced Placement track, gifted track, honors track, or college preparatory track. The primary reason the participants hated social studies was

because they were bored and the reasons they were bored was because they did not see the information as applicable, the students did not understand the subject matter, the students did not all speak English fluently, or the participants had a history of poor performance and were disengaged by their lack of school success. Only this last reason is relative to the participants of this study; the rest of those included terms could be pertinent to any student on any academic level or track.

In this school community, a high rate of teacher turnover exists in general and, while social studies was one of the most stable departments in the school, there were still a number of staff replacements. For example, when I started my second year at this school, I was the second most senior member of my curriculum group; the department chair was the first. I was given a leadership position over that curriculum group of seven people, all of which were new hires other than the department chair. I left at the end of the 2013-14 school year and so did three other teachers from the social studies department. All of those who left took jobs closer to their home or received a promotion or both. A quick review of this department showed that they have eleven teachers (out of eighteen) that have been at the school less than two full school years. Could the transient nature of the teachers in this school create an environment which relays to the students that their education is a career "pit stop" for educators on their way to a school at which they actually want to be teaching? Perhaps the message to the students is that the school community was not worth investing in, and the students determined the same.

Perhaps the biggest limitation of the study is the fact that the participants would not review transcripts of the interviews. I provided numerous opportunities, in person and electronically to allow the students to review their words and determine if what typed was what they remembered saying; however, not one participant chose to review the transcript.

Critique of eLECTIONS

While eLECTIONS proved to be a positive vehicle for social studies haters to engage in social studies, there were some limitations of the game, as well.

First of all, the website needs Adobe Shockwave™ in order to run correctly. This software was certainly necessary in the early to mid-2000s, but now is not really used. These sorts of plug-in applications are almost completely embedded in to web browsers and a separate download is not necessary. The requirement of Shockwave gives the game an obsolete feeling that it was created in the early 2000s and has not been updated, like a person that still carries a pager or Palm Pilot™. This feeling that the game is old is accurate, however, when participants viewed the graphics.

One of the major downfalls of the game is the simplicity of the graphics. Educational games do not have the sort of financial resources dedicated to improving graphics on a consistent basis. In Figure 19 is a picture still of EA Sports' *Madden NFL 12* football game.

Figure 19. Madden NFL 12 (2012).

There have been several releases of the *Madden NFL* series since 2012, but I chose this iteration of the game because 2012 was also the last year that Cable in the Classroom updated

eLECTIONS. In examining Figure 19, there are many visual elements that provide a realistic

feel for the game. Examining just the two players in the foreground, the viewer can see great

attention to detail. First, there is a shadow on the grass of the Chiefs (red and white) player with

the ball. Across the body of the ball carrier is another shadow, this time the arm of the Chargers

(blue and white) defensive player. The cleats of the Chargers player are also different, given the

angle of his feet to the turf. There is a gleam off of each players' helmet, assumedly from the

stadium lights, which are not in view. The number on the back of the Chargers tackler is

contoured around the player's shoulder pads and rib protector. Finally, the Chiefs player has a

different style of cleats than his teammates in the background, giving him individuality as a

virtual offensive threat. This annual series is constantly praised for its attention to detail in the

graphic. While these graphics standout from their realism, the graphics of eLECTIONS can

distract players from the game's purpose, especially when participants familiar with games with

graphic levels achieved by games such as *Madden*.

Another element that would have benefitted more students is an opportunity to change

languages so that students could understand the content in their most familiar language. There

were several students in the classroom that spoke Spanish and, while they were fluent in English,

the opportunity for them to learn the content in a more accustomed voice perhaps could have

allowed those students to increase their understanding.

In addition, while the videos on the left side of the screen in Figure 16 are designed to

help students identify major components of the presidential election process, there are videos

available to the students that are not necessarily relevant to the game. Some of those topics

include women's suffrage, the Civil Rights Voting Act, and the 2000 presidential election.

These topics are incredibly important in American history and detail how underrepresented

groups gained the opportunity to vote and how close presidential contests can be; however, they are not germane to the Electoral College and may inhibit learning about the Electoral College by confusing students with these slightly-off themes. eLECTIONS wanted to cover all topics election related and used this format, instead of focusing on the Electoral College by itself.

Some of these critical items can be addressed by Cable in the Classroom. The company could certainly add linguistic choices and delete some of the superfluous videos that do not educate the student on Electoral College specific information. However, Cable in the Classroom would have a hard time addressing the issues with the simplistic graphics. While Cable in the Classroom could update some of the images and make the cards or background crisper, they really cannot compete with the constantly improving graphics the students are used to in games like *Madden NFL 12* or the *Call of Duty* series.

Further Research Opportunities

Several themes that presented themselves during this study that would benefit from further research. One of those themes is standardized testing. While standardized testing was a mere inopportuneness for me as the researcher, the issue of high stakes testing cannot be ignored as a simple inconvenience for students and teachers. Standardized testing dominates the educational landscape, from student progression to teacher evaluation to state and federal funding. This topic is no small issue. Students know what these standardized tests mean to them as a student, but the tests are so frequent and so ingrained into the school calendar that students frequently disengage from these tests or dismiss them; students know there will be another test opportunity very soon. Further research not only on the impact that standardized testing has on students, but also on the impact it was on the school calendar, personnel, and resources. Another area of research could focus on how standardized testing effects the level of engagement students

have with particular content areas. Are students more likely to engage in a specific discipline because they know there will be high stakes testing on that material? Or do standardized tests limit engagement because of their frequency, therefore, making consistent momentum in the class impossible? How is engagement impacted in content areas where there are no standardized tests? Are students more likely to discount these subjects as less important, or more likely to engage, knowing they have an opportunity to learn in a less stressful environment?

Another area that should be further investigated is the impact eLECTIONS had on achievement. This study was specifically designed to research engagement with the game and not examine how eLECTIONS influenced students' ability to demonstrate learning, formally or informally. In a previous article I wrote with Chara H. Bohan and Cheryl A. Beshke, we suggested possible assessment opportunities based on eLECTIONS.

After the election, students have the opportunity to see the results of their actions through an itemized list detailing the states in which they campaigned on each turn and the choices they made along the way. A more telling evaluation of what students learned in the process can be gained by having discussions in class. Questions, such as the ones below, can begin to help facilitate discussion:

- How did you choose your party affiliation and key issues? What stance did you take on these issues? Why did you take those particular stances?

- In what states did you campaign the most? How did you determine where to campaign? What problems did you encounter while choosing your campaign trail?

- What were some of the challenges you faced along the way? How did you determine what moves you should make?

- If you played this game again, what would you do differently? Why would you make those changes?

- What did you learn by playing eLECTIONS that you did not know before? (2014, p. 85-86)

These discussion questions could be used in between partners who played together, students who played the game, but not with students who played against each other. Other discussion opportunities include a small group or even facilitating all of these discussion avenues with a "think, pair, share" pedagogical approach. Asking these questions allow for students to delve deeper into their rationale and decision making; a metacognitive reflection into their thinking and then students could determine if they would have made a different decision based on their experience and reflection. These questions can also guide facilitators to engage students not only in the game play, but also the social studies content as well. Asking the students to determine what they now know that they did not before game play requires students to again scrutinize their experience through the metacognitive process and name the concepts about the content that they learned.

Of course, discussion is not the only way to assess learning for eLECTIONS. The English-Language Arts Common Core standards place strong emphasis on writing and social studies content can support these standards by providing opportunities for students to expound upon their learning in class. An essay or critique of the game allows students to demonstrate mastery of content and continue to hone their writing skills across the curriculum (Moore, Beshke, & Bohan, 2014, p. 86).

This study also highlighted the problem of curriculum pacing. Ms. Lawson, as are most social studies teachers, faces the disadvantage of being required to press through content without

true regard for whether or not real learning is taking place or the pace appropriate for her

particular students. The curriculum fits the old adage of being, "a mile wide and an inch deep;"

content is skimmed and briefly covered without the opportunity for students to delve deeper into

its importance. When Lucas conducted an interview with the father of historical thinking, Sam

Wineburg, they discussed the importance of understanding the implications of social studies as

compared to teaching a list of facts stated

> We need to distinguish between those aspects of our history that are extraneous and those
>
> that are absolutely central to effective citizenship. My fourteen-year-old son had to stop
>
> and think when I asked him if the Korean War came before or after World War II. Our
>
> young people need to understand basic issues of chronology. The aftermath of World
>
> War II created a power grab that positioned the United States against the Soviet Union,
>
> which ultimately played out on the battlefields of Korea. If one doesn't understand the
>
> basic links of that narrative, how can one understand Vietnam, how can one think about
>
> the dissolution of the Soviet Union? (2006, p. 40).

While one of the goals of social studies is to provide students with the information and thinking

processes to engage in participating in decision making in the world around them, the focus of

present-day social studies curriculum falls far below this lofty goal and frequently becomes the

instillation of facts and rote information, which leaves no time is left for analysis, discussion,

argument, discernment, or engagement. This pacing is, of course, linked to the previously

mentioned issue of standardized testing. However, the pacing in and of itself creates problems

outside of standardized testing. There is not time to stop and participate in a teachable moment

when students desire to learn more about the curriculum. Projects, field trips, and authentic

learning opportunities are left by the wayside so that they do not interfere with scheduled

common assessments, county benchmark dates, and administrative visits that examine where teachers and students are in the standards as compared to their peers.

Lastly, UDL is primarily thought of as a program that benefits exceptional learners, especially those that need assistive technology. However, this learning theory was specifically implemented in a general education classroom. Research on the relevance and/or importance of UDL in other general education settings, content areas, and with various populations could illuminate whether or not UDL could or should be employed outside of the special education or inclusion classroom. Further research could examine other pedagogical methods used primarily in special education or inclusion classroom and determine if they, too, affect learning, engagement, and any number of relevant student issues.

Importance of the Study

This research was crafted to discover if there was any relationship between student engagement among self-identified social studies haters and eLECTIONS. The study was also designed to determine whether elements of UDL facilitated engagement, as well.

1. How do students who self-identify as 'social studies haters' experience playing social studies-related simulation games?

The students that participated in the study overwhelmingly determined that they were more engaged in social studies via the means of eLECTIONS. The most important findings from this study were the participants' realizations that they could engage in social studies and not necessarily hate it. Most of their hatred developed out of boredom; by engaging the students and eliminating the boredom, students saw that social studies could be interesting and relevant. This fact was never more evident than when Cierra mentioned that she liked the game because she

had time to learn the information, as opposed to class, when she felt rushed through the content

without an appropriate amount of time to digest the content.

> **Cierra:** Usually, with a regular class, you just take the notes and you don't really read
>
> through it yourself, unlike the game, I actually got time to read, like what I was supposed
>
> to do, or what it meant, you know? Unlike the notes, when you just take it and write it
>
> and don't really look at it. You just write fast and you don't really analyze it or think
>
> about it.

The participants felt engaged both in the content and in the game. The competitive nature of the

game, trying to be president, allowed students to actively think and participate in the process of

the game. Whether they were playing by themselves or with a partner, the element of

competition fueled the students to continue playing, even when they were losing or did not

understand the results of their choices at points in the game. The students felt engaged with the

content in that they expressed their interest in learning information that they did not previously

understand. This connection between engagement in the content and the participant via

eLECTIONS was unmistakable. Consider the following statements by Miguel and Josh:

> **Miguel:** It was pretty fun. I learned a little bit more about elections. I was into it. The
>
> game style was kinda like the game Life™. It was good. It showed that not everything
>
> goes as planned. How easy it was. Like, it wasn't confusing. The information came
>
> clearly about what you had to do.
>
> **Josh:** The game was fun. I actually learned some stuff that I didn't know. Like the Patriot
>
> Act. It was interesting. It was fun. I really wasn't that bored when I got the game.
>
> 2. How do the components of Universal Design for Learning theory affect students'
>
> engagement in social studies-related simulations and games?

The other relevant finding was the discovery that UDL methods work with students that do not qualify for special education or inclusion services in a variety of ways. UDL's simple goals of making information accessible and providing multiple means of demonstration of learning is fulfilled by eLECTONS' opportunity to provide student choice, a variety of means to learn the content, and engagement with the student to enhance the learning experience. Students of all backgrounds and educational abilities deserve the opportunity to learn and exhibit their learning by the best means available. Returning to the issue of standardized testing, the problem is in its name: standardization. This phrase indicates a narrowly-focused, "one size fits all" approach to determining student learning when it is evident that students can provide proof of knowledge in a myriad of ways other than on a scantron. The idea of students being afforded the "least restrictive environment" in which to learn should not be applicable only to special education students; all students should have the opportunity to learn in the way in which they do so best. eLECTIONS provided a less restrictive medium to learning than did the lecture notes and PowerPoint presentations in the general classroom.

These findings were explicit outcomes of the research. However, the most important aspect of this research is the hope that students were able to walk away from participating in this study and feel confident in their ability to engage in social studies. Participants had the opportunity to see social studies as more than a class they have suffered throughout the duration of their primary and secondary educational journey. Learning about social studies provides opportunities to learn about aspects of society that matter to them as individuals and is not confined to constant droning and rambling about dates, "important" facts, specified standards that were bureaucratically created, and a slide show. Social studies is learning about platforms, determining how elections work and how to determine if individuals agree with politicians

before they vote for them. Maybe that information propels students into activism at the local level or beyond. Perhaps it enlightens students to continue to look for information themselves, rather than have it spoon fed. While I created four student composites, there were fifteen actual students that participated in the study. I believe that all fifteen of them walked away with some level of accomplishment in this area. I believe they were engaged in the game and in their understanding that they own the ability to use this learning experience in the future. If that engagement occurred with even some of the participants, then that realization was the most important finding of the research: Engagement in social studies can lead to greater understanding of the world around them.

Reflection

It is with great intent that I did not title this section, or this chapter, "conclusion." Instead, as I reflect on the study itself, I think about some of the tasks which I would have done differently. In answering his own question, "How do you conclude a qualitative study?" Harry Wolcott (2009) states,

> You don't….In the dichotomous thinking said to be typical of Americans, research is sometimes portrayed as either decision-oriented or conclusion-oriented….I do not work toward a grand flourish that might tempt me beyond the boundaries of the material I have been presenting, or might detract from the power (and exceed the limitations) of the observations themselves or what I tried to make of them (p. 113).

While I had enough participants to reach the saturation point of data, I would have liked to have observed students more frequently in the computer lab. I should have attempted to reschedule the day lost to standardized testing, although at this particular school, it is frequently difficult to access computer labs on short notice. One more day in the computer lab would have afforded the

students more opportunity to spend in the game, possibly more time accessing the videos and various avenues of additional resources available to them.

In addition, I would interview Ms. Lawson. Her point of view in this study is based solely on my observations, conversations with students about her teaching style, and their retelling of interactions with her. While I believe I accurately portrayed her role in the classroom and her connection with the students, allowing her to provide insight about her classroom, meeting standards, and student engagement could have proved beneficial.

I wonder how the study would have changed if I conducted the research at a different site. While I am not sure whether or not the results would have changed, that familiarity with the students, the teacher, and the site would not have existed. I do not know if it would have provided richer data or more difficulty creating data, because the site, the students, the teacher all come part and parcel. What did occur during this study was for students, who have determined that they hate social studies, to have the opportunity to engage in this identified hated discipline through the simulation game eLECTIONS.

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Appendix A

Name _____

Unit Three: Political Identification, Parties, & Elections
Chapters 5, 6, 7, & 8

These questions are due on test day!

1. Define political parties and give their purpose?

2. Explain the function of political parties at the following levels:
   a. Local:

   b. State:

   c. National:

3. Explain the three different party systems:
   a. One-party

   b. Two-party

   c. Multiparty

4. Define the following nomination methods:
   a. Caucuses

   b. Nominating conventions

   c. Primary elections

   d. Petitions

5. Define the different types of elections:
   a. Primary

   b. General

   c. Runoff

    d.   Special

6. Electoral College
    a.   Explain the Electoral College:

    b.   Describe the changes made with the following Amendments:
        i.   12th

        ii.   23rd

    c.   Define:
        i.   Electoral Vote

        ii.   Electors

        iii.   Winner-take-all-system

7. Define:
    a.   Political Action Committees

    b.   Soft money

    c.   Hard money

8. Explain the expansion of voting rights with the following laws and Amendments.
    a.   Voting Rights Act of 1965

    b.   15th Amendment

    c.   16th Amendment

    d.   24th Amendment

    e.   26th Amendment

9. Explain how the following factors affect voter turnout
    a.   Education

    b.   Political socialization

    c.   Income

    d.   Age