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History Teachers' Perspectives of Time Constraints, Engagement, and Relevance in the Curriculum

Christy Mimie Davis
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

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Christy Davis

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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EdS, Lesley University, 2007

MA, Lesley University, 2000

BA, North Georgia College, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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October 2017

Abstract

Over the last 20 years, many state school administrators have reduced social studies instructional time in favor of time dedicated to reading or math skills due to the pressure of standardized testing. The purpose of this qualitative case study, which was based on constructivist theories about learning and schema theory, was to analyze teachers' perspectives on teaching history lessons, in terms of engagement and relevance, while working within new time constraints. Purposeful sampling was used to select 6 teachers for interviews; all had experience teaching social studies courses at the upper elementary and middle levels in a public school district that has been influenced over the last 20 years by the pressures of standardized testing. Interview data were coded and analyzed for common themes. The teachers reported that the lack of planning time and instructional time, compounded with students' lack of schema, hampered the delivery of engaging and relevant history lessons based on the tenets of constructivism. The results of the data collection were used to design a professional development program that would allow teachers to work with engaging instructional strategies designed to stimulate situational interest, which would ultimately lead to schema development. This study has implications for positive social change in that school leaders and other stakeholders could use the results to make decisions about the allotment of instructional and preparation time to provide teachers adequate opportunities to design and deliver engaging and relevant history lessons to enhance students' learning.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to the people who have earned an honorary Ed.D. for listening to me, drying my tears, plugging their ears, patting my head, feeding me chocolate, and helping me count down the days until I earned my very own dots and letters and could wear the fuzzy sleeved gown and funny hat that goes with the doctorate. I therefore dedicate this to my parents, the best teachers I could ever have, and my fiancé, the best listener in the world.

I would also like to dedicate this to my darling babies, my Italian Greyhounds Zephyr and Flora, who started this journey warming my feet under the table, and who have ended this journey warming my heart in my memories. I will always miss you. I feel your love in the doggy kisses from your little furry brother and sisters, Ronin, Kleio, and Asia.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Due to changes in federal academic policy over the last 20 years, school district administrators in the state of Georgia chose to reduce the amount of instructional time dedicated to the study of history (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Maguth, 2012), providing limited opportunities for students to engage with history lessons that are relevant to their own experiences. The administrators' decision have relegated history education in schools like the one in rural Zephyr City, Georgia (a pseudonym), to being studied as a way of teaching reading skills or as a series of facts to be memorized; neither prepares students to understand the history of the area around them (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Kenna & Russell, 2014; Lovorn, 2012; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Pace, 2011; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Without meaningful opportunities to engage with the study of history, student achievement declined (Lovorn, 2012). Understanding one's history is critical to national citizenship (Lopez, Carratero, & Rodriguez-Moneo, 2014a) and understanding one's local history is critical to community identity (Lopez, 2014b). Students who miss the opportunity to engage with their own history also miss the chance to learn important lessons in critical thinking, empathy, and civic competence (McCully, 2012; Winstead, 2011).

Students in the small town of Zephyr City have grown up around architecture and locations that were important at many major points in Georgia's history. However, due to the reduction in instructional time, history teachers have experienced a struggle to

make history lessons engaging and relevant to students who feel the concepts of history are too distant and disconnected from their own lives to be memorable, despite the proximity of the landmark locations (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). In this study, I investigated teachers' perspectives on the challenge of teaching engaging and relevant history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school, while working within the instructional time constraints placed on classroom teachers by the school administration.

Without having been taught local history lessons in school to help these school-aged community members understanding the importance of their area's history, small, history-rich communities like Zephyr City (Abernathy, 2015) stood in danger of losing their sense of historical identity. According to historians, historical identity is the most important social identity for an individual citizen; it also constitutes a critical foundation of the concept of nationalism for a united country (Lopez et al., 2014b). The sacrifice of the study of historiography, that is, history as a separate and unique discipline, in favor of studying history as a method of teaching reading skills or as a series of facts to be memorized (Conley, 2011; Lovorn, 2012), caused current students as well as graduates in the community to view history with "general apathetic detachment," (Lovorn, 2012, p. 569). As a result, they lack the empathy and processing skills needed to understand humanity in both the past and the present and to make predictions for the future.

Definition of the Problem

The problem in Zephyr City, Georgia, involved the national emphasis on standardized testing and the school district's decision to take time and attention away

from history classes and give it over to standardized testing. After a while, standardized test scores in history revealed diminished student achievement at local, district, and state, levels (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.). Community leaders in the small but history-rich town of Zephyr City lamented a perceived lack of interest in its history town by its current students and by its young adults with families (Mayor D. Shoaf, personal communication, June 2, 2015). "I am very concerned how the public and local schools aren't interested in local or community history as past generations once were" (Mayor D. Shoaf, personal communication, June 2, 2015).

The shift in attitude that coincided with the reduction in history class time left the burden of historical preservation on the shoulders of an increasingly aging population. Mayor Shoaf said that it was critical for the younger people in town to understand the relevance of history to their own lives so they could be prepared to make decisions in the future that supported the mission of the Historical Society. "We must start with the younger generation," he said, "who needs to see why [history] in fact matters" (D. Shoaf, personal communication, June 2, 2015).

The significant reduction in social studies instructional time evolved gradually as local school district administrators and teachers struggled to meet the mandates of educational reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 and subsequent reforms. As a result, teachers were forced to put a premium on high performance in reading and math skills on standardized tests at the expense of studying history (Walker, 2014).

NCLB (2002) dictated that all students must master 100% of math and reading skills on the federally mandated standardized tests or the school would no longer receive its federal funding. At that time, 90% of the schools in the country relied on federal funding to survive, so the state school leadership in Georgia, like the others in states across the United States, took decisive action to avert fiscally devastating consequences (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Scott, 2011). Georgia state school administrators began modifying testing expectations and introducing curriculum changes to offset the demands set by NCLB (2002). On the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), the test administered yearly to each elementary and middle school student in the state, the state school administrators set the expectations for history achievement much lower than the expectations for reading and math, a 90% pass rate (GaDOE, 2013a). Curriculum changes centered on reducing instructional time in history, for example, with lower expectations of assessment scores and reassigning that time to the "sacred subjects" such as reading and math (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012, p. 193). Reading and math test scores were reported directly to stakeholders in newspaper articles and in school district publications that were sent to the parents of each child in the school district. History scores were not included in the reports (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010).

The federal government recognized that the 100% requirement was not immediately attainable, so the federal Department of Education introduced the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) which allowed states to apply for waivers to avoid the fiscal punishment of a reduction or removal of federal funding for the schools that did not reach the goal of total mastery (GaDOE, 2014c; Saultz, 2014b).

The Georgia state school leadership's application in 2013 for a federal waiver dictated that the accountability measure for local schools would still be based in part on their students' performance on the standardized tests, tests that continued to prioritize reading and math skills and marginalize history instruction (Polikoff, McEachin, Wrabel & Duque, 2014). Research has shown that when school district administrators are faced with the punitive implications of repeated failures on standardized tests, subjects like social studies and specifically, history, are discarded (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Ross, Mathison, & Vinson, 2014).

Another stipulation of the state of Georgia's NCLB waiver application, found in a program nicknamed "Race to the Top," or "RT3" (2009), was that the state would align its teaching curriculum to match the nationally developed Common Core Curriculum. For history teachers in the state of Georgia, the Common Core Curriculum provided no content guidance but only a series of reading and literacy expectations requiring students to read and interpret historical documents (Conley, 2011; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). The state of Georgia interpreted the Common Core expectations as an addendum to the already established Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), which dictated the history curriculum. Teachers implemented the Common Core addition by incorporating lessons on reading and composition strategies into the established classroom curriculum (Monte-Sano, 2012). Another element of the RT3 program (2009) required school administrators to regularly evaluate the classroom teachers' performance, but gave no provisions for evaluating history teaching strategies or assessing teacher proficiency in teaching history (van Hover, Hicks, & Cotton, 2013).

Georgia's interpretation of the Common Core Curriculum's history demands resulted in a gradual process of turning history classes into "reading academies" and sacrificing social studies instructional time in favor of time devoted to reading and math. Research has shown that integrating history classes into reading classes reduces the study of history to a series of content-oriented reading skills lessons (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere & Stewart, 2011; Conley, 2011) or a series of disjointed facts to be memorized (Lovorn, 2012). In most cases, reducing history instruction results in the danger of history being put "out of business" (Walker, 2014, p. 45), or rendered nonessential.

Researchers who have devoted years of study into the importance of historical thinking, or historiography, agree that social studies courses and their subdomains of civics and history are a critical area for the development of a sense of personal and national identity (Jones, 2010; Rüsen, 2011); citizenship and democratic values (Ross et al., 2014; Winstead, 2011); empathy and social justice (Dean, 2012; Pereira, 2014; Ross et al., 2014; Taylor, 2011); and critical thinking (Burstein & Knotts, 2010; Ross et al., 2014; Winstead, 2014). No other subject affords the learner the opportunity to develop a socially conscious voice and to learn the concepts of citizenship and democracy, as well to learn how to participate in a democratic society (Ross et al., 2014; Winstead, 2011). However, the current accountability instruments measure factual recall only (McKenna & Russell, 2014). When instructional time has been so restricted, there is no time for higher order discussions about these democratic concepts or for dynamic and innovative lessons about the importance of citizenship (Boyle-Baise et al., 2011; Jurica, 2010; Pace, 2011).

Given its broad range of subjects and stories, social studies is by far the most easily accessible of all disciplines and should be the foundation for all other subjects, including reading, math, and science (Winstead, 2011). Yet policy makers and textbook companies continue to provide prescriptive sets of activities and lessons that require students to learn passively the publishing company's prescribed depiction of history rather than allowing students to create their own meaning of the world around them, and to learn how to work to make positive social change (Ross et al., 2014).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

This study was conducted in the district where I was a sixth-grade teacher and in the city in which I lived. The generation of school-aged young people living in Zephyr City, Georgia, at the time of the study had been taught less about local history than any other generation (Walker, 2014). Due to the federal government's emphasis on standardized testing over the preceding 20 years, the local school system administration reduced the amount of time spent on history instruction to devote more time to emphasize reading and math skills, which were the primary focus of most of the mandated standardized tests (Bolick, Adams, & Willox, 2010; Maguth, 2012). Each week, middle school students who lived in Zephyr City and attended school in the surrounding Flora County School System (a pseudonym) received 500 minutes of reading instruction and 500 minutes of math instruction but only 250 minutes of broad field social studies instruction (Flora County Schools, n.d.). Teachers assigned to teach broad field social studies classes had to design and implement not only lessons on local, state, national, and

world history, but also lessons on civics, government, geography, culture, religion, language, economics, and several other disciplines. Thus, the time spent on actual historiographical focus in a social studies classroom each week was far less than 250 minutes (GaDOE, 2013; National Council on Social Studies, n.d.).

If students needed extra remediation in reading or math, they were eligible to receive an additional 250 minutes of either discipline weekly, but no such remediation program existed in Flora County for history understandings (Flora County Schools, n.d.). This additional remediation time in reading and math was a stipulation of the district's charter, dictating that these supplementary remediation classes were fundamental to the functioning of the school district. The additional remediation time was created in part by reducing social studies class time across the district. Because the remediation time was tied to the school district's charter, there were no long-range plans to return that time eventually to broad field social studies instruction or history lessons in particular; to do so would violate the terms of the district's charter and could result in the immediate closing of all district schools (Flora County Schools, 2009).

At the high school level, the school district administration also decided to reduce broad field social studies instructional time. Prior to 2011, to graduate, students in Georgia had to demonstrate mastery on a comprehensive graduation test that included elements of history, civics, geography, and economics reflective of a four-year high-school social studies curriculum (Flora County Schools, 2013). After Georgia's NCLB (2002) waiver application was approved and the state was relieved of the fiscal consequences of not meeting the NCLB (2002) goals, the state school board reevaluated

its own testing requirements (Floyd County Schools, 2013; GaDOE, 2014d; Saultz, 2014). In 2011, the End of Course Tests, required only in the core academic classes, replaced the comprehensive Georgia High School Graduation Test, which included questions about history (GaDOE, 2014d). The Georgia state school administration decreased the core requirement for broad field social studies classes in Georgia high schools. Instead of expecting students to have four credits in social studies (as required in reading, math, and science), students needed only three credits of social studies classes (GACollege 411, 2009), thus removing a full year of coursework. In 2014, the Georgia state school board replaced the End of Course Tests with the Georgia Milestones Assessments, which provided final assessments in social studies in only two areas: United States history and economics/free enterprise/business (GaDOE, 2014d).

By circumventing the standardized testing mandate, Georgia state school leadership removed even more focus on history at the secondary level, granting history classes less importance than elective classes (Georgia required four credits of electives) and using the Georgia Milestones Assessments to formally assess less than half of the material on the state-mandated high school social studies curriculum (GACollege 411, 2009). Furthermore, a bill signed into law by Georgia Governor Nathan Deal on March 30, 2015, stipulated that "students shall no longer be required to earn a passing score on any graduation tests to earn a high school diploma" (GaDOE, 2015, para. 2), thereby removing any consequence for a student demonstrating a total lack of social studies understanding on either of the two tests designed to assess a student's understanding of social studies at the high school level (GACollege411, 2009).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik into orbit and caused the government of the United States to reevaluate its educational program entirely. In 1983, the National Commission for Excellence in Education published a report, *A Nation at Risk*, which stated unequivocally that the United States was a nation on its way to complete mediocrity, with no hope of being globally competitive with other countries (Scott, 2011; United States, 1983). Six years later, then-Governor Bill Clinton led the 1989 National Education Summit to lay the groundwork for a sweeping new act to be called America 2000 the Excellence in Education Act (1989), which allowed for school choice, charter schools, and many more market-based concepts that were ahead of their time (Scott, 2011). Later presidential administrations used the premise of the Excellence in Education Act (1989) to develop GOALS 2000: Educate America Act (1994), which was signed into law in 1994 and reevaluated in 2002 with the ratification of the No Child Left Behind Act (Scott, 2011). No Child Left Behind, authored by the Bush administration, drew upon federal educational programs that had been established and subsequently discarded under Johnson's earlier 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Scott, 2011).

The federal government chose to measure school excellence, the focus of many of the education acts in the early 2000s, through standardized test scores and to enforce the government's standard of excellence with shocking punishments. If a system did not show adequate yearly progress (AYP), the principal and staff could be fired and the school itself could be closed (Ravitch, 2011; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Rather than risk

job termination, school district administrators across the nation made drastic changes in their school districts to meet AYP by the federally established deadline of 2014. To protect their own jobs and the schools, students, and teachers in their districts, administrators wanted to reach the ultimate goal set by NCLB (2002): 100% mastery of all tested material by 100% of the students in 100% of the schools in the country (Ravitch, 2011).

Nearly half of the school districts in the country reported reduced instructional time in history classes because historiographical concepts were not addressed on the standardized tests mandated by the states in compliance with these new NCLB policies (Maguth, 2012; Pace, 2011). A 2007 study conducted by the Center on Education Policy (McMurrer, 2007) revealed that, after five years of NCLB, district administrators had cut, on average, 76 minutes of broad field social studies instruction each week, without making any changes to the state-mandated curriculum. This squeeze on instructional time without a corresponding reduction in curriculum meant that teachers were forced to cover the same amount of information in much less time (Bolick et al., 2010; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Pace, 2011).

According to the original terms of NCLB, all schools in the nation were to show 100% mastery on the standardized tests by the year 2014. In 2009, the government developed the ARRA to avert the 2014 deadline. The ARRA (2009) provided a grant program, Race to the Top that offered financial incentives for states that supported innovation in education (Georgia Department of Education [GaDOE], 2014). In 2011, the ARRA (2009) allowed a waiver for schools to bypass the 100% mastery mandate and

replace it with their own measures of adequate yearly progress (Kenna & Russell, 2014).

The state of Georgia applied for and was granted a waiver, and replaced the standardized

tests with other forms of assessment that ultimately focused on mastery of math, language

arts, and reading skills exclusively (GaDOE, 2014).

Although the increased emphasis on standardized testing in subjects other than

history relates to the passage of NCLB, the decision to remove class time from broad

field social studies instruction does not manifest as an exclusive result. In the 1980s,

elementary school teachers spent an average of 21 minutes each day teaching social

studies, and up to 95 minutes each day teaching reading skills (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010).

A report from the National Center for Educational Statistics showed that over the last 17

years, those same teachers teach weekly, on average, 11 hours of reading skill content, 5

hours of math, and only 2.9 hours of social studies (as cited in Fitchett & Heafner, 2010).

Smith and Kovacs (2011) noted that the NCLB (2002) legislation simply made it easier to

remove focus from social studies courses without repercussion, and the fear of

punishment for not reaching appropriate levels of reading and math proficiency

encouraged school district administrators to push social studies courses farther and

farther away from the center of academic policy attention (Boyle-Baise, et al., 2011).

The Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP) survey conducted in 2010 indicated that only 12% of high school seniors have a

firm grasp of United States history, and that only 2% of the students surveyed have an

understanding of the importance of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in

1954 that desegregated schools (Bolduc, 2011). The study also showed that 83% of

eighth grade students could not sufficiently use historical examples to support an interpretation of past events (Monte-Sano, 2012). The NAEP assessment was first administered to students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade in 1994 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). After analyzing the last 20 years of data from the NAEP test, the Department of Education found that the average twelfth-grader's score showed no significant increase in content mastery of the American history concepts, and had declined in mastery of civics concepts (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Despite the massive amount of changes in federal education policy and the sweeping changes that trickled down to local districts because of the threats and promises of NCLB, students were simply not showing the level of improvement one would expect as a result (Walker, 2014). Rather, according to the NAEP test results, their understanding of history had stagnated and their understanding of what it means to be a citizen had declined (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perspectives on teaching history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school in terms of engagement and relevance while working within the instructional time constraints applied by the school administration. This study was also designed to investigate ways to analyze the teachers' perspectives in order to help teachers become more successful within the limited time allotted for history lessons. It was critical to consult with the teachers to understand (a) the struggles they faced to make informed decisions about the impact of the external pressure of standardized testing and (b) the resulting constriction of time on the attitude and performance of their students.

Operational Definitions

Broad Field Social Studies: According to the National Council of the Social Studies, this is a field of study including anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology (NCSS, n.d.). In this school district and state, the courses are defined as "social studies," rather than specifically "history," thus the reference will be to social studies classes with an emphasis on specific history instruction.

Core classes: Academic core classes are those classes which are required for graduation from Georgia high schools, not including elective classes. Core classes are classes in the fields of math, reading, language arts, science, and social studies (GaDOE, 2015c).

Engaging methodologies: Engaging methodologies are ones that encourage interaction, stimulate curiosity, and exhibit originality (Hall, 2015).

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS): The GPS, or "the standards," are the list of expectations for each subject taught in the state of Georgia. The GPS provide the clear expectations for school district administration to use when designing curriculum for each class at each level. The GPS in history are included under the heading of social studies (GaDOE, 2013b).

High stakes testing: Standardized testing systems that imply significant consequences to the school district, individual school, school administration, teachers, and students based on the number of students who successfully demonstrated mastery of the stated goals with a passing score (Vinson, Ross, & Wilson, 2011).

Historiography: The study of history itself, including the way it is written, the procedures and methods used to interpret past events, and an analysis of the purpose and bias of the narrator or historian who is recording the event (Straub, 2015).

Significance

This study was designed to analyze teachers' perspectives of teaching history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school in terms of engagement and relevance. The results of this study are expected to allow stakeholders to use those academic professionals' perspectives in a way that will help the teachers design lessons that are more engaging and relevant for the students while working within administratively mandated time constraints.

This study was significant because the problem of lowered student engagement in studying history manifests as greater than simply a local concern. No other academic subject affords the learner the opportunity to develop a socially conscious voice and learn the concepts of citizenship, democracy, and lessons of how to participate in a democratic society (Ross et al., 2014; Winstead, 2011). The study of history also affords the learner the opportunity to understand broader concepts like empathy and critical thinking, which are skills critical to fostering social change by developing "civic competence" (Vinson et al., 2011). The federal legislation which had encouraged school district administrators to take time away from social studies education served as a detriment to every student in every classroom across the nation (Hernandez, 2013; Polikoff, McEachin, Wrabel & Duque, 2014). Most school district administrators in the state still chose to rely on standardized tests as measures of accountability because of the demands of the federal

laws, and standardized test achievement continued to reflect an emphasis on reading and math skills, rather than social studies or history understandings (Burstein & Knotts, 2010; Ravitch, 2011).   The results from this research will be applicable to other stakeholders in school districts across the country who find themselves similarly experiencing a desire for greater student engagement in history studies but also lacking in instructional time allotted to broad field social studies classes.

Guiding Question

The problem in the community of Zephyr City, Georgia, was that a national emphasis on standardized testing resulted in the local school district administration's decision to take time and attention away from history lessons in social studies classes. The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perspectives of teaching history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school in terms of engagement and relevance while working within the instructional time constraints. The guiding question behind this study was as follows: "What are the classroom teachers' perspectives of the challenge of teaching engaging and relevant history lessons within the time constraints placed by the school district administration?"

Review of the Literature

Research Strategy

Articles discussed in this section were found using Google Scholar, EBSCO Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Research Library, SAGE, and ERIC. Search terms included *constructivist philosophy, curiosity, teaching social studies, social studies, standardized testing, social studies marginalization, No Child Left Behind,*

historiography, standards based education reform, teaching with local history, and

teaching history. The principles and tenets of the constructivists guided the analysis of

the academic literature. Saturation was reached in this thorough examination of the

conflict between the constructivists' theories of the ideal classroom and the reality of

history classroom instruction since the introduction of NCLB.

Conceptual Framework

      The theoretical frameworks of this doctoral study have their roots in the work of

the constructivists. In constructivist ideology, learning is a process, not a product, and

reality is constructed based on the learner's experiences in the world around themselves

(Ultanir, 2012). For the constructivists, learning was not limited to classrooms alone and

the teacher was not the ultimate source of information (Ultanir, 2012; Yilmaz, Filiz, &

Yilmaz, 2013). Rather, because learning is a product of one's background knowledge and

present experiences, the learner is not limited to one source of knowledge (Ultanir, 2012).

The world surrounding learners, and all of the stories and history contained therein,

leaves a lasting impact on what students know and how they create new knowledge

(Ultanir, 2012; Yilmaz, 2011).

      The cognitivists, the precursor to the constructivists, sought to understand how

humans made sense of their environment and processed their experiences (Yilmaz, 2011).

Cognitivism has its roots in behaviorism. The behaviorists searched for an explanation

for human behavior but were limited simply to what was observable (Yilmaz, 2011).

Considered by many to be the father of the cognitivists, Edward Chace Tolman (1922)

broke away from the behaviorists' school of thought when he began to question the

reasoning behind a mouse's motivation to travel through a maze (Yilmaz, 2011). Tolman

challenged the behaviorists' idea that all decisions are based on a stimulus-response

interaction and instead proposed that behavior comes from reactions to "behavior-cues,"

"behavior-objects," and "behavior-acts" instead of simple, predictable stimulus-and-

response chain of events (Tolman, 1922).

Building on Tolman's argument that there are many ways of perception, John

Dewey (1934) promoted the constructivist idea that reality is a result of experiences

(Ultanir, 2012). Instead of knowledge being external and objective, Dewey theorized that

knowledge comes from making inferences based on one's experiences, and that real

education came from experiences (Ultanir, 2012). Dewey's interpretation of the

acquisition of knowledge helped other theorists refine their own understandings of how

learners process information for lasting meaning. From Dewey's work, theorists began to

note that the learners are heavily influenced by the world around them and what they see

and experience on a day-to-day basis.

Jean Piaget (1952) taught that as learners progress in life, they develop schema, or

mental images, from the world around them and from their own experiences that serve as

the foundation for future learning. Piaget believed that new knowledge was applied to

old schema, thus requiring the learner to reflect on past experiences, assimilate new

information, and in processing the new information, modify the old schema to

incorporate the new, or disregard the new if it conflicted significantly with the old

(Ultanir, 2012; Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2011). If no schema exists to build upon,

Piaget asserted, the new knowledge will not last. However, if the learner shows interest in

the material, finds it engaging and relevant, and has a foundation upon which to scaffold the new learning, the learner's schema will successfully incorporate the new learning. If there is no strong connection to an existing schema, the resulting disequilibrium could frustrate the learner, but if he or she is engaged in the lesson and finds the material relevant, the resulting curiosity will encourage further exploration (Wood et al., 2011). The key to learning for Piaget and the other constructivists was that the students should not see the teacher as the sole source for information; rather, the teacher should be a guide toward new engaging and relevant information that could incorporate the learner's world and past experiences to stimulate natural curiosity (Thayer-Bacon, 2012; Wood et al., 2011).

Maria Montessori (1913) argued that a learner's natural curiosity was the biggest catalyst to gathering new information, and as the learners' interests motivate them to explore further, they create new schema (Ultanir, 2012). Students learn, Montessori argued, when personal experiences and perceptions allow them to take in new knowledge, and especially if they are surrounded with engaging and relevant opportunities to learn (Greene, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2012). In Montessori's paradigm, learning comes from within and students are explorers who naturally and actively seek opportunities to learn, rather than empty vessels waiting passively to be filled (Greene, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2012; Ultanir, 2012).

Curiosity is an important element in the acquisition of knowledge in the constructivist mindset because it is triggered by uncertainty (Wu, Miao, & An, 2014). According to Festinger's (1957) theory, cognitive dissonance is the result of two

cognitions, or "bits of knowledge," that are relevant but inconsistent (Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Levy, 2015, p. 184). When learners encounter an idea that challenges the consistency of two previously considered cognitions, the resulting dissonance is enough to motivate the learners to gather information to alleviate the discomfort that comes from the dissonance (Harmon-Jones et al., 2015).

Similarly, if students find as a result of this information-gathering process that they have a gap in knowledge of a particular topic, natural curiosity guides them in the investigation and exploration process to fill that gap to relieve the dissonance and seek the answer in the area just beyond their current knowledge (Oudeyer & Smith, 2014; Wu et al., 2014). Wu, Miao, and An (2014) identify three situations that can stimulate a learner's curiosity: through novelty, surprise, or uncertainty. Situations that are new for the learner can clearly identify a gap in the knowledge base for which there exists no prior schema. Wu, Miao, and An (2014) add that when learners experience an event that is not what background knowledge suggests should have happened, the factor of surprise stimulates curiosity to find a reason why the expectation was different from the actual result (Wu et al., 2014). If the learner is completely devoid of responses for a certain stimulus, the feeling of uncertainty can also stimulate one's curiosity to determine which of the multiple competing responses could be correct, or determine which of the multiple available actions is clearly incorrect (Wu et al., 2014). The emotional motivation to explore and ascertain the information missing in the learner's background knowledge is dependent both on the perceived relevance of the situation at hand, as well as the significance of the deficit in the gap in knowledge; a learner's interest is engaged by that

which is only just beyond the current knowledge rather than that which is too far out of the reach of the existing schema (Oudeyer & Smith, 2014; Wu et al., 2014).

For the constructivists, education is connected to action and learning is connected to social and cultural experiences. As students are driven toward new experiences due to the emotional motivation of curiosity based on a self-identified gap in knowledge or through engaging and relevant lessons designed to foster that same interest through social activities or object studies (Yilmaz, Filiz, & Yilmaz, 2013), the students develop schema needed to process future information (Ultanir, 2012). Students can be encouraged to develop interest through engaging activities crafted to trigger and sustain their situational interest through presenting relevant problems based in prior knowledge that require solutions in the unknown (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). Rotgans and Schmidt (2011) note further that these lessons motivate epistemic curiosity by using novel questions, ambiguous statements, and presenting unsolved problems.

The location of the study was relevant to the contructivists' theories on experience leading to schema development in learners. Zephyr City's mayor commented that the need for students to recognize the relevance of the history lessons to their own experience was even greater thanks to the wealth of history that surrounded them each day (D. Shoaf, personal communication, June 2, 2015). With a large limestone cave and a powerfully productive fresh water spring in the heart of the town, Zephyr City has been a center of activity for hundreds of years. Established as a town in 1832, but serving as a key juncture on trade routes linking major cities like Atlanta with points in neighboring Alabama for many years prior, the history of this little town spans from the Woodland

Indians, to the Creek Indians, and through the Cherokee period, culminating in being a

stop on the Trail of Tears, which removed the Cherokee from Georgia to Oklahoma

(Abernathy, 2015). Archaeological excavations in a downtown building referred to as the

Vann Cabin revealed it to be a Cherokee-built structure, making it one of the oldest

buildings in Flora County (Crowder, 2015; Stewart, 2013).

The town of Zephyr City also served as a medical triage center during the Civil

War, hosting and healing soldiers injured from nearby battles such as the Battle of

Allatoona Pass and the beginning of Sherman's march through Georgia, which started

nearby (Abernathy, 2015). The city government building was the location of the triage

center (Abernathy, 2015). Zephyr City also served as the home for the Georgia School

for the Deaf, one of the first schools set up solely to serve the deaf community in the state

(Abernathy, 2015), and many of the original Georgia School for the Deaf buildings are

found in the immediate downtown area, as well.

Thanks to the diligent efforts of the historical society in town, the majority of the

historic buildings in the town have been renovated to their original appearance

(Abernathy, 2015). The town's mayor added, "When students walk past or go in those

buildings, they are seeing what the Cherokee saw and walking where the Civil War

soldiers walked" (D. Shoaf, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2016). The town grew up

around those structures. For the students at Zephyr City Elementary School who have

grown up in this four-square-mile town, the buildings were an integral part of their own

personal history. Understanding the importance of these buildings and the relevance of

these buildings and the history behind them could help the students become more

engaged with the events of the past, imparting valuable historiographic skills like understanding historical perspective and multiple causality while also instilling the values of nationalism and patriotism that come from experiencing the power of the past (Lesh, 2011).

Review of the Broader Problem

A gap in practice exists between the ideal classroom experience based on the constructivists' thought and the current classroom experience based on the demands of standardized testing. The following two themes emerged in the analysis: (a) the negative effects of the standards-based education reform efforts on social studies instruction and the use of social studies instructional time, and (b) the struggles faced by teachers who are not prepared to teach the material due to a general lack of knowledge about the subject caused by a lack of preparation.

The Need for Engagement in Lesson Design

According to Mitchell, ideally, students in an active learning classroom have their interest stimulated through being empowered to explore engaging and relevant activities that connect past experiences to current situations (as cited in Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Oudeyer & Smith, 2014). Intrinsic interest comes from being aware of what one does not know and feeling enough engagement with the educational process to be willing to explore further to find answers to the unknown (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). As a student pursues a new topic, feelings of deprivation are reduced and a pleasure comes from closing gaps in knowledge; when students are engaged and encouraged to follow their own curiosity, as theorized by Shiefele, Krapp, and Winteler, achievement will increase

(as cited in Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). This requires teachers to be ambitious in their lessons and choose content and material that will be engaging and relevant for their students (Hong & Hamot, 2015; Ross et al., 2014), and be willing to challenge the administrative edicts to use the materials provided by the testing companies (Hong & Hamot, 2015; Vinson et al., 2011; Winstead, 2011), which many teachers are either too afraid or too unprepared to do (Jurica, 2010).

With very little instructional time dedicated to the study of history, teachers become curriculum gatekeepers, choosing the material that is fast and easy to deliver rather than that which could be more engaging, relevant, and challenging, but would take longer to plan, implement, and teach (Lovorn, 2012; Pace, 2011). Lessons on historiography and historical thinking can be time-consuming to plan and implement, and as teachers are faced with demands for straight factual recall without any equivalent demands for the depth of the discussion or the implementation of higher order thinking skills, many teachers find they do not have enough time to spend on designing innovative or dynamic lessons (Day, 2013; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Kenna & Russell, 2014; Lovorn, 2012; Pace, 2011). Instead, some teachers choose to use their creativity in designing lessons for tested subjects like reading and math, rather than designing engaging lessons for the non-tested history material (Jurica, 2010; Yali & Hoge, 2005).

The era of high-stakes testing, especially in low-income or low-performance schools (Hong & Hamot, 2015), has effectively stripped teachers of most of the creative control they once had in their own classrooms. Instead of being encouraged to design engaging, relevant activities, teachers are given prescriptive, scripted lessons designed by

the testing companies to improve test scores (Hong & Hamot, 2015; Ross et al., 2014; Winstead, 2011). These lessons do little more than simply serve the purpose of providing short and concise bits of information designed for easy digestion (Day, 2013) and a series of facts to be recalled (Lovorn, 2012). These choppy, disjointed lessons are the exact opposite of the engaging curriculum required for students to scaffold new material onto their existing schema (Conley, 2011). According to Ross et al. (2013), instead of pursuing a goal of lasting understanding, teachers today are forced to fit their lessons to match a list of skills and compliant behaviors derived from an external source, which are reinforced by institutional rewards and punishments. The goals set by administrators outside of the classroom do not afford teachers the time to respond to student needs; rather, as Leahey posed, the sum total of their academic success or failure is reduced to a series of numerical indicators (as cited by Ross et al., 2014).

The Reliance on Textbook and Prepared Material

For those teachers who strive to maintain some semblance of autonomy in their lesson plans, rather than teaching the dictated curriculum in the face of standardized testing pressure, even finding material to deliver in engaging and relevant lessons is difficult (Hong & Hamot, 2015). Mohamed and Whitburn (2014) noted that coming up with new lessons with fewer and fewer resources requires teachers to work even harder to take the time to find appropriate resources without falling behind in their other responsibilities. Many school budgets simply lack the money to afford the materials printed by the testing companies, which sets them at a significant disadvantage to those schools that can afford to purchase teaching materials (Baker, 2012; Broussard, 2014).

Mohamed and Whitburn (2014) went on to add that a lack of subject matter knowledge further compounds the difficulties, showing that ultimately, the textbook becomes the easy, largely controversy-free alternative for students to learn the information passively (van Hover, Hicks, & Cotton, 2013).

The reason for such reliance on the test preparation materials and books published by the large publishing houses is the hope that it will prepare students for the scattershot high stakes testing required in the wake of educational reforms like NCLB and RT3 (2009) and the ensuing consistent pressure for high performance on factual-recall standardized tests (Conley, 2011; Hernandez, 2013; Lovorn, 2012). The test preparation materials do not help teachers to make efforts to connect the new information with any existing schema, thus frustrating the learners' attempts at making any lasting connections that would encourage the new information to remain in the learner's mental databases (Conley, 2011). Rather, the "myriad bits of content" delivered through worksheets and "drill-and-memorize" activities (Conley, 2011, p. 18) are much more difficult for the learner to retain than if those bits of content were presented in ways that align with existing schema, engage and interest the learner, and stimulate natural curiosity with relevant lessons that help students see the connections between the world around them and the new material presented to them (Conley, 2011; Hall, 2015; Ultanir, 2012).

Social Studies, as a Class, is Boring

Perhaps not surprisingly, the teachers' choices in using the misaligned, uninteresting test preparation materials as teaching materials has had a negative impact on attitudes toward social studies as a subject. As school district administrators actively

decided to take time away from social studies in favor of subjects that are on the federally

mandated standardized tests and stopped treating social studies as an independent course

worthy of its own study, students also began to feel that social studies is unimportant and

not worthy of their time (Jones, 2012; Jurica, 2010; MacPhee & Kaufman, 2014).

Teachers faced with a decreasing amount of time dedicated to history often rely heavily

on teaching through the textbook, which is a source that provides facts but is

overwhelmingly boring to most students (Jurica, 2010; MacPhee & Kaufman, 2014).

History becomes no longer engaging or relevant when it is reduced to a small block of

time, and as teachers are forced to put aside their own autonomy and focus on dry facts,

the creative engaging methodologies and in-depth relevant studies are pushed aside,

perpetuating the popular negative perception of social studies being boring (Heafner &

Fitchett, 2012).

Becoming a Reading Teacher

Many teachers have attempted to modify their curriculum to include history

education in conjunction with reading skills lessons. In this way, some teachers felt they

might have salvaged some of the importance of a history curriculum and reclaimed some

of the instructional time that had been sheared away from teaching the discipline and

parceled out to reading or math skill areas (Boyle-Baise et al., 2011). VanFossen and

McGrew (2008) found in one study that this approach is by far more popular with

teachers of younger students, used by nearly 60% of elementary schools and a third of

intermediate schools. However, additional research shows that this approach to teaching

history does not allow the teacher to achieve the desired result of teaching two subjects at

once. Rather, according to Boyle-Baise et al. (2011), it is done at the expense of one

subject and ends up trivializing both. Reading integration is generally done haphazardly

and without focus or design, and not planned purposefully to teach relevant social studies

skills (Walker, 2014), until finally social studies is simply seen as a byproduct of reading

(Pace, 2011). The damage is that without establishing the narrative, local relevance,

context, and reasoning behind reading materials such as historical documents, the

students do not have any existing prior schema with which to connect this new

information, which results in students being, essentially, "historically illiterate" (Calder,

2013, p. 6; Day, 2013).

If the context of the historical documents is simplified by teaching the documents

as reading lessons, it "furthers the notion of a secondary role of social studies…as an

integration fodder for literacy instruction" (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012, p. 193). McCully

(2012) found that removing the rest of the historical narrative from the reading of

individual documents strips the documents of meaning and denies the reader the

opportunity to put the meaning of the documents in any kind of broader context. This

does not help the students find the foundation to understand the historiographic material,

nor does it give them any real help in understanding the reading concepts.

As history classrooms become more and more like reading enrichment facilities

(Boyle-Baise et al., 2011), classroom engagement and the teachers' passion for the

subject tend to wilt. Teachers begin to rely on the textbook to deliver the information the

students need because it is presented in a tidy package (Lovorn, 2012; Pace, 2011).

Unfortunately, textbook versions of history are often too politically correct to be

informative and encompass far too broad of a spectrum of information to be easy to

understand (Bolduc, 2011; Calder, 2013; Day, 2013; Yoder & van Hover, 2013).

Teachers also tend to rely on the text when they themselves lack the knowledge,

confidence, or support to teach the material creatively on their own and are simply

looking to fulfill the minimum requirements of state and district curriculum (Jurica, 2010;

Zhao & Hoge, 2005).

Further, because of the blending of social studies with reading classes at lower

levels, many students are lacking the historiographic understanding of the events

discussed in upper level courses, requiring the upper level history teachers to shoulder the

burden of teaching not only their own expected curriculum, but also the factual

foundation of each of the topics, as well (Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005; Day,

2013; Lovorn, 2012). Often, teachers choose to teach using lectures in order to provide

all of the information needed because of the lack of student preparation in the lower level

courses, but a study by McBride, Bergstrom, and Foran in 2013 indicated that students

found lectures to be "abstract and distant…confusing and irrelevant" (p. 4).

At even higher levels, professors in teacher preparatory programs in colleges now

are putting a priority on teaching their candidates reading and math instructional

strategies, rather than stressing historiography in pedagogy classes (Bolick et al., 2010;

Jurica, 2010; Yoder & van Hover, 2013). Brand new teachers may graduate and enter the

classroom without having any social studies classes other than the general classes

required by the university, and because of this they are not prepared to teach history as

heritage instead of disjointed facts to be memorized (Bolick et al., 2010; Lovorn, 2012;

Yoder & van Hover, 2013). Over their entire public educational career, which began after the implementation of NCLB, today's graduates have never been in a history classroom that was not taught by a teacher pressured to perform on high-stakes tests that demanded factual recall over historiographical understandings, or teaching within time constraints due to the standardized test (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Hong & Hamot, 2015; Lovorn, 2012; McBride, Bergstrom, & Foran, 2013).

The Results of Marginalizing History Classes

The National Council on Social Studies (NCSS) reported that at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, history curriculum has been marginalized at all levels (cited in Maguth, 2012), including higher education. A study conducted by the Department of Education indicated that the marginalization of the study of history has taken a toll on history graduates, too; during the 2010-2011 academic year, only 2.02% of the degrees conferred were history degrees, which marks a level lower than all but five of the last 25 years and the lowest in the last ten years (Townsend, 2013). This marked decrease in history degree recipients represents a decline of nearly 3,700 students nationwide who are choosing to pursue other areas of study (Townsend, 2013) rather than choosing to pursue a degree that would make them a subject matter expert in a history classroom, capable of designing engaging and relevant lessons for students, and passing on lessons in citizenship, empathy, and historical identity, which are foundational elements for creating a united nation of citizens capable of making positive social change (Lopez et al., 2014b; Ross et al., 2014).

Over the last ten years, researchers have published articles warning the public of the ominous effects of the NCLB's emphasis on testing. As early as three years after NCLB was introduced, researchers like Burroughs, Groce, and Webeck (2005) cautioned that the exclusion of social studies as an area of emphasis could result in "an eclipsing of the civic and public mission of American schools…students will likely leave school unprepared to become informed, responsible, and engaged citizens of their communities," (p. 14). Others have painted bleak pictures of the future of American citizens as school district administrators have relegated social studies to the position of a very boring offshoot of reading courses (Jurica, 2010; MacPhee & Kaufman, 2014). Students enjoy history classes but do not see them as relevant (McBride et al., 2013), and as school district administrators continue to "squeeze social studies out" of the curricular expectations in elementary and middle schools, as Houser (1995) noted, there is nothing to indicate that social studies will ever be removed from the "back burner" of education (as cited in Vinson et al., 2011).

The teachers' pressure from this attempt at meeting the reading and math skills demands of high stakes testing has caused significant changes in social studies classrooms in districts around the nation, including the local school district in this study. Teachers are challenged to balance the needs of the school with the needs of their students, which require them to design lessons that are engaging and relevant to their students, while managing the constraints of less instructional time allotted by district administration due to the pressure of standardized testing. This study allowed me to use the teachers' perspectives on teaching engaging and relevant lessons while managing the

reduction in instructional time to understand and analyze the challenges of teaching in an atmosphere made more uneasy by the pressure to conform to the demands of standardized test performance.

Implications for Social Change

Interviews conducted with teachers allowed me to derive critical insight into the challenge of teaching engaging and relevant history lessons within the time constraints placed by the school district administration. Based on the information gathered through the literature review, I anticipated that the teachers would indicate frustration at teaching the seemingly disparate GPS in an engaging and relevant way. I began the interview process with an expectation that the teachers would respond positively to a professional development program that would incorporate their perspectives and provide assistance with teaching engaging and relevant lessons based on the GPS. Although I was prepared to modify the project after my careful analysis of the teachers' responses to the interview questions if the findings did not reflect my anticipated results, ultimately after conducting a thorough data analysis, I did not feel a change was necessary.

Because of the potentially far-reaching implications of this professional development program, the subject offers many different directions that researchers and stakeholders could explore. Following my expectation that the participants would respond positively to a professional development program designed to incorporate their perspectives to design engaging and relevant lessons, stakeholders could use the professional development program plan to design lessons for locations outside of Zephyr City or Flora County. Engaging and relevant lessons could be created representing the

history of neighboring counties, or even towns and cities farther away. For the lessons in future projects to be engaging and relevant, the professional development program should be designed to reflect the experiences of the students in that particular location in order to allow the learners to make connections with their own experiences.

I anticipate that the teachers' and students' responses to engaging and relevant history lessons will be positive. If the positive reactions indicate agreement with the thoughts of the Constructivists that students are more likely to remember information presented when they are engaged in learning something that connects to the world around them and is perceived as relevant, this methodology could be applied to other locations in the area with similar historical experiences, or even recommended for other locations in similar history-rich towns across the country.

The classroom implications can reach even farther. In the state of Georgia, history is taught from third grade to eleventh grade (GaDOE, n.d.). At each level, teachers incorporating engaging and relevant lessons about history in different places or about different people could raise the learners' interest levels, stimulating the curiosity that leads to construction of schema. Although this is in no way a solution to the problem, this could serve to reinforce the Constructivists' conviction that lasting learning stems from connecting personal experiences to engaging and relevant historical learning.

Summary

For the bulk of the current generation's academic life, social studies as a discipline has been marginalized and relegated to the position of an offshoot of a reading skills course. A concerted effort must be made to invigorate the public's once strong

feelings of national and community history and to revive the flagging interest in studying Zephyr City's history. This community can no longer assume that the elements that make this town historically significant will be taught fully in the local elementary school, or even at the middle school, high school, or college levels. Engaging and relevant lessons are the key to making sure that history is not forgotten in the classrooms already struggling to meet the demands of standardized testing.

This study included interviews with teachers with experience in social studies course instruction at the elementary and middle school level. I interviewed six teachers about their experiences with a limited amount of instructional time for their history lessons, as well as their perspectives on their students' feelings of engagement with the material and the relevance of the material being presented to their own prior experiences. The teachers' responses, gathered through one-on-one interviews, were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes and compared with my researcher notes. Overwhelmingly, the teachers agreed that there was a challenge to creating engaging, relevant lessons with such a short allotment of instructional time. This qualitative, case study research design is expected to allow the researcher and stakeholders to use the teachers' perspectives to help students increase their understandings of history by making the connection between what is around them and what is being taught through engaging and relevant lessons.

In the next section, I will discuss my research methodology and the process by which I selected and interviewed six teachers. The interviews were based around questions reflecting the themes that emerged as I analyzed the current problem as it has

been presented in current literature. Research shows that the best efforts of teachers to

compete with the rapidly decreasing amount of instructional time dedicated specifically

to the study of history simply is not making the material engaging or relevant enough for

lasting understanding. Sterile and controversy-free textbooks and test preparation

materials lack engagement, and history lessons masquerading as reading skills reviews

lack context. The researchers indicated that time constraints were a challenge for

teachers. My interviews will explore teachers' experiences of that challenge in their own

classrooms.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In response to a national emphasis on standardized testing, district administrators took planning time away from history teachers and instructional time away from history classes. The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perspectives on teaching history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school in terms of engagement and relevance while working within the instructional time constraints. In this section, I will discuss my research design and methodology, as well as the approach I took toward data collection and interpretation.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The question guiding the research was as follows: "What are the classroom teachers' perspectives of the challenge of teaching engaging and relevant history lessons within the time constraints placed by the school district administration?" This question reflected the local problem and allowed me to address the issue of the lack of instructional time dedicated to history instruction in social studies classes. I sought the perspective of teachers who have been impacted by the time constraints in their history classroom, and then analyzed their responses. The interviews were based on the three following questions:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the challenge of teaching history lessons within the time constraints placed by the district administration?

2. What are teachers' perspectives on the relevance of their history lessons to their students' lives and experiences?

3. What are teachers' perspectives on the level of engagement they see from their students as a result of the loss of time from social studies instruction?

This case study research allowed me to analyze the perspectives of teachers who are challenged with teaching engaging and relevant history lessons with reduced instructional time. Case studies allow the researcher to create understanding of an event through the eyes of those who are witnesses (Lodico, Spaulding,, & Voegtle, 2010). In a case study, the researcher constructs meaning based on individual experiences, recognizing that each person's perspective is different, and that multiple meanings and interpretations can come from a single experience (Lodico et al., 2010). The challenge here was to put aside, or bracket, my own opinions and to base all conclusions on interviews and reflection rather than on assumptions (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). The case study lets the researcher describe in rich detail the shared reactions and perspectives of those who experienced the event first-hand, and explain to the reader what it was like for the participant (Merriam, 2009). Case studies are not fodder for sweeping generalizations, nor can a case study be applied immediately to a larger population.

A case study fit this line of investigation because it allowed me to analyze the shared perceptions of the small group of individuals who are bound together in a unique situation (see Merriam, 2009). This study qualified as a case study because there was a

finite number of participants from which to choose--in this case, teachers who are bound together in a location that is rich in history that connects directly with the state curriculum.

Grounded theory research did not fit this particular line of inquiry because there is no need for a broadly generalizable theory about the research (Lodico et al., 2010). Similarly, an ethnographic study would not have fit because this is not based solely on observations and will not be analyzing the impact of the community's culture on the experiences of the teachers being interviewed (Creswell, 2012). A phenomenological study would also not have been appropriate because this study will not be conducted using "extensive amounts of data over time," (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 270). A case study allowed me to see insight into a particular situation, in this case, the experience of teaching state standards with a strong connection to local history under the pressure of standardized testing expectations (Lodico et al., 2010). In this situation the appeal of a case study was found in its ability to offer an "in-depth description and analysis" of a smaller, bounded system of teachers like these assigned to teach history lessons in an area rich in historic ties (Merriam, 2009, p. 40).

Participants

The participants for this study were selected purposefully from the local Zephyr City elementary school, as well as the two middle schools attended by students from that school (see Table 1). Purposeful sampling was ideal for this case study because the

subjects chosen offer specific insights that are relevant to and helpful in expanding the

understanding of this particular research topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

Interviewee	Years of experience teaching	Years of experience teaching fourth, fifth, or eighth grade Georgia social studies curriculum standards
Participant A	30	28
Participant B	13	5
Participant C	15	4
Participant D	21	9
Participant E	12	12
Participant F	29	15

The participants were teachers who had experience teaching social studies classes

using the GPS, specifically those standards with direct connection to the history of the

state of Georgia. The local school in Zephyr City served students in kindergarten through

fifth grade, but the GPS for history focus on events that happened locally only in fourth

and fifth grade, then again in eighth grade. Because the sample was drawn based on their

school site location and experience with the discipline of social studies, the participants

had a wide variety of total years of experience in the classroom, as illustrated in Table 1,

although that element did not factor in to the selection of participants. This sampling

strategy resulted in a sample of six teachers chosen by their location, the subject matter

taught, and years of experience teaching history, not necessarily by their total years of experience in the classroom. One teacher was recommended by a principal because she had several years of teaching experience, but because it was her first year teaching social studies, I chose not to invite her to participate. Purposeful sampling encourages the researcher to choose "key informants" based on their expertise in that area (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 140) and because that individual had not yet had an opportunity to demonstrate expertise in teaching the GPS for social studies, she would not necessarily have been an asset to the research at hand.

I worked with the human resources department at the school district as well as the principals of the individual schools to request a list of those teachers who were assigned to teach social studies classes using the GPS. Once I received a copy of this list, I personally contacted each principal by email and with a written letter to explain my purpose in conducting the study to gain access to the participants. Once access was granted by the principal, I contacted each participant through a written letter, as well as email and in face to face conversations, to explain to them the purpose of the study and what was expected of them in terms of time and responses. I was careful to note that each participant would be protected from harm in each of these informed consent letters. Given the nature of this qualitative research, I can be sure that none of the participants would be placed in a position where they could potentially be physically harmed by the research (Lodico et al., 2010). I asked each teacher to meet for one interview that would take approximately an hour, and asked each for permission to contact them later if any follow-up questions need to be asked after each interview was transcribed, coded, and the

accuracy of the transcribed interviews was verified with the interviewees. One follow-up interview was conducted through a written letter and face-to-face question with the participants.

However, to create a successful relationship with each participant, contact was not limited solely to this interview. I established multiple methods of contact, reaching out through email as well as telephone conversations and expressing to the participants that I was available to talk to them at any time if they had concerns about their own participation or their responses to the questions. Several of the teachers wanted to continue the conversation after the interview was finished and the recording device was turned off. Although those non-recorded responses were not included in the findings, it is noteworthy that the interviews encouraged the teachers not only to think about the questions after I had left, but also to reach out to continue the conversation. Their eagerness to continue our discussions about the questions showed that the subject was a critical topic for these classroom teachers.

I met with each teacher prior to the interview to walk through their schools and classrooms. Because I taught in this district and lived in Zephyr City, I gained the participants' trust by being a fellow social studies teacher. I recognized that my connection to the subject of social studies and history could lead to a bias which could have influenced the results, so I consciously chose to control for that bias by keeping my own opinions out of the data interpretations. At the time of the walkthrough, each participant was provided with informed consent to let them know that they would be protected from any harm that might come from the interviews. The participants were

reminded that their responses would be kept confidential and they were free to remove themselves from the study at any point. Each participant had the opportunity to read and review my findings, and will have an opportunity to read the final product after completion. The idea of protection from harm includes the protection from any foreseeable adverse consequences, so because I did have a friendly working relationship with the participants, I was careful to make a plan of ways for the participants to manage personally any "unanticipated outcomes" of the interviews (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 150).

I also kept a research journal of contemporary editorial news articles, online blog posts, and general educator commentary in professional organization magazines and web forums relevant to this topic. I read articles and commentary posted by general middle school organizations like the Association for Middle Level Education, National Education Association, and the local Georgia Association of Educators. I also read carefully posts from discipline-specific sources such as the National Council for Social Studies, as well as the Georgia Council for Economic Education.

Data Collection

I interviewed the participants using an interview protocol and encouraged them to give extended answers to the open-ended questions. The interview questions were drawn from the themes gathered from the conceptual frameworks based on the work of the Constructivists, as well as the review of the literature about the central research question once saturation had been reached. The face-to-face interview was much more applicable to this case study methodology than a paper and pencil or computerized survey. In a

face-to-face interview, the researcher is free to ask leading questions and encourage the

participants to elaborate on their answers in a "respectful, nonjudgmental, and

nonthreatening" way (Merriam, 2009, p. 107). Because I shared their position as a social

studies teacher, I could be an "interested and sympathetic listener," which may have

helped them "clarify their own thoughts and experiences" to provide the in-depth

responses required of a qualitative case study methodology such as this one (Merriam,

2009, p. 107). Interviews were recorded on an Olympia digital recorder and were

uploaded as data files to a password protected Google Drive account. The interviews

were transcribed later using Microsoft Word. I used research logs and reflective journals

to keep track of my thoughts on the interviews as well as to make notes of emerging

themes and understandings.

Access to the participants was allowed after three levels of permission had been

granted: from Walden University (Approval No. 08-19-16-0343770), from the school

district, and from the individual principals at each school site. Once I had secured

permission from the university to proceed with the research, and permission to research

in the district had been obtained, I contacted the director of human resources in the school

district to request a list of principals of schools with a fourth, fifth, and eighth grade

social studies class. I purposefully chose to contact principals whose students whose

homes were in the general area of Zephyr City, Georgia. I used that list to contact the

principals to request permission to interview teachers who were teaching social studies

courses in fourth and fifth grades at A and B Elementary, as well as eighth grade at C and

D Middle School. After I received the list, I sent a letter to each of the principals of those

three schools explaining the purpose of this study and the steps that would be taken to ensure confidentiality in the responses. With the principals put at ease and after they gave their permission as well, the participants were invited by written letter, email correspondence, and face-to-face contact.

Because I shared a common interest with the participants of teaching social studies, and struggled with the same dilemma of teaching the state-mandated curriculum in a limited time frame as well, I could establish a strong working relationship in my role as researcher and foster the intimacy and trust needed to gather their honest results. I did not have any authority over these teachers, so this was not seen as a conflict of interest, nor did those teachers feel any pressure to provide insincere responses. I shared the common background of teaching students from this area with the participants and had worked together on projects in the past. I had been teaching in this relatively small rural district for 17 years, so I had a strong working relationship with these teachers. This served to put them at ease because I was not an outsider. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted that an advantage of qualitative research is that because many people associate research with surveys and questionnaires, a more "low key" approach could garner more genuine responses (p. 85). This relationship might potentially have led to a situation where the results might have been biased. As the interviews progressed, I controlled for that bias by providing positive reinforcement for each answer so they would not feel the need to say what they thought I wanted to hear.

Each interview was conducted in a neutral area of the interviewees' choice in the teachers' schools, which served to put them at ease, as well as provided them a convenient path to walk away from the interview if needed. Each was reminded at the beginning of each interview that they were free to end the interview or their participation in this project at any time and that they might walk away at their discretion. I also reminded them that I would share with them the findings from the research. This served to put them further at ease, as well as served as a member check to provide validity and reliability to the research. The introduction to each interview ended with a reminder that the participants' confidentiality would be protected. In a study such as this one with a small sample size and a relative small geographic location, Lodico et al., (2010) noted that it might be a challenge to maintain confidentiality. I was very conscious of this challenge, and in the analysis I was sure to provide enough detail of the group or setting to inform the reader, but not so much that I would violate that promise of confidentiality.

I recognized that I did have some strong biases about this topic because of my own experience in the classroom. I have been a classroom social studies teacher for 22 years. I believe strongly in the importance of teaching historiography as well as basic social studies concepts in the classroom. I feel the gradual removal of instructional time dedicated to the study of historiography is destructive to the social studies curriculum. However, as a researcher, I needed to put aside any strong personal feelings and focus instead on the perspectives expressed by these participants. If their feelings were different, I could acknowledge my own emotions, but I must report on their responses, not supplant them or lead them with my own. Although there were no significant outlier

responses in the interviews, I still sought a peer to review all of the data from the transcriptions impartially for logical development of the codes and themes. This peer, who was familiar with the study as well as research methodologies, was given the opportunity to sign a confidentiality agreement so his identity was protected. In that way, I compared his impartial results to my own, and worked to remove any traces of bias revealed by this peer review.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed after the interviews using Microsoft Word, then color coded for themes. I transcribed each of the interviews by hand, without transcription software. I listened to the recording of the interviews, then typed verbatim what I heard. Although it was a lengthy process, listening and transcribing allowed me to hear the responses clearly and internalize the vocal tones and inflections made by the speakers. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted that one of the most difficult challenges of transcription was accurately capturing the punctuation to reflect the meaning of each statement (p. 132), and I found that challenge to be quite real. Transcribing by hand in this way also helped me to avoid any potential mistakes made by an impersonal software program because I was able to hear what each participant said. I compared each of the completed transcriptions to the research notes taken during the interview to ensure that what was being typed was true to the spirit of the conversation as well as to the actual words that were spoken.

On several occasions, the interviews were interrupted by other teachers, administrators, or students entering the room. For each of those interruptions, I noted in the transcription that an interruption had occurred, but did not transcribe the exchange of the interruption. In one situation, the school counselor had interrupted the interview with a matter of some urgency related to a student. Although the participant stepped into the hall to conduct the conversation, the door to the room was not closed. At that time, I covered the recorder to prevent any of the sensitive conversation from being recorded and distracted myself with interview notes so that I would not overhear what was being discussed, even though the discussion was carried out in hushed tones. The interviewee made no reference to the conversation other than an apology for the interruption, and the interview continued from that point. I noted the interruption in the field notes, but did not allow the interruption or the break in questioning to impact the integrity of the transcription process. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) agreed that editing out extraneous conversations and discussions unrelated to the topic was an acceptable type of "shortcut" to take (p. 132). I made the conscious choice to leave out the interruptions in the transcription, both to maintain the focus of the data as well as to preserve the promise of confidentiality made to the interviewees.

After typing each interview, I re-read the transcriptions carefully, editing any typographical errors or any other errors in the transcription's formatting. Several of the interviewees answered the questions in long streams of thought, so many of the interviews went on for more than eight pages. I understood that this transcription process was going to be the most labor-intensive part of the data analysis process (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010), so following their advice, I set aside

several days to dedicate to the transcription process. After editing the transcriptions for

typographical errors, as well as any speaking errors the interviewees acknowledged and

corrected during the interview but leaving the grammar and syntax intact, I printed each

interview and sent it to the corresponding participant. I thanked each for their

participation and honest answers in an attached note, and asked each to contact me if they

felt there were any corrections or clarifications that needed to be made. To ensure quality,

I encouraged the participants to review the transcriptions for accuracy. Each participant

was offered the opportunity to be contacted for follow-up questions, with the

understanding that he or she may decide to discontinue his or her participation at any

time. None responded that any corrections were warranted, so I continued with the color

coding and analysis process.

The analysis process began by arranging the interview transcriptions and field

notes chronologically and color coding the transcriptions and notes for themes. In the

color coding process, each interview was analyzed and common themes were noted as I

was reading the printed transcriptions. I used a lean coding process, which allowed me to

assign only a few codes to each transcript rather than working with an unmanageable list

of codes (Creswell, 2012). I made notes of words and ideas that came up repeatedly to

help identify emergent themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each of the 20 common themes

was assigned a different color. As I reviewed the transcripts again and saw a comment

relating to those themes, I underlined that comment in the appropriate color. I anticipated

overlap between the comments, and the visual element of the colors separating the

commentary made it much easier for me to compile and sort the participants' responses into three major themes. I isolated each color into its own separate theme and analyzed each independently, noting areas of alignment among the coding and responses and the conceptual frameworks.

Additionally, I made notes during the interview of the nonverbal communication such as body language and gestures that the participants exhibited. As I reviewed and coded the transcripts, I carefully analyzed the nonverbal communication notes against the transcripts of the recording to determine if the nonverbal communication or body language reinforced or detracted from the participant's responses.

As described earlier in section two, I also kept a running research journal of contemporary editorial news articles, online blog posts, and general educator commentary in professional organization magazines and web forums relevant to this topic posted by organizations like the Association for Middle Level Education, the National Council for Social Studies, the National Education Association, and the local Georgia Association of Educators, as well as the Georgia Council for Economic Education. As I transcribed and analyzed the data, I examined those commentaries, relying on them as a wider view of the general social studies teaching experience for triangulation. Once I noted that the continuous review of the interviews, field notes, and commentaries were no longer yielding new information for my study, I understood that saturation had been reached (Lodico et al., 2010) and moved ahead to sort the themes to determine the findings.

I recognized that each participant would have his or her independent opinions that might or might not align with the others' perspectives. The interview questions, found in Appendix A, were designed in a way that elicited participants' responses about experiences teaching social studies curriculum and history lessons at a time when standardized testing demands have taken away time and attention from the subject. When a participant described an experience that was not in line with the interview questions, I directed him or her back to the stated question in a polite and nonconfrontational way. When a participant expressed an opinion that was very different from the others, I pursued that line of discussion in the interview to ask for more explanations or examples. When one interviewee in particular gave very short, somewhat hesitant responses, I adjusted the questioning to include more open-ended questions to elicit more of that participant's opinion, and the interviewee ultimately offered more detailed responses as a result of my adjustment in questioning. As I coded the transcripts, I was prepared to find that one participant's response might have been very different from others. Different perspectives are not unusual in qualitative research, so discrepant cases were expected (Lodico et al., 2010). As the transcription process neared the end, however, I did not discover a discrepant case in the coding and analysis process. Had that happened, though, the participant would have been contacted to further explain his or her answers, and the discrepant case would have been addressed in the findings as such.

Findings

The problem in the community of Zephyr City, Georgia, was that a national emphasis on standardized testing resulted in the local school district administration's

decision to take time and attention away from history lessons in social studies classes. The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perspectives of teaching history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school in terms of engagement and relevance while working within the instructional time constraints applied by the school administration. The guiding research question behind this study was "What are the classroom teachers' perspectives of the challenge of teaching engaging and relevant history lessons within the time constraints placed by the school district administration?"

The semi structured interviews focused on the teachers' perspectives of teaching history lessons that centered on events and concepts that could be found in the local history of Zephyr City and surrounding Flora County, Georgia. The research questions guiding the interviews were:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the challenge of teaching history lessons within the time constraints placed by the district administration?

2. What are teachers' perspectives on the level of engagement they see from the students as a result of the loss of time from social studies instruction?

3. What are teachers' perspectives on the relevance of the history lessons to their students' own prior experiences?

A case study approach was used to analyze the shared experiences of teachers assigned to teach social studies classes that incorporate history lessons that are relevant to students in Zephyr City and Flora County, Georgia. Six teachers provided their

perspectives based on many years of classroom teaching experience. Most of the

participants had been teaching the Georgia social studies curriculum for the majority of

their teaching career, and looked back over the years to provide a long-ranging view of

the challenges of teaching social studies in general and history specifically. The six

participants provided their perspectives on the three research questions, as shown in

Table 2.

Table 2

Perceptions of Social Studies Teachers – Findings

Interview Questions	Themes	• Findings
Q1: What are your perspectives of the influence of the lack of instructional time on student engagement and feelings of relevance?	Time	• Teachers want to be able to teach without the stress of the standardized testing deadline for mastery and the lack of priority on history understandings. • Teachers would like the flexibility to schedule more time in class to invite outside experts to visit and share experiences and stories about subjects in which the students have expressed interest.
Q2: What are your perspectives of how the students engage with material they learn in your history instruction based on the state mandated curriculum?	Engagement	• Teachers felt that students are not interested in or curious about the new history material. • Teachers felt that students see the history material as entertaining when it is presented as a story, but do not make a lasting connection to the material. • Teachers felt that the material is too abstract for the students to internalize.

Q3: What are your perspectives of how your students connect their own prior experiences with the history curriculum you are assigned to teach?	No schema	- Teachers felt that students are lacking in prior experiences and thus do not connect readily to the history lessons due to a lack of schema. - Teachers felt that students do not recognize that the landmarks around themselves connect to historical events and are unfamiliar with their surroundings. - Teachers felt that students do not hear stories at home that provide foundations for schema that relate to history curriculum.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, major themes emerged from the responses. I color coded each them as it emerged and found through the color coding that each theme was carried over from one interview to the next. There were no discrepant cases; each teacher expressed a perspective that aligned with these themes in their interviews.

The teachers' responses to the interviews indicated that the pressure to meet the standardized testing deadline forced teachers to push or rush history lessons in favor of the material that was weighted more heavily on the statewide standardized assessment. Teachers also responded that while stories piqued the students' interest momentarily, stories alone did not lead to lasting engagement with or understandings of abstract history

concepts. The teachers felt that the students did not have the familiarity with their surroundings from personal experiences or through family stories that could have provided the scaffolding for the history curriculum to be personally relevant to the learner's own schema.

Standardized Testing Constricts Instruction

The standardized tests are administered in Flora County early in April, effectively cutting off a full month of instructional time, so the teachers commented about the pressure that puts on them to compact the material into a very brief period. Each of the participants agreed that standardized testing is a negative force in their classroom. Flannery (2015), in an article from my research journal, noted that although it seems the lawmaker's enthusiasm for test scores is never ending, teachers need to remember that each student deserves a rich, rewarding, engaging educational experience in the classroom. Participants in this study agreed with Flannery (2015) but expressed frustration with the lack of time allotted to instruction to create the engaging experiences.

> The curriculum is based on so many weeks, but in reality you have, you know, 27 or 28 weeks because of testing, right? And you have to cover all the curriculum, so I say that [is] a big problem…what [the standardized testing deadline] doesn't allow you to do is you can't ever take any time with any unit. Every unit feels a little rushed…we have to keep moving and we can't slow down and really get into anything. You're just skimming the surface. (Participant E)

Do I feel like I have enough time to teach what I need to teach? No, because we have to shut down two months early due to testing. If we could push it back to May, obviously that would help…but no, there's not enough time, especially for the [Georgia Performance] standards we have in the 8th grade. (Participant B)

Sometimes I think that's my fault because I don't make time for [engaging strategies], but then again, I'm always afraid I'm not going to be where I need to be before they take the test. (Participant D, Sept. 23, 2016)

Time for History is Sacrificed for Other Concepts

The grading system of the standardized tests in upper elementary and middle school social studies courses weighs government and economic concepts more heavily than history concepts. Students are expected to demonstrate mastery of more of the government concepts than the history concepts in order to earn a successful score. To meet this demand, many of these teachers made the decision to dedicate more class time to the government curriculum than the history curriculum. Two participants specifically noted that the 8th grade Georgia History curriculum has far more history material to teach than government, but in terms of student mastery expectations on the standardized tests, is more skewed toward government policies and laws than actual history timeline elements.

We've got to focus on what's mainly on the test, which is government…with Georgia history, you ought to be able to do a lot, but with the standards the

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way they are, there's not much you can do…really, it's like a government

class and then a history part. (Participant B)

We have a lot of standards in social studies. Especially in the eighth grade – I

think we have too many because when you get to the test, the questions they

ask are things we usually don't cover until the end of the year. They want

more into the government, the civics, [which] seem to be more of the

questions than the basic history questions. (Participant A)

Lack of Engagement with the Curriculum

Several of the teachers expressed personal disappointment at their students' lack

of interest in the history lessons they were teaching. Because of the time constraints, the

teachers were limited in the amount of time they could spend with subjects that the

students found interesting. Hall (2015) noted in an Association for Middle Level

Education article from the research journal that when information given is fragmentary,

the lack of resolution can often be destructive for student engagement with the topic. The

participants agreed that there did not seem to be enough time to allow for exploration of

concepts that might be more engaging for the students. For each of the teachers, lack of

student interest resulted in much more work on the teachers' part to make the lessons

engaging enough for the students to respond favorably, yet compact enough to fit within

the time constraints.

They're not interested in a lot of the stuff we cover. If we were able to cover what

they were interested in, obviously they'd be more engaged. But they don't

care…Even though it does affect them, they don't care…I mean, it happened to all these dead people and how does it tie to them, how does it affect them today? Especially, why do I have to know this? (Participant B)

I think history to most kids is 'neat' [said unenthusiastically, in a condescending tone]. I would say they think it's neat. It's like an interesting little TV show they've watched. You know what I mean? I don't think they take it seriously. They can't see the relevance to their life. They don't hate it…in general, I wouldn't say it's important to them. (Participant E)

Abstract Concepts Present a Challenge to Engagement

Without an appropriate schema provided by personal experiences through travel or family stories, many of the teachers noted that the concepts of history were abstract and difficult for the students to comprehend and find relevant to their own lives. When the concepts themselves are challenging for the students to grasp, teachers experience even more of a struggle to make the lessons engaging and relevant. Even the lessons on war, which several participants noted is perennially popular with upper elementary and middle school aged children, can be difficult for students to engage with due to the level of "moral ambiguity" (Participant E, Sept. 29, 2016) found in events like the Civil War.

Even our hard and fast rules aren't hard and fast rules…and that's hard for middle schoolers. It's hard for adults sometimes. The thing about social studies is that it's something that…for many kids, they don't get it now, and for us to expect them to get this interpretation that we're asking them to get, they can't. (Participant E)

They don't have a concept of time. At our kids' age, I don't think they're even developmentally ready to understand that…it's just so abstract for them. I mean, they love the role play and all that, but I don't think they truly understand the time periods. (Participant F)

Lack of Appropriate Schema

Each of the six participants noted that their students did not have a frame of reference upon which to make connections with the history curriculum. Students were not familiar with locations in the state of Georgia or even in Flora County that were relevant to the Georgia history curriculum. Students also very seldom shared stories that were passed down in their families about elements of Georgia history. Mohammed and Whitburn (2014) noted that it is difficult to get students to care about the material they are studying when the students do not see the lesson as immediately relevant or applicable to their lives. Each participant shared frustrations about the lack of schema their students had before coming into their classrooms:

You know, our problem with our community is that our kids don't leave the community…when you ask them questions about Atlanta, or you assume…things that should be common sense but are not because they don't have that experience" (Participant A)

There's a world out there besides what's directly around you…some of it is that the parents don't know, or the parents don't appreciate it. (Participant C)

I think the biggest problem is that they've not been anywhere…When I talk to kids about 8th grade, even about Ronin (a large nearby city, a pseudonym) in general, they don't have a clue about where things are…We're limited on what we do [because] if you don't know where you come from, you have no idea how your world fits together. (Participant D)

It seems more and more we have kids who have never been outside Ronin, Georgia. They don't know where Zephyr City is. I'm serious, they go to Walmart. That's why I said the more real experiences, that's the only thing that's going to make it come alive. (Participant F)

Personal Experiences are Ideal for Schema Construction

In an article from the research journal, Yancie and Clabough (2016) discussed the importance of giving students opportunities to experience history first-hand to stimulate engagement and allow students to construct schema necessary to build lasting understandings, allowing history to "come alive," as Participant F commented during the interview (October 14, 2016). In Yancie and Clabough's (2016) experience, allowing students to dress up as historical figures was a highly engaging way to have the students experience history. Participants in this study agreed that with the lack of student schema playing such a significant part in the challenge of making abstract history concepts more engaging and relevant to the students, their ideal classroom would be designed to give students the opportunity to have personal experiences to build feelings of relevance.

Participant C commented on the educational potential of having students or even teachers dress in historically accurate costumes for a day (September 9, 2016).

For several of the teachers interviewed, the opportunity to travel into the community to learn their local history would also be a powerful tool for schema construction, in addition to events providing the opportunity to dress up in costume. However, several participants noted that there were drawbacks to these potentially valuable experiences. For the students in Participant F's school, the financial cost of costumes or field trips was too prohibitive. For the teachers like Participant D and E, the instructional time that would be taken up by the out-of-the-classroom field trip or special event day is too costly to merit the planning required for the experience. Each of the teachers said that their ideal classroom would incorporate multiple inexpensive field trip or other opportunities for their students and allow instructional time for the experiences.

> If you can take them to Myrtle Hill [a key historical point in the nearby town of Ronin with monuments dating back to the Civil War] and walk around and show them the statues…that's a jumping off point to explain things. And then you take them down to the memorial [for soldiers of all wars], they get excited about that because they can see…We have such a rich history. If we can get them interested in their local history, it would broaden their view and they would say 'I might want to learn about that.' (Participant D)

> I think any time you can bring something to life, you should…when they can experience something, it's always more beneficial. (Participant C)

Guest Speakers Bring Expertise to Discussions

In addition to field trips being ideal for engagement with the history material being presented, the teachers also mentioned the desire to invite local experts and important people into their classroom to offer personal stories to the students to provide relevance to the lessons being taught. Participant D noted that many students do not have an interest in asking their grandparents about their memories of growing up in Flora County (Sept. 23, 2016) and Participant F said that these types of family stories did not come up in her class discussion without her offering an incentive to the students for conducting the interviews at home (Oct. 14, 2016). Bringing in outside guest speakers, the teachers said, would be a way to introduce the students to the stories of history that they were not receiving at home from family, and were therefore not part of the students' schema upon which they could build new knowledge.

> Kids love to hear first-hand accounts from people when you can have people come in and talk about their lives…They don't remember what they read in history books…If you could give them a real, rich understanding of the town they lived in, it [would be] more of a study of history and the social aspect of what's going on. (Participant C)

> If we didn't have all of the pressure of the test, you could bring in some guest speakers like [named a Ronin, Georgia, resident], locally. We used to bring her in all the time for local area studies [a high school class that has not been offered by the school district in almost 10 years]…If she could come in and do something for

a couple of days, I mean, they would really love that. She's a great storyteller and knows her stuff. (Participant B)

Let an expert come in and talk to these kids about these locations, and then let's go on a trip. Let's go visit these places. And then have the kids be able to ask questions and have somebody knowledgeable enough to answer them…to me, it's all about questioning and interest…there are so many people in our community that are so knowledgeable…we don't use those resources as much as we could. (Participant D)

Observations by the Researcher

When I compared my researcher's notes and research journal against the transcriptions of the interviews, I could see that the interviewees' body language, gestures, and other nonverbal communication aligned with the interpretation in the transcriptions. The participants expressed frustration and, at times, anger at the challenge of teaching social studies classes with strong ties to local history when they felt their students were reluctant to engage with the history lessons because they did not understand or appreciate the history around themselves. Several gestured to the resources they had been given by the school district as an example of the curriculum materials being insufficient to cover the breadth of information they were expected to cover in such a short amount of time.

Evidence of Quality

I followed carefully the procedures listed to make sure that this study was founded on accurate data with member checks, triangulation, and a peer review. Each of the participants was given a printed copy of their transcripts and findings, as well as an offer to read the final results when published. I had contact with each participant after the interviews were conducted, and none expressed a need to correct or clarify any of the points presented in the transcriptions or findings.

As the interviews progressed and as each was transcribed, I carefully compared the field notes and observations against each of the transcriptions. I consciously edited out of the interviews any identifying data, and excluded transcriptions of conversations that were not immediately related to the interview protocol. I compared the notes of nonverbal communications against the transcription of the verbal exchanges to make sure the interviewee's intentions were noted accurately in the transcriptions. The raw data and transcribed data were both kept in a secure location on a password-protected computer and on a personal flash drive. I kept up with the observer's notes that were written on the form found in Appendix B. I also compared the interview transcriptions and emergent themes to common themes found in the research journal, which was a collection of posts, articles, and commentary about social studies education from professional organizations for teachers of middle schoolers, as well as discipline-specific organizations discussing history specifically as well as broad field social studies. This triangulation helped to add to the validity of the research and the reliability of the findings.

The transcripts, with names and identifiers removed for confidentiality, were given to a peer reviewer who was familiar with the research process. This peer reviewer was also reminded of confidentiality procedures before he began his process of reviewing the transcripts. He evaluated the transcripts against my list of emerging themes and checked for congruency between the data and my findings (Merriam, 2009). He also analyzed the tentative interpretations against the transcribed interviews to add another layer of validity to the research.

The final elements that promoted the validity and reliability of the research (Merriam, 2009, p. 229) came from the rich, thick descriptions that contextualized the comments supplied by the participants. I also engaged in self-reflection to identify and acknowledge my own biases and assumptions to avoid any unintentional impact on the data.

Summary of Outcomes

Because the stories of the history of the community are not specifically assessed on the standardized tests, teachers felt those lessons that could have been the most engaging and relevant to the students were, at best, rushed, if not eliminated completely due to the time constraints placed by school and district level administration. Where the students were missing schema, the teachers commented that they could also see the students were missing interest and engagement with the lessons. For the teachers, the students' lack of schema with the area around them was a significant challenge because they felt the students found the new knowledge to be irrelevant to the students' prior

experiences. In addition to presenting the new material that was expected of each grade level's curriculum, the teachers felt they had to provide lessons into the students' own personal history as well to build the schema that would have been in place already, had it been learned at home. Stories shared by families have more of a personal connection and greater perception of relevance to the individual; as Participant D noted, if the subject matters to the presenter, it will almost always be relevant to the student, as well (Sept. 23, 2016). Family stories contribute to schema development; in constructivist thought, the schema the students develop at home from their earlier experiences serve as the scaffolding upon which new knowledge from the classroom can be constructed (Ultanir, 2012).

For each of the teachers, the ideal classroom offered many opportunities for students to interact with their surroundings through field trip experiences. Teachers felt that experiences at specific sites with subject matter experts would make a significant difference in their students' engagement and interest levels, as well as their feelings of relevance regarding the history lessons. Although physical experiences are preferred over digital experiences, each of the teachers repeated the need for seeing and hearing about the people, places, and things being taught. "This is history you can bring into your classroom," Participant C said. "Why would you not want to do that? [shrugging]" (Sept. 9, 2016).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perspectives of teaching history lessons to students in upper elementary and middle school in terms of engagement and relevance while working within the instructional time constraints applied by the school administration. I used the data gathered from the interviews to analyze the social studies teachers' perceptions of meeting the expectations set forth by the state curriculum in a way that was engaging and relevant, while at the same time managing the challenges they faced in terms of less time dedicated to history instruction to create engaging, and relevant lessons for their students. The participants for this study were the classroom teachers themselves, and their perspectives, gathered from face to face interviews and observations, were used to design a project that addressed the challenges the teachers experienced.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this qualitative case study research, I interviewed six teachers who were assigned to teach history lessons in elementary and middle schools in the Flora County School District. The participants each taught lessons that had a strong connection to the local history of Zephyr City and surrounding Flora County. Through their interviews, they reported that they did not feel they had enough time to develop and deliver engaging and relevant history lessons before the standardized testing began in early April. Flora County School District administrators need to offer ways to support teachers who are seeking strategies to design engaging and relevant lessons while managing the time constraints caused by standardized testing. A professional development program based on a collaborative workshop model would allow teachers to work together to share ideas about successful lessons, as well as provide an opportunity to learn more about research-based strategies to foster engagement.

Rationale

The project I designed is a three-day professional development program based on the needs expressed in the data gathering and analysis process, including a need for engaging and relevant activities that can be designed and delivered without a great deal of preparation time needed. The program will give participants the chance to collaborate, and discuss effective strategies for creating engaging and relevant lessons, as well as to learn more strategies based on contemporary research.

Because the professional development program focuses on strategies for designing classroom lessons, the participants should be teachers or other classroom professionals who are tasked with designing history lessons for classroom implementation. Administrators, both at the building and school district level, are welcome to observe and participate. In the state of Georgia, administrators at building and district levels are required to have had classroom experience. The administrators' experience could yield perspectives that are beneficial to the participants.

The three-day professional development program would be offered once a month for three months. The extensive time between sessions would allow the participants to have time to discuss and share strategies. Participants could use the four-week span between workshop sessions to develop and implement lessons based on the shared strategies and then return to the workshop with constructive feedback. Participants in this strongly collaborative environment would be encouraged to share what they have developed; the lessons they designed would be available to other teachers in the school district. Lessons and lesson strategies would be posted in a public forum accessible to teachers from other disciplines and schools across the state and country.

Review of the Literature

The participants were interviewed about their perspectives on the challenge of designing engaging and relevant history lessons for their students while managing the pressure of instructional and preparation time reduction due to standardized testing. Several themes emerged from an analysis of their responses. Participants indicated in their interviews that the abstract concepts in history lessons presented difficulties for their

students in terms of engagement, and that their students did not express feelings that the lessons were relevant to their own experiences due to what the teachers perceived as a lack of schema. Most of the teachers interviewed noted that they wanted to design engaging and relevant lessons but did not feel they had the time to plan or implement them. The professional development program I designed offers a collaborative atmosphere for classroom professionals to explore research-based and data-driven strategies for designing lessons that are both engaging and relevant to the students and can be prepared readily and quickly by teachers. The following review of the literature discusses how the professional development program was designed to meet the criteria identified in the scholarly literature.

Articles discussed in this section were found using Google Scholar, EBSCO Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Research Library, SAGE, and ERIC. Search terms included *engagement, relevance, situational interest, teacher qualities, student motivation, and student achievement*. Common themes emerged in the analysis, including the different types of engagement, the importance of feelings of relevance to students, and the qualities teachers should demonstrate for optimal engagement and achievement in their classrooms. Saturation was reached in this thorough study by reading articles found with the search terms, as well as looking through the peer-reviewed articles' list of sources for further research into the emerging themes.

Active engagement leads to academic achievement. The research shows repeatedly that active engagement in class lessons leads to academic achievement (Archambault, Pagani, & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Fogarty, Davis, Anderson, & Myint, 2017;

Turner, Christensen, Kackar-Cam, Trucano, & Fulmer, 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

According to a study by Lipstein and Renninger (2007, cited in Fogarty et al., 2017),

when students are engaged in a task, interest in that task promotes the attention needed to

sustain the effort required to maintain focus. Although learning is a joint effort between

teacher and students, when a class is engaged, the teacher's role becomes less about

providing redirection and managing negative behaviors and more about providing

structure and supporting the students as they learn (Archambault et al., 2013; Turner et

al., 2014).

Engagement includes a broad range of experiences and social and academic

behaviors, and can be described as behavioral, affective, and cognitive (Archambault et

al., 2013; Renninger & Bachrach, 2015). According to Wang and Degol (2014),

behavioral engagement is evident in a classroom when students are on task and

participating, and can be considered an observable form of motivation. Students who

show a high level of behavioral engagement may also feel empowered to take control of

teacher instruction by asking questions (Smart, 2014; Wang & Degol, 2014). High levels

of behavioral engagement can be closely linked to the teacher's classroom management

ability; in a study conducted by Fauth, Decristan, Rieser, Klieme, and Büttner (2014),

successful classroom management was positively linked to increased student knowledge.

Behavioral engagement is strongly connected to and reflective of both affective and

cognitive engagement and indicative of future academic success (Archambault et al.,

2013).

Students demonstrating affective engagement, also referred to as emotional engagement, believe their interests are valued by the teacher and have higher feelings of academic self-confidence (Archambault et al., 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Affective engagement is highly influenced by feelings of belonging to a group, and opportunities for students to work collaboratively with social interaction help to foster strong feelings of community within a classroom (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Turner et al., 2014). Teachers who provide structure in their lessons and design in-class cooperative activities provide students the opportunity to feel cared for by their teacher and peers (Turner et al., 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013), and students who are engaged in cooperative activities are more likely to show academic gains over time (Archambault et al., 2013).

Cognitive engagement is also considered to be agentic engagement because it often emerges in students because of the activities and lessons designed by the teacher (Archambault et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014). Students demonstrating cognitive engagement show a psychological investment in the lesson (Archambault et al., 2013). Cognitive engagement relies heavily on teacher expertise and the teacher's ability to create opportunities for students to feel the competency that comes when students are given a measure of autonomy in the classroom (Renninger & Bachrach, 2015; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Students demonstrate the greatest cognitive engagement in classes where the teacher designs lessons that are challenging and hands-on, and provides clear expectations without taking away student choices and autonomy (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Patall, & Messersmith, 2013; Siegle, Rubenstein & Mitchell, 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2017; Wang & Degol, 2014).

The research indicated that all three types of engagement are in some way related to the teacher's expertise in instructional design (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Teachers create opportunities for students to demonstrate behavioral engagement with collaborative and group assignments (Renninger & Bachrach, 2015; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Turner et al., 2014). A supportive, positive, and caring environment that allows students to build relationships with each other and the teacher helps to foster affective engagement (Fauth et al., 2014; Wang & Degol, 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013), and lessons designed to stimulate curiosity with challenging tasks help promote cognitive engagement (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014; Siegle et al., 2014). Because the teacher is the "central figure of classroom learning" (Maulana, Opdenakker & Bosker, 2016, p. 147), and is the key source of engagement in the classroom, teachers need support in designing lessons and classroom environments that support engagement in each form.

Relevance matters. Another concern expressed by the interviewed teachers was that the lessons they taught were not seen as relevant by their students. Research supported the idea that relevance and authenticity in lesson design is important for student growth (Fogarty et al., 2017). In 2002, Wilson and Sperber theorized that engagement in a task is more likely if the learner feels the task or learning goal is relevant (cited in Fogarty et al., 2017). Several studies have found that learners are willing to exert the cognitive effort to pursue deep learning strategies if the task is useful, meaningful, or personally significant (Durik, Schechter, Noh, Rozek & Harackiewicz, 2014; Fogarty et al., 2017; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014). Often, teachers can foster feelings of relevance by designing lessons with their own students' interests in mind, providing a layer of personal

meaning for the students involved in the learning task (Fogarty et al., 2017; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Context personalization can be a valuable way to connect students to a task at hand and encourage them to see value in the assignment (Høgheim & Reber, 2015).

Situational interest can foster engagement and feelings of relevance. Several of the teachers who were interviewed expressed that the lack of prior or background knowledge was an obstacle to their students' perception of relevance in the lessons. Research indicated that although prior knowledge is important, it is possible for teachers to trigger their students' feelings of personal relevance through the development and maintenance of situational interest (Durik et al., 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014). Situational interest describes the learner's desire to engage in a task that has meaning to them because of a perceived gap in their knowledge of a subject (Durik et al., 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014).

Lessons that trigger situational interest include intriguing cognitive or sensory stimuli that incorporate novelty or surprise to confront students with a potential gap in their own knowledge (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014). When students lack the background knowledge to support their interest in a new cognitive stimulus, the newfound situational interest must be maintained with texts or other materials with high personal significance to the learner (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014). When interest is triggered and its development is supported, engagement is the result, and "interest needs engagement to influence performance" (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011, p. 66). Establishing engagement with a task triggers situational interest, which is a deep desire to know more

about an object or a topic, rather than simply a sense of enjoyment-based interest based in amusement with the new stimulus (Knogler, Harackiewicz, Gegenfurtner & Lewalter, 2015).

Once a student's situational interest has been triggered by a realization of a knowledge gap, teachers must maintain that level of interest by continuing to introduce new ideas (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2017). When the gap in knowledge is filled, a student's situational interest can be sated, which could potentially lead to a decline in both interest and engagement (Renninger & Bachrach, 2015; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2017). However, it is possible to restimulate a knowledge gap through carefully designed instructional materials that offer challenges or increased levels of personal relevance to the learner (Renninger & Bachrach, 2015; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2017). When a student's situational interest has been appropriately stimulated, it can develop into individual interest, which comes from an increase in knowledge about that topic, and can then become a self-sustaining motivation that leads to lasting knowledge and feelings of competence and autonomy (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Lack of schema challenges success. The teachers interviewed also noted their students' lack of schema inhibiting their ability to form interest and retain the information provided in the history lessons. Situational interest can lead to schema development if the teacher provides open lines of communication for help and support (Smart, 2014; Wang & Eccles, 2013), and designs and manages his or her instructional materials appropriately (Fauth et al., 2014). Materials and presentations that are too difficult or ineffective result in either a cognitive overload or a state of cognitive underutilization, neither of which

results in schema development (Park, 2015; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2017). However, when teachers appropriately manipulate instructional design to meet the needs of their learners, they can trigger situational interest which, in turn, leads to schema development (Park, 2015). According to Park (2015), the construction of schema does not necessarily have to be exclusively due to background knowledge and experiences alone; through effective instructional design, strong teachers can stimulate curiosity and push their students to develop a lasting interest that results in the construction of new schema.

Teachers need support to maintain situational interest. Continually stimulating interest with a variety of challenging tasks can be difficult for teachers without a strong base of knowledge in their subject matter or a solid base of support from other experienced educators (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). Wang and Degol (2014) noted that the lessons that most successfully stimulate interest and motivate students are ones that are hands-on, challenging, and authentic, with clear expectations, strong guidance, and constructive feedback. Turner et al. (2014) added that the task must require teachers and students to work together, keeping in mind each other's needs and strengths and weaknesses. For many students, motivation comes because of interest that is stimulated by these challenging, authentic lessons, even if the lessons themselves are not considered fun (Durik et al., 2014). If teachers make a lesson relevant and the students perceive it as useful for closing a gap in knowledge or highly personally significant, the students may perform better because they are willing to expend the effort and even experience some pleasure in the pursuit of the knowledge (Durik et al., 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014).

Teacher expertise matters. In a study conducted in 2011, Rotgans and Schmidt determined that the social climate of a classroom, based on the students' feelings of their teachers' expertise, is a strong indicator of student success. The researchers found that for the students involved in their study, it was unlikely that they would take a learning task seriously if they felt their teacher did not understand the task (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). The teacher's behavior and the students' perceptions of their teachers' abilities are linked to and could be predictors of the students' academic motivation and achievement (Maulana et al., 2016). If a teacher has background knowledge and subject matter expertise, he or she will have ways to explain concepts in engaging terms, which Rotgans and Schmidt (2011) theorize is a crucial key to the development of situational interest. However, if the teacher lacks content knowledge or does not have a solid base of support from which to draw instructional strategies and thus has low expectations for the class, the students' self-perceptions decrease (Siegle et al., 2014). In the study conducted by Siegle et al., (2014), the researchers found that students need "intellectually agile and curious [teachers] who [are] kind and [have] high expectations" (p. 38).

Professional development supports teacher expertise. Many of the professional development learning opportunities offered to teachers fall into one of three main types: Formal, informal, and nonformal (Kleickmann et al., 2013). Formal opportunities have explicit objectives and goals; informal opportunities are a highly contextualized "side effect" form of learning with no specific objective and can more accurately be described as experience; and, as noted by Grossman (1990), nonformal opportunities happen with peers or mentors outside of educational institutions (as cited in Kleickmann et al., 2013).

Because most of the formal learning opportunities are designed to help teachers learn skills to meet standardized testing goals, very little professional development attention is given to content knowledge (Sadler, Sonnert, Coyle, Cook-Smith & Miller, 2013). The result of the overemphasis on teaching strategies rather than content knowledge is that many teachers have gaps in their own content knowledge that limit their ability to respond to students' questions or design challenging tasks (Kleickmann et al., 2013; Siegle at al., 2014). In classes where students did not feel the teacher was able to answer their questions, the students did not have a strong desire to do well (Siegle et al., 2014), however, students had much more confidence when the teacher is perceived to be a secure base and source of help (Smart, 2014). Bayar (2014) noted that teacher quality is a prime indicator of student achievement.

Teacher collaboration leads to positive social climate. Research indicated that teachers need frequent opportunities to collaborate with peers and experience deliberate opportunities to learn more about their content to continue to be effective in engaging their students and fostering motivation that leads to learning (Bayar, 2014; Kleickmann et al., 2013). Although teacher popularity was linked to student achievement in a study by Wagner (2008, cited in Fauth et al., 2014), the teacher's cognitive characteristics were much more strongly connected with student motivation and achievement (Siegle et al., 2014). Social characteristics like rapport, empathy, and listening contribute to a supportive classroom climate, which is often predictive of student interest (Kleickmann et al., 2013), but research repeatedly linked effective teaching with subject matter intelligence (Fauth et al., 2014; Kleickmann et al., 2013; Siegle et al., 2014). Teachers

with greater amounts of content knowledge, as well as general intelligence, are more capable of providing students with multiple explanations of difficult concepts, as well as providing information at greater levels of depth and breadth that offer challenges to the students (Siegle et al., 2014). Siegle et al. (2014) found that teachers with strong subject matter intelligence are also more at ease with and have a preference for abstract concepts like the ones that the participants in this researcher's study struggled to explain.

Metacognitive approaches help teachers prevent misunderstandings. A study conducted by Sadler et al. (2013) indicated that teachers would also benefit from professional development opportunities designed to help them identify common student misconceptions of concepts found in the subject matter to be more effective and thorough with their classroom instructional design. Misconceptions, in this case also called preconceptions or naïve conceptions, are persistently and commonly held incorrect ideas, rather than any kind of incorrect explanation of a subject in a course (Leonard, Kalinowski, & Andrews, 2014). Multiple choice tests often offer these commonly held preconceptions as distractor answers, and if students are not familiar with their own misconceptions, those multiple choice questions are easily answered incorrectly (Sadler et al., 2013). Teachers who are adept at identifying misconceptions and evaluating their students' metacognitive approaches toward new information are more capable of being effective and thorough with their own classroom instructional design (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, 2014). Sadler et al. (2013) also noted that when teachers are knowledgeable of the common misconceptions in their subject area, student gains in their study were much greater. The most beneficial professional development opportunities

for standardized testing success would be designed to assist classroom teachers in remediating their own misconceptions or gaps in their own knowledge about their specific subject area, as well as identifying common student misconceptions (Coe et al., 2014; Sadler et al., 2013).

Project Description

After analyzing the data gathered from interviews and reviewing research gathered from contemporary articles, I found that effective professional development programs include opportunities for participants to collaborate, as well as develop immediately useful strategies and lessons based on self-identified classroom needs. In a 2016 study reflecting constructivist thought by Thomas-Brown, Shaffer, and Werner, middle and high school social studies teachers collaborated in a professional development program that allowed them to create common lessons based on the needs the participants identified in the first session. The project study designed from the data analysis and literature review will follow a similar path in that it is heavily based on teacher-identified needs with "practical applications" and "teacher buy-in based on achievable goals" that are immediately relevant to the subject matter the teachers will be instructing (Thomas-Brown, Shaffer, & Werner, 2016, p. 68). Because the teachers interviewed for this study noted a lack of student awareness of the history of the area around them, I will focus activities and interactive experiences on opportunities for the participants to reinforce their own local area history understandings and work with activities that could stimulate curiosity with their own students. The teachers also expressed the need for activity and lesson ideas that fit within their limited amount of instructional time.

The project study I designed is a three-day professional development program with the goal of helping teachers reinforce their own content knowledge, as well as work together to develop engaging lesson-design strategies that would be reasonable to teach in a short amount of time, as opposed to developing week- or month-long units of study. Following Thomas-Brown, Shaffer, and Werner's (2016) design, this relatively long-term program will center around teacher participation and shared knowledge to increase professional pedagogical understanding in a collaborative atmosphere over a period of three months (Coe et al., 2014; Sadler et al., 2013). Although the program is designed for teachers and instructors who design lessons for classroom implementation, school district administrators will be welcome to attend to observe the needs of the teachers and offer their own perspectives from their previous years of classroom experience.

The professional development program will begin with a discussion of the research base behind the program contents. I will explain what I have learned about the influence of engagement and relevance on student academic performance through the course of the doctoral study. The participants will have an opportunity to discuss the limitations of classroom planning and project implementation due to time restrictions, but that will not be a significant part of the initial presentation because of the potentiality for that discussion to become negative. Often, teachers can be reluctant to participate in professional development opportunities, and starting with negativity would be counterproductive to the goals of the program (DeMonte, 2013; Thomas-Brown et al., 2016).

The goals of this professional development program are to help teachers develop engaging lessons that could trigger situational interest without being time-consuming or demanding a great deal of planning ahead to implement. The objectives of the professional development program are to help teachers think about their existing lessons in terms of ways to stimulate situational interest, to experience activities that could be used in their own classroom to stimulate situational interest, and to collaborate with other teachers to brainstorm ideas for stimulating situational interest using activities from this professional development program as inspiration. Participants should be encouraged to modify each of the activities so that the structure remains the same but the details are changed to support the lessons to fit their own lessons, teaching styles, and classroom climates. Each of the activities are designed based on concepts from research that have been positively connected with building situational interest. The participants will have the opportunity to experience each activity as if they were students, and will then have a moment to discuss their observations with the other participants in the group, modeling the level of communication and collaboration that is ideal for the successful implementation of these activities with their own students.

On the first day of the professional development program, I will introduce the research base and explain the concepts behind the activities that are designed as examples for stimulating situational interest. Participants will be given an initial interest survey to determine specific areas of weakness or areas that the participants identify as areas in which they need more ideas for engaging activities. The first activity uses a reverse timeline learning task to present a mystery for the participants to solve. The teachers will

break into smaller groups and create a timeline of Flora County history using cards that provide only a date. The groups will need to use their background knowledge to explain the importance of the dates that were chosen. This activity is designed to cause them to perceive their own lack of knowledge, which, according to Rotgans and Schmidt (2014), can trigger situational interest.

Meaningful and active involvement in small group, hands-on activities can also stimulate situational interest (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2013). The participants will work with a different small group to complete the second activity, which is a blind jigsaw puzzle. Participants will assemble a jigsaw puzzle without a picture as a guide. The assembled puzzle reveals a map of the cities of Ronin and Zephyr City from points in time relevant to the history of Flora County (Cherokee removal, Cherokee land lottery, Civil War, Reconstruction, Great Depression, and so forth). When the groups assemble the puzzle pieces, they will draw upon their collective background knowledge to identify the time period as well as the location. Each of the activities will be followed with a small- and large-group discussion about feedback from the activity, including ideas for modification and other applications to foster situational interest.

The second day of the program will be dedicated to a long-term Photo Puzzle activity that will allow teachers to explore the community and learn more about a landmark of their choice that represents a certain period in Flora County's history. Participants will create a puzzle trivia game with a photograph of one historically significant landmark from Flora County and ten questions about that landmark's history. In this activity, the teachers will be given an orientation in the morning that will explain

the requirements of the activity and provide them with the rules that will guide their work, as well as give them the opportunity to select at random the time period on which they will focus. The participants, working in small groups, will be dismissed to spend the next five hours in the community, looking for one public historic landmark that represents their assigned time period and taking several photographs of architectural elements of this building. The groups will use available resources to find out ten important facts about the building they have selected. The community library in the city of Ronin has an excellent local history section, and the participants will be encouraged to utilize this resource, as well as take advantage of any history resources offered by the landmark itself.

After a working lunch, the teachers will return to the workshop locations and use the available technological equipment to design their presentation. Groups will use one of the pictures they took that morning and alter it somehow, either by zooming in or covering up one part of the image. The close-up picture should be accompanied by one fact about the landmark. Each of the ten slides will gradually reveal the image and will offer a fact about the location. The goal of this is to encourage participants to use their background knowledge to identify the structure before the final slide reveals the full image. Participants will have additional time in the afternoon to design the presentation.

After a working lunch and an hour of group work time, the participants will have the opportunity to participate in a Breakout Box activity. Following the success of "Escape Room" types of games that require groups to work together to solve puzzles to break out of a room (Nicholson, 2015), a Breakout Box allows teachers to have the same

level of interactive and collaborative problem solving in a much smaller area. The Breakout Box activity requires the participants, working in small groups, to solve various puzzles to learn the secret codes that unlock various locks on the Breakout Box. Because it is a timed activity, groups must use collaboration and communication to solve the puzzles. The first group to unlock the box will win a prize. Before the close of the second session, participants will have the opportunity to reflect on the day's activity and discuss ideas for modification for their own classrooms.

The final program day will offer participants the opportunity to present the Photo Puzzle they developed, as well as view the puzzles developed by other groups. Ample time will be allowed for discussions of classroom implementation, as well as ideas for writing extensions. Because each group was assigned a different time period, participants will also be encouraged to discuss how these presentations could be used to stimulate situational interest in classroom discussions that introduce each time period.

After lunch, participants will be introduced to the EdCamp model of professional development program implementation. According to Swanson (2014), EdCamps offer participants the opportunity to share their own ideas and successes with each other in small groups, with each topic coming from the interests and expertise of the members of the group as a whole. Large papers will be posted during the lunch break, and people who would like to have more information about elements introduced during the previous two days of the program will add discussion topics to the blank pages. Participants who feel they have either expertise in that area, or share questions about that topic, write their names on the blank pages.

This organic method of designing professional development programs developed in 2010 and has become popular in the United States as well as internationally because it encourages the participants to learn from each other (Swanson, 2014). In the program developed by this researcher, the collaborative element of teachers working together and learning from each other is critical to the continued success of the program concepts, as well as for the support of the teachers who choose to participate and implement the ideas (Coe et al., 2014; Thomas-Brown et al., 2016). Four brief sessions will be offered, and participants may choose among any of the group-derived discussions. The final session will end with a period of time for reflection, discussion, and a final, summative evaluation survey generated through Google Forms.

The time between monthly sessions will give teachers an opportunity to put one of the collaboratively designed lessons to use, with the intent of providing feedback for modifications at the next meeting date. The goal of this program is to allow teachers the opportunity to collaborate and design effective and engaging lessons with a short amount of time that will stimulate their students' situational interest, while providing enough background knowledge to the teachers to allow them to provide more information about the lessons as the learners need.

The resources needed for this professional development program are activities and games designed to trigger interest, and those will be provided by me and printed by the facility hosting the program through Flora County Schools. Because this program has very few financial costs in terms of supplies due to the absence of a need for books, outside consultants, or other supplies, I predict there will be support from the Flora

County Schools administration. However, the cost of substitute teachers for the participants may be a potential barrier to implementation.

I will present this project study to the Flora County Schools administration to demonstrate the need for the program as evidenced by the frustrations expressed by the teachers as well as the proposed benefits for the system as indicated by the review of the literature, requesting that the administration fill a supportive role in the implementation of this program. Additionally, my role will be to facilitate and implement the activities and discussions in the professional development program and serve as a point of contact for future support of the participants. The individuals selected to participate will be expected to design an activity to present to the large group on the third day, but each participant will be strongly encouraged to contribute their thoughts and modifications, as well as future activities they have designed, to a commonly shared resource page hosted by the Flora County Schools network.

Ideally, this program would be offered for the first three months of the academic year so the participants can have the greatest opportunity to implement the activities designed as a result of the program. The participants would also benefit from having the first half of the academic year to get to know their class climates and their own students' needs to design the most appropriate activities using their own experiences as inspiration. This program could be offered for the first three months of either semester of the academic year.

Project Evaluation Plan

This project will be evaluated at the end of each day with a series of formative Google online forms. Each participant will be asked if the day's activities met his or her needs, and will be given the opportunity to offer suggestions or post questions for further study. On the final day of the program, the participants will be given a final summative survey to determine if the full program met each participant's needs, or if there were areas upon which improvements could be made. I will make myself available to each participant for support past the close of the program.

Because the program is designed to meet the needs of the participants as expressed by the initial survey administered on the first day, the determination of whether or not the project was successful will be also be based on the participants' survey responses. In the interview process, the participants elaborated on their feelings of the challenge of designing engaging and relevant lessons for their students with a reduced amount of time in which to plan and implement the lessons. The goals of this professional development program are to help teachers develop engaging lessons that could trigger situational interest without being time-consuming or demanding a great deal of planning ahead to implement. The objectives of the professional development program are to help teachers think about their existing lessons in terms of ways to stimulate situational interest, to experience activities that could be used in their own classroom to stimulate situational interest, and to collaborate with other teachers to brainstorm ideas for stimulating situational interest using activities from this professional development program as inspiration. The summative survey will give participants the opportunity to

reflect on these goals and objectives and determine if the program successfully met their needs and fulfilled each objective.

The stakeholders, then, will have a much greater role in determining the success of the professional development program. Classroom teachers and other classroom professionals who have a responsibility for designing history lessons for implementation are the key stakeholders. The comments expressed by the classroom teachers were the foundation for the research completed in this project. School administrators and school district administrators in the state of Georgia have been classroom teachers in the past, so their perspectives on the needs in the classroom should not be minimized. Their expertise and years of experience should also be acknowledged and valued if they choose to participate in the professional development program.

Project Implications

This project has a strong potential for social change because the professional development program is designed based on the expressed needs of the classroom teachers. The project provides participants the opportunity to explore their own local history and experience different activities designed to stimulate situational interest. The program also offers participants the opportunity to think of their own strengths and offer to share those strengths and those classroom successes with other professionals. Opening the kind of dialogue for teachers to learn from each other is critical because not only have the teachers requested the content knowledge background support, "they are…responsible for translating this knowledge into effective classroom teaching"

(Bayar, 2014, p. 320). According to Bayar (2014), a professional development program that allows active participation and teacher or participant input has a greater chance to increase the participants' instructional quality, which has been shown to be a strong indicator of student academic success.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Time has been taken away from history instruction and lesson preparation due to the pressure of standardized testing. Interviewees identified the lack of time as a significant challenge when designing engaging and relevant lessons for their students. Interviewees also noted that their students demonstrated a lack of schema about their own local history.

This project has two strengths. First, the professional development program addresses each of the elements identified by the participants. The program uses activities that have been designed to meet the best practices identified by research. Rotgans and Schmidt (2011, 2014) noted that situational interest is connected to engagement, which is itself connected to student achievement. Thus, the program focuses on styles of activities that not only are designed to stimulate situational interest, but are also broadly applicable to several different curricular topics. Teachers can use the basic framework of the activities and apply them to many different lessons, allowing more time to devote to planning lessons, rather than searching for an activity to stimulate their students' interest.

The other significant strength of this program is its collaborative element. Teachers are given multiple opportunities to reflect on the activities and offer suggestions for modifications for different classroom needs. Teachers are encouraged to work with several different groups, which would give them a chance to network and meet others who are also assigned to teach the same content area. Teachers need the opportunity to

have nonformal learning experiences from which they can glean valuable information from peers or mentors in order to be strong, effective instructors (Kleickmann et al., 2013). Collaborative experiences like the ones offered in this program, especially with the EdCamp concept (Swanson, 2014), are valuable learning tools for teachers.

This project study was subject to one limitation. The historical content delivered in this professional development program focuses on a relatively narrow period of history in a small county in northwest Georgia. The GaDOE lists many more events in history and significant people, places, and things that also need to be taught.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem in Flora County is that teachers are limited in the amount of time they have to prepare and implement history lessons. An alternative approach to this problem would be to implement school-based professional learning communities (PLC) for history teachers rather than a group of representatives from each school that would meet at a central location. The PLC would meet periodically to share information and collaborate on lessons within each school. Another approach to the problem would be to look outside Flora County for published, packaged curricula. This would solve any concern about a lack of time, but it is the least desirable option according to the research. Students can perceive a lack of teacher engagement with the packaged teaching materials, and when students feel that their teachers are not engaged with the materials, then their own motivation decreases, generally foreshadowing a concomitant decrease in achievement (Maulana, Opdenikker & Bosker, 2016).

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Over the last twenty years, national attention has been drawn away from the basic principles of the study of history and historiography. Time has been allotted to strengthening math and reading skills, and the focus of school success has been on the scores of standardized testing. The time that was once dedicated to social studies and history instruction has been redistributed to math and reading skills remediation, and throughout the process of research and project design, I have found no evidence to indicate that time will be eventually restored to the study of history in classrooms in Flora County.

Having the opportunity to delve deeply into the study of an area in which I have years of experience, that is, teaching social studies and history, has provided me with a deeper insight into a growing national trend. There is a strong call throughout the contemporary academic journals for engagement in history lessons. Other scholars recognize how important it is for students to feel that history, and specifically their own history, matters. Through the research process, I have found many articles from academic writers supporting the idea of engagement and relevance in history classrooms, but it is only recently that organizations like the Association for Middle Level Education began asserting in their publications and official policy statements that engagement and relevance in instruction is critical to student achievement.

Since this research began, I have seen more opportunities for teachers in my area to learn about engaging methodologies for teaching history, but there does not seem to be a cohesive central research base that expresses the influence of a feeling of relevance

specifically in the study of historiography. The majority of professional development program offerings today continue to make social studies teachers serve a dual purpose of teaching both history standards and reading skills. The concept of teaching history through literacy is not new, but I have seen through my work that the concept repeatedly fails to stimulate feelings of engagement or relevance in the students, and ultimately decreases the quality of both the history and the literacy instruction.

As a researcher and through this research process, I have learned the importance of keeping my students in mind as I am designing history lessons, not just because I feel it is important, but because I know the research base states clearly that student achievement comes from engagement and relevance in lesson design. As a teacher, this journey has changed my classroom completely. I now understand why my students may appear frustrated and disenfranchised by the academic process and feel empowered to change my instruction to incorporate ways that support my students with engagement and relevance. As a professional, I now understand the power I have as an academic and as a scholar and will use my newfound knowledge to support other teachers with suggestions for engagement and relevance in their own lessons.

<div align="center">**Reflection on the Importance of the Work**</div>

As a result of this study, I have found the importance of seeing the classroom history instructor as a content and pedagogy expert. Packaged curricula and trendy lessons do not serve to meet the needs of the students, and the teachers like the ones interviewed who have years of experience understand what makes the students feel engaged with the material. It was meaningful to me that the teachers at the time of the

interviews expressed the same reactions to the challenges of time reduction and student apathy that teachers had been expressing for years, as I found in the articles I reviewed for the literature review. My job as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer thus needs to be an advocate for the classroom expert. Teachers need the opportunity to learn from each other. The EdCamp model, where teachers use their own expertise and experience to collaborate and offer support to one another (Swanson, 2014), will be a foundational model for any future programs I develop. I discovered overwhelming evidence that supports the idea that if the classroom teacher is confident and supported, his or her students will reflect that confidence in their own academic achievement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Positive social change comes when communities understand the need for empathy and the need to work together to advance the community for all members' best interests. Research showed that the single best way to learn empathy is to discuss it in terms of history. Yet, when the time for history has been reduced, when can those discussions occur? Providing students with feelings of engagement and feelings that their work matters and the lessons matter to them individually causes them to be willing to be more connected to their classmates and their teachers. Engagement and relevance are key factors in student motivation, achievement, and are indicators of success in the future.

Teachers who are supported as they design engaging and relevant history lessons can also improve the climate of their own classrooms. When teachers feel confident about their lessons and have the resource base to collaborate with other teachers to find engaging and challenging instructional strategies, students tend to be more engaged with

the material, their classmates, and their teachers. Fostering a positive climate in the classroom with engaging lessons promotes social change as students see history not as a boring subject, but as relevant to their own lives.

The ultimate change will be in the hands of the district administrators after reading the results of this study. District administrators have the power to support teachers with collaborative activities like EdCamps and programs that support teachers' content and pedagogical development. State administrators also have the power to examine the influence of the redistribution of instructional and planning time once dedicated to history, and make changes to balance the expectations for each academic subject equally, giving respect to each discipline as being important for academic and social development, but also the development of well-rounded students and citizens.

Future research could explore the long-term efficacy of the activities suggested in the professional development program. Many of the themes in history repeat from year to year and, according to research, students are more likely to retain information about which they were curious, or about which their situational interested had been stimulated. Longitudinal research could be conducted to determine how long the students retained the information presented through the activities.

Future researchers could also explore the differences among various demographic communities in terms of feelings of engagement and relevance as a result of the implementation of the activities in the professional development program. An exploration could be conducted of the perspectives among different socioeconomic groups, gender groups, or even ability groups.

Conclusion

Teachers who have been faced with the challenge of less instructional preparation and delivery time since the advent of No Child Left Behind (2002) have been faced with the decision either to stick to the textbook, which is boring but convenient, or to take the time to design creative and memorable lessons. Engaging and relevant lessons are the key to student achievement, according to the research, but the best lessons are often passed over due to decisions made by administrators that reflect the last 20 years of pressure from standardized testing.

This project study has made me realize how important it is to be an advocate for the teachers who want to design engaging and relevant lessons but do not feel they have enough time to do so. Districts like Flora County need to take an active role to support their history teachers by offering opportunities to collaborate and work as a team to design the lessons that research shows to be effective.

Through the study of history, students learn empathy. They learn the importance of one voice in a democracy. They learn how to make the social changes necessary to push our nation into being a responsible participant in our interconnected global society. Good citizens do not come from standardized tests. Good citizens emerge when their citizenship is tested and they use the examples of history to change the world.

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Appendix A: The Project

Engagement and Relevance and Time in History Instruction:
Strategies to Stimulate Situational Interest

Designed by Christy Davis, Walden University
June, 2017

Project Guide Overview

- Learning goals for participants - handout

- Initial survey

- Session #1

    o Agenda

    o Activity plans

    o Formative assessment (survey)

- Session #2

    o Agenda

    o Activity plan

    o Formative assessment (survey)

- Session #3

    o Agenda

    o Activity plans

    o Formative assessment (survey)

- Summative survey

Goals and Objectives for Participants

What can I expect from this program?
→The goal of this program is to help you to practice several strategies that support engagement by stimulating situational interest, and to help you feel comfortable enough to use these types of activities in your own classrooms by changing out details quickly and easily to fit your lessons and teaching style.
→The secondary goal of this program is to give you the opportunity to collaborate with other educators to share ideas and lessons and create a network of support for future lesson planning, as well.

What are the objectives of this program?
→To help teachers think about their existing lessons in terms of ways to stimulate situational interest;
→To experience activities that could be used in their own classroom to stimulate situational interest;
→To find ways to stimulate situational interest that are quick and easy to plan and implement; and
→To collaborate with other teachers to brainstorm ideas for stimulating situational interest using activities from this professional development program as inspiration.

What should I keep in mind during this program?
→These activities are designed based on concepts from research that have been positively connected with building situational interest.
→Think of ways to modify each of the activities so that the structure remains the same but the details are changed to fit your own lessons and teaching style. Use the outlines of these activities and just fill in the particulars that meet your own needs.
→Talk to each other! Are you inspired to make changes to an activity? Share it with the rest of the group. Have an idea that might make an activity even easier and quicker to plan and implement? Let us know!
→Communication, collaboration, and cooperation are critical for both teacher and student success. Work together and share your email addresses to create a supportive community of educators to share lessons as the year goes on.
→Try the activities. Are there problems? Talk them out! The problems you experience could be valid concerns when you implement something similar with your own classes.
→If this makes you think of another great idea, take the time to write it down, even if it means stepping out of an activity for a moment while you make notes. Let these activities serve as inspiration.
→If you're engaged in the activities, there's a great chance your students will be, too.

Designing History Lessons with Engagement in Mind

Initial survey

How comfortable are you with using lectures in your history lessons?

Not at all comfortable

1
2
3
4

Very comfortable

How comfortable are you with using the textbook in your history lessons?

Not at all comfortable

1
2
3
4

Very comfortable

How comfortable are you with using individual activities in your history lessons?

Not at all comfortable

1
2
3
4

Very comfortable

How comfortable are you with using small group activities in your history lessons?

Not at all comfortable

1
2
3
4

Very comfortable

How comfortable are you with using puzzles or problem-solving activities (like break-out boxes) in your history lessons?

Not at all comfortable

1
2
3
4

Very comfortable

How comfortable are you with using review games (like Kahoot) in your history lessons?

Not at all comfortable

1
2
3
4

Very comfortable

How often do you use lecture in your history lessons?

Seldom

1
2
3
4

Daily

How often do you assign students work from the textbook in your history classes?

Seldom

1
2
3
4

Daily

How often do you assign students individual work in your history classes?

Seldom

1
2
3
4

Daily

How often do you assign students small group work in your history classes?

Seldom

1
2
3
4

Daily

How often do you use puzzles or problem-solving activities in your history lessons?

Seldom

1
2
3
4

Daily

How often do you use games in your history lessons?

Seldom

1
2
3
4

Daily

What would help you most with your history lessons?

Support or PD for content knowledge
Support or PD for lesson planning (including activities)
Additional resources to use in teaching
Other:

What is your greatest strength in lesson planning?

Your answer

What is a weakness you have in lesson planning?

Your answer

In which area do you have expertise that you would be willing to share with other teachers?

Successful instructional strategies

Special content knowledge or experience in particular curriculum elements

Other:

SUBMIT

Session 1 Agenda

8:00 - 8:30 Registrants sign in

8:30 - 9:00 Welcome and housekeeping announcements

9:00 - 10:30 Introduction to study, definitions of engagement and relevance and explanation of research base (PowerPoint presentation)

10:30 -10:45 Break

10:45 - 12:00 **Modeling engagement strategies: 1 - Reverse Timeline** Participants will work in small groups to fill out a timeline of local Flora County history. Each group will be given index cards with dates and must use their own prior knowledge to explain the importance of each date, then create a timeline on large paper.

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch

1:15 - 2:00 Small groups present timelines to large group. Reflect and discuss as small/large group: How effective was this? How could this be used with what they're teaching right now in their classrooms?

2:00 - 2:30 **Modeling engagement strategies: 2 - Blind Jigsaw Puzzle** Participants will work together in small groups to fit together the pieces of maps of locations in Flora County created from different periods of Flora County's history (Cherokee Land Lottery, Civil War, Depression, 21st century). When the puzzle pieces have been assembled, groups should use clues in the pictures to determine the time period and the specific location.

2:30 - 2:40 Break

2:40 -3:00 Reflect and discuss as a large group: How effective was the puzzle strategy? How could this be used with what they're teaching right now in their classrooms?

2:45 - 3:30 Preview of the next session and "homework." Each participant should think of ways to incorporate these two strategies of group brainstorming or jigsaw puzzle assembly and implement one of these activities (or an activity inspired by discussion from the reflection times) in their classes. Participants should return with feedback on challenges or successes. Participants will also be reminded that the activity in the next class will require a laptop computer and camera, and that they will be in the field for the majority of the morning, so dress appropriately.

Designing History Lessons with Engagement and Relevance in Mind

Christy Davis
Walden University

Who said this quote?

"Standardized testing of math and reading skills has been proven repeatedly to be a benefit to students of history classes. Taking time away from history classes makes students more engaged and less likely to declare that history is boring. Students love textbooks and teachers love having little to no time for planning."

Your Choices

- A) George Washington, 1776
- B) Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1942
- C) Marilyn Monroe, 1960
- D) Nobody, ever

The Current Problem

Standardized tests emphasize math and reading skills

⬇

History classes lose time for math and reading lessons

⬇

Students see history as boring, but what can we do to get their interest back when we don't have time to plan?

⬇

The textbook is easy and gives the information…

⬇

…but it's boring.

What does the research say?

Students need to have schema to build upon in order for them to remember what we're teaching.

Think of the schema like scaffolding holding up painters...without scaffolds, how will they reach the highest points?
(Ultanir, 2012)

How do you build schema?

Students build schema when their background knowledge connects with new information. Connection builds interest, which stimulates curiosity, which leads to more schema being built.

Tell me more about curiosity…

Curiosity can be roused by uncertainty, novelty, or surprise. If a learner is presented with a puzzle or mystery that causes them to see they have a gap in their own knowledge, curiosity can lead to the desire to fill that gap. This can engage learners and give them emotional motivation to pursue knowledge.

(Wu, Miao, & An, 2014)

So how do I use this?

Puzzles, games, and social activities that cause learners to step away from a textbook or worksheet can stimulate that curiosity…or "situational interest."

When situational interest is triggered, it leads to curiosity, which leads to motivation to learn more.

Students can even be motivated to get engaged in lessons that aren't traditionally considered "fun" if their situational interest has been previously stimulated.

(Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014)

Is that all?

Research goes on to point out that teachers need to have a good grasp of their own content, as well as support from their teacher peers.

Being able to collaborate and share ideas help teachers to build activities that trigger situational interest. However, situational interest is like a fern. It needs constant attention and constant stimulation to continue to grow.
(Bayar, 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014)

So, in conclusion...

Hook them with a puzzle or mystery. Grab them with group tasks.

In this program, you'll participate in several activities that are designed to stimulate situational interest. Enjoy and keep these questions in mind:

> How can I use this with my classes?
> What part can I modify to fit my needs?
> What are the people in my group saying?

Most of all, use the "down time" to share ideas. Learn from each other!

Activity #1: Reverse Timeline

Materials needed:

      Index cards

      Markers, tape or glue, scissors, magazines for cut-up

      Large sheets of paper for posting responses

Preparation:

      Gather 10 to 15 dates that are important to the local history of Flora County. These should range from common knowledge (Civil War, Trail of Tears, etc.) to specific (establishment of Georgia School for the Deaf, establishment of Berry College, etc.). Write the dates on index cards and make enough copies of the set of dates for each group.

Implementation:

      Divide the large group into smaller groups. Give each group the index cards with dates, markers, and large paper. Instruct each group to put the dates in order and affix to the large sheet to create a timeline. Then, each group should identify the importance of each date and write it on the timeline. (If a group does not know the importance, they should be encouraged to be creative with their response rather than leaving it blank.) They should decorate their timelines with pictures cut from magazines or sketches if time permits.

      Give the groups up to an hour to develop their timelines and then decide on the presentation method. Each group should present their timelines to the large group, giving particular attention to any dates to which they have given different answers from the other participants.

Processing:

      Where were the correct answers? Who had the most eye-catching timeline? Where were the incorrect answers? Who had the most creative responses?

      Was this a difficult task? Why or why not? Were there leaders in each group who knew most of the dates? Did it help or hurt the process when everybody knew an answer? When nobody knew an answer?

      Was this something they could do with their own classes? How might they modify this to meet their own classroom needs?

      How might this be used in ways other than a timeline? (A list of famous people, critical battles, important court dates, etc.)

Activity #2: Blind Jigsaw Puzzle

Materials needed:

Photocopies of maps from Flora County from various time periods (these can be printed or copied from Internet sources or from library resources, with identifying dates removed) printed on card stock

Markers, tape, glue

Large sheets of paper for posting responses

Preparation:

Find maps of Flora County, the city of Ronin, or Zephyr City from various points in time. Consider the pre-Cherokee period, the Cherokee Removal, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Depression, Railroads, and even current maps from the Chambers of Commerce. Copy these maps onto card stock or heavy paper and cut into smaller pieces that would fit together. Be sure to remove any dates on the map that would give away the time period. Make one puzzle for each group.

Implementation:

Divide the large group into smaller groups. Instruct them to assemble the puzzles without using any pictures as reference. After they have assembled the puzzle and taped/glued it to the large paper, they should work together to use the clues in the puzzle to identify the time period and location, which they should also note on the large paper.

Give each group up to 30 minutes to assemble the puzzle and identify the location. After the discussion, encourage groups to use their break time to look around at the other maps in the room.

Processing:

Which group felt they had the easiest puzzle? Why? Who had the hardest puzzle? Why? What would have made this easier? What would have made this harder?

Was this a difficult task? Why or why not? Were there leaders in each group who knew the information? Did it help or hurt the process when everybody knew the answer? When nobody knew the answer?

Was this something they could do with their own classes? How might they modify this to meet their own classroom needs?

How might this be used in ways other than maps? (Famous pictures, famous posters or text images, famous speeches, etc.)

Session 1 Formative Assessment

Designing History...Reflecting on today

Formative Assessment for each session

Today's activities met my needs as a participant.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

I can use the activities in my classroom soon.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

The presenter(s) were engaging and met my needs as a participant.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

I have questions that still need to be addressed.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

Comments...

Your answer

SUBMIT

Session 2 Agenda

8:00 - 8:15 Participants sign in

8:15 - 9:00 Welcome and housekeeping announcements, introduction to the day's activity

Participants will be asked to go in small groups and photograph a landmark of interest. They will use their resources (laptop, Google, local library, etc.) to determine the original construction date, original purpose, and subsequent uses of the landmark since its construction. Participants will be encouraged to find the story of the building and how it connects to the history of Flora County. Participants will have the morning and lunch time to develop their presentations and should be ready to format and prepare their presentations during the afternoon.

9:00 - 1:30 **Modeling engagement strategies: 3 – Photo Scavenger Hunt**

Participants will go into the community and seek out local landmarks to photograph and research. This will be a working lunch.

1:30 - 2:15 Participants will return to the workshop site to design their presentations.

2:15 - 3:15 **Modeling engagement strategies: 4 - The Breakout Box**

Participants will work together in small groups to figure out local-history-related puzzles to determine the codes to get into the locks of a breakout box.

3:15-3:25 Reflect and discuss as a large group: How effective was the Breakout Box strategy? How could this be used with what they're teaching right now in their classrooms?

3:25 - 3:30 Wrap-up and preview the next session. Groups will present their local history landmark pictures in the morning, so "homework" will be to complete the presentations. Participants will also be given the opportunity to present informally to self-selected groups in an EdCamp concept, so if any participant has experienced significant success with these strategies or other engagement strategies, they are encouraged to bring materials needed to present to smaller groups.

Activity 3: Photo Scavenger Hunt

Materials needed:

Groups will need cameras

Groups also need access to software to design slide presentations

Preparation:

This requires little planning on the part of the presenter. The groups are responsible for locating their own historic landmarks, although a list of suggested landmarks might be useful for participants who are not as familiar with the history of Flora County as others.

Expanded activity learning goal:

This activity requires the groups to leave the program space and enter the community. They will locate an historic landmark (building, residence, cemetery, etc.) and take several photographs, including one that would easily identify the location. They should also work to find information about the landmark either from reliable Internet sources, from employees of the landmark, or from research conducted in the Flora County Library in the city of Ronin. They will create a ten-slide presentation that requires the viewers to guess the location. Each slide will have a question and a picture. The first slide should give a difficult question about the location, and provide a picture that gives only a hint of the landmark, and the questions and pictures should progressively become easier to guess. The goal of this activity is to have the groups begin their introduction to the historical landmark with a visual puzzle, gradually revealing hints about the location while triggering situational interest by drawing on background knowledge of the community or the time period.

Implementation:

Divide the large group into smaller groups. Each group will have the morning time and the working lunch time to locate an historic landmark in Flora County. They will have a small amount of time to work together after the working lunch time, but will be expected to have the presentations ready for the large group when the next session begins.

Processing:

Which group chose the easiest landmark? Why? Who had the hardest landmark? Why? What would have made this easier? What would have made this harder?

Was this a difficult task? Why or why not? Were there leaders in each group who knew the information? Did it help or hurt the process when everybody knew about the landmark? When nobody knew about the landmark?

Was this something they could do with their own classes, with the exception of leaving campus to complete the task? How might they modify this to meet their own classroom needs?

How might this be used in ways other than landmarks? (Famous pictures, famous posters or text images, famous speeches, etc.)

Activity 4: Breakout Box

Materials needed:

Breakout boxes with locks (one for each group)

Appropriate puzzles and codes for each lock

Timer

Preparation:

Develop a code or puzzle to provide the combination for each lock securing the Breakout Box. Questions such as "In which year was the city of Ronin founded?" could provide a four-digit code to unlock a four-digit combination lock. A street map of Flora County could provide the answers to a directional lock when the group maps a path from landmark A to landmark B. Alphabet locks can be solved with the last name of a Ronin founder or Civil War general. Each group should have the same questions and the same locks.

Implementation:

Divide the large group into smaller groups. Instruct them to assemble the puzzles without using any pictures as reference. After they have assembled the puzzle and taped/glued it to the large paper, they should work together to use the clues in the puzzle to identify the time period and location, which they should also note on the large paper.

Give each group up to 30 minutes to assemble the puzzle and identify the location. After the discussion, encourage groups to use their break time to look around at the other maps in the room.

Processing:

Which group felt they had the easiest time? Why? Who had the most difficult? Why? What would have made this easier? What would have made this harder?

Was this a difficult task? Why or why not? Were there leaders in each group who knew the information? Did it help or hurt the process when everybody knew the answer? When nobody knew the answer?

Was this something they could do with their own classes? How might they modify this to meet their own classroom needs?

How might this be used in other ways? What other codes could be used? (Famous pictures, famous posters or text images, famous speeches, etc.)

Session 2 Formative Assessment

Designing History...Reflecting on today

Formative Assessment for each session

Today's activities met my needs as a participant.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

I can use the activities in my classroom soon.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

The presenter(s) were engaging and met my needs as a participant.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

I have questions that still need to be addressed.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

Comments...

Your answer

SUBMIT

Session 3 Agenda

8:00 - 8:15 Participants sign in and draw for presentation order and sign up to present at 10:15.

8:15 - 9:45 Group presentations of local landmark stories. Reflect and discuss as a large group: How effective was the photograph strategy? How could this be used with what they're teaching right now in their classrooms?

9:45 - 10:00 Break

10:00 - 10:15 **Introduction of the Ed Camp concept**

Participants who have had particular successes with any of the engagement strategies will be given the chance to present to small self-selected groups.

10:15 - 11:00 Ed Camp Presentations - slot 1

11:00 - 11:10 Break

11:10 - 11:55 Ed Camp Presentations - slot 2

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch

1:15 - 2:00 Ed Camp Presentations - slot 3

2:00 - 2:15 Break

2:15 - 3:00 Ed Camp Presentations - slot 4

3:00 - 3:30 Wrap-up and evaluations

EdCamp Concept

Materials needed:
> Large sheets of display paper
> Markers
> Timer

Preparation:
> Make sure there are available places for groups to meet (spare rooms, or corners of a large meeting room).

Implementation:
> At the beginning of the day, introduce the large group to the EdCamp Concept. Ask the large group for suggestions of topics they'd like to know more about or would like to discuss further and write those topics at the top of large sheets of paper (one topic per page). Ask the participants if any would like to share areas of their own expertise to smaller groups, or would be willing to serve as small group discussion facilitators. The EdCamp Concept is designed to allow the participants the opportunity to learn from each other in organically arising and self-selected groups.
> Participants who are willing to host or moderate groups should list their group topics on one of the large sheets of paper. Other participants will have the option to sign up for one of these sessions. Remind the participants that there are four 45-minute sessions scheduled for the afternoon time, so they can choose at least four presentations or discussions to attend. Encourage participants to attend a session in each time slot and to be prepared to report back to the large group with feedback at the end of the day.

Processing:
> Was this a useful activity? Did they feel they learned something new, or created new networks, or shared something they felt good about? What were the drawbacks to the sessions? How might this be helpful later in the school year?
> Was this something they could do with their own classes? How might they modify this to meet their own classroom needs?
> How might this be used in other ways?

Session 3 Formative Assessment

Designing History...Reflecting on today

Formative Assessment for each session

Today's activities met my needs as a participant.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

I can use the activities in my classroom soon.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

The presenter(s) were engaging and met my needs as a participant.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

I have questions that still need to be addressed.

Strongly disagree

1
2
3
4

Strongly agree

Comments...

Your answer

SUBMIT

Designing History...

Summative Assessment

The presentations met my needs.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

The facility met my needs.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

My questions were answered.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

This presentation was useful to me as a teacher.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

I will be able to use these ideas with my classes.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

I will be able to use these ideas with my classes.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

The opportunities to talk with other teachers helped me with my own planning.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

Comments, suggestions, etc?

Your answer

SUBMIT

References

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    knowledge. *Learning and Instruction*, *32*, 37-50.

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    Constructivist learning in Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori. *International Journal*

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    companions. In *Proceedings of the 2014 international conference on Autonomous*

    agents and multi-agent systems (pp. 1401-1402). International Foundation for

    Autonomous Agents and Multiagent Systems.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Form

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer _____

Interviewee _____

Release form signed? _____

Notes to interviewee:

 I really appreciate your honest responses during this interview. Thank you for agreeing to help, and thank you for your time.

 Please remember that your confidentiality will be protected during this interview and in all transcripts. Do you have a preferred pseudonym?

 This interview should take approximately 45 minutes. There are five major questions I'd like for you to answer. If at any time you wish to stop the interview, please feel free to let me know. At that time, if you would like to reschedule, I would be happy to accommodate you, or if you would like to terminate your involvement with this project, you are free to do so, as well.

 After the interview is transcribed, I will share with you a copy of my draft results. Please review your data and make any corrections or clarifications as needed.

 The purpose of my research is to analyze teachers' perspectives on ways to make history lessons engaging and relevant to their students' own prior experiences while working within the time and curriculum constraints placed as a result of standardized testing. I will be asking your perceptions on using local history as a methodology to garner student interest and engagement in learning about the broader history perspective dictated by the Georgia Performance Standards. The guiding research question behind this study is "how can the current social studies

course curriculum be modified to incorporate local history and increase student engagement and learning?"

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about your perspectives on making connections between your students' experiences with the curriculum you're assigned to teach.
   a. Successes in terms of time allocation?
   b. Successes in terms of resource availability?
   c. Successes in terms of student engagement?
   d. Other experiences?

Observations by interviewer:

Reflection by interviewer:

2. In what ways do you see your students responding to new material by connecting elements of their own previous experiences?
   a. Students' comments about what they've been told (stories told at home or by family members or friends)?
   b. Students' comments about what they've seen (locations or buildings near their home/school)?
   c. Students' comments about what they've previously experienced (books or movies)?

Observations by interviewer:

Reflection by interviewer:

3. Please tell me about your opinions of the students' connections to the Georgia Performance Standards for social studies.
   a. About which elements are your students the most curious?
   b. How do you feel about the relevance of the history standards to the area (city, county) in which you teach?

Observations by interviewer:

Reflection by interviewer:

4. Please tell me about your opinions of the students' engagement in the history standards and lessons you teach based off of the Georgia Performance Standards.
   a. In what ways do you see the students connecting the history lessons to the area (city, county) around themselves?
   b. How do you think your students feel about the history lessons?
   c. How connected are the history lessons to the local history of the area (city, county) in which you teach?
   d. How do the students respond when/if you teach using stories in history, especially stories that are about local people or places?

Observations by interviewer:

Reflection by interviewer:

5. What would your ideal history class look like to maximize the students' curiosity and engagement?
    a. In terms of time?
    b. In terms of resources?
    c. Other ideas?

Observations by interviewer:

Reflection by interviewer:

Upon completion of interview:

Thank you very much for your honest answers and the time you gave during this interview. Please remember that your confidentiality will be protected.

I will take this recording home and transcribe it. After I have transcribed the interview, I will send you a draft copy of my results. Please review your data for accuracy and make any necessary changes for clarity.

Provide contact information

Send thank-you note with transcriptions