Swept Away Before Learning to Swim: Social Studies Subject Area Literacy for High School Students

Aaron K. Shaw

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SWEPT AWAY BEFORE LEARNING TO SWIM: SOCIAL STUDIES SUBJECT AREA LITERACY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Connie Shaw; thank you for your endless support, may you rest in peace. To my wife Gail and our four children, you supplied the inspiration to proceed through the many arduous hours needed to complete this valuable work. I also thank my father, Avery Shaw, for the many conversations that helped me unfold the story and determine the course of action.
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you were reading, but you kept on. Thank you very much your dedication, not only to my work, but to the theories surrounding literacy.
**Abstract**

History education provides a valuable asset in the education of youth from the integration of disciplines to the opportunity to stimulate higher order thinking in high school students. However, little research before the 1990’s had been done to improve the century old pedagogy of presentation and memorization. This study looked at the historical thinking skills of *sourcing, contextualization* and *corroboration*, presented in Sam Wineburg’s (1991b) research comparing high school students with professional historians. This mixed methods study explored the impact of focused instruction in high school social studies classrooms using the three historical thinking skills to determine the effectiveness of this instruction as a tool to learn the skills in a way that the students could evaluate historical events using the skills. The participants, high school sophomores, showed modest improvement in the skills of *sourcing* and *contextualization*, and they showed minimal improvement in the skill of *corroboration*. The intervention required a 50% increase in lessons focused on *contextualization* due to student confusion, but this led to the highest improvement of skill level. *Sourcing* and *corroboration* showed measured improvement in four and six students respectively. Overall, the intervention led to student improvement in all areas, and extended lessons and expanded curriculum could result in extensive improvement in historic thinking skills.
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List of Abbreviations

ELA ........................................................................................................... English Language Arts
ESSA ......................................................................................................... Every Student Succeeds Act
NAEP ................................................................. National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCATE ..................................................................................................... National Council for Accreditation of Teachers
NCLB ....................................................................................................... No Child Left Behind
Chapter 1: Nature and Significance of the Problem

Introduction

Students are inundated with information during their years in school and their need to interpret information grows with the exponential Internet growth. Wineburg (2005) explains that students are “flooded by information as never before [and] … get swept away before learning to swim” (p. 662). Social studies classrooms provide an opportunity for students to evaluate information to determine the validity. However, history standards have long required teachers to teach students to memorize historical facts. Furthermore, extensive requirements for new teachers of social studies require vast understandings of numerous subjects including history, economics, and sociology with the intent of encouraging the transfer of this information to students; but the requirements fail to recognize the opportunity for social studies teachers to teach reading and writing, skills necessary to promote social justice. Social studies teachers need to foster the development of document evaluation and interpretation skills, which are best assessed using reading and writing skills. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) still promotes the necessity of teaching historical facts, and not skills development.

The requirement to memorize facts and events has been an undercurrent of the social studies curriculum for more than a century (Wineburg, 2001). Wineburg describes a test given in 1917, in which 668 Texas high school students scored 33 out of 100 on an
American History exam testing what was considered by the testers to be the most obvious and important facts of history (p. vii-viii). This exam told a story of students lacking the basic facts about history. The results of the test led a behavioral approach to teaching social studies, in which students learned about the events, dates and names from history. That curriculum traversed the following century with little to no change or adjustment to new learning theories. The story of who is attending school had changed as universal education became common during the depression, but history education did not change nor did the comprehension of history by students (Wineburg 2001, p. viii). The idea that teachers should teach skills was furthest from the minds of curriculum developers until 1987 and the Bradley Commission. The commission reported that history teaching does not follow the pedagogical variety necessities of other subjects; history is history (Wineburg, 2001). Developers insisted that history instructors present information to students in a manner that allowed those students to repeat the information on tests as is apparent in the standardized test questions which ask students to relay information thought important to the test developers (Wineburg, 2005; Wineburg, Smith & Breakstone, 2012). The role of history, as Wineburg (2001) quoted Woodrow Wilson, endows us with the “invaluable mental power we call judgment” (p. ix). Wineburg (2001) further explains Wilson’s views, “The role of history to change how we think, promotes a literacy not of names and dates but of discernment, judgment and caution” (p. ix), and history education during the twentieth-century fails to heed Wilson’s proclamation.

Wineburg (2005) discusses the importance of learning the facts of history as designated by the standards required under the mandates of No Child Left Behind. He further ponders about the facts in general, who chooses which ones are important; but a
more appropriate question would be which “facts” are accurate. Ravitch (2013) articulates the purpose of education as a means “to prepare everyone to assume the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy” (p. 238). She explains that students should learn about the key events that shape the world today. Ravitch (2013) does not assume students need to learn all of history, but rather “enough to reach their own judgements about candidates and issues” (p.238). This requires cognitive development related to the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration in that history is not to be memorized, but evaluated (Ravitch, 2013).

Wineburg (2001) attempts to explain cognitive theories related to the curriculum of social studies courses, where, by the 1980’s he found none. He discovered history education theories that reflected the results of Bell and McCollum’s 1917 exam in Texas; students were expected to memorize the facts of history. The course of history curriculum did not follow the complete suggestions of the Bell and McCullum research, which suggested understanding and interpretation of documents (Wineburg, 2001). J. Carlton Bell (1917) explained that if a passage is novel then reading and rereading is necessary to comprehend the meaning. After World War I few curriculum designers paid attention to any concept except the last suggestion by Bell and McCullum, as described in Wineburg (2001) that students should have the ability to answer factual questions (Wineburg, 2013). Not until the late 1960’s into the 1970’s did psychologists E. A. Peel, Charles Judd and Roy N. Hallam explore historical thinking in connection to Piaget’s theories of intellectual cognitive development (Wineburg, 2001). Each attempt reflected an effort to study history from an evaluative perspective, but they all removed events from context and failed to account for personal biases. The assessments asked similar questions as
might be found in mathematics, science or even literature studies, which could reflect
cognitive development, but not historical thinking. The results of Hallam’s studies as
Wineburg (2013) expressed, “the abstract nature of history, argued Hallam ‘can perplex
the most intelligent of adults’” (p. 38). Hallam and Judd influenced history education as
late as the 1980’s where it faced the problems of lack of consensus regarding the facts of
history leading to assessment issues as well as the unwieldiness of term papers like those
found in college level courses (Wineburg, 2001).

Wineburg (1991b) queried, “Do students realize that they are as dependent on the
author’s hearts as on their heads?” (p. 496). Bias influences reports of history as
documented both by the individuals who were present when events occurred and by the
individuals who studied the past and produced secondary accounts of the events.
Regardless of who reported or studied the stories of the past, documents reflect the heart,
experiences and time/space context of the reporters. Textbooks used in classrooms are
secondary sources and reports in them reflect the biases of the author and the companies
that produce the books.

Since Wineburg’s revelation of stagant history education curriculum in the late
1980’s, changes have been made to state standards. For instance, Pennsylvania social
studies standards no longer require teachers to instruct students on specific facts from
history. The standards, as explained by the Pennsylvania Department of Education now
ask students to make connection among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual
evidence. Pennsylvania’s history standards attempt to integrate the results found through
the efforts of many researchers which point to contextualization, sourcing and
corroboration as keys to studying history as found by researching historians and
comparing them with students and teachers (Wineburg, 1991b; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996; De La Paz, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Seixas, 2017). The three skills require students to have the necessary basic literacy skills to understand the language of the documents. Wineburg (2005) declares, “Literacy must become our first standard, the one that appears on our flag” (p. 665). History curriculum and instruction must remove the dioramas and knowledge posters because they shirk the hard work necessary to become literate individuals and to battle the ever-widening gap inhibiting advances in social justice (Wineburg, 2005 p.664).

**Statement of Problem of Practice**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) recorded a drop in literacy scores since 1992. Jobs requiring high literacy skills are on the rise while blue collar jobs and other jobs requiring low literacy skills are diminishing (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Although English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms are the focus of literacy, or reading education especially within the Common Core Standards, the history classroom provides a unique opportunity to expose students to nonfiction literature as well as open their minds to social studies subject area literacy. IN addition, common core standards have dictated the need for history educators to instruct students on reading skills. The overarching standard for history education as found in the PA Core states, “Reading Informational Text: Students read, understand, and respond to informational text – with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence”. Research of subject area literacy assesses the need to gain subject specific knowledge to deepen understanding. For example, in history skills such as contextualization, sourcing, and corroboration, often found in literacy
standards, specifically deepen understanding of historic documents and can assist in developing civic skills to enhance social participation (Shanahan et al., 2016; Ravitch, 2013). History curriculums however, spent nearly a century emphasizing memorization and regurgitation of facts, paying little attention to promoting a deeper understanding of documents, analyzing history, relating events and realizing that more than one version of the event exists (Hynd et al., 2004; Shanahan et al., 2016; Twyman et al., 2006). Too many high school courses continue to rely on the textbook for curriculum and historians feel those inadequately portray real events (Wineburg, 1991).

**Purpose Statement**

History teachers often discover that their students have difficulty understanding and integrating information from historical documents as well as their textbooks because they have primarily been required to memorize facts, and search the text for correct responses. PA Core standards require students to learn to determine, analyze, evaluate and assess primary and secondary sources to corroborate information from each. The standards further require students to produce a product using information from multiple sources. However, students lack the skills to corroborate multiple documents including exploring contextual clues and determining perspectives of the source of the text (Shanahan et al., 2016). This lack of subject area literacy skills leads many history instructors, this researcher included, to revert to lecture style teaching as well as the use of videos and films rather than assigning reading and evaluation of documents (Shanahan et al., 2016). History is meant to be learned, as professional historians do in their everyday work (Wineburg, 1991b), not simply memorized for regurgitation on a multiple-choice exam.
Students often accurately predict what may come next in text or formulate the main idea of documents, all skills taught in ELA and history during primary grades, but they fail to recognize nuances in documents that point to alternative meaning (Wineburg, 1991b). Collins and Smith (as cited in Wineburg, 1991b, page 502) explain that students may, “fail to understand a word … a sentence … relationships between sentences … [or] how whole texts fit together”. Students also fail to recognize connotations of words, in short, they lack the skill to source, corroborate and place documents in context (Wineburg, 1991b). The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of teaching students to evaluate sources, contextualize and corroborate information between sources (Monte-Sano & De La Paz et al. 2012; Shanahan et al., 2016; Wineburg, 1991b). The Problem of Practice for this dissertation was that high school students’ subject area literacy skills in the area history education, those of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization are lacking.

Statement of Problem

The subject school, as with many others in the state of PA, has struggled to consistently meet the standards required to make adequate yearly progress. The state average score of advanced or proficient on the literacy Keystone exam for eleventh graders, recorded for 2019, the year prior to the study, was 71.5%. Note that in all cases students qualifying for free or reduced lunches are considered at risk, In the subject district they scored below the district and state averages on the Keystone Literacy exam. Whereas the results for the district studied on the Keystone Literacy exam was 77.4% with advanced or proficiency, and above the state average. Although the district students recorded scores above the state average, the results indicated that 22.6% of students were
not making the grade. Data shows that the school district studied consistently scores above the PA state average on the Keystone exam for literacy, but the highest score in the three years prior was 80% advanced or proficient in 2017. These scores indicated that students in the school being studied needed to improve their literacy skills. Social studies, as mentioned, provides an ample opportunity to work on basic nonfiction literacy skills.

In addition, students are required to develop historic thinking skills as per PA Core State Standards, the skills needed to source documents, contextualize the documents and corroborate different information from multiple sources. My classroom adequately represented the course taken by most history teachers with a focus on learning of historical facts. Best practices found in the cognitive learning theory improved upon the curriculum standards of lecture and regurgitation, by using graphic organizers, higher order thinking, and group interaction (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). However, students were still required to memorize basic historical information and respond to standard assessment questions. I fooled myself into believing the students were learning how to do history by asking open-ended free response questions, but little effort was made to evaluate primary and secondary sources, look for biases and assess historical events. Much like behaviorism of the first half of the twentieth-century, students memorized events, dates and people (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). This type of learning is not uncommon, but certainly not the actions of a trained historian, nor the efforts needed for social reconstruction.

Wineburg’s (1991b) research comparing the skill set of historians to those of advanced placement high school students exposed me to the understanding that students lacking these skills are not uncommon. I further recognized the importance of developing
deep reading skills. Previous studies inferred that the use of deep reading techniques could improve students’ deep reading skills in history (Shanahan et al., 2016). Students often take historical documents as fact and do not question their validity simply because they are in print (Shanahan et al., 2016). Studies from the past two and a half decades have looked at this phenomenon and have concluded the same. This study acknowledges the research showing that students lack historical evaluative skills and therefore the study focuses on the solution following research performed to affect student cognitive development (Shanahan et al., 2016; Gaston et al., 2016; Hynd-Shanahan et al., 2004; Mateos et al., 2008; Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012; Twyman et al., 2006; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wineburg, 1991b).

The sample for this study is approximately 27 students enrolled in an accelerated tenth grade American History course in a small rural high school. This community began declining with the demise of the big three U.S. automobile manufacturers as the twentieth-century closed. The community relied heavily on transportation industries and many members of the community worked in various companies in a larger neighboring city. Other citizens farmed and still do. Nearly 46% of the high school students, and upwards of 70% of the students in the entire district receive free or reduced priced lunches. All students in the two district elementary schools receive free lunch and breakfast as part of the national school lunch program.

The potential transfer of the results of this research will be to introduce the social studies literacy skills to the seventh through ninth grade social studies teachers in the school district to encourage them to begin referencing the skills concepts and introduce them to their classes. Students are taught phonics and other basic techniques to read and
comprehend the basic meaning of a passage, but their reading education traditionally stops here (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This connection will prove valuable since students transitioning from eighth grade to high school are not prepared for deeper reading and therefore lack the basic skills accentuated above (Hynd-Shanahan et al., 2004; Monte-Sano and De L Paz, 2012; Shanahan and Shanahan, 2008).

**Theoretical Framework**

The definition of literacy evolves and adjusts with society and culture. The current definition includes the 21st century’s access to information and the ability to interpret that information, and now includes skills required to become independent thinkers (Gaston et al. 2013; Shanahan et al. 2016). Simple understanding of main ideas, and predicting text is not indicative of the thought process of historians, and has not evolved with the advanced changes to the definition of twenty-first century literacy (Mateos et al., 2008). This learning style reflects the early and mid-twentieth-century behavioral and cognitive theories (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Social constructivism requires students to use their own perceptions to interpret the outside information and create their own new meaning (Schiro, 2013). Students require historic thinking skills to evaluation of sources, disciplinary literacy development to recognize connotation and denotations in context, reading strategies, research skills and transfer of knowledge from one context to the next (Gaston et. al. 2013; Shanahan et.al. 2016). Further interaction with peers and a facilitator, the context expert or teacher, helps to add perceptions and interpretation to the new inputs. In history class, the new inputs should be primary and secondary resources, which are open to interpretation and evaluation.
Students enrolled in the subject school’s tenth grade American history rarely grasped the need to understand source bias and context, rather they focus their reading, notetaking and studies on preparation to answer questions, and to pass tests. Mateos et al. (2008) discussed, “secondary students lack the cognitive and metacognitive processes that would enable them to make strategic use of reading and writing” (p. 693). The development of these skills can enable them to take an active approach to reading. These skills can provide information to affect social change and effectively reduce adults doomed to take dead-end jobs and improve citizenship (Wineburg, 2005). The content presented in the secure environment of the classroom, if used in a social constructivist learning context, can become a tool for social reconstruction as well. Addressing authentic subjects, pertinent to the students’ community improves the likelihood of significant learning (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Schiro, 2013).

Definition of Terms

Sourcing—Martin and Wineburg (2008) define sourcing, “To give full consideration to who wrote [created] a document before launching into its contents. … there is no such thing as free-floating information—historical texts are written by people in particular settings” (p. 313).

Historic documents—Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) define historic documents to include film, interview protocol, primary, secondary, or tertiary documents, and so on (p. 50).

Corroboration—Monte-Sano and De La Paz (2012) define corroboration as, “comparing documents … to find points of agreement and contradiction” (p. 276).
**Contextualization**—Reisman and Wineburg (2008) define, “the act of placing an event in its proper context—within the web of personalities, circumstances and occurrences that surround it” (p. 202).

**Research Questions**

Will teaching the skills of sourcing primary and secondary historic documents improve the assessment of source bias and validity in high school students?

Will instructing the student to place documents in the proper context of history improve the student’s comprehension of the document source, meaning and content?

Will instructing the student to source and contextualize documents improve the student’s ability to corroborate information found in documents?

**Research Design**

This study was performed as an action research (AR) study in order to evaluate the practice of the classroom teacher. AR focuses on the pedagogy and practice of individual teachers in an independent setting thus reducing the generalization of the research. This method contrasts traditional research since traditional quantitative and qualitative research has a goal of external validity and transferability respectively. Although this AR addresses local issues, the study builds on other current research in the field of subject area literacy (Hynd-Shanahan et al., 2004; Monte-Sano & De L Paz, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Further, the study sought to improve the curriculum of the identified school district and the skills of the students.

This study quantitatively evaluated the sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization skills of students enrolled in a history course using action research to evaluate the effects of planned intervention (Efron and Ravid, 2013). The students
participating in the study are a convenience sampling and will not be divided randomly, rather as determined by the participating school district. All participants received the intervention following a pre-test. The intervention instructed the student participants on the skills of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization over the course of a single nine weeks grading period. After the nine weeks session, student participants received a post-test similar to the pre-test, testing the literacy skills of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization.

**Description of Author/Researcher**

My background includes living in a variety of states as I moved frequently during my school years until I reached high school age. We lived in small rural farming communities in Ohio, large metropolitan areas like Lansing, Michigan and wealthy communities in Connecticut. I experienced many different cultural groups, but mainly predominantly white communities until I reached high school when my family moved to culturally diverse Orlando, FL. For the first time I experienced being a minority in the middle school I attended in Pine Hills, FL. Approximately 40% of the school’s population included Asian, Hispanic and White non-Hispanic, while 60% of the population was African American. I experienced these differences on the athletic fields where I was one of six non-African Americans on a football team of approximately 50 players.

I left that middle school and attended a high school with different demographics. The school had a balanced racial mix, but it added a socio-economic gap. The school population numbered nearly 3000 students. Some students in attendance were children of wealthy Disney executives, while other students were children of low-income farmhands.
working in the citrus industry. The social, economic and cultural diversity within the
school introduced me to many differing groups. I remained active in sports and expanded
my participation to theatre and other clubs on campus.

I am a white male in my late 40’s and my upbringing has been in the lower
middle class, in which I remain. I learned perseverance from my parents as they
navigated the difficult business landscape with high school educations. We rarely wanted
for much, however my brother and I learned that we had to work for anything, and that
little would be given to us without effort.

**Relationship to Study Subjects**

The high school in which the study was conducted boasts a population lingering
around 600 students per year. The school is situated in a rural farming community that
had the fame of having built the trailers that hauled “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” to the
waiting flight crews destined to use them to end World War II. Bessemer Steel built the
town many generations prior as a switching point for the mighty steel giant’s shipments
of iron ore rolling off the Great Lakes and traveling by train to be processed. That
industry no longer stimulates the economy of this little town and therefore the
propositions of the children growing up here are bleak. Much of the current economy
rests in the hands of the devastated industries of the *Rust Belt* town of Erie, PA, and the
limited farming industry. A correlation between this rural district and the inner-city
school can be witnessed in that both communities suffer social injustice and political
neglect due to diminished constituent influence (Ravitch, 2013).

The community is 85.6% white non-Hispanic with very little socio-economic or
cultural diversity (Proximity, 2015). Even though I enter as a white lower middle-class
male, my childhood introduced me to vast diversity and my tolerance and understanding contrasts with the population and therefore my students. I acted as an insider/outsider since I was studying my own classroom as an outsider to this community (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My upbringing in small rural farming towns in Ohio prepared me for this community, but the blossoming environment of the Southeast demonstrated opportunities available and changed my perspective.

My education background reflected the cognitive learning theory, mixed with behavioralism. The majority of my courses throughout high school focused on the learning of important information, as defined by the textbook companies, and regurgitation of that information on assessments. Some teachers exposed us to research, but no instruction of evaluation was given. We worked in groups on science projects and presentation of novels in ELA courses. We researched, in a book report fashion, the details historic events and produced a product that reflected information that supported our hypothesis. My first exposure to primary and secondary sources and their evaluation came as I began preparing my literature review for this dissertation. I quickly connected the concepts that the College Board looks for from students on the AP exams, and was ashamed to realize I had missed the point while instructing my students. I attended my teacher training program during the height of NCLB. All attention was paid to learning theories like the cognitive theory, Skinner’s behaviorism and Piaget. Disciplinary literacy never entered the conversation. Evaluation of sources remained obscure concept. Social constructivism was falsely linked to constructionism.

The change in my philosophy emerged through the process of my studies with the University of South Carolina. I recognized long ago a need for social justice
improvements. I knew students struggled with literacy exams. I recognized that social studies provide a context to present all content areas. As I studied Wineburg and those that followed the vision of effective history education materialized. Social constructivism when used in conjunction with historic thinking skills will improve knowledge and develop individuals and groups able to communicate and create meaning from content. Social justice can be affected through social reconstruction through the subject presented. This can occur in all disciplines by simply adjusting the topic of questions and the introduction of controversial topics. Armed with this new knowledge I embarked on the action research study explained below.

Limitations of the Study

Oliva and Gordon (2013) exclaim, the wall separating school from community has crumbled” (p. 75). Action research (AR) provides a link between the researcher and, as Herr and Anderson (2015) proclaim, “highlights the involvement and participation in a local community as a less estranged experience” (p. 84), with a goal of improving the pedagogy at a level relative to that community. This AR certainly intends to benefit the school in which the participants attend. The community will be the beneficiary as students presumably improve their cognitive skills with the intended results of an improved citizenry, the intended outcome of those skills developments (Shanahan et al, 2016).

Since the participants came from a convenience sample, variables with the participants were out the researcher’s control. The description of the sample listed above shows a lack of racial diversity and a common low socio-economic level. Both factors present limitations to the transferability of the study conclusions. Beyond uncontrolled
limitations, the convenience sample was further delimited by selecting only accelerated students. There is no way to redistribute these groups. The independent variable implementations remained constant among and for each of the three groups in hopes of countering the pre-existing limitation of time of day and classroom atmosphere.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This AR dissertation evolved as the process of implementation and data retrieval identified the need to adjust pedagogy and curriculum to meet the development of critical literacy-based history skills of the participants. Early review of current skills revealed shortcomings in participants’ abilities that required more elementary documents, for example. Likewise, I expound upon changes to the pedagogy needed due to limitations found. Herr and Anderson (2015) describe the Action Research Dissertation as, “a more tentative document but with a commitment to carefully documenting ongoing decision making and direction taken” (p. 87). The curriculum for secondary social studies, and more specifically, history education continues to evolve and this study duplicates previous studies and aims to improve the practices of the author and the author’s district.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Most students enter high school with a general ability to read, however little attention is paid to disciplinary literacy, or specific terminology used in different academic disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). For example, in history lessons, students have limited ability to accurately understand the background of documents and effectively evaluate and situate these texts. This process, used by historians to determine the events of the past, uses the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration (Wineburg, 1991a). To accentuate this theory Wamba (2010) articulates, a “comprehensive literacy education amounts to an essential component of any strategy focused on improving schools and closing the achievement gap” (p. 109). Education lies at the core of affecting social justice, and social studies literacy can bring change for a citizen of the United States by improving critical reading skills (Ravitch, 2013). Ravich (2013) explains that the goal of education is to effectively prepare people for citizenship and not simply to attend college. She also describes a good education as “step[ing] outside the world of textbooks and worksheets and introduc[ing] students to worlds that they never dreamed of, and to ideas that change their way of thinking” (p. 239). Citizens need to read, evaluate sources, contextualize and corroborate documents to judge the character of the author and validate information (Nokes et al., 2007; Monte-Sano & De
La Paz, 2016; De La Paz, 2005; Reisman, 2012) in order to make informed decisions when voting (Ravich, 2013) or simply writing responses to prompts.

History text books have been accepted as fact by educators and students. The facts of history are to be learned and memorized. Wineburg (1991b) queried, “do students realize that they are as dependent on author’s hearts as on their heads?” (p. 496). People do not want to feel as though they are being led astray and not told the complete truth. However, modern politicians and news outlets tell a partial story based largely on their personal bias, and the author relays the information influenced by their bias. Historical documents describe the events of the past in a similar manner, and those authors have presented information from their own biased viewpoints (Ravich, 2013. Historical documents will be affected by the context in which the authors wrote them, as well as the experiences they have had. Therefore, history, especially that found in history books, will need to be evaluated and interpreted in order to evaluate historic events. An effective way to prepare individuals to understand complex issues and historical influences in order to make important decision, elect officials and serve on juries, as Ravich (2013) describes, “determines the fate of our nation and … determines the fate of others” (p. 238) can be found in the study of history, economic and civics. The development of the historic thinking skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration can enhance individual abilities to evaluate historical events, improve history disciplinary literacy, and perhaps close the achievement gap.

**Purpose of This Literature Review**

A literature review provides background knowledge about a problem in order to provide an author with guidance toward a thesis to resolve a Problem of Practice (Machi
& McEvoy, 2012, p. 3-5). This review led to a thesis and an action research topic related to improving literacy, and Herr and Anderson (2015) explained the advantage of action research that “it taps the lived experiences and deep knowledge of those harmed by status quo and, via a process of ‘researching with,’ revisions possibilities while cultivating tools to work for change” (p. 158). Thus, this literature review can affect things that were previously taken for granted in terms of learning and contest the possibilities. Although an action research is about creating change in a local community the write up of the research can present the information well beyond that community (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The hope is producing a document to affect social change through disciplinary literacy skills development. Efron and Ravid (2013) would consider this type of action research to be “critical research” (p.42) in that it aims to expose inequities and repression to bring social change to the issue of poverty through literacy development, specifically that of history education.

This literature review originated as research into solutions for the issue of literacy and the achievement gap between minorities and white students, as well as poverty-stricken students and their struggles compared to affluent students using social studies curriculum. Since the objective of the study is to address literacy, and the researcher teaches history, a logical search revolved specifically around history education, especially in light of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the more resent Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA). Research involved searching for solutions to deal with the demands of these acts to improve literacy via history curriculum. The progression of research revealed a relatively new field of history education that found its origins in the 1980’s as then graduate student Sam Wineburg searched for literature on cognitive development as it
deals with history learning, and found nothing (Wineburg, 2001). Subsequent experimental and quasi-experimental research uncovered data leading to suggested changes to history curriculum to better connect to the practices of professional historians that could also serve to reduce the achievement gap using historical thinking skills to evaluate historical document and produce written products as well as overall interpretation and comprehension skills (Ravitch 2013; Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2016; Nokes et al., 2007; De La Paz, 2005; Reisman, 2012).

The studies researched disseminated discoveries about the successes and failures of students, teacher and historians to reach logical conclusion regarding historical events using multiple primary and secondary documents. Mining the extensive references provided by researchers revealed a multitude of data and information. However, nearly all authors’ research cited, or a chain could be traced back to Sam Wineburg’s 1991 seminal study with discovering the techniques used by historians when they evaluate documents to evaluate historic people and events. Wineburg (1991b) led to further studies in the 1990’s, until more recent studies beginning with Hynd et al. (2004) that addressed the specific shortcomings of students and experimented with improving skills. Consequently, this literature review demonstrated the advancements in the studies of historical literacy, written products created by students, historical interpretation and historical comprehension as a means to improve the literacy achievement gap, and how these improvements have been theoretically linked to improved citizenship and potential career advancement (Johnson, Avineri & Johnson, 2017; Wamba, 2010; Clymer, Toso, Grinder & Sauder, 2017).
Problem of Practice

The Nation’s Report Card (2017) shows a consistent increase in overall reading scores for eight grade students, although small gains, students had improved from 1971 to 2012 (Table 2.1). However, the results of the 2015 reading test for eighth graders showed a two-point decrease from previous scores in the number of students at or above the proficient level from 36% to 34% (The Nation’s Report Card, 2017). The Nations Report Card (2017) uncovers the story of achievement by high school seniors on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since 1971 that demonstrates similar trends. The average score in reading increased from 1971 to 1992, but decreased from 290 in 1992 to 287 in 2012 (See Table 2.2). The percentage of high school students who score proficient or above also continued to drop from 1992 at 40% to 2015 at 37%. The NAEP results demonstrate that high school student’s reading skills declined since 1992 in the number of proficient readers, as well as seeing an increase in the number scoring below basic (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; The Nation’s Report Card, 2017). A telling statistic about the overall performance of students in high school can be found when investigating the 2012 results of the reading test; prior tests did not designate data based on free or reduced lunch eligibility. Students eligible for free or reduced lunches scored 13 points lower than their grade-level counterparts on the 2012 test (Table 2.3). This statistic exposes an achievement gap due to socioeconomic levels in schools, and not only due to race. Although racial issues certainly affect scores, that is a subject which has been and still needs further research to overcome.

Reading scores explain many of the shortcomings of adults after graduation, but graduation rates reflect a poor showing with a rate of only 83% for all students and
varying results for ethnic groups (Table 2.3). Although graduation rates have increased since 1991, the results need to improve in order to affect social change (The Nation’s Report Card, 2017). Changes to instruction will improve literacy levels that will enable all graduates to compete for the most lucrative jobs in the U.S. economy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Shanahan and Shanahan describe a perspective on the development of literacy skills instruction that will lead to improved results (Figure 2.1). The figure describes the growth of students from early childhood literacy development in basic literacy skills through more complex intermediate skills involving the middle grades curriculum. Finally, high school students need specialized instruction within disciplines. This study addresses the specialized instruction in history to improve the evaluation and interpretation of historic documents and therefore improve civic citizenship (Johnson, Avineri & Johnson, 2017; Wamba, 2010; Clymer, Toso, Grinder & Sauder, 2017). Beyond civic improvement, any time spent reading in any subject will ultimately improve basic and intermediate reading skills leading to increases in literacy and hopefully social change (Reisman, 2012).

Figure 2.1 Levels of Literacy
Note. Basic Literacy: Literacy skills such as decoding and knowledge of high-frequency words that underlie virtually all-reading tasks. Intermediate Literacy: Literacy skills common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies, common word meanings and basic fluency. Disciplinary Literacy: Literacy skills specialized to history, science, mathematics, literature or other subject matter. (Adapted from Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)

Table 2.1 Long-Term Trend in Reading Age 13, All Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Average Scale Score</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td></td>
<td>260</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td></td>
<td>255</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The NAEP Long-Term Trend Reading scale ranges from 0 to 500. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.

Table 2.2 Average Reading Scores for 17-Year-Old Students by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Average Scale Score</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td></td>
<td>290</td>
<td>(1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td></td>
<td>285</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The NAEP Long-Term Trend Reading scale ranges from 0 to 500. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.
Table 2.3 Reading Trends Age 17 by National School Lunch Program Eligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Eligible: At Risk Students</th>
<th>Not Eligible</th>
<th>Information not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average Scale Score</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>Average Scale Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>national</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>(1.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The NAEP Long-Term Trend Reading scale ranges from 0 to 500. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.

Figure 2.2 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for Public High School Students, by Race/Ethnicity: 2014–15

Note: This report was generated using the NAEP Data Explorer

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspectives driving this action research originate with curriculum developers such as Bobbitt, Dewey and Piaget, but the need for social justice comes from qualitative research efforts of Jonathon Kozol. Bobbitt expounded on the need to create objectives in curriculum, though minimal, to address the social studies that could eliminate the social shortcomings (Bobbitt, 2017). Bobbitt encourage the ideas of social
justice, the core of social reconstruction theory. Jonathan Kozol (1993) expressed the dire situation found in the urban schools, for example Brooklyn, NY. His extensive travels in the impoverished communities revealed to him a need for social justice and a change to schools that would beget positive results and reduced poverty of a people impoverished through no fault of their own. The changes to the communities Kozol (1993) describes, can be accomplished through social reconstruction theory applied in simple objectives in history curriculum. Dewey (2017) believed that the school is an extension of the community and that it should bring students a “share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends” (p. 35). Thus, school should reflect the community and aim to affect change through social justice education.

Frank Bobbitt (2017) described the evolution of our social order as one “proceeding with great and ever-accelerating rapidity” (p. 11). He continues to explain the desire of all social classes to grow and obtain full human opportunity, a sentiment expressed by President Wilson. Bobbitt also considered the democracy increasing and this can be seen in social organization such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) being established in 1909 (https://NAACP.org). Bobbitt (2017) believed that social shortcomings in subjects such as literature and history are indefinite and subject to personal bias and interpretation. For these reasons he saw a necessity for “a quarter if the desirable objectives … that would be a great advance over none at all, as at present” (pp. 17-18). He recognized that scientific method could not be applied to all and sometimes science is best left incomplete.

Dewey (2017) proclaims the true center of correlation within school subjects to be the student’s social activities, which would also be influenced by their community and
personal bias. He continues by explaining that the subject of history therefore needs to be organized to show the past as a reference to social life to give meaning. In support of this theory Monte-Sano and De La Paz (2012) found that demographics had no effect on writing about history. These findings further emphasize the need to organize history to reference social life and the community in which the schools are situated (Dewey, 2017).

Piaget, (as described in Schiro, 2013) theorized that people travel through stages of learning as they get older. Each stage presents opportunity to introduce social constructive education. In each stage students assimilate information differently than in previous stages, but each piece of new information alters the child’s subjective reality. Ultimately, Piaget (as referenced in Shiro, 2013) describes, “constructivist theory [as] concerning how people construct knowledge through the process of assimilation and accommodation” (p. 131). By introducing community related topics into the context of the history and social studies lessons, students will be introduced to social constructivism in all stages of development. This theory can also be integrated into all disciplines objectively. The social constructivist theory presents the best solution to the instructional design (ID) of this action research. The theory proposes the individual assimilation and meaning development. Then individuals work together to process new inputs, and combine the group’s meanings to realize a consensus.

An education system described by Kozol (1993) chooses to indoctrinate students rather than allow them the freedom of independent thought. The situation described by Kozol mirrors the research Wineburg (2001) referenced from the Texas examination that found students scoring 33 out of 100 when tested on American history information. Kozol (1993) describes a system, in which teachers continue to use cognitive theory and
behaviorism in the classroom to instruct students to pass a test rather than look at the strengths of the individual student and build those strengths (Boutte, 2016). Kozol (1993) tells teachers to open children’s minds using the authoritative words from authorities of the past and present. They should expose students to authentic relative materials, allowing students to form their own opinions and discuss difficult real-world problems. He encourages new teachers to be proponents for change (Kozol, 1993) through social justice. Kozol makes the argument that society is unhealthy based on the tattered neighborhoods, dilapidated schools and urban plight Kozol found in the boroughs of New York.

All four authors’ ideas amalgamate to a direction of social justice within schools, related to communities, that reflects in the social reconstruction theory. The belief that educators search for the student that is not yet there, echoes through the works of educational development notables like Frank Bobbitt, John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Jonathan Kozol (Kozol, 1993; Dewey 2017). History education when presented using the social constructivist theory, can open the minds of students to allow themselves to develop historic thinking skills. Further use of social reconstructionism can change the mindset of those students, and lead to meaningful social change brought on by individuals and group consensus. Social constructivism, the over-arching theory, and social reconstructionism, the core theory of this action research teaches individuals and groups to question and debate, then challenge and not simply to fall into line with the existing communal structures.

The opportunity to engage students in high school history lessons in authentic lessons, opens avenues for interdisciplinary discussion. However, a key element to the
context of history lessons, as will all disciplines, is the use of historic thinking skills.
Disciplinary literacy, and skills focus that encompass the needs of each content area must also be taught. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) explained the differences among the many content areas taught in school. Even though the terms are the same, sourcing contextualization and corroboration for example, they mean different things when execute in each course. Ertmer and Newby (2013) explained that when students are novices they require cognitive theory lessons that instruct students to use discipline-based skills, like historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration.

**Social Constructive Theory**

Social constructivism bases learning on the creation of meaning from experience. As Piaget explained, as people grow they inherit experiences and knowledge that assimilates previous experiences (Schiro, 2013). Much like the cognitive learning theory, the new information is coded with the existing information inside of the individual (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). The difference between the cognitive theory and constructivism is that constructivists believe, according to Ertmer and Newby (2013), “that the mind filters input from the world to produce its own unique reality” (p. 55). Whereas cognitive theory teaching with a particular objective in mind. Constructivist do not deny the exist of the real world, as it were, rather they see individual interpretation stems from personal experiences. The outside inputs assimilate into the mental cycle of an individual’s knowledge. Those inputs are filtered through what can be perceived by that person, then interpreted to create the new reality (Schiro, 2013; Ertmer & Newby, 2013). The social aspect of the theory happens through agreement and disagreement.
among peers and the context expert. The goal of social constructivism is to reach consensus and/or new meaning for the group and child.

The social constructivist learning theory relies upon a consistent contextual situation for the learner to gain maximum value of the new information. In education this context can be defined by disciplines. For a history lesson, for example the students would be introduced to topics in a familiar manner using primary and secondary sources to present information about the past. A key element to the context is the ability to express ideas free from the fear of ridicule and consequences. Although, a facilitator must teach the participants to interact on a civil level, especially when the students are novices. Students evaluate the information and form their own new meaning. To effectively reach new meaning, the students would integrate their new meanings with others through the group discussion and debate. The most effective learning comes from agreement and disagreement leading to a balance of personal equilibrium and group consensus (Bickford, 2010; Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2001; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Schiro, 2013).

For their part, the instructor in the room serve as the context master as, in any apprentice situation. They do not provide correct answers, only behaviors. Rather the teacher, acting as the context expert, facilitates discussion and provides skills to interpret the source information, allowing students to evaluate, code and assimilate information into their own schema (Applefield et al, 2001; Ertmer & Newby 2013). Since each individual is to create this new meaning for themselves, they should be allowed to free associate and filter new information through their own experience. In the early stages, when students are novices to the skills of historic interpretation, a teacher may need to
use more cognitive learning techniques such as graphic organizers until the students improve to approach mastery. Full use of social constructivism can occur in the approaching mastery and mastery levels of learning.

**Social Reconstruction Theory**

Schiro (2013) describes the beliefs of social reconstruction ideology as seeing the problems of social existence and knowing the solution to self-destruction looms in developing a vision of a better society in light of the existence of the unhealthy society. Achieving the vision requires movement and change. Proponents of social reconstruction ideology know that education holds the key to this change. Counts (2017) conveys that teachers have opportunities to influence the development of courage and power in students; they could encourage social change by promoting social learning. Smiley and West (2012) quoted Robert Kennedy who said:

> The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike. Rather it will belong to those who can blend vision, reason and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals and great enterprises of American society (p. 95)

Social reconstruction ideologists believe teachers hold a key to bringing this change if they have the courage to promote social change in the lessons, topics and organization of learning in their classrooms.

History and other social studies subjects teach students how their society works and how it can be changed (Ravitch, 2013). The topics discussed in history classes, or any discipline for that matter, can bring to light social justice issues facing society. If the documents presented to students expose the decisions made by the leaders of the United
States and the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, or the treatment of the Japanese prisoners of war at Manzanar, students will have the opportunity to debate, discuss, agree and disagree on the topics drawing upon their own experiences to formulate the new meaning. The context of the history classroom and the authentic assessments used to introduce the information provides the familiarity needed to execute the use of the historical thinking skills. The more historic thinking skills are used in this context the more effective learners become in their execution of the skills. Furthermore, the students are encouraged to express themselves without fear of retribution or ridicule from peers of the facilitator context expert (Schiro, 2013). The teacher, thus the school serves a function in the development of children during the stages of life described by Piaget. The key to the development of social reconstructionism is the need to encourage, teach and cultivate thinking, discussion and consensus among participants.

**Cognitive Constructivism**

Wineburg (2001) explained a dramatic lack of research related to history education as related to the theory of cognitive constructivism. His early research looked for connections to the teaching of history in secondary education and the cognitive research used is other content areas. He found that some students could interpret documents and history while others could not. The lack of literature led to his seminal research comparing thinking processes of historians and high school students to discover the reason for the short-falls in secondary education (Wineburg, 1991b; Hynd, et al, 2008). Much research building on Wineburg (1991b) suggests methods tied to the cognitive constructivist model. Social Reconstruction ideology relies on social constructivism for learner development, because it promotes sensory-based meaning
development, as well as active assimilation and accommodation to enhance meaning for each learner. All learning is influenced by what the learner already knows (Schiro, 2013; Montessori, 2017; Bobbitt, 2017; Dewey, 2017).

Wineburg (1991a) exclaimed, “the subject of history has been largely ignored” (p. 73), in the exploration of cognitive skills used in various subjects such as mathematics and science. Wineburg (1991a) discovered the books that aimed to assist novice historians to write about history, published in the mid-nineteenth century, are limited in their historical thinking because they do not adequately explain the practices actually pursued by historians (Wineburg, 1991a). The presumption that competence in skills developed for other subjects will lead to success in history is unsupported through decades of research (Wineburg, 1991a; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Cognitive constructivism theory encourages the interpretation of new information as it filters through an individual’s perceptions. These perceptions form through experience. Wineburg (2001) explained that research on the use of cognitive science in history education not only lagged, but was virtually nonexistent.

Wineburg (1991a) continues to explain that historical thinking skills are not equivalent to science and mathematics inquiry for which “goals are given to individuals, who then transform problems to arrive at solutions” (p. 73). History goals remain vague and indefinite since documents provide information, not necessarily facts. An historian will use inductive reasoning to take their observations to a logical conclusion. To express this more simply, authors of historic documents tell an influenced version of an event (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008). Readers need to not only read and comprehend the words
of the document they also need to interpret the meaning of the information and the intentions of the author (Wineburg, 1991a; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

**Disciplinary Literacy**

The United States has seen a decline in the performance of high school students on the NAEP reading tests since 1991, both in overall score and the number of students scoring proficient or advanced. However, the problem recognized before this study, is that students in low socioeconomic communities tend to score lower on the NAEP reading assessment than students in affluent districts. In the subject district, for example, historically underperforming students lower the overall. Few research-based lessons were being used in the researcher’s classroom, and throughout the social studies department as a whole. All students suffer when instruction fails to prepare them. The objectives of the department and the district aim to score better on the Keystone exams. Since social sciences are not a tested subject, the emphasis in those classrooms was to improve reading and writing skills. These skills are not commonly taught in social studies teacher preparation programs, and certainly not the specialty of history teachers. Therefore, teachers in the department focused on history content knowledge, and no emphasis to adjust to the research-based theories was made.

With respect to literacy, Wineburg (2005) explains, “If we rely on data from the latest [NAEP] [functional illiteracy] is exactly the predicament we are in. These scores reveal that in 2003, half the students in cities such as Atlanta, Cleveland, Los Angeles and the District of Columbia failed to reach even basic level [in reading skills]” (p. 662). Without the ability to read and write Wineburg (2005) adds, “one thing is abundantly clear … high school graduates will face the culture of power from the outside looking in”
Social reconstructionism taught in social studies courses using disciplinary literacy skills can improve historic thinking and recognition of social justice issues skills, while honing the finer close reading skills needed for historical interpretation (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008; Reisman, 2012). Furthermore, the fact that students are reading to gather the new information, will have the added benefit of getting students to read and write. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) hope to involve history curriculum in solving the deficient NAEP scores. Simply asking history teachers to instruct students on literacy skills in order to accommodate non-fiction literature has proven to alienate learners and create ambivalence (Pace, 2012).

This brings researchers back to Wineburg (1991b), which exposed a gap in the historic thinking skills used by the academy and secondary schools. Wineburg’s (1991a) study would reveal the difference in the reading techniques used by eight historians versus those used by high school students. The history professors were experts in a variety of fields from American Colonial history to Japanese history and even a medievalist (Wineburg, 1991b). His study began with studying historians’ thoughts by using think-aloud methodology that they were taught to use by the researcher. He asked the historians to verbalize their thoughts as they analyzed complex problems. The surprising results from this study of historians was that they paid attention to the source of the document, as well as the context of the article, not simply the content. Not surprising, the historians all read the documents with similar scrutiny and were able to come to conclusions even though the subject matter was related to Colonial America, out of the range of expertise for many participants (Wineburg, 1991b). The historians used context clues found in the source information, as well as looking at the specific source of
the documents in order to reveal what the sub-texts can explain, before reading or interpreting the documents. Furthermore, the historians corroborate information to interpret the details of the events, not relying solely on the authenticity of a single source.

In the same study, Wineburg (1991b) evaluated the skills of eight highly advanced high school students, with average SAT scores of 1227, as compared to the historians. This seminal study concluded that students were indeed lacking the skills of an historian. Wineburg (1991b) explained, “[the] students [in the study] rarely saw subtexts in what they read” (p. 510), which were core to historians’ conclusions. Students would not often compare the documents instead the differences between documents frustrated students (Wineburg, 1991). One finding exposed a chasm between academia and secondary education and was discovered after reviewing how participants ranked the documents read during the study. Wineburg (1991b) reported that when asked to rank documents by their validity, historians ranked a direct excerpt from a textbook last, “even less trustworthy than an excerpt from a fictional work” (p. 500). Wineburg (1991b) went on to explain that historians reasoned that, “the [textbook]… passage contradicts primary accounts from both British and American sides” (p. 500). In contrast, the students ranked this particular document much higher, failing to recognize the discrepancy seen by the historians. Wineburg (1991b) reported on one the students, a 4.0, on a 4.0 scale, student enrolled in AP American History:

He carefully monitored his comprehension and uses debugging strategies such as backtracking when meaning breaks down; he pauses and formulates higher-order summaries after each paragraph; and he tries to connect the content
of what he reads to what he already knows. Nonetheless Darrel rated the textbook as the most trustworthy of the eight documents (p. 501).

All of the students in the study were exceptional academic performers and they scored above the national average on NAEP for history. Yet all of them contrasted the historians and chose the textbook to be the most trustworthy. The students effectively articulated the main idea of documents (Wineburg, 1991b). Wineburg (1991b) further revealed the students could, “predict what might come next, [locate] information in the text, and answer literal and inferential questions” (p. 502). These are basic literacy skills taught to middle grade students, and used extensively to evaluate reading comprehension.

The skills highlighted in Wineburg’s study as they pertained to the high school students appeared in later work that studied students’ achievement and curriculum. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) explained the phenomena of predicting and identifying main idea as, “most students manage to master basic and even intermediate literacy skills, many never gain proficiency with more advanced skills … [needed] to read challenging texts in … history” (p. 45). By the early 2000s social studies curriculum developers adjusted the course to aim at educating students to be active citizens and learn certain history content (Wineburg, 2005, p. 662). The courses also promoted character education, environmental education and a large array of other topics related to social studies (Wineburg 2005, p. 662). Social justice apparently topped all the lists in states. Any time-spent reading will lead to improved literacy skills and potential for improving the poverty situation in The United States (Reisman, 2012; Ravitch, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Researchers in the 1990’s began researching the understanding and use historic thinking skills used in secondary all levels of education. They looked at the effects of
historic thinking skills instruction. However, the introduction of NCLB and now ESSA, seems to have inhibited the growth of historical learning skills instruction in the secondary classroom (Cowgill & Waring, 2017; Pace, 2012). Since social studies education took a subsidiary role under those federal mandates, the growth of the discipline stopped. Evidence points to teacher induction programs, and their failure to effectively develop teachers capable of using and teaching historic thinking. Teacher programs failed to develop history literacy skills in new teachers. Teacher induction programs should focus on historic thinking skills and the instruction thereof. Secondary students will not learn to evaluate history through primary and secondary sources without proper instruction and practice.

Ravitch (2013) proposes a significant problem of lack of evaluation skills increases exponentially as students are flooded with information that can overwhelm them. The information pours in from easily accessible digital sources. This information can cloud the minds of illiterate adults and students (Ravitch, 2013). The tools needed to dissect the claims and evidence discovered are not present, and students appear functionally illiterate. The digital world provides a vast stream of information (Wineburg, 2005). Stated simply, Wineburg (2005) expresses, “Flooded with information as never before, many students [and adults] get swept away before learning to swim” (p. 662). If they do not use the historic thinking skills of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization, they focus on information from primary sources, books and websites during research that appears to support their hypothesis. Research results is shrouded by cognitive bias.
Armed with a lack of cognitive studies dealing with history education, Sam Wineburg’s (1991b) seminal study exposed historians, “as a guild, [who] have been uncharacteristically tight-lipped” (p. 496) about the skills they use to evaluate historical documents. As a result of this tight-lipped nature of historians where historical skills are concerned, there grew a chasm between the academy and grade schools. Instruction of disciplinary literacy lacks in history classrooms, but this literacy enables students to evaluate history, and form their own meaning.

**Historic Thinking Skills**

Little research prior to the early 1990’s looked at the role of social studies educators and cognitive skills until Wineburg (1991b). Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish and Bosquet (1996) brought relevance with a study of classrooms and teachers as a follow up study, which looked at the process and outcomes of high school tenth graders reading multiple historic texts. Students in a single school taught by one teacher and all enrolled in a college level course were chosen for the study. They were given background questionnaires and a writing assessment prior to proceeding with reading documents related to the on-set of the Vietnam conflict. The students were finally asked to rate the strength of relationship between 10 key words or phrases. After gaining a baseline to begin the study Stahl et al. (1996) presented the students with 11 documents to read related to the topic (p. 437). The authors intended to examine the validity of prior research such as Wineburg’s (1991b), examining the ability of high school students to evaluate multiple sets of conflicting documents.

The results of the study indicated that students showed a significant increase in understanding after the reading of the second text (Stahl et al., 1996, p. 440). They found
that the first document reading led to increases over the pretest data, but the biggest jump was from the first to second document readings. Stahl et al. (1996) interpreted this to mean, “that a student needs to read at least two different texts to develop a coherent mental model and that the majority of the growth occurs with two reading, but not much occurs after that” (p. 440). These findings in themselves do not seem to contradict the results that Wineburg (1991b) discovered in his seminal study, even though the results showed the largest improvement from document one reading to document two, and decreased results with the 9 subsequent documents.

From the outset a difference arose between the students and an expert control group, a group of teachers. For instance, students grouped the terms using a confirmation bias showing United States actions in Vietnam as defensive and all other grouped with aggression. This differed from the control group of experts that viewed both sides in a more balanced regard (Stahl et al, 1996, p. 441). The researchers believed these differences reflected the average ages of the two groups, the students being 15-16-year-old sophomores and the control groups, all having lived through the Vietnam era. Stahl et al (1996) explained that the control group arranged the terms around two axes aggression and defense, and foreign and domestic (p. 441). The researchers continued by explaining that the students clustered around aggression and defense, but the students placed the foreign aggressors in the aggression group while terms related to the Unites States were on the defensive side showing a blatant bias toward the United States in foreign affairs, reflecting a different world view versus the control participants’ balanced view. They lived through the turmoil of the era and perhaps question reasoning for being in Vietnam to begin with.
In the study, students chose the documents to read and in what order to read them. Many of students, about two thirds of them, chose a document that appeared to provide an overview (Stahl et al 1996, p. 442). Stahl et al (1996) speculated, “the history [document] was chosen because it seemed to provide an overview, and because students would perceive it as neutral in tone” (p. 442). Both texts were also short and focused. Likewise, the annotation made by the students of the documents reflected a tendency to select information that supported their position; in rare cases were conflicting information annotated. Stahl et al (1996) indicated, “students seemed good at filtering information they did not need” (p. 442). Selective deletion of information indicated that the students were uncomfortable with corroborating details.

The notes that were taken by the students also told a tale of the students understanding of the documents, and perhaps the students need for supporting details. Some students took copious notes while others listed main ideas (Stahl et al, 1996, p. 447). Researchers found one consistency; the students reduced the quantity of notes after the first text read. The students tended to write notes that corroborated their position and not ones that contradicted them. Stahl et al. (1996) concluded that, “students … were able to concentrate on relevant information. In two pieces written for a purpose different from the purpose given the students, they consistently ignored irrelevant information, focusing instead on information suited to their purpose” (p. 447). As the students progressed, they seemed to search for supporting details and continued to ignore details that did not corroborate their hypothesis. This evidence supports the lack of the historical thinking skill of corroboration in high school students (Ravitch, 2013; Nokes et al., 2007; De La Paz, 2005; Reisman, 2012; Shanahan, et al. 2016).
Yeager and Davis (1996) researched, “teachers' historical thinking with regard to the interpretation of a particular set of historical texts and interpretive tasks” (p. 148). In other words, the study observed teachers performing the historical thinking skill and using disciplinary literacy as studied in Wineburg’s (1991b) seminal study. The researchers studied a group of teachers, had them read documents and then they interviewed the teachers asking questions regarding each document and the teacher’s interpretation. Their research led them to categorize in-service teachers into three classifications (Yeager & Davis, 1996 p. 151).

In one classification, three of the teachers interviewed displayed skills similar to the historical professionals seen in Wineburg’s seminal study, those of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. Yeager and Davis (1996) described Meredith, a member of the group of three, as having “emphasized a constructivists method toward historical thinking” (p. 151). They explained the details of her interview and expressed that she had used skills such as sourcing, contextualization and corroboration to evaluate the documents.

The second classification of teachers, described using Julie, tended to read for entertainment purposes (Yeager & Davis 1996, p. 155). In Julie’s case, she read documents, or rather skimmed through them to see if the document interested her. She had a basic understanding of the information, but she spent no time looking at the source nor did she seem to place any concern on subtext, thus she and the others in her group were compared to the students in Wineburg’s seminal study (Yeager & Davis, 1996). She made a superfluous review of the documents, with little evaluation. These results correspond with the students in Wineburg (1991) and Stahl et al (1996).
The final classification of teachers read each document for accuracy. The focus of this group of eight was Jordan. He spoke little in the interview but he emphasized the validity of the statements, paying little attention to the source information provided, much like Julie (Yeager & Davis, 1996). This individual also shows some similarities to the students in Stahl et al (1996). Yeager and Davis (1996) pronounced, “Indeed, Jordan seemed to imply that the purpose of historical inquiry was eventually to take sides, to clearly come down on one side of a particular historical issue” (p. 159). He appeared to concern himself with corroboration in terms of confirmation bias and little else, very much like the students in Wineburg’s (1991b) seminal study. A trained historian focuses on the validity of a source and context surrounding the source’s production in addition to the content.

The results of the Yeager and Davis (1996) study points to a need for changes to teacher pre-service programs. The programs need to better prepare teachers to instruct students on the historic thinking skills necessary to evaluate historical documents. Yeager and Davis (1996) specifically conclude, “students are not likely to think historically unless their teachers do so” (p. 162). The study brought up several points for further research, one in particular related to my study introduced by Yeager and Davis (1996) asked, “How does historical inquiry contribute to the larger citizenship goals of social studies instruction?” (p. 163). Their inquiry stimulated numerous future studies, some of which are mentioned later, that address the need for civic education.

Further studies corroborated their findings accentuating the need for changes to history education programs. History curriculum, according to Carl Becker (as cited in Wineburg, 1991b) we are all historians. Wineburg (1991b) continues, “if becker is right,
then school history possesses great potential for teaching students to think and reason in sophisticated ways.” Teachers must be taught to reach for the children drowning in information by teaching them to swim. Wineburg (1998) explains the core to the curricular change necessary, “The creation of context lies at the heart of historical expertise, forming the foundation upon which sound historical readings must rest” (p. 337). A follow-up study explored the historical thinking of two historians with differing backgrounds to analyze how they read documents (Wineburg, 1998, p. 319). This study mimicked the seminal study, but it also built on the work of Yeager and Davis (1996) and Stahl et al (1996) in that the study looks for further clues as to the skills used by historians.

Wineburg (1998) points out that “novice readers encounter the past in primary documents and judge it” (p. 338). The study explains that the phenomenon of “presentism” exists in many novice readers whereas they tend to look at the past through the lens of the present. This tendency Wineburg (1998) explains, “is not some bad habit we’ve fallen into, but is instead our psychological condition at rest” (p. 338). The work of the subject matter expert of the studies content reflects the true substance of this study. Although he wrote books about the Civil War (subject of the study) he still asked questions during his reading of the documents and referred back to previous documents and earlier assessments (Wineburg, 1998). Historians do not simply refer to the archives of information they have stored to find information to complete an interpretation, the process used by historians resembles a student responding to a document-based question (DBQ) (Wineburg, 1998, p. 340). Since the number of students that will become historians remains very low the focus on history instruction is, and probably always has
been, liberal rather than vocational (Wineburg, 1998). This further accentuates the need for historical skills development as a means to improve civic education. This sentiment echoes in Wineburg (1998), “it may be students’ response in the face of complexity—what they do when they *don’t* know—which holds the key to their continued learning from the world we call the past” (p. 340, italics from original text).

The data gathered to date seems to validate Wineburg (1991a). Historians did indeed use different skills than those of many secondary school educators and students. Hynd, Holschuh and Hubbard (2004) encouraged students to “not only read texts for factual information, but also to engage in sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration, the strategies the Wineburg (1991[b]) found historians using” (p. 143). This study was performed with college students of varying experiences, ages and educational expertise. The researchers wanted to determine if college students could perform the tasks of historians, contrary to high school students who failed to perform the tasks outlined in Wineburg (1991b). This study hoped to use an experimental model to manipulate variables in hopes of changing the practices of college students who presumably have more experience than high school students (Hynd et al., 2004).

The results of this study were positive even though the initial data collected in the research pointed toward a similar response from participants to those in previous studies (Hynd et al., 2004). After instruction the college students were able to shift their thinking to using the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration (Hynd et al., 2004). Hynd et al., (2004) expressed the concern with the “responses that [the participants] made … might not be made by younger, less epistemologically mature high school students”
The researchers suggested that the study be done with high school students and with students of different achievement levels (Hynd et al, 2004, p. 169).

**Action Research Instruction**

History instruction has long been associated with memorization of names, dates and places, as well as teacher lectures that were all expected to lead to critical thinking now expected by state standards (Twyman, McCleery & Tindal, 2006). Twyman, McCleery and Tindal (2006) suggested a merging of concepts based learning and problem-solving strategies. Their study lasted 5-weeks during a U.S. Colonial history unit. The researchers felt that the teaching strategies used as well as the poor-quality textbooks affected the performance of students in their historical thinking and problem solving. They worked from this definition of *historical thinking* as “the ability to analyze problems within time-stamped periods and generalize interpretations by articulating patterns of similarities and differences as well as cause and effect” (Twyman, McCleary & Tidal, 2006, p. 332). Further reading reveals their connection to Wineburg (1991a) in both contextualization and recognition of the non-linear nature of history thinking.

Another connection Twyman, McCleery and Tindal (2006) make to Wineburg’s seminal study regards textbooks and the poor quality of them as historical resources. This study concluded that concept-based learning when incorporated with strategic thinking skills instruction and application skills instruction will lead to students learning to evaluate complex problems. However, students did not show a significant difference in content knowledge (Twyman et al., 2005).
NCLB and Other Initiatives

A study of ELA teachers who had been trained in C3 Framework (College, Career and Civic Life for social studies state standards) to meet the changing curriculum in ELA courses requiring non-fiction be taught, found that ELA teachers need to learn to incorporate multiple documents to lessons on nonfiction text evaluation (Bickford, 2017). The study found that the teachers in the study preferred the use of multiple documents since the documents seem to motivate and interest students. The teacher reported student engagement in historical thinking skills. This qualitative study observed the changes t the ELA classrooms of the participants and the supplemental materials selected by the teachers.

In opposition to the ELA course shifts based on standards changes, social studies instructors teach reading and comprehension skills (Pace, 2012). Many social studies instructors lack the background and educational training to accomplish this leading to different results for students than expected for history education. Pace (2012) observed the classrooms of the participants, much like Bickford (2017), but observations indicated lessons revolved around literacy instruction using the history textbooks. This non-fiction nature of the textbooks provided instructional opportunities to teach comprehension of that type of literature, but the heavy literacy-based instruction forced history teachers to alter focus away from history education (Pace, 2012). Pace (2012) reported another unexpected consequence of student ambivalence; the direct consequence of this type of instruction according to the study is a redirection of attention away from history education. Furthermore, the standardized questions asked related to historical non-fiction passages steered learning back to antiquated instructional methods (Pace, 2012) used and
known by teachers prior to 1991 (Yeager & Davis, 1996). A conclusion worth repeating is the unintended consequence of student boredom (Pace, 2012).

More than 20 years after the publication of Yeager and Davis (1996), Cowgill and Waring (2017) concluded similar results regarding the lack of teachers’ historical thinking skills. They also found students lacked historical thinking skills. Teachers made some progress in the instruction of sourcing, but observation revealed that teachers fell into a rhythm with this skill, but underperformed when it came to contextualization and corroboration (Cowgill & Waring 2017). The study was non-experimental in nature and closely mimicked Wineburg (1991b, 1991a). The difference between the two studies is the use of teachers as participants versus historians. The results of this study surprised the researchers in that they expected that teacher induction programs were preparing teacher to meet initiatives directed at the Common Core as well as National Council for Social Studies (Cowgill & Waring, 2017). The authors suggested the use of this knowledge to improve development programs to enhance teacher knowledge of the skills for their own use as well as instructional practices (Cowgill & Waring, 2017, p. 134).

**Sourcing, Contextualization and Corroboration**

Primary in the study of individual documents is the need to source documents or determine the author’s motivation and intentions as well as the reliability of the document (Wineburg, 1991b). The research accentuates the need for contextualization to place the source into the proper time and space in history to reduce the tendency for students and teachers to rely on their personal perspective when evaluating the author’s viewpoint (Monte-Sano and De La Paz, 2012; Seixas, 2017). In order to interpret the events of the past and persuade others to recognize a particular point of view, a budding historian
needs to corroborate sometimes conflicting documents. Current research continues to assess the validity of teaching using *sourcing, contextualization and corroboration* to assist students in learning history, but also to encourage civic responsibility through the understanding of similar current documents to those found in history (Nokes, 2007; De La Paz, 2005; Reisman, 2012; Shanhan et al., 2016).

Research indicates a positive correlation between the use of multiple documents in history instruction and overall student learning (Boyd, 2007; Bickford 2010, 2017; Hynd et al. 2004; Cowgill & Waring, 2017; Nokes & Hacken, 2007; Collin & Reich, 2015; Shanahan, Bolz, Cribb, Goldman, Heppler & Manderino, 2016). In the case provided in Bickford (2010) students engaged in classroom discussions more readily due in large part to a deeper understanding of the topic. All the studies recognized the improvements in student learning, but some found that the lack of historical thinking skills instruction prohibited significant growth.

The enhancements to history instruction will relate to improved civic skills (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan et al 2016; Collin & Reich, 2015). Students require improved reading skills, as Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) described in their study, to perform in the modern workplace as well as making informed decisions in civic life. Shanahan et al. (2016) emphasized the need for historical thinking skills that will improve independent thinking and participation in a civil society in a rapidly changing world (p. 241). The curriculum plans developed throughout the studies discussed above rebuild the secondary school history courses into a moral environment, which intend to mirror the university, professional workplace, everyday life and the public sphere (Collin & Reich, 2015). However, the changes proposed in these studies are difficult to
implement since so many extraneous variables that exist in teacher education programs affect the outcome of the curriculum implementation (Shanahan et al., 2016; Collin & Reich 2015).

**Conclusion**

Maria Montessori recognized that the goal of education was to train the mind in the same manner as of old without trying to draw upon new constructive forces (Montessori, 1971). She saw that society was unhealthy and in need of social change, but *The Absorbent Mind* was originally written in the post-World War Two era when all societies were reforming themselves to fit into the new world order. A consistent thread woven through the philosophies of many curriculum developers spelled out the need for social change, and most philosophers recognized history courses as a vehicle to stimulate the young mind to bring social change (Montessori, 1971; Montessori, 2017; Counts, 2017; Ravitch, 2013; Dewey, 2017; Bobbitt, 2017). Statistics show a consistent deficit in reading skills between socioeconomic classifications of students that indicates a larger issue in education and society as a whole. Loosely linking the philosophies and the statistical facts leads to a conclusion that history education can affect social change (Ravitch, 2013). For this change to occur teachers need to proceed with confidence, courage and personal commitment. They then need to heed the advice of President Wilson and Robert Kennedy to allow all students the rights and privilege of earning the bounty of nature through education.

Social reconstruction ideologists see society as flawed and in need of change. They further believe that this change can come from curricular changes, which allow personal growth. Wineburg (1991b) found a key to evolving the cognitive skills of
students to help them evaluate and interpret historic documents. These same skills of *sourcing, contextualization and corroboration* when applied to modern social, economic and political documents can improve citizenship and lead to better decisions on things that effect our democracy (Shanahan et al., 2016; Nokes, 2007; Ravitch, 2013). The changes in curriculum reflect a movement toward social constructivism because it promotes sensory-based cognition, a fundamental detail in the development of the child’s mind (Schiro, 2013; Montessori, 2017). Thanks to the efforts of researchers who built on Sam Wineburg’s seminal study, history education curriculum may finally reach the suggested goals of Woodrow Wilson.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

Overview of Study

Students often inaccurately evaluate primary and secondary sources, struggle with placing the sources into proper context and do not corroborate information among historic documents. The ability to properly assess documents and use them to respond to nonfiction prompts in high school history courses may seem arbitrary, especially considering the use of behaviorism, or the memorize then test methods of many history curriculums. However, the skills developed in social studies education may lead to a better-informed citizenry (Ravitch, 2013) as described in social reconstruction theory. Although not the primary intent of the study, civic engagement is critical to the success of a democratic society, and the improvement of the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration through exposure to primary and secondary documents in high school using methods common to social constructivism, mimics civic life.

Research Questions

Will teaching the skills of sourcing primary and secondary historic documents improve the assessment of source bias and validity in high school students?

Will instructing the student to place documents in the proper context of history improve the student’s understanding of the document source, meaning and content?

Will instructing the student to source and contextualize documents improve the student’s ability to corroborate information found in documents?
Research Design and Intervention

General Description

The study was performed as action research by the researcher teacher. The researcher studied the effectiveness of instructing students in the skills of sourcing as a method to improve the student’s full understanding of document bias and validity. The researcher used the cognitive instructional theory to demonstrate the skills needed to accomplish sourcing, and continued with this method throughout the introduction to each new phase. The study continued by addressing the concept of contextualization with the aim to improve the evaluation skills of students. The researcher explained that, contextualization can improve the understanding of historic documents by evaluating the circumstances surrounding the creation documents. After instructing the student on the skills of sourcing and contextualization and allowing the students to construct new meanings from the outside inputs found in and around the documents, the researcher worked to combine the new truths to further evaluate individual documents. The final stage of the intervention required instruction to the students on the skill of corroboration, or comparing and contrasting information found through close reading. During each of the three phases of the intervention, students worked independently to form their own new truths, then interacted with peers to reach group consensus, or learn from one another through social acculturation (Schiro, 2013). The student worked to respond to nonfiction prompts using evidence from the documents. The students learned that the responses to the prompts were not specific in that a particular answer was expected. Rather, the students could formulate their own interpretation using their personal perceptions and interpretations (Shiro, 2013; Ertmer & Newby, 2013).
**Description of Intervention**

Sourcing requires the student to analyze primary and secondary sources prior to engaging in the reading of the document content. The student looks for authorship, date of original publication and the intended audience. Many times, the information needed to source a document might not be known to the students. In this phase, students were instructed to gather information from outside sources, many times via Internet inquiries. This information provided the student with potential author bias and potential for validity of the source based on the author’s expertise or lack thereof. An example from the intervention was an article about The Little Rock Nine published in Look Magazine. This type of source did not mean as much to these modern students, since hardcopy magazines are not as prominent as cyber content, and Look Magazine has not been published for many years. However, the magazine once prominently covered newsstands. Furthermore, the student needed to know who the intended audience of Look magazine may have been, also the author’s name and reputation. In the case of this type of media, the student will need recognize that journalism was, and still is an admirable profession and not the often-maligned profession reflected current political rhetoric.

In this same fashion the student learned to evaluate the document based on the context of the period in which the document was first published or created. Contextualization requires some knowledge of history. In some cases, the student may need to research the period for this information. They perhaps have too little prior knowledge to develop an effective new meaning from the data input. Using the Look Magazine example, the student seeks to understand the intricacies of the period surrounding the desegregation of the Little Rock Central High School and the origins of
the Little Rock Nine. They may also want to know more about The Civil Rights Movement and racial tensions of the 1950’s.

Once the student has the source and contextual information on the document, they began to evaluate the information provided by the document, and extracted through close reading. At this point the student used both the source and contextual information to evaluate the information in the document as well as give proper value to that information. A magazine from the 1960’s elaborating on the desegregation of schools may show a conservative light on a racial situation to ensure sale of the issue and maintaining integrity with advertisers. So, the student would want to know the source and contextual information to know that the article shows bias appropriate to the time.

Once information has been collected by the student from the documents and proper value placed on that information, the student can begin to address a nonfiction prompt. More than likely documents would compare as well as contrast one another. The key to corroborating information and responding to the question was taught by the teacher/research by diagramming a response, for example using an advanced organizer. The student learns to compare and contrast information, keeping bias and validity in mind. At this point the student was ready to write an analytical response to the prompt paying particular attention to the conflicting information. In many cases the contrasts provide the most vivid image of the historic event in question.

Through the phases of the intervention, the researcher observed learning by assessing the students’ produced artifacts, evaluating class discussion and reviewing student exit tickets. During social acculturation discussions, the researcher eaves dropped on discussions and supplied minimal intervention to keep conversation on task. The data
gathered through assessment of all afore mentioned methods allowed the researcher to proceed with each phase. In the case of contextualization, the researcher found a need to back up and reexplain concepts. Final assessments of each phase proved evidence of successful instruction, as did the post-intervention assessment.

**Constructs**

The student’s ability to source, contextualize and corroborate information from historic documents to better understand historic events are the constructs for this research. The researcher aims to influence these constructs through the planned intervention. Sourcing, contextualization and corroboration are defined above, and transfer to skills used by professional historians to determine the events of history. The intervention systematically provides instruction to the student to enhance these skills and develop historic reasoning skills

**Context and Participants of Study**

The research was performed in a rural high school setting. This is a micro study that focuses on a small convenience sampling of tenth grade accelerated American History students. The researcher is the teacher in the classroom. The students came to the teacher at the outset of the school year. None of the students have had any courses with the researcher previously. The extent to which the students have been exposed to the constructs of the study were unknown, but the researcher believes exposure is minimal at best. The researcher is a veteran history teacher and has been in the school for 11 years prior, and since this is a small district the students have some familiarity with the teacher/researcher. This enhanced the trust among the participants, hopefully augmenting the learning of new skills.
The students were divided into two classes. One meets early in the day while the other late in the day. There was a risk of duplication of information from the earlier period to the later, but the data showed no increase in scores from one period to the next. The total sample size was 27 students. The small size was purposeful and favorable due to the limited resources of the researcher including time constraints due to the typical schedule of a high school instructor and funding.

The group of students were accelerated students, presumably college bound. The students were assumed to have above average reading skills. This level of student was chosen to reduce the need for adaption of materials and/or teaching basic reading skills. For this reason, the intervention focused entirely in the disciplinary literacy of history curriculum and address the constructs of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration.

_Data Collection Measures, Instruments and Tools_

The data collection began immediately at the onset of the fall semester with the pre-intervention assessment. The intervention concluded with the post-intervention assessment. Artifacts were generated by the students during the intervention to allow the researcher to understand the development of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration through an ongoing constant comparative methodology. These included exit tickets, social acculturation and other written and oral assessments. Field notes were kept to detail classroom interactions and researcher observations. All artifacts were used to determine mastery levels for the group as well as individual students.

_Pre-Intervention/Post-Intervention Assessments_

The pre-intervention assessment provided the student with four modified historic documents of no more than one page in length related to the Armistice that ended World
War I. The documents provided source information including date of publication, type of document, and author. The student evaluated the prompt “What were the attitudes toward the armistice ending World War I” (SHEG.Stanford.edu). The students were presented with questions to assist in the evaluation of source and context, as well as a graphic organizer. The questions encouraged the students to search for information using deep reading techniques common to ELA classrooms. The questions also enhanced the evaluation of source and contextual information found in the source information as well as encouraged the student to look beyond the document. The information found by the student varied based on the personal interpretation. The pre-intervention assessment asked the student to propose a hypothesis at two points. The student proposed a hypothesis after the first round of documents, of which there are two, then after the final round of two additional documents. The hypotheses should contain corroborating evidence from the documents as well as the student’s analysis of the prompt.

A post-intervention assessment was similar in structure to the pre-intervention assessment, and immediately followed the intervention. The post-intervention assessment worked with the prompt, “Who is primarily responsible for the Cold War – The United States or the Soviet Union?” (SHEG.Stanford.edu). The students were provided four documents in the same fashion as with the pre-test, in pairs of documents. The student answered questions related to the source and context as in the pre-intervention assessment. The students were asked to respond to the prompt after evaluating each pair of documents as with the pre-intervention assessment. This evaluation intended to evaluate the student’s skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration in responding to a nonfiction prompt.
The final hypothesis of the pre- and post-intervention assessment was evaluated using similar rubrics, thus providing data to determine the success of the intervention. The responses to the guiding questions and the graphic organizers were also evaluated to assess skill development. Each category was judged on a scale from mastery to approaching mastery to novice. The students were evaluated on the recognition of bias and validity from the source of the documents in one category. The second category addressed the contextualization of the documents. The students were evaluated on the ability to place the document in context of the period in which the document was produced, providing evidence of events surrounding the authorship. Thirdly, the rubric evaluated the use of evidence as a tool to present a hypothesis for the prompt. Finally, the students’ responses were evaluated for mastery on the skill of corroborated evidence to produce an analytical hypothesis. To reiterate, all four categories were evaluated on a scale from novice to mastery.

Artifacts

During the process of the intervention, the students produced written artifacts used to demonstrate mastery. The students also provided feedback in the form of exit tickets using open-response question, multiple choice and Likert scales. Exit tickets were collected from the student during each lesson. Some lessons lasted one day while others occupied multiple days. Each lesson was flexible in the number of classes needed to complete. The goal of the lessons was for learning to occur. If the students struggled to make new meaning from through their own lenses, then the lesson could be extended. If the concept appeared elementary, then the lesson could be expedited. The researcher expected to collect one or two exit tickets per week during the nine weeks of the
intervention, however time constraints, and the need to extend lessons limited this collection. On average, one exit ticket per assessment was collected. These artifacts were evaluated to determine progress toward mastery in each of the skills on a daily and weekly basis. Questions asked on exit tickets, during class discussions and on other formative assessments included inquiry into the students’ understanding of the source information from documents, the validity of the document and the context of the document. For example, the students were asked to evaluate the validity of a given document from the Armistice assessment on a scale of one to five (Graph 4.1), whether one document is more valid than others or explain the tone of the author.

The data retrieved guided future portions of the interventions and assessments, leading to additional lessons or moving on to the next skill. Further data were gathered through observation, discussion, and classroom activities. Artifacts collected included activities designed to help the student develop the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. These data were recorded by the research/teacher in a field journal as well as in graded assignments in the classroom grade book.

The written responses used in the intervention were evaluated using tools provided by Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) as well as research created rubrics. SHEG bases the tools on the concepts presented by Sam Wineburg, as he is on the history faculty at Stanford University. Most materials used came from SHEG. Additional resources were found at LOC.gov, as well as DocsTeach.org, a subsidiary of the National Archives. DocsTeach.org uses documents found in the National Archives and user created lessons are accessible, as well as templates to create additional lessons. The Library of Congress (LOC) also provides lessons to be used with the primary and
secondary documents found on their site. The LOC provides templates for instructing the
student to evaluate primary sources, https://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-
analysis-tool/. These tools assisted in the sourcing of the document as well as the
contextualizing the source, for example with the Leo Szilard letter to President Truman.
Additionally, the students were presented with a variety of primary sources to analyze.
Class discussion provided insight into the understanding by the classes. Further written
responses provided detailed individual evaluation to ascertain mastery.

The rubrics used in the pre-intervention assessment and the post-intervention
assessment aimed to evaluated the skills development of individual students (Appendices
B & C). The researcher evaluated responses based on three level of mastery: novice,
approaching mastery and mastery, as described in the constructivist theory (Ertmer &
Newby, 2013). Though subjective to the assessment, no specific responses are objective
based upon the new meaning created after each student filtered information through their
own perception and interpretation. Social reconstruction occurred throughout the process,
particularly with the use of authentic real-world primary and secondary sources that
challenge common understanding of past events.

Research Procedures

In this study the focus was in the era of World War II to the beginning of The
Cold War. The documents reflected this period in American History from a variety of
sources, including both primary and secondary sources. In the first lessons, the students
received direct instruction on the value of understanding the source prior to assessing the
actual document, as is common with the cognitive theory. The student learned to detect
bias through evaluating the point of view of the author. This process allowed the students
to evaluate the authority and thus the weight that should be given to the information found in the document. This was done prior to reading or further analysis of the document. In many cases the students lacked knowledge of the source. Part of this lesson was to learn to research information on the source using Internet searches, social acculturation or context expert direct instruction. The students were first given an image of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Then they were asked to evaluate the well-known image, and respond to questions related to the image. In this case, the students were provided the artist and the approximate date of creation. They were asked if the document would provide historians with an accurate description of the events surrounding the signing of the Declaration. Many students were familiar with the painting, and a copy of the painting hangs in the researcher’s classroom. Most students missed the detail that the artist painted the source 60 to 80 years after the event, and therefore would have only second-hand knowledge of the event.

The second step of this lesson required further pre-reading evaluation of source information. The date of the document presented additional evidence of the validity of the information found in the document. The students learned about the difference between secondary and primary documents. Both types of documents have value and the student needs to learn the value of each. Once the date is determined, the student must learn to evaluate the context of the document. The students likewise, needed to research the period, since they had limited knowledge of that period of history. A trained historian has depth of knowledge to filter new inputs through, while the students lack the background. This phase of the evaluation looked for things such as word choice that challenge current
convention, but were common in historical context. Students were taught to reflect on the tone and meaning based on the period in which the document was created.

The combination of the details discovered through sourcing and contextualization provided students with vast information about the bias, validity and context of the document. Social constructive activities enhanced the process of evaluation. Different students introduced personal perceptions and together they interpreted document source and context information. The next lessons in the intervention, the researcher proceeded to instruct the student to evaluate each document and decide if the information in the document deserved prime billing or a secondary role in the evaluation of the historic event. Prior to this phase, students accepted information in textbooks, for example, as valid simply due to the acceptance of that genre in school settings (Wineburg, 1991b).

Once the document was evaluated for bias and validity, the content can be appraised through careful assessment, and close reading. This process also requires the student to have their research at the ready. Some terms were unfamiliar to the student, as well as many of the events described in the documents. This process is much like a scientist reproducing experiments. The student must learn to become meticulous and cautious as they proceed through the document looking for details, while keeping context and source information at hand. The student learned to dig for information and produce carefully evaluated information from the content of the sources. Because of the meticulous nature of this process, the student only addressed a few revised documents. SHEG provides modified documents with which to work. This was necessary to build confidence in the new skills being developed. The context of the history classroom also provided a modicum of comfort. This comfort was enhanced through creating a safe non-
judgmental environment, devoid of ridicule and constraints. The researcher was accepted
as the context expert, there to facilitate, but not to pass judgement.

The final stage of the intervention coordinated with ELA Common Core
Standards to respond to nonfiction prompts, or create artifacts, such as written responses
to prompts and responses to Likert surveys, using information gathered from multiple
primary and secondary sources. The student was instructed to use the information found
in the sources to respond to the prompts. This task often confounded many students. The
challenge seemed to be in the corroboration of the information. Many respondents used
only supporting information, avoiding the contracting data, even if the information comes
from less valid sources. Corroboration requires the student to compare and contrast
information from the primary and secondary sources, so a single focused response fails to
achieve full corroboration. The students were instructed to make broad connections, both
positive and negative between the documents. The students learned to use and cite
evidence from the documents to support their analysis of the prompt. The crucial step of
this step of this process was instructing the student to pay attention to contrasting details,
and not look only for confirming details, especially when the contradicting information
comes for valid sources. The use of contrasting details proved to be difficult to teach. By
constantly comparing data from artifacts, the researcher was able to redirect and facilitate
learning of skills. Although, the researcher found difficulties in not explaining his own
meaning and personal interpretation. This action would have negated the process being
taught.
Data Analysis Plan

A constant comparative method was used to discern emerging themes, and determine learning throughout each phase of the intervention. The emerging themes such as confirmation bias, guided adjustments to the lessons used to implement the intervention constructs (Mertler, p. 97). The exit tickets collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The artifacts provided quantitative data from Likert scale questions that was used to assess learning. For example, when students were asked to quantify the feelings of the average American toward the Japanese Americans (Table 4.3 & Figure 4.2), this assisted in assessing the learning of the skill of contextualization. Through these quantitative results the researcher reacted by reteaching the methods, as misunderstanding was reflected in the responses. This was also seen in the recognition of tone found in the exit ticket from the Leo Szilard lesson (Figure 4.4). The mixed results established a necessity for reteaching of the concept.

The textual information provided through open-ended questions from the exit tickets were used in open coding to generate axial codes by categorizing properties of the information. Additional data from the field notes and assessment results throughout the intervention provided data for axial coding, connecting as many data points as possible. The Likert results and the assessment data were evaluated both as a whole as well as individually. If the researcher ignores individual student scores in an attempt to evaluate the whole then the teacher/research risks leaving individuals behind and perhaps missing fine details needed to improve the intervention for future use. With the individual in mind, the researcher looked for a holistic generalizable. The axial codes developed during the intervention lead to hub allowing for a core code to be centralized. In this
intervention, students showed a tendency toward confirmation bias. This was evident with the use of supportive information, and the ignoring of conflicting information from strong sources. In the end, the post-test determined that confirmation bias was the core code when the skill of corroboration was evaluated (Table 4.4). When addressing the Corroboration line of the rubric, the results were nearly 50/50 in the use of corroboration on the post-intervention assessment. This code was developed through the constant comparative methodology throughout the intervention.
Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

Overview of Study

Problem of Practice

Students in the study high school often inaccurately recognize and/or provide source information for historic documents. They tend to show a misunderstanding of the context of the document, if expressed at all, as a means to evaluate historic documents. Finally, the students tend to not corroborate information among historic documents as is evident in their responses to open-ended written prompts. These oversights lead to misinterpreting historical events and an inability to evaluate historic events using historic and secondary documents. Although these skills appear relevant only to history lessons, they may enhance a student’s ability to close read information in other disciplines since any time spent reading will improve literacy skills. These skills may also be transferable to civic life and decision making as an active member of society.

Significance of Study

Literacy demands students gain reading skills, but disciplinary literacy demands skills development needed to effectively perform tasks in a given discipline. Social sciences are no different than other subjects. As discovered in the seminal study performed by Wineburg (1991b), high school students, including students at all performance levels, lack these skills. On the surface, this study aims to develop these skills in high school students as a part of history education. These skills can translate into
careers in the humanities with the aim of keeping history relevant. Beyond the social science connection, the skills developed transfer into higher order thinking, a cornerstone of modern educational practice.

**Data Collection Method**

This study used action research to evaluate the intervention’s effectiveness with high school students. The researcher/teacher taught lesson on the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration, and the students practice the skills. The students read many historic and secondary source documents related to the period from the end of World War I to the beginning of the Cold War, as they learned about the three historic thinking skills. This practice was done in stages starting with lessons on sourcing, followed by instruction and practice with contextualization. The intervention culminated with lessons on corroboration. All the lessons required reading of a variety documents as well as viewing images. They also required students to write frequently.

The quantitative and qualitative data collected were reviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The researcher acted as the teacher providing lessons to the student participants in three phases related to sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. The students were given a pre-intervention assessment to evaluate their skill level with sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. The students performed daily tasks working on skills related to the three historic thinking skills. These tasks produced artifacts used to evaluate the progress of the group and individuals. In addition, students responded to exit ticket questions to further evaluate their understanding. Finally, the students took an assessment, the post-intervention assessment, to determine if growth and/or mastery was attained.
**Sample Characteristics**

The convenience sample size was 27, and organized by classes with thirteen in the earlier class of the day and fourteen in the later class. One class met in the morning and the second class met after lunch. The students in the study reside in a small rural district in Pennsylvania. They voluntarily enrolled in an accelerated American History course for tenth graders, and all students in the study were in tenth grade. As of 2018, the school population is 58% economically disadvantaged, 96.6% white and no students are listed as English language learners. The total school population is 436 students (futurereadypa.org).

**Intervention Strategy**

The study began with a pre-intervention assessment to evaluate skill levels of the participants. The assessment focused on the on the Armistice that ended World War I. This baseline data provided a starting point for lessons that taught students the historic thinking skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. Each of these three skills were evaluated independently, although many exercises required the use of all three tasks. During the instruction of sourcing, for example, the exercises evaluated the student’s mastery/understanding of sourcing. The students as a whole improved in the use of this skill, and this is discussed in the General Findings.

The historic skill of sourcing encompassed a two-week lesson which focused on evaluating historic document for trustworthiness. In this process the student learned to evaluate the document based upon who wrote the document, what was the author’s perspective, why was it written, when was it written, where was it written and is it reliable or not. The student learned to apply value to the document as a source to answer
an historic question or describe an historic event. Following this portion of the intervention the students were assessed to determine what level of mastery has been reached.

Following improved mastery of the skill of sourcing the intervention launched into instructing students to search, evaluate and discover details about the context of the historic documents. This process followed the same course as instruction for sourcing. This portion of the intervention also required two weeks. This process coached the student to discover the context of historic documents looking for the following as described by The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG.edu, 2019): “When and where was the document created? What was different then, and what was the same? How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?” The students addressed these questions through context clues in the document itself, using online resources as well as library resources to discover and evaluate details. The students also reflected on class discussion and lecture notes to place documents in context. The students completed an assessment following the intervention to determine the level of mastery achieved. In the execution of this phase of the intervention, I found a need for additional time for this phase, as I outline in the General Findings sections. I continued the phase for an additional week.

Finally, students were instructed on the use of the skill of corroboration, which combines the historic thinking skills addressed in the first two lessons with the content of the documents found in close reading of the information. Students evaluated the document source, placed it in context and then proceeded to use information from the documents to determine the assumed truth about historic events. They compared and
contrasted information in the documents, looking for associating and contrary information. They looked for gaps in the information and searched other sources for this information. Finally, after determining the reliability of sources through corroboration, they formulated their thoughts about historic events in question.

**General Findings**

*Pre-Intervention Assessment*

The results of the pre-intervention assessment showed a lack of use of source information by the participants (Table 4.1). Most students did not support their arguments with information from the provided historic documents. Only two students used any direct quotations from the sources. No students evaluated the sources for reliability, and the students simply took the sources as fact. Nearly all students pulled information from a single source. In most cases they chose the least complicated source in terms of verbiage, Lexile score and structural complexity. In contrast to their choice, when completing an exit ticket following the assessment, many students gave the most complex document, the document supplied by the researcher/teacher directly from the Armistice, credit for being the most valid (Figure 4.1).

More than half the participants grasped the importance of documents A, an excerpt from the diary of General John Pershing, and B, an excerpt from a note by a German representative placed at the end of the armistice (Figure 4.1). This understanding gave them a score of approaching mastery. However, many students did not address the reasons for the other documents being less trustworthy. No student addressed the context of the documents as seen in Table 4.1. The date of all the documents was within days of the Armistice signing. No students explained the importance of dates, nor did they
address the context of proximity to the events leading to the signing of the Armistice or
the events of the Russian Revolution for example. The use of supporting detail was
emerging, but no student showed mastery.

Most students failed to use details to support their argument, thus scoring as a
novice. In some cases, when used, the details were cited. Often the students explained the
detail from the document, rather than weaving the statement into their response as
supporting information. The area of corroborating details from multiple documents was
weak. The students may have used information from multiple documents, but the
connection was arbitrary in most cases. This skill appears to require higher order thinking
and development. This also seems to correlate to the use of supporting detail.

The results of the pre-intervention assessment validate the problem of practice.
The researcher chose this intervention due to previous students’ performance on open-
response questions. The participants in this study showed the same lack of skills, as
evidence from the results of the assessment shows.

Table 4.1 Student Results of Pre-Intervention Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mastery</th>
<th>Approaching Mastery</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sourcing: Bias and Validity</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextualization: Place document(s) in historic context</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting Details</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corroboration: Combining information to formulate a thesis</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase One, Sourcing

The first lesson on sourcing directed students to a well-known painting depicting the Signing of the Declaration of Independence. Students were to determine the usefulness of the document in determining the activities that took place at the signing. Few students noted that the document was painted 60-80 years following the event. Therefore, the artist would have had fleeting knowledge of the actual activities. This shows evidence that the students may not look at the provided source information to evaluate documents.

Figure 4.1 Armistice Assessment Exit Ticket Results

Note: On scale: 1= invalid; 5= very valid; These results of student confidence exit ticket related to Armistice pre-intervention assessment show the students’ evaluation of the documents individually as well as their understanding of the task ask of them on the Armistice assessment. The results displayed are averages for the six questions.
Following two weeks of lessons the students were given a series of document pairs with a brief synopsis of each, and an historic question related to each document pair. The students were to choose the most trustworthy document for responding to the prompt. Students results were scored using a simple answer key to evaluate the response. The average score was 4.5 out of 6-possible possible correct responses to the questions. The score includes results of a question in which neither of the choices would be considered valid in most cases. The researcher encouraged the students to choose one of the sources, and did not suggest that “neither” could be a choice, although it was implied, which may have impacted the results. With this question removed, fifteen students accurately answered all the questions (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Results of Sourcing Post-Intervention Assessment Comparing Sources, Sourcing Intervention Final Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Question</th>
<th>Source 1</th>
<th>Source 2</th>
<th>neither</th>
<th>correct answer</th>
<th>percent correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>92.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>88.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *These four students may have overheard conversation between other students and the researcher as they completed the assignment. Some students responded negatively to the “neither” answer to the 6th set of documents, and verbalized this openly to the teacher/researcher while others still had their assessments.
Phase Two, Contextualization Intervention

This series of lessons began with a set of photos taken by Ansel Adam of the Manzanar internment camp in California. The lesson began with a lecture on Ansel Adams’ work and exhibition of some of his work. The lecture also covered the reason for the Japanese being interned in the various camps away from the West coast. Students also watched a brief video explaining the situation in the West after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This was done since most students had no background information on the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

A series of photos were presented to student pairs for their evaluation. Students worked in pairs to evaluate the context and content of the documents, which are all photos taken by Ansel Adams. They also responded to questions about the documents, as well as questions about the response of America to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and how it related to the photos taken of Manzanar. The students needed to look beyond the content of the photos to look for the subtle suggestion made by Ansel Adams as the real conditions in the internment camp Manzanar. Ansel Adams was working for the U.S. Government when he took the pictures and was told to only show the positive aspects of the camp. He did this, but he also used subtle indicators to show the true nature of the camp. The students needed to look for these. Further they were expected to reflect on the location of the Japanese camps and the events such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor leading to the internment.

Student completed an exit ticket that included questions to determine student understanding of the concept of contextualization. This was given during the third week of instruction. The responses were organized using a Likert scale with options related to
their interpretations of the materials. Student responses showed evidence of understanding the complicated relationship between average Americans and the Japanese minorities mainly found on the west coast of the United States prior to World War II, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Table 4.3). The data indicate student understanding of the context of the period of history. The students reflected on the influence of images taken by Ansel Adams at Manzanar. They expressed that the average American would have been somewhat comfortable with the conditions in Manzanar (Figure 4.2).

Recognizing the relative comfort to the incarceration of the Japanese Americans shows that the students may not completely understand the racial tensions between Japanese-Americans and white Americans. If they did, more students would have chosen one and two, rather than two and three. The context of WWII and the fear and animosity following the bombing of Pearl Harbor seems to be missed.

Table 4.3 Student Perception of the Opinion of Average Americans Toward Japanese Americans Following the Bombing of Pearl Harbor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Students</th>
<th># of Students</th>
<th>percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cautious and fearful of them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either no opinion or confident they are friendly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.2 Student Perception of the Attitude of Average Americans Toward the Incarceration Camps After They Would Have Viewed the Images by Ansel Adams

**Contextualization Assessment**

Following three weeks of instruction, a challenging document was presented to the student to evaluate their ability to contextualize information, while still demonstrating a capacity to source. The document was a petition written by Leo Szilard and undersigned by twelve scientists involved with the Manhattan Project (National Archives Foundation). Little source information was provided, nor was there any superfluous contextual information. Students were expected to evaluate the source using prior knowledge learned through the course to this point, paying particular attention to their knowledge of the victory on Europe, the death of Roosevelt and the bombing of Japan. They could also use the Internet to look up information as the assessment was being done with online resources from DocsTeach.org, which is directly connected to the Library of Congress. Szilard had written the letter to President Truman following the surrender of the Germans in Europe and prior to the completion of the two Atomic bombs. Exit Ticket responses exposed mixed understanding of the context (Figure 4.3). A 10-point rubric
was used to evaluate their written response regarding the context of the document. Most students scored 5 points or fewer out a possible 10, with the average being 3.15. In the document, tone and message reflected similar issues as seen with determining other contextual elements, which may demonstrate that students had difficulty isolating content that expressed tone and message (Figures 4.4 & 4.5).

Figure 4.3 Student Recognition of Context
Figure 4.4 Student Recognition of Tone
Phase Three, Corroboration Intervention

Following the completion of the sourcing and contextualization phases, which were intertwined in the final assessments of the contextualization lessons, the intervention continued to the third phase. This portion of the intervention commenced with an evaluation of eight documents revolving around World War II. Students answered a series of questions about each individual document to evaluate the source and the context of the individual documents. The questions guided the students through the information found through close reading of the documents to focus their attention on details found in the document. Students were expected to corroborate information found in the documents with outside information found in earlier lessons such as the Manzanar
assessment and the Zoot Suit riots documents from the contextualization lesson. The connection to the prior lessons were intended to place the current assessment documents in proper context, and supply the student with corroborating details. After evaluating the documents individually for source and contextual information, the students addressed the following prompts, how did Americans contribute to their nation’s war effort during World War II, and how did participating in the war create new opportunities for certain groups of people in America. As with all previous assessments, the students were expected to provide evidence to support their responses to the prompts. In the interest of time, the student responded with a single introductory paragraph with an analytical thesis, therefore the assessment looked for corroboration of documents in the response. As expected, the students readily provided source information, they continued to stumble with the contextualization construct, and they largely failed to corroborate information between documents or with prior knowledge. The written results from this assessment served as a baseline for teaching corroboration in this lesson. Field notes taken during the assessment, observations of the students while working, remarked that the students grasped the source information fairly well, but they stumbled when contextualizing.

After processing and discussing the results of the WWII assessment, the students began a lesson on the Holocaust using resources supplied through EchoesandReflections.org/teach/. Students watched a series of eyewitness videos and read numerous accounts of events related to The Final Solution, or the genocide of the Jewish by the Nazis during World War II. The results of this assessment were tallied using an exit ticket following the lessons. For example, students were asked “Why would the stories of the survivor be so similar when we know that typically human memories
are inaccurate?” Most students recognized the importance of the traumatic experience and the effect this type of event has on ones’ memory. One student also noted, “The human memories are typically inaccurate, however most of the stories are extremely similar which proves the validity of the stories.” This response shows corroboration of information among documents, in this case through an interview, by the student. In response to a similar question about similarities in which a Likert scale was used to gage student understanding of corroboration an average score of 3.84 out of 5 was achieved with 19 of the 26 respondents choosing 4 (Figure 4.6). The verbiage of the scale may have prevented students from choosing 5, thus confounding the results.

![Figure 4.6 Student Responses to Assessment on Corroboration of Information](image_url)
Likewise, students demonstrated an understanding of information they already knew as it corroborated with the new information presented in the lesson. Figure 4.7 shows 100% of the students learned something new that they did not already know, and Figure 4.8 shows a comparison of old and new knowledge. Overall, the students’ responses illustrate the learning of the skill of corroboration. Students connected evidence among the interviews, and other documents presented, and they capably related new knowledge to data already coded in their own memories.

Figure 4.7 Student Responses on Exit Ticket Following the Completion of the Final Solution Lesson

*Note:* Question asked, “Did you learn something about the Holocaust you did not know before?”
Figure 4.8 Student Responses on an Exit Ticket Following the Completion of the Final Solution Lesson

Note. Question asked, “Do you feel what you knew about the Holocaust was accurate, even after studying the Interviews and documents?”

Post-Intervention Assessment

The assessment centered around the beginning of The Cold War period following the end of World War II. Students addressed the question, “Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War – the United States or the Soviet Union?” (SHEG. Com). Students evaluated four documents in two separate pairs and assessed a timeline of events surrounding the start of The Cold War. The results of the assessment appear to point toward improvement in skills toward the level of mastery. The most dramatic improvement occurred in the use of supporting details (Table 4.4). Even though this is a byproduct of the process taught in the intervention, it is vital in evaluation of skills and
assessing the student’s capacity to evaluate historic information within documents. In addition, Pennsylvania Common Core standards for Social Studies require the student know how to use supporting details from documents to respond to historical prompts.

Table 4.4 Results of the Post-Intervention Assessment – The Cold War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mastery</th>
<th>Approaching Mastery</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sourcing: Bias and Validity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextualization: Place document(s) in historic context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting Details</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corroboration: Combining information to formulate a thesis</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students showed improvement as a whole in every category, with one student reaching mastery in using supporting details. There was little change in the skill of sourcing, 19 students in the post-intervention assessment versus 15 in the pre-intervention assessment. These results confound the data from the end of phase one assessment addressed above (Table 4.2), since that data shows significant improvement when comparing two documents for validity. The evaluation tool could be to blame for this discrepancy. The students’ corroboration scores did improve as 14 students reached approaching mastery versus only 8 in the pre-intervention assessment.

The skill of contextualization showed improvement as 19 students were able to accurately assess the context of documents versus no one being able to assess context in the first assessment. However, further examination of the use of context in the essay response to the prompt shows limited use of context. The rubric considered the use of
context in individual responses to questions used by students to evaluate the documents. The same type of questions was also used in the first assessment, so there is parallel forms corroboration from data and information produced in the guiding questions and the essays on both the pre and post-intervention assessments.

**Supplemental Analysis of Data**

The concept of contextualization appears to have challenged students throughout the intervention. Contextualization requires students to recognize where and when the document was created; what was different, and what was the same at the time of creation; how might circumstances in which the document was created effect the content (SHEG.com). This can also be reflected in the tone of the document. Students may lack the background knowledge of the period, or not feel confident in their knowledge, and this would hinder their willingness to add contextual information. Observation made during classroom discussion indicated a lack of confidence. For example, on August 29 the classes worked with the researcher on documents from the Armistice assessments. Although the students appeared to realize the context of document A, an excerpt for the diary of General John Pershing, and document B, an excerpt from the Armistice agreement, they hesitated to mention the contextual evidence, as well as the corroboration between the documents.

Further evidence of the students’ struggles with contextualization is mentioned in the field notes from October 7. They asked questions such as, “What exactly is contextualization,” and “How am I supposed to know the author?” I explained the elements of contextualization as described in the poster (Appendix A), and they recognized the process at that point. Notes indicated that the students understood the
concept of contextualization and sourcing, but they did not recognize the skills by name. Future studies should focus on teaching the disciplinary language and how these terms differ in their use in social studies courses.

During further discussion with students in the corroboration phase of the intervention, I found that students tended to apply their personal bias to documents when evaluating them, although with practice this tendency was reduced. For example, in the lesson regarding the Appeasement of Adolph Hitler during the sourcing intervention when responding to a question about the validity of the provided documents, a student commented, “No because they were mostly opinion-based and were opposing my standpoint in the argument.” This response indicates confirmation bias. Confirmation bias, though seemingly a natural human response, hinders one’s ability to evaluate sources.

Confirmation bias continued to hinder some students as mentioned above. In responses provided to the Cold War assessment, the students indicated a bias toward the U.S. When analyzing the evidence found in a document from Nicholas Novikov, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States in the early Cold War era, one student recognized the direct references to feelings toward U.S. actions at the end of World War II made by Novikov. However, in a prior question, the student pulled the statement, “The United States has the right to lead the world...” as evidence of the Ambassador’s opinion of U.S. action in the years immediately following the end of World War II. The Ambassador, stated,

The foreign policy of the United States, which reflects the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital, is characterized in the postwar period by a striving for world supremacy. This is the real meaning of the many statements by
President Truman and other representatives of American ruling circles; that the United States has the right to lead the world (Sheg.edu).

The student’s statement is taken out of this context and can be assumed to be a result of searching for confirmation bias.

Overall, when comparing data from pre-assessment data (Table 4.1) with data post-assessment data (Table 4.4), the students showed improved in the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. Although the data indicates success with many of the students, a large percentage of the students still scored in the novice category in these skills.

**Summary**

Although not a central focus of this study, student engagement in the intervention, which sought to increase student proficiency in sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating, was strong. In most cases, students eagerly reviewed documents and discussed topics surrounding the historic events in question. The students in the earlier class took opportunities to discuss related topics in more depth. The class tended to explore topics both through conversation with me, but also through Internet resources. Notes indicate that the earlier class appeared to take a longer time to “settle in to the documents”, but this time was often spent questioning contextual information and synthesizing information across genres, periods in history and historical concepts like economy versus politics.

The students’ results showed that they struggled with contextualization in their written responses. Rarely did the students explain the context of the event using outside information, nor did they use context to evaluate the documents or its content. As seen in
Table 4.4 and the results of the Leo Szilard letter (Figure 4.5), the students scored the lowest in contextualization. Although, most students showed improvement in understanding of the concept of contextualization, their expression of the concept in written responses lacked.

Sourcing also appears to test the students in their written responses. Field notes described students skipping over the source information and jumping immediately into close reading of the document. This was evident in the appeasement documents, as discussed above. This researcher surmises that the written evidence provided by the students is due to lack of instruction on the proper techniques of responding to non-fiction prompts. The pre-intervention assessment indicates at least a gap in understanding instruction on proper technique, if not an absence all together. The improved responses indicate a capacity to learn the skills.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview of Study

Problem of Practice

This action research study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction specifically planned to improve the historic thinking skills of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration as used to evaluate historic events using historical documents. Evidence from previous students and current research indicates a gap between the capacity of high school students to use historic thinking skills professional historians use to determine the events of the past (Wineburg, 1991a). The intervention focused on each skill separately, then assessed the students’ capacity to use them as they answered questions about historical documents and responded to non-fiction writing prompts.

Participants

The participant sample was a convenience sample. The students receiving the intervention were enrolled in the teacher’s courses, and they were divided through the school’s normal scheduling process. The total number of participants was 27 when the intervention began, however one student left the course during the intervention to attend cyber school. All student participants attend a rural high school in northwestern Pennsylvania. The school district has high number of students in the free and reduced lunch program (Proximity, 2015).
**Data Collection**

Data was gathered throughout the intervention using student artifacts, class discussion recorded in the researcher’s field notes as well as summative assessments. The intervention began with a pre-intervention assessment and culminated with a post-intervention assessment. Both assessments contained four historic documents, a series of questions for students to organize their thoughts, and a graphic organizer for the same purpose of consolidation of ideas. Students were scored on a written response to a non-fiction prompt using a rubric as well as the responses to the organizing questions. Each assessment used an independent rubric specific to the document sets, but they each evaluated the skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. In addition, the rubrics assessed the written use of evidence by the students.

During the lessons, students were encouraged to discuss historic documents and information as small groups as well as in class discussions. The researcher reflected on these discussions, as well as other extraneous variables like time of day in a field journal. These data helped to understand the students’ learning, even though the assessments results may have shown other results. Exit tickets also served to evaluated student understanding following various exercises with the intention of further understanding student learning.

**Data Review**

Data review was done using a constant comparative method throughout the entire intervention. The researcher, as is common in action research, assessed student learning through the data gathered from various artifacts. From the assessment of data, decisions on further instruction using cognitive learning theory was used in phase two,
contextualization. The assessments demonstrated the effectiveness of the use of social constructivist learning theory, as students created new truths through their own personal lenses, and social negotiation. The theme of confirmation bias dominated the coding of the results. This method was used to evaluate open-ended responses on the exit tickets, document questions, and classroom discussions. This data was compared with field notes and summative assessments to evaluate mastery during each phase of the intervention.

**Data Analysis Results**

The students in the study improved their skill level as seen in the final results of the post-intervention assessment results (Table 4.4) versus the results of the pre-intervention assessment (Table 4.1). No students reached mastery in all categories, and only one student reach mastery in any category. The participants showed the greatest improvement with the skill of contextualization. In the first assessment, no students connected the documents to the period in which they were created, or used any other contextualization techniques. The final assessment showed 70.4% of the students reached the level of approaching mastery (Table 4.4). The students showed improvement in all skills, and reflections in the field notes about class discussion validate this statement, even though the results of the post-intervention assessment display mixed results, in the area of corroboration particularly.

The improvement on the final assessment was not unexpected. Though notes and exit tickets exhibited a positive correlation and improved understanding, the researcher expected the students to score in the approaching mastery level, with few if any reaching mastery. Notes taken on 6 October, by the researcher following the evaluation of the D-Day assessment, brought into question the development of student skills resulting in poor
responses to written prompts. Further consideration of curriculum taught in previous years, the learned habits of the students might cause them to not respond with full and complete answers, however more evaluation of skills was needed. The struggles at this point were with contextualization, and this is noted in the subsequent notes taken during classes on 7 October. Those notes described the students as asking question such as “what is contextualization.” After extended lessons on contextualization, a formative assessment related to WWII showed that concentrated lessons were beginning to affect change and improve the students’ skills. Students appeared to be acknowledging what they did not know, and it was their misunderstanding that manifested itself in the confusion from 6 October. A one to one conversation with a student, who was in process of completing the WWII document prompt, identified her new found understanding. The student, considered an average student in this group, explained that she felt she had learned a lot about documents and was having an easier time recognizing, or “finding the points asked for.” This conversation on 11 October provided clarity to the researcher of success, even if scores on assessments still did not show mastery.

The greatest challenge in the intervention was with instruction of contextualization. As noted above, the students struggled with understanding the concept. By 6 October, the students had been working with contextualization for two weeks, and the intervention was to shift to the corroboration phase. The researcher decided to expand the lessons on contextualization due to poor results, and added two assessments including the Leo Szilard letter; Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 show the results of the assessment and lesson. The data showed mixed results, with half the participants grasping the concept of
contextualization, and the other half struggling. Following the Szilard assessment, the lessons shifted to corroboration.

The corroboration data showed the desire of students to look for information that confirmed their belief, rather than allowing the information to lead them. Numerous examples of this appeared in the data, more so on the pre-intervention assessment, but consistently throughout the intervention, and into the final phase. The students talked about connections between and among documents during class discussions, but little attention was paid to conflicting information. The sourcing of the documents did seem to lead the students to evaluate the reliability of each document, so they tended to use multiple documents, but they only tied together comparing data, not contrasting.

**Data as Related to the Research Questions**

The three research questions related directly to the constructs of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration served as the topics for the three phases of the intervention, as well as the subject of the rubrics used to score the pre- and post-intervention assessments.

**Research Questions**

Will teaching the skills of sourcing primary and secondary historic documents improve the assessment of source bias and validity in high school students?

Will instructing the student to place documents in the proper context of history improve the student’s understanding of the document source, meaning and content?

Will instructing the student to source and contextualize documents improve the student’s ability to corroborate information found in documents?
**Sourcing**

The results showed improvement with the construct of sourcing. Though the improvement was slight in terms of the scores received on the post-intervention assessment, the field notes reflect additional understanding of the construct. Students commented on the validity and reliability of various documents, especially when discussing a set of sources for the fictional lunchroom fight. They placed value on the sourcing of information related to the fight, many saying they would rely heavily on video evidence, if available, and only give credence to consistent evidence, showing recognition toward corroboration.

When students were provided scenarios and pairs of documents, they consistently made accurate choices in term of which document had the most reliability, the core concept of sourcing. This assessment proved the students understanding of sourcing, however, the results of the post-intervention assessment showed only slight improvement in the skill. Therefore, the research tool comes into question. The tool relied upon the students’ written responses to a prompt, and perhaps the fault or inadequacy lies in the students’ abilities to provide effective written evidence. The method of data collection used relies more on written communication, and may not reflect the student understanding of the skills as well due to extraneous variables. The stand-alone assessment (Table 4.2) demonstrated mastery gained by most students in sourcing, however this did not seem to translate to the written artifacts.

**Contextualization**

Due to challenges with this construct, the researcher added an additional week of instruction to this phase of the intervention. The students appeared to struggle with the
construct due to lack of understanding of the term contextualization. Even though the word was familiar, students apparently rarely considered the context of a source of information when evaluating the source for validity. Therefore, the construct is sketchy in their minds. Furthermore, they seemed to lack knowledge of how the context affects the content. For example, the students struggled with tone. They did not seem to connect that context affects the tone used by the author. Their struggles exhibited in the tone questions on the Szilard assessment (Figure 4.5).

Although no students reached mastery, and the results of the post-intervention assessment and field note bore this out, vast improvement occurred in this skill. This phase of the intervention proved that instruction on the construct of contextualization improved students understanding and execution of the skill.

**Corroboration**

The construct of corroboration was interwoven into the first two phases of the intervention. Students were frequently asked to close read the documents and compare and contrast information during the first two phases. Even though they were not focused on this skill specifically, corroboration became a natural biproduct of the entire intervention. During the final two weeks of the intervention, lessons focused on comparison and contrast of information, and students quickly grasped the concept. Field notes show that student conversations and class discussions often concentrated on the issue of consistency of information. Still only a little more than half of the students reached the level of approaching mastery (Figure 4.4). This was the lowest score on the post-intervention assessment. As highlighted, the student results from the exit tickets throughout the intervention revealed confirmation bias in responses, and a lack of
comparison of information. Students might have looked only for information that supported their conclusion, rather than contrasting information, and this is consistent with curriculum taught in standard history classes, where students look for correct answers and memorize historic facts to regurgitate on tests.

In addition, the tool used for assessment may have affected the results. Students may not have written, or formulated their responses accurately, but perhaps they understood the construct. Unlike the construct of sourcing, evidence provided in the exit tickets and formative assessments lacked data to support participant understanding of the construct. However, classroom conversation and debates showed rudimentary understanding of the construct that was not reflected in the assessment results.

**Results Related to Existing Literature**

The current research reflects results in previous studies. The students’ advancement in sourcing, as well as their contradictory results on the written responses, is consistent with previous studies. The difficulties during the study to effectively instruct students to contextualize documents and information corroborates with previous studies as well. The difficulty using corroboration to analyze documents and the events in question also appears in other studies. Few students use evaluative statements in their responses (Stahl et al., 1996; Wineburg, 1991a.; Wineburg, 1991b). This research appears to triangulate student skills studied in social studies education. The trend exposes inadequate instructional plans, which focus little on historic document study and more upon facts and memorization.

The topics chosen, particularly as related to minorities as in the Zoot Suit Riots lesson, the Manzanar lesson and the Holocaust lessons brought to light challenging topics
that need discussed. Social reconstructionism requires introduction of challenging topics in context of the classroom. The combination of these authentic topics with the social constructivism theory enhanced the student’s recognition of social justice conflicts, while in a protected safe environment.

**Sourcing**

Wineburg (1991a) explained that the historians often used source information to determine the value of historic documents, as well as the bias of the authors. In that study the students used source information only 31% of the time. Students in this study used few documents and spent little space writing about the source information on the pre-intervention assessment. They did not use the source information to evaluate the documents, thus displaying similar results to previous studies. The results of the exit ticket after the assessment demonstrated that the majority of students relied heavily on an individual document and paid little attention in their response to the actual Armistice Agreement document, the most reliable of the sources. However, after instruction in the skill of sourcing, the results of the sourcing formative assessment shown in Table 4.2 demonstrates that students, when specifically asked about source information, do have the capacity to perform sourcing tasks, and evaluate the reliability of documents. The loss of material in the student’s mind, or the lack of use thereof, happens between the initial observation and the written response. This too is explained in the literature as “rocking tradition” (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008) of the social studies curriculum.

**Contextualization**

The construct of contextualization is an unnatural act in the classroom and is a difficult concept to learn let alone teach (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008). This bears out in
the results of this study as well. The concept challenges students to a point until they began to recognize their own ignorance. This fact of learning is consistent with previous studies on contextualization, as seen by Reisman and Wineburg (2008). They explained that the construct takes time and students need given multiple opportunities in order for mastery to begin to emerge. Thus, the additional week spent learning the construct is natural and recommended in future studies.

**Corroboration**

Research validates the students use of corroboration as a tool to understand not only individual documents, but also to connect information within conflicting and associated information. Stahl et al. (1996) discovered that students consistently ignored irrelevant contrasting data, and utilized information that supported their argument, much like the participants in this study. Wineburg (1991a) also explained that students used document information from documents that they could not corroborate information in other sources. This should have challenged the validity of the document and its content, but students seem to ignore this. The participants displayed similar issues with their responses. Data from the pre- and post-intervention assessments showed little change in the skill of corroboration as a result of the intervention. Field notes and class discussion established that students made some attempts to corroborate, but they tended to look only for supporting details, thus the claim of confirmation bias as a code affecting the results of the study. Stahl et al. (1996) also explained that students in their study showed little growth in their historic information after the first document they read, regardless of the information found in subsequent documents, unless the information provided clarity to the student’s conclusion.
Limitations or Suggestions

The greatest limitation of this study was time. As the phase on contextualization drew to its time limit, students continued to struggle. Evidence from artifacts and observation showed that the phase needed to be extended, and it was. However, this extension affected the final phase of corroboration. Time was fleeting, and always hinder the effects of an intervention, but efficiency can improve this. A researcher should constantly evaluate and adjust lessons according to student learning. A movement from cognitive learning to social constructivism should be made in accordance with learning. Evaluation and assessments need to accurately appraise skill development. For example, a researcher may emphasize the definitions of the constructs earlier and more frequently.

Time also plays a part in the creation of lessons. Since the constructs studied are fresh and new to social studies curriculum, other than Stanford History Education Group the Library of Congress and The National Archives, few resources exist that put documents into a workable format. Finding documents and creating lessons are time consuming. Teachers need lessons that are ready for the classroom, as well as education on how to use them. The lessons need to be authentic, and challenge social justice issues for social reconstructionist learning theory to affect change. In addition, the participants in this study had access to computers and an extensive in-school library. Other studies may be handicapped by a lack of resources like this.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action Plan

Secondary history classrooms have not changed much during the past century since 1917. Any changes were stalled during the years following the signing of NCLB into law due to a national focus on mathematics and ELA education. The social studies
occupied inferior positions in school curriculums since they were not tested areas in high-stakes state testing. Future research into the effectiveness of lessons in sourcing, contextualization and corroboration need to be performed to bring attention to these twenty-first century skills that extend beyond math and language skills in to social studies disciplinary literacy. In those studies, the researcher should focus on disciplinary terminology. In other words, researchers should first focus on explaining the concepts of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration early and often.

All secondary, and really any grade level social studies curriculum should aim to use social constructivism learning theory in order to demonstrate to students that knowledge is subjective. This concept flies in the face of conventional social studies curriculum. As mentioned above, history courses often focus on the facts, dates and people from history. This is not what history is. As with civic life, history is subjective. Students taught through social constructivism and reconstructionism learn to use historic thinking skills to produce their own new meanings. The challenging world children face is fraught with ebbs and flow. Learning to evaluate the difficult topics while in a protected environment of the classroom will improve their abilities to have tough discussions.

The concept of disciplinary literacy plays a role here. Students may be familiar with the terms discussed in this study, but they may not understand how they play a role in the study of history. However, lessons on the constructs independently will benefit long-term. Although the interconnected nature of educational disciplines makes absolute separation of the content connotations of the terms difficult, it is not impossible.
The history classroom needs to look more like a science lab in terms of observation, research, evaluation and formulation of new truths. Teachers need to allow students to observe the events of the past. Then they can research and evaluate the evidence and discuss the findings with peers under the protective watch of a content expert. Through the process of observation, research and evaluation the student, as an individual, can formulate their own new meaning of history. This will not eliminate the need for direct instruction to provide background historical information. Nor will this process take the need to teach historic thinking skills through the constructivist theory away from the teacher. It will, however, enhance the classroom to become an incubator of ideas and collaboration.

The final study suggestion, and these have been researched, is to enhance the written aspect of the students’ work. Writing skills are an extraneous variable. Some cross-curricular effort with the ELA department can be used to improve the results in both subjects. Considering that the researcher began this adventure in an attempt to use the social studies classroom as a tool to help the ELA department with literacy development, certainly cross-curriculum is warranted.

**Sourcing**

A study on the construct of sourcing may want to address the need to use outside resources for information. Students are aware of search engines, but they use confirmation bias when finding answers, stopping on the first page of a search, rather than digging deep into the results. The first item in the search that supports their assumption often become their only source for information. A study focused on finding the source data could be used to enhance search skills, although a study such as this will
be time consuming in the beginning and may require a lot of hands on instruction and interaction. This can be challenging in the constraints of modern education and the high-stakes testing atmosphere.

**Contextualization**

This construct presented the biggest obstacle in the intervention and warrants further study. The current study found success with repetition of action. Perhaps a study that uses graphic organizers more efficiently would produce more efficient results by maintaining the focus of the students in the context of documents. A suggestion in the study of context may be to present more information of surrounding details from the time, place and social conditions prior to delving into the documents. The danger of this would be a reversion back to the memorization and test pedagogies.

**Corroboration**

Corroboration studies may be better suited to integration during sourcing and contextualization than either of the other two constructs. Since confirmation bias played a role in the students’ work in all phases, addressing corroboration earlier in the study, and maintaining student attention on the concept may lead to more successful instruction of the skill. If students learn to connect information when sourcing and contextualizing then the construct may be more fluid. On the other hand, studies to look at breaking old habits of supporting your point view with information may be needed. Students have this concept of supporting details ingrained in their work, and they seem to lack the ability to bring in contradictory points.
Writing

ELA courses focus on writing, but should history courses not also do the same? Further research on effective historical writing may present a streamlined pedagogy that can enhance responses to the non-fiction prompts. The only reason this skill is mentioned is due the difficulty in this study of triangulating the skill levels of the participants using the tools of this study. The skill of writing certainly warrants study, but in the case of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration, it serves the purpose of a tool for evaluation.

Learning to Swim

Mentioned above are examples of the constructs needed and used by historians to determine the course of events from the past using historic documents. The social constructivist theory allows students to use their perception to filter new inputs of information. They can then interpret that new information to create their own meaning. In each case students can use Internet sources, as well as library resources to help with understanding the document’s source, context and content. After creating their own new meaning, student interaction through social acculturalization and negotiation improve communication and corroboration between differing points of view. Students learn to reach a consensus through compromise.

All aspects of this study should incorporate evaluation of sources, thus teaching students to swim in the vast waters of information at their disposal. A study that addresses this concept prior to beginning a similar intervention may reveal a method that improves student’s knowledge and skill, therefore enhancing understanding of the historic documents.
Summary

Common Core State Standards ask social studies teachers to teach historic thinking skills, this does not mean they have to abandon historical lessons, or forget the anecdotes that make learning history fun for students and teachers alike. This also does not mean the textbook should be abandoned. Textbooks can become tools for context and overviews of subjects from history, but the books should not be a crutch on which teachers and students lean. If history courses are to become relevant, teacher must focus on the basic historic thinking skills of sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. These three constructs build the skill of historical evaluation and can lead to careers as historians.

History classrooms need to be transformed using social constructivism learning theory, to become relevant. Sam Wineburg (2001) pointed out that the lack of cognitive studies in the area of social studies led to the continuation of memorize and test curriculums that dominated history classrooms. The antiquated pedagogy will not assist in producing civic minded, deep thinking adults willing and able to discuss social justice issues. Introducing authentic social justice quandaries into a social reconstructionist classroom, in the context of a history lesson will bring to light issues that are not typically discussed in history book. The advancement made in history education prior to the introduction of NCLB need to continue.

As disconcerting as the policies of NCLB and Race to the Top were for public education, they produced conversation about changes to curriculum that hope to enhance the skills-based and problem-solving learning necessary for students to enter the new global economy. Common Core State Standards already demand the use of historic
thinking skills, but teachers, and teacher education programs appear to lag behind.

Grassroots change can bring effective skills to veteran teachers, and new teachers and their students will reap the rewards.
References


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progressions of instruction across a school year in an eleventh grade u.s. History class. *The History Teacher, 49*(2), 241-270.


Wineburg, S. (2005, May), what does NCATE have to say to not much. *Phi Delta Kappan*.


Appendix A: Posters Hanged in Classroom

SOURCING

Before reading the document ask yourself:

- Who wrote this?
- What is the author’s perspective? • Why was it written?
- When was it written?
- Where was it written?
- Is it reliable? Why? Why not?
CONTEXTUALIZATION

- When and where was the document created?
- What was different then? What was the same?
- How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?

CORROBORATION

- What do other documents say?
- Do the documents agree? If not, why?
- What are other possible documents?
- What documents are most reliable?

Note. *Printed as posters and hung in the classroom in which the intervention was being presented. Found on SHEG.com.
Appendix B: Pre-Intervention Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mastery</th>
<th>Approaching Mastery</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sourcing: Bias and validity</strong></td>
<td>Document C and D are newspapers from The USA and Great Britain, and report on events in those countries; whereas Doc A is a diary of a respected General who attended the peace negotiation and Doc B is an actual excerpt from the formal document. A and B should carry more weight due to these details.</td>
<td>Placing the majority of the emphasis on the second or first document, thus allowing personal bias to play a role in their decisions would reduce the validity of the response.</td>
<td>Placing too much emphasis on Docs C and D because of their emotional draw; The details in those two documents leaves the reader guessing to an extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextualization: place document in historic context</strong></td>
<td>Reference that all sources were produced within days of the signed Armistice, putting each as eyewitnesses to the events immediately following the signed armistice. In addition, the student recognizes that Doc C and D were printed in far off countries.</td>
<td>Seeing the closeness of the dates would produce an emerging skill.</td>
<td>Not recognizing the context of the documents, for example the fact that Pershing was present, or the proximity of the dates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting details</td>
<td>Used extensive details to bolster the argument, without allowing the details to overpower their own argument, citing the quotes as well</td>
<td>Use of some detail, but perhaps the use of extensive quotes or explaining the quotes rather than letting the quotes be a part of the response flow. Providing some credit for the information</td>
<td>No use of specific evidence from the documents, particularly if no citation information is providing for any supporting details used.</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboration: combined information to formulate a thesis</td>
<td>Combining information from multiple documents to support a thesis; additional use of outside information from personal knowledge</td>
<td>Heavy use of information from a single document, limiting information from any other source.</td>
<td>Little evidence of information from the documents, rather the response lacks connection to the documents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Post-Intervention Assessment Rubric

Rubric: The Cold War

Name:

Prompt: *Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War – the United States or the Soviet Union?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sourcing: Bias and validity</th>
<th>Mastery 3</th>
<th>Approaching Mastery 2</th>
<th>Novice 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the risk Wallace took in writing his letter to the President; Churchill gave his speech in America, in MO, Truman’s home state; Novikov’s letter was directly to the Kremlin and not to be seen by other country’s eyes; Truman gave his Doctrine Speech to Congress two years following the end of WWII; Thus, recognizing the validity of the private letters as important and Churchill’s message since he had nothing to gain politically from his rhetoric (For full sourcing information see notes below)</td>
<td>Making a connection to the authors, the role of the author, the audience of the documents, why when or where the document was created.</td>
<td>Mentioning the author of the document, or not, with little to no effort to explain bias or other source information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualization: place document in historic context</td>
<td>Supporting details</td>
<td>Corroboration: combined information to formulate a thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The order of the documents is critical. Churchill’s speech would have been public, the two letters that followed that year were private. The Doctrine was last. WWII had just ended and the desire to continue the war did not exist. The desire to maintain peace was strong. The USSR, as any nation, was concerned with self-preservation, having been invaded twice in the first half of the century. The US had dropped the atomic bombs, and not been destroyed during WWII like most of the developed world. (For context of individual documents, see notes below)</td>
<td>Effective use of multiple quotations from different documents to enhance the student’s argument. These pieces of evidence will help prove corroboration and explain the student’s thesis.</td>
<td>Connecting information from Novikov and Wallace as corroborating, even though neither would have seen the other’s remarks. Churchill’s speech is corroborated by the Truman Doctrine, who states that the use of monetary support to prevent the spread of “terrorists”/ “fifth column”. Connecting the ideas of Churchill with the concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some description of the events surrounding the beginning of the Cold War, but little attempt to place the individual documents in context.</td>
<td>Some use of quotations, some of which may be explained by the student, to support the student’s thesis. The quotations may or may not prove corroboration between documents.</td>
<td>Making basic connection between Wallace and Novikov, or the ideas of Churchill with The Truman Doctrine in terms of peaceful settlement of issues to prevent war.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little to no attempt to explain the context of the period in history, or the context of the documents.</td>
<td>Very little use of quotations or other evidence from the documents, even though it is obvious that the student read the documents.</td>
<td>Little to no connecting of information from the documents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Document A

Churchill speech in the US at the University of Missouri, the home state of President Truman. March 1946; Former Prime Minister of the UK; Tone is dire; a call to prevent war and establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy. Churchill was present at Yalta when Stalin and FDR also agreed to allow the Eastern European nations to hold free election. Since then the Soviets made many of the emerging countries satellite countries, held to Soviet rule and direction. He further warns of the fifth columns working to establish communist rule elsewhere.

Document B

Truman Doctrine March 12, 1947; Speech delivered to Congress; Greece has come the US asking for financial support to resume buying necessities. He mentions terrorists and armed minorities invading. This should bring memories of the Nazi party’s rise to prominence in Germany during the 1930’s. He further warns of a sort of domino effect that could lead to the demise of Turkey and a spread through the Middle East and back to the west. He expresses that free people of the world are looking to the US for support. His tone is serious and he is showing the leadership that he felt the US should follow, “The Buck Stops here”. His tone also shows urgency, “great responsibility has been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.
**Document C**

Nikoli Novikov, Soviet Ambassador to the US, September 1946; Letter written to Soviet leadership including Stalin and Molotov. Explanation given in regard to the US establishment of bases around the globe, outside of the US. Also, the establishment of new weapons is explained, although no specific weapons are mentioned. He looked at the rhetoric of Truman and other officials as “striving for world supremacy”. He accused the US of waiting until the last minute to get involved in the War, avoiding direct participation, enter at the last minute to affect the outcome of the war and ensure their interests. All competitors would crush one another leaving the US as the most powerful.

**Document D**

Henry Wallace, served as Commerce Secretary under FDR and continued under Truman, was ousted from the ticket in 1944. His letter is directed to Truman. He put his job on the line by making these statements, many of which were directed at Truman’s own political philosophy; His tone is of a disturbed individual. He was concerned by the trends of the US during the post-war period. Appearances of the activities that the US was doing including bomb tests, weaponizing Latin-American countries, air bases around the globe. Should we establish democracy in the Eastern European nations when democracy has never been there before? Would this appear to be an attack on the Soviets?