CULTURALLY RELEVANT ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSION

IN A HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

by

Andrew M. Beagle

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Faculty of

The Evergreen State College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master in Teaching

2015

This Action Research Project for the Master in Teaching Degree

by

Andrew M. Beagle

Has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

by

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Michi Thacker, M.A. Education, Member of the Faculty

ABSTRACT

To make history more engaging for students, educators must incorporate activities that provide authentic learning experiences where student's personal interests and historical content are intimately connected. The goal of the social studies curriculum is to foster skills of citizenship, therefore this notion should at all times be at the forefront of the history teacher's lesson planning. This action-research study aimed to explore the effects of using culturally relevant content to gain access to ancient history material, and additionally, examined how discussion of controversial issues influenced student's perception of citizenship. Student surveys, interviews, and a detailed research journal, resulted in a greater understanding of how culturally relevant discussions are successful at connecting to ancient history and how students positively respond to authentic learning experiences. Additional insight was provided about student's perception of the benefits of discussion and how the skills used were associated with being a participatory and informed citizen. Despite overwhelming positive response from students, the fate of many schools' curriculum has become dictated by results on standardized tests; therefore, further research is needed to explore the qualitative and long-term effects of using these strategies.

Keywords: culturally relevant, controversial issues, discussion, authentic learning, engagement, citizenship education, ancient history curriculum

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Acknowledgements

These demanding two years would not have been possible without my parents Marty and Debi, and grandparents Gene and Nadine. Whether in academics, athletics, or somewhere in between, your love, support, and lessons are the reasons for my successes. Aunt Nancy and Aunt Linda, thank you for your keen eyes and multiple reviews of this paper. Thank you to all my family, friends, and dog Hazel for understanding my busy schedule and still finding time to golf or play basketball.

It has been a blessing to have such positive and wonderful people to go through this teacher-education experience with; Tiana, Jamie, and Sara, you three have helped keep me focused and created unforgettable memories. Thank you to the faculty of M.I.T. for the thoughtfulness and responsiveness they provided on a daily basis.

Finally, thank you to Lindsey Boatright, the staff, and the students who welcomed me into their high school and allowed for me to freely explore the ideas that inspired this research study.

CHAPTER I—INTRODUCTION

In the Star Wars universe of George Lucas, the Stormtrooper training facility on the planet Kamino created each clone as a receptacle for information to be recalled and utilized in future situations. The social studies classroom has turned into a version of Kamino and the lack of authentic learning is devaluing the primary aim of the social studies: citizenship. The State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2013) states the aim of the Washington State EALR (Essential Academic Learning Requirement) Standards for the social studies is to help students become "responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society within an interdependent world" indicating that the foundation of each and every geography, economics, civics, and history class is based on fostering democratic principles that are replicated in and out of the classroom. Yet, there seems to be a contradiction as the focus on federal and state standardized testing increases every year. As a unified democratic nation, it is crucial that we share common core values, but is it fair that every student in this vast 3.79 million square mile country be placed into a Kamino-like institution and viewed as clones of one another?

John Dewey (2012) believed education socializes its members in accordance with the habits and aims of those in power. In the past decade, the United States has been falling behind globally in math and

science and as a result, a national campaign for more careers in these fields, supported by subject-specific federal grants, has flooded high school career centers. The Program for International Assessment, part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, issues a test to 65 nations every three years assessing the proficiency of 15-year-olds in math, science, and reading. The 2012 round of testing uncovered that the U.S. was 29th in math (was 23rd in 2009); 22nd in science (was 18th); and 19th in reading (was 10th) (Chappel, 2013). The National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grant was established as a federal response to this data and the federal Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant states that bilingual and foreign language education, math, science, and special education are areas of high need.   The reaction to national trends implies global academic competition is of a higher importance and is more of an American value, than teaching the values of a democratic republic.

Has the national push for science and math careers devalued the focus for the formation of citizens that occurs in classrooms every day? This question is not easily answered, but data of the perceptions of high school students about social studies classes provides educators insight for why a heightened focus on citizenship education is necessary. Rote memorization based on textbooks is the consensus that many students share when asked about what happens inside the classroom and this

sentiment is compounded because many teachers do not feel comfortable departing from the text (Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; DiCamillo, & Pace, 2010; Frijiters, ten Dam, & Rijlaarsdam, 2006; Noddings 2013; Parker, 2006; VanSledright, 2013). If this is how the social studies is to create citizens, then success in the field should be assessed on students' ability to recite the Pledge of Allegiance; a real-life creation of Stormtroopers pledging themselves to a concept they cannot understand.

It is time for a pedagogical change to occur inside the social studies classroom that emphasizes the humanities side of the discipline, not a banking of facts (Freire, 2000). With the increased accessibility of primary sources through internet databases many teachers are replacing the textbooks with source work through document based question (DBQ) worksheets. As a part of the social studies teaching community at Mount Thurman High School (MTHS)[*], located in the Pacific Northwest, I have been privy to this transition. But this is only a step in the right direction; the result of source-based curriculum is students that can read and extract information like a social scientist, but not think like one. During an interview, an academically successful 11th grade U.S. History student made it clear that he saw no difference between prior textbook-based classes and our source-based content (personal communication, February 27, 2014). An authentic learning experience focuses on active participation in ones learning that incorporates the

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[*] All names of participants and places have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

actual skills, knowledge, and attitudes that professionals use in the field and treats students as more intellectually equal (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004; Scheurman & Newmann, 1998). Authentic pedagogy improves academic performance in the social studies (Newman, 1995), but as long as educators and textbook publishers are giving the message to students that the answers to social problems exist within the text, then citizenship for social justice will remain an abstraction.

Critically analyzing historical and contemporary issues is mentally demanding and a dramatic shift from what students and educators have grown accustomed. The problem is that students are disconnected from the true purpose of social studies education. As discussed, the aim of the social studies is directed towards citizenship building, but even this may seem abstract to a high school student. Revolving curriculum around culturally relevant issues that students identify as interesting and important in their lives is the perfect entry point for tackling the seemingly abstract lessons of history.

If students are given the opportunity to explore material that is relevant to their daily lives then their personal perspective becomes a powerful asset to the democratic classroom. The result of taking on culturally relevant controversial issues will be disagreement; a foundational value of democracy. Currently, controversial issues that arise are often covered neutrally and authoritatively, or not addressed at all (Hess, 2011; Philpott, Clabough, McConkey, & Turner, 2011). There

have been occasions at MTHS where I have observed opportunities to explore an issue unaddressed. I ask myself, is this because the teacher did not recognize the opportunity, or did not feel comfortable discussing it? Is it perhaps the students do not know how to constructively discuss controversial issues because they are so accustomed to rote memorization and fill-in-the-blank assessments? I wanted students to further explore the topic and their comments because I was intrigued by how they were approaching the content of the lesson through their own perspective. The answers to my questions formed the creation of this action research project in which I will use culturally relevant topics to implement discussions of controversial issues in a classroom with little prior experience of this practice.

There are very tangible benefits of discussing and critically analyzing controversial issues, yet how to implement the practice of doing so into the classroom remains in contention. Incorporating discussion of controversial issues into the social studies is crucial for citizenship education in a society that is still highly segregated by socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, gender, and ability. Citizenship is a broad concept to teach requiring an understanding of all disciplines to fully conceptualize. Educators must first develop a purpose for their actions aimed at enlightening and engaging students in analysis of the historical roots of social inequities that still influence our daily lives.

The clone soldiers on Kamino were unable to make decisions for themselves. Because of successful indoctrinating education, when the base was taken over by the evil Galactic Empire, the clones became pawns of the side they were educated to fight against without even knowing it. The danger of the power that schooling has on society was an issue that Paulo Freire (2000) devoted his career to; "education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression" (p. 65). Having influence on citizenship is a powerful tool that educators possess, but how we are wielding it needs to be reexamined. Even though decades of research praise the work of those teachers who teach for active citizenship through their social studies lessons, too many classrooms often let the opportunities to analyze the core value orientations that impact American society slip through the cracks.

Research Questions

Based on the available research and in-class experience it is clear that departing from the textbook and incorporating more authentic learning experiences is necessary to promote student engagement and ultimately, citizen formation. Presenting material in a backwards fashion, starting with contemporary culturally relevant issues, is how I aim to: 1) gain access to historical content, 2) allow for students to feel

personally connected to the content, and 3) use constructive discussion of controversial issues. This pedagogical approach will aim to address the questions:

- How do culturally relevant issues affect access and engagement with historical content?

- How do students view discussion of controversial issues as a practice of democratic citizenship that is applicable to their everyday life?

CHAPTER II—LITERATURE REVIEW

Democratic Citizenship Education Using Controversial Issues

Before the connection between democratic values and discussing controversial issues is examined, a definition for *citizenship* should be explored. Educators must be aware of how they define citizenship because it influences their practice in the classroom (DiCamillo, L. & Pace, J. L., 2010). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) explored the views of teachers on citizenship education and found three general descriptions. *Personally-responsible citizenship* focuses on building character by emphasizing values such as "honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work" (p. 241). This is a passive form of citizenship because it implies that by simply acting morally an individual is positively contributing to society. The classroom focusing on personally-responsible citizenship does not allow for critical analysis of the root causes of social problems. The second type of citizenship commonly found in high schools is the *participatory citizen*. This type of citizenship is an active process of engaging students in community-based projects and local government. The *participatory citizen* creates stronger interpersonal skills, trust, and collective commitments. The final type of citizenship Westheimer and Kahne discuss is the *justice-oriented citizen* where students critically analyze the root cause and interconnectivity of institutional and social problems. These three different views of citizenship education give

educators an idea of how different aims of citizenship will influence practices within the classroom.

The social studies classroom presents daily opportunities for controversial discussion that promotes justice-oriented citizenship. As history classrooms move away from textbook-based curriculum and instead incorporate primary and secondary source documents, students are becoming more adept at understanding how the perspective of an author influences how the source can be read and used to promote historical thinking (VanSledright, 2013). Multiple perspectives are not only found in source documents; the high school classroom is likely the most diverse environment students have experienced. The history classroom is full of citizens-in-the-making that enter the classroom with their own areas of cultural expertise. Constructive discussion of controversial issues is an ideal format to allow students to practice skills that foster justice-oriented citizenship. The overarching theme of teaching the social studies, as dictated by the Office of the Superintendent of Instruction, is to create citizens. The opportunity to discuss controversial issues in class is imperative for preparing adolescents for the complex and difficult decisions that will impact their lives. Therefore, every action within the social studies classroom should be taken with the goal of citizenship in mind.

The relationship between the skills necessary for citizenship and discussing controversial issues is evident in the attitudes and reactions

of students. In a meta-analysis on the previous 25 years of research on
using controversial issues in the classroom, Soley (1996) found that
students who experience more controversial issues in the classroom
exhibit "lower levels of cynicism, higher levels of sense of citizen duty,
increased participation, and increased level of political efficacy" (p. 3).
Exploring controversial issues is a key component for justice-oriented
citizenship. Students that analyze and dissect the interconnectivity of
social problems are actively practicing democracy; "it makes students feel
like citizens, not just citizens in training" (Hess, 2003). Additionally,
Liljestrand (2012) states that the role of the teacher is not to develop
students into citizens, but to "facilitate young people's personal
development of their citizenship" (p. 90). There is a current abstraction
between citizenship education and active citizen engagement. Students
in a civics or U.S. History class expect to be taught "how a bill is made"
or the "impact of the Cold War on American citizens" and that having
this mechanical knowledge somehow translates to absorption of
democratic values. Teachers must make it clear that analyzing social
studies issues is an active form of what it means to be a democratic
citizen; it is *authentic learning* (Hess, 2003; Newman, 1995). If a skill or
concept has no applicable value outside the classroom, regardless of the
problem's difficulty, it does not foster citizenship or authentic learning
(Newman, 1995). Parker (2006) describes this goal for students as
enlightened political engagement, by which he means, citizenship is not

abstractly created as individuals mature, but it is developed through study and engagement.

Practicing enlightened political engagement treats students as democratic citizens, not citizens-to-be, and empowers them to discuss topics from multiple perspectives (Liljestrand, 2012). Teaching for democracy must be done in an authentic and relevant manner because citizenship education should be seen as "a potential for learning rather than something that requires learning according to predefined and selective traditions of civic knowledge for making citizenship possible" (p. 90). However, many social studies classrooms claim a democratic philosophy but students remain disconnected from the content. An access point is needed.

Culturally Relevant Issues

The diversity within every high school classroom in America presents a constant challenge for educators to present material in effective and engaging learning experiences. Student comments and ideas are greatly influenced by their cultural upbringing and therefore it is unfair to assume that the classroom is an open market of ideas (Kelly & Brandes, 2001). Connecting students' school life with their cultural reality allows students to make sense of their world while attending to the academic standards and using student interest as an access point to social studies content allows students to incorporate prior knowledge

and past experiences (Durden, 2008). Making sense of the world using prior knowledge and experiences nurtures the identity development of students. Identity development is highly dependent on the cultural values stressed during childhood and adolescence. As students progress through academia the values they believe in are shaped and challenged by interactions with educators, students, and curriculum. The interplay between cultural values and a social classroom environment can be explained by Albert Bandura's *Social Learning Theory*, as Durden (2008) describes, "whenever we attempt to make sense of our world, we construct an understanding of the event by using our prior knowledge, past experiences, and cultural references or tools. We are engaged, not passive learners" (p. 410). Therefore the unique and diverse personalities in the classroom should be seen as a gift for practicing democracy through the social construction and challenging of knowledge, beliefs, and values. Providing classroom activities that promote social interaction supports student's academic growth, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The cultural environment of childhood creates the foundations of a student's identity and knowledge base, however, the classroom environment can be one that does not nurture these individualities.

In order to incorporate culturally relevant issues it is necessary for educators to reframe how content is approached by analyzing education through the lens of the student. Culturally relevant content allows for

students to express their individuality as well as affirms the cultural capital each student enters class with is respected and a benefit to the whole learning community. Students feel safe to express their personalities and are "empowered intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 17-18). The challenge for educators is to create experiences of relevancy to all students. Identifying which issues are of importance to students and differentiation of learning tasks are both essential to utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy (Durden, 2008). Incorporating culturally relevant issues increases engagement, critical thinking, and motivation (Ginsberg, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995), providing a potentially effective strategy for accessing content in the social studies.

Culturally relevant issues increase student engagement and empowerment while aligning with democratic and citizenship education (Milner, 2011). Providing space for cultural differences to be expressed provides students with opportunities to acknowledge differences and constructively come to conclusions. Additionally, it allows students to utilize their perspective and critically examine content and develop their own definition of citizenship (Milner, 2011). The choices educators make about the content and tasks is inherently a political choice (Kelly & Brandes, 2001) and utilizing culturally relevant issues in the classroom models democratic values.

The Benefits of Discussion for Students

The benefits of classroom discussion of controversial issues are exponential on student skill improvement; there is no such thing as too much, as dialogic skills continually develop with practice (Schuitema, Veugelers, Rijlaarsdam, & ten Dam, 2009). Verbally expressing thought requires cognitive skills that are seldom utilized in the traditional text-centered social studies classroom. In a meta-analysis, Johnson & Johnson (2009) examined major themes from the past 40 years of research in constructive controversy pedagogy and found clear benefits of constructive controversial discussions: increased critical thinking, engagement, and skills that foster citizenship.

Almost all contemporary studies find that critical thinking is greatly increased as students internalize, process, and verbalize opinions and thoughts. Constructive discussion improves students' ability to effectively make justifications for their claims, a key component for a democratic seminar or deliberation (Byford, et al., 2009; Frijters, et al., 2006; Schuitema et al., 2009; Soley, 1996; Hess, 2002; Parker, 2006). As students improve their discussion skills they improve their reasoning. Instead of hastily disagreeing without thinking, students disagree while thinking (Hess, 2011). A dialogic approach to controversial issues is very constructive as it constantly challenges students to react to new situations. During a discussion, students are continually receiving and internalizing new information and studies show that not only do

discussions of controversial issues increase student awareness of other's opinions, but students critical analysis of their own opinions are equally increased (Parker, 2006; Soley, 1996; Schuitema, et al, 2009). Critical analysis of one's' opinion speaks to the heart of what it means to be an engaged citizen. However, Marri (2005) found that teachers often over-stress critical thinking skills at the expense of social action, therefore a balance between critical thinking skills and citizenship formation must be a reoccurring focus for educators.

Increasing interaction with multiple perspectives is at the core of guiding students in becoming democratic citizens and the social arena of the high school classroom is most likely one of the most diverse places that students will experience. For students to authentically practice citizenship they must be able to act democratically in a culturally diverse high school. Students that critically justify their claims are able to have powerful and passionate discussions with alternative ideologies without making it personal (Hess, 2011; Schuitema, et al., 2009). In their 2006 study, Frijters, et al. found that students that constructively discussed controversial issues were more likely to refer to social justice as an explanation for *value orientations* of right and wrong. The more students critically analyze and understand the underlying social, economic, and political factors of value orientations the more likely they are to advocate for social justice (Westeimer & Kahne, 2004). Bringing controversial and culturally relevant issues into the classroom makes visible the social

construction of the issue (Liljestrand, 2012). Constructive discussion is necessary for this because since "conceptions of the greater good will differ, justice-oriented students must develop the ability to communicate with and learn from those who hold different perspectives" (p. 243).

Constructive discussion is *authentic learning* because to live within the diverse society of the United States necessitates interaction with individuals with alternative perspectives. In their research study in 1995, Newman and Gamoran analyzed math and social studies classrooms (4th through 10th grade, in 24 schools that represented 16 states) to analyze how authentic learning influenced student performance. The researchers triangulated their data of observing lessons, teacher questionnaires, and student performance statistics to find that authentic pedagogy increased performance of all students, not just high-achievers, and was significant across grade levels and subjects (Newman, 1995). The researchers did not use a standard assessment task, raising questions about transferability of the study, however, using data from all grade levels in two content-areas, and incorporating the diversity of each class into data analysis, provides reliability and generalizability. The results identified in this study, as well as many others, demonstrate how authentic learning correlates with the aim of citizenship education through increased student performance, identity development, crossing borders of separation, concept attainment, and equity assurances (Newman 1995; Rule, 2006). In conclusion, authentic

learning provides students the opportunity to gain the cognitive and emotional skills needed to analyze diverse value orientations through real-life practice of democratic values.

The benefits of an authentic pedagogical approach to constructive discussion of controversial issues expand beyond cognitive skill development and democratic examination of value orientations. Allowing students to freely discuss issues that affect their personal lives is a practice of both culturally relevant pedagogy and *authentic learning* that greatly increases student engagement (Hess, 2002; Rule, 2006; Soslau & Yost 2007). Research by Soslau and Yost (2007) examined two fifth grade classrooms in both social studies and math classes to explore the relationship between authentic learning and motivation. One classroom was used as a blind control group and did not receive authentic learning experiences. Data from each class was collected in the form of journal responses, benchmark test scores, attendance records, and suspension incidents which were coded and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The study revealed that students who receive authentic learning experiences make more real-life connections (66% vs. 29% in control group), increase performance on benchmark tests (16% increase vs. 10%), are more likely to attend class (2% increase), and are 53% less likely to be suspended. Additionally, the support for the research project was overwhelming as two local newspapers wrote articles about the communal work being done by students. A year after the study, Soslau

and Yost performed a follow up study and found that students who received authentic experiences retained their level of performance. The sample research is not generalizable to the whole field of education because the participants are all from a similar age and region. However, the results do support transferability of using authentic learning as a pedagogical practice. Of particular note, the findings state that students who participated in authentic learning were 53% less likely to be suspended. The cause for this may be because authentic learning experiences created an environment where students felt a sense of belonging where participation was valued by teachers and other students, and as a result, a desire to contribute to the learning environment led to fewer suspensions. The research studies previously discussed help identify the academic and social benefits of authentic learning and how they correlate directly with values that define citizenship education.

Through interviews with teachers who use constructive controversial discussion, Philpott, et al. (2011) found that being emotionally invested produces higher student engagement; the more intimate an issue, the more likely students will participate. In their seminal study in 1985, Johnson and Johnson found that students involved in constructive controversial activities enjoyed the procedure and experience of the task better than students in competitive debates or individualistic studies. Students more engaged in the task to a much

higher degree cooperated with other students to investigate the issue rather than simply come to an agreement (concurrent controversy discussions) and were more likely to further pursue knowledge outside of class (Johnson & Johnson, 1985).   Self-determination theory concentrates on the need for students to feel autonomous in order to authentically learn. Academic autonomy produces students who act with personal causation when learning and a loss of student autonomy results in a lack of motivation to participate that many teachers have difficult overcoming (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). Paulo Freire (1998) states in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, "to teach is not to *transfer* knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge" (p. 30). Discussion of controversial issues promotes engagement resulting in students who are empowered with personal responsibility of their learning.

Emotional engagement increases students' willingness to participate, but constructive controversial discussions present a real challenge for students and teachers. While expression of multiple viewpoints is expected, often when concerning moral issues discussions can become emotional and erode discussion ground rules for respect. If students' adhere to established discussions expectations and debate the idea, not the person, interpersonal communication skills are improved (Hess, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 2009) as well as the analytic, communicative, and strategic skills necessary for collective problem

solving (Liljestrand, 2012). However, discussions that become debate oriented, where one side is steadfast in their opinion and trying to win, arguments can become personal resulting in deconstructive controversial discussion (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). When this occurs students often rebuttal in a similar aggressive fashion, or simply shut down (Philpott, et al, 2011). Therefore, beginning discussions with the intention of having a constructive controversial discussion, not a debate, leads to positive emotional engagement, an increase in interpersonal communication skills, respect for self and respect for multiple perspectives.

Constructive discussion has apparent cognitive benefits for students, but it also has an emotional impact. Students believe that through discussion their opinion is heard and valued by their peers and the teacher (Hess 2011). Self-efficacy is the opinion one has about ones' ability when interacting with their environment (Bandura, 1993). As previously discussed, the skills of discussion continue to improve with practice, therefore encouraging students to participate in constructive discussion not only engages them in a citizenship fostering activity, it also improves their emotional competency to do so. Additionally, constructive discussion provides opportunities for otherwise marginalized students have a voice. The institution of American education has established strict standards to dictate what skills and knowledge a successful student must have and it unfairly favors some groups over others. Constructive discussions are most productive when

multiple perspectives are shared, analyzed, and interpreted. For students who enter the classroom in a sense of dread, confusion, or anger because of the cultural biases of the educational system, to have a forum where their voice can be heard is highly empowering and may have a domino-effect in their self-efficacy in other classes (Alonso, Anderson, Su, & Theoharis, 2009; MacLeod, 2009).

Teacher Reservations for Using Controversial Issues

As federal and state government focus on standardized testing increases, greater pressure is felt by educators to adequately prepare their students. Research of the published literature about controversial issues resulted in three major themes that represent teacher apprehension for incorporating controversial issue discussion in their curriculum: the role of student, the role of the teacher, and professional risks. The nature of controversial issues is that they are not agreed upon, therefore to incorporate them in the classroom comes with risks to the teacher.

The social aspect of the classroom is riddled with peer pressure that can lead to student discomfort during discussions. "The behavior and perceptions of peers strongly influence students' views of classroom discussion. Peers matter more than teacher, especially the popular kids" (Hess, 2002). Consideration for how actions and words are interpreted by peers influences participation (Flynn, 2009) therefore student

reservations to authentically analyze controversial issues result in how they prepare for discussions. Byford (2009) found that students would often gravitate towards sources on the internet that support their already formed opinions as a way of finding the answer they perceive the teacher wants to hear. Sometimes out of respect for the students, teachers purposely avoid use of controversial issues (Hess, 2011). Thus, the student/teacher and student/student relationships in the classroom must be orchestrated in a way that fosters constructive discussion.

The discussion of controversial issues has impacts on the students but there is also debate on how the teacher should be involved. There are varying views on how much a teacher's personal input should be expressed during discussion because of its potential to conflict with the values of the community (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Outlon, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). The Outlon, et al. (2004) study reported that 64% of teachers surveyed believe that it is impossible to teach controversial issues without being biased. Research by Kelly and Brandes (2001) focused entirely on teachers' perceptions of neutrality and only 8% state that neutrality was possible. Even if the teacher does not directly interject their opinion in the debate, simply the act of choosing one topic over another is a political act that could create professional backlash (Hess, 2002; Outlon, et al., 2004).

Many teachers surveyed described that they would be more comfortable incorporating controversial issues into their curriculum if

they had been better prepared during their preparatory-education classes or through professional development workshops (Byford, et al. 2009; Outlon, et al., 2004; Philpott, et al, 2011). Many teachers have not been trained for incorporating controversial issues; clearly, for teachers to become more comfortable incorporating controversial issues in their curriculum developmental workshops must be provided. Conversely, Parker (2006) explains that when teachers think they are having a productive discussion, they are often just leading a recitation of facts. Even teachers that feel adequately prepared fail to explore controversial issues for other reasons. Constraints from a strictly managed curriculum simply do not allow enough time for teachers to provide students opportunities to critically analyze content. Marri (2005) and Outlon, et al. (2004) found that often teachers find class content an obstacle for discussing controversial issues. The lack of authentic learning opportunities for citizen formation through discussion of controversial issues is grounded in the inability and inaction of teachers.

However, the inaction from many teachers is out of fear. Most teachers are unaware of the current legislation regarding use of controversial issues (Outlan, et al., 2004). Additionally, many do not know their school policy and refrain from using controversial issues because they do not know how the administration and community will react (Byford, et al., 2009). The growing adoption of standardized testing is influencing how teachers cover material because test results impact

the success of students and teachers. Therefore, strictly adhering to material that will be tested, rather than teaching authentic and democratic values, becomes an act of self preservation. Successful reports of teachers incorporating controversial issues in their practice stress that the support of the administration and school community is key (DiCamillo, et al., 2010; Parker, 2006). In order for teachers to feel safe using controversial content in their classrooms, more transparency of school policy and a marriage between the relationship of standardized tests and content depth are necessary.

In conclusion, using culturally relevant issues as access points for democratic and citizenship education through discussion has academic and cognitive benefits that move beyond the classroom as a form of authentic learning. The delicacy of incorporating culturally sensitive material raises morality issues for educators to consider, but the fundamental values of democracy that these pedagogical approaches represent outweigh the reservations because "classrooms that are devoid of moral inquiries risk becoming purposeless spaces where facts are dispensed at the expense of meaning, and information is relayed without wisdom" (Sadowski, 2008, p.201). Acknowledging that all students who enter the classroom are "responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society within an interdependent world" (Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Instruction, 2013) proves the need for

educational practices and a learning environment that nurtures identity development through democratic values has never been higher.

CHAPTER III—METHODS

Based on the available research and in-class observations, it is clear that departing from the textbook and incorporating more authentic learning experiences is necessary to promote equitable student engagement and ultimately, citizen formation. Presenting material in a backwards fashion, starting with contemporary culturally relevant issues, is how I aimed to gather data relevant to the two research questions:

- How do culturally relevant issues affect access and engagement with historical content?

- How do students view discussion of controversial issues as a practice of democratic citizenship that is applicable to their everyday life?

I anticipated that this process would: 1) increase access for students to historical content, 2) allow for students to feel personally connected to the content, and 3) allow for constructive discussion of controversial issues. This strategy is a departure from banal memorization of facts because it provides opportunities for students to analyze historical concepts by drawing upon prior knowledge and personal experiences. As students explored ideas, the historical facts determined necessary for students to learn by the Mount Thurman High School social studies curriculum, Common Core State Standards, and Washington State EALR Standards were used as support as students built and justified opinions. This process mirrored how professional

historians critically study history, providing authentic learning

experiences that are applicable to situations outside of the social studies

classroom.

Setting and Participants

The setting for this action-research project was a public high

school in a suburban community located in the Pacific Northwest. For

the 2013-2014 school year, the school served 1,485 students, ninth

through twelfth grade. During this study, the school report card stated

that about 58% of the student population was white, 15% Hispanic, 14%

Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% African American, and 7% other, and 36% of

students were on a free or reduced-price meal plan. The city where

MTHS is located had a population of around 42,000 residents with a

population density of around 2,600 inhabitants per square mile, and the

median income per household was about $47,000. The high school had

a pool that was often open to the community, a separate theater building

that was rented out to community programs, and athletic fields which all

demonstrated the presence of the school in the surrounding community.

MTHS state assessment scores in 2013 were above the state average in

all content areas (reading, writing, and math). There was no culminating

test in the social studies that impacts student graduation. The school

offered Advanced Placement (AP) courses in 12 content areas and over

half of the student population was enrolled in at least one AP class (MTHS Report Card, 2014).

This research is based upon data obtained from two classes that were chosen out of convenience, as I was the primary instructor for a ten-week period. Both classes met daily for 55 minutes and the students were organized into seven table groups of three or four students each. Working in small groups met the need of a spectrum of learning profiles by providing opportunities for partner or small group work, whole class instruction, and independent work.

The two classes were a ninth-grade AP World History course that students took for one semester. This was the first history course these students had taken in high school, but being an AP class, it was assumed that students had an academic history of success. This research uses data from the 50 individuals of the two classes; 50% female, 50% male; 78% White, 4% Hispanic, 4% African American, 14% Asian/Pacific Islander. There were two students designated as Limited English Proficient that required written directions and verbal check-ins after instruction.

Throughout the semester students filled out short-answer surveys about their experiences using contemporary issues to analyze historical content to allow broad trends to be identified. Additionally, six volunteer students were interviewed to provide data for student-level analysis. Data from two classes and six individuals allows for larger trends to be

identified as well as provide insight into student perceptions about using culturally relevant issues to study history and how discussion of controversial issues is applicable to their everyday lives.

Connecting to History Classroom Activity

The majority of data collected for this action-research project were in response to an activity tailored specifically for students to analyze historical content from a contemporary standpoint (for activity description, see Appendix B). Once during the semester each student was assigned to lead a discussion with a small group about a topic related to the ancient civilization. For the assignment, the student used the location, area, people, or a concept associated with the civilization, and connected it to either a current world issue or a personal interest. Prior to discussion, the student leader found an article that discussed the contemporary topic or event and turned in a short written piece that included a brief summary of the article and a personal reflection detailing why the topic was chosen and should be discussed. Additionally, the discussion leader was required to prepare three to four questions with which to promote discussion. Previous class activities provided opportunities for students to practice formulating discussion questions that promote deeper learning using Costa's Levels of Inquiry (Appendix C).

Students were randomly assigned major civilizations aligned with the social studies curriculum with at least two weeks notice in advance of the due date. The last day of the unit of each civilization was a Connection to History discussion day where the student assigned the particular civilization led discussion in a group of ten to twelve students. With ten minutes left in the period students were given a list of four or five questions for reflecting on the discussion (for list of post-discussion questions, see Appendix D). In the assignment description I provided written examples of what was expected as well as leading questions to scaffold students who were responsible for presenting. Students who were assigned early presenting dates received more scaffolding and one-on-one check-ins because it was clear that students were not accustomed to this type of assignment.

For the purpose of data collection, the post-discussion questions will be referred to as student surveys. The following is a list of the student-chosen topics used in the Connecting to History discussions:

- The Gender Bias of High School Dress Codes

- Agriculture's Influence on Society

- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria Group (ISIS)

- The Ethical Implications of Hydroelectric Projects in Developing Nations

- Society's Influence on the Importance of the Arts vs. Athletics

- Overpopulation and the Environment

- Religion vs. Faith

- The Effects of Video Games on Society

- Conservation of Non-Renewable Resources

- Society's Reliance on New Technology

As the teacher/researcher my role was to observe how and if students related the article to historical content as well as to help facilitate discussion if necessary. During discussions it was a challenge to stand back and let students explore these ideas on their own because they chose very interesting topics. It was very important that during these discussions I was aware of how students were exploring controversial issues as well as how I postulated my personal stance on the issue. In most cases I had not read the articles that students chose, so like my students, the material was brand new to me. The amount of my participation varied and was closely linked with the depth of questions that the discussion leader posed. Students often asked me clarifying questions because often there was little prior knowledge about the content.

Students were also aware of their role during discussions. There was no requirement to speak, but the class had established a discussion norm that placed value on hearing everybody's perspective. Additional discussion norms were to show respect to others by not interrupting and to ask questions if a statement is unclear. All students were active

during discussions by taking notes and internalizing what was said in order to answer post-discussion surveys.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Limitations

This is a qualitative research study during which I had the role of instructor and researcher. Data from student surveys that identified classroom trends was cross-analyzed with qualitative student interviews and teacher field notes in order to extract findings that are representative of the entire class. Data was collected over a nine week period beginning the second week of class in the form of student surveys, student interviews, and teacher field notes (see Appendix A, Data Collection Calendar). The short duration of this study was a limitation as it did not allow longitudinal conclusions to be made, but collecting data from multiple sources adds to the validity of my research. Throughout the research process data was analyzed in order to identify if more or different pieces of data were necessary. The intention was not to compare data from each class but instead to identify patterns that can be useful for educators of all grade levels and tracks, as well as, to inform my future practice.

Data Sources and Analysis

Three sources of data were collected that provided evidence for this action-research study: student surveys, student interviews, and teacher field notes.

Student Surveys

Students completed a survey after the completion of each Connection to History discussion that posed questions about perceptions of the effectiveness of using culturally relevant issues to access historical content and how discussion of controversial issues reflects authentic and democratic education. The survey allowed for change of student perception to be analyzed as well as providing informative feedback for changes in pedagogical approach. Surveys from ten separate Connecting to History discussions were used, resulting in 155 student surveys with four or five questions each. Having so much data from the student surveys allowed for many important themes to be discovered. Surveys were analyzed using an open-coding technique by grouping similar responses (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003). Because the majority of student surveys were completed electronically, it was very easy to copy and paste student responses into separate documents organized by relevancy of answer. These reoccurring ideas were then given thematic labels. The major themes were then correlated to the relevant research question. The survey produced data that identified how the process of using culturally relevant issues and controversial discussion influenced

student perception, allowing for evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching strategy.

Surveys are a valuable source of data as long as they accurately address the research questions. Student responses can only be used as a reliable source of data if there is content validity of the survey. A survey of short open-ended questions allows students to express their personal opinions, but also creates the possibility that student answers do not address the research questions.

Student Interviews

Student interviews provided an intimate and authentic qualitative explanation of the quantifiable data produced by the student surveys. As the student surveys identified the relationship between the research process and the entire classroom, student interviews provided insight explaining individual student experiences. Three volunteer students were selected from each class. Because the students were volunteers, interviews did not produce data that represents the perceptions of the entire class, but this does not affect how information from the interviews correlates with data from student surveys. Interviews were semi-structured using a bank of pre-determined questions to direct conversation when necessary. Open ended questions encouraged students to elaborate their thoughts and allowed me to use probing questions to explore student generated insights. Interviews allowed for informal member checks to provide validity of the data.

Interviews were audio-recorded and afterwards partially transcribed. While listening to interviews I used the same open-coding technique (Auerbach & Silverstein. 2003) to identifying reoccurring ideas as was used with student surveys, but because interviews were audio, while listening I made note of the time stamp of relevant ideas and assigned the passage to one of the major themes discovered through student surveys. If the passage did not align with a theme but I still determined it relevant, I created a separate document titled "unaligned", which I later reexamined to determine if the passages provided further insight towards the research questions. After fully listening to interviews and recording time stamps in the thematic documents, I returned to passages that were relevant to the research questions and fully transcribed these parts. The connection between student surveys and interviews provides triangulation of data that is the basis for the key findings of this research.

Teacher Field Notes

Student surveys and interviews produced data of student perception about the research teaching strategies used, but personal reactions and interpretations of my practice are equally important to the data set. My perspective is important because it provides data that interprets the effectiveness of culturally relevant issuers and controversial discussions. As a participating member of the research process it is important to identify that my opinions and interpretation of

events were an active part of data collection and analysis. Field notes were taken on a daily basis during and after Connecting to History discussion activities and were used to track how I perceived the effectiveness of pedagogical choices and my interpretation of student engagement. Comparing field notes with student interviews and surveys triangulates the data.

Field notes were analyzed by comparing them with the larger themes identified from student surveys and interviews. The general categories I took notes on were: what student engagement looked like, if historical content was discussed, if students related themes within the discussion to their personal lives, and the types of skills I noticed students using.

Limitations

As the sole researcher in this project, as well as the primary instructor of the classroom, my interpretations and prior knowledge influenced how I coded interviews. The limited time of this study prevented multiple researchers from separately coding and confirming how data was organized. Additionally, interviewing a small percentage of each class does not provide insights representing all students. The limited duration of the study also does not allow for longitudinal data to be collected on how students used skills gained from discussion to access historical content or correlate with citizenship. In surveys

completed towards the end of the study many students compared the quality of discussion with previous ones, mainly referring to more diverse voices being heard during discussion. I believe that if this study was to continue that students would reflect even more on the progression of discussion skills. By triangulating data using surveys, interviews, and field notes I aimed to provide credibility for the thematic findings that the data produced. Additional credibility and transferability of this study is provided by the thick and rich description of the research process.

An additional factor that may have influenced the data collected was that students were given participation credit for completing the student survey after every discussion which resulted in a wide range of insights. Some responses were over a page long and some questions were answered with a single word. Because a point value was assigned to students completing the survey, it cannot be verified how authentically students responded to the prompts. Data from extended answers provided much more insight than short responses and therefore is more heavily represented in the findings of this action-research study. However, all responses were coded and therefore had a direct influence on the larger themes that the data represents.

There was no desired outcome for this action research project as the intent was to discover the effectiveness of using culturally relevant issues to access historical content and the use of controversial discussions so that the process is transferable to other classrooms. As

individual data sets were analyzed, new ideas emerged that influenced

the relationship between data. Analysis of published research

surrounding these topics created preconceptions about my experiences

which influenced how I recorded and analyzed data. Incorporating

student voice in connection with class-wide trends allows for

confirmability of my own positionality and prior knowledge. The

implications of this study are all analyzed with the professional research

discussed in the literature review in mind. The correlation between my

findings and what professional research concludes provides

dependability to this study.

CHAPTER IV—FINDINGS

The conclusions shared by Outlon, et al. (2004) and Marri (2005)—
that often teachers find class content as an obstacle for discussing
controversial issues—were a major inspiration in the formation and
production of this action-research study. This study aimed to use
culturally relevant issues to gain access to historical content, allow for
students to feel personally connected to the content, and foster
constructive discussion of culturally relevant issues. In doing so,
students learned and practiced skills that foster citizenship and
authentic learning. During each unit of study on ancient civilizations,
students participated in a Connecting to History discussion in which
they used a contemporary article chosen by a student leader to relate
today's world with the area of study. Students reflected on discussion
through surveys and interviews, and after each discussion I recorded my
personal reflections and analysis. While the findings section of this
action-research study will be separated by each research question, it is
evident that many discussion skills that students identified as important
consequently became a theme within the second research question
because it directly influenced their engagement level (research question
number one). It would be amiss to separate content and skills because
combining the two was an implicit goal of the activity used for this
research and therefore themes may address data that is used for both
research questions.

Culturally Relevant Issues and Engagement

The first research question investigates how culturally relevant issues affect access and engagement with historical content. Through my analysis I discovered three major themes. First, the majority of students provided positive responses towards making connections between the past and the present. This was demonstrated explicitly by students as well as through ingenious connections between historical and contemporary eras. Second, I found that many students were far more interested in current events than they were in ancient history; however, many students indicated that looking at ancient history using a contemporary issue greatly increased their interest in the unit of study. Third, I found that many students have difficulty in identifying how contemporary issues impact their personal lives.

Access and Engagement

Through analysis of the student surveys, interviews, and teacher field notes it was very evident that the use of contemporary and culturally relevant issues resulted in a high level of engagement with historical content for the majority of students. The Connecting to History activity was created so that students generated the content and dictated the direction of the conversation. Allowing students to incorporate their personal interests in an ancient history class was clearly something that they had not experienced before, as my student Pam stated, "the discussions are something that take social studies to the next level, if

that's a good way to put it, instead of the boring textbook's 'this is what happened.' So, I mean I think it just makes it just so much more interesting." Cheryl echoed this sentiment: "I feel like I can relate more to what happened in Mesopotamia when before I kinda felt like they weren't very relevant because they existed 5000 years ago on a different continent." A goal of democratic education is for students to personally interact and critically reflect on the major ideas and themes throughout history. By providing an activity that relied completely on students being responsible for generating the content and administering the process of investigation, the activity assigned competence to students, as well as placing the themes that span historical time and space at the forefront of student thought. Student surveys and interviews made it very clear that finding linkages between the past and the present directly influenced how they approached class content, as explained by Tyler: "These activities made me think that ancient cultures aren't as different from the present (ex. How men were generally more dominant than women). Before I thought that ancient cultures were really boring and no one needed to know about them."

The three students quoted above use very interesting verbs in their responses. They use "I feel" and "I think" statements rather than concretes such as "I know". Another student, Lessie, stated a similar reaction: "It helped me understand the feeling as well as the pros and cons of something new and extraordinary that was introduced to a

civilization." These responses imply that there is a deeper thought process occurring as students reflect on the Connecting to History discussions. They are not reproducing memorized facts found in textbooks or primary source packets, but rather they are emotionally responding to the historical content. This small difference in how students reflect about course content can help inform teachers about the depth of which students are accessing and engaging with content.

Being able to connect themes from ancient history made the historical content much more accessible and personal for most students, but additionally, it provided students with an authentic learning experience. Instead of students being viewed as future citizens, authentic citizenship-building experiences send the message to students that the content and skills being used in class are what is used by professionals. As Johnny identified:

> We end up getting into a lot of heavy topics, and end up debating like politicians almost, and just like, having that ability to know what you're talking about with, like, modern issues seems really important...and just like, help you make decisions and makes people more aware of issues that are out there.

This quote demonstrates how through discussing contemporary issues, Johnny experienced enlightened political engagement by viewing himself as a participating democratic citizen, not just a citizen-to-be, and

empowered him to discuss "heavy" topics from multiple perspectives (Liljestrand, 2012). A classroom environment where students feel safe and empowered to discuss their personal opinions and reactions to controversial topics must be founded on elements of the authenticity of the learning activities, specifically because students tangibly and publically experience exercising skills they will use in real life.

In the first student survey administered, when asked "Is learning about ancient civilizations important, why or why not?" a common response was that it helps us learn from previous mistakes, but in class activities there was very little discussion or written analysis about how the historic content informed our current society. Therefore, this general student response about learning from past mistakes seemed like an abstract and inaccessible way of connecting history to the present. After several discussions, students began to deepen their understanding of the larger themes that have affected all civilizations throughout history, including our own. For example, when discussing the Iron Age and relating it to the current technological boom, Jan explained, "Throughout history technology advancements have had downsides as they have also had good sides. Taking advantage of technology to get what you want has been happening for a very long time." Another student, in response to the same discussion, stated that "iron was connected to power and success for their people and I can see how today it can be applicable to organ printing in that those with more money [power] could possibly

elongate or save their lives." As students participated in more Connecting to History discussions, the connections between ancient civilizations and the present became more abstract, and in my opinion, much more valuable for classroom discussion. Kyle also shared insight into how technology impacts society: "the discussion made me understand that the immediate reaction people have for something new to the world is how advantageous it would be and not how dangerous or immoral it is." This is a very powerful way of thinking about a topic as far removed from the present as the Iron Age and demonstrates how students became very competent at extracting major themes from historical content. This finding correlates with how Schuitema, et al. (2009) described that the skills used during discussion can be exponentially enhanced with practiced. These students demonstrated how their critical thinking and ability to form deep insight about historical topics increased over time due to the dialogical and interactive process of forming ideas.

For some students the process of the activity was more engaging than the cultural relevancy of the content. As Johnny states:

I'm really excited when I come into class and it's Connecting

to History day. It's my favorite thing we do in class, cause

it's like a debate. You know, and debating is fun and it gives

you room to have your own ideas, and…a lot of the topics are

really hard to think how you are going to relate that to

modern day, so it's pretty interesting the kinda things people

have come up with.

This student exemplifies the sentiments of most of the more vocal

students who participated in the study who tended to have very high

participation during the discussions. Despite his engagement stemming

from the process of debating ideas, his quote demonstrates how allowing

students to choose content to relate to history exposes them to new ideas

that they find compelling. Another student who regularly participated in

discussion stated, "because with each person you can tell they wanted to

talk about the topic, you know like-with Beth and video games- that's

obviously something that she cares a lot about. But it's also a good topic

to talk about." All three data sources triangulate to agree that using a

combination of culturally relevant issues and discussion provide multiple

access points for students to be engaged with historical content. Using

discussion to increase engagement with historical content is a necessity

for encouraging students to gain skills of citizenship, which will be

discussed later in the findings section of this study.

Emphasis on Current Events

The Connecting to History activity aimed to engage students by

using contemporary events and issues that would be more familiar to

students. I quickly found that the quality of analysis of the issue and the

connections between past and present were varied and highly dependent

on the preparation of each student discussion leader. Some students

came into the classroom during lunch or stayed after school to discuss their ideas and hone their open-ended discussion questions while others were confident that my check-ins on their progress were sufficient assistance. I found that more complex discussion questions resulted in deeper conversations about issues with both a historical and contemporary focus. In both surveys and interviews many students identified that although the conversation was extremely engaging and interesting, there was only a loose connection to how the issue was situated historically. As Johnny stated, "we end up debating more modern subjects, which I think is good, because we need to have that…Because this is the world we live in."

From the overwhelmingly positive response from students about the topics discussed, as well as the process of the activity, it became clear that students are very interested in analyzing contemporary issues. As Tyler stated,

> I do think that these activities make me want to learn more about current events because most of the topics that are discussed are almost completely new to me. It makes me feel 'included' by knowing about the current news because everyone is talking about it. I will definitely start keeping up with the news because of these discussions.

Tyler's comment is an example of the intrinsic motivation to search out further knowledge that is required in order to engage in deep historical

analysis. Tyler's surprise that many of these issues were unknown to him is explained by Lessie who stated that she thought that "the Connecting to History's were an eye opener for students who don't pay attention to the news." These two insights may indicate that as students recognized the depth to which their peers engaged and analyzed contemporary issues, the communal interest of the entire class grew as well. When considering Bandura's *Social Learning Theory,* this conclusion makes perfect sense, as students are constantly evaluating their understanding and knowledge within the learning community. Ladson-Billings (1995) discussed how providing opportunities for students to socially construct understanding supports academic growth, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. This insight, that students become socially engaged to learn about current events, is supported by my field notes that tracked a general increase of participation for each discussion and equally by students like Johnny, who said "it's really cool now in high school to actually see how many people actually care about these things."

The overall interest that students demonstrated through discussions and reflections in surveys and interviews indicated that using contemporary issues was a very powerful and effective way to access historical content even if the connections are abstract. Culturally relevant content created a classroom environment where deep historical thinking was encouraged and taking risks while make historical

interpretations was respected. Being aware of what is occurring in the news had a similar affect on Tyler who stated that it made him feel "included" as well as Lessie who indicated that "it gives me knowing." Combined with the skills students identified as being utilized during the discussion, they make a strong case for this activity as a powerful vehicle for democratic citizenship education, which will be discussed in the following findings section.

Impact on Personal Life

As students indicated overall enthusiasm for the Connecting to History discussions I expected them to also make connections between contemporary issues and their personal lives. However, there was high contrast between students whether or not the themes we explored had major implications on their lives. This finding was very surprising to me, as in my research journal I had notes about how topics could impact the local community and I specifically asked questions to lead group conversations in this direction. For example, during the discussion that analyzed the relationship between spirituality and religion, Gavin stated,

> The local community doesn't need to pay attention to this until there is a problem with it which there probably never will be. People really won't be bothered by spiritual people unless they are trying to force their spiritualness on others which also I don't think they would do.

While when responding to the same question, Ophelia explained:

Yes it is good for your community to be aware of all religions

and not force one main religion onto you because religion is

what you personally believe in, not what society wants you to

believe. You need to be able to choose for yourself.

These polar responses to the same topic indicate how students'

individuality is expressed through these discussions, which is an

important aspect of a democratic and identity-nurturing classroom

environment.

Each post-discussion survey had a similar polarity of community

connections. It is possible that students simply did not take the time to

delve into the themes that were discussed. It is also likely that prior

experiences, or lack thereof, with the content influenced their ability to

translate larger themes to the local community. After discussion of

society's reliance on new technology (the article was specifically about

the potential power of 3D printing), Bridgette stated that "3D printers is

nothing to be concerned about, though we could still look at the risks

because there are always risks." This response does not really delve into

how it may personally affect her life, but Frida responded to the same

topic saying, "It's an advance in technology that can bring very big

advantages to our society, which we would see in our hospitals or even in

homes." This statement has a much more specific tie to the local

community demonstrating that Frida not only grasped how 3D printers

could be a local asset, but that the larger theme of changes of technology influences her life.

As soon-to-be legal citizens, it is important for students to understand how events that occur in faraway places have ramifications on their personal lives. The same abstract connections are the aim of translating themes between the past and the present. Student responses indicated that the ability to relate themes and ideas to the local community was highly dependent on the topic of study.

Discussion of Controversial Issues as Citizenship Education

The second research question inquired how students view discussion of controversial issues as a practice of democratic citizenship that is applicable to their everyday life. Data analysis produced two themes that addressed this question. First, there was a wide variation of students' definition of citizenship as well as the role that discussion has in citizen cultivation. Second, students are keenly aware of the skills that are practiced through controversial discussion; most importantly, students are very aware of multiple viewpoints and want to hear their peers' ideas when discussing controversial issues.

Student Definition of Citizenship

Student interviews provided the most insight for how students define their citizenship as an adolescent because the one-on-one discussion allowed for clarifying questions. Of the seven students

interviewed, all but one most closely defined citizenship as the personally-responsible citizen who focuses on building character by emphasizing values such as "honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work" (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p. 241), or, the participatory citizen that emphasizes engagement in community-based projects and local government. Several students echoed similar ideas of the citizenship status of teenagers, by stating that although they are not able to influence the laws that get made, they are still protected by them and that they are actively participating in society by "going to school, interacting with others, learning the history of our town" (Lessie, personal communication, November 7, 2014). Pam defined the actions of a teenage citizen in a similar way, "I go to school everyday, I do very well in school. I'm contributing to the well being, the general upward swing of the students. And I try to get involved; I'm in band, math club, and yeah, just being able to contribute to something good." Although the sample size of students who were asked questions about citizenship was small, the responses indicate that young adolescents see their role in society as one of upholding a moral code and being active within their community, which is largely considered to be the high school community.

Only one student of the seven interviewed had a definition of citizenship similar to how Westheimer and Kahne describe the justice-oriented citizen. This type of citizenship critically analyzes the root

causes and interconnectivity of institutional and social problems. I conducted the interviews that informed these findings after the completion of the tenth Connecting to History discussion. I was surprised that only one student out of the seven interviewed discussed how the topics the class discussed were directly tied to understanding our society better. As previously mentioned, students chose very controversial and important topics (see page 30) and I assumed that in their reflections students would provide evidence of thinking like a justice-oriented citizen. This student, Johnny, responded to my question about whether or not he considers himself a citizen by answering, "Well I can't vote yet...well...that's an interesting question. Technically the laws of the U.S. still apply to me. But really it's more than just being aware of what laws to vote for. The Connecting to History discussions I think bring up really important topics that a lot of us don't think about."

Since students seemed to align more with the personally-responsible and participatory definitions of citizenship, I was very interested to explore whether or not students viewed the Connecting to History activity as a citizenship-building exercise. Before this can be discussed, it is necessary to explore the wide array of skills students used during these discussions.

Benefits of Discussion

As discussed in Chapter II, there is a plethora of research exploring the benefits of discussion on critical thinking. With the role as the

teacher and researcher I was keenly aware of the skills my students were practicing and recorded in my research journal when students used evidence to support an opinion, asked clarifying questions, contributed abstract ideas, and disagreed openly with other students. This information was compared with the responses from student interviews and surveys to identify the most common skills students used in discussion.

As discussed previously, introducing culturally relevant and contemporary issues into the content increased student engagement and access to historical content, but additionally, so did the physical process of discussion. "You get to use your knowledge for something other than writing it down on paper, or taking a test. It's like, active" (Johnny, personal communication, November 7, 2014). A fundamental skill in the social studies is building and supporting arguments and it became clear to me from the first Connecting to History discussion that many of my students loved to share their opinions. In an interview, Jan explained:

> You actually get to thinking and you're not just stuck
>
> there staring at a book the entire time. You're actually
>
> using your brain and getting other people's opinions to
>
> see what the best choice is, or what you think is for
>
> the better or worse.

Not only does Jan identify the importance of forming opinions about controversial topics, but she also implies that hearing multiple

perspectives is important when forming opinions. Her classmate, Bridgette, agreed: "It's a good skill to be able to articulate what you think, back up your opinion, and at the same time listen to what other people say and be open to their opinions." Other students concurred with Jan and Bridgette in explaining the impact of others opinions, as Lessie stated: "Considering that you're working with a group, you're speaking, you're sharing your opinions, you're basically putting all your heads together to answer a question and it changes your perspective, about like how the issue affects you." Acknowledging alternative perspectives is a primary component of citizenship education and is therefore an authentic learning experience for students; "I love that kind of stuff you know, hearing others opinions, and rethinking my opinion" (Misa, personal communication, November 6, 2014).

Student responses provided support for the conclusion that discussing controversial issues is an authentic learning experience because the skills used and practiced in the classroom are directly applicable to real life situations. In response to the survey question "What are the benefits of having these discussions?", Pam stated: "Being able to engage in discussion/debate and being able to put your thoughts into words because those two apply most to real life situations." Tyler responded similarly: "Public speaking and diplomacy are the most important as they are very important life skills, and will be used throughout your entire life." Jan provided a wonderful insight into how

groupwork added to the authenticity of the activity when she said: "The skills of speaking up, listening, and arguing your point are important to learn in discussion groups because you will need them not only in school settings, but in work, relationships, and to have a more bold character." These quotes support the work by Hess (2002), Rule (2006), and Soslau & Yost (2007) that explored how authentic learning experiences increase student engagement and create a learning environment where students feel as if the skills they are practicing are worth their time and investment. The common occurrence of the idea real-life applicability while coding all three data sources indicated that the commonly-heard question from students of "Why are we doing this?" can be answered by the students themselves.

A component of discussion skills that I did not keep track of in my research journal was, consequently, one of the most common discussion related themes: participation. Students were very concerned with the level of participation, but for different reasons. Many stated that in order to improve the following discussion that everyone needed to participate which implies that students' value hearing all voices. However, there were clear power dynamics at play during discussions, where the few students with the highest confidence in expressing understanding verbally dominated conversation. In the surveys following the second discussion, Misa indicated that she was very aware of the unequal participation levels and how she spoke much more than others. She

went on to state that to improve the next discussion she could talk less and ask more questions of other students. What Misa does not provide is an explanation of why equal participation is important, and this was a common detail that students did not provide in their responses.

While I began by using the code "Participation" during the research process, I changed it to "Groupwork" because I believed it provided a better understanding of why students were so concerned with equal participation. After creating this broader code I found that some students have a deeper understanding of participation. As Brian explained, "if you disagree and don't say anything, you still hear the other side. And you're getting to basically tell yourself why you believe what you believe. And sometimes I'll then ask myself why I believed that." By working in a group Brian acknowledges that even if he is not verbally participating, deep critical thinking is still occurring.

The five main findings of this action-research project—engagement through culturally relevant issues, student interest in current events, wide variation in students' ability to connect issues to their personal life, definition of citizenship, and the benefits of discussion—represent the five most commonly coded themes (for a list and frequency of all themes and codes used, see Appendix E).

The findings presented here support and build on the professional literature associated with culturally relevant content, authentic learning,

controversial discussion, and citizenship education. It was anticipated that students would be more engaged by incorporating content that has closer ties to their personal lives, but it was very intriguing to see the insight to which students were able to describe the benefits of these discussions. Additionally, findings indicated that using contemporary issues is a very powerful way to get students talking about themes that can be applied to historical content. However, it is important that educators ensure that the connections between the present and the past are explicit and accessible for all students, as with each Connecting to History discussion there was variation in the depth of connections made by students. A very interesting finding was that students had many different ways of answering whether or not they believed they were citizens; if democratic and citizenship education is the ultimate goal of the social studies, then more class time must be given to this question. Finally, students were keenly aware of the skills they developed and practiced while discussing controversial issues.

The purpose of this action-research study was to gather data to help inform my future practice. As previously stated, there were findings that closely aligned with the associated literature and also themes that arose unexpectedly. In the following chapter, I will explore how the findings can provide insight for myself and other educators in how to make ancient history content for accessible for high school students.

CHAPTER V—IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

The findings of this study are intimately linked with that of the relevant literature about using culturally relevant issues, authentic pedagogy, discussion in the classroom, and citizenship education. Each of these pedagogical approaches provides educators with opportunities to access content and engage students. This action-research study resulted in a better understanding of how to go through the process of connecting abstract themes across space and time while studying history by providing evidence for the two research questions:

- How do culturally relevant issues affect access and engagement with historical content?

- How do students view discussion of controversial issues as a practice of democratic citizenship that is applicable to their everyday life?

The findings of the study provided insight for why this process was necessary, but it is important for educators to experiment with how to provide more efficient and effective access points for students. This action-research study provided data and findings that are in opposition to the idea that often teachers find class content as an obstacle for discussing controversial issues (Marri, 2005; Outlon, et al., 2004).

Increasing Engagement while Increasing Skills

The Connecting to History activity was how I incorporated culturally relevant issues into an ancient world history course and increase student engagement. As the activity description explains, students were allowed to choose any topic they found interesting as long as it was relevant to the unit of study. I provided examples and worked one-on-one with students prior to leading discussions to ensure they were comfortable with their topic and were forming discussion-provoking question. The content that students chose had a large variation of connection to history as well as interest level for all students.

Making more concrete connections to history could be improved by having more explicit instructions that this was an expectation of the assignment. I believe the idea that all students may not have been engaged with the content because students chose topics of personal interest, is a major benefit for classrooms that support citizenship education because it supports students' self-efficacy by making their interests public through an intellectual conversation. My student Pam recognized this, "Heather's topic of video games… that's obviously something that she cares a lot about. But it's good to talk about because the article said that video games make kids more aggressive but so many of my friends play them and aren't aggressive." Pam was a student who was vehemently against video games but still found great benefit in discussing the topic. It is important that educators allow students to

incorporate their interests in classroom activities because it creates a greater sense of classroom community. The Connecting to History activity is an example of how students were able to make links between personal interests and class content.

However, some topics of conversations were not as engaging as the aforementioned video games discussion. When studying ancient Egypt, a student who was very interested in the uprising of ISIS in the Middle East chose an article about the most recent event. This was a difficult concept to connect to ancient history as well as discuss because it required a large amount of background knowledge from modern history to have a strong enough understanding to form opinions. With limited time in the unit, we could not have explored all this background information, but I believe that rather than focusing on the content, instead, focus on the larger idea. This would create a discussion where students identify larger themes that have affected people over time and in different places.

The need for educators to incorporate controversial and contemporary issues into history classes is supported by the findings of this study and is wonderfully described by Eric Toshalis in *Adolescents at School: Perspectives on Youth, Identity, and Education*:

> Youth may not be ready to make actual decisions regarding
> stem cell research, poverty, torture, war, racism, weapons of
> mass destruction, global warming, and disease prevention—

the very issues that will determine how we progress through

the twenty-first century—but they relish opportunities to

practice thinking through such problems nonetheless. Issues

like these are the ones youth are often most eager to explore

with audiences led by trusted adults who provide resources

and direct energies to support a complex understanding of

what we ought to do (Sadowski, 2008, p. 202).

Although research and the findings of this study agree that culturally

relevant issues create effective access points for engaging with historical

content, future research is needed to explore effective strategies for how

culturally relevant content can influence understanding of ancient

history and if this process is as effective as traditional strategies for long-

term retention of information and skills.

Deepening Connections between the Classroom and Citizenship

Having completed this study, I remain with the question of whether

or not I fully embraced the aim of the Washington State EALR Standards

for the social studies by helping students to become "responsible citizens

in a culturally diverse, democratic society within an interdependent

world" (OSPI, 2013). The process that students underwent created

authentic learning experiences and incorporated culturally relevant

issues, yet overall it was difficult for students to make connections to

their personal lives or to the concept of citizenship.

The lack of consistent ability to translate major themes to the local community to enhance citizenship education indicates that educators should spend more time exploring what students know about the local community. Many of the major themes that my class unpacked were on a global scale and consequently, identifying how the local area is affected was fairly difficult. In addition to using articles from national publications, I could have encouraged students to select issues out of the local newspaper. The overall difficulty connecting the larger themes of study to the local community indicates that integration of place-based education within ancient history courses could heavily support a classroom focused on citizenship education.

A major theme extracted from student-generated data was that they were very concerned with equal participation in discussions. Student responses in interviews and surveys closely linked participation with the importance of hearing others' perspectives which is closely aligned to citizenship education and the principles of a democratic classroom. In the future, when I use discussions to explore historical or contemporary issues I want to spend more time co-establishing discussion norms with students, exploring how quality arguments are formed, and integrating how to ask focusing questions during discussion. Using Costa's Levels of Inquiry was extremely beneficial for discussion leaders, but it was clear that the participants were not using tier three questions to clarify or deepen understandings.

The Role of the Educator

When exploring controversial issues, the role of the educator becomes highly politicized and must be traversed with caution (Philpott, et al., 2011). Allowing students to choose issues placed a lot of trust in their hands. For this reason it is very important to have multiple check-ins with students who are given the independence of selecting material for class. I was heavily supported by my mentor teacher as well as received positive feedback from the Vice Principal of MTHS after she observed one of our discussions. Before engaging students in activities with controversial content, it is imperative that educators understand and be respectful of the cultural context in which they are teaching.

Over the ten week period of student teaching and data collection, the role that I assumed during discussions continually evolved. Early on in the year I felt the need to interject my questions and opinion because I thought students were still exploring what I was expecting from them. I provided a rubric and guidelines for the discussion leader, but did not create a task card for discussion participants. Though at the beginning of each discussion we briefly reviewed the norms and I highlighted some student responses on how to improve discussion, having both verbal and written reminders of expectations, norms, and guiding questions could enhance students' confidence and self-efficacy during discussion.

As students became more comfortable in discussion, which I determined by observing more question-posing to one another, more use

of evidence, and increased participation, my role as a facilitator of the discussion ebbed. However, each student had different academic abilities and levels of comfort when speaking in front of others and therefore it is important to determine the level of scaffolding on an individual basis. The question of what is the role of the educator when discussing controversial issues as well as when assigning independent learning opportunities can only be answered through experience.

The data for this study were primarily based on the Connecting to History discussions and post-discussion surveys. After each discussion I found it necessary to revise my role in the discussion, as well as, provide specific scaffolding based on the prior discussion to the next discussion leader. This activity was my vehicle for accessing historical content and was overall a very worthwhile exercise. However, these discussions only occurred at the end of each mini-unit and therefore the days that led up to discussion had less opportunity to provide space for students to make connections between the past and the present. Educators who plan on using a similar approach to teaching historical content should experiment with installing exercises in everyday activities that analyze major themes in history from multiple perspectives. Not only will this enhance engagement, but students will actively be developing the skills needed for an informed and politically enlightened citizenry (Hess, 2011; Liljestrand, 2012).

Concluding Thoughts

The findings of this action-research study support the associated literature in providing evidence that authentic learning experiences, culturally relevant content, and controversial discussion have outstanding benefit for analyzing topics within the social studies. To provide students with intrinsic motivation and engagement through contemporary issues proved to be an access point that shows how the abstract themes of ancient history have been and will be represented in all civilizations. Despite overwhelming positive response from students, the fate of many schools' curricula has become dictated by results on standardized tests, therefore, further research is needed to explore the qualitative and long-term effects of using these strategies. This process of connecting to history was far from the banking concept that Paulo Friere describes and that the Stormtroopers on Kamino experienced; instead of rote memorization of facts determined necessary to learn by authorities, students self-generated class content and determined how it was useful in their personal lives. As the interconnectedness of the worlds' cultures and information increases, the skills associated with citizenship education have never been more crucial for our future generations and must remain at the forefront of every action that takes place in the social studies classroom.

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APPENDIX A

Data Collection Calendar

Week	Student Survey	Student Interview	Research Journal
1			
2	X		X
3	X		X
4	X		X
5	X		X
6	X		X
7	X		X
8	X		X
9	X	X	X
10	X	X	X

APPENDIX B

Connecting to History Activity Description

Connecting to History Assignment
Once during the semester each student will be assigned to lead a discussion with a small group about a topic related to a civilization we are studying. For this assignment you will take the location, area, people, or a concept associated with the civilization you are assigned and connect it to 1) a current world issue, or 2) a personal interest of yours. You will find an article that discusses your topic or event and turn in a short written piece that includes:
-A brief summary of the article (1 paragraph)
-Who, Where, What, Why
-A personal discussion/reflection to the article that can answer any or all of the following:
-What does this article make you think about?
-How does this article relate to history?
-Why is this important to you and the local community?
-3 or 4 Discussion questions relating to your article and/or the history concept
-a weblink (url) to your article online that you will post on the "Connecting to History Weblinks" document in your Google Shared folder.

What you turn in
On the due date you will turn in your paper in the shared-folder on your Google Drive as well as paste the weblink of your article in the "Connecting to History Websites" document in your shared-folder, above your link write the date and article name. This paper is worth 50 points and will be graded with the attached rubric.

Unit	Date	Unit	Date
1 Mesopotamia	9/23	**8** Greece	
2 Egypt	10/2	**9** Colonialism	
3 Indus Valley	10/9	**10** Rome	
4 Early China and Confucianism/ Taoism	10/17	**11** Han China	
5 Iron Age	**	**12** Mauryan and Gupta	

		dynasties	
6 Assyria, Israel, and Phoenicia		**13** Hinduism and Buddhism	
7 Persian Expansion			

**Blank dates will be filled in as we get closer

I am very excited to see how you approach this assignment and hope that it challenges you. If at any stage of your research you have questions or need clarification do not hesitate to email me or set up a lunch/after school meeting.

Rubric

Score	Summary Paragraph	Personal Response	Discussion Questions
5 (100%)	Summary is succinct and detailed; answers who, what, where, why and includes an analysis of where the article came from.	Response is insightful; new ideas are formed using the concepts highlighted in the summary; connections are made to history; and discusses why ideas are important to local community.	Questions are open-ended and can be answered with historic and current examples
4(90%)	Summary answers and then discusses who, what, where, and why.	Response discusses in-depth the concepts highlighted in the summary. Responds to 1 of the following 2 topics: connections are made to history; and discusses why ideas are important to local community.	Questions are mostly open-ended can be answered with historic or current examples
3(80%)	Summary answers who, what, where, and why.	Response discusses in-depth the concepts from concepts highlighted in the summary.	Most questions are open-ended and can be answered with historic or current examples
2(70%)	Summary vaguely answers who, what, where, and why.	Response vaguely discusses the concepts highlighted in the summary.	At least one question is open-ended and can be answered with historic and current examples
1(60%)	Summary address some of the following: who,	Response is loosely connected to summary.	Questions are thoughtful and related to article,

	what, where, and why.		but are not open ended.
0 (<60%)	Incomplete summary.	Incomplete response.	Incomplete questions.

Some Suggested Locations for Articles

www.nytimes.com
www.nationalgeographic.com
www.bbc.co.uk
http://www.npr.org/sections/news/
You can also google your topic, but if you use an article that you find on google I hope that you will discuss the validity of the author and/or publication.

3 Ways You Can Approach This Assignment

1. Think about a problem that your ancient civilization had and what kind of similar issues exist today., or think about a problem we have today in our society and search for a parallel in history.
2. Think about how the geography of your civilization influenced their society, and how geography does the same or different today.
3. Take a specific topic from any section of your SPICE notes and think about the idea that it represents, and then think about a current example of that idea.

Example Connecting to History Paper
History Unit and Connection Topic:

The Connection between Agricultural Revolution/Hunter Gatherer Societies and Fast Food in the 21st Century

In the article *Fixing a World that Fosters Fat*, from the New York Times, Natasha Singer argues that despite the knowledge that fast food is unhealthy, as a society, we continue to eat it daily in extreme amounts. Singer states that this is because fast food is so prevalent in American towns and cities that it is accepted as natural part of our human made environment. What is of major concern is the extreme amount of calories and saturated fats in many fast food meals can be associated with adult and child obesity and diabetes. Compounding the problem is that fast food is cheap and therefore is an attractive meal for the millions of Americans who cannot afford local organic products. Singer ends the article by discussing the current role the government plays by subsidizing (making it cheaper for) the growing of corn by American farmers. The New York Times is a trustworthy news source, however, despite citing many scientific studies, the tone of this article suggests that the author has a specific opinion about fast food.

It is impossible not to be affected by fast food every day. I drive past restaurants, see advertisements, or consume it without thinking

twice about the impact it has on my life. I find it very sad how we have all this knowledge yet refrain from making major changes to our food system. However, there are parallel examples in history that may explain why the food system has not dramatically changed despite all this information. For decades the Surgeon General's warning on every cigarette case has stated that smoking can cause serious health effects, but it was not until the past decade that it has been made illegal to smoke cigarettes indoors. The major issue with fast food, as it has been with smoking cigarettes, is that people's behavior is extremely difficult to change despite having scientific knowledge that supports changing our habits. If I chose not to ever eat fast food I do not think it will have a dramatic influence on my community. My actions would not make the local McDonalds go out of business or create more local produce. Or maybe it would? As a citizen within a democracy it is my responsibility to act on my beliefs. I can share my opinions with others, I can volunteer at local organic farms, and using my right of assembly guaranteed by the first amendment I can protest outside of restaurants. The dilemma I face is that I speak only about the actions and change of my personal behavior and not of the change of behavior of society as a whole.

It is an understatement to say that food dictates human activity because we must eat to survive. Yet, perhaps it is because food has gained so much political and economic power that all these environmental and human health issues are becoming so visible. The Agricultural Revolution, when hunter/gatherers transformed into sedentary agriculturalists, was a monumental change in human behavior. Even though it created the potential for civilization it is easy to imagine that it also brought on more complex social issues and human behaviors.

My Questions for Discussion:
-What can you do to influence the behavior of your community?
-Does food run our lives? How do we decide what we eat?
-Do you think you are personally in charge of deciding what you eat? Why or why not?
-What are some of the major influences for why food production has changed, historically or currently?
-How do major changes/trends happen, what changes are currently happening?

Notes: In this example my questions are broader than my personal response. It is probable that during discussion I bring up the specific examples I wrote about (obesity, people can't afford healthy food, etc.) but when writing discussion questions you want to ask "level 3" questions

APPENDIX C

Costa's Levels of Inquiry

Level 3: Applying Information *Demonstrates mastering of knowledge learned*	**Decide**	Judge Value Predict Evaluate	Rate Justify Decide Measure	Choose Assess Select Estimate	Conclude Summarize
	Supportive Evidence	Prove your answer Support your answer	Give reasons for your answer	Explain your answer Why or why not?	Why do you feel that way?
Level 2: Processing Information *Practice knowledge learned*	**Use understanding**	Dramatize Practice Operate Imply Apply	Use Compute Schedule Relate Illustrate	Translate Change Pretend Discover Solve	Interpret Repair Demonstrate Infer
	Examine	Diagram Distinguish Compare Contrast Divide	Question Inventory Categorize Outline Debate	Analyze Differentiate Select Separate Point out	Criticize Experiment Break down Discriminate
	Create	Compose Design Propose Combine Construct	Draw Arrange Suppose Formulate Organize	Plan Compile Revise Write Devise	Modify Assemble Prepare Generate
Level 1: Gathering Information *Introduction of knowledge*	**Remember**	Define Name Repeat	List State Describe	Recall Memorize Label	Match Identify Record
	Show Understanding	Give examples Restate Discuss Express	Rewrite Reorganize Explain Report	Review Recall Find Paraphrase	Tell Extend Summarize Generalize

Adapted from the AVID Tutorial Support Resource Guide (Costa, 2001)

APPENDIX D

Post-Discussion Survey Questions

As students gained new skills and insights with each discussion, I occasionally added or changed questions to address new concepts. The following are three examples of questions that I used.

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1. What was the most interesting topic that your group discussed? Is this applicable to other civilizations and/or other issues in the world today?

2. How did this discussion deepen your understanding about ancient Chinese culture? If so, how?

3. Is the topic discussed something that you think the local community needs to pay attention to? Explain.

4. Is there any way you think we can improve this activity?

1. How do you think this discussion went? How come?

2. How does this activity make you think about ancient cultures?

3. How do you think this activity will help you analyze the next civilizations that we study?

1. Last week you thought about what you could do to improve this discussion, how did you work towards that today?

2. How did this discussion deepen or change your understanding about the Indus Valley Civ.?

3. What was the most interesting topic that your group discussed? Is this applicable to other civilizations and/or other issues in the world today?

4. Earlier in the year you defined what "citizenship" is, do you think these Connecting to History activities practice skills that build citizenship?

APPENDIX E

List of Themes and Codes

Themes and Codes for Research Question 1: How culturally relevant issues affect access and engagement with historical content.

Themes	Very Common Codes	Semi-Common Codes	Least Common Codes
Theme 1: Engagement	• Connecting ideas to the past • Engaging activity • Abstract ideas from content	• Understand history deeper • Concern for our future • Morality/making decisions	• Big picture ideas • Being informed
Theme 2: Current Events	• Watch more news • Strong connection between present and past	• Read more news online • Concern for our future • Morality • Personal impact on life • National vs. individual issue	• Weak connection to past • Being informed
Theme 3: Connecting to Personal Life	• Abstract ideas from content • Connections seem "far" away (location or time span)	• Importance for local community • Personal impact on life • National vs. individual issue	• Being informed • Little prior knowledge about topic

Themes and Codes for Research Question 2: How do students view discussion of controversial issues as a practice of democratic citizenship that is applicable to their everyday lives?

Theme	Very Common Codes	Semi-Common Codes	Least Common Codes
Theme 1: Student Definition of Citizenship	• Yes • Covered by laws	• Citizenship skills • Volunteer/ Participate • Morality	• Being informed • Voting • Duty
Theme 2: Student Identified Benefits of Discussion	• Alternative Viewpoints • Reexamining own ideas • Defending own opinion • Want equal participation • Groupwork/ teamwork	• General skill building • Put ideas into words • Using evidence to support ideas • Skills used later in life • Citizenship skills	• Listening Skills • Discussion norms • Deep thinking • Being informed • Predetermined opinions