

**CONNECTING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT: STUDENT MEANING MAKING IN A
MIDDLE SCHOOL WORLD HISTORY CLASSROOM**

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This descriptive study investigates the ways that students in an Ancient History class make meaning of past events by relating them to their present lives and experiences. The study is grounded in theories of historical thinking, particularly focusing on the concepts of presentism and its usefulness for examining classroom teaching. The following two research questions guided the study: 1) How do students make connections between the past and present? 2) When given the opportunity in writing and discussion, in what ways are students engaging with distant events in the past? The research site was a middle school in a medium-sized city located in the Midwest. Data was collected in the Fall of 2010 over the course of eight weeks during two units of study (Ancient Civilizations Review and Ancient Greece). The following data sources were collected: five audio-recorded classroom discussions and other instruction, twelve interviews with students and student assignments and journal entries. The analysis revealed two categories of the students' thinking about the relevance of past events: (1) conflating the past with the present and the challenge of presentism, and (2) translating and adapting the past to the present. The data showed that some students viewed history from a presentist perspective that did not distinguish sufficiently between time periods. However, many students also applied lessons from the past to their own lives by associating historical ideas and themes to their individual experiences, which was especially evident in the discussions. Students tended to make sense of

history by assigning meaning to the concepts they were studying in a personal manner and by finding similarities between the past and present.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	X
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	2
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY	5
1.4 CONCLUSION	6
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL THINKING.....	8
2.1.1 Knowledge of the past.....	9
2.1.2 Interpretation of the past.....	11
2.2 MEANING MAKING IN HISTORY.....	12
2.2.1 Private meaning	13
2.2.2 Private meaning	16
2.3 ENGAGING LEARNERS IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM	19
2.3.1 Methods for supporting meaning making in the classroom	22
2.4 CONCLUSION	28
2.5 SUMMARY.....	29
3.0 METHODOLOGY	31

3.1	QUALITATIVE METHODS	31
3.2	THE RESEARCH SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS.....	32
3.3	DATA COLLECTION	35
3.3.1	Class discussions	37
3.3.2	Writing assignments	37
3.3.3	Student interviews.....	38
3.4	DATA ANALYSIS	39
3.4.1	The coding process.....	39
3.4.2	Trustworthiness of the data.....	42
3.5	SUMMARY.....	43
4.0	FINDINGS.....	45
4.1	STUDENTS’ CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PAST AND PRESENT ...	46
4.1.1	Conflating the past with the present and the challenge of presentism.....	46
4.1.2	Translating and adapting the past to the present	56
4.2	ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE STUDY OF HISTORY THROUGH WRITING AND DISCUSSION.....	67
4.2.1	Facilitating student thinking	67
4.2.2	Students’ learning preferences	75
4.3	CONCLUSION	80
5.0	DISCUSSION.....	84
5.1	STUDENT CONNECTIONS AND MEANING MAKING.....	86
5.1.1	The nature of the relationship students develop with the past.....	86
5.1.2	Ms. Stewart’s pedagogy and instructional strategies	88

5.2	SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS	90
5.3	SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	94
5.4	CONCLUSION	97
APPENDIX A	98
APPENDIX B	105
APPENDIX C	107
APPENDIX D	110
APPENDIX E	112
APPENDIX F	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY	115

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. History education frameworks	40
Table 2. Revised coding structures	40
Table 3. Design structure.....	92

PREFACE

Beginning the dissertation journey seems an insurmountable task. Indeed it would be without the help and assistance of professors, colleagues, family and friends. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. John Myers, for his assistance, insight and guidance. His constant push required me to become reflective in the process and advance my writing skills. I am grateful to my committee, Dr. Patricia Crawford, Dr. Meryl Lazar, and Dr. Amanda Thein for their thoughtful feedback and constant encouragement.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

History is boring. How many students have uttered these words over the years? Building students' personal interest in history is considered one of the persistent—and elusive—challenges in the discipline. In my own career as a classroom teacher, changing students' perception of history from boring to relevant and meaningful was a driving force in my instructional practices and remains a primary goal for teachers at all grade levels. However, too often teachers' goal of making their curriculum relevant to students' lives results in classroom teaching that might be fun but does not require learning disciplinary knowledge and thinking skills. In other words, the issue is not only about engaging students but doing so while also supporting their intellectual development.

Across disciplines, one of the key practices in research regarding student engagement is to help students see relevance in the curriculum and value to their lives (Newmann, 1992; Riggs & Gholar, 2009; Schreck, 2011; Tileston, 2004). In history education, making the past meaningful requires more than just the mere presentation and memorization of famous people and dates which is the typical way that history is taught in the U.S. (Wineburg, 2001). As Gary Gordon (2006) writes,

If you don't use the specific subject matter in your life today, you probably remember very few of the very things about which you were tested. But if the class successfully

engaged your interests, you've retained the broad concepts for use throughout your life.

The trick is to provide as many moments of enthusiasm for learning as possible (p. 81).

As Gordon and other learning theorists have argued, making the curriculum relevant to students' interests leads to long term understanding. However, making personal meanings about history in the classroom is a messy process. When confronting history, students may view it as strange and irrelevant or apply present day attributes when evaluating historical content. Both perceptions can create an environment where students may become frustrated with historical inquiry. In order to counter this, Gamoran and Nystrand (1992) suggest teachers ask students to personalize material students may make meaningful past to present connections. Teachers want students to see the 'big picture' of history and apply those thoughts and ideas to their own lives (Wineburg, 2000).

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researchers have theorized about what it means to assist students in making history relevant to their present lives in terms of the basic skills they should possess, what history should be taught, and the role of the teacher. Engagement with the past is grounded in the concept of searching for historical meaning (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Grant, 2003; Seixas, 1994). The act of connecting past and present requires students to construct knowledge and apply what is learned in other contexts (Levesque, 2008). In doing so, students attempt to make sense of the past and assign it meaning.

Problematic to student meaning making are the multiple ways in which they may actually view the past. Wineburg (2001) urges us to go beyond the now and our own image. If we

understand the past, it will help us to understand ourselves and the world we live in. Similar to Wineburg, other researchers (Barton & Levstik, 2004; VanSledright, 2008) also argue that educators should provide students with the opportunity to explore the past by negotiating and interpreting its meaning. Understanding history requires exposure to viewpoints, source materials and assists students in engaging in intellectual processes. However, there is little guidance in the literature for precisely how teachers can help students to connect the past and present nor is there much explicit advice about the perils of taking on such a teaching goal.

Furthermore, the history education literature contains multiple views on the value and nature of this connection. Some researchers call for making the past strange through the use of multiple perspectives to help students relate to the past (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Seixas, 2000; VanSledright, 2008; Wineburg, 2000). The strangeness of the past piques student interest having them view the past through the perspective of people at that time. It then asks students, “How did we end up here?” and “What is our relationship to past events?” Others maintain that connecting to the past is necessarily personal because it allows students to understand their place in the world (Bentley, 2007) and can assist students with placing individual societies in the larger context of history (Palmitess & Staggs, 2005). History is no longer remote but a thread of ideas and actions and continuity and change over time.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to investigate what was going on with one classroom where the teacher believed in helping students connect the past and the present on a personal level in order to find out in what ways students assigned meaning to history. Proactive measures on behalf of teachers

are integral to proper practice, paying close attention to student interpretation and the problems that arise when students engage in making sense of the past. Studying a classroom and interviewing students who consistently attempted to assign meaning to the past shed some light on how they connected to the past and made sense of the present.

Over an eight week period, I studied a middle school world history course as it addressed two distinct areas in the social studies where the teacher's intent was to place an emphasis on connecting the past to the present in a personal manner. During this time, students were introduced to pre-history and early Ancient Civilizations. Throughout the units of study students participated in classroom activities that introduced them to important skills (including inference and analysis) they used during the course. Reinforcement of these skills paired with content knowledge were focal points of the teacher in the chosen research classroom.

This dissertation explored (a) the ways that students make meaning of the past to inform the present in a middle school classroom and (b) the nature of the relationship among the classroom activities assisting this process. Over the course of 8 weeks, classroom discussions were recorded and students' written work collected in the form of open-ended reflections and journal entries (4-5 assignments). Both units of study (pre-history and ancient civilizations) were structured around data collection. Writing prompts asked students to compare past events to today and describe the impact of the past on today. In addition, classroom instruction and discussions pertaining to their written work and the teacher's intent of making the past personal were recorded. Interviews explored student thoughts about the importance of history, classroom activities and the written work of students in conjunction with tasks inquiring about historic events and their connection to today. Structured in this manner, the interviews allowed students to explain their thought process in creating responses.

In the present research study, the following questions were addressed:

1. How do students make connections between the past and present?
 - a. In what ways do students make content relevant to the present?
 - b. In what ways do students make content relevant to their lives?
2. When given the opportunity in writing and discussion, in what ways are students engaging with distant events in the past?

I explored these questions in order to examine the different ways that students made meaning of the past in relationship to their lives. Based on an analysis of the history education literature, I expected that classroom discussions and writing activities would provide students important, although different, spaces to reflect on the curriculum and engage in meaning making.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Previous studies conducted with students have focused on historical empathy as a means to assist students with meaning application of the past (Barton and Levstik, 2008; Kohlmeier, 2006). Historical empathy strives to provide students with visual imagery of the past—an imaginative way of thinking about past events and actions (Levesque, 2008) in order to place themselves in the past. Typically this involves asking students for an emotional response or reaction, often based on moral judgment and perspective (Levesque, 2008). Historical empathy is personal in nature, reflective of the student engagement literature promoting personal connections. However, this study seeks to better understand how students are finding relevance. Instead of placing themselves in the past, research conducted here examines the ways in which students are connecting the past and present and finding relevance. Relevance plays a key role in the

historical thinking literature (Grant, 2003; Seixas, 2006; VanSledright, 2004, Wineburg, 2000). It is the cognitive act of understanding the different social, cultural, intellectual, and even emotional contexts that shaped people's lives and actions in the past with those in the present (Seixas, 2006). Connecting past and present in this manner can assist students with engagement. Without engagement, there can be no relationship to history. When students engage in the study of the past they learn from the past, not just about the past. They apply meaning.

This study is important because it adds to the growing body of research on students' historical understanding. It discusses the types of connections students make when studying the past and the usefulness of instructional methods in doing so. This information is important for teachers as they attempt to engage students in the disciplinary study of history.

1.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have outlined the problem, purpose and significance of the study. The following chapters are organized as follows:

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature concerning historical thinking and situate the importance of meaning making among the main components of knowledge and interpretation. The manner in which students create meaning, both public and private, are addressed. In addition, I include the problems students face when confronting the past. An outline of the theoretical arguments in this field are discussed and play a key role in laying the groundwork in subsequent chapters on data analysis and findings where I examine the manner in which students create meaning to connect the past and present. Lastly, I provide an overview of student engagement in the study of history and explore how students use history. The roles of

discussion and writing are explored in assigning historical meaning, specifically writing as a reflective practice and discussion as a negotiation of ideas.

Chapter 3 provides a description of interpretive qualitative research, the method used by this study and an explanation as to why it is appropriate. The research setting and participants are described with attention to site demographics and structure of the course. I address the research design used for data collection, the types of sources collected (discussions, writing, interviews) and procedures. Data analysis is discussed including the generation of codes and the coding process. As a part of the section, I emphasize trustworthiness of the data and potential limitations of the study.

In Chapter 4 I explore the manner in which students attempted to make meaning of the past. I identify the ways students attempt to connect the past to the present including the role of presentism plays. Exploration of the relationship between written responses and student discussions is covered as instructional methods in best assisting students with these types of connections.

In Chapter 5 I revisit my research questions and provide a summary of the main findings. I discuss the connection between student engagement and student meaning making, including the need of students to look for practical applications of history, the cross-curricular nature of history instruction, and role of writing and discussion in assisting student connection and meaning making. Implications for teaching practice paired with practical advice with regards to learner engagement and instructional tools are discussed. In addition, suggestions for future research concerning this study are provided including the potential to focus on teacher instruction and intent, usefulness for ESL and ELL students, and gender. First paragraph.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of historical thinking, focusing on the domains of knowledge and interpretation as key elements in assisting students to make meaning from their study of history. I address the potential pitfalls some students may have when engaging in the study of history, particularly how it relates to making sense of historical knowledge and interpretation. Then, I focus on how supporting students to reflect on and create personal meanings about history content can make the past relevant and consequential to their lives. My review of the literature identified two distinct categories of the ways that students make meaning about the past: the public and private meanings that they attach to historical events as they relate them to their lives. Lastly, I discuss the ways that two instructional methods (discussion and writing) support making history personally relevant and also facilitate student engagement in learning.

2.1 OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL THINKING

The field of historical thinking, first and foremost, teaches students to engage in the act of historians: gathering evidence, generalizing from data, applying lessons of history to current events and stating conclusions (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997). This approach asks students to use historical knowledge to understand more deeply how life used to be, its impact on today, and how we use that to think about the future (Seixas and Clark, 2004). Thus, an important step of

historical thinking is using knowledge about the past to inform how we understand and make sense of the present.

Historical thinking emphasizes two areas: 1) the cognitive processes student engage in when studying history (Wineburg, 2001) and 2) using the past to construct knowledge (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Levesque (2008) takes this a step further stating, “To think historically is thus to understand how knowledge has been constructed and what it means” (p.27). It is how students use the past that is of particular interest to this dissertation. Knowledge use and interpretation are integral to how student create meaning of an historical event. Some researchers believe that to learn to think historically, students need to develop frameworks of history that they are likely to use (Lee and Ashby, 2000). In turn, this will help give sense to the notion of progression in history. If students can understand where we have been as a nation and the direction in which we are headed—they begin to interpret accounts, find meaning and apply meaning to the present day (Lee and Ashby, 2000). This act moves the process of learning from primarily recalling facts to a sense-making activity that helps student to understand the world around them and their lives.

2.1.1 Knowledge of the past

Throughout the elementary and secondary grades, students encounter the past and develop their knowledge of it. Research has shown that students consistently place historical knowledge into structured narratives (Barton, 1996; VanSledright & Brophy, 1992). Students use this narrative structure to make sense of trends in history in addition to better understanding the past such as technological and social progress and national struggles (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Yeager et al., 2002). It is no surprise students may default to the narrative structure when applying historical

knowledge. According to Levesque (2008), “To be meaningful, the past must be somehow coherently organized” (p. 60). For students this means making sense of the past in a manner that assists in the application of historical ideas, themes, persons, etc. as opposed to trivializing them. Fitting the past into a story-like account is familiar and logical. Applying the past to the present demonstrates the logical patterns of struggle, progress and change over time.

A study conducted by Barton and Levstik (2008) took a closer look at how middle school students viewed ideas, events and people in America’s past. As a part of their research, students participated in a semi-structured interview involving small, single-sex groups of 3-4 students. Students were asked to choose eight pictures from a stack of twenty cards to be placed on a timeline of important events from the past 500 years. Once groups had placed events on the timeline, they were asked to explain each of their choices, identify which pictures others may have chosen and talk about what they learned about history both in and out of school. Findings from this study indicate that the students tended to discuss and view the past as a legitimation for the present.

Similarly, an examination of 14 tenth grade students revealed that most students applied historical significance to events that could easily be linked to the present such as world wars and ideologies like communism. Seixas (1994) interviewed the high school students and asked which events they considered to be historically important within the past 50 years. Though relatively small in sample size, the results reinforce the claim that students are more likely to make connections to events that can be related to current issues.

This is not to say problems do not arise when students attempt to connect the past and present to derive some sort of meaning. Sometimes, in order for the narrative to fit, students may oversimplify, leading to the exclusion of lifestyles and diversity because they do not fit neatly

into the narrative. For example, the role of women in history and their experiences has been overlooked by students who tend to write about and discuss the experience of males exclusively (Fournier & Wineburg, 1997). To counter this, the role of the teacher becomes very important. They must provide a varied curriculum and additional materials for student to use and interact with in order to see the many sides of history. Students must engage in interpretation to assist their breakdown of knowledge about the past.

2.1.2 Interpretation of the past

Interpreting the past—in contrast to passive memorization—is important because it allows students to reach their own conclusions, validate their ideas and expand their perspective (Barton & Levstik, 2004). When students are allowed to grapple with the past, their inquiry into history becomes more transparent. As they interpret, students find answers to their questions, but may also be presented with new ideas and perspectives (Levesque, 2008). Interpretation involves actively constructing knowledge and determining meaning.

During this process, students evaluate evidence and develop conclusions. Exposing students to viewpoints assists them in engaging in intellectual processes that allow them to identify inconsistencies in order to make informed choices and negotiate their understanding of the sources presented to them (Seixas 2000). The practice of using multiple texts and sources provides opportunities for students to enhance historical thinking (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001). According to Mayer (1998), inquiry generates an authenticity that builds genuine excitement for the topic. When students are engaged with historical documents on such a level, they are more likely to be critical of what is presented to them and legitimately engage in historical thinking.

Student interpretation of history is impacted by their perspective and background. Though students have demonstrated they can apply historic perspectives rather than their own when evaluating conflicting sources, the potential still exists for students to resist accounts based on their own positions and/or opinions (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Students have the tendency to make judgments about the past based on personal feelings that may taint their interpretation of sources.

In addition, some students also have trouble recognizing the impact of institutions such as religion, government, and the economy on perspectives in the past. They are more apt to describe how changes affected people in the past as opposed to society as a whole (Brophy & Alleman, 2005). This, however, is limited and can be corrected based on instruction and curriculum focus (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

2.2 MEANING MAKING IN HISTORY

One of the goals of the field of historical thinking is for students to learn to interpret and make meaning from historical events. Previous research has shown that one of the key ways student make meaning from history is through personal connections between past and present events (Grant, 2003; Seixas, 1994). According to Donna Tileston (2004),

Our species...is always trying to make sense out of its world. If we want to make information meaningful to the people we teach, we have to...help students see how the new learning will help them personally in some way. Ask, “How is this learning used in the real world” (pp. 96-97)?

Tileston's comments suggest that identifying relevant examples can help students negotiate meaning from the past and apply it to the present in meaningful and useful ways.

In my review of the literature, I found two main models for the ways that scholars conceptualize the approach student use to make meaning from the past to the present: (1) private meaning and (2) public meaning. According to Cercadillo (2001), meaning negotiation is not a fixed entity; rather its nature changes according to different people at various times throughout history. While there is a growing area of research concerning how students apply meaning, a majority of it concerns how it is ascribed to the nation state (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Levesque, 2005; Seixas, 1994; Terizan & Yeager, 2007) and student identity (Almarza, 2000; Epstein, 2000; Yeager, Foster and Greer, 2002). While the work conducted with student identity seems like a good starting point for the past to present connection, few deconstruct the meaning-making students participate in from a personal point of view. Most literature revolves around students' disconnect with history due to a lack of relevance in their lives from an ethnic standpoint. This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by providing insight into the manner in which students relate to the material and attempt to connect to the past.

2.2.1 Private meaning

Relating knowledge of the past to students' experience, as opposed to something that remains distant and untouchable, is the first step in helping students make sense of history as valuable and useful (Dunn, 2000). Dunn stated, "The key epistemological problem in history education is to figure out how students use their minds to connect their reality to the experience of human beings who are dead and gone" (pp. 137). From this perspective, history is not a static body of

knowledge but shapes, and is shaped by individuals' experiences. Through the personal connection to history, students can use their own experience to aid in their interpretations.

Using personal connections to apply history was present in a study by Rosenzweig (2000) who attempted to create some baseline data in researching media reports indicating the general public knew little about the past and cared even less. The sample for the study consisted of 808 Americans. The study sought to explore popular historical consciousness which was defined as "the ways that Americans use and think about the past" (Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 263). Most participants recounted personal stories to make the past intimate thereby blurring the lines between personal history and national history. The participants tended to construct narratives of the past to help understand their present. Many cited a lack of connection to the classroom considering history as a memorization of facts. Though the study did not focus on classrooms in general, based on his findings, Rosenzweig (2000) called for history teachers to actively engage students in history. Asking students to reenact and revisit history using a hands-on approach in the classroom would help to bridge the gap between the importance of history in school to the importance of history in their personal lives.

Presentism and the strangeness of the past

Social studies students sometimes encounter problems understanding history when they are faced with more than one account or source document. Students may view the past from their own framework of the present. Researchers have termed this action *presentism* (Seixas, 1998; VanSledright & Afflerback, 2000; Wineburg, 2001) whereby students may include personal experiences to help them understand the past or make judgments based on personal beliefs. Presentism requires little effort and is our default mode when looking back on history. We look for something familiar or usable (Wineburg, 2001). In viewing the past as usable, we usually

encounter what we want to find. In other words, we mold the past to fit our preconceived notions of what it is and ignore those elements that may not fit our framework. Mature historical knowing teaches us to go beyond the present in which we are born into, to go beyond our own image (Wineburg, 2001). It is difficult because our default is to look for the familiar.

The alternate side of *presentism* is encountering the strangeness of the past. Strangeness can be used to initially engage students but may ultimately leave them feeling detached or disinterested. Without considering the world today and viewing history on its own terms can be confusing for students, not to mention difficult. Wineburg (2001) argues that studying history navigates between the strange and familiar. It is what leads to mature historical thought. He urges educators to go beyond the two extremes discussed above. Students should not encounter the past and label it; they should learn from it. Wineburg considers the lens of presentism to be a poor facilitator in connecting the past to the present. Finding something familiar about the past may lead to superficial comparisons and is not good practice.

However, according to Lowenthal (2000), the hardest part for teachers is to keep the ancient past accessible while stressing its strangeness. Looking for the familiar is also important because it can facilitate greater student engagement in the history classroom. Teachers are faced with negotiating between the familiar and the strange. It is a tricky process in which teachers attempt to address differences yet draw attention to how events have changed and shaped our world today.

In addition to navigating the strange and familiar, students sometimes encounter a past to which they can not relate. Students may fail to see relevance of the past to their own lives. This could be due to cultural or societal issues such as gender, race, or poverty. Assigning meaning is not an absolute. It is dependent on many independent factors that can change for every

individual. This clearly reverts back to the lenses by which we view the past. Hunt (2000) suggests that students learn there can be a variety of ways in which to view the past and all can be equally valid. Lee (2005) however cautions against this type of relativist thinking, asking that students seek a deeper understanding of history in order to better evaluate the past.

However, educators can also use the concept of presentism as a stepping stone to help students understand the past and articulate meanings about it. Lowenthal (2000) defines hindsight in light of presentism as an “awareness that knowing the past is not like knowing the present and that history changes as new data, perceptions, contexts and syntheses go on unfolding” (pp. 64). In this sense, students own morals may play a part in their evaluation and interpretation of the past. With hindsight, past events may be filtered through the present but with an awareness of how events have influenced other events that occurred since that time. This approach may be an important step in assisting students relate to the past and to see it as significant to their present lives.

2.2.2 Private meaning

Public meaning indicates that students are attempting to use the past to understand a current event or occurrence that has an impact today while private meaning is indicative of the student forming a relationship between the past and one’s own life. This process involves students connecting the past to a current event or similar occurrence. They use that past to better understand something in the present.

The influence of past events is at the heart of what Grant (2003) calls *sameness*. Sameness, however, involves applying the past as a way of understanding the present in a linear manner. In his study of two high school classrooms, Grant found that students were often times

making connections between the past and present by seeing a direct link to current events. He cited students discussing the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s as similar to the current push for gay rights beginning widely in the 1990s. The students were using a past struggle to better understand a current issue. Students may not have been personally affected by the events but they could begin to relate common characteristics to the world today.

In an international comparative study between Spain and England, Cercadillo (2000) asked students in grades 8, 10, and 12 to discuss two historical events, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the campaigns of Alexander the Great, after reading two different accounts of each event. Cercadillo (2000) found that students ascribed significance in five ways:

- 1) Contemporary – Event is seen as important by people at the time
- 2) Causal – Student situates an event in relation to its causal power. Significance, therefore, depends on later events. Students show some awareness of historical context and how the event shaped the future
- 3) Pattern – the event provides a model, sets an example, or acts as a template for future actions
- 4) Symbolic – Significance is ascribed from the perspective of the past and usually exemplifies a moral lesson from history
- 5) Present/Future – includes a direct link from the past to the future

Her study revealed that most students across all grade levels utilized contemporary and causal means for ascribing significance. The categories of symbolic and present/future were practiced the least, but when used was done so by the older students. Though Cercadillo's research focused on historical significance, I think it is important to note the above categories

provide a useful tool to help chart the ways in which students may formulate connection with the past to make meaning of the present.

Coinciding with Cercadillo's comparative study, Yeager, Foster and Green (2002) asked 23 American students and 21 English students from the middle and high school levels to compare 47 historic events and explain which ten were the most significant in the twentieth century. Seven students from each class were later interviewed. Findings included that students sought current relevance of historical events in their explanations. Though there was a notable distance between which events English and US students deemed important, they both indicated that the events were relevant to them. Students were ready to deem events not important but could later elaborate and find a connection during the interview process. In addition, moral issues played a role in how students connected to the material. Many were able to see another side of an issue and practice historical empathy. They did doubt that people learned moral lessons from history because the same trends, such as war and poverty, still exist. Many viewed history's lessons concerning human behavior with both optimism and pessimism. This is an important finding as it speaks to the lenses by which students view history.

A pointed contrast from the work of Cercadillo and Yeager et al., Almarza (2001) found that the students in her research faced a difficult time relating with the past because their study of history lack relevancy. A majority of the students studied were Mexican-Americans being taught from a White-American perspective. In the classes observed, the teacher did little to acknowledge the minority groups' contributions to history and subsequently the students felt they were excluded and thus irrelevant to the narrative of history. Some students became disinterested and thus disengaged while others became hostile towards the instructor, searching for more than a top-down approach to learning. In essence, the students desired a more holistic,

inquiry based approach whereby they could make their own judgments regarding historic events, an approach that allowed them to be active and involved.

Almarza's study speaks to the occurrence of students not being able to make the past to present connection. Though this study cites lack of teacher connection to her students' ethnicity as a specific barrier, it is important to note that history instruction requires engagement. Students' engagement levels rise when they are allowed to follow their own ideas and be actively involved in the discussion (Tomlinson, 1999). Limiting student involvement is disadvantageous to instruction and learning. The study conducted in this dissertation seeks to engage students on a personal level to assist in their meaning making and connection to the past.

2.3 ENGAGING LEARNERS IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

How do teachers engage students in the act of thinking historically? To aid in our understanding, researchers have theorized about what it means to engage students on a cognitive level with history and have debated the basic skills students possess, what history should be taught, and the role of the teacher. Researchers have also investigated to come to a better understanding of what it means to interact with history cognitively. The research reviewed in this section suggests that students require guidance to effectively work with sources and students depend on their own knowledge and backgrounds to aid in their interpretation of history.

Both the literature on student engagement in the classroom and the literature specific to historical thinking agree on some common themes. They assert that instruction must be relevant and personal if students are to connect in any way that allows them to begin to negotiate meaning (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Dunn, 2000 Newmann, 1992; Shreck, 2011). If students view the past

as unimportant, useless or cannot find a connection, they may become apathetic or removed from historical inquiry. “There can be no engagement if the expected learning and efforts at arriving at that learning are not robust and meaningful to the student” (Schreck, 2011, p. 69). Without engagement, there can be no relationship to history.

The challenge with history instruction is fighting against student apathy or disengagement. Students have a tendency to “turn off” if what they are learning does not apply to them or is not useful or challenging (Newmann, 1992; Zhao and Hoge, 2005). While energy and enthusiasm can support student interest in historical study it is not sufficient to sustain their interest over the long term, (Grant, 2001; VanSledright, 1998). Teachers need to demonstrate history as more than rote memorization of dates and random facts. They need to actively engage student in exploring history and aligning the discipline to address student interests and learning styles (Burenheide, 2007). They need to find a sense of meaning in the subject matter (Cornelius-White and Harbaugh, 2010). Exploration of history should assist students with learning from the past not just about the past. Application of meaning is integral to learner engagement.

Making history personally relevant sustains student engagement. A study conducted in an international school in Greece analyzed interview data from secondary school students and found that students viewed content that connected to their everyday life to be important to their engagement in the class (Mitsoni, 2006). How a student feels about a topic will determine how much time he or she will spend engaging with it (Schreck, 2011). This is an important point as it speaks to the level of participation students may have in class including reflecting on ideas presented in class and the amount of time spent on homework. Thus, moving from a teacher centered model to a student focused model may increase student involvement in class.

Ryan and Patrick (2001) found similar results in a study of 233 eighth graders. Their study suggested that classroom environment was closely related to student engagement and motivation for learning. One key indicator included that students were more engaged when they perceived the classroom to be a place where their ideas were valued. Emotional connection is the key to learner engagement (Schreck, 2011). Students want to feel a sense of purpose, to know that they and their contributions are a valued part of the classroom environment. Providing students with choice can be one approach to increasing their engagement. Using strategies that allow students to make decisions and solve problems gives them ownership of their learning (Riggs and Gholar, 2009). Suggestions include offering open-ended activities that ask learners to struggle with ambiguities and use creativity in their response (Cornelius-White and Harbaugh, 2010). Students are more apt to talk out problems and ideas, listen to peers' input, and draw their own conclusions. In essence, they are engaging in historical understanding through their use of evaluation, corroboration and synthesis.

Teachers must demonstrate value to students and “reach beyond themselves to ensure that what they teach students connects with their everyday lives” (Riggs and Gholar, 2009, p. 110). Helping students form an interest in their learning is the first step toward meaning application (Gordon, 2006). There are many tools that can be used but a majority of the emphasis has been placed on discussion (Cornelius-White and Harbaugh, 2010; Harris and Haydn, 2006; Monahan, 2000; Newmann, 1992) and reflection (Newmann, 1992; Riggs and Gholar, 2009; Schreck, 2011). When students are provided time to think and reflect, students are more engaged, involved and attentive in the classroom (Newmann, 1992). Students can negotiate meaning with peers and explore ideas.

2.3.1 Methods for supporting meaning making in the classroom

In this section I review the modes of instruction that are helpful in assisting students with connecting the past to the present. As part of the learning process, students need to have an opportunity to explain what they can do with the information in a real world context if they are to demonstrate true knowledge and not mere memorization (Tileston, 2004). Research shows that writing and discussion are two of the most effective teaching methods for supporting students to reflect on the curriculum and to create meaning. Writing allows students to begin the process of synthesizing information. They take what they know and begin to evaluate meaning. It is student-centered in nature and a key part of inquiry based classrooms (Dornan, Rosen & Wilson, 1997). Classroom discussions also provide an opportunity for students to negotiate meaning. Moving away from the teacher-centered classroom and allowing students the opportunity to manage discussions (Barton & Levstik, 2004) can aid in strengthening the basic skills students need in order to compare sources and perspectives. Exposing students to viewpoints assists them in engaging in intellectual processes that allow them to identify inconsistencies in order to make informed choices (Seixas, 2000) and negotiate their understanding.

Writing

Reviewing students' writing is an opportunity to peer inside their thought process. Through writing activities, students wonder aloud about what they are learning. Students connect, analyze and verify ideas (Cruz, 2001). This type of evaluation fosters critical thinking. As students write, they must think about organization and begin the process of selecting and sorting ideas (Brown, Phillips & Stephens, 1993; Passman & McKnight, 2007). Writing allows students to stretch mentally and is critical to mastery of content. Asking students to think and write in a disciplinary context they use the writing process to discover meaning (Brown et al., 1993). This assists

students' analysis of an issue using different lenses to create their own interpretation (Cruz, 2001). Engaging in the acts of the historian, writing allows us to witness this negotiation. According to the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003),

If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with details, wrestle with facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if student are to learn, they must write (p.3).

Writing is not only a thinking process, but central to learning.

Using writing as a tool for learning focuses on student-centered, inquiry-based classrooms (Dornan, Rosen & Wilson, 1997). Writing allows students to begin sorting out their ideas and perceptions. Entering into a dialogical conversation with these sources can foster a deeper understanding of their content. Writing assignments are meant to aid the student with synthesizing information in addition to explaining their thought process in the interpretation of history. Students need to be able to express their point of view concerning what they learned and how they view what is being studied. Teachers helping students deconstruct and understand historical material requires using literacy practices as a scaffold to ask questions about evidence and information. Wineburg and Martin (2004) state,

...the teaching of history should have literacy at its core... No celebration of multiple intelligences or learning styles that takes the form of skits or illustrated knowledge posters equips us to answer those who would deceive us the moment we open our browsers. Skits and posters may be engaging, but leaving students there—engaged but illiterate—amounts to an incomplete lesson that forfeits our claim as educators. (p. 44-45)

Literacy acts are integral in the process of aiding student understanding of texts, promoting the higher critical thinking skills. During this process, students partake in writing and reading activities in order to help organize basic ideas and concepts.

Grounded in the historical thinking literature, Leinhardt (2000) inquires about the best mix of educational processes to assist with student engagement. Acknowledging that students relate to the past via the world around them, she divides the types of historical knowledge students encounter into academic, popular culture, and local and personal. They are all related. Her interests lie in how the history students study contributes to their life and learning.

Part of a large body of research conducted in Western Pennsylvania, one study follows a single student in analyzing how he became more adept in writing about historical ideas. Using the Document Based Question (DBQ) response essays commonly linked to Advanced Placement Tests as the writing task, Leinhardt's inquiry focused on how the student used this format to express historical understanding. Making connections among a variety of primary and secondary documents, the subject learned to write better based on this instructional design. With repeated practice and feedback from the instructor, he became adept at breaking down the format in a manner that allowed him to not only focus on the content of history but include different perspectives including his own.

Discrepancies exist in terms of meaning making for students based on what the teacher is requiring of them. In his research of the history classroom Green (1994) analyzed the disconnect between what historians do and what history students are asked to do. The practice of writing is discussed and analyzed. Exploring the cognitive demands of writing and learning in history is divided between the student and the historian. Green concludes the type of writing produced by students is ultimately influenced by the questions posed by instructors. Teachers, then, need to

align the writing task with desired outcome. The writing prompts for this study were designed around this idea. Students were consistently asked to directly apply what they were learning to their own thoughts regarding the topic.

Analyzing student writing can assist teachers in better understanding how students make sense of the past. “Meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with” (Elbow, 1973, 15). Teachers should structure assignments to help students become personally engaged with the question (Bean, 1996). In addition, designing questions that focus on both thinking and feeling help to develop students’ cognitive and affective thought processes (Brown et al., 1993). Most importantly, the focus of student writing should be on students’ active involvement in connecting and integrating ideas from course content including lecture, text, and discussion (Johnson, Holcombe, Simms & Wilson, 1993). Writing should encourage students to think about historical problems, events, or figures and apply them to today in order to evaluate how they create meaning from the past.

Discussion

One of the many benefits of discussion is that it assists students with connecting to a topic. Building connections is at the heart of meaning-making and insights gained via discussion often times apply directly to the outside world (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). According to Brookfield & Preskill, “When students analyze their experiences in a discussion, they often start to make connections between this analysis and their lives (p. 28).” Content analysis during discussion allows students to unpack their ideas and begin to make meaning.

Discussion assists students with sorting out their ideas and provides a constructive means by which they can “talk through” their process of understanding, problem solving or application of ideas (Tileston, 2004). It allows students to provide their own viewpoints and interpretation to

the material. In essence, students talk about what they have learned and their application process. Many times this is due to students beginning to take a stance or point of view on an issue. They want their voice heard and may attempt to persuade peers toward one idea or point versus another (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). During this sharing of ideas and perspectives, students formulate their own perspective and begin to apply meaning to the issue.

Discussion allows for student responses to reflect on issues that relate to their own interests and experiences (Lapansky, 2003). In her research on authentic classroom discussions, Hadjioannou (2007) found it common for students to express opinions, reflect and make connections with their own experiences. During discussions, students mentioned their home lives and shared stories to emphasize their main ideas. This is not uncommon as many discussions mirror a conversation (Wilén, 2004) as teachers encourage students to make connections between new content and their prior knowledge and experiences.

Discussion in the classroom is a practical student motivator. It can assist with student engagement. A study conducted in England by Harris and Haydn (2006) sought to provide insight into student motivation and engagement with history within the confines of the classroom setting. The study found clear evidence that student enjoyed interactive activities such as role play and discussion as a part of the course. Written work was overwhelmingly viewed as negative. Harris and Haydn are quick to note that the type of activities teachers view as engaging for students, such as discussion and debate, students view as integral to effective learning. It was the key motivator for their participation and engagement in the history class.

Using discussion as a motivator assists with promoting participation from all students. “While it may be true that students gain something from passively observing an exchange of ideas...students who take an active part in that exchange are far more likely to have thought

about the issue and internalized it” (Monahan, 2000, p. 2). This is helpful with regards to reinforcing historical thinking skills referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Through the use of historical thinking, students engage in a process known as internalization. According to James Wertsch (2000), internalization is the process by which individuals acquire beliefs, attitudes and behavioral regulations from external sources. Progressively, they begin to transform these into personal attributes and values as a negotiation based on ideas presented and dissected during discussion.

Discussions can be just as reflective as writing assignments. They require adequate time for students to think and reflect (Rowe, 1987) in order to be beneficial and supportive in meaning negotiation. Allowing students to write down notes and practice think time to gather their thoughts can increase the quantity and quality of student responses (Wade, 1994; Wilen, 2004). A discussion should be approached in a similar fashion to writing.

Another approach to discussion that is dependent on the teacher is the manner in which discussions are conducted. Typically, classroom discussions follow the IRE pattern of (I) initiated question, (R) student response, and (E) teacher evaluation of the student’s response (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979). Some researchers (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010; Edwards & Mercer, 1987) call for discussions to be more expansive as opposed to evaluative if they are to promote student engagement. This includes interactions with the student that allow him to construct and explain knowledge as a part of the response.

It is important to remember that the same pitfalls that plague student meaning making of the past can be present in these methods. Students may not engage in discussion for fear of looking stupid or being unprepared (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005) or because they view the task as irrelevant or have difficulty relating issues in a real world context (Newmann, 1992). Teachers

have the ability to influence student engagement in the classroom but it is ultimately up to the students whether or not they will be active members of the class (McFadden & Munns, 2002; Zyngier, 2008). Utilizing discussions and writing are two methods that can be used to assist knowledge construction and meaning application.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Researchers address the variety of ways in which students confront history. They are quick to explain the lenses by which student view and begin to make sense of historical events, people and places. Important to this line of inquiry is the manner in which students make meaning of the past and apply it to the present. Good teaching practice suggests that teachers make an effort to engage students in history by presenting it as personal.

Though the literature suggests how students may view history, little has been done to shed light on the specific nature of attempting to personalize history. We know that students who do not form a connection to the past see little importance in its study and may become removed from inquiry. It is also important to note that students rely on their own experiences to help shape their understanding of history. It is these experiences and perspectives that could be of great assistance to pedagogical methods.

A majority of the studies discussed in this chapter detail student application of meaning from an American History or 20th century point of view. I think this becomes more difficult the further one goes back in history. This is why it is important to examine how students relate to the ancient past. Is it just as easy for students to make such connections? Within the confines of a world history course, Endacott (2005) discusses context and connection as key factors in laying

the foundation for productive classroom discussions, resources, and assignments. Connecting long ago events to current events, her research discusses the need to help students construct a knowledge base and attitudes regarding world history by providing a common thread. History is still important to their everyday world, no matter if it is by public or private means.

This study sets out to investigate how students negotiate meaning of historic events from a personal framework of public and private negotiation. While the existing research provides insight into student engagement with the past, the gap in current research regarding middle school students and their articulation of meaning making to the ancient past is important here. Because study of the ancient world is even more so removed from the present, students are usually quick to disregard its importance. It does not hold manageable reference points that a local or national history does. Further inquiry into the area of ancient history might provide new insight and interest more researchers.

2.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter I provided an overview of historical thinking with an emphasis on the importance of knowledge and interpretation in assisting students with historical inquiry. How students acquire knowledge and the manner in which they engage in interpretation are key components to assisting meaning making. I discussed the manner in which students begin to make meaning when connecting the past and the present. As students begin to assign meaning, the literature indicates it is typically done in one of two ways—private means and public means. The personal nature of this activity lends itself to potential problems when working with the past. The concept of presentism was discussed in relation to student views of the past.

I then describe what it means to engage students in the study of history and provide an overview of useful strategies teachers use in the classroom. Writing as a reflective practice and discussion as a negotiation of ideas are presented as ideal means to promote student meaning making of the past and connecting it to the present.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the research method used for this dissertation study. First, the basic qualitative research approach is outlined. Next the participants, school setting, and data sources involved in the research are described in detail. Finally the data sources and analysis, including concerns related to reliability and data limitations are presented.

3.1 QUALITATIVE METHODS

In the field of education, basic qualitative studies form a majority of the research (Merriam, 2009). All genres of qualitative research attempt to make sense of social phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1984) such as studying a classroom setting. As opposed to gathering facts and measuring patterns, the qualitative approach considers process and meanings (Ely, 1991). Interpretation is valued more than hypothesis testing because qualitative research is dynamic and intuitive. The researcher sets out to explore phenomena, examine everyday occurrences—such as the classroom setting, and collect data from that setting. The use of the participants' own words help to support the findings of the study.

However, according to Merriam (2009), designating a study as a basic qualitative study stems mainly from describing what the study is not. She elaborated this position stating that

One does a qualitative research ...[these] other types of qualitative studies have an additional dimension...Though all qualitative research attempts to measure how meaning is constructed and how people make sense of what is going on around them, the primary goal of basic qualitative research is to uncover and interpret meanings (p. 23-24).

Like the other studies in the qualitative research body, an interpretive qualitative study focuses on purposeful samples, richly descriptive findings, and a focus on meaning, understanding and process. It is difficult to pigeonhole it into just one of the qualitative traditions

An interpretive qualitative approach involves rich meaning. The overall goal is to best understand the experience as close to possible as the participants feel it (Ely, 1991). This includes gathering data such as interviews and collecting student work in context. For example, interviews are meant to be dynamic, exploring participant thoughts and asking for elaborations when needed. They require the use of main questions, probes and follow-ups (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Qualitative interviews tend to be detailed and descriptive. Recording classroom discussions yields the same type of rich data. Recordings capture the nuance of voice, adding to the meaning of the words on the page (Ely, 1991). Applying the qualitative approach assists in capturing the classroom experience.

3.2 THE RESEARCH SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The site for this study is located in the Newton Public School District¹ in southwestern Pennsylvania. The district serves approximately 5,100 students of which 1,700 attend the

¹ Names of the school district, teacher and students have been changed in order to protect identities.

intermediate and middle schools covering grades 5-8. 12% of all students have an IEP (Individualized Education Program). Based on the 2000 census data (National Center for Education Statistics Website, 2011), the school district serves a population that is 98% white, .3% African American, .3% Asian, .4% Native American, .4% Hispanic or Latino, and .4% two or more races. The median household income for the district was \$45,376 (National Center for Educational Statistics Website, 2011).

This classroom teacher, Ms. Stewart (a pseudonym), was chosen due to the match of her expressed interest in the study and willingness to allow research to be conducted in her classroom. I previously had the opportunity to observe Ms. Stewart in the classroom and to discuss theories and practices of teaching history with her due to her roles as a mentor teacher in the University of Pittsburgh social studies certification program. In our discussions, she expressed particular interest in assisting students with making personal connections to history. Ms. Stewart currently serves as the curriculum coach for the middle school in addition to mentoring new faculty and student teachers.

For this study, data was collected in two sections of Ms. Stewart's World History II course. Initially, the course began with a review of pre-history and early river valley civilizations such as Sumer, Egypt and Shang Dynasty. The units were divided among the following topics over the course of the school year:

- 1) Early Civilizations (The Review Unit)
- 2) Ancient Greece
- 3) Ancient Rome
- 4) The Byzantine Empire
- 5) The Middle Ages

- 6) The Renaissance
- 7) Global Awareness (Geography)

This research study was conducted during the first two units: Early Civilization Review and Ancient Greece over the course of eight weeks. Throughout these units, students were consistently presented with the following themes in both instruction and text:

- 1) Characteristics of early civilization and culture
- 2) How people have made use of their resources and surrounding environments
- 3) Archaeologists and their contributions to history
- 4) How to become a stronger reader of text, especially primary source materials

Ms. Stewart often used these themes as an opportunity for students to provide their own insight and perspective. She would ask students for their opinions and to explain, in both writing and in discussion, how the main ideas of the past impact us today.

Similar to the student engagement approaches discussed in the literature review, Ms. Stewart sought to emphasize a common thread throughout her teaching of ancient history. Her primary objective was for students to personally connect to the material. Ms. Stewart would ask students about how they related to the materials presented to them such as if students ever felt like the peoples they were studying. In addition, Ms. Stewart's goal was to help students see how the past impacted them today. At times, she would use the past to present connection as a means to explain a concept. For example, when introducing the characteristics of early Greek governments, Ms. Stewart would ask students to identify the features that can be seen in their own family structures and, on a larger scale, our own government.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected during two units of study (Ancient Civilizations Review and Ancient Greece) over the course of eight weeks in the Fall of 2010. To answer the research questions, this study employed the following data sources: (a) audio-recorded classroom discussions and other instruction, (b) student assignments and journal entries, and (c) interviews with students (see Appendix B). Only those activities that pertained to the research questions were collected and recorded during each unit of study.

Data was collected over the course of two units of study during the Fall of 2010. It began in September and was completed by November. On September 1, 2010 I met with the class, introduced myself and the study. I entertained questions from the students and distributed the permission forms (Appendix A). In addition, I met with parents that evening during the school's Open House to inform them of the study. Permission forms and a letter explaining the research study were made available to the parents. I assured both students and parents that neither personal identities nor the identity of the school would be released in the dissertation. I also emphasized that students would not be asked to do anything outside of the classroom teacher's lesson plans or given extra credit/have their grade altered in any way due to participation. In addition, I reinforced with parents that if students were given permission to be interviewed, it would be done so during the morning homeroom period or activity period in the afternoon. At no time would students be allowed to miss classes in order to participate in the study. Parents were asked to return permission slips within one week (by Wednesday September 8). Thirty-four of forty-six students were granted permission to participate.

The first classroom discussion and writing prompt during The Early Civilization Unit concerning prehistoric man were collected on September 9, 2010. The discussion was audio-

recorded and the writing prompt assigned at the end of class (see Appendix C for specific contents). The writing prompt was posted on the classroom whiteboard in the same place as other similar prompts the students are used to. The following day, students were allowed to complete the prompt at the beginning of class if they did not have enough time to do so the previous day. The second classroom discussion was recorded after the teacher reviewed some classroom issues and centered on characteristics of early civilizations and their influence on today.

The next occurrence of data collection took place on September 20, 2010. Students were covering the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. I collected their reflection writing concerning the contents, purpose and influence of this piece of literature and recorded their subsequent discussion about it. The last piece of data for the first unit of study was obtained one week later on September 27, 2010. Students responded to a journal prompt asking about Sumerian law and its application to today.

Data collection for the second unit of study, Foundations of Ancient Greece, began on October 1, 2010 with a writing prompt (see Appendix C) asking students to find similarities between Greek polis' and cities today. One week later, student writing was gathered again asking students to reflect on their study of the Trojan War. The unit study was then interrupted by pre-tests in preparation for the state-wide standardized tests that take place in the spring. Final data collection commenced on October 21 and progressed through November 4, 2010. During that time, two more discussions were conducted covering the ideas of power and influence in ancient Greece and their subsequent impact on government. Another writing prompt was assigned on October 25 asking students to reflect on their study of ancient Greece so far and describe its impact, if any, today. Lastly, on November 4, 2010 a class discussion was recorded highlighting contributions of Greek arts and a comparison to common themes today.

Once classroom discussions and student writing were collected, interviews with student volunteers began. I asked students about their study of history and to comment on the work they produced in class. In addition, students engaged in an activity where they classified historic events studied over the 8 weeks as important (or not) to their lives today (Appendix D). Interviews concluded on November 18, 2010.

3.3.1 Class discussions

Over the course of eight weeks, six discussions were recorded: September 9, September 10, September 20, October 21, and November 4. Three audio recordings of classroom discussions were collected for each unit. This included when a writing assignment was introduced to the class and used as a means for large group discussion classroom talk was recorded in an attempt to capture student thoughts regarding the process.

3.3.2 Writing assignments

Writing tasks included the use of a journal. Students responded to writing prompts in their history journal six times over the course of the two units (see Appendix C). Journals were collected on: September 9, September 20, September 27, October 1, October 8, and October 25. The main purpose of this journal was to provide students with a common place to write and reflect about the people, places and events they had been studying with an emphasis being placed on application to the present. The question design for these writing assignments served three purposes: a) to encourage student to reflect on key elements of the curriculum, teaching objectives, and major themes; b) to assist students in formulating an opinion on information that

is personal in nature and support it with facts; and c) to allow for some element of student choice, thus showing what content they perceived as meaningful.

3.3.3 Student interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 students inquiring about topics of study during this school year in order to gain their understanding of history and how they related to it. Students who had completed the appropriate paperwork to participate in the study were asked if they would like to participate in an interview regarding their study of history. Twelve students volunteered.

I designed the interview questions to focus on student thinking about course content rather than right/wrong or yes/no answers. Questions were open-ended in design to allow students to recall previous study in history if they chose. Questions included asking students to reflect on their writing assignments, scaffolding activities such as classroom discussions and cooperative group work. Questions were planned in advance were adjusted based on student response in order to gain a more clear explanation or provide a follow-up prompt. At the beginning of each interview, rapport questions were designed as a part of the protocol to help students feel more at ease. Each student was thanked for their participation and encouraged to ask questions about the research and purpose of the study if they desired (see Appendix D).

As a part of the interviews, students completed an exercise whereby they connected past events to today. Cards were given to students and they were asked to explain which events they believed connected to today. Questions inquired about the process and how they formulated their ideas. Students were asked to explain and elaborate on those events they felt still impacted them today and those that did not. The use of student cards was modeled after similar interviews used

in previous studies concerning student ideas about history (Barton & Levstik, 2008; Epstein, 2000; Lee & Ashby, 2000). All interviews were recorded and conducted at the end of the two units of study.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of data included constant comparative analysis based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), whereby one piece of data was compared to others, in this case written reflections, discussions and interviews searching for prominent themes. From the themes extracted, sample codes were created and revised based on the reoccurrence of themes across categories and responses (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Data was then reviewed and coded by not only the researcher but also colleagues familiar to the study to ensure reliability. Once codes had been identified, the next step continued to analyze the data in order to discover how these themes and codes crossed over observations and written responses, how they answered the research questions, and identified broader implications for report (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.4.1 The coding process

The first step in preparing codes for responses involved reviewing the transcripts and student writing to become familiar with the contents. In order to ascertain how students personally connected the past and present I used a coding scheme guided by those ideas of researchers in history education discussed in the literature review as a starting point (see Appendix E, Table 1).

Table 1. History education frameworks

Category	Definition	Examples
<i>Presentism</i> (Seixas, 1998; Wineburg, 2000)	Viewing the past from the lens of the present; public historical significance	dismiss events in the past as stupid, make stereotypical judgments, view people in the past as not being as smart as today
<i>Strangeness of the Past</i> (Wineburg, 2000)	Viewing the past as unrelatable	unable to make a relationship with the past; difficult to find similarities; hard to comprehend what life was like
<i>Making the past personal</i> (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Dunn, 2000)	Drawing connections based on personal experiences or knowledge; application to today; having feelings for past events; significance is personal in nature	Perspective recognition, caring about or having an interest in the past, a desire to help someone in the past or feeling badly about an event in the past and responding to a situation in the present based on a reaction to a past event.
<i>Sameness</i> (Grant, 2003)	Similar to presentism- using the same lens- but views the past as an alignment of the present	Makes a direct relation from the past to today; uses past events to explain current (similarities)

Next, I reviewed data to see what else may be emerging that did not fit with these preconceived coding structures. I assigned themes initial codes and then analyzed for frequency and similarity among the data. In this particular study, student responses gravitated toward two major categories: public and private application of history with a series of more specific subcategories. This analysis produced a series of new codes used to classify data (Appendix F, Table 2).

Table 2. Revised coding structures

Theme	Category		Explanation
Public (PU-)			The student discusses a public connection to the past. Views the past as:
	-knowledge	-K)	Helping build knowledge base; content
	-basic needs	-BN)	A contribution to fulfilling societal needs
	-use	-U)	Something that is physically used today

Private (PE-)			The student discusses a private connection to the past. Views the past as:
	-lessons	-L)	Teaching a lesson that applies to self
	-emotional	-E)	A personal connection; emphasized a feeling or emotion; empathetic
	-disconnect	-D)	Unimportant; cannot see a connection
	-judgmental	-J)	Sees it as good or bad based on personal beliefs or morals
	-use	-U)	application; speaks of history as having a personal impact as opposed to societal
Supporting Response (SR-)			The support for the connection the student makes is or indicates:
	-logic leap	-LL)	Incongruent; there seems to be something missing. The idea of connecting to the past is there but is not as concrete as others; it is indirect
	-change over time	-CT)	events from their inception may have been altered somewhat but are still basically the same and still hold influence today
	-weak	-W)	unsupported or missing
	-strong	-S)	comparative; provides an example

Using this new coding structure, transcripts and written responses were coded in their entirety, holistically. I did not employ a line by line coding structure due to the nature of student responses. After assigning codes to student responses, I then reviewed their supporting statements to examine how students justified their statements (Table 2). Lastly, I reviewed the transcripts to ensure findings and themes were consistent with the data. In order to determine which findings were supported, I referred back to the literature.

3.4.2 Trustworthiness of the data

I enlisted the help of two people who agreed to read and code the written data and transcriptions following the coding structure I created. Both readers were familiar with the general nature of the study but were not acquainted with the students. One reader is a social studies classroom teacher and department head with a bachelor's degree in history from University of Michigan and a master's degree in education from Aquinas College. The second reader is also familiar with the study, a teacher and doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh. Both readers were provided with the coding structure and the same excerpts of data from discussions, interviews and student writing.

Miles and Huberman (1984) identify five areas for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative data:

- 1). *Objectivity/confirmability*
- 2). *Reliability/dependability/auditability;*
- 3). *Internal validity/credibility/authenticity;*
- 4). *External validity/transferability/fittingness;* and
- 5). *Utilization/application/action orientation.*

Concerning *objectivity/confirmability*, this study was conducted in a detailed manner with data collection procedures and analysis detailed and connected to the research methodology. All data has been reserved and may be reviewed by others. *Reliability/dependability/auditability* were addressed through the presentation of the research questions in a clear manner. The design of the study was structured in alignment with these questions. In addition, peer/colleague review took place throughout the course of the study and additional readers were present to code the data following the same guidelines and coding outline.

My attempt to triangulate data using student written work, interviews and recording classroom discussions addresses *internal validity/credibility/authenticity*. Connections of the data to emerging theory about historical understanding are made. The issue of *external validity/transferability fittingness* is referenced through the descriptive nature of the study population, setting and background. Conversely, this study is interpretive in design and the number of students participating makes its generalizability weak. Yet, it is meant to be an introduction to how students make meaning of the past in a classroom where the teacher's intent is to do so.

Lastly, this study seeks to inform social studies teachers about the nature in which students assign meaning of the past as a mode of historical understanding. In addition, it involves the learning of middle school students and instructional methods. These address to the final issue of *utilization/application/action orientation*.

3.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter I defined the basic qualitative research approach based on the work of Merriam (2009). The purpose of this type of study is to identify what it is *not* as most frameworks within qualitative research seek to interpret, explain, or empower using phenomenon, narrative or cases. It is in demonstrating this difference I explained the purpose of using the basic qualitative approach.

The setting for this research site was described. A timeline for data collection was presented. Explanation of the procedures used in the study, the types of data collected including class discussions, writing samples and interviews were discussed. A unique aspect of this study

was the classroom teacher's intention of making the past personal for her students and allowing the class to opportunity to attempt to make this connection. Next, data analysis was addressed. The coding process was detailed and tables featuring the main codes were included.

Finally, I detailed the validity issues involved in this research study. Following the structure set forth by Miles and Huberman (1984), I addressed reliability issues commonplace in qualitative research to my study.

4.0 FINDINGS

The organization of this chapter follows the two research questions that guide this dissertation. Each section presents findings from the data that were collected concerning ways that the students were guided to make meaning of the past by connecting it with the present. The three primary data sources were classroom discussions of historical topics, reflective writing assignments and student interviews.

Section One addresses the first research question on the ways students mentally connect past events and periods with their present experiences and understanding of the world. Findings from this section confirmed previous research (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Grant, 2003; Seixas, 1998; Wineburg, 2001) that students connected the past and present in diverse ways, which both supported and contradicted genuine historical understanding. Two categories of the students' thinking are presented: (1) conflating the past with the present and the challenge of presentism, and (2) translating and adapting the past to the present. The data showed that some students viewed history from a presentist perspective that did not distinguish sufficiently between time periods. However, many students also applied lessons from the past to their own lives by associating historical ideas and themes to their individual experiences, which was especially evident in the discussions.

Section Two examines the roles of discussion and writing in assisting students to connect the past with the present. The class discussions and the writing assignments facilitated students

to negotiate ideas and make meanings during the study of history. This section also explores the ways that the teaching methods used to support making the curriculum relevant and meaningful engaged students in learning about the past. The data showed that students preferred having options when completing homework assignments and desired to apply what they were learning in other contexts. The students also specified how discussing ideas before beginning writing tasks was beneficial to their reflection process. Lastly, the difficulties students encounter when writing and talking about events in the past and present is discussed.

4.1 STUDENTS' CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PAST AND PRESENT

During this study, when students made meaning of an historical event, person, or time period, they connected the past to the present in two ways: (1) conflating the past with the present and (2) translating and adapting the past to the present. In what follows, these two categories are explained and the findings for each category are presented.

4.1.1 Conflating the past with the present and the challenge of presentism

Conflating the past to find similarities in the present suggests that the students are using past events to shed light on their understanding of a current event or circumstance. In this case, the present event is explained as being linearly related to what happened in the past to today, in a manner Grant (2003) would declare as seeing surface connections between the past and present. In other words, the students view the present as shaped directly by similar events in the past. For example, in this excerpt from Stephen's journal entry, he attempts to align contributions of the

Greeks to modern day in a linear fashion. His account lacks substantive explanation to fill in the gaps for the reader as seen below.

The golden age of Greece is important to me today because it has influenced the things we do. One example important today is the Greek theater. This is because without it TV shows and movies wouldn't exist today (WP6.1, Stephen).

There is a sizable gap between Greek theatre and the invention of television and movies. Understandably, Stephen is attempting a connection between the Greek themes of comedy and tragedy with entertainment we have today. This is a connection that he attempts in a linear fashion by writing, "...without it TV shows and movies wouldn't exist today." This comment actually requires more development. Stephen's statement lacks the proper examples to assist this connection. His rationale jumps from Greek theatre to modern day television with no reference to the early playwrights or the themes of comedy or tragedy discussed in class or his text.

This is only part of the story. Surface level connections do not expose larger meanings or themes that cut across history. This concept of sameness is helpful as students begin to compare events and actions in the past to present day circumstances but becomes problematic because the connection is not explained or attributed to a larger historical theme or movement. This perspective is an effort to use the past as a means of understanding the present. It is, however one-sided in that students rarely use events in the present to help explain the past. Using Stephen's example above, it is not possible to reverse this alignment by stating television shows and movies exist today because of the Greeks. This linear connection is helpful to finding similarities but can also be problematic as these similarities, such as the example above may be superficial and forced.

Another potential problem is revealed in the journal writing prompt. In requesting students to make a connection between the past and the present by asking, “Is the Golden Age of Greece important to you today? Why or why not?” student reflection is stymied by looking for parallels between the past and the present or denying any impact at all. The nature of the question is limiting to Stephen’s response. He must either answer in the affirmative and formulate a connection or explain why he did not relate to the past. The structure of the question does not allow Stephen to evaluate his viewpoint or use writing as a means to negotiate meaning. Instead, it assists in creating a linear connection that is superficial and reinforces the presentist perspective.

One manner in which students wrote about or discussed the relationship between the past and present was grounded in the concepts of survival and progress. Students spoke and wrote of the past as similar to today with the awareness that we live our life in time. That one event follows another as a progression of ideas. The ideas of survival and progress over time were evident during the classroom activities centered on prehistoric man. Teacher intent for this lesson revolved around helping students to recognize what life was like during that time. The class discussion centered on debriefing a scenario activity where students attempted to understand more deeply what life was like during the Stone Age. This discussion then led to a small group modern day problem solving activity covering the same themes of survival. This discussion attempted to unpack student ideas regarding survival, then and now, referring back to prehistoric times and the natural instinct of man to survive.

In these discussions of prehistoric man, student talk focused on the theme of basic human needs as presented in the excerpt below. This excerpt identifies what the students found similar between the actions of prehistoric man and themselves and how students feel about the

similarities. In conflating the past, the students create a linear relationship between human's basic needs in the past and present.

Teacher Food, water, shelter, clothes. These are modern humans' basic needs. Now think about the simulation game you played yesterday what do you have in common with prehistoric man? Or do you think there isn't anything in common?

Brad We would, ah, we would have to like hunt to survive.

Teacher Hunting. You definitely have that similar. Hunt to survive, hunt for food.

Kristi Shelter.

Teacher Shelter. You need a place to stay, to keep you dry to keep you warm. What else do you have in common with prehistoric people?

Kelly Trying to survive.

Teacher You are trying to survive. You are trying to stay alive-absolutely. What else? Anything else? Does it surprise you that you have anything in common with prehistoric man?

Kelly No.

Teacher No. Why doesn't it surprise you?

Kelly Because we are all human.

Teacher Because we are all human, ok. Did anyone think it was surprising, like I would never think I had anything in common with them?

Tricia Like when we decided to use hair for nets. I wouldn't have thought of that until I had to. So I'm surprised we thought like that- I'm surprised I

thought like they would. Cause many think they're just dumb but they're not if they survived.

In this exchange, the teacher pulled together the scenario and student group activity with the main ideas students had been reading about: what life was like for prehistoric humans, including the environment and activities in which they participated. The students explained what they might do in similar circumstances, mentioning hunting, building shelters, and using simple tools. Their strategies for survival mirrored those of ancient humans and the teacher noted universal human needs as the touchstone for scaffolding the past to present connection.

In comparing the two scenarios, ancient man and modern day, students began to find direct similarities between the past and present. In this case, students conflated functions in the past, the basic needs of man, to the same needs present today. For example, Kelly mentions that she is not surprised to find commonalities between now and then because “we are all human,” suggesting that things have not changed that much. The use of hunting and finding shelter seems logical to Kelly because they are basic needs that she believes are part of the basic human condition and our need for survival. Tricia, conversely, is surprised by the similarity but able to discuss the actions of her group in relation to what was done by those in the past. Tricia uses an example from her group deciding to use hair to make nets in order to make a simple tool. Tricia states this is not something she would have thought about on her own. But, by participating in the activity and placing herself in a modern day example, Tricia finds herself reacting in the same way as those in the past-by creating a tool to assist in survival. This act appears to change her mind regarding previous thoughts about prehistoric man. She refers to prehistoric man as

“dumb,” but came to the conclusion that prehistoric humans must have been smart to have ultimately survived the conditions.

When Ms. Stewart asks the class, “What do you have in common with pre-historic man?” she is, in essence setting students up to make a link between the past and present. Problematic to this line of questioning is that it supports students in conflating the past with the present. She asks students to use the lens of the present to evaluate the past. While this is helpful in finding similarities between the past and the present, the discussion does not use these similarities to propel students to the next level. The concept of progress over time is not addressed nor is it used to assist students with understanding and applying larger historical trends and themes.

Many students directly correlated the past and present by suggesting the past functioned as a knowledge distributor, which people in the past continued to grow based on learning from previous civilizations. For example, during his interview, Peter explains how humans have been adapting over time:

Hunter-gatherer societies are like the building blocks of humans. It is kind of like every generation got smarter, bigger, logicaler [more logical]. I feel that like I mean, think about it. From a cavemen we have nothing and had to survive on our own to now is, I mean we have some geniuses like Albert Einstein. People who are so amazing. I think it's pretty cool. We had to have some pretty smart humans back then to be living. Not like ancient Greece, but before, in the BC to be able to survive-not die-and get food. (Peter, I11, 12:03)

Peter speaks about the past as a linear progression to the 20th century, declaring early society as “...the building blocks of humans.” Like Tricia, he sees early humans as the foundation for later progress because, as he says, “We had to have some pretty smart humans

back then to be living...to be able to survive-not die-and get food.” He relates the actions of the cavemen as an assist to the knowledge we have accumulated over centuries. To connect Albert Einstein in time with prehistoric humans may seem like an intellectual leap; however he uses this exaggerated example to make the point that we are indebted to previous generations for the evolution of knowledge over time as a product of survival. We learn not just about the past but from the past.

Peter’s example is also problematic. His connection may be questionable as he prefaces his final statement with “Not like ancient Greece, but before, in the BC...” This may be a minor misstep, but he blatantly reveals that he does not have a general understanding of the time periods. Could his example have been more accidental than intentional? It may be that Peter was just grasping at the idea and by talking about it he eventually settled on this example, allowing his train of thought to be verbalized.

Similar to how Peter discussed progression over time, Alli mentioned the importance of knowledge and the progression of learning. In the selection below, Alli explains the contributions of the Greeks to learning

They [Greeks] influence the way we live today. The classes we take, the buildings we have, the ceremonies we do. Everything. Well a lot of things come from the “Golden Age of Greece” like learning. Medicine, science, math. It was important to them and learning is very important to today. And it will probably always be. Without learning, we wouldn’t be very smart. We would still be living in the same old stone buildings they built. (WP 5.1)

Alli touches on the emphasis Greeks placed on learning to today. She sees it as very important and states, “...it probably always will be.” She sees the progression of knowledge in

the past adapting to new ways of doing things—in her example, architecture and construction. Without adapting ideas of the Greeks, we would still be living in the same structures.

While discussing the contents of her writing journal during the interview, Alli reinforces the progression of history. She refers back to her main idea regarding learning speaking of history as linear and causal as the dialogue below shows.

Alli: ...because it deals with everything that we do. Like history can lead to one thing and then that can lead to another. Like we studied how Greek government included a democracy and since then many places have tried to have one as a part of their rule, like here.

Interviewer: Tell me more about why you think it is important to study history.

Alli: I think it is because in college and stuff you have to know it because every subject involves history. Like in science class you learn about discoveries and who made them. And sequential order because we kind of like have to think about, if you have to do a few things, you have to put them in order of how you think they will be most productable.

Interviewer: How does that relate to history class?

Alli: Like cause and effect. This happened first and then this happened. It's the order: this then that. (I6, 1:00)

First, Alli mentions learning about democracy and how other nations have applied that concept, including the United States. She then uses her own example of learning from the past in terms of applying skills learned in history class to other coursework. She was able to see the relationship from one subject matter to another and deemed it important based on the influence historic knowledge has. This is partially attributed to the causal mode by which students assign meaning (Cercadillo, 2001). Unique to this exchange is Alli's application to another subject she is

studying. She notes that, “history can lead to one thing and that can lead to another”, suggesting causal relationships between past and present. Alli addresses sequential order and how that is important for producible (she uses “productable”) results, by which she means a specific sequencing must be followed in order for the desired result to occur. According to Alli, history then is a byproduct of a series of events. Alli is aware of a concept she is learning through her study of history and can see the importance in other classes.

However, the correlation Alli makes here is also superficial. Previous research has found that students sometimes oversimplify causal relationships between past and present (Barton & Levstik, 2004; VanSledright & Brophy, 1992). Alli merges the development of democracy, into two steps: “Greek government had a democracy and since then many places have tried to have one as part of their rule, like here.” The road to democracy for many nations is rocky at best, and the characteristics of early Greek democracy are not exactly the same as the components of democracies today. But, in Alli’s explanation it is merely a “this then that” connection. It is simple and straightforward.

Though recognizing similarities between events in the past and present can assist students in discovering the importance of the past to today, it can also be forced and the alignment artificial. At the beginning of this section, Tricia spoke of prehistoric humans and how her knowledge of the past changed when she realized similarities between her actions and those of early man. Tricia attempted to find parallels in her journal entry regarding prehistoric man, which this excerpt illustrates:

I think developments in the Stone Age have been helpful. Some inventions and ways of doing things have been helpful in everyday life. For example, domesticating animals has been helpful for training my dog and people around the world domesticate animals to

farm and to help people. Controlling fire for like times when you go camping or in a fireplace is important. Tools like fish hooks and things made for metals and bronze that we use today can be used to build things like houses. I think prehistoric man was important to us today.

Tricia identifies a variety of ways we have learned from the past. She discusses the knowledge of animal domestication to be important to her own pet but also for farming today, the ability to control fire as a basic need we use today, and the tools that were created as a direct application to similar items today. These three forms of adaptation of the past stem from Tricia's recognition that the past has something to teach us, we can learn from it. Tricia's realization is important to note due to the fact that she previously indicated, during the class discussion, she was surprised by seeing similarities between the past and present. She was able to view the past from her position in the present and draw connections. Her categorizing is similar to Grant's (2003) observation that students tend to find direct comparisons between the past and present. In this instance, viewing the past by means of the present allows Tricia to accommodate for some differences without ridiculing the past as dumb or stymied. For example, she understands that fire provided benefits of warmth and cooking for prehistoric humans (warmth, cooking) and uses the same instance from the past in the exact same manner, such as for use while camping. Prehistoric humans were not camping, but this perspective assisted Tricia with creating this connection. The use of fire in the past and present contain the same characteristics and that is enough for Tricia equate the two and representative of how students typically conflagrate the past with the present.

This same passage, however, also exemplifies the tension that exists when students attempt to connect events in the past to modern day examples. Tricia's account also reveals a

forced connection between the past and present. When Tricia writes, “Tools like fish hooks and things made for metals and bronze that we use today can be used to build things like houses,” she has made a linear connection between the past and present that is forced and incorrect. Fish hooks made from bone and the metals used in modern building materials are, of course, not identical. She equates them as such because she is viewing fishhooks as being made of metal, as they are today, and not bone. Tricia is visualizing the same type of fishhook in the past and in the present. Overemphasis on the present in relation to interpreting the past creates an improper connection (Grant, 2003; VanSledright, 1998). Tricia is relying too heavily on the present and it has tarnished her interpretation.

4.1.2 Translating and adapting the past to the present

The second way that students in this study connected the past with the present was to inform some aspect of their personal experience in terms of how the world works. This is a connection by means of involvement. Students actively interpreted the past and adjusted it to the present. Students’ thinking in this category perceived the past as meaningful because they can learn from it; typically in the form of a lesson passed on they can apply to themselves in the present. Cercadillo (2001) discusses this as the symbolic nature of history in which students use the present to relate the past by attaching a moral or lesson learned from history. The personal nature of this connection allowed students to apply lessons of the past to their own lives.

For example, during a lesson regarding the Trojan War, students studied a variety of sources to help them piece together what had happened in the past and to decide whether or not it was accurate. Students engaged in interpretation by asking such questions as: Could this really have happened in the manner stated? How did we come to have this specific account in history?

The class was left to form their own opinion in regards to historical accuracy and the relative importance of studying such an event in history. In this excerpt, Dean elaborates on his written response to a question about the significance of studying the Trojan War in an interview and discusses how he finds a lesson in the past and is able to contextualize it in the present.

If we didn't study the Trojan War, no one would know about it or learn from it. Like, lessons. The lesson from this is "never give up." They thought they gave up from getting the queen but ended up surprising them in the end so they never really gave up and ended up getting what they wanted. Like when you watch the news, you always hear about countries that are trying to talk to one another, usually about peace or whatever or make friends with other countries. You have to keep trying. Don't give up.

Dean first justifies the need to study the past in order to learn from it. The past adds to what we know in the present and can assist in how we view current events. Dean provides an example to prove his point. He discusses the need for peace in our world today based on an ancient encounter in Greece that may or may not have happened. Instead of worrying about the accuracy of the account, Dean is able to make sense of the past by forging a connection to today and seeing a need for the lesson today. "Never give up" is the lesson. He applies it to the Trojan War stating it is important to get whatever it is you set out to, in this case the queen. In terms of today, Dean discusses countries' relationships with each other and the peace process. He maintains they should keep trying to work for peace. The lesson is symbolic and he adapts it for use in the present. Following this line of thinking, what Dean attempts here is similar to what Cercadillo (2001) discusses as symbolic meaning. Dean is making sense of the past by noting a lesson from the past that can be used today. He has found a use for this piece of historical knowledge in acknowledging the similarity of war.

During the review unit of Early Civilizations, students were presented with a read a portion of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The story revolved around a man who many thought was crazy and intentionally secluded him from the rest of the group. The man was isolated from the community until he had the opportunity to become like the other members and faced a choice- be alone or be a member of the group. Students read the story, paraphrased their own account and were asked a series of questions regarding their opinions about the story and inferences they made, supported by the text. The questions were a part of a written assignment and could be used during the class discussion to assist in their explanations. One key question asked in an effort to directly correlate the primary source written during the BC era to the students was: *Have you ever felt like the man in the story?* Jim responded with an example from his recent past.

Yes, I felt like him when I ate too much candy and was a mad man. I was all over the place. No one hung out with me at that party and called me crazy. The next party I stayed with everyone else (Jim, WP 3.1)

Jim admits to feeling lonely like the man in the story. In particular, he mentions how no one hung out with him at a party and discusses the corrective measures he took the next time he attended a party, "...I stayed with everyone else." Similar experiences came to light during the class discussion as students began to share their stories.

Jessica Um, there was a time when I moved in the summer and none of my neighbors would know me and I couldn't play with them I would feel kind of alone.

Teacher Ok, so you can kind of relate because you can remember that feeling before you got to know your neighbors. And really being by yourself. Thank you for sharing that. JD?

JD Well, my friend and I were playing hide and seek, and I was hiding and no one could find me. I was out in the woods for like 20 minutes.

Teacher Oh my gosh. Did you feel lonely?

JD Yes

These examples from student writing and discussion exemplify using personal experiences to connect to the material. The examples above highlight the loneliness students have felt as a connection to the man in the story. JD discusses how no one could find him and he was alone in the woods for 20 minutes. As mentioned earlier, the teacher directly implemented instruction to assist students with connecting to the story in this manner. As Barton and Levstik (2004) reference in their research, having feelings for past events allows the meaning students create to be personal in nature. Creating opportunities where students can use personal experiences provides students with an analogy that can help them construct meaning (Tileston, 2004). In this example it is used as a helpful scaffold to facilitate student experiences as a means by which they can make inferences about the material. Asking students to directly identify with emotions described in the story allowed them additional insight. Students could begin to understand the story by sharing their own. Having translated their experience in conjunction with the man in the story, students were in a good place to make meaning of the text.

An ancient text can be especially difficult for middle school students to deconstruct because the language can be very different from their own. Using emotion and personal connections as a means by which students can relate to the material may potentially provide the opportunity for students to better understand why historians may study this text and see its importance. During the same class discussion regarding the Epic of Gilgamesh, Ms. Stewart asks

why it is important to study an ancient text and what students inferred about people at the time. Curt explains the importance of the story as a life lesson and the class begins to address life lessons that can be interpreted from the story.

Curt Well, kind of like a life lesson to teach that it is better to be safe than sorry.

Teacher A life lesson. It's better to be safe than sorry. So it's trying to teach the people of that time period a life lesson. Do we have life lessons? In today's culture? Do we have stories that try to teach us life lessons? Yes, we do. Can anyone think of an example? Do you think it is common for life lessons to be talked about in old documents going through the ages? Do you think that is a common theme from civilization to civilization all the way up to modern day?

Lisa Yes

Teacher Why do you think that?

Lisa Because, um, if you look at what's important to one group it may be important to another. If it is a good theme or uh lesson it won't be that different.

Teacher Right sometimes you hear the same types of stories from generation to generation because they teach a valuable lesson. You may have heard your parents and grandparents tell stories and the lesson may be the same because it is a valued lesson.

Curt states it is important to study the story because life lessons can be learned, "It is better to be safe than sorry." This leads to the idea that if the lesson or idea is important enough, passing the story down stories from generation to generation indicates the society found it

important as well. Ms. Stewart's next line of questioning reinforces this point as she provides question after question considering if this is a common theme from civilization to civilization. Lisa elaborates her response and Ms. Stewart draws the life lesson idea back to a personal connection by including families as performing the same duties with lessons. The second period of this class referenced the same idea in regard to the story.

Teacher Why would historians try to study or look at stories like this one? What is the point of looking at a primary source like this one?

Ethan So they can get like direct information instead of looking on the internet and who knows what they'd get.

Teacher Ok, so it is a true document from that time period. What is important about studying an object from a specific time period?

Ian It may help us learn about our generation now.

Teacher Ian suggests that it may help us learn about our generation now. Do we have similar stories today, now in our generation? Like, taken from this Epic?

Tory Um we learn about like a different philosophy that we don't know is going on.

Teacher We can learn about different philosophies that we may not know about- they are new to us, personally. Like old ideas and ways that may be extinct but we can learn about them. What is the basic idea behind this story?

Sarah Um, this one story here?

Teacher Yes, what was the purpose of this civilization having this story

Sarah To tell you that it is ok to be different

Teacher Ok, that it is ok to be different. What was the purpose of this story? It was to tell you it was ok to be different. Which is kind of teaching you what?

Steve Self-confidence. That it was important to this civilization.

Ian suggests that studying the past can help us to better understand ourselves now. The discussion eventually leads to Sarah stating that the lesson learned from this story is, "...that it is ok to be different." Steve then takes this idea a step further explaining that self-confidence was important to this civilization. Because Ian begins by stating the lesson is important and can be applied to today, students can apply the lesson to themselves.

This second excerpt, however is problematic in that, though it is set-up for students to create personal meaning, one student misses the prompt and does not answer the question. When the teacher asks if there are similar stories today, Teri responds that, "...we learn about a different philosophy that we don't know is going on." The teacher rephrases the response for clarification purposes as learning about different philosophies that, "...we may not know about, personally. Like old ideas and ways that may be extinct but we can learn about them." Teri's original statement does not make sense, nor does it relate to the original question. It may be because Teri was having trouble viewing an ancient text as informative to today.

Although Teri struggled in the previous excerpt to apply lessons from the past to life today, later in the unit she showed considerable insight. As a part of a discussion on power and influence in ancient Greek city-states, Teri uses the example of peer pressure below to connect power and influence in ancient Greece. She made the following comment:

I think there is a connection because you need both to make a successful polis because if, you need power to keep most things in order and you also need influence to do the same. Because if they think you have power they might go along with it otherwise not everyone would listen. For example like what about influence like in peer pressure? It's the same kind of influence, for good or bad.

To support her point about power and influence in Greece, Teri draws an analogy to peer pressure. Teri explains that people “might go along with it otherwise not everyone would listen.” Power and influence means having a voice and getting people to do what you want. She adapts this idea to the present by explaining its relationship to peer pressure, “It’s the same kind of influence, for good or bad.” Teri has taken the power a government official wields and placed it in a personal context. To do so Teri had to consider the input from the discussion and appropriate the meaning.

Lessons learned surfaced again during student writing about their study of the Trojan War. After students discussed the varying accounts they had studied in conjunction with the war and their opinions concerning whether or not the history of the war was accurate, students took the time to explain how they personally felt in a journal entry. This segment from Jim explains his thoughts on the importance of studying the Trojan War.

Studying the Trojan War is important. It teaches many lessons that could help you with your sports, school and just with your regular day. For example, in the Trojan War I think they teach the lesson to “never underestimate your opponent.” You can use this in sports because then you play your best and do not have to worry about coming back to win. It’s that important. I think about it when I play basketball. Don’t think you’re gonna win, just play hard.

Jim’s detail regarding applying lessons from the Trojan War to personal life demonstrates the type of lesson he deemed important. He was able to connect to the material through sports by stating, “Never underestimate your opponent” and how he applies that lesson when he plays sports. He did not mention the importance of corroborating sources or the potential inaccuracies of this historic event. Instead, he chose to highlight a personal connection and adapt the meaning.

Jim has made the material personal in the manner recommended by the literature (Cercadillo, 2001; Dunn, 2000).

Another area where students translated lessons from the past to make them relevant today was while studying the early governments of Greek city-states. Students were asked to read about the different structures: monarchy, democracy, autocracy, and tyranny. Teacher intent was to have students draw similarities between these early forms of government and their own lives. Prior to this exchange, students read about the varying forms of government, discussed power and influence as a correlation to ruling and were allowed time to think about and jot down thoughts concerning how this relates to their own family structure. In the exchange below, Kyle, Kevin and Kate discuss their analysis:

Teacher Is someone willing to share what their family represents in terms of government wise? Kyle, Thank you.

Kyle My family is like a democracy because everyone gets to have a say.

Teacher So, there are times when everyone gets a choice and it's all kind of equal?
Ok. Can you give me an example

Kyle When we go out to eat, they ask where we want to go.

Teacher You get to pick like what restaurant you would like to go to. So, whatever gets the most votes that's where you go? Ok. That's a really good example. Um Kevin.

Kevin My family is kind of um like a monarchy and a democracy at the same time because sometimes my parents will let me and my siblings pick somewhere to go but then sometimes they just choose.

Teacher So sometimes they kind of pull rank as parents and just say “This is what we are doing”

Kevin And sometime it is like a democracy and they give us a say.

Teacher Got it. So they’re not like tyrants, they’re not mean about it.

Kate My family is like a tyranny. [laughs]

Teacher A tyranny!?! Tell me how.

Kate Because mom chooses everything. Sometime we get a say in stuff but not always she usually chooses and we do it.

Teacher Ok. Good job. Whenever you guys take a test on this, and you will eventually, I want you to remember well, relate it back to yourself because that is how you will remember. Is it a little more clear for you now?

Directly relating political structures to their own family provided students with the opportunities to discuss the main elements of the political structure and adopt it to what they purport happens in their own lives. Students demonstrate an understanding of tyrants, democracy and monarchy through their personal connection. Statements such as “they give us a say” depict students having a voice such as with a democracy. Kevin demonstrates knowledge of the difference between monarchy and democracy in his description by stating, “Sometimes my parents will let me and my siblings pick and sometimes they choose [what we are going to do].” Ms. Stewart clarifies his response for the class to differentiate between the two types of governments referenced. Describing that the parents “pull rank” Ms. Stewart is subtly explaining the difference between monarchy and democracy. Kate, conversely, describes the tyrannical structure of decision making in her home by stating, “...she [Mom] usually chooses and we do it!” The teacher is deliberate with her goals of this lesson with the students. At the end of the

exchange she states she wants students to be able to relate the material to themselves, in that way they will remember it. These comments recall Dunn's (2000) assertion that history must be made personal in nature in order to help students connect the distant past. Endacott (2005) also discussed personal connections as a key factor in laying the foundation for relating long ago event to current ones. In the example above, students are able to see history as relevant to their everyday world through an examination of their family structure.

Applying life lessons from history or indicating an emotional link toward history are common themes of connection. Linking developments in the past to their own experience, as opposed to something far away is helpful to students' connection to the past (Dunn, 2000). When students connect to material emotionally, they are more likely to remember it and therefore apply it. (Schreck, 2011; Tileston, 2004).

Recognizing patterns in history is also a means by which students adapt the past to the present. Discovering patterns in history provides an example or acts as a template for future events (Cercadillo, 2001). It is not surprising, then, that students adapted ideas about the past to explain their importance now. For example, in the excerpt below, Sara describes the importance of learning about the Trojan War because it may assist us in knowing how to deal with the same situation if it were to happen again.

It's important because history tends to repeat itself. For example, if something like this were to happen, we would know how to handle it. It could help us know what to do and what not to do. (Sara, WP 2.2)

Sara indicates that the knowledge is important to help us in the future. She states that we need to know, "what to do and not to do." Studying past events can assist with building knowledge in

order to have potential solutions or avoid the same mistakes. We adapt ideas in order to address problems with the past, to avoid the same perils and pitfalls.

4.2 ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE STUDY OF HISTORY THROUGH WRITING AND DISCUSSION

During this study, discussion and writing activities supported students' engagement with learning history and connecting the past with the present. This section examines the ways that discussion and writing activities (1) facilitated student thinking and (2) the students' learning preferences in doing so. As students wrestled with ideas and attempted alignment and adaptation of historic events and ideas in the past to the present, sometimes it was in a clear, concise manner but other times the messy process of connecting events from the past to the present was demonstrated. To better situate the connective meanings students attempted, this section also acknowledges students' learning preferences and students' thoughts on engagement.

4.2.1 Facilitating student thinking

Classroom discussions provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the historical knowledge they have learned in order to make more personally relevant meanings. When alternate points of view are presented in a discussion, students can consider changing their original thoughts. During the exchange below, Ms. Stewart asked students what they thought of the following statement: When organizing a new religion, ancient people borrowed ideas from other religions

that already existed. In what follows, Aaron offers her viewpoint of this statement. As more students provide their perspective, Aaron's opinion changes.

Aaron: I don't like that. That is copying. You should think of your own ideas.

Linn: Just a bunch of copycats

Carol: I don't think it is good to steal anything.

Zach: Yeah, You shouldn't take things from others.

Dylan: I think each religion had their own thing. Buddhists and Hinduisms built temples for gods. They both did. Not just one. So why not Sumer?

Chris: Makes sense because it seems about impossible to make a whole new religion.

Taylor: They were copying to make something their own idea.

Haley: If you borrow ideas from the past it may help you.

Aaron: I guess I wouldn't say it was wrong to do it [copy] though. We do borrow things off of others. Sometimes to make them better like weapons, tools, food.

A majority of student responses in this excerpt declare that the sharing of religious ideas is wrong, stating that it is a form of copying. This may be due to classroom policies in reference to plagiarism. When students use each other's ideas in the classroom setting such as on homework or tests, it is considered cheating. Aaron declares borrowing ideas as "copying" showcasing her negative viewpoint to her classmates. The dialogue transitions when Dylan brings up other early religions as examples. Next, Chris mentions the difficulty of creating a new religion from scratch. Copying is then justified as a means of formulating a new idea. Haley then takes this thought a step further by stating the borrowing of ideas can be of assistance. This is an important statement because it has implications for both the past and present. Aaron's final comment is demonstrative of this. Her thinking comes full circle as she changes her response from, stealing

think of it a little bit as a verb now. What does it mean to influence someone?

Nick Influence because you could influence power over someone.

Teacher You could influence power. Lynn.

Lynn I think it's influence as well because what's more important, playing a sport, being a jerk to somebody or helping somebody with what they need and being a good person.

Teacher This is interesting. Um, are powerful people always jerks?

Students No...no...

Teacher The reason I ask that question, "Are powerful people always jerks?" is that well it seems like you guys are thinking that power equals jerkiness. Does it sometimes?

Students Yes, yeah, sometimes

Teacher It can.

Ian Sometimes if you're cocky.

Teacher What do you mean?

Ian Like, Mark Sanchez. He's the quarterback for the Jets, played at USC. He's like really good though. You might think he sucks and I think he sucks but he's a good quarterback.

Teacher But, you think he's powerful? Tell me how he is powerful.

Ian He picks apart defenses and can impact his team, tell them what to do.

(D3.1, 6:45)

The movement of this discussion presents an interesting dynamic. In the beginning of the discussion, Lynn equates playing sports to “being a jerk” and helping somebody to “being a good person.” Influence means having power over people, both good and bad. Ms. Stewart expands this point by addressing the question to the class at large. Ian then speaks up and relays how power can be good, even if it is enacted by someone who is a jerk. He uses Mark Sanchez as his example stating, “He’s like really good, though. You might think he sucks and I think he sucks but he’s a good quarterback.” In this instance, Ian references Lynn’s original point that playing a sport equals being a jerk but that it works for the football player’s role on the team. He expands her idea and helps to clarify what it means to have power.

In the next portion of the discussion, Ms. Stewart transitions the conversation to course content regarding power and influence in the Greek city-states. She asks students to connect what they have been talking about to historic events they had just been introduced to the day before.

Teacher Here’s what I need to know, I’m bringing it back home...So, those of you who think you see a connection, do you mind sharing what you think the connection is? Between power, influence and polis?

Haley To make your polis successful you want to have power and influence on the people so they can have things accessible to you and you to them.

Teacher I like that. Kevin.

Kevin You need power and influence on the lower class. Then you can make them, ‘cause they’re the lower class, do stuff like jobs around the polis so you don’t like have to.

Jim In a polis you have to have power so like people don’t just go running

around crazy and you have to have influence over other people to get them to do jobs and stuff.

Nick You need influence so that the ruler can control the city-state and power so that back in the days when people tried to attack you could defend your place and people.

Teacher This is so interesting to me. Kyle.

Kyle Just about everything connects into power and influence

Teacher It really does. Power and influence plays a huge role in history and you guys are starting to see these connections which I appreciate. Every polis in Greece operated it in a different way. They all had their own kinds of government.

Tracy I was kind of gonna say that a polis includes building and people and different jobs and like, when you think about it and hear everyone talk, in every group of people there are people either above you or below you so you'd need a different government depending on the people you had there.

Teacher That's exactly right so in every polis they have different forms of government with people kind of on top and beneath. And to understand the different polis' you had to understand who had the power and who had the influence.

(D3.1, 6:45)

Students begin to describe power and influence as supportive of a government or societal structure. For example, Kevin references using power and influence on the lower class to make them, "do jobs and stuff." Jim steps in to expand the idea but stating you need power, "so people

don't just go running around crazy" and adds Kevin's point about jobs. Staying with this theme of power and control, Nick mentions both influence, for control of the polis and power to defend the polis. Lastly, Tracy synthesizes all these ideas with her response stating, "you'd need a different government depending on the people you had there." She understands that every polis was different and begins to formulate, with the help of her classmates, that the structure of each government may be different, depending on people in the polis.

Tracy comes to this conclusion "when you think about it and hear everyone talk." Tracy has negotiated her response based on the input of her peers. She practiced reflection and considered the ideas of others in her reply. Discussion allows students to negotiate ideas as they attempt to apply meaning to history. Wilen (2004) describes the function of discussion as an oral exploration of ideas whereby students make connection between the past and present. Students require time to think and reflect in order to increase the quality of responses and to engage in skills valued in the history classroom such as comparing responses and applying knowledge in a new context. It is discussion and reflection that assist with student engagement (Newmann, 1992). The nature of student engagement stems from personal perspective. Students first begin by discussing the topic from their own point of view. They later apply their knowledge and synthesize ideas providing modern context to the past. In demonstrating the value of knowledge beyond the classroom, students engage in their classroom studies (Newmann, 1992) and can apply issues to the real world. In this case, applying real world issues to the past.

It should be noted that this discussion is largely guided by the IRE format whereby students contribute and then Ms. Stewart evaluates their response. At times students refer to their peers or expand their response, but more often it is not a true, dialogic discussion. Specifically in the first part of the discussion, Ms. Stewart calls on students individually and evaluates their

response. She asks for clarification such as, “what do you mean” and “tell me how...” for the benefit of the class. While this assists student elaboration, it is not a true discussion because it remains teacher centered and does not allow for students to question each other and formulate their own ideas. The second half of the discussion does reflect more student initiative in responding to each other and it is here that Tracy formulates her ideas based on what she has heard her peers discuss. The latter portion of the discussion is more useful to students negotiating their ideas and making meaning from the past to the present.

In this next segment, Sarah reflects on early religions as she writes in her history journal. Grounded in the idea that worshipping more than one god is wrong, Sarah is adamant in her response, however, she also contradicts herself. Sarah writes the following,

This is wrong. I don't think they should honor made up gods. I mean why put all this hard work into fictional characters? It's just making it up and not getting it from like maybe a bible or something and whoa! you do not, well, should not sacrifice your own kind. I do know that some rulers forced their ideas on people and that's not right. You shouldn't be forced. There could be another religion that is better or correct and people should have religious freedom. (WP2.1)

By stating people shouldn't honor gods but later indicating “people should have the freedom to choose,” Sarah's reflection contradicts itself. Why doesn't the freedom to choose extend to the worship of more than one god such as the Egyptians or Greeks? These are both personal belief statements but her rationale for making one statement does not apply to the next. Her position is partially grounded in the present. Sarah has connected to the past by stating her own personal thoughts and indicates, in writing, emotion (“whoa!”). As Schreck writes, “Engagement exists in the realm of feeling and contact” (2011, p. 1). Emotional connection is a

key factor in learner engagement. It is this same catalyst for engagement that is impeding her from seeing the past on its own terms. It is strange to her because it is something she does not believe in.

4.2.2 Students' learning preferences

The students interviewed for this study discussed the importance of studying history as well as describing the classroom activities and topics that engaged them. While not all of them viewed the study of history as important, they identified elements that supported their engagement in the class.

A large portion of students discussed the importance of studying history as a means to gauge where we are today. During interviews, students referred to the importance of “understanding other cultures”, “applying what was learned in the past to today”, and the concept of change over time. This section focuses on other means of engagement with the study of history.

Though not all students may participate in the discussion, the presentation of a variety of ideas can still impact their negotiation. During her interview, Liz commented on the impact of hearing what others think during a discussion and how helpful in can be. She stated,

I like having discussions and then writing about it because you get like, have feedback on information...I can go over and think about what everyone said and decide what I think (I6, 6:01).

Liz commented that discussion allow for “feedback on information.” Through participating in classroom discussion, Liz can hear what others think of her ideas and she can listen to others. Then she can, “go over and think about what everyone said and decide what I think.” Listening

to others assists in her reflection process before she writes. Discussions help her organize her thoughts and think through the topic.

Though students who take an active role in discussion are more likely to have deliberated and internalized an issue (Monahan, 2000) it does not indicate that discussion is only beneficial for those who participate. When paired with writing, students are provided the opportunity to reflect and negotiate meaning. Using both writing and discussion in tandem is helpful in this process.

Student participation in class discussion and writing tasks assist in their engagement with the past. These classroom activities impact how students view an historic topic and allow students to express their opinions. During the student interviews, 9 of the 12 students indicated their preference for discussing an historic topic first and then writing about it. Mark provides an example below:

When we were talking about if Atlantis was real or not. We read about how people thought it was real and then I changed my mind after hearing what others said because they brought up really good reasons (I9, 6:32).

Mark preferred listening to his peers to help formulate his own ideas. He changed his mind “after hearing what others said because they brought up really good reasons.” Mark evaluated the responses of his classmates while considering what he had read about the topic. This can happen within the confines of students sharing their ideas with the class as seen in the excerpt from the earlier where students are asked to respond to early religions’ development. Students began by passing judgment from their own personal point of view stating the ancient religions stole ideas and that was wrong. By the end of the exchange, the students had applied the adaptation of religious ideas as a public means with one student changing her mind based on input from others.

Self-expression

All twelve of the students interviewed referred to classroom activities that encouraged forms of self-expression such as participating in scenarios and creating maps and diagrams as a reason for enjoying the course. One activity students frequently referenced was the creation of an Olympics brochure. Students were required to develop a brochure describing ancient Greek Olympics, comparing the games in ancient Greece to modern day, and providing illustrations/graphics. Students were given the freedom to choose the organization, design, and content.

The element of choice was important for some students as they indicated in their interviews it was easier to express their thoughts when they were allowed to choose topics of interest to them. Being provided with a creative outlet permitted students to showcase their skills and demonstrate what they know visually. One student mentioned being able to “draw what they see” as important to helping to create a visual image of how the polis in Greece was constructed (I5, 2:37). Increasing student choice increases student engagement and they become more reflective about what they are learning (Riggs & Gholar). Alternate forms of presenting information are important to historical inquiry and assistive in engaging students in the study of history.

Student interest in new ideas and concepts

While almost all of the interview participants indicated the past was important to study because it helped us to better understand the present, two stated it had no effect on them today. This could be, as one student indicated, “...they might think what happened in the past is done and not that important anymore. They don’t see the connection” (I7, 1:05). Connecting past and present is the means by which student engagement in the subject is practiced. Teachers need to

actively engage student in exploring history and aligning the discipline to address student interests and learning styles (Burenheide, 2007). Teachers are encouraged to present alignment between the past and present to entice students to want to know more. It is designed to assist in student inquiry.

What is interesting about the two students who claimed disinterest in the study of history is that their reasons for being so are rooted in historical inquiry. They both wanted to learn something new. As one girl stated, “It’s boring to study stuff you already know” (I3, 3:39). Similarly, Peter has the desire to learn but laments that he has heard it all before,

I don’t like it. I feel like it’s not giving me a purpose like it’s not helping me outside of school. The stuff we learn...I’ve heard it all before. I am excited to see what the high school will be like to learn about the American Revolution and stuff.

(Peter, I10, 2:06)

When pressed for a topic he has studied this year that was of interest and he enjoyed studying, Peter responded

The one thing I liked was learning about Greece. Not at first so much because the gods and goddesses. I’ve heard all that. It was like last year it kept going each day and kind of the same stuff. But then Mrs. Stewart kept putting in more and more stuff. Now I’ve been getting to the Greek stuff I never knew! Monuments, philosophy, Greek life. And then the wars and I like that a lot more. I just didn’t know. It gives me perspective on a side of the world and where it came from. I want to know more. (I11, 6:01)

Engagement in the study of history was piqued by Peter when he was introduced to new concepts. He may not have a use for them or, in his own words, “it’s not helping me outside of school” see a connection to today at first, but he does want to learn about new ideas and people.

Peter comments, "I've heard all that. It was like last year it kept going each day and kind of the same stuff. But then Mrs. Stewart kept putting in more and more stuff. Now I've been getting to the Greek stuff I never knew!" He appears to be excited about the new ideas and people he is learning about. How a student feels about a topic will determine how much time he or she will spend engaging with it (Schreck, 2011). This is imperative as Peter concludes his thoughts about his study of Greece, saying it is important because, "It gives me perspective on that side of the world and where it came from. I want to know more."

Other students were not as adamant as Peter with regards to the unimportance of history; they did indicate an interest in learning new ideas and concepts. Their enjoyment of history is based part in the fact that they are presented with tools of inquiry they have not used before or assist their attainment of concepts.

Making inferences has really helped me think more and learn more. I take my time. I can use it in other classes. (Interview 7, 2:09)

If you are going for a job you will need to know how to write well. [Writing in] the TEXXI format is helping me to write well. I am more organized. I can see it helping me for an interview. (Interview 3, 2:35)

The Talking to the Text can help you understand what you are reading more. It can be used in other classes. Figure out ideas. (Interview 9, 2:13)

These students spoke of their connection to history based on a skill they learned. They did not necessarily draw a connection to content but addressed a skill they acquired while covering the content. Students mentioning skill as important does not apply to history directly or the manner in which they make meaning, but it is important to note they are scaffolds to assisting the past to present connection. Students stated, "I took my time" and "I am more organized" with

regards to finding inferences and writing. The last passage includes, “Figure out things.” This could refer to the attempt of meaning making or the practice of reflection. Regardless, the students recognized the importance of these skills in both their history class and as applicable to other classes and real world experience. They are included in this section based on the fact that they assisted students in engaging with discussion and writing.

In examining student responses discussed above, what becomes clear is that students begin to construct meaning based on what they see, hear, and do in class. Through classroom discussions, the manner in which students evaluate information becomes clear. Students appreciate hearing the voices of their peers in order to formulate their own opinions. When students discuss with their peers they are typically explaining their point of view. A 20-minute classroom discussion does not allow for all students to be involved via participation, but it does allot time for responses to be heard, evaluated and eventually evolve in student writing. Discussions become a key mode of inquiry in the classroom. Writing then allows for reflection of the discussion and an elaboration of their thoughts and understanding of what is being studied.

4.3 CONCLUSION

The two ways that students connected past and present in this study raise some important issues for history education. Some scholars caution against the act of presentism (Levesque, 2009; Wineburg, 2001) because, they argue it can impede students’ historical understanding. Students may view the past from their own framework leading to forced connections that may be superficial and require no real effort in interpretation of the past. Links students create are similar and not well described or expanded. They fail to dig deeper to extricate meaning. Instead,

students merge the meaning of the past with that of the present or students fail to find any similarities to use as a foundation for further inquiry because they cannot relate. Viewing history from a presentist point of view can be detrimental to their understanding as they may be quick to stereotype or dismiss the past as unimportant (Wineburg, 2001) allowing for improper connections or no connections to be made.

Indeed, this was demonstrated in the data (ex. students aligned characteristics of Greek city-states to a modern day equivalent) and did present some problematic issues. When students create linear connections it effectively equates what happened in the past and present as equal. This idea, when unaddressed, is problematic to student understanding of historical events. However, when students are able to recognize a direct use for the past in the present, they are more likely to make a connection (Riggs and Gholar, 2009; Schreck, 2011). Students find that what they are studying is still important to today in some way.

Presentism is tricky and so is navigation between the past and the present. I argue based on the finding of this study that although the lens of presentism may lead to superficial connections, it can also be used as a stepping stone to help students better make sense of the past if it is acknowledged. In presentism, students' morals may play a part in their evaluation and interpretation of the past. Past events may be filtered through the present but with an awareness of how events have influenced other events that occurred since that time. The data here suggests that as students encounter history they begin to articulate the concept of change over time. Students may equate the events in the past and present but some are also capable of recognizing these links as part of a progression. Granted, students may require assistance in elaborating their responses to articulate more sophisticated connections, but the link they forge is the first step to student engagement with historical inquiry.

Findings from the second major theme regarding students translating and adapting the past to the present indicate that students inferred lessons about the past and applied them to their own life. They also adjusted concepts to better understand their function in the past. The nature of these connections included applying personal lessons and feeling an emotional connection to events of the past. The literature suggests linking developments in the past students' experiences, as opposed to something far away is the first step in helping students connect to the past (Dunn, 2000). Through the personal connection to history, students can use their own experience to aid in their interpretations. This was evident in student discussions regarding the similarities between familial structure and early Greek city-states. Students sought out opportunities to apply what they were learning personally in some way. When students attempted to find a personal link with history, they usually avoided the pitfalls presentism holds on linear connections. The lens by which students view the past is still personal, but by adapting the message and making inferences, students transferred meanings in the past to applicable notions today. The past becomes more accessible and understandable to students.

The role of discussion and writing contributed to students' engagement in the study of history. I indicate their assistive design in helping students negotiate meaning and formulate ideas and opinions, including student preference to hear ideas before writing their own thoughts. Students did encounter logic leaps in their writing. The direct, conflating connections made by some students in their writing did not demonstrate more sophisticated connections between past and present such as identifying change over time or progression of ideas as their peers showed. I argue that this is because there is no intermediary or prompt to assist with student explanation.

The focus of student writing should be on students' active involvement in connecting and integrating ideas from course content including lecture, text, and discussion (Johnson, Holcombe, Simms & Wilson, 1993). Students lack sufficient support, at times, when provided with open-ended writing prompts and absence of other classroom activities to assist in the generation of ideas. Some students require assistance with unpacking their ideas in order to provide more clarity.

Last, student thoughts on engagement in the study of history is offered along with what they claim to be engaging about their class, including choice and acquiring new knowledge and skill sets. The findings from this chapter highlight areas for further discussion and implications for classroom practice in the next.

5.0 DISCUSSION

To this day, the problem in history education has been the failure to understand how educators can improve students' historical thinking by introducing them to disciplinary concepts and procedures allowing for [a more sophisticated understanding of the past and contemporary issues] progression in historical thinking (Levesque, 2008, pg. 31).

Researchers have carefully considered what it means to assist students in making history relevant to their present lives in terms of the basic skills they should possess and how history should be taught. Helping students relate to the past is a challenging problem for teachers due to the variety of ways students may view history. Students may create direct connections from the past to the present or they may disengage from inquiry due to an inability to understand the past on its own terms. Unfortunately, there is little guidance in the literature for precisely how teachers can help students to connect the past and present nor is there much explicit advice about the potential pitfalls of taking on such a teaching goal.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students relate the past both in their class discussion and in their writing over the course of two units of study in a middle school world history course. Answers to the questions posed in this study add to the growing body of research on students' historical thinking and engagement in the study of the past. In addition, the

answers contribute to the examination of student writing in conjunction with classroom discussion and instruction as a means to engage students in the study of history. Teachers will be able to assist students in making these connections if they have a better understanding of how students think about the past to make sense of the present.

Review of the data revealed student responses reflected meaning making by conflating the past with the present and translating and adapting the past to the present. Students described the importance of what they were learning in class as assisting them with content knowledge, fulfilling basic needs in society or providing a similar use from the past to today. Students connected the past to the present by making similarity comparisons as supported by the literature and indicated students understood the concept of change over time. Students also took ideas in the past and applied them to the present. For example, students discussed and wrote about events in the past and indicated personal lessons that could be taken away from their study of the event. They also discussed their feelings concerning the event being studied in addition to their own personal perspective in passing judgment regarding the past. These characteristics are supported by the literature concerning how students assign meaning.

This chapter discusses the practical implications that arise from the findings of this study. First, potential reasons for the problems students may have when attempting to navigate the connection between past and present are discussed. Second, suggestions are presented for helping students to make their study of history relevant. Lastly, suggestions are made for instruction in the social studies and further research.

5.1 STUDENT CONNECTIONS AND MEANING MAKING

The findings in this study supported the theoretical concepts addressed in Chapter Two. In particular, students tended to make sense of history by assigning meaning to the historical events they were studying that were personal in nature and by finding similarities between the past and present. Additionally, a few students found engaging with history problematic due to disinterest and stating studying history was unimportant to them.

5.1.1 The nature of the relationship students develop with the past

Theorists contend that when students are able to recognize a direct use for the past in the present, they are more likely to make a connection and this connection assists in their engagement in the topic being studied (Riggs and Gholar, 2009; Schreck, 2011). However, as discussed in the findings, a tension existed in students' thinking when they attempted to connect past events to their present experiences. The presentist perspective students used has the potential to assist or impede understanding. For example, using the lens of the present may aid students in finding similarities between the past and the present but how they support these similarities may lack depth. For example, when Stephen attempts a connection between the Greek themes of comedy and tragedy with entertainment we have today by writing, "...without it TV shows and movies wouldn't exist today." This comment actually requires more development. Stephen's statement lacks the proper examples to assist this connection. His rationale jumps from Greek theatre to modern day television with no reference to the early playwrights or the themes of comedy or tragedy discussed in class or his text. Clearly, it is not an easy task to find something in the past

to which one can relate and therefore connecting the past and the present can be forced and superficial.

Searching for a direct link and forging similarities between ideas and events in the past and present can be a good starting point for a larger discussion with the class to help students understand the concept of change over time. When left alone or unaddressed, students miss a potentially deeper connection. For example, when Brad writes, “The Stone Age has been helpful to today because without them we would never have cars, trucks or boats. Without the wheel and the sail, there wouldn’t be as much advancement in transportation,” he assumes that we would never have cars without the invention of the wheel. This explanation lacks depth. Brad is connecting to the past because he can see a use for it in the present. His alignment of ideas is a good first step but he does not address the evolution of these ideas. A class discussion or additional instruction from the teacher would help to expand Brad’s idea.

During the unit on Greece, writing assignments revealed some direct connections but as a whole, students were more apt to elaborate responses and apply what they were learning to their own lives. Negotiating and adapting a link between the past and present can assist students with key historical concepts such as change over time. Indeed, students often addressed this concept in their writing. The process of this negotiation is integral to historical understanding due to the critical thinking skills involved. Students must reflect on development and change, generalize and apply information (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997). Instead of ignoring or casting aside an idea because it is not exactly the same, students should attempt to adapt and apply meaning to the present.

This leads me to believe that students’ trouble with developing plausible and significant connections to the past is due to the difficulty they face relating to the distant past and finding

relevant examples. Students made superficial connections due to the fact that they sought similarities as a means to relate the past to the present. This was due in part to the presentist lens by which students view history and the types of questions the teacher posed.

5.1.2 Ms. Stewart's pedagogy and instructional strategies

Important to this study is the manner in which Ms. Stewart taught students to connect personally to history. As stated in Chapter Three, Ms. Stewart's goal for her classroom is to help students relate to history on a personal level. Her strategy is representative of both the literature on student engagement in the classroom and the literature specific to historical thinking. They assert that instruction must be relevant and personal if students are to connect in any way that allows them to begin to negotiate meaning (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Dunn, 2000 Newmann, 1992; Shreck, 2011). While an important pedagogical goal, the difference between what learner engagement and historical thinking skills look like impacts instruction and thus how students come to connect the past with the present in this study.

Engaging students is important because it stems from accessing their prior knowledge (Schreck, 2011). Essentially, instruction begins with identifying what the students already know. Ms. Stewart uses this approach to assist in piquing curiosity and reaffirming student knowledge, acknowledging that students may be at different stages. It is evident that Ms. Stewart supports students to share personal meaning to assist in how students relate the past to the present. As Riggs and Gholar (2009) contend, "Teachers must reach beyond themselves to ensure that what they teach students connects with their everyday lives" (p. 110). She often poses questions such as, "have you ever felt like..." in an attempt to place students in history and provide an emotional link to the past. The writing prompts used in class reflect this approach as well.

Asking students “How has the Golden Age of Greece impacted you today” or “Do you think the Stone Age is important to us today” attempts to assist their connection between the past and the present. These writing prompts offer students a choice in what to write about, thus indicating what the students finds important.

However, the design of such questions can be problematic. These types of questions may, as the engagement literature suggests, ask students to find similarities between the past and their lives today. Unfortunately, this type of prompt can also assist students with conflating the past with the present, leading to surface level connections that do not address larger themes in history or the big picture. The questions are one-dimensional in design. They ask for comparisons and do not require students to explain the nature of these connections.

In addition to writing prompt design, the nature of discussion in Ms. Stewart’s class at times leads to the same type of direct, similar connections that do not allow for students to reflect and formulate deeper meanings. The default structure for most classroom discussions is the IRE/IRF model whereby the teacher questions the class, student responds and that response is evaluated. There is little room in this structure for the free flow of ideas among students. It is a teacher-centered model that limits student participation and is commonplace in Ms. Stewart’s instruction. As Gordon (2006) explains, moving to a student focused discussion increases student involvement in addition to promoting meaning application. This is the type of model called for in the history education literature (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Students are more apt to talk out problems and ideas, listen to peers' input, and draw their own conclusions when they are in charge of the discussion and the teacher takes the position of moderator. In essence, they are engaging in historical understanding through their use of evaluation, corroboration and synthesis.

The historical thinking literature suggests that student application of knowledge is more important to historical inquiry as it relies more on critical thinking skills. This implies taking the engagement theories a step further and adapting them for use in the social studies classroom. Ms. Stewart, is doing exactly what the school administration and current reform efforts suggest to make learning relevant and personal. What is needed now is to adapt what constitutes general student engagement for use on a content level in the social studies.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

Proactive measures on behalf of teachers are integral to proper practice, this includes paying close attention to student interpretation and the problems that arise when actively engaging in interpretation of the past (Seixas, 1998). The manner in which writing and discussion strategies are implemented in the classroom can assist students in their meaning making of the past. Because both writing and discussion allow students to work with critical thinking skills that are an important facet of historical thinking, their use in the classroom is important.

Be wary of similarity statements

When deconstructing student ideas and aligning events in time, it is important to be watchful for connections students make based on surface-level similarities. Statements such as “Greece had a democracy and we have a democracy” are comparative but do not increase student understanding or address the differences of the two and how that came to be. The potential for deeper meaning and assisting students with applying the concept of change over time is present. Similarity and comparative examples used by students offer the opportunity to elaborate responses and assist in a more meaningful connection.

Design writing assignments similar to discussion

Sometimes, students attempt connections in writing assignments making it more difficult to ask for clarification similar to follow-up questions in a discussion. Students lack sufficient support, at times, when provided with open-ended writing prompts and absence of other classroom activities to assist in the generation of ideas. They require assistance with unpacking their ideas in order to provide more clarity. Reconstructing writing assignments that allow for follow-up prompts, similar to those recommended in discussion (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010; Edwards & Mercer, 1987) such as “tell me more” provide students with an opportunity to expand or elaborate. It is the beginning step as students begin to learn about and practice coherent writing skills. It may seem disjointed in the beginning to ask a series of questions but could lead to more elaborative responses.

Cross-curricular connections

One reason students may have engaged in creating connections between concepts, ideas and events in the past and present is because they were able to apply what or how they were learning. When discussing their interests and explaining why history is important to study, some students indicated processes they learned could be applied to other classes. Content was mentioned as well, in some cases, but interesting was the implication of using skill sets learned in history class to other courses. Students referenced modes of inquiry such as using cause and effect strategies in a science course, using writing strategies in an English course, and clarity in their writing helping in high school and potential jobs in the future. It may be helpful to seek out opportunities to compare process in other subjects so students see relevance and can apply to both. This may boost engagement and reinforce the importance of the concept being studied. An

approach such as this can be especially helpful and attainable in middle school environments where teachers typically work together in teams when planning curriculum and instruction.

The reciprocal relationship of writing and discussion

During student interviews, all but one student mentioned their preference for discussing topics in class before formulating their own opinion on the issue. The corroboration among peers was assistive to student reflection. However, more students are apt to participate in class if they have thought about a topic ahead of time, including having some ideas written down (Dornan, Rosen & Wilson, 1997). Students need to be able to express their point of view concerning what they learned and how they view what is being studied. This is an important aspect that teachers must observe carefully. Teachers must listen to what the students are actually saying and recognize the links and connections they are attempting to make. Teachers helping students deconstruct and understand historical material requires using literacy practices as a scaffold to ask questions about the information (Wineburg & Martin, 2004). Assistance in this manner will help students clarify their ideas and teachers evaluate what the student is actually saying.

Based on the findings in this study, students indicated they preferred using discussions to assist in their evaluation of the material before beginning a writing assignment and doing so produced more elaborative responses. My recommended approach to assist students in making meaning of the past to the present includes pairing writing and discussion together. Using writing and discussion as complements to one another, as opposed to separate instructional strategies may better support students' critical thinking. My design structure (Table 3) centers around the reciprocal relationship writing and discussion possess.

Table 3. Design structure

Step	Activity	Skill
Brainstorm (Write and Post)	Introduce chosen topic or theme to class. Ask class to list any and all prior knowledge	Recall Identify

	regarding the topic	Application
Big Idea Question A (Write, Discuss & Post)	Ask first question	Application Explanation
Big Idea Question B (Write, Discuss & Post)	Ask second question This question should be related to and expand upon Question A	Application Explanation
Breakdown (Discuss)	Ask students: 1. What is the relationship between Question A & B? 2. During the course of this activity have your thoughts on, position of, or knowledge of information found on the brainstorming list changed? Why?	Analyze Compare Contrast Corroboration
Briefing (Write)	Students write a recap of the discussion describing what happened from brainstorming to the breakdown. Students should include: 1. the big questions asked 2. summary of responses 3. identify if ideas/concepts changed or stayed the same during the process (from brainstorming to briefing), and provide an explanation as to why they think that is	Synthesize Explanation

Step One of this discussion design begins with brainstorming. It is important to assess what students know. It also creates a reference point the teacher can mention during discussion. Steps Two and Three involve designing two questions that are similar yet expand upon the ideas of each. Additional questions may be added here to continue the process. Allow the students time to record their thoughts after the question is presented. Address the question to the entire class and record responses for the class to see. Step Four asks students to begin to break down ideas and concepts. The teacher goes back to the first question and asks students to identify any patterns or similarities between responses to questions A, B and the brainstorming list. It is at this point the teacher can identify strong relationships and potential problems in the connections students are

making and address them with the class. Last, students are required to write a briefing explaining the contents of the discussion and evaluate the information elicited from the discussion.

Throughout this process it is important to provide students with opportunities to both see and hear the material. Posting student responses will be helpful to comparing answers and finding similarities or discrepancies in student thought. A template of the suggested design structure could be adapted for students to record responses during the discussion and provide a common space for reference when they prepare their briefing. Each stage of the discussion is designed to engage students in using critical thinking skills. Intent for this design is to approach class discussions as another potential source of information similar to lectures and the textbook. Discussions should help students negotiate ideas and assist teachers with evaluating student responses in order to facilitate the negotiation. It also encourages students to do the same. During discussion times, it is important to remember that vocal does not necessarily signify active and vice versa.

5.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Research suggests that student negotiation of meaning lays the groundwork for historical thinking (Seixas, 1994; Wineburg, 2001) in that it assists students in thinking critically. However, little research has been conducted with regards to how this is facilitated by the teacher. While studies have been conducted, including this one, focusing on students and engagement, teacher intent would be another lens by which this could be done.

Following teacher intent from all phases of planning, implementation and instruction to compare it with student outcomes would be beneficial to the literature. We know teachers want

to engage students in the study of history, but what does that mean to the individual teacher? For Ms. Stewart, her intent was to have students personally relate to the material. This is a foundational strategy of the student engagement literature referenced in Chapter Two. We know, based on the findings of this study that students engaged in additional manners, including finding public meaning. Though the intent was personal other outcomes existed. Further research into teacher intent, paired with inquiry regarding instruction and student outcomes would be valuable as this study focused mainly on student responses.

Focusing on intent, instruction and outcome has wider implications for practitioner research and teacher training. Teachers willing to research their own classrooms have access to valuable information regarding their teaching practices and the learning of their students. Through reflection they then can address best teaching practices and modify as needed. The same can be applied to pre-service teachers. Understanding the tandem between intent and outcomes can assist pre-service teachers as they begin working with methods of instruction.

Shifting focus in the other direction, research that investigates students' negotiation and meaning making on assignments without specific teacher intent would be revealing as well. Is this something students conduct naturally? What does this say about the learner engagement literature and social studies instruction?

The middle school classroom involved in this study, while not generalizable to larger groups, was an average class. Students in this classroom were not placed on the "higher track" for coursework or advanced classes, nor were any placed with an IEP or diagnosed with learning disabilities. Further research conducted with low-level learners, including ESL and ELL may assist researchers to better recognize strategies that may engage learning at multiple levels in the social studies classroom. As more and more students become mainstreamed and classroom

teachers are provided with fewer resources, instructional assistance in this area would be beneficial (Case & Obenchain, 2006). A relatively few number of students who participated in this study were confronted with an inability to engage on some level with their study of history. Attempting this study with a variety of learning abilities will add to the literature concerning student engagement and help to identify teaching strategies that may be beneficial to below-average learners and those who require more learning support.

Similar to the focus on low-level learners, using gender as a lens by which to conduct the study would add to the current call in the social studies (Barton, 2008; Crocco, 2008) to investigate differences in teaching and learning. Social studies education is ripe for inquiry due to the general lack of gender specific research. Understanding learning theory and evaluating how students learn is important as well but may not be as enlightening without correlating research concerning student backgrounds and identities, including gender.

Beneficial to the current literature would be to explore how students are approaching curricular materials and teaching techniques. Researching boys and girls, examining their participation and social relations in the classroom environment and comparing those observations with individual interviews would be enlightening for social studies researchers. Knowledge construction is integral to understanding history. A mere memorization of facts and recall do not demonstrate understanding. Knowledge construction could be demonstrated through discussion of key facts and sorting out inconsistencies, questioning information instead of simply accepting information. Exploring gendered identities and perspectives can help us to better understand how students engage in these activities and make sense of history.

The same can be said for attempting to results based on ethnic backgrounds. While research cited in Chapter Two includes references to studies regarding ethnic minorities unable

to see themselves in history and thus disengaging (Cercadillo, 2000; Epstein, 2000) it would be beneficial to conduct this research with populations of students that are not represented here. When research is conducted with a variety of students with multiple learning abilities and backgrounds, a clearer picture of student meaning making and engagement in history will be determined.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the extent to which middle school students negotiated meaning and sought connections between the past and the present in their writing and discussion over the course of two units of study in a World History classroom. Major findings included students were able to make meaning of the past by relating the past to today through current events, finding similarities and forging a connection, and adapting events in the past to fit today. Student often sought to describe a practical, useful connection of the past in the present that can be problematic and beneficial with regards to presentism and the lenses by which we view the past. These findings have implications for how students connect to and engage with history and how instruction can be structured to assist with eliciting more elaborative responses and student engagement.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR CHILD-SUBJECT TO ACT AS A PARTICIPANT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Connecting Past and Present in a Middle School Classroom

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Michelle Anderson
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Why is this research being done?

Your child is invited to participate in a research study of middle school students' writing activities that promote connecting the past to the present in their social studies class. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how students make meaning of the past to inform the present. The University of Pittsburgh and the Norwin School District have agreed to cooperate in this research.

Who is being asked to take part in this research study?

Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she is a student in Mrs. Palmer's Social Studies course. All students in two sections of Mrs. Palmer's World History Social Studies courses are being invited to participate in this study (approximately 50 students).

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, we would ask him/her to do the following things:

Some discussions based on the writing prompts and instructional content that your child is involved in will be audio recorded- he/she only needs to participate as he/she normally would. These audio recordings will be transcribed and analyzed for the ways in which material is presented to the students and how students relate to the past throughout the discussion.

Other data that will be collected from your child, should you choose to allow your child to participate, include classroom artifacts related to your child's interpretation of history (e.g., written responses to writing prompts, assigned essays, etc.).

Your child may be asked to be interviewed about how he/she developed historic interpretations based on both instructional activities and the writing prompts. The interview will take no more

than 30 minutes to complete. During the interview I will ask your child to reflect on how he/she prepared and constructed the essay. Questions such as “Why did you choose to discuss *X* as a part of your essay?” or “Do you think it is important to study history? Why/why not?” represent the types of questions that would be asked during these interviews.

These interviews will take place during your child’s free period or as a part of his/her social studies class. He/She will not be removed from another class. Your child’s participation in these interviews is entirely voluntary and will not impact his/her relationship with Mrs. Palmer or his/her grade in Mrs. Palmer’s course. I will not collect any data from your child’s school records.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this research study?

Your child may feel anxiety about participating in a research study. Your child may feel embarrassed about participating in an interview or by having her or his participation in everyday class activities audio recorded. The confidentiality of your child’s responses (the ideas that your child’s name will not be linked to things that your child says or does during his/her participation in this research study) may be breached.

What are the possible benefits from taking part in this study?

Your child will not benefit from this study. However, the findings from this study may inform how history is taught and writing approached in middle school classrooms, including Mrs. Palmer’s classroom.

Who will know about my child's participation in this study?

The records of this study will be kept as confidential (private) as possible. Research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet and in a password protected computer. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child or Norwin Middle School. Data collected related to students who choose not to participate in the study will not be used in any reporting of the results of this study.

Is my child's participation in this research study voluntary?

Your child's participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will not affect how your child participates in classroom activities. Your decision to allow your child to participate in this study will not affect your child's current or future relations with your child's course instructor, Norwin Middle School; Norwin School District; or the University of Pittsburgh. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your child's course grade in any way.

May I withdraw, at a future date, my consent for my child to participate in this research study?

You may withdraw, at any time, your consent for your child's participation in this research study.

Your decision to withdraw your consent for your child to participate in this study will not affect how your child participates in classroom activities. To formally withdraw your consent for your child's participation in this research study you should provide a written and dated notice of this decision to Ms. Anderson at the address listed on the first page of this form.

Your decision to withdraw your consent for your child's participation in this research study will not affect how your child participates in classroom activities. Your decision to allow your child to participate in this study will not affect your child's current or future relations with your child's course instructor, Norwin Middle School; Norwin School District; or the University of Pittsburgh. Your decision to withdraw consent for your child's participation will not affect your child's course grade in any way.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by a qualified individual or by the principal investigator, Ms. Anderson at the telephone number listed on the first page. I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by Ms. Anderson.

I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations in the event that the research team is unavailable.

I understand that, as a minor (age less than 18 years), my child is not permitted to participate in this research study without my consent. Therefore, by signing this form, I give consent for his/her participation in this research study.

Parent's Name (print)

Relationship to Participant (Child)

Parent's Signature

Date

ASSENT

This research has been explained to me, and I agree to participate

Signature of Child-Subject

Date

Child's Printed Name

CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research to the above-named individuals, and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individuals had about his study have been answer, and I will always be available to address future questions, concerns or complaints as they arise. I further certify that no research component of this protocol was begun until this consent form was signed.

Investigator's Signature

Date

Investigator's Printed Name

APPENDIX B

STUDENT DATA

Student Data	When Collected	Research Question Addressed	How Analyzed
<p>Class Discussions:</p> <p>3- Unit One: Prehistory/Civilization Review</p> <p>3- Unit Two: Intro to Greek Civilization</p>	<p>September- October</p> <p>October - November</p>	1 & 2	<p>Use of coding structures— codes were created and revised based on the reoccurrence of themes across categories and responses</p> <p>Response Comparison</p>
<p>Writing Assignments:</p> <p>3- Unit One: Prehistory/Civilization Review</p> <p>3- Unit Two: Intro to Greek Civilization</p>	<p>September - October</p> <p>October - November</p>	1 & 2	<p>Use of coding structures— codes were created and revised based on the reoccurrence of themes across categories and responses</p> <p>Response Comparison</p>
<p>Interviews (12)</p>	<p>November 11 & 18</p>	1 & 2	<p>Use of coding structures— codes were created and revised based on the reoccurrence of themes across categories and responses</p> <p>Question #7 from interview protocol</p>

Research Questions-

3. How do students make connections between the past and present?
 - a. In what ways do students make content relevant to the present?
 - b. In what ways do students make content relevant to their lives?
4. When given the opportunity in writing and discussion, in what ways are students engaging with distant events in the past?

APPENDIX C

WRITING PROMPTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

Unit One: Pre-History and Early Civilization Review

Data Collected in Order of Occurrence

September 9: Discussion (Based on participation in historical simulation game):

Our basic needs related to prehistoric man

1. What did you learn from engaging in the simulation activity?
2. How might this information apply to prehistoric peoples?
3. What did you learn about yourself?
4. What did you learn about prehistoric culture?

September 9: Journal Entry Prompt:

- Have developments during the Neolithic revolution been helpful in your life today? Explain your response-why or why not.

September 10: Discussion Questions (Based on classroom scenario):

1. How is a civilization different from just a group of people living in the same area?
2. Have the civilizations we have been discussing similar to ours?
3. What common characteristics do we share?
4. Which ones are interesting or surprising to you? Why?
5. We will soon be starting a unit on ancient civilizations. What do you think of when you hear the word *ancient*?

6. Could we possibly have anything in common with those civilizations? What do you think?

September 20: Journal Writing Prompt:

- Epic of Gilgamesh- What do you believe is the main idea of the story? Have you ever felt like the man in the story? Explain using an example.

September 20: Discussion Questions

(based on writing assignment and reading of excerpt from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*)

1. What is happening in the story? Let's retell it in our own words.
2. What is the main idea of the story?
3. Have you ever felt like the man in the story?
4. What do you think trying to teach us?
5. What can it tell us about Sumerian culture?
6. What are your final thoughts on this piece of ancient literature?

September 27: Journal Writing Prompt (also briefly discussed in class):

- Ancient Sumerians and other early civilizations often sacrificed humans to the gods. They did this because they *honestly* believed that if they sacrificed humans to the gods, then the gods would give them things like nice weather and good crops. We know the gods weren't real, but the ancient people believed in them 100 percent. Knowing this, do you feel that sacrificing humans was the right thing for them to do **at the time**? Why or why not?

Unit Two: Foundations of Ancient Greece

Data Collected in Order of Occurrence

October 1: Journal Writing Prompt:

- Do you notice any similarities between the polis/city-state and our cities today? Explain your response with an example.

October 8: Journal Writing Prompt:

- Do you think it is important to study the Trojan War today? Why or why not?

October 21: Discussion: Power and influence in ancient Greece

1. What is power?
2. What is influence?
3. What is more important, power or influence?
4. Why do you think __ is more important?

October 22: Discussion: Compare your family to a government of the Greek city-states

1. Elicitation of student responses, asking them to elaborate and support their answer

October 25: Journal Writing Prompt:

- Think back on our study so far of Greece. Do you see Greek influence in our world today? Do you think they are important? Explain your response using an example.

November 4: Discussion: (Lecture identifying characteristics; Discussion asking students to apply Greek themes to modern day) The Greek Arts

1. Comparison of Greek dramatic and comedic elements in TV and movies today

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions	Addresses Question	Research
Tell me your favorite thing about being in 7 th grade. What activities to you enjoy doing?	Rapport Building Questions	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why do you think history is a subject taught in school? 2. Explain why you think it is important or not important to study history. 3. How do you think you will use what you have learned so far in class this year –OR- In what ways have you used what you have learned so far this year? 4. Over the course of this school year, you have studied a variety of historic events. Tell me about your favorites. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why was it your favorite? 5. Which was your least favorite? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why? 6. Describe the assignments or activities you particularly enjoyed this year. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why do you think you enjoyed them so much? 	Q2-	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Let's take a closer look at your history journal you completed for this class. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How did it relate to what you have been discussing in class? b. Describe what you were required to do. c. Talk me through your writing: How did you come up with this idea? d. Why did you decide to write about (X)? 	Q1- Q2-	

<p>e. What, in particular, prompted you to discuss (X)?</p> <p>f. How did this idea (X) lead to (Y)?</p> <p>g. What classroom activities helped you with your writing?</p>	
<p>8. Let's take a moment and look over the following events (cards with events). Do you remember writing about any of these events in your history journal?</p> <p>9. Which ones do you think connect to today? Why do you think that?</p> <p>10. Why don't you think these cards (ones left over) apply to today?</p> <p>7 Event Cards: <i>Neolithic Revolution, Egyptians, Hammurabi's Code, Mummification, The Trojan War, The Greek City-States, Greek Governments, Greek Philosophers</i></p>	<p>Q1-</p> <p>Q2-</p>
<p>Thank students for their participation. Ask if they have any questions.</p>	<p>Closing Questions</p>

Research Questions—

1. How do students make connections between the past and present?
 - a. In what ways do students make content relevant to the present?
 - b. In what ways do students make content relevant to their lives?
2. When given the opportunity in writing and discussion, in what ways are students engaging with distant events in the past?

APPENDIX E

BASIS FOR CODING STRUCTURE

Category	Definition	Examples
<i>Presentism</i> (Seixas, 1998; Wineburg, 2000)	Viewing the past from the lens of the present; public historical significance	dismiss events in the past as stupid, make stereotypical judgments, view people in the past as not being as smart as today
<i>Strangeness of the Past</i> (Wineburg, 2000)	Viewing the past as unrelatable	unable to make a relationship with the past; difficult to find similarities; hard to comprehend what life was like
<i>Making the past personal</i> (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Dunn, 2000)	Drawing connections based on personal experiences or knowledge; application to today; having feelings for past events; significance is personal in nature	perspective recognition, caring about or having an interest in the past, a desire to help someone in the past or feeling badly about an event in the past and responding to a situation in the present based on a reaction to a past event.
<i>Sameness</i> (Grant, 2003)	Similar to presentism- using the same lens- but views the past as an alignment of the present	Makes a direct relation from the past to today; uses past events to explain current (similarities)

APPENDIX F

DATA CODES

Research Question 1: How do students make connections between the past and present?

- a. In what ways do students make content relevant to the present?
- b. In what ways do students make content relevant to their lives?

Theme	Category		Explanation
Public (PU-)			The student discusses a public connection to the past. Views the past as:
	-knowledge	-K)	Helping build knowledge base; content
	-basic needs	-BN)	A contribution to fulfilling societal needs
	-use	-U)	Something that is physically used today
Private (PE-)			The student discusses a private connection to the past. Views the past as:
	-lessons	-L)	Teaching a lesson that applies to self
	-emotional		A personal connection; emphasized a feeling or emotion;

		-E)	empathetic
	-disconnect	-D)	Unimportant; can not see a connection
	-judgmental	-J)	Sees it as good or bad based on personal beliefs or morals
	-use	-U)	application; speaks of history as having a personal impact as opposed to societal

Research Question 2: When given the opportunity in writing and discussion, in what ways are students engaging with distant events in the past?

The supporting responses students used when connecting the past and present were examined according to where they occurred in the data (discussions, writing prompts, interviews)

Supporting Response (SR-)			The support for the connection the student makes is or indicates:
	-logic leap	-LL)	Incongruent; there seems to be something missing. The idea of connecting to the past is there but is not as concrete as others; it is indirect
	-change over time	-CT)	events from their inception may have been altered somewhat but are still basically the same and still hold influence today
	-weak	-W)	unsupported or missing
	-strong	-S)	comparative; provides an example

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