EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REFLECT CURRENT RESEARCH ON HISTORICAL THINKING AND UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which teacher beliefs and practices at the high school level reflect current research on historical thinking and understanding. The topic is significant as teachers are a crucial variable in a child’s education and evidence over the years has revealed that students have long struggled in developing conceptual awareness and higher order thinking skills that contribute to historical thinking and understanding. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. To what extent do teacher beliefs and practice reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding?
2. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by their professional development?
3. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by the context in which they work?

This research project is comprised of a multi-site case study where history teachers at three Southeastern Massachusetts high schools participated. The study triangulates data by using interviews, document analysis, and observation to provide the rich data necessary for analysis of the research questions. Vygotsky’s constructivist sociocultural learning theory was used as a lens to inform this study.

A number of themes emerged from this study. Most notable is that emphasis on disciplinary skills and concepts associated with historical understanding and thinking varies from teacher to teacher. Another significant theme emerging from this study is that influential and supportive peers are strong influences on how teachers approach their craft. These findings can help inform future professional development for history teachers.
Key Words: Historical Understanding; Historical Thinking; Constructivist Learning Theory; Teacher Beliefs; Teacher Pedagogical Practice; Teaching and Context
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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem of Practice

In the opening of his 2001 book, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, cognitive psychologist Sam Wineburg commented on American students’ lack of historical awareness states:

Considering the vast differences between those who attended high school in 1917 and the near universal enrollments of today, the stability of students’ ignorance is amazing. The whole world has turned on its head, but one thing has stayed the same: Kids don’t know history (pg. viii).

Wineburg went on to comment that the focus should not be on what kids don’t know but instead examine what they do know and why and how they know it. As a teacher of history for nineteen years, Wineburg’s suggestion to explore why and how students know what they do strongly resonated. Why is it that some students seem to understand history while others struggle with the topic? Further, what role does the teacher have in the development of historical understanding in their students?

The constructivist theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, and others support that high school aged students are cognitively able to develop advanced levels of understanding (Hallam, 1967; Vygotsky, 1994; Bruner, 1977). Research has shown that students can exhibit many of the core disciplinary concepts and skills identified by Peter Lee (2005) in his synthesis of current research on historical thinking and understanding. Among the concepts included by Lee are the critical examination of evidence, the explanation of long and short-term causes and effects of historic events, historical empathy, construction of historical narratives that emanate from their understandings, and other concepts regularly employed by seasoned professionals.
In considering why many high school students have difficulty understanding history the role of the teacher is critical (Barton and Levstik, 2003; VanSledright, 2011). It is the teacher’s responsibility to create an environment that is conducive to student learning. The teacher, through classroom interactions, can establish an environment where students can develop the core concepts and skills associated with historical thinking and understanding (Levesque, 2008). This is not to say that the teacher is solely responsible for student learning. It is, in fact, a shared endeavor but the teacher’s position is, nonetheless, significant. With this in mind, the problem of practice for this study centered on the extent to which teachers understand and support the development of the core concepts and thinking skills associated with historical understanding as defined by current thinking and research in the area of historical understanding, and the degree to which their professional development and the context in which they work impacted their own understanding and teaching of historical understanding.

**Significance**

The development of historical thinking and understanding in students is significant not only for the individual student but also for the collective good of the nation and the global community. The skills that comprise historical thinking and understanding are skills that are essential for productive membership in a pluralistic, democratic society (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Wineburg, 2001). Understanding causality, continuity and change, and evidence are important if citizens are to think critically about the decisions they are encouraged to partake in. Also important, as Bain (2005) commented is that history “shows the light and dark side of humanity” (p. 71) and is central to showing what it is to be human. History can humanize people and be “a tool to change how we think” (Wineburg, 2001, p. ix). Changing how we think is increasingly important as we progress through the 21st century. As the world becomes evermore
interconnected through advances in communication and trade, historical concepts and skills become more significant (VanSledright, 2009). They help us to think critically, seek evidence, and understand alternative points of view. These concepts and skills take on increased importance as we are introduced to increasingly diverse thoughts and perspectives.

Despite the presence of literature supporting the development of historical thinking and understanding few students develop such competence (Wineburg, 2001; Barton and Levstik, 2003; Levesque, 2008). Levesque (2008) comments that today’s students are taught about history and the facts associated with it but not taught how to do history. What students lack according to Levesque are the disciplinary skills and concepts that support historical study. These skills are not acquired in everyday life: they need to be cultivated (Lee, 2005). If we fail to cultivate these concepts, Wineburg’s observation that “kids don’t know history” (Wineburg, 2001, p. XX) will continue to ring true.

As previously stated, the role of the teacher as a facilitator in the development of a student’s historical thinking and understanding is critical. The teacher creates the learning environment that promotes historical understanding (VanSledright, 2011). With the teachers guidance students can acquire the core disciplinary concepts and skills that underlay historical thinking and understanding and can help students identify bias, understand why things happen and determine what is significant, among other things. Importantly, these skills can help students become more critically aware decision makers as they increasingly partake in the opportunities society offers (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Gardner and Boix-Mansilla (2006) identify disciplinary understanding as the most advanced way of approaching and investigating the past.
Despite the acknowledged importance of the teacher in students’ development of historical thinking and understanding recent research revealed that students are not being introduced to disciplinary thinking within the field of history. Failure to impart historical understanding to students can leave them ill prepared to take part in our increasingly pluralistic world (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Instead of cultivating historical thinking and understanding, teachers are busy covering content for state required exams and often revert to cultural norms that promote history teaching as a fact-gathering endeavor (Wineburg, 2001; Barton and Levstik, 2003; VanSledright, 2011). Wineburg (2001) notes that teachers spend very little time engaged in the study of how to teach students the disciplinary skills and concepts that underlay historical thinking and understanding. When this happens teachers tend to revert to teaching how they experienced it or how it is being modeled by their peers. What results are students who are passive learners and not thinkers that construct their own narratives about the past (Levesque, 2008). To help advance the cause of historical thinking and understanding this study explored why teachers make the decisions they do when teaching history. What beliefs and values contributed to those choices and what impact did their professional development and the context of their teaching have on these decisions and their resultant teaching practice.

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

By exploring teacher beliefs and practice relative to historical thinking and understanding this study looks at how teachers approach the teaching of history and why they approach it this way. In doing this, the study also considered the role of professional development as a factor in shaping teacher’s beliefs regarding the teaching of history as well as their practice. The study also considered the influence that the work environment had on teachers’ belief systems and practice. The knowledge gained from this study provide schools with data specific to history
instruction that can ultimately be used to enhance the content and design of professional
development opportunities in schools with the intent of improving history instruction.

From an intellectual perspective this study not only revealed the extent to which
disciplinary concepts associated with the teaching of history have been implemented but also
revealed limited variations of teaching methodology among the different populations explored
across different schools in the study. VanSledright (2011) acknowledges that schools tend to
develop self-perpetuating cultures of success and failure. He points out that wealthy suburban
schools tend to do better on high stakes tests and often have higher pay scales than their urban
counterparts. VanSledright further contends that these wealthy suburban schools spend less time
teaching to the test leaving teachers more time to experiment in their lessons and raise the level
of their teaching. This lends itself to a culture of success. The findings from this study call into
question aspects of VanSledright’s conclusions as teachers from each of the schools employs
similar pedagogical methodology in the classrooms observed. Another revelation is found in the
fact that there is no systematic approach to the teaching of history. Each teacher covers content
that is required by their respective curriculums, but the concepts and skills that are developed are
left to the discretion of the individual teacher. Each of the areas mentioned above speak to larger
issues that are society-wide and can further inform what is already known in these areas.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the three following research questions.

1. To what extent do teacher beliefs and practice reflect current thinking and research on
   historical understanding?

2. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by
   their professional development?
3. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by the context in which they work?

Theoretical Framework

The constructivist theories of Lev Vygotsky provide the theoretical framework for this study. More specifically, this study draws largely on Vygotsky’s advocacy that social interaction is of central importance to an individual’s development. While most of Vygotsky’s work and the early part of this chapter center on child development in more recent years his work has been applied to adult learning. The universality of Vygotsky’s constructivist theories are appropriate as the present study’s emphasis on teacher beliefs and practices necessitates a theory that incorporates adult learning.

Vygotsky and constructivism. Loosely defined, constructivism supports the view that learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge. Constructivism deals with the cognitive processes in which the learner develops his or her knowledge. In emphasizing knowledge construction rather than knowledge reproduction multiple perspectives and interpretations are acknowledged. It counters the traditional teaching model that has the teacher at the center of activity and the student as a passive receptacle of information (Caprio, 1994). With this in mind, it is the ideas and interests of the child that drive the learning process. Teachers are to assist students in the development of new knowledge. In a constructivist classroom the student is encouraged to ask questions, make analogies, and construct conclusions. In essence the student is the creative producer of knowledge. Constructivism has a long history in education. Traced back to Rousseau and his emphasis on the child in the learning process, constructivism has gained in significance through the years.
Among the most influential constructivists of the modern era is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory focuses on the relationship between a child’s internal developmental processes and the child’s interactions with peers and others (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s sociocultural model, introduced in the early part of the 20th century, is central to this examination of historical understanding. Vygotsky’s work, as the name implies, emphasized the social and cultural origins of cognition. In fact, Vygotsky (1978) felt that social learning went hand in hand with biological development. The individual and the social were seen as equal parts of a single, interacting system (Cole, 1985). Socio-culturalists ascribe to the belief that culture defines what knowledge and skills children need to acquire (Cole, 1985; Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993; Wertsch, 1998). This view supports a discovery model of learning that views the community as essential to meaning making. Knowledge is constructed in conjunction with the natural environment. It also recognizes the importance of cultural tools such as language, adult/student relationships, and other dominant cultural assumptions as key factors in determining patterns and rates of development for students (Cole, 1985). Vygotsky and his disciples take the view that no child develops in a vacuum, free from external influence (Cole, 1985; Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993; Wertsch, 1998; Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003).

Another significant aspect of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) describes this as the distance between the child’s actual developmental level and a higher level of potential development that comes with adult guidance. In education this places the teacher or more advanced peer in the critical position of guiding the student and helping the student increase their skill level (Cole, 1996).

Within the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky identified two types concepts that are developed. One is that the child grows from the life experiences. The other, the scientific or
academic concept, is the product of the teacher-learning process. Both concepts are developed simultaneously during a “child’s mental development” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 365). It is during the teacher-learning process that Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development comes into play. A teacher can create assignments for students that serve as scaffolding as the students explore various concepts or learning opportunities. By emphasizing a shared experience for the students where the students construct an understanding of the concept the teacher becomes more like a coach as opposed to a deliverer of information (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003). It is also important that as a child progresses through their education that concepts be further developed. This requires continuing education and situating the development of a particular concept within the zone of a student’s proximal development (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003).

**Constructivism and the teaching of history.** Russian psychologist Piotr Galperin (1982), a Vygotsky disciple, has added to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory by exploring educational implications of Vygotsky’s work. One significant contribution is that learning will be more effective if students, with the teacher’s guidance, are made aware of the complexity of the learning task at the outset. This helps students explore and possibly change their conceptual understandings (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003). Addressing conceptual issues is of critical importance as conceptual understanding is at the core of human thought. Concepts help us to organize our thoughts therefore providing structure to the world.

One study that supports Galperin’s work is Mason’s (2001) study on anomalous data. Mason introduced students to conflicting theories about the building of the Great Pyramids. By introducing conflicting theories at the beginning of a unit on the Great Pyramids students were aware of alternative ways of thinking early on. The teacher was able to guide the students
toward a higher conceptual understanding of the Great Pyramids (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003).

Teaching historical skills is often identified with conceptual change. For example, a 7th grade student may have a very simple definition of history while a high school student, with more exposure to history and the concepts and skills associated with the discipline, will develop a more complex definition. This reconceptualization of history is a significant point in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. Ultimately, more time needs to be dedicated to understanding basic historical concepts (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003, p. 248).

In the Netherlands there is a gradual step-by-step process for introducing concepts to students. In short, the teacher helps the student find locate and process new information. The student, by doing these activities with teacher guidance, experiences the boundaries and range of a concept. Also, important is using everyday concepts as the basis for building understanding of academic concepts. To effectively do this the teacher needs to inquire what the student already knows (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003).

Most scholars working in the Vygotskian tradition have focused their attention on children’s’ interaction with adults or interactions within schools and the subsequent construction of learning (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). Steven Grant (2001) exemplifies this as he conducted a study that explored this interaction specific to the history classroom. He explored the impact of different teaching styles on students’ ability to acquire and utilize historical thinking skills. His work revealed that students whose teachers utilize an active, student-centered approach to learning have far greater success in developing higher order thinking skills that are necessary for historical thinking and understanding.
The presence of sociocultural theory is, in fact, quite widespread. Other prominent researchers, including Wineburg (2001), Barton and Levstik (2004), Donovan and Bransford (2005), Levesque (2008), VanSledright (2011) have used sociocultural theory to frame their work. Barton and Levstik specifically identify the work of James Wertsch (1998), a Vygotskian socioculturalist, as influential to them. From Wertsch, Barton and Levstik extract Kenneth Burke’s framework (1969) that promotes the use of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose in understanding human action and motivation. Each of these is related and involves the culture and context an individual is part of to explain their actions. Failure to account for one of the above elements would provide an incomplete understanding of an individual’s motivation. For example, the scene or setting of an event is critical to understanding how the agent (main character) responds to a situation. Likewise, the means by which acts are carried out (agency) is also important to understanding human action. Ultimately, Barton and Levstik (2004) emphasize the importance of the “socially situated nature and purpose of students’ actions” (p. 13) as being significant.

Wineburg (2001) also acknowledges the importance of culture in a how students perceive the past. He comments that students have difficulty at times developing a complex understanding of Lincoln’s world because it is hard for individuals today to understand a world that had slavery. Other students have difficulty including the contributions of women in the past because cultural and societal norms, in the form of teachers and texts, often fail to do so. We are influenced by our current view of the world.

M.S. Donovan and J.D. Bransford (2005) in the introduction to How Students Learn: History in the Classroom discuss the importance of Vygotskian ideas as well. In fact, the premise of the book seems to be rooted in the Vygotskian theory. The first principle of learning
that Donovan and Bransford acknowledge, that students come to school with preconceived notions, is in line with Vygotsky’s belief that one’s environment is significant to the learning process. The second principle, that emphasizes the importance of conceptual frameworks in developing understanding, supports Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. Donovan and Bransford mention that concept development is often gained in schools in conjunction with a more advanced individual.

In the second chapter of Donovan and Bransford’s (2005) *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom* the connection to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development is also apparent. In this chapter Peter Lee explores some of the skills that embody historical thinking and understanding or the “doing” of history and how teachers can help their students develop historical understanding. It is the role of the teacher as a guide that connects most strongly to Vygotsky’s ZPD. It is the teacher’s job to guide the student through the progression of historical thinking, as history is not an intuitive discipline. Bruce VanSledright (2011) supports this view as he suggests that educators utilize the ideas of the experts to structure learning opportunities for students.

Stephane Levesque (2008) adds to the importance of sociocultural influences in his book *Thinking Historically*. In his chapter on empathy, Levesque notes that that historian’s re-creation of history is influenced by the sources they chose to use and by the “perspectives and beliefs of the present” (p.143). Levesque’s discussion on the importance of societal and cultural influences is not limited to empathy. Evidence of these influences can be found throughout the book. This echoed by Bruce VanSledright (2011) when he writes, “historians mediate the past in their retelling of it, that their own sociocultural positionalities cannot be shorn in order to free that past to reveal itself independently of those who seek to retell it” (p. 46). Therefore, if historians are
influenced by environmental factors in their interpretation of the past it is reasonable to expect that high school students will be cognitively shaped by their surroundings as well.

James Wertsch’s (2004) discussion of specific and schematic narratives in Russia offers an interesting look into the influence of social and cultural norms on one’s interpretation of the past. What Wertsch found was that different generations in Russia were influenced by the political changes experienced with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The pre-collapse group constructed narratives that were much more detail oriented and in line with the Soviet collective memory viewpoint. The younger, post-collapse, generation created narratives that were noticeably different in that they lacked detail and had substantial factual inaccuracies. Wertsch attributes this to the changing expectations of society and the shift in collective memory that followed the end of Soviet Union.

Another educational implication of Vygotsky’s work can be found in the work of Kenneth Gergen (1995). Gergen follows in the footsteps of Vygotsky by identifying that knowledge resides in a collection of linguistic forms and is shared through means that rely on language. With this being said, knowledge becomes a shared endeavor as the communication process relies on the social interaction of two or more people. Considerations for learning and teaching include the idea that lessons should develop as the result of a dialogue between the participants rather than through a teacher directed mandate. This is a belief that has been echoed by Wineburg (2001), Bransford and Donovan (2005), and Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt (2005). All three works advocate that teachers need to assess what prior knowledge the students have if they are to create effective learning environments.

**Sociocultural and adult learning theory.** While Vygotsky’s work largely focused on the child’s development, studies have shown that his theories also have application to adult
learning and this study. Previously mentioned studies, Gergen (1995), Werstsch (2004), and Levesque (2008), have each taken Vygotsky’s basic premise that all learning is social and expanded the discussion to include adult learners. Catherine Hansman (2001) comments that the social aspect of adult learning has gained importance since the 1990s. Central to this is the view that people learn when they are part of a community of learning where they are interacting with other more experienced members of the learning community (Fenwick, 2000). Fenwick’s use of Vygotsky sociocultural model in the discussion of adult learning validates the use of Vygotsky’s theory for the proposed study. With this study’s emphasis on how teacher’s develop their belief’s and practices relative to historical thinking and understanding it is essential to frame the study with a theory that is applicable to the entire learning community, both young and adult. The emphasis on social learning, found in the theories of Vygotsky, are helpful to better understanding not only how students understand history but also how adults learn. Vygotsky’s recognition of the significance and influence of one’s environment stands out.

Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel, in their 2009 book 21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times, posit that, “in many ways, all learning is social…” (pg. 34). With this in mind Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and its advocacy that learning is influenced by societal and cultural norms provides an important framework for this study on historical thinking and understanding. Societal and cultural norms not only dictate what we learn but also how it is taught to us.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

For years educators and researchers considered and debated why students should learn history and how best to teach history. In that time numerous articles and studies have been conducted and findings shared that have expanded what we know about how and why children
learn history. The cognitive core concepts of historical thinking and understanding evidenced by students and the implementation of these concepts has formed the largest part of research thus conducted. These two areas, cognitive core concepts and teacher implementation of them, serve to inform this study. An understanding of the cognitive core concepts that experts have identified as essential is necessary if one is to explore how teacher beliefs and practices reflect current thinking in historical understanding. Likewise, an examination of how teachers have learned to teach and how teachers can design learning opportunities that incorporate the core concepts underlie this study.

Bruce VanSledright (2011) opens his book, *The Challenge of Rethinking History Education*, with an overview of two teachers. Both are veteran teachers but their approach to teaching history is decidedly different. One educator adheres to the collective memory approach to United States history while the other educator uses a more investigative, discipline-based approach. For years the collective memory approach to U.S. history has dominated history classrooms across the nation (VanSledright, 2011). This approach relies heavily on acceptance of the American past as one of steady progress and presents the past as fact-based and beyond critical interrogation. This approach to teaching history has been criticized for some time yet still persists. One explanation lies with pressures placed on schools and teachers to present history this way. As recently as 2006, the Florida legislature mandated that U.S. history be taught via the collective memory narrative (Florida House of Representatives).

The other educator profiled by VanSledright (2011) represents an approach to the study of history that is largely supported by modern research on historical thinking and understanding. Students ultimately take ownership of their learning by questioning the past and seeking answers to those questions. To better understand this disciplinary-based approach to historical study
requires an examination of what is known about cognitive development and student growth in historical understanding.

What is known about cognitive development and student growth in historical thinking and understanding? How students construct knowledge is a very broad topic. Current literature reveals focused studies on specific conceptual understandings and writings that analyze and evaluate the more specific studies. Within this literature certain themes emerge that bind current scholarship together such as the influence of an individual's socio-cultural influences on how they view the past and the belief that students are cognitively capable of thinking like a historian.

The next question of the literature asks, what does the scholarly literature reveal about the role of teacher pedagogy and its impact on how children understand history? Much of this research flows off the belief that students can think like historians, albeit at an appropriate cognitive level. Evidence within this body of work supports the view that teachers are key players in the students’ success as they structure and scaffold the learning experience for the student. With this in mind, research reveals that teachers need to be able to think like a historian if they are to instruct others to do this.

**Cognitive Core Concepts and Skills of Historical Thinking and Understanding**

What constitutes historical thinking and understanding? Consensus is that students should be able to explain why and how events transpired in the past. This requires students to be active searchers of knowledge not passive recipients of information. Among the concepts that students need to cultivate are epistemology, evidence, causation, agency, meaning, change and continuity, progress and decline, significance, and empathy, (Seixas, 1993; Grant, 2001; Lee, 2005; Stokopf & Bermudez, 2008; Levesque, 2008). Ultimately, historical thinking and
understanding is revealed when students can apply their historical research and knowledge beyond the immediate lesson (Stoskopf & Bermudez, 2008).

At the core of historical thinking and understanding is the awareness that history is a human construct. The past we study is the human past as interpreted by humans. By exploring how historians ply their trade a student can truly begin to understand the complexity of the human experience. Students can begin to see how different accounts of the past can coexist. As part of the study of history, we need to try and understand the beliefs and values found in the past if we are to truly understand the past (Lee, 2005).

Central to this is acquiring and applying the disciplinary skills utilized by the professional historian. Howard Gardner and Veronica Boix-Mansilla (2006) posit that second-order thinking skills promoted through disciplinary concepts is the most advanced way of thinking about history. Disciplines offer people ways of “knowing” about past and current events. Disciplinary thinking is challenging. It requires hard work that is intellectually demanding. It is never complete. The benefits of disciplinary thinking are that students can engage in critical investigations of the past that can lead to new understandings.

The issue of depth over breadth is one that plagues history teachers and their students. As history has expanded beyond the classic political story of the past to include social and cultural themes there has been a strain exerted within classrooms for more coverage (Levesque, 2008). Despite this tension researchers, like Peter Lee (2005), have noted that students need time to work with disciplinary concepts in depth if they are to develop complex historical thinking and understanding. Students will not be able to truly understand history if they are only exposed to brief snippets of the past.
Epistemology. Epistemological considerations are essential to examining how students make sense of the historical past. How students refine their picture of history is critical to the development of historical thinking and understanding (Seixas, 1993). Numerous studies on historical thinking and understanding say young people are exposed to formal history through their school experiences as well as the myths and stories that are passed to them through family members, the media, and a variety of other sources. These experiences contribute in significant ways in shaping a students’ underlying approach to history (Seixas, 1993; Grant, 2001; Wineburg, 2001; Lee, 2005; Levesque, 2008; VanSledright, 2011).

In his chapter on what students know and what they can do with that knowledge VanSledright (2011) provides a helpful overview of student learning. One of the things he stresses is that each student is unique and that their different life experiences influences how they view and understand the past. He exemplifies this by explaining how a white student may understand and accept the freedom-quest narrative more readily than minority students whose understandings have been influenced by different experiences. VanSledright provides three epistemological stances that help to explain where students are in there historical thinking. The first is the naïve realist. That is, that history is already decided and there is no interpretation or criticism of it. If there is a conflict then the students at this stage think someone has gotten something wrong. The next stage of epistemological understanding is naïve relativism. During this stage the student sees history as open to any interpretation and that no ones, even those based on weak or illogical assumptions, is wrong. The final stage is the critical pragmatist. This stage represents the highest order of historical thinking as it allows for an evaluation of historical accounts. Criteria-based tools are employed during this stage to assess the strength of accounts (pg. 66). These stages become an underlying progression to the development of historical
understanding and are dependent in some ways on the cognitive development of the child although the work of Bruner supports that one can begin to develop higher levels of thought if it is presented in an appropriate progression.

Peter Lee (2005) also acknowledges students have preconceptions about history and identifies the need for a conceptual progression to historical thinking. Lee identifies many of a student’s preconceptions as being based on viewing the past through a modern lens. People using a modern lens attempt to use everyday ideas about life to frame or inform their analysis of the past. Recognizing and attending to this view can help students better employ a historically appropriate lens to the examination of history. Lee also identifies the need for a progression of conceptual understandings that can help students organize the plethora of factual data that is common to history. These concepts can be substantive in nature or more disciplinary in nature. Substantive topics include ideas about power, money, trade, diplomacy, and others. Disciplinary concepts, which Lee refers to as second-order knowledge or meta-historical understandings, include evidence, causation, empathy, and others. It is through these disciplinary concepts that students will come to understand what is history. Conceptual tools are necessary to make sense of the substance that makes up the past (Levesque, 2008). Lee (2005) notes that it is important to understand that students will not be doing history at the same level as the professional historian. Nonetheless, it is essential that students be introduced to this way of thinking so that they may become aware of how histories are constructed.

Chowen (2005) builds upon Lee’s (2005) view that students need to be introduced to second-order thinking skills if historical understanding is to develop. In a study of secondary history students Chowen found that students defined a historian as someone who had published. With this definition in mind they did not identify themselves as historians. The failure of
students to see themselves as historians or as doing historical work can be problematic. If the students have difficulty identifying with the work of a professional historian they may be limited in the degree of historical understanding they can evidence.

**Significance.** Significance is central to the study of history (Seixas, 1993; Grant, 2001, Levesque, 2008). It offers a way to organize the past and separate the important from the trivial. The importance of significance is that it helps people focus on what they deem important (Levesque, 2008). Fitting with the constructivist framework of this study, significance is largely influenced by life experiences such as family and school. The problem that currently exists in education is that criteria for determining and framing discussions of historical significance are largely absent in classrooms. Levesque (2008) feels that by clarifying historical significance students can better question the past. In doing so students will be able to be more critical of their own and others determination of what is significant and why. Levesque uses the five factors put forth by Geoffrey Partington to provide guidance in understanding historical significance. The five factors are importance, profundity, quantity, durability, and relevance. It is important to note that these criteria are familiar within the historical community but not so much outside of it. This is an important discussion point as many teachers are discussing significance within their classes but not using the concepts employed by the professionals. Memory-significance or the use of personal or contemporary reasons to ascribe significance is common (Cercadillo, 2001). Supporting this view, Peter Seixas (1997) posits that an event is significant when a person sees its relevance to other events and to themselves. This is a logical point as it is impossible to completely separate the modern world from interpretations of the past. Seixas contends that children construct their own understandings based on their experiences and that these experiences help shape the mental framework they use to examine history. With this in mind,
understanding students’ conceptions of significance is essential if we are to help them to better understand history.

Within the topic of significance there is a need for research to be conducted on the procedural aspects of how significance is determined. Levesque (2008) identifies that much research has focused on the substance of historical significance and not how and why people have focused certain topics. More also needs to be done with multicultural understandings of significance where the official version of the past conflicts with ones self-evident view of the past.

**Causation.** Causation, with all its complexity, is the next important aspect of historical understanding. Causation helps us to understand why things happened. In this sense causation is closely connected to significance. If an event is deemed to be significant to history it logically follows that the causes of that event will be explored.

Much of the complexity associated with causation can be connected to the preconceptions one holds relative to an understanding of cause. A preconception that can impact historical thinking and understanding is that students have a tendency to see causes as independent variables that are interchangeable (Lee, 2005). An example of this occurs with European exploration. Some students will find topics like the creation of nation states, the Renaissance, and technological developments as interchangeable causes of exploration. Other students will link these causes in a linear fashion saying that one led to the other and so on. Both of these examples miss the complexity inherent in the era that each major cause was at one time reacting on and being reacted upon by the others. It is the relationship between the causes that matter as much as the causes themselves. What is important in understanding causation is that the questions we ask of the past influence what may come to be seen as a cause.
Evidence. Another central component of historical thinking and understanding is evidence. Research shows that some students never actively reflect on how it is that we know about the past. Most, especially younger students, accept narratives about the past as beyond question. When they do start to question the past more problems can arise. For example, when detecting bias in a source, students are likely to dismiss the source completely (Lee, 2005).

More recently the critical evaluation of evidence has been used to introduce students to historical investigation. Levesque (2008) offers two conceptual categories, external criticism and internal criticism, to organize this evaluation. Among the concepts attended to within external criticism are whether or not a source is primary or secondary, who constructed the source and why, and whether or not the source is public or private. These questions are essential to developing a critical understanding of the document. Internal criticism of evidence is more difficult. It requires the historian to understand what the document meant at the time and place it was written (Stanford, 1994). Internal criticism seeks to assess the document’s reliability. To do this the author must explore, among other things, the context in which the document was created and what the document meant to the author (Levesque, 2008). Moving students toward internal criticism represents a step toward greater historical awareness.

Since the 1980s there have been a number of studies that have touched upon the use of evidence by students in the study of history (VanSledright, 2002; Wineburg, 1991). VanSledright (2002) found that students, ages 10-11, were excited about historical inquiry but lacked necessary disciplinary understanding of history to effectively use evidence. Students had difficulty accepting points of view that differed from their prior understanding. Part of the problem, as Barton (2001) identifies, is that the United States focuses too much on the transmission of information and not enough on the disciplinary skills of history. More emphasis
on a cognitively appropriate progression of second-order historical skills could help rectify this issue. The problem that arises is how does one go about teaching students to use evidence effectively? Levesque (2008) observes that there is no clear plan available for how teachers could realistically do this in their classrooms.

**Change and Continuity.** The concepts of change and continuity are also central to the development of historical thinking and understanding (Seixas & Peck, 2004). Without an awareness of how the past has evolved into the present a student will have difficulty understanding the importance of the past. Understanding change and continuity is a difficult process that develops throughout one’s lifetime. Lee (2005) sees the complexity of change laying in the fact that change is often a gradual process that occurs over an extended period of time. Within this discussion it is difficult to identify one or two events that caused a shift in say the demographic layout of the nation. Changes such as this are more commonly viewed as a change in the state of affairs as opposed to a new event. Problems occur when students view change as an event as opposed to a change in the state of affairs. These students will see change as periodic or intentional rather than part of the continuous story of the past. In short, their preconceptions about change can interfere with the development of a historically appropriate view of change.

Two concepts that are important to understanding change and continuity are sequencing and colligation. Each of these concepts helps historians understand change over time and continuity in times of change. These two concepts are essential to understanding meaning and significance of past events. The sequence of events is important to understanding history because it can help with causal understandings as well as with future consequences (Levesque, 2008). One task of historians is to organize past events into convenient narratives (Lowenthal,
1985). The actors of the past did not have the perspective of the modern historian as they were living through events whose consequences had yet to be revealed. In essence, historians add order to the diverse events of the past. Change and continuity become important as they help the historian to order the past. This is where colligation comes in. Colligation is seeing an event as part of a larger, more general movement (Levesque, 2008). Walsh (1967; as cited in Levesque, 2008) identifies three principles necessary for an idea or theme to be considered colligatory. The first is that the colligatory idea must be based in fact; the second is that the idea must help to illuminate the facts; and the third is the idea must be concrete and universal (p. 72). In short, the idea must come from the sources. Ultimately, change needs continuity. Without some continuity in human affairs change would not be noticeable to historians (Levesque, 2008).

The implications for students are evident through research conducted by Denis Shemilt and Bruce VanSledright. Shemilt (1980) found that students viewed history as episodic and not continual whereas VanSledright (2002) found that students made causal connections that supported what they already understood about history. What students in both studies ignored was the importance of any sequential and causal relationships that may have existed. This is problematic because it creates holes in historical thinking and understanding. Contributing to students’ difficulty with change and continuity is the fact that students are often young and have not “lived” through or witnessed a great deal of change, in the larger historical sense. Additionally, a student’s life experiences can impact how they perceive or see change and continuity.

**Time and chronology.** In any discussion of continuity and change the concepts of time and chronology are important. Dates allow us to order events and can help us to understand other concepts such as cause or change. For example, time allows us to sequence events so that
we may look at what happened prior to a later occurrence. Additionally, historians may define eras of time that do not conform to traditional time segments such as centuries or decades. Historians clump and partition the past as themes dictate. Discussing the Red Scare of the 1950s really begins in the second half of the 1940s following the collapse of U.S.-Soviet relations. In short, this means that history is not always neatly organized into convenient decades or centuries. The difficulty time poses for students is that it tends to require an understanding of theme, fact, and possibly, how the people of the past viewed the eras they lived in (Lee, 2005). With this in mind, time becomes a much more complex concept.

Chronology is as conceptually important as time. The U.S. National Standards for Social Studies identifies chronological thinking as the cornerstone of historical thought. It allows you to explore cause and provides a framework for organizing historical thought. This goes beyond the simple chronology. It involves using either a narrative, thematic, or contemporary approach. The narrative approach, as promoted by the U.S. National Standards for History Education, has students construct their own narratives based on their work with primary and secondary sources. In the doing this, the student is more cognizant of the chronology that exists. The thematic approach emphasizes major trends or ideas in history. This approach can reveal the underlying complexity that exists in historical study. Namely, that change can happen in one area but not in another. The final approach, the contemporary approach, encourages students to critically explore a concept they take for granted. This can encourage greater historical thinking and understanding while at the same time acknowledge and allow for each student to incorporate their experiences in the study of the past (Levesque, 2008).

**Progress and decline.** As much as history is about change and continuity it is also about the direction and meaning of the change (Levesque, 2008). This is more complex than it seems.
For instance, a positive change for one group can be a negative for another. The use of evaluative judgment to determine the positive or negative direction of change can be problematic and lead to debate within the historical community. For one, this argument can bring up the question of value judgments in historical analysis and what values are being utilized to evaluate the past. Lee (2005) comments that students often view any change in history as inherently positive. This grows from the view that change is an intentional, controllable phenomenon. A student may think, why change something if it is not going to be positive in some way. Using a historian’s understanding of change a student may see that change can be both positive and negative. Another issue identified by Lee is that the past is looked at as inferior when compared to the present. An example would be that cars in the past were less efficient than today’s models. The underlying premise is that scientists in the past were not as smart as the modern researcher (Lee & Ashby, 2001)

Levesque (2008) provides three principles useful in guiding the historian’s evaluative judgments relative to progress and decline. The first is continuous application and involves the application of standards that are applicable to an entire period and not just portions of it. The second principle is equal importance. That is, historians must see the value of both progress and decline. This recognizes that each position, progress and decline, is explored using valid evaluative standards. The third principle, prudential relevance, requires historians to judge change based on the standards of the time period under study. For example, it is unfair to judge education in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century using standards and expectations of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The issues present and dominant modes of thought in each era may be significantly different.

Another issue that teachers face is student preference to study history that shows progress. Husbands, Kitson, and Pendry, (2003) saw this with students studying the Holocaust.
The Holocaust challenged student belief that things always get better. Seixas and Clark (2004) have also examined students’ conceptions of progress and decline. In their study, Seixas and Clark explored student thoughts regarding four murals that depicted the growth and progress of British Columbia during the colonial era. Some students supported the murals as respecting the past while others thought the murals reflected a flawed past that subjugated minority groups. In short, the murals for this last group reflected a lack of progress. Still another group of students saw the murals as a representation of British Columbia’s historical past that could be used as teaching tool to understand change (in Levesque, 2008).

**Empathy.** The final core concept that contributes to historical thinking and understanding is empathy. Empathy is attempting to understand the past through the eyes of the people that lived at that time. This means understanding the dominant cultural currents that influenced and shaped peoples perspectives at that time. It requires leaving behind our understanding of the world in an effort to understand another time. Lee (2005) sees empathy as something we achieve if when we entertain ideas different from our own. This requires an analysis of evidence and thinking about the past. It is divorced from an emotional connection with the past because we, in the modern era, can never truly feel the pain that slaves may have felt when separated from their family. Empathy can help to counter the view of the past as being inferior to the present (Grant, 2001).

One of the jobs of the historian is to close the ever-widening gap in historical understanding between the present and the past. As we move further from an event our understanding and empathy become more disconnected. It becomes more difficult for us to understand why people behaved the way they did and why history played out as it did (Levesque, 2008). Examples of this can be found when looking back on the Holocaust, slavery in America,
or the treatment of Native Americans throughout history. In each of these examples it is difficult to shed our modern lens and understand the past as the past was.

To help develop empathy Levesque (2008) advocates that the historian try to look at the past, as the actors of the time would have while at the same time remaining cognizant of their own identity. This would allow for the creation of a narrative that captures the past yet is relevant to the present. To do this Levesque (2008) offers that we need to appreciate human uniqueness while at the same time acknowledging a shared humanity. Levesque (2008) also suggests that historians consider the personal, sociocultural, and contemporary contexts when empathizing with the past. Examining personal and sociocultural factors can help the historian better understand or empathize with the past. Examination of the contemporary context is equally important as the ways we view the past and interpret events is clouded by or own values and beliefs. VanSledright (2001) comments when we consider our context we learn about who we are, our historical viewpoints, and how they influence our analysis and interpretation of the past.

Also adding to research done on empathy is work done by Lee and Ashby (2000). Lee and Ashby observed that young students have difficulty with empathy because they view the past as being more limited than the present. Either the actors of the past were not as intellectually advanced as the current era or they lacked in some other aspect of life such as morality or industry.

Yeager and Doppen (2001) conducted one study that had positive findings. Yeager and Doppen found that students reveal greater levels of empathetical understanding when they are confronted with multiple perspectives on historic events. Students in this study were more likely to see the inherent complexity of Truman’s decision to use atomic weapons on Japan than their
counterparts that had only textbook evidence of this event. Many students also expressed greater moral certainty regarding the use of atomic weapons after being exposed to the evidence than prior to the evidence.

A problem that plagues educators attempting to teach empathy is a limited understanding of empathy. Many seem to view empathy as simply imagining what the past was like. While this is a component of empathetic thinking it is also a great over-simplification. High-level empathy requires advanced levels of inquiry and a wide range of primary and secondary source evidence to help paint a picture of the past and how it may have been viewed to its contemporaries (Levesque, 2008)

**Interdependence of core concepts.** A number of important themes emerge from the literature presented. One is that each of the core concepts described above is not a stand-alone topic. Each is dependent on the others and all are necessary, to some degree, for advanced historical thinking and understanding to develop. For this reason this study, as it attempts to explore the topic of historical thinking and understanding, requires these core concepts to be explored. Another theme that can be drawn from the literature is that the disciplinary concepts discussed can be acquired and applied by students if they are introduced at a cognitively appropriate pace. The expectation is not that high school students will be professional historians by the end of their senior year but that they will utilize, at varying levels, the thinking skills of the historian. The final theme that stands out is importance of sociocultural factors and their influence on how people think about and view history. The preconceived understanding an individual has impacts how they examine the past. This consideration significantly adds to the importance of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development as a theoretical framework for this
study. Implied in this is that the teacher and students will take a journey of exploration together not only to understand the past but to also better understand themselves.

**Pedagogical Practices and their Impact on Historical Understanding**

As a response to the standards-based reform movement that took place in the United States during the 1990s policy analysts called for systemic reform of our public schools. If students were going to achieve the high goals set for them it follows that teachers would have grow as well. Research in the last ten years has shown that teachers have a significant impact on student outcomes (Koppich, Humphrey, & Hough, 2006). Stoskopf (2001) posited that good instruction grew, in part, from a teacher’s passion and energy for the subject. Research has also shown that teachers of history need a deeper understanding of subject matter and thinking skills used by the professional historian (VanSledright, 2011, p. 173). To this end teachers need to understand how historians approach their work and be able to share this understanding with their students. To do this teachers must probe student understanding, organize the curriculum, and create a learning environment that allows student understanding of history to grow into sophisticated understandings (Bain & Mirel, 2006). The importance of the teacher as a variable in how students learn history is essential and therefore critical to this examination of how students develop historical thinking and understanding. Further, a constructivist framework supports this inquiry into student learning and the examination of recent literature concerning the teacher as a player in student learning.

A review of the literature on the teaching of history has also revealed a number of themes that help organize this review. Among them is the importance of acknowledging student preconceptions, developing questions that guide students toward greater content and conceptual awareness, focusing on the development of historical thinking skills, as well as others. A
thematic approach to presenting what research has been done is most appropriate considering the frequency that these themes appear within the literature.

**Learner-centered classrooms.** A central theme that appears in Donovan and Bransford’s (2005) collection is the need for learner-centered classrooms. Donovan and Bransford identify that varied student backgrounds that can impact how students engage with their learning. A learning-centered classroom requires teachers to pay attention to student backgrounds, cultural values, and abilities. Sam Wineburg (2001) identified an individual’s preconceived notions about the world as a central reason why people often have difficulty in thinking historically. Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt (2005) observe that the identification of student preconceptions is essential if teachers are to prevent misunderstandings and develop conceptual tools needed for historical understanding. Additionally, identifying student strengths and use of those strengths can enhance learning (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 14). Grant and Gradwell (2010) support this conclusion in their discussion of the “ambitious teacher”. Grant and Gradwell assert that understanding students can help the teacher make educational decisions that best help a student grow. Teachers are more able to make connections to current events or examples the students can identify with. Knowledge of the students can also help the teacher identify historical questions the students have interest. These questions can engage and motivate students to pursue the study of history (Bain & Mirel, 2006).

A fundamental preconception that influences students is the belief that the study of history is the simply the study of past events. Students, and many adults for that matter, believe that history is, as Newt Gingrich stated, a list of facts. Bain (2005) addresses this by suggesting the creation of conceptual maps for the students in their study of history. He develops this by having students explore whether or not the historical accounts they read represent “history-as-
event” or “history-as-account” (p. 187). This distinction is essential to understanding history. “History-as-event” supports the view that has been promulgated through the ages in school-based history courses that history as presented in textbooks is accurate and beyond reproach. “History-as-account” acknowledges the interpretive nature of history. It opens the field to analysis that encourages thought, examination, and questioning. From this, the students can begin to expand their understanding of history. Questions that follow can explore the relationship between the author and their identification of what is significant and how continuity and change are presented. It can also help with the evaluation of evidence and the exploration of cause and effect relationships.

**Importance of guiding questions.** Another significant theme that presents itself in the literature is the role of guiding questions as important to a student’s development of historical understanding. Bain (2005) highlights the importance of guiding questions by identifying that guiding questions can help students select, organize, and structure their facts. In doing this, the teacher must be able to pursue both instructional and historical lines of thought. Teachers are charged with helping students learn history. Teacher’s must decide if they are going to allow students to explore the discipline completely and construct knowledge or limit their students with defined sets of knowledge and a sprinkling of engaging activities (Burernheide, 2007). To explore the discipline teachers must help students think historically. A good question can help facilitate this. Good questions will have students analyzing historical details while at the same time developing a greater understanding of historical skills and concepts including significance, cause and effect, change and continuity, evidence, and empathy. By selecting good, enduring questions a teacher can engage and motivate students to pursue the study of history (Bain & Mirel, 2006).
The central importance of guiding questions to the study of history is echoed by many (VanSledright, 2011; Grant, 2001; Levesque, 2008; Grant & Gradwell, 2010; Wiersma, 2008). Each author identifies the value of questions as providing an organizational framework to historical analysis. Additionally, guiding questions can encourage the construction of knowledge (Wiersma, 2008). VanSledright (2011) provides an interesting view into the teaching of history through discipline-specific concepts with his discussion of a fictional teacher, Thomas Becker. VanSledright chronicles the fictional struggle that Becker has in trying to design a unit on Andrew Jackson that acknowledges the complexity of Jackson. Becker’s struggles, and subsequent realizations, are supposed to reflect the struggles that history teachers everywhere might endure. Becker’s ultimate goal was to get his students to think historically by using organizing concepts with analytic strategic processes to understand the past. The first step that VanSledright has Becker engage in is the formulation of investigative questions that spur the students to dig into Jackson’s life and garner a more complete understanding of the man.

**Historical thinking skills and concepts.** The next major theme present in the research is the importance of historical thinking skills and concepts. These skills allow students the opportunity approach history as a professional historian would, albeit at a cognitively appropriate level. Students are not expert historians. They approach the discipline of history from a different place than the expert (Wineburg, 2001; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas, 1994 in Bain, 2005). The dilemma for the classroom teacher is how to engage the student within the actual discipline of history. Simply working with a primary source document won’t do. Teachers need to consider how well the source contributes to the deepening of historical thinking, whether or not the source is interesting to the students, and if the source is cognitively appropriate (Levesque, 2008). The teacher can help the student consider who wrote the source, what bias
might be present, for what reason was the document was written, etc. This can be challenging for high school students to do (Bain, 2005, p. 202). Tharp and Gallimore (as cited in Levesque, 2008) stress that students need adult guidance until they internalize the concepts. Once again, the constructivist presence appears.

Problematizing history and presenting varying accounts to students is just the beginning of what history educators need to do (Bain, 2005; Voss and Wiley, 2000). As mentioned previously, students need support to develop their historical thinking skills. This is difficult task as each classroom is filled with students that represent various cognitive levels. Bain (2005) identifies that attention to “the design and use of history-specific cognitive tools” can help students remain engaged and achieving new levels of understanding (p. 202). Bain calls for “history-specific social assistance” to help students progress. What “history-specific social assistance” entails is an embedding of domain-specific thinking into classroom activities. These activities include learning content, analyzing sources, evaluating evidence, determining significance, to name a few. Through these activities, which are guided and supported by the teacher, students are encouraged to work together using the thinking skills of the historian. Within this collective environment each student’s individual growth contributes to the growth of the group. The result is the creation of a community of learners that share their developing understandings.

The use of organizing concepts is an important component of learning identified by Donovan and Bransford (2005). Donovan and Bransford promote the construction of a knowledge-centered classroom where the focus is on what is taught and how it is taught. This falls largely within the control of the classroom teacher. Part of this is developing domain specific concepts and skills that can support greater understanding. Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt
(2005) posit that conceptual tools such as evidence, causation, empathy, time, and others help people organize and think about the limitless amount of factual knowledge that exists.

While it is understood that conceptual ideas need to be developed throughout one’s education, it is important to note they cannot be randomly introduced (Ashby, Lee, & Shemilt, 2005). Levesque (2008) comments that studies done by Barton, Grant, Levstik and Smith, Mayer, VanSledright, and Wineburg in the United States, and Seixas, Martineau, and Levesque in Canada show that young students are capable for effective historical investigation. Essential to this is a program of gradual and persistent exposure to historical thinking concepts. The development of second-order conceptual ideas, however, is difficult to map given the fact that each individual is developmentally unique. What Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt (2005) recommend is charting a path of development with an awareness that students will be at different points along the path. The benefit of this is that one path offers a plan that students can grasp and teachers can follow. Teachers and students can build on previous understandings.

Meta-cognitive thinking. Another key feature found in the literature concerning teaching and development of historical thinking and understanding is the need to cultivate meta-cognitive thinking in students. Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt (2005) assert that meta-cognitive development occurs when conceptual tools are internalized. The students can begin to ask their own questions and guide their own learning. The importance of this to teachers is apparent. Teachers need to approach their teaching with this knowledge in mind and design their lessons accordingly. Students that have internalized historical concepts can develop interpretative answers to their questions or those posed by the teacher, such as guiding questions discussed earlier. Interpretative responses are, according to Dickinson, Gard, and Lee (1978), one of the most sophisticated forms of historical thinking.
Grant and Gradwell (2010) comment, “good history teachers take no single shape, teach in no single fashion, and assess their efforts with no single measure” (p. 2). This being said, there is agreement within the literature that good teaching does adhere to certain ideas. Among these ideas is the importance of acknowledging student preconceptions, using guiding questions to stimulate learning, and attending to the development of conceptual understandings within the students. The result, as the research indicates, is an increasing level of meta-cognitive growth by the students that correlates to increased historical understanding. Ultimately, successful teachers help expand a student’s content awareness as well improve their ability to analyze data, interpret evidence (Bain, 2005). Weaknesses, within the research, as identified by Grant (2001) lay in the fact that more studies are needed to explore the intersection between teacher methodology and student learning.

**How Teachers Learn How to Teach History**

Now that the core historical concepts have been presented and a discussion on how those concepts can best be implemented is complete it is time to examine how teachers learn to ply their trade. In exploring this topic the literature reveals two areas for consideration. One area is the historical factors that influence teachers and their teaching. The other is the role of adult learning theory and its impact on educators. In each of these areas the presence of sociocultural influences is strongly felt.

Historically, as mentioned earlier, the teaching of history has largely been influenced by the pressure to instill the collective memory narrative in school children. The root of this lay in the desire to promote values that the nation’s leaders, both elected and not, deem important (VanSledright, 2011). Examples of this from the past include the infallibility of Washington and Lincoln and the benefits of Anglo-Saxon supremacy on “backward” nations. At different times
in our nation’s past we have emphasized the collective memory approach to “safeguard” our traditional value systems in the wake of perceived threats. Examples of this can be seen in increased efforts to regulate history courses as immigration issues are being debated. The example of the Florida legislature mentioned earlier provides a good example of this.

An additional factor that has promoted the collective memory approach to teaching is the amount of time prospective teachers are actually exposed to the collective memory approach (VanSledright, 2011). As a pre-collegiate student a prospective teacher will largely be exposed to the more traditional collective memory approach. When they get to college prospective teachers will spend most of their practicum time in classrooms under the supervision of educators that are probably employing the collective memory approach (VanSledright, 2011). The amount of time that is actually spent learning about and using teaching methods that promote historical thinking and understanding is miniscule.

While VanSledright (2011) provides an excellent discussion of systemic flaws in teacher training programs and the legacy of collective memory history Anne Hansman (2001) offer a more theoretical discussion about how teachers learn. More specifically, Hansman (2001) discusses how experiences in and out of the classroom helped she and her peers learn to be teachers. Hansman notes that this is not a new finding. The social aspects of learning have long been promoted as effective practice (Dewey, 1916). Interactions with students and professors, collegial discussions with peers, reflection, and negotiating the universities rules and regulations all contributed to the group’s development as educators. To Hansman this is a form of situated cognition. At the core of situated cognition is the belief that learning is social in nature. To take this a step further, situated cognition recognizes real-world contexts as the best learning environments. In education situated learning would occur on the job where teams or mentors
exist or during a supervised practicum. What is important in situated learning, and hence the connection to Vygotsky, is the inclusion of a more knowledgeable peer.

Within the real-world context one method for learning is through cognitive apprenticeships. LeGrand, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993) present five phases of learning. Initially, modeling occurs where learners observe a more experienced person. The next phase witnesses the learner trying out or approximating that activity they witnessed. During this phase the learner engages in pre- and post- activity reflection. During the third phase, known as fading, support is gradually withdrawn as the learners’ abilities grow. Self-directed learning is the next phase as the learner is more independent and receives support only when they request it. Generalization is the final phase. At this point learners summarize what they know and how it might be applicable to future practices. Hansman (2001) sees the apprenticeship model of learning as commonplace at the university level although slightly modified based on individual needs.

Another method of learning is through communities of practice. These communities are self-organized and contain individuals with shared needs and/or beliefs (Hansman, 2001). The informal nature of these groups allows them to form for many different reasons. In school settings, as shared common planning time, a shared passion for a subject area, or a shared philosophical outlook on life or teaching can underlie these groups. The intimate nature of these groups often allows members to have a strong connection with the group.

**Essential Knowledge**

When considering the extent to which teacher beliefs and practice reflect current research in historical thinking and understanding it is essential that one first be made aware of what makes up historical understanding. As has been shown historical thinking and understanding involves
the acquisition of a variety of core concept germane to the study of history itself. In short, historical understanding means training students to begin thinking like historians. It does not mean that they will develop the core concepts to the degree that advanced practitioners in the field evidence. This can take years of diligent study and practice. What is important to take away from this discussion is that it is necessary for students to begin working with these concepts. Another important discussion point is that each concept is important as a standalone entity and as support for the other concepts. Empathy provides a good example of this. As a standalone concept empathy encourages the individual to consider events through the lens of a person living during the time period being studied. Empathy is a way for us to shed our presentist lens and to understand the past as it was. In a broader sense empathy is dependent on the other concepts. One cannot develop empathy without an understanding of evidence or significance. This is not to say that one concept precedes another. What does happen is a spiraling of understanding in all concept areas. As one area is better understood the other areas grow as well.

Equally important to take away from this literature review is the relative importance of the teacher as a model for student growth and development. It is up to the teacher to provide the structure and scaffolding for the students to grow. The central idea of this section is the need for the teacher to support the meta-cognitive development of the student. To do this the teacher must possess disciplinary knowledgeable and design activities that develop the core concepts in the student. An important step in doing this is for the teacher to gain an understanding of students’ preconceptions. This allows the teacher to know what the students’ know.

The final area of importance is understanding how teachers learn, from both a theoretical and historical perspective. From a theoretical stance, teachers are largely influenced by the
environment they work in. Hansman’s (2001) work in this area provides an excellent discussion of this and is supported by Vansledright’s (2011) stance that regretfully new teachers are merely the product of the old system. The discussion of the historical and continuing significance of the collective memory approach to the teaching of history is also critical to understanding why teachers teach the way they do. External pressures and years of the same approach to history has made change difficult and, in some instances, a violation of political statute. In this heavily charged environment it is easy to understand way an emphasis on core historical concepts has been limited.

**Chapter Three: Research Design**

As has been evidenced in the literature review there has been a great deal of research conducted relative to how students develop historical thinking and understanding (VanSledright, 2011; Grant & Gradwell, 2010; Levesque, 2008; Wineburg, 2001; Barton & Levstik, 2004). Within this discussion the role of the teacher is critical to the development of historical thinking and understanding. What pedagogical choices are they making and why are they making them are important considerations.

**Rational for Qualitative Multi-site Case Studies.**

The importance of Vygotsky’s constructivist theory of human development and learning as a framework for this study supports the use of a qualitative case study when examining the pedagogical choices made by teachers and why they are making them. Both constructivist theory and qualitative studies share the same desire to understand the world in which individuals live and work (Creswell, 2009). To help understand this world qualitative studies emphasize the importance of the natural setting as a data gathering point and identify the researcher as the key instrument (Bogdon & Biklen, 1992). The natural setting is important as it provides the context
for our lives. Contextual influences can help us better understand the complexity inherent in exploring why teachers make the pedagogical choices they do. It is exactly this context that Vygotsky saw as a critical element of his Zone of Proximal Distance. In order to understand and incorporate context, qualitative studies consider all data as important (Bogdon & Biklen, 1992). It is from this data, garnered from close human interaction, that rich and deep analysis can be conducted (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). These face-to-face interactions accentuate the meaning people bring to the phenomena (Strauss, 1987). The emphasis on process characteristic of qualitative studies is also significant. The focus on process reveals how attitudes and beliefs are translated into action. Qualitative studies also allow understandings to be constructed as the participants reveal them. There is no preconceived hypothesis. Ultimately, qualitative studies reveal how the participants make sense of their world. The participants are allowed to tell their story. In this study the voice of the teachers are the story.

The key characteristics described above and the specifics of this study make the use of case study appropriate in helping understand the extent to which teacher beliefs and practice reflect current thinking in historical thinking and understanding. In fact case study research shares many elements that support qualitative studies. Among the shared aspects of both are that each is a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 2008). This is an important point to mention as case study supports the on-going evolution of meaning (Yin, 2009). With this in mind the process and the product are one. Case study also acknowledges the role of the researcher. This case study is intrinsic in nature as the researcher’s interest in the phenomena is what drives case study and motivates the creation of the research questions to be pursued (Stake, 2008). Further, the focus of the research question in this study on teacher beliefs and practice are suitable for case study design. Yin (2009) comments that case study is
appropriate when one wants to know how social phenomena work, in this case teaching and teacher beliefs. Qualitative case studies see context as essential to the development of understanding. Nothing is considered trivial as the boundaries between context and the phenomenon are often blurred. With this in mind the varied forms of data serve to accentuate the participant’s perspective and provides the rich data that qualitative research calls for (Yin, 2009).

**Research Questions**

This qualitative case study has been guided by the following three research questions:

1. To what extent do teacher beliefs and practice reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding?
2. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by their professional development?
3. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by the context in which they work?

These questions align well with qualitative research as they focus on the meaning teachers bring to the table when thinking about their trade. The question requires that the teachers’ voice and story be heard. By emphasizing the participant voice the researcher has been able to construct a detailed and complex understanding of the topic (Creswell, 2009). From this data rich analysis has been constructed that will help scholars better understand how teacher pedagogy can influence the development of historical thinking and understanding in students.

**Methodology**

One key reason a qualitative case study is appropriate to this study is the emphasis on naturalistic inquiry (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Examining teacher beliefs and practices as they unfold naturally will provide data that are not controlled. This data reflects what actually
happens in classrooms and how teachers feel about historical thinking and understanding in the schools being studied. Also important is that the researcher had personal contact and insight with respect to this study and that this relationship is a valued aspect of qualitative research. The researcher, as a peer to the participants, also has thoughts and feelings regarding this topic. A final strength of qualitative research is that qualitative data centers on the voice of the participant. From this comes the deep narrative and meaning that this topic requires.

**Site and participants.** In the selection of site and participants it is most important to use purposeful sampling that can provide information needed to answer the research question (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher’s school, East Regional High School, and two neighboring high schools, Central High School and North High School, have been used as sites for this study. The selection of these three sites stems from the researchers knowledge of these institutions and the different communities they serve. North High School represents an urban district while Central High School represents a middle to lower middle class suburban population. East Regional on the other hand is comprised of students from three communities that can be considered middle to upper middle class. East Regional and Central are schools of approximately 700 students and have similar sized social studies departments of seven to eight members per department. North High School is a much larger high school with approximately 2,400 students. The history department staff at each school represents a range of teaching experience. Each district has staff with 20 or more years of experience while also having staff with less than five years of experience. Additionally, each school has a staff gender breakdown that will allow the researcher to have both male and female participants.

The researcher’s relationship with the faculty at both Central and East Regional has been beneficial to this qualitative study. As a former employee of Central High School and current
employee of East Regional trusting relationships have been established with many of the participants. This relationship has helped elicit candid participant responses that have benefited this study. Further, the participants were comfortable that anything they revealed would remain secure. The researcher has a working relationship with the history department chair at North High School but no previous relationships with any of the teachers at North High School. With this in mind the researcher cultivated open and trusting relationships with study participants from North and affirmed for them that the information provided will be confidential.

The initiation and negotiation of research relationships is a key design decision (Maxwell, 2005). It is from these relationships that data has been drawn, a thick narrative created, and conclusions drawn. According to Maxwell (2005) what is needed is a relationship that allows for the ethical gain of information that can inform the research questions. What makes this difficult is that the relationship with the participant is complex and changing. Weiss (1994) urges that the researcher maintain a working research partnership that allows for give and take. It is from this give and take that useful material comes. The researcher’s pre-existing relationship as a peer of the participants provided the opportunity for this give and take to be quickly developed. A trusting relationship had already existed. At the same time the perpetuation of existing power relationships was monitored (Burman, 2001). As the researcher has a previous relationship with some participants, pre-existing and unidentified power hierarchies possibly existed. To address these issues the researcher took steps early in the study to explain and develop a desirable working relationship. As part of this process the researcher engaged in writing reflective memos that addressed these issues and others. In this case the memos serve as a record of the researcher’s perceptions relative to participant-researcher interactions.
To ensure the cooperation of the study participants a number of steps were followed. First, confidentiality was assured. Aliases were used and all materials secured. Also, participants were provided an overview of the conclusions drawn from this study that provided them not only with closure but also with a sense that they contributed to a study that can benefit their work. It is important that the participants are part of the process as they are the study. To further ensure cooperation of the participants, the researcher was cognizant of how this experience would feel from the perspective of the participant. This means that the researcher was aware and sensitive to the feelings of the participants. The researcher addressed this by offering words of encouragement, lending an empathetic ear, and feeding a hungry belly. This also means that data collection is sensitive to the participants needs. If a participant preferred to be interviewed during the school day or after or in their classroom or somewhere else steps were taken to honor that request. Likewise, observations were arranged according to the needs of the participants.

**Data collection.** The triangulation of data is central to qualitative studies. Using a variety of sources and methods reduces the risk that conclusions will not be considered trustworthy. Interviewing, observations, and documentary evidence all contributed to the researcher’s interpretation. Each offers insights that the others may not provide (Maxwell, 2005). For example, in some cases the interview revealed one thing while the observation revealed another. It is important to remember what we say is not always what we do. The strength of the interview and the documentary evidence is that they provide information on things that cannot be observed, such as past actions. Each of the methods used helped the researcher gain the information needed to answer the research question.
**Teacher interviews.** Ten social studies teachers were interviewed (3-4 per school). Teachers were primarily selected on their willingness to participate. Another factor that impacted participant selection was the experience level of the teachers. The wide range of teacher experience found in the study reflects the different experience levels that exist in many schools. Having varying grade levels represented was also an important consideration for much the same reason as teacher experience is a factor. Another benefit of having the different grade levels represented was that comparisons of teacher methodology were more appropriate when two or more classes in the same grade level were examined.

The strength of interviews is that they revealed what the participant thinks or feels about something. For this reason Fetterman (1989) describes interviewing as the most important data collection technique for qualitative research. Ultimately, answers to interview questions need to provide responses that help answer the research questions. To do this the interviews were informal in nature. The interview, therefore, had a conversational tone to it. This put the participant at ease. Questions were prepared but were open ended in nature so as to allow the views of the participant to come out. This is essential, as the researcher wanted to create an environment of trust and respect that provoked the participants’ to share thoughts about their teaching (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Questions asked drew from knowledge-based questions, opinion-based questions, and experiential questions (Patton, 2001). These question types provided insight into the thinking of the participant relative to historical understanding. Interview protocols can found in the Appendix C.

**Teacher observations.** In addition to the interviews, teacher observations were conducted. All teachers involved in the study were observed teaching a history lesson within their respective classes. During the observations descriptive and reflective notes were taken in a
two-column format (Creswell, 2007) (see Appendix B). Teacher-student interactions and teacher methodology were observed during this process. The observations provided the researcher the opportunity to witness the practices of each teacher observed and then assess the degree to which those practices are or are not in congruence with their stated beliefs in the teaching of history (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). This is an essential data gathering method for this study as it helped to triangulate data by examining what actually happened in the classrooms. The researcher was able to witness the beliefs and pedagogy of the participant as they play out.

Some potential issues that the researcher was cognizant of include the observer effect and observer bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). With respect to the observer effect there was concern that the participants’ behavior would change knowing that researcher was in the classroom observing them for evidence of historical understanding. What helped to mitigate this is the fact that the researcher is not, nor has ever been, in a supervisory role at these institutions. Also, limiting the impact of observer effect is the fact that this data is confidential and used for educational purposes. The other area of concern was observer bias. To limit the impact of observer bias, the researcher took time to get to know the subjects and the environment as well as triangulate the data sources. Additionally, the researcher reflected, through memos, on his attitudes and how they influence his perceptions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Researcher bias in a qualitative study is impossible to eliminate. What can be done is to acknowledge the bias and continually monitor it.

**Document evidence.** The final piece of data gathered were teacher lesson plans and/or assessments. These documents offer a wide range of information that sheds light on the research questions. One of the items gleaned from the documents is what practice the teachers have put in place. Though teacher lesson plans and assessments vary with each individual, they offer insight
into concepts and skills that teachers deem important. This data is important as it represents evidence that is thoughtful given the fact that it has been compiled and saved by the teacher (Creswell, 2007). This data was used to better understand the pedagogical decisions that are employed by the teachers. Additionally, teacher beliefs were reflected from the lesson plans and assessments.

**Data analysis.** Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe data analysis as a dynamic process that involves brainstorming and trying out different ideas in an effort to find out about a phenomena and how it works. This requires the researcher to immerse himself in the data while examining the interplay of concepts before an interpretation of the data can be produced. As mentioned in the previous section interviews, observations, and documents supplied the data to be analyzed. These sources were triangulated to reach conclusions about how teacher beliefs and practice in history reflect current thinking in historical understanding. Coding formed the basis of analysis for all data in this study and resulted in the conclusions put forth in this study.

Throughout the study data analysis was an ongoing process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that immediate analysis of data can allow for the development of concepts and allow for more focused follow-up. Analysis happened, as Creswell (2007) comments, concurrently with data gathering. As interviews and observations occurred and data was collected the researcher actively examined the data.

This process witnessed the coding of transcriptions from interviews as well as notes from observations and text from documents. Each of the data sources being used for this study contributed to the triangulation of data necessary for to this study as each captured a different perspective. Interviews allowed the participant to voice their thoughts and perspectives while observation revealed what actually happened in the classroom. Teacher observations were
recorded through a two-column chart with descriptive events and reflective notes (Creswell, 2007). The descriptive column provided the researcher with a record of what happened while the reflective column allowed for immediate thoughts. At different points in time these reflective thoughts contributed to the creation of analytic memos (Saldana, 2009). Lesson plans and assessments offered a view into what the teacher intended to do and were juxtaposed with what actually happened and with how the teacher perceived what happened. The collection of codes that resulted from these data sources provided the researcher with a broad view of the teachers’ beliefs and practices as called for in the research question.

The analysis of data for this study was guided by a combination of emic and etic approaches as well as descriptive and In Vivo coding methods. The use of emic and etic as an analytical method allowed the voice of the participant to come out and also offered an opportunity for the researcher to describe what took place. These analytical frameworks are most often used by anthropologists and social scientists that study human behavior (Kottak, 2006). They are appropriate for use in this study seeing that teaching and the choices teachers make are forms of human behavior. Emic coding examines how people perceive the world as well as considering what has meaning for them. With emic coding the participant is dominant. Etic coding offers a slightly different perspective where the researcher identifies what is important (Jingfeng, 2013). This fits well with the current study as the researcher can view the data with more impartiality than the participant.

Initial data analysis focused on the development of first cycle codes (Saldana, 2009). During this stage of analysis data was broken into small categories using descriptive coding and In Vivo coding methods that closely align with an emic approach to analysis. Descriptive coding allows for the simple breakdown of data based on what is being said. In Vivo coding keeps the
data rooted in the participants language (Saldana, 2009). Each of these methods was appropriate for the initial or first cycle coding of this study. Both descriptive and In Vivo coding allow the researcher the opportunity to begin preliminary organization of the data in an effort to find out what has been said. Another advantage of descriptive and In Vivo coding is that it supports the microanalysis of data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Microanalysis allows researchers to generate ideas and delve deeper into the data. In Vivo coding goes one step further in focusing on the participants’ language which is critical to this study as the study emphasizes the teachers’ voice. Both coding methods also lend themselves to the constructivist nature of this study in that the participant voice was emphasized.

As the coding process continued the researcher transitioned to second cycle methods (Saldana, 2009). During this stage the researcher compared, re-organized, and focused codes into categories. At this point the researcher began to prioritize codes into axial categories and eventually synthesized information to identify core categories that became the foundation of the grounded theory supported in the study’s conclusions. At this stage of analysis the researcher was thinking about why what is happening in the data might be occurring. The researcher also explored the extent to which the participants are touching upon key elements of constructivist theory. It is important to note at this point that coding was very much heuristic in nature. It is cyclical and each cycle serves as a filter for the previous one. For the current study, movement into second cycle coding occurred as more data was acquired and the researcher’s immersion in that data was sufficient enough to allow second cycle analysis.

Also significant are the analytic memos. These memos are important as they reveal the lens used by the researcher to examine and interpret the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To this end, the memos provide data on the researcher’s code choices, research questions, relationship to
the study and participants, emergent themes and concepts, etc. (Saldana, 2009). Each of these areas offers rich insights into the researchers perspective. Memos ultimately helped improve the quality of analysis through reflective thought. Saldana suggests that the memo’s themselves become part of the data that contributes to the study’s final conclusions. The memos, after all, reflect the researcher’s thoughts and how they might impact the researcher’s interpretation of data.

Validity and Credibility

A number of steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. Prior to exploring these steps it was important to distinguish quantitative and qualitative forms of validity. In quantitative research studies there are four areas that contribute to a study’s validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One area is that of internal validity or the extent to which variations in an outcome or dependent variable can be attributed to a controlled variation in an independent variable. In a qualitative study credibility replaces internal validity. Credibility or truth-value, as Lincoln and Guba refer to it, is evident when the researcher has represented multiple constructions in an accurate manner. This is achieved when participants review the study and its findings. Additional ways to assure credibility are found in the fact that qualitative studies seek to include the human element. That is, qualitative studies welcome the humans and acknowledge that instrumentation can change due to the fact that the instruments are human. An additional factor that contributes to credibility is long-term involvement in the study. Qualitative studies require the immersion of the researcher in an effort to truly understand the phenomenon and the context it exists in.

Credibility in the proposed study was achieved through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement allowed the researcher the opportunity to
build trust with the participants, recognize and acknowledge his own preconceptions and how they influence his interpretations, and understand necessary contextual factors. Prolonged observation helped the researcher identify central aspects of how teacher beliefs and practice in history reflect current thinking with respect to historical thinking and understanding. Identification of these central elements allowed the researcher to explore them in great depth.

In conjunction with prolonged engagement and persistent observation, the triangulation of data helped provide a rich and comprehensive account. Each of the different data collection points offered unique opportunities for data gathering. Observations revealed how the participants actually employ historical understanding in their classes. Documentary evidence revealed the extent to which they developed historical understanding in their classes. Interviews revealed their beliefs, attitudes, and values relative to historical understanding. Each of these data sources was valuable on their own but collectively they provided a complete and insightful look into the participants’ beliefs and practices.

A second area of validity that needs attention in quantitative studies is external validity. External validity presumes a causal relationship can be generalized across different measures of cause and effect as well as different types of persons, settings, and times. External validity can be achieved with a random sample that includes every element of the desired population. Internal and external validity are often juxtaposed in quantitative research. In qualitative studies external validity is identified as transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss that transferability can be established with thick description. Thick description provides the detail necessary to see if conclusions are transferable to other times, settings, or situations. Critical to thick description is the discussion of a phenomenon’s context. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also support the importance of context as a way to ground concepts and minimize chances for
distorted meaning. In the current study the researcher focused on gathering detailed field accounts that contributed to the thick description necessary for transferability. This was achieved through the combination of interviews, teacher observations, and documentary evidence. During this process the researcher emphasized voice of the participant and the context of the various data gathering points.

Reliability is the third area that contributes to a quantitative studies overall validity. Reliability is rooted in the belief that an application should be repeatable. Qualitative studies rely on dependability instead of reliability. Dependability can be achieved through an auditing process that has an outside researcher examine the process and product of the study. The outside researcher seeks to determine the extent to which the study’s conclusions are rooted in the data.

The final area that contributes to the validity of a quantitative study is the study’s objectivity. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985) objectivity can be achieved through the mutual agreement of multiple observers to the study’s findings. Qualitative studies employ confirmability, which looks at the extent to which the researcher bias has influenced the study’s findings. For the current study the researcher addressed both dependability and confirmability through the use of external audits. A recent doctoral graduate at Northeastern reviewed the study’s conclusions. The feedback given by this researcher helped identify strengths and weaknesses in the study’s data and analysis. It is important to note that complete agreement is unlikely due to the interpretive nature of qualitative studies. Nonetheless, his suggestions helped inform this study and help support its validity.

As mentioned earlier reflective thought and writing is a critical part of ensuring the validity and reliability of this study. The researcher wrote reflective memos during all phases of the study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stress the importance of memos as a way of organizing
thoughts with respect to the study. Qualitative analysis is by nature a complex undertaking that would be difficult without memos. Memos provide a record of the researcher’s thoughts and reflections that can contribute to the study’s overall validity. Specifically, during observations there is a column designated for the researchers reflections that corresponds to the descriptive/detail part of the observation protocol. Also, after many of the interviews the researcher engaged in reflective memo writing. Memo writing was beneficial as it helped limit observer bias.

The researcher’s positionality relative to this study is one that was carefully addressed. As a current member of East Regional High School and former faculty member at Central High School the researcher has intimate knowledge of both schools. With this in mind, it was essential to acknowledge biases and adhere to the steps for validity and reliability outlined above. It should be mentioned at this point that the researcher’s connection to these schools has positive attributes. First, and foremost, is that the participants know and trust the researcher already. As a colleague, with no supervisory past, the researcher is “one of them”. This trusting relationship helped the participants feel comfortable with the researcher. Another benefit of having a relationship already established was that the participants and administration at both schools welcomed this study. Asking teachers to make time in their busy lives for a study such as this is a significant request. When it came from a person they know and trust it was greeted positively.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects in this study is a paramount concern. To this end, all information about participants and schools will be kept anonymous. By keeping the schools and participants anonymous the participants should feel open to sharing their beliefs and practices
relative to historical understanding. There was no administrator reviewing or having access to
this information. Additionally, the interviews and observations were centered on the teachers’
views and inclusion of historical thinking skills that contribute to historical understanding not on
an evaluation or critique of the schools or their leadership. Also important to note is that minors
were not part of the participant pool although they were part of the observation process, though
not the focus. At no point was specific reference made or connected to a specific child. All
International Review Board guidelines were followed throughout this study. Letters of
introduction to the study and the researcher were be sent to the administrators of North High
School, Central High School and East Regional High School seeking permission to conduct the
study at their respective schools. Following this letters of introduction were sent to members of
the history departments at each school, seeking volunteers to be participants in the study. These
letters explained the study’s intent as well the process for the study. Once faculty expressed
interest being a participant the researcher provided them with informed consent paperwork that
assured confidentiality and protected them as participants. Finally, all data was secured in a
locked closet and will be destroyed at the end of the study.

As has been repeatedly mentioned the researcher engaged in regular reflection to identify
any bias. As colleague or former colleague to many of the participants the researcher
approached the analysis of data and drawing of conclusions as detached as possible. This means
that the researcher evaluated data based only on what was revealed by the data. Reflective
thinking and memo writing greatly added in this endeavor. Ultimately, however, the voice of the
researcher made its way into the study. This is an inevitable situation and a welcomed one in
qualitative studies. The researcher maintained an open dialogue with respect to this. In this way
the readers of this study are fully aware of the researchers views and bias.
Conclusion

Throughout the researcher’s nineteen-year career in education it has become evident that not all students develop historical understanding in their history classes. This has been a source of much thought and interest for the researcher. The role of the educator in this dilemma is just one part of the larger issue but a significant one. What are teacher beliefs with respect to historical thinking and understanding? Do teachers attempt to teach the skills necessary for historical thinking and understanding? If so, how do they go about doing it? Each of these questions can help to shed light on an age-old problem that “kids just don’t know history” (Wineburg, 2001). Results from this study can add to the growing literature that explores how teachers can impact the development of historical understanding in teachers (Grant, 2010; Levesque, 2008; VanSledright, 2011). The qualitative nature of this study is appropriate as the constructivist theory that frames the study recognizes the human element present in learning. The ever-changing nature of the human experience does not minimize the importance of this study or its validity. In fact, qualitative studies find their strength in their connection with the human spirit. The emphasis on depth and context found in qualitative studies provides rich source knowledge for future researchers and practitioners. The case study proposed here offers an opportunity to access a wide range of data sources that will not only provide depth but also breadth to the beliefs and practices of teachers at the two high schools involved in this study. As a result, this study should significantly add to existing literature on teacher beliefs and practices relative to historical thinking and understanding.

Chapter IV: Research Findings

Chapter IV presents key findings on high school teachers’ perceptions and practices with respect to current research regarding historical thinking and understanding. Participants were
selected based on their willingness to take part in this study and their availability to meet with the researcher. In total there were ten participants from three Southeastern Massachusetts high schools.

The chapter is organized into three sections. The first section offers a description of the study’s context. The second part of this chapter introduces the emergent themes that were identified during the coding process and drawn from the data. Within this section, the emergent themes are discussed in the context of the three research questions that drive this study.

1. To what extent do teacher beliefs and practice reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding?
2. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by their professional development?
3. To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by the context in which they work?

The final section of this chapter summarizes the findings as a whole.

**Study Context**

As presented in Chapter Three, ten history teachers across three Southeastern Massachusetts high schools were chosen to participate in this study. One school is a large, ethnically diverse urban district with over 2,400 students while the other two schools are smaller, less diverse schools with about 750 students each. The noticeable difference between the two smaller schools is that one is located within a district comprised of largely upper middle class families while the other is made up of students from middle to lower middle class families. The selection of these three high schools from differing socio-economic communities allowed for
teachers from across varied communities to have voice in the study. It also ensures that the different settings themselves are represented.

The ten participants represent a wide range of experience. The most experienced teacher has 37 years in education while the least experienced teacher has just over three years experience. Having a range of experience like this is important to this study as teachers with more or less teaching experience may have varying views on teaching, professional development, and the importance of context in shaping ones outlook and practice relative to the teaching of history. Table 1 shows the demographic composition of the participants.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Socio-economic make-up of school</th>
<th>Number of schools taught at in career</th>
<th>Was teaching the primary career choice when leaving college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lower Middle Class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lower Middle Class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lower Middle Class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first set of data collected were interviews where the participants responded to open-ended questions related to the three research questions of this study. While the questions focused on the research questions, the open-ended nature of the each interview question allowed the participant to respond in a way that was unique to them. Shortly after each interview, the researcher arranged to observe each teacher teaching a lesson. For each observation the researcher sat in the participant’s classroom and took two-column notes related to the pedagogy evidenced during the lesson. The final step of the data-gathering phase of this study was to collect samples of participant assessments, activities, and lesson plans. The documents are varied as some represented projects that spanned a period of time while others represented more traditional, one-period tests or essays. These sources of data helped to triangulate the data as they offered further evidence of what concepts were emphasized in the class and each teacher’s approach to the teaching of history. After data was gathered the researcher coded the data using a blend of emic and etic styles in conjunction descriptive and In Vivo analysis that will be described in the next section.

Coding

The choice of Emic and Etic coding, in conjunction with descriptive and In Vivo methods of analysis, stems from the study’s connection to human behavior. The emic approach focuses on how people perceive and categorize their world as well as how they attach meaning to things. Etic analysis places greater emphasis on the researcher as an observer that can view data from a different perspective (Kottak, 2006). Both approaches serve to balance the other. Emic analysis encourages the voices of the participant, which are essential to this qualitative study, to be heard and therefore offers grounded analysis. It is within this framework that descriptive and In Vivo methods were also utilized to help form codes. The Etic allows the researcher to view the data
from a deductive position (Jingfeng, 2013). In this sense, the researcher can see how the data adds to establish understanding. The outcome of Emic and Etic analysis for this study are emerging thematic codes that organize the data. It is from these codes that the perceptions and understandings of the participants were analyzed in relation to the teaching of history, historical thinking and understanding, and Vygotsky’s socio-cultural learning theory.

Table 2 provides an example of the coding process used in this study with a description of that process following.

**Initial reading.** The coding of data was broken down into three phases. The initial phase involved reading the transcriptions of participant interviews. During this phase the researcher familiarized himself with the wealth of information that each participant offered. Although no codes were developed at this point the researcher began to process the data and think about codes. It was also at this time that the sheer volume of information gathered became apparent. While the amount of data was initially overwhelming the researcher was buoyed by all the potential that was present within the transcriptions. The open-ended nature of the interview questions truly allowed for the participant’s beliefs to come out.

**Emergent themes:** The second phase of coding saw a blend of emic and etic analysis where the researcher extracted a set of initial codes based on what the participant’s voice revealed. Emphasizing the participant voice and identifying codes that grew out of the participant voice is in line with an emic approach to coding. Emic analysis is focused on the participants perceptions of their world and experiences (Kottak, 2006). As found in etic analysis this phase witnessed a greater emphasis on the researcher as an observer. By identifying a set of initial codes the researcher was beginning to impose an outside lens on the participant’s voice in an effort to categorize data. Doing this for each participant allowed the researcher group similar
Table 2

**Coding Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements of participant (emic)</th>
<th>Emerging Themes (emic/etic)</th>
<th>Central Themes (emic/etic)</th>
<th>Connection to Socio-cultural theory (etic)</th>
<th>Reflective thoughts (from memos)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They were so passionate about this subject. I look at them every day and it may be different as I knew them out of schools but they lived history. They were educators all the time not just between the bells.</td>
<td>1. Passion 2. Inspiration 3. Personal connections 4. Influence 5. Love of the subject</td>
<td>1. Mentor teachers have significant impact on participants approach to teaching</td>
<td>Teachers are models for Doug and act as the more influential other as discussed in Vygotsky’s ZPD.</td>
<td>Doug seemed happy to be taking this stroll down memory lane. It is obvious that these teachers had a significant impact on him. I wonder if this will be the case with other participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have moved towards professional learning communities or PLCs and they have helped greatly. Lately we have been working on analyzing documents or evidence and have discussed DBQs or data-based questions.</td>
<td>1. PLCs 2. Concepts - evidence and writing 3. Positive and influential peer relations</td>
<td>1. PLCs valued for allowing integration of content and concept 2. Concept development varies from teacher to teacher 3. Collegiality</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development - influence of more experienced other (the PLC members)</td>
<td>It seems as though the PLC provides the opportunity for teachers to talk about best practices. This is similar to what we do at ORR.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in the first column of the above table, the transcription of Doug’s interview is full with information on his perceptions on various topics. For example, during the initial round
of coding the passion and inspiration he remembered his high school teachers displaying stood out as well as their love of the subject matter. Also present in the transcription of Doug’s interview were some of the historical thinking skills and disciplinary concepts that he focuses on in his classes as a result of the Professional Learning Community he belongs to. The codes, garnered from the initial round of coding, provided the researcher a wide range of topics to consider when attempting to identify the central themes of this study.

**Central themes.** After coding the data for each of the study’s ten participants the researcher started the process of identifying central themes. It was at this time that the researcher began to see the study take shape. The data seemed all the more manageable and seemed to be talking to the researcher. In reviewing the initial codes the researcher began to notice patterns or recurrent themes. What was interesting was the inherent complexity within the different themes. An example of this can be found in the theme that addresses the influence of mentor teachers on the participants. Doug and many other participants identified the passion and professionalism of their mentors as significant in their development while two other teachers commented that they had no positive role models or mentors that influenced them. The uniqueness of each individual response and the voice qualitative studies give to the individual came out in this section of the paper. The participants’ beliefs (emic) were combined with the researcher’s more deductive position (etic).

**Connections to socio-cultural theory.** As the researcher was reading and coding the data of this study he was cognizant of the socio-cultural work of Lev Vygotsky. With this lens in place the researcher was looking for examples where the participants were constructing knowledge. In the above examples, Doug’s memories of his mentors were revealing of the constructive interactions between he and his teachers. The impact that these teachers had on him
continues shape him today. He tries to emulate their passion for history and learning in his own professional career.

Another aspect of socio-cultural theory that is regularly present within this study is Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Distance. In the example of Doug and his mentors the mentors served as guides or role models for him as he went through school and on into his professional life. Another area where this was evident can be found in the second example above. In this case the members of the PLC act as the “more influential individual” that help guide the others toward a higher level of understanding. In this case it has to do with teaching and understanding data-based questions.

During all phases of the coding process the impact of the socio-cultural framework was felt. In many ways the design of the research questions and subsequent participant responses contributed to this as the study was framed by the socio-cultural model. Each of the codes and central themes was analyzed with the theoretical framework in mind.

Research Question #1: To what extent do teacher beliefs and practice reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding?

This question tackles two significant topics. One centers on teacher beliefs relative to historical understanding and the other around teachers’ practice and its relationship to historical understanding. Each will be discussed independently and then together (as described in table 2).

Table 2

Breakdown of research question #1

| Extent to which teacher beliefs reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding. |
| Extent to which teacher practices reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding. |
Alignment between teacher beliefs and teacher practices relative to current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding.

**Extent to which teacher beliefs reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding.** Teacher beliefs are essential to this qualitative case study as their belief and value system most likely influences their practice. The interview process offered an excellent vehicle to uncover these beliefs as each teacher had the flexibility to answer the questions as they are interpreted them. Ultimately, each participant was interviewed and transcriptions of these interviews were then coded according to themes that lent themselves to the first research question. Table 3 presents the five themes that emerged from the coding process.

Table 3

*Emergent themes: Extent to which teacher beliefs reflect current thinking and research on historical understanding.*

| The concepts associated with the teaching of history are taught in conjunction with content. |
| Ability level grouping influences the teacher’s emphasis on concepts and content. |
| Emphasis on concepts associated with current research on historical understanding varies from teacher to teacher. |
| Teachers’ goals impact the choice of skills and concepts they develop in their classes. |
| Teachers’ express mixed views on a student-centered classroom. |

*The concepts associated with the teaching of history are taught in conjunction with content.* All ten participants in this study discussed a shared relationship between the use of concepts associated with the teaching of history and the content itself. Despite the belief that concepts and content go hand-in-hand, deeper analysis of participant responses revealed subtle
differences. Eight teachers see content and concepts as inseparable as one supports the other. For these teachers, deeper conceptual understanding enhances content awareness while greater content awareness lends itself to more advanced conceptual understandings. Hence, there is an inseparable and mutually supportive relationship between concepts and content. In fact, this is what historical thinking and understanding is. The remaining two teachers, however, see content as the critical element in history education and will sacrifice deeper conceptual development if needed to cover more content. Table 4 provides a breakdown of teacher beliefs relative to concept development versus content driven decisions.

Table 4

*Teacher beliefs relative to concept development versus content coverage as the dominant factor in pedagogical decisions.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Teacher beliefs relative to concept development versus content coverage as the dominant factor in pedagogical decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Skills and content are inseparable. Skills are embedded in content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Skill development is essential; content is necessary to develop skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Skills are essential but content is important to skill development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Skills and content are intimately connected. One needs the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Skills are needed to better understand the content and vice versa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Skills and content are inseparable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Skills and content are linked; they both need each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Skills and content are linked together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Content is primary concern. Skills and concepts fit when they can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Content focused as standardized testing dictates curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concepts and content are inseparable. Matt, a six-year veteran teacher, comments that he recently had students engage in an activity that encouraged them to empathize with the trench soldier of World War I. The purpose of the lesson was not to teach them about empathy as much as it was an attempt to have the students better remember the larger, content driven learning objective which was to have them understand what the fighting was like and how the horrors of war could impact the future political and social landscape of the nations involved. In this case Matt had students watch a video that depicted, with gruesome detail, what trench warfare was like during WWI. He followed this up with primary documents that supported the scenes from the video. By trying to have the students empathize with the trench soldier, Matt was using the concept of empathy to bring about a greater awareness of the content.

While Matt allows the content to dictate which concept is discussed, James sees an opportunity for including historical concepts like cause and effect and significance each day. James suggests, “If you are teaching history you have to talk about cause and effect. If not, what are you talking about?” James’ point is valid. In teaching history it is difficult to avoid the conceptual understandings as they help to define, collectively, historical thinking and understanding.

Chris offers a slightly different take on the relationship between concept development and content coverage. Chris puts it well when he says that conceptual development and content are, “…related quite intimately. The content, ideally, should be the vehicle for bringing out skills that are necessary. History education without either is insufficient.” An important takeaway from Chris’ statement, and different from Matt’s commentary, is that content supports concept development. Paul confirms Chris’ view when he says that, “content is important because you cannot think without something to think about.” Bill also supports this view by
noting that content is used to build conceptual understanding. He further comments that conceptual awareness and development is of much greater importance in the long term as it can help students better make sense of not only history in the future but also the world in which they live.

Despite the subtle differences described above, eight out of ten teachers believed that concept development and content coverage were dependent on one another in an effort to attain historical understanding.

*Content trumps concepts.* Two of the participants shared that although concepts were important, if push came to shove they would sacrifice skill and concept development in favor of content coverage. One common explanation for this was a feeling that the current curricula do not allow much time for skill and concept development. Doug feels that by incorporating skill development, such as writing, into his classroom he must sacrifice content. It is important to understand at this point that writing is often a skill that is used to reveal content and conceptual understandings. Ted echoes this sentiment by noting that the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) has, “…forced us into a situation where we have to spew out facts. The kids need to know factual information because they are going to get these little bubble sheets on standardized tests that rely on factual knowledge.”

*Ability level grouping impacts the teacher’s emphasis on concepts and content.* One theme that emerged from the interviews that was unanticipated by the researcher was the impact that ability level grouping would have on the pedagogical decisions made by teachers. Six out of the ten teachers commented that their decision to incorporate advanced historical concepts into their classes was dependent on what level class they were teaching. Two of the schools, East Regional and North High School, have four levels available to students. The lowest of the
levels, the “applied” classes, are for students that struggle with basic reading and writing. The “college prep” class is geared toward students that read at grade level and write at grade level. “Honors” is for the more advanced student while “Advanced Placement” is a college level class for the very advanced and motivated student. Central High School has similar options with the notable difference being that there is no “applied” level option. The “college prep” option combines the “applied” student and the “college prep” student.

Particularly interesting was that some teachers said they would focus less on skills and concepts with more advanced students while others said they would place more emphasis on skills and concepts with these same students. Doug captures the essence of the struggle some teachers have when he comments,

I teach the same content to all levels but going from a high-level honors class where Venn diagrams and breaking down documents from the 18th and 19th century is regular to a class of students that struggle with basic comprehension is difficult. With a lot of these kids you have to hold their hand just to have them understand the content. Then taking what they know and having them analyze, contrast, and apply to modern events…All of those things become difficult because some kids just struggle to grasp the basics.

Doug further identifies that the problem stems largely from weakness with reading comprehension.

Pam sees that issue a bit differently than Doug. For Pam the issue stems more from a lack of effort than a lack of ability. She notices that many of her students to not “attend” to their studies. She comments that she can do more with her honors students as they are able to better retain information and recall it for activities. Her college preparatory classes on the other hand are more difficult as, “they wipe the slate clean every day like it is Groundhog Day for them.”
Both Doug and Pam, while differing on the cause of the problem, identify weaknesses in their students’ ability to grasp the nuances inherent in history. Also imbedded in this discussion is the importance of content coverage for Doug and Pam. Each of them expresses a concern that if more time is spent with skill work the content will be sacrificed.

*Lower levels need more skill work.* While Doug and Pam discuss less skill development with the lower level ability groups, Lucy, Paul, and Bill offer a different perspective. Lucy and Paul feel that the lower the level of student the more attention to skill development is needed. Lucy felt that the lower level student needed more in the way of skills development to better understand history as the skills associated with historical study help students to understand that history. She further comments that when the students get older or are in more advanced classes the skills can be refined and more time can be spent with the content. Paul adds that it isn’t that the lower level student is not capable of achieving academic success. He comments, “One of the things we find in our least academic classes is that we have many great thinkers. They don’t just tell you what you want to hear.”

Bill on the other hand feels he provides his advanced students with more “interesting” content while the applied classes generally stick to the Massachusetts History Frameworks. Bill notes that if he was to start telling a college prep class interesting stories that add depth to the topics being discussed he would have three or four out of 20 actively engaged with the story. He feels that history is not a passion many college prep students but something that they are required to take in order to graduate.

*Each class is unique.* Another consideration relative levels is whether the teacher is creating lessons based on the needs of each individual class. Pam mentioned that the strategies she uses depend on the “crop of kids” she has. She mentions, as do some other participants, that
she tries different things with different kids. Lucy and Paul concur. Lucy notes that one year she may have a strong college prep level class and the next year she may need to change the course because the students are not strong. In essence, the adaptability of the teachers and the uniqueness of the students from year to year results in different points of emphasis for the teachers.

Although there are different views expressed by the teachers’ with respect to the impact of leveled classes the essential takeaway is that leveled classes affect how teachers approach instruction. Some see the need for greater skill and concept development while others identify the need for more content knowledge.

*Emphasis on skills and concepts associated with current research on historical thinking and understanding varies from teacher to teacher.* Each of the ten teachers that were interviewed discussed skills and concepts that they emphasized in their teaching. What is interesting, but not surprising, is the fact that each teacher stresses different skills and concepts. In one classroom the emphasis may be on the effective analysis and use of primary documents while in another class the focus is on the cause and effect relationships that help define the past. Adding another level of depth to the data is the fact that there are differences amongst the teachers in how they emphasize the same skill or concept in comparison to their peers. Table 5 provides an overview of concepts teachers develop in their courses.

*Evidence.* When asked what skills they focus on in their courses many of the teachers mentioned evidence. This makes perfect sense as the study of history relies heavily on the analysis and synthesis of evidence from the past. Within this discussion four teachers, Chris, Lucy, Doug, and Ted, commented on the need for students to understand the dialectic tension that dominates the study of both the past and the present. For Chris, getting students to see the
various perspectives people have on an event is essential. In examining documentary evidence he stresses that students explore the author, the context in which the document was written, and the intentions of the document. Lucy’s goal is to have the students’ craft sound written arguments that are supported with evidence gained from the documents. This requires students to be aware of the dialectic tension present in the documents and in history. Doug also wants his students to be able to use evidence to support a position but underlying his motivation is to prepare his students for the primary document analysis that can be found on standardized tests.

Table 5

*Overview of concepts teachers develop in their courses.*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Writing and the use of evidence to support a position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Cause and effect, evidence analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Continuity and change, significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Empathy, cause and effect, chronology, progress and decline, evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Writing and the use of evidence to support a position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Synthesis of information, writing, significance, evidence, causation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Cause and effect, compare and contrast, evidence, writing, significance, continuity and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Causation, empathy, evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Evidence to support a position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Empathy, cause and effect, evidence, agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cause and Effect.* Another common concept mentioned often by the teachers is cause and effect. For Ned and James cause and effect is of central importance. Ned sees cause and effect as not only a basic component of understanding our past but also in helping to explain the
present. Ned comments that he wants students “to know that the way things are today are because of decisions made by people in the past.” James “hammers” cause and effect as he sees it critical to explaining the past. As mentioned previously James believes, “in covering the content you have to talk about cause and effect. If not, what are you talking about?”

One thing the interviews reveal is that all of the teachers are integrating concepts and skills that are necessary for historical thinking and understanding. The complexity lies in which ones they focus on and why they focus on these. Paul captures the essence of this dilemma well when he comments that there is a “shotgun” approach to teaching skills and concepts in history classes as there is no system in place that tells teachers which skills and concepts to emphasize. One thing that helps explain how teachers decide which skills and concepts to cover stems from how they, the teacher, understands history. Chris identified this when he explained that he teaches from a dialectic understanding, as that is how he understands history.

**Teachers’ goals influence the choice of concepts they develop in their classes.** Critical to understanding each of the participants’ beliefs about the teaching of history is finding out what motivates them as a teacher. It is not surprising that this topic came up in all of the teacher interviews as the questions encouraged them to reflect on their teaching. Despite the fact that each teacher was unique in this area there are some commonalities. Among the similarities is desire to prepare students for the future and to study the past to better understand the present.

**Preparing students for the future.** One thing that bound all the teachers together was a desire to prepare students for a future of decision-making. Some of the teachers commented that our democratic system relies on a well informed and thinking populace to vote and that their mission was to help develop these future voters. Bill noted, “I always have on my syllabus that one of the goals of this class is to get you to be civic thinking, good Americans.” He further
comments that his students will eventually vote and make decisions. He hopes that after his
class they will have the skills to investigate and think about the issues facing the nation. Matt
supports Bill’s views by saying that history is the perfect discipline for this to take place. After
all, history is about people making choices and the concepts that support historical thinking and
understanding are ones that we all should familiar with.

Other teachers did not specifically mention preparing future voters as a motivation but
expressed a desire to develop students with better critical thinking skills. For Lucy and Doug the
study of history offers an opportunity to get students to think. Doug wants his students to see
learning as an important endeavor for the sake of learning itself. If he can encourage them to
become life-long learners, they will be better prepared for their future. Lucy encourages the
students to become better thinkers through her focus on developing them as writers as she sees
writing as the expression of thought. Regardless of the specifics the end result is the same.
Teachers generally want to prepare students for a future that is full of decisions.

Use history as a way to better understand the present. In his classes, Ted tends to focus
on the inherent tension that resides in the historical past. By emphasizing conflict Ted feels that
students can better understand the tensions that exist in the present. With this knowledge his
students will be better able to understand and contribute to the present. For Chris and Bill there
is a desire that their students better understand the world that we live in. Chris notes that his
overarching goal is for his students to understand the politicized nature of our world. To this
end, he has students examine a topic from different textbooks from around the world to see
different interpretations of the event. He and his students then engage in a discussion as to why
there may be different perspectives on the event. Bill focuses on using current events, such as
the Supreme Court decision on health care reform, to better understand the significance of the
*Marbury v. Madison* and the concept of judicial review. Bill feels that not only will his students better understand the present they will also understand the past and its importance.

*Seek the truth.* Two of the teachers, Pam and Paul, identified seeking the truth as their motivation. Paul, drawing on Socrates, believes there is an innate curiosity in all of us and that we are all moving toward some element of the truth. Likewise, Pam hopes her students find the truth but as they see it after careful and thoughtful analysis. Paul and Pam look at learning as a personal endeavor that they need to cultivate within their students.

An awareness of the participants’ goals can provide a better understanding of what influences the decisions they make in the classroom with regard to concept development and content coverage. As has been presented above, many of the teachers see history as critical to understanding the present and being able to constructively contribute to society. It follows that the choices they make are most likely drawn from these goals that reflect their beliefs.

*Teachers’ express mixed views on the student-centered classroom.* Each of the schools in this study has some form of block scheduling. Both East Regional and North have four 85-minute blocks per academic day while Central has six one-hour blocks per day. Teachers’ comment that it is not feasible to give an 85-minute lecture to a group of high school students so they break up their instruction to include a blend of student-centered activities and teacher-centered instruction. Bill notes that in his classes he may lecture for ten to fifteen minutes and then have students use the information provided to complete a student-centered activity. These activities can include completing a cause and effect chart, writing an editorial, creating a political cartoon, or any number of other things where students apply what was just presented to them. This method of instruction is common among the teachers and is most notable in the college prep classes.
In honors and AP classrooms the most common instructional method is some form of Socratic discussion. The teacher offers an open-ended question to the class and the students and teacher then engage in a discussion of the question. While the Socratic discussion allows teachers and students to interact, Paul occasionally takes student-centered learning to another level by using the Harkness Discussion Model. Harkness discussion’s are entirely student-centered and require the students to discuss, amongst each other, the nuances of a reading or prompt. In the Harkness model the teacher acts as an observer or facilitator. Paul believes that the block schedule is perfect for the Harkness discussion as they generally benefit from a longer block of time.

*Limits to student-centered learning.* A number of teachers commented that while they desire to have a more student-centered classroom there are other factors that can interfere with this. One of the most common issues is the pressure teachers’ feel with respect to the coverage of content. The Massachusetts History Frameworks require that high school history courses cover a wide range of topics. Some teachers in this study have expressed frustration that coverage requirements limit the time they can dedicate to skill and concept development as well factor into their decision to be more teacher-centered. As Doug said in the teacher-centered model “…at least you’re hitting the curriculum and exposing them to it.”

Another factor that limits student-centered learning opportunities is a lack of motivation in some students. Teachers’ comment that too many of their students are content to pay attention, take notes and quizzes but are reluctant to engage in independent learning. Pam notes that many of her students are sneaking peeks at their cell phones the instant she turns away from them instead of working on the project or activity she just assigned them.
Despite the concerns mentioned above each of the teachers’ participating in this study saw their classes as a blend of student-centered learning and teacher-centered instruction. The realities that the high school teacher faces are that a blend is necessary due the length of the learning block and socio-emotional developmental level of many high school students.

**Extent to which teacher practices reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding.** The topic of teacher practice will be examined through the analysis of both documentary evidence, in the form of lesson plans and assessments, and observations of participants teaching. The observations provide a snap shot of the classroom and the teacher’s interaction with students. This is valuable as it evidences subtle nuances present in the classroom. Assessments allow for a broader view of the teacher’s practice as it often reflects the culmination of a series of lessons. These two data points are significant in that they reflect what the teacher practices. Analysis of both documentary data and observations resulted in three emergent themes, listed in Table 6.

Table 6

*Emergent themes: Extent to which teacher practices reflect current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content coverage largely drives instruction while concepts and skills are embedded in the learning process and vary from teacher to teacher.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction is a blend of teacher-centered instruction and student-centered learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited differentiation of instruction in different ability level classes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Content coverage largely drives instruction while concepts and skills are embedded in the learning process and vary from teacher to teacher.* James’ quote, “If your not teaching cause and effect are you even teaching history” is appropriate to this theme. In fact, it is quite
appropriate for much of this study. Based on the data, each teacher moves through the curriculum in a chronological fashion that witnesses content as the central element of the class. Yet, the inclusion of skills and concepts associated with the study of history are, in fact, present in all classrooms but are discussed as the teacher sees them appropriate. This allows for the teacher to decide, based on their preferences and understanding of history, what skills and concepts to focus on.

_Documentary analysis._ Documentary analysis of tests, essay prompts, projects, quizzes, and lesson plans reveals that content recall is intricately meshed with conceptual awareness. This can be seen in Ted’s “Causes of the Civil War” assessment. While the first part of the test emphasized content recall type questions, with significance intertwined, the open responses at the end of the test stressed almost equally content awareness with conceptual understanding. For example, the prompt “explain how both Northerners and Southerners felt about going to war with Mexico” requires that students’ understand empathy as well as content specific information about the causes of the war. Ted’s choice of this prompt was drawn from activities he had done with the students. While he chose a prompt that emphasized empathy another teacher could have asked the students to consider why people in the North opposed the war with Mexico and much of the South supported the war. In both of these prompts the students are exploring similar content but Ted’s is asking the students to examine the feelings of both sides. Table 7 provides an overview of essay prompts and related concepts from four of the teachers in the study.
Table 7

*Essay prompts and associated concepts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Essay Prompt</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Evaluate the guiding ideas of the industrialists, unions, and political parties of the late 19th century. Which economic policies were most beneficial to the nation?</td>
<td>Cause and effect, progress and decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Select a leader, from this unit, that you admire and one that you do not hold in high esteem. Explain your selections in as much detail as possible.</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>The second wave of European colonialism largely focused on Africa and Asia. Select one imperial empire and compare and contrast the impact of their policies on Africa and Asia.</td>
<td>Continuity and change, significance, cause and effect, progress and decline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Why is the Mayflower Compact an important part of history?</td>
<td>Significance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in this table content knowledge and conceptual understanding are needed to successfully construct a response. Similar relationships are evidenced in other assessments provided by the participants. For example, many of the multiple-choice, short answer, true and false, and fill-in-the-blank questions require that the students’ know the significance associated with the question or the causes of the topic.

Chris and Pam incorporate the analysis of primary documents into some of the assessments they provided. Chris had his students read short excerpts of documents and then answer questions related to the perspective of the author as well as the significant ideas found in the article. Pam, on the other hand, has her students write an essay that incorporates information from the documents as well as outside knowledge that they bring to the table. While Chris and
Pam emphasize the use evidence in the examples provided it is apparent is that each teacher touches upon different skills and concepts while assessing their students.

*Observational Analysis.* Observational data supports the analysis found above in the documentary review. Content coverage and conceptual development go hand-in-hand. Each of the teachers touched upon the concepts but with different levels of emphasis. For example, in Doug’s class they were reviewing for a test so there was a heavy reliance on content review. In doing this, however, Doug provided questions that required the students to identify the significance of an event or individual or the causes and effects of an event. In contrast to Doug’s more content heavy class, Pam’s students were asked to recall content to explain why Yellow Journalism in the late 19th century could be viewed in both a positive and negative light. This activity required students to empathize with the past and understand how yellow journalism could be seen both ways. Ted also has his students do this when they were asked to defend the institution of slavery from the Southern perspective.

Both observational and documentary data support the intimately connected world of historical concepts and content. One without the other is insufficient. To paraphrase James again if we are not teaching historical concepts are we teaching history?

*Instruction is a blend of teacher-centered instruction and student-centered learning.* Through the classroom observation process and documentary evidence it is evident that there is a blend of teacher-centered instruction and student-centered activities within each classroom. The ratio of teacher directed instruction to student driven learning, however, varies from teacher to teacher. In many of the classes the teacher’s were using modified versions of the Socratic seminar that relied heavily on the teacher to drive discussion.
In Matt’s 9th grade Honor’s World History class, James’ 8th grade Applied World History class, and Paul’s 11th grade Advanced Placement United States History class instruction was initiated through a teacher-centered power point presentation. Each power point was largely a vehicle for information distribution and the teacher would engage the students in discussion based on different pieces of data provided in the presentation. Even though the students were involved with this discussion they were not driving it. They were more often than not responding to prompts proposed by the teacher. For example, Paul presented a power point slideshow that placed the Scopes Monkey Trial within the context of the 1920s. Slides focused on contrasting the positions of the religious fundamentalists that were against the teaching of evolution with the science community that supported evolution. At this time Paul was doing most of the talking by asking the students more questions than they asked him.

At the conclusion of the PowerPoint and the discussion, which occupied about 45 minutes, students were asked to discuss who decides what we teach. At this point the class becomes much more student-centered with the students driving the discussion and Paul playing the role of an influential participant. The students blended information from the power point with their views on who decides what is taught and why. In this example, Paul provided a very teacher-centered approach for the first part of class and later offered the students an engaging question that the students explored further.

In other classes similar pedagogical models were observed. In classes where power points were used each teacher had the students engage in a more student-centered activity after the power point. The activities varied in difficulty of what was asked of the students. For example, Matt had his students, in small groups, compare and contrast the effects of the American Revolution and the French Revolution. This activity required a high level synthesis as
the power point presented the effects of each revolution separately. The students needed to
categorize the data into larger organizational themes to successfully complete the assignment. In
his role as facilitator, Matt moved from group to group monitoring and offering suggestions.
James on the other hand had his 8th grade students complete a worksheet that required them to
identify the significance of key people and events from the power point. Most of the answers to
the worksheet could be found in the power point itself.

The blend of teacher-centered instruction and student-centered work described above was
largely the same for teachers that did not rely on power point presentations. In these classes
there was often a teacher created activity for the students. While this is student-centered in one
sense it is teacher-centered in another. The teacher is dominant in this scenario as the students
lack the opportunity to create or make the activity authentic. In Chris’ 9th grade College
Preparatory World History class the main activity of the day was a guided worksheet that had
students analyze evidence and identify perspective and significance from the period immediately
following World War Two. The activities in Chris’ lesson had the students work their way
through primary source evidence while employing many concepts associated with historical
understanding. Despite this, the lesson was largely teacher-centered in nature. The students
followed Chris’ lead and completed the task as he requested. A more student-centered approach
would have witnessed the students identifying key questions or selecting the documents for
analysis.

The researcher does not think it unusual for there to be a blend of teacher-centered
instruction and student-centered learning. In keeping with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal
Distance it would be very rare if there were not teacher-centered instruction. Teachers act as
models and set up the expectations for the class. The issue at hand is the degree of teacher-
centered activity and how frequently the students are given the opportunity to guide their learning.

Limited differentiation of instruction in different ability level classes. In analyzing the observational data gathered it became apparent that there is not a significant difference in coverage of concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding between different ability level groups within the same grade. What is different at the various levels is the depth of understanding associated with each concept or skill. Table 8 identifies the grade, course name, ability level for each class, and concepts present in instruction.

Table 8

Impact of ability level grouping on historical concept coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade observed</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Historical Understanding concepts present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>College Prep (CP)</td>
<td>Causation, significance, chronology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>Applied</td>
<td>Significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Primary document analysis, significance, causation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Causation, significance, empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Primary document analysis, perspective, significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>U.S. History</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Causation, significance, empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>U.S. History</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Empathy, causation, significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>World History-Ancient World</td>
<td>Applied</td>
<td>Causation, significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>U.S. History</td>
<td>Advanced Placement</td>
<td>Causation, significance, Empathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9th grade comparison. In examining the data from the 9th grade World History courses it is apparent that each of the teachers spends time developing one or more concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding. The greatest difference is found between Doug’s “applied” course and the other 9th courses. The applied class is designed for students that struggle with grade level reading and writing. With this in mind, Doug narrows the number of concepts introduced or covered during the class. On the day the researcher observed Doug’s class he and the class were preparing for a test. The main part of this preparation centered on the significance of people and events from the age of discovery. Doug provided the students a list of key terms and names that required the students to recall simple one-sentence responses about the subject.

In contrast to Doug’s applied class the other 9th grade classes were exposed to many different concepts during the observation that required deeper content and conceptual understanding. This was noticeable in both Lucy and Matt’s classes. Lucy’s emphasis on significance required her College Prep students to provide multiple reasons for the importance of events being discussed. She also had the students prioritize which events might be most significant when considering the overarching question of the day. Matt’s class required a similar of understanding with it focus on empathy for the World War One soldier and life in the trenches. Students in both of these classes had to go beyond recall and show a level of understanding that witness them make decisions based on their understanding of the past.

10th grade comparison. In the two observed 10th grade classes there was no significant difference in conceptual thinking. Bill’s college prep class and Ted’s honors course both
touched upon the same concepts but in slightly different ways. Bill had his students engage in a simulation based on the Trail of Tears. The students prioritized a list of things that were important to them and then, as they walked around the building to pre-arranged stops corresponding to actual stops on the Trail, Bill would have the students eliminate different things from their lists. After the activity was completed Bill had the students complete a journal about the experience that required the students to examine the impact of the experience. Ted, on the other hand, had students discuss in class how slave owners could defend the institution of slavery. Granted Ted’s activity was part of a test review but both teachers, though teaching different ability-level groups, touched upon empathy. To further support the limited differences between Ted’s and Bill’s courses are the similarities in their assessments. Bill’s 10th grade U.S. History college prep class and Ted’s 10th grade Honor’s U.S. History class both ask basic questions pertaining to significance in the multiple choice portions of the tests.

Although there seems to be little difference between ability-level groups with respect to the content being covered and historical concepts being employed there are some differences. As evidenced in the difference between Doug’s “applied” classes and the other 9th grade courses the depth of understanding can be different. This, however, was only noticed in a comparison of Doug’s class and the other 9th grade classes. In all the other courses the expectation of understanding was similar whether it was an honors course or college prep course.

Alignment between teacher beliefs and teacher practices relative to current thinking and research on historical thinking and understanding. Examination of the data gathered in this study has identified three areas for comparison between the stated beliefs of the teachers and what their practice reveal. Within these three areas all five emergent themes emanating from the
interviews as well as the three emergent themes garnered from the observational and documentary data are present. See Table 9 for a list of common themes.

Table 9

Common themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is significant alignment between the beliefs expressed by the teachers and their practices relative to the relationship between content and conceptual awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception on the impact of ability-level grouping and practice differ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ blend teacher-centered instruction with student-centered learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**There is significant alignment between the beliefs expressed by the teachers and their practices relative to the relationship between content and conceptual awareness.** Nine of the teachers identified that content and concepts went hand in hand with one another although two were willing to sacrifice time spent on skill and concept work in an effort to cover required content. Observations and documentary evidence support that teachers do, in fact, combine skill and concept development with content coverage. It appears that the study of history intimately connects content and concept. You cannot have historical understanding without conceptual awareness. The issue that arises from the data is the degree to which concepts are included and the number of concepts that are utilized in class. The data used in this study reveals that teachers have a tendency, due to their own experiences in teaching and their goals as an educator, to focus on concepts that reflect their framework of understanding. In short, teachers are influenced by their own epistemological views and these views find life in their classes. They, therefore, stress or emphasize different concepts and/or the depth to which they explore the concepts varies.

**Perception on the impact of ability-level grouping and practice differ.** Teacher beliefs about differences in ability-level grouping relative to conceptual development do not correspond
to practice. Six out of ten teacher’s acknowledged that what they do skill-wise and conceptually is dependent on the ability-level of the students. What observation and documentary evidence indicates is that there is little difference between the different ability-level groups relative to the conceptual components of historical thinking and understanding that are used in class. What may in fact explain the teacher comments is that they, as individuals, may differentiate amongst the different ability groups they teach as opposed to differentiation based on school policy.

**Teachers’ blend teacher-centered instruction and student-centered learning.** Teachers, in practice, employed a blend of teacher-centered instruction and student driven activities as they described in discussing their beliefs about this topic. The length of the teaching blocks contribute to a situation where teachers can instruct for a time and then have the students engage in activities that require them to apply their knowledge. The issue with the activities that can detract from the student-centered association is the fact that many of these activities are teacher generated. Students are doing the work but teachers are creating it. Therefore the level of student ownership is somewhat minimized.

A theme within this discussion that was mentioned during the interviews but was not apparent in the observations or found in the documentary evidence were factors that contributed to less student-centered learning in the classroom. Among the things mentioned but not found was the impact that unmotivated students had on the teachers’ decisions. In most classes observed the class was attentive and seemingly engaged, save the occasional distracted student.

**Research Question #2: To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by their professional development?**

To help better understand how teachers approach the teaching of history the researcher asked the participants to comment on the impact of professional development has had on them.
This question is essential as professional development, whether it is student teaching, coursework, or informal discussions, can help shape how one understands and practices teaching. Similar to Research Question #1, this question will be organized from the perspective of beliefs and values as well as practice. Table 10 provides an overview of the three components of Research Question #2.

Table 10

*Three components of Research Question #2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which teacher beliefs and values are influenced by their professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which teacher pedagogical practice is influenced by professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment between teacher beliefs and practice relative to the influence of professional development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Extent to which teacher beliefs and values are influenced by their professional development.** In holding with Vygotsky’s belief that socio-cultural influences are central to one’s development, the professional development, both formal and informal, that teachers experience throughout their careers may influence the beliefs and values they have about the teaching of history. After analyzing the participant’s interviews two themes emerged from the discussion on professional development. Table 11 lists these themes.

Table 11

*Emergent themes relative to impact of professional development on teacher beliefs and values.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers value formal professional development opportunities that integrate content and pedagogical topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor teachers have been positive role models and have significantly influenced how</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers value formal professional development opportunities that integrate content and pedagogical topics. Based on teacher interview data, professional development is perceived to be most valuable when teachers are part of the decision making process. This is most notable, as stated by the participants, within professional learning communities (PLC) and external seminars, such as those sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Gilder-Lehrman Institutes, and the College Board’s Advanced Placement training programs. Teachers commented that both PLCs and external seminars combine pedagogical and content-based discussions that they desire. Additionally, PLCs are dependent on teacher buy-in and guidance. Teachers helped guide the agenda of the PLC. External seminars satisfy teachers’ needs as teachers choose to attend these seminars based on areas of interest to them as opposed to being mandated to attend.

At North High School the PLC model is in place and teachers have organized professional development discussions that blend history content and pedagogy specific to the teaching of history. Paul, as the department chair, contacted Elizabeth Belanger from Stonehill College who specializes in training future history teachers for suggestions relative to the needs of the history department at North High School. One of the things she offered was a document from the Civil War era that was marked up with comments that a historian would have about the document. Paul realized that if he had taught the same document he would not have touched on many of the things that she did. Paul noted that he would have skipped analysis of the title and date with his students yet those are critical components necessary to understanding the document. When Paul showed his peers the marked up document he said their eyes “lit up”. Paul further commented that teachers want training that will help them better teach history.
Paul’s observations about the need for professional development that integrates both the analytical skills necessary for historical understanding and content is echoed by many of the teachers in this study.

Teacher commentary also evidenced that PLCs are going a long way toward fulfilling the need for both content discussions and pedagogical development. Doug, James, Ted, Chris, and Ned’s commentary lent credence to this point. Doug and James both believe that the best practices discussions occurred during their PLC time has helped them to become better teachers. This, in turn, has then helped the students have a more success in their classrooms. Doug comments, “If we are talking about helping me become a better teacher and my students to grow more than give me history specific professional development and that will happen.” He finds that this happens during PLC time. Chris supports the need to provide teacher directed PLCs by noting that over the last two years history teachers at East Regional have engaged in a book study of Stephane Lesveque’s *Thinking Historically*. This has opened discussion that was previously limited about the concepts that support historical understanding. Teachers at East Regional are now thinking about and talking about what significance means. Ted, the 20-plus year veteran, was wary of PLCs when they were first introduced. As he says, “After 26 years you see trends come and go and you get a little jaded. I thought here we go again. In another three years we will be onto something else.” However, after experiencing the PLC Ted believes, “PLCs are the best format we have seen in quite a while. Teachers talking to teachers is the best idea in a long time.” Each of the teachers noted that the one shortcoming of the PLC was that they would like more time together to discuss what it is that they do as professionals.

The other desirable professional development opportunity teachers frequently mentioned were external seminars that combined content acquisition and pedagogical development. Ted
and Doug were enthusiastic about the seminars they recently took part in and how these experiences also benefited their peers. Ted spent a week in New York City as a participant in a Gilder Lehrman Institute on Abraham Lincoln. As part of the institute Ted was exposed not only to other history teachers from around the country but also to some of the nations most notable Lincoln scholars. With his new knowledge about Lincoln and how to teach about Lincoln, Ted was able to share with his students and, through the PLC, with his peers. Doug commented that his month-long internship with the Massachusetts Historical Society got him “excited about sharing” his newly acquired knowledge. He also noted that he was doing the work of a historian and felt he had a stronger understanding of the skills and concepts that are important to historical study as a result.

Not all formal professional development has been as desired and beneficial as PLCs and external seminars. Undergraduate and graduate education classes taken to fulfill licensure programs received mixed review by the study’s participants. Ned felt that his education classes were “worthless” as they promoted methods that were not appropriate to the students he had in class. Pam, on the other hand, finds some value in her college coursework. She identified that although many of the things she was exposed to were not helpful she occasionally draws on her past coursework for ideas. Lucy joked that her college coursework was so long ago that she can’t possibly remember it. Then, in a more serious moment, says that teaching was radically different in the early 1970s and that her coursework would not be useful in today’s schools. In contemplating future advanced study Doug identified a desire to pursue history, not education. As he comments, “It is no slight to education but I think it’s more important to my teaching to develop a deeper understanding of history and to be excited about it.”
Another area that did not receive much support from the participants was district-sponsored professional development that was more general in nature and not connected to the teaching of history. Matt feels that about 5% of the district level professional development has been useful to him. By and large he feels that mandated professional development is impersonal and far too generic to help content teachers better provide for their students. Bill also supports this view and feels that sometimes even PLC time can be stolen from the teachers to support school or district goals like NEASC accreditation reports.

Teacher-driven professional development receives a great deal of support from the participants of this study. These teachers, being professionals, desire professional development that will help them do what the job requires; that is, teach history to their students. As Doug said, “If you are reading a textbook every day and not doing anything else you can become jaded. But if you keep introducing new and exciting things to teaching you will be excited.”

Mentor teachers, both formal and informal, have been positive role models and have significantly influenced how participant teachers approach their teaching. Eight out of ten teachers commented they have influential mentors, both formal and informal, that have impacted how they approach teaching. Themes that standout are that the influential mentors had professional bearing and/or passion for what they did. Table 12 provides an overview of the ways all ten teachers were impacted, or not in two examples, by an influential mentor.

Ted and Lucy both feel that they would not be the teachers they are today if it were not for the professional example set for them by mentor educators. Ted has adopted from his mentor the importance of letting the students know that his job is to create a learning environment where history is explored. To this end, Ted identifies that he tries to engage the students in historical
examination with a firm but fair hand as his mentor did. Lucy identifies in herself her mentor’s ability to diffuse potentially disruptive situations with a blend of comedy and to keep kids on task as a result. Both Lucy and Ted commented that having command of the subject matter is a critical takeaway from the mentors they had.

Table 12

*Influence of mentors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mentor Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Mentor was professional. Commanded the class with confidence. Was engaging, good story teller, and firm but fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Mentors were professional. Had command of material. Helped her beyond the content and pedagogy. They were essential to her success as a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Mentor was professional. Cared about his students and had high expectations of them and of himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Mentor was both professional and passionate. His enthusiasm was infectious. He was always organized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Mentor was both professional and passionate. Had excellent power points and wove in stories that captured students attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Mentor was passionate. Valued education all the time, not just between the bells. Encouraged that in her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Mentor was passionate. Stories brought children in. Proved to her that lecture, done well, is a fine method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Mentor was passionate. Was “old school” with heavily teacher-centered classroom. Was engaging and fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>No mentor mentioned. Self-driven. His dialectic framework drives his methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>No mentor mentioned. Identifies Socrates as role model. Wants each student to find their own truth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pam and Doug identified the passion of their mentors as significant influences on them as teachers. Pam recalled that her fifth grade teacher told stories that made history “come alive” for her. She further commented that she tries to work interesting stories into her lessons that may
make history come alive for her students as well. Pam also notes that peer mentors have influenced her teaching. From one former mentor she developed an awareness that content is as important as skill and concept development. The content after all provides the data that makes the skill or concept pertinent. For Doug the passion evidenced by his Advanced Placement United States History teachers when he was a student was critical to his development. He notes that his teacher, who was also the mom of one of his friends, was concerned that her students not miss the opportunity to learn. Doug says that she was always pushing him, and others, to take full advantage of the gift of learning. He notes that this is what drives him as he teaches.

The two outliers within this theme are Chris and Paul. Both said that their teaching stems largely from how they view the world not from someone else’s model as learning is unique to each individual. Both see it as there job to introduce the past to their students, give them some concepts and skills to examine that past with, and let them determine what they think of the past. Paul and Chris didn’t feel that they had any teachers that did anything exceptionally well and wanted to chart their own course in education. Chris admits that he may have learned what does not work from some of his teachers. In this way Chris has turned what he perceived as negative into a positive.

By and large, the role of mentor teachers has been viewed in a positive light. Most have taken away things from their mentors that have helped to shape how they ply their trade. What is missing, however, from many of the discussions are specific connections to concept and skills development associated with historical thinking and understanding. The absence of these connections leads one to conclude that mentor relationships are more about being a teacher than developing a repertoire of specific pedagogical tricks.
Extent to which teacher pedagogical practice is influenced by professional development. As discussed earlier in this study in relationship to Research Question 1, many of the skills and concepts necessary for historical thinking and understanding are present in the participants’ classrooms. Where exactly the teachers acquired their understandings of these skills and concepts cannot be definitively answered. Were they gathered over years of observation and reflection? Or were they the result of more formal professional development opportunities? James, for one, offers that he has observed other teachers, identified what they do well, and borrowed those ideas that fit with his personality. Ned, on the other hand, uses compare and contrast activities because a seminar he attended encouraged him to do so.

In practice the influence of professional development is evident to a limited degree in the classrooms of participating teachers. Present in each classroom and evidenced by each teacher however is a passion for the subject matter and teaching. What is not present in many classrooms is evidence that recent professional development opportunities gained through participation in PLCs or seminars has been implemented. Table 13 depicts the emerging themes found in the examination of observations and documentary data relative to professional development.

Table 13

Emerging themes found in the examination of observations and documentary data relative to professional development.

| Limited evidence supporting the inclusion of professional development opportunities in class activities. |
| Passion and professionalism are evident in each participant. |
Limited evidence supporting the inclusion of professional development opportunities in class activities. A few of the teachers in this study have put into practice lessons learned from formal professional development opportunities. For example, Pam incorporates the analysis of evidence into her assessments and daily lessons. One of the assessments that Pam offered to her Advanced Placement U.S. History students was a data-based question (DBQ). The DBQ required students to read and analyze eight documents then use those documents and any outside information they recall to respond to a prompt. Pam’s rubric requires the students to not only explore the document as a standalone source but to also place the document within a larger historical context. Properly using the documents to respond to the prompt is evidence of higher level historical thought that is supportive of advanced historical understanding. Advance Placement training and Teaching American History grant courses all contributed to Pam’s use of primary and secondary sources in class. The DBQ is a staple of the Advanced Placement test and the Teaching American History grant focused its instruction on bringing primary sources into history classes. The intent of both the Advanced Placement course and the Teaching American History grant is to have students gain greater historical understanding by engaging in the analysis of historians.

Lucy’s pedagogical choices provide another example of professional development finding its way into classrooms. Professional development finds its way into Lucy’s classroom through an emphasis on written expression as is evident in her assessment activity. She requires the students to respond to multiple essay prompts that incorporate different concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding such as empathy, progress and decline, and significance. Although the researcher did not witness Lucy’s professional development activities she did comment during her interview that she had some excellent professional development
years ago that was led by members of the English department and concentrated on writing. It is fair to assume that these opportunities influenced Lucy’s later choices with regard to the teaching of writing.

While it is evident that Pam and Lucy have incorporated lessons from professional development into their classes it is more difficult to ascertain the degree to which other teachers in this study have done the same thing. Based on the evidence sample of this study there is nothing supporting the inclusion of formal professional development, related to the skills and concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding, in the participants classes or assessments. At North High School the recent professional development emphasis has been on the analysis and use of primary documents to respond to prompts. Yet, there was no evidence of primary document analysis during the observed lessons or on the gathered assessments. A similar scenario has played out at East Regional. Recent professional development time has been spent on a book review of Stephane Levesque’s *Thinking Historically*. Levesque’s work explores what it means to think historically by explaining concepts such as significance, progress and decline, and evidence. Despite the time spent on the book study there is limited evidence that its lessons are being included in class activities or on assessments. For example, significance was regularly discussed but without any reference to the criteria listed in Levesque.

*Passion and professionalism are evident in each participant.* Based largely on data gathered from observations the teachers in this study are passionate about their teaching and extremely professional when conducting their classes. Each of the participants brought an energy and excitement during the classes that the researcher observed. Paul, for example, was visibly excited when during a discussion of the Scopes Monkey Trial a student concluded that the Trial was reflective of the large tension that existed during the 1920s between the urban and
rural sectors of the nation. The impact of Paul’s excitement caused other students in class to be even more attentive to what was going. Paul’s passion for teaching was also evident later in the class when he asked the students to ponder who decides what is taught in schools. The implications of this question were not lost on the students as they excitedly engaged in a spirited debate on this topic. This impromptu debate on a topic of larger significance than the Scopes Trial is revealing of Paul’s passion for learning. He suggested this question knowing that his students would become energized by it and begin to see how the issues in the Scopes Trial had a larger significance. In Ted’s class he started class off with a review of previous material. For every question a student answered correctly Ted would through a piece of candy to the student. While the students were definitely motivated by the candy reward they were also taken in by Ted’s excitement at their responses and the additional commentary that he would add to each query and response. These two examples are representative of the passion that each of the teachers in the study exhibited. All the teachers were excited when their students were engaged in the learning process.

In addition to the passion each teacher displayed there was also a high level of professionalism on display. James, Ned, and Doug start off each class with a review of the previous lesson and a preview of the upcoming lesson. In this way students activate their thinking and are aware of what is expected from them. Chris starts off his class by reminding the students of the school’s mission statement that promises each of them an education that is well rounded. Each of the teachers’ redirected students that were off task with subtle ques that did not cause the student embarrassment. While not every teacher verbally goes over the days plan like James, Ned, and Doug each of the teachers uses an agenda on the board so that students would
know what was expected during the lesson. The agenda served notice to the students that the teacher was prepared for the class and that certain learning objectives were to be met.

**Alignment between teacher beliefs and practice relative to the influence of professional development.** Drawing connections between teacher beliefs and practice helps to better understand the decisions teachers make and how those decisions find life within the classroom. The topic of professional development is important to understanding the decisions teachers make because these choices could stem from training that the teachers have been exposed to. Within this discussion, the influence of mentor teachers’ passion and professionalism was readily on display although two teachers that did not indicate any mentor influence were among the most passionate and professional. The presence of more formal professional development, such as external seminars and PLC discussions, was widely commended by the teachers but was not as evident in their lessons or assessments.

During teacher interviews there was widespread support of professional development that integrated content with the skills and concepts necessary for historical understanding. Despite this the data gathered did not support that these lessons were finding their way into the classroom, save a couple of examples. The most telling piece of evidence was the assessments as these reflected the main points of emphasis in the respective classes over a period of time. The assessments at East Regional and North High School did not incorporate any evidence of the professional development the staff had recently experienced. At East Regional none of the teachers evidenced the inclusion of criteria identified by Levesque that helped to explain significance or any of the other concepts mentioned in the book. Similarly, teachers at North High School did not include the analysis of evidence into the observed classes or in the gathered assessments. Data from Central High School was inconclusive as the their professional
development time was spent on designing common assessments that were not included in the documentation gathered.

Where a strong correlation existed between teacher beliefs and practice was in the influence that mentor teachers had on the participants’ was modeling the passion and professionalism that was regularly on display. When the participants were asked about influential individuals they often cited mentor teachers that were models for them. Most often the participants said these individuals set a standard of excellence and enthusiasm to aspire to. From classroom observations it is evident that the teachers in this study took the lessons of their mentors to heart. In each classroom there was true concern for learning displayed by the teachers and a love of teaching and history that helped to capture the attention the students.

Research Question #3: To what degree are teacher beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices influenced by the context in which they work?

As teachers can be impacted by the professional development so to can the context of the work place be a factor that influences how they think about, approach, and practice their craft. This is also in line with the socio-cultural framework of this study as environmental factors can impact their thinking and actions. As with the other two research questions this question will explore teacher beliefs and values relative to the work environment and its impact on their teaching as well as how the work environment impacts their actual practice. Table 14 shows the organizational framework for research question #3.

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Framework for Research Question #3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree to which teacher beliefs and values are influenced by the context in which they work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree to which the pedagogical practices of teachers are influenced by the context in</td>
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which they work.

Alignment between beliefs and values and practice relative to the influence of the work environment.

**Degree to which teacher beliefs and values are influenced by the context in which they work.** In exploring the impact that the work environment has on the participants of this study three themes emerge from the data. The themes are derived largely from participant interviews. The first theme, and the most frequently identified by the participants, is the positive influence and support provided by fellow department members. The second theme stems from the participants discussion of the socio-economic condition of their community and how it impacts the students and their teaching. Not every teacher commented on this being a factor, which leads to the final theme. This theme highlights some of the participant’s belief that no matter where you teach the kids are kids. This theme does not believe that socio-economic factors are significant factors that impact teaching. Table 15 provides a list of these three themes.

**Table 15**

*Themes associated with the extent to which the context of one’s work environment influences their beliefs and values.*

- The most common influence on teachers is the collegiality and support offered within their respective departments.
- Some teachers view the socio-economic condition of their community as a factor in how they approach teaching.
- Other teachers minimize the socio-economic element, instead believing kids are kids wherever they come from.
The most common influence on teachers is the collegiality and support offered within their respective departments. Six out of the ten teachers interviewed for this study commented on how the history department they are part of is beneficial and helpful to them. These teachers introduced the department theme of their own free will, as it was not part of a prompt asked by the researcher. Of the remaining four teachers three teachers did not mention their departments at all as influencing them either positively or negatively. The remaining teacher, Bill, did not feel that department time was used well.

Each of the six teachers that mentioned their department as influential to them noted that they enjoyed talking to each other because they all shared a love of history. Matt felt that time spent with his “close knit” department was helpful because each member of the department values the profession. Department time is time where history teachers can talk about teaching history. James and Doug would agree with Matt and add that department time is about sharing best practices so that everyone can benefit. In this way each department member can grow and feel supported. Doug adds that at North High School, where the history department has twenty teachers, there is always someone else that has taught or is teaching the same course as you. This helps as a teacher can always access advice from a peer. Doug captures the mood of many participants when saying, “I think one of the things that is most influencing to teaching is being around other good teachers. You know, when you have good teachers in your department that set a standard of excellence, you have some good modeling. It is hard to be complacent in that kind of environment.”

As mentioned above, only one of the ten teachers was not positive about the influence of his department. Bill feels that too much department time is spent on administrative requests and not enough time has been dedicated to best practices. Despite Bill’s misgivings about the
allocation of department energies, most teachers in this study find their department members as being helpful and supportive of one another. The fact that most teachers spoke highly of sharing best practices is indicative of the influence that each teacher can have on others within their department.

_Some teachers view the socio-economic condition of their community as a factor in how they approach teaching._ When asked the direct question whether or not the cultural environment of the school or community impacted their teaching seven out of the ten participants identified that the socio-economic condition of their community had some impact on how they approached their craft. Within this discussion the teachers from the more affluent school, East Regional, identified a different set problems than those mentioned by the more working class community of Central and the urban high school, North.

_Affluence and its problems._ Matt, who previously taught at Melrose, MA, notices that the expectation at East Regional is significantly higher than the expectations were at Melrose High School. Matt welcomes the higher expectations as he feels he is constantly striving to be a better teacher. He sees himself as more reflective as a result. When asked about the influence of school and community influence on his teaching Chris mentioned that he recently read a book that showed students from affluent communities tend to suffer from higher rates of depression and significant familial isolation with parents that work long hours. In these families the parents are often concerned about their children’s academic well being but sometimes fail to develop nurturing relationships. With this information in mind, Chris mentions that he is more aware of his students’ mental health. To this end he has attempted to alleviate some of their stress, without compromising the academic integrity of his courses, by allowing students to re-write essays in the pursuit of mastery. Chris says that this has had a noticeable difference in the stress
and anxiety levels of his students. Lucy feels that the students at East Regional are more willing and engaged than students at other schools because, “even the worst behaved kid really wants a good grade.” Lucy also notes that high levels of parental involvement, though occasionally misplaced at times, indicate some level of concern about the academic experience of their children. In this environment, Lucy feels that it is easier to focus on teaching when you are not as concerned with class management issues.

*Working class and urban problems.* One of the most common complaints at working class Central High School and urban North High School is the lack of parental involvement. Teachers at each school note that many phone calls home are unanswered or not returned by parents. James notes that North High School tends to be very kid-centered due to the lack of parental involvement. Kid-centered in this context means that the school gets minimal parental support so it is up to the student take corrective action with the support of the staff. Bill sees that same thing at Central High School as he notes that the community is not overly supportive of education. For Bill, the lack of parental involvement is frustrating, as he knows that once the student leaves at the end of the day there will be no support. This is problematic for Bill as he notes that he and the school have often provided as much remediation as time will allow during the academic day and that the student will continue to struggle without support at home.

The respective socio-economic backgrounds of Central High School and North High School also influence the pedagogical choices the teachers make. Ned, who teaches at Central, feels that the working class background of most students results in more time being dedicated to skill and concept development with less time being used to uncover content. At North High School, James comments that he is willing to try new things but because the students are “tough, urban kids” he needs to be ready move on if the students are not receptive to the new strategy.
Ted notes that for many students at North High School the six hours they are in school each day may be the most stable six hours that day. With this in mind Ted strives to provide a safe and secure environment in his classes where the students can embrace the learning opportunities before them.

*Other teachers minimize the socio-economic element, instead believing kids are kids wherever they come from.* Three of the teachers in this study felt that, although each of their respective schools had unique challenges, students are more or less the same wherever you are. This is not to say that every student is exactly the same. What these teachers are commenting on is the fact that every school deals with students that have difficult home experiences, suffer from mental health problems, are influenced by peer behaviors, etc. Doug sees the kids at North as being similar to the students of the high school he attended. Pam agrees with Doug in commenting that the students at Central High School are not much different than the ones she had when she taught in New Bedford, a neighboring urban district. These teachers do not feel as thought they would approach their students any differently than they would students at another school from a different socio-economic setting. From their perspective the problems teenagers face are not limited to one socio-economic setting over another. Kids at urban schools can suffer from depression the same as students from an affluent school.

Based on the comments of the participating teachers the cultural context of one’s work environment has an impact on how they view their work. For many in this study the presence of supportive peers was identified as significant in shaping them. They used their peer relationships to bounce ideas off of others that were familiar with their struggles. Also significant is the impact of the socio-economic background of the respective communities. Many teachers noted that each of their schools had unique needs that could be seen as impacting how and what they
were able to accomplish in the day. Even the three teachers that felt kids were kids wherever they were admitted that each school has a unique set of problems unto themselves.

**Degree to which the pedagogical practices of teachers are influenced by the context in which they work.** One theme emerges from the data regarding the impact of the work environment on teachers’ pedagogical practices. It is that teachers’ pedagogical practices are largely similar at each school. The analysis of observational data and class assessments shows that though each teacher is unique in their own way the pedagogical choices made by the teachers relative to what skills and concepts are covered and the general enthusiasm and professionalism evidenced are largely similar at all three high schools. Table 16 presents the dominant theme related to the influence of the work environment on the pedagogical practices of teachers.

Table 16

**Theme related to the influence of the work environment on the pedagogical practices of teachers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data indicates that teachers’ pedagogical practices are largely similar at each of the three schools regardless of differences in the work environment.</th>
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*Data indicates that teachers’ pedagogical practices are largely similar at each of the three schools regardless of differences in the work environment.* With few exceptions the data supports that students at each of the three high schools in this study are employing similar teaching methods. At each school there was a mix of teacher driven instruction and student centered activities, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, the content, skills, and concepts being covered were similar. In fact, the researcher felt the students or teacher at one school would have fit in seamlessly at either of the other two schools with respect to student engagement and behavior and the teacher’s pedagogical choices. Paul, from North, and Pam, of Central, provide
a great example of this. Both were observed teaching a class to 11th grade Advanced Placement U.S. History students. Other than the fact that one class was observed a 7:30 am and the other class at 12:30 pm, the two classes could have been interchangeable. Paul and Pam asked their respective classes to examine themes that not only revealed a complex understanding of the eras being discussed but also had relevance today. As mentioned earlier Paul asked his students to consider who decides what is taught while Pam asked her students to consider whether taking control of another country is ever justified. The discussions that ensued at both schools evidenced a high level of engagement by the students and also revealed an advanced understanding of the importance of the question to history.

Paul and Pam’s classes were not the only ones that the researcher observed similar pedagogical choices being made. In Ted’s Honor’s 10th grade U.S. History course at North High School and Ned’s 9th grade World History course at Central High School students experienced a review of previous course material and then were allowed to work on student-centered activities for the remainder of the class. In each class the teacher monitored and helped the students as needed and the students were all largely on task. The activities themselves were slightly different but the conceptual understanding was the same. Both teachers were asking their students to explore the significance of various topics. Once again, other than different content, the students could have seamlessly transitioned between either teacher.

Assessment data is also supportive of shared expectations and coverage of concepts and skills needed for historical understanding. In Lucy and Chris’ 9th grade College Prep World History courses at East Regional students are given required to respond to open-ended essay prompts that require them to display understandings of causation, progress and decline, and significance. Students are given a choice in deciding which essay prompt they will respond to so
not every historical thinking and understanding concept is being assessed for each student. At Central High School, Nick has his 9th grade College Prep World History students creating a web page detailing the significance of various World War II battles. At North High School, Doug has his 9th grade students answer a series of short answer questions that not only require an understanding of significance but also of cause and effect. At each of the schools the assessments are largely similar. The expectation of each teacher may differ but the skills being assessed are alike.

Teachers at each of the high schools are remarkably similar in how they approach their trade. The data gathered does not support that the context in which they work has impacted the pedagogical choices they make relative to the teaching of disciplinary skills and concepts. This is not to say that other contextual factors, such as student culture and teacher expectations on assessments, do not have an influence on what takes place in the classroom. Those factors were beyond the scope of this study. Another consideration has to do with the fact that these teachers volunteered for this study. That being said, a more comprehensive sampling with more researcher immersion may be needed. While it may be true that each school has unique issues the teachers at the schools in this study present their students with similar educational experiences.

**Alignment between beliefs and values and practice relative to the influence of the work environment.** There is no concrete evidence found in the observations or documents that confirms the beliefs shared by the participants regarding the impact that a supportive department has on one’s pedagogical practices. One reason for this is that the sharing of ideas amongst department members was not documented as part of this study. With this being said, the fact that
so many participants identified this theme is indicative of its significance, even if it is circumstantial.

Likewise, the observational and documentary data does not support many of the participants’ belief that community and school culture impacts the pedagogical choices they make. Evidence, as stated above, shows that teachers at each of the three schools make similar pedagogical decisions. Socio-cultural characteristics of each school do not seem to be a factor in how the teachers prepare for their classes. This data confirms the belief held by a few of the teachers that “kids are kids” wherever they may be.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings from this study were compiled as a case study conducted with history teachers from three public high schools in Southeastern Massachusetts. The study explores the beliefs and values of teachers relative to current thinking in the field of historical thinking and understanding as well as how those beliefs translate into their practice. Additionally, the study considers the impact of professional development and the context of the work environment as factors affecting the beliefs and practices of the participants. Also significant is that a constructivist, socio-cultural framework provided the theoretical lens by which the researcher analyzed the data and drew conclusions.

With respect to research question #1 the analysis of data from interviews, observations, and documents revealed:

- Teachers’ decision to emphasize certain skills and concepts is based largely on how they understand history.
- Ability level grouping has little impact on which skills and concepts are taught.
- Teachers blend student-centered activities with teacher-centered instruction.
Analysis of data from research question #2 on the influence of professional development reveals:

- Mentor relationships are identified as being influential in shaping the way teachers approach teaching.
- Department sponsored professional development is rarely evidenced in the classroom.

Research question #3, on the impact of the work environment, shows:

- Despite different work environments, most notably the socio-economic make-up the their respective communities, teachers employ similar pedagogical methods.

In summary, the participating teachers in this study revealed that though they do teach the skills and concepts that are associated with historical thinking and understanding there is little connection to or awareness of current scholarly research in this area. Most teachers are approaching their craft by employing their framework for understanding history by emphasizing the skills and concepts they are most comfortable with. Additionally, their professional development that focused on the skills and concepts of historical thinking and understanding, although desired by the teachers, has not found its way into their classrooms. Finally, the interviews, observations, and documentary evidence support that teachers at each of the schools approach their teaching in a similar manner. Each classroom was very much like the others.

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

This study explores the extent to which high school history teachers understand and implement current research and thinking associated with historical understanding. Developmental psychology supports that students have the cognitive ability to understand the disciplinary concepts that support the study of history yet it has long been identified that
students’ understanding of history is limited (Wineburg, 2001; VanSledright, 2011). This has led some researchers to consider the role played by the teacher in the development of historical thinking and understanding (Barton and Vevstik, 2003; VanSledright, 2011) as the teacher establishes the environment where thinking skills and core concepts associated with historical understanding are developed (Levesque, 2008).

Strongly connected to the exploration of teachers’ beliefs and practice relative to historical thinking and understanding is the role played by professional development and the work environment in shaping or influencing their thoughts and pedagogical decisions. This is in line with socio-cultural theories of learning that support the importance of the environment in shaping how and what we learn (Hallum, 1967; Vygotsky, 1994).

Examining teachers teaching history and the belief systems that underlay their pedagogical decisions can help the educational community better understand if today’s students are being exposed to current scholarship in the field of historical thinking and understanding. This is essential as the teacher provides framework and scaffolding for student growth and learning. Ultimately, the development of historical thinking and understanding and the concepts associated with it help to prepare students for their futures as members of a democratic society (Barton and Levstik, 2004).

**Review of Methodology**

This qualitative case study examines ten high school history teacher’s beliefs and practices relative to historical thinking and understanding. The ten teachers were selected from three southeastern Massachusetts high schools during the winter of 2013. The three high schools were selected due to their socioeconomic make-up and the willingness of district and building administrators to allow the researcher access to their schools. One school was a large urban high
school, one was comprised largely of lower middle-class to middle class families, and the last one was a regional school drawn from three towns that are largely populated by middle to upper-middle class families. The different demographics not only allow for multiple working environments to be examined but also reflect a larger cross section of society than the examination of a singular school. Data was gathered through interviews, observations, and by collecting documentary data in the form of assessments and lesson plans. The interviews were framed with open-ended questions related to the study’s three research questions and allowed the participants to guide the interview. The data gathered for this study has provided for a rich, deep narrative.

To ensure the validity of the study a number of steps were taken. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were all accounted for to aid in establishing the study’s validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). First the credibility of the study was achieved through prolonged engagement and triangulation of data. During the time the researcher spent with the participants a level of openness and trust developed where the participants felt comfortable talking to the researcher and sharing their thoughts about their teaching. Finally, the different data collection points allowed for the triangulation of data. Alignment between teacher beliefs and practices would not be possible without multiple data gathering points. It is also important to note the relationship of the observations and the documentary data. Participant observations allowed the researcher to see a “snap shot” of teacher practice while the assessments offered a broader view of topics covered by the teacher over a longer period of time.

One limitation to the study’s methodology is found in the length of time for each observation. The researcher, due to professional obligations beyond this study, observed each participant for one 85-minute teaching block. After conducting the study the researcher believes
more classroom observation time might provide a deeper picture of teacher practice. This, however, is mitigated to some degree by the collection of teacher assessments described above which provide a broader view of disciplinary concepts and skills covered.

To further ensure the validity of this study the data gathered supplied thick description that allows the study’s conclusions to be transferable to other settings. Participant responses in this study reflect a wide range view points on the topics discussed and provide insights on those thoughts. This depth of data allows for others to evaluate the transferability of the study’s findings beyond the participating schools and individuals. Both dependability and confirmability were ensured as the researcher had a recent doctoral student examine the process and product of the study. Additionally, all collected data exists on the researcher’s laptop and in hard copy.

This final chapter is organized in the following sections: discussion of major findings, discussion of findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks, discussion of findings in relation to the literature review, significance, limitations, conclusion, future research, and personal reflection.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

Table 17 identifies the four major themes that emerged through the analysis of participant interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. In identifying the significant themes of this study the researcher placed a greater emphasis on observational and documentary data relative to insights gained from participant interviews. This emphasis emanated largely from the researcher’s belief that the observations and documentary data were reflective of what the participants actually practiced. The interviews, on the other hand, offered more in the way of values, beliefs, and perceptions regarding teaching. While all three sets of data were important to this study the researcher found, in drawing conclusions, that practice reflected what was
occurring while values and beliefs helped bring to the surface what the participants knew and thought about the current scholarly research available on historical understanding.

Table 17

**Emergent themes drawn from analysis of participant interviews, observations, and documentary evidence.**

- Emphasis on specific skills and concepts associated with historical understanding and thinking varies from teacher to teacher.
- Though teachers value professional development that focuses on the teaching of history little of it is evidenced in practice.
- Mentor relationships and supportive departments are strong influences on how teachers approach their craft.
- Despite differing work contexts teachers employ similar pedagogical methods.

**Emphasis on specific skills and concepts associated with historical understanding varies from teacher to teacher.** The overarching theme revealed by the data is that each high school history teacher that participated in this study introduced students to select thinking skills and conceptual understandings associated with historical understanding. Each teacher placed emphasis on the skills and concepts that they chose to focus on. In the process the teachers often neglected other skills and concepts necessary for historical thinking and understanding.

When asked about whether or not there was a systematic approach to introducing students to the different concepts that support historical thinking and understanding one of the participants said there was no system but more of a “shotgun” approach to conceptual development. At East Regional High School, recent professional development centered on a detailed reading and discussion of Stephane Levesque’s *Thinking Historically*, which discusses many of the historical understanding concepts, but little of this has made it into the history
classes that were part of this study. Without a systematic approach teachers are free to develop concepts that they feel are important without attention being given to other concepts that are also significant.

Within this discussion the individual goals of each teacher seem to have a heavy influence on the skills and concepts they choose to develop. For example, Pam identified empathy as one of her priorities. To this end she designs lessons and formulates assessments with empathy as a focal point. For Chris, having students become aware of the dialectic tension present in the world is his motivation. As he stated, it is how he has come to understand history. Other teachers evidenced similar relationships between their beliefs and understanding of history and what concepts they chose to develop. Once again the issue with this is that other important concepts are left out or receive limited treatment.

The “shotgun” approach to teaching the skills and concepts associated with historical understanding and the fact that teachers often impart their understanding of the past to their students reveals the need for greater emphasis on the current scholarly research in the field of historical understanding. It is not that teachers do not want to employ the findings put forth by the research community. What is lacking is an awareness of current research due to limitations in professional development and college degree programs in education programs (VanSledright, 2011)

**Though teachers value professional development that focuses on the teaching of history little of it is evidenced in practice.** Teachers in this study, by and large, applauded and desired professional development opportunities that allowed them to explore either the content of history in greater depth or offered chances for them to gain insight on how to better teach history to their students. Many of the teachers commented that these opportunities are now being given
to them through professional learning communities at their schools and the chance to talk about teaching history was a far more valuable use of their time than a generic offering on teaching in general. In practice, however, little evidence of current professional development activities was evident in each of the teacher’s classrooms.

Many of the teachers in this study have touted the benefits of the professional learning community as a form of professional development. Highlights for the teachers are opportunities to share best practices with their colleagues. Embedded within this is the fact that the shared best practices are specific to the teaching of history. PLC time also allows teachers to share knowledge gained from seminars taken outside of the school day. These have included National Endowment for the Humanities programs and Advanced Placement training among others. As 26-year teaching veteran Ted said, “Teachers talking to teachers is the best idea in a long time.”

Although teachers promote the benefits of the PLC model, and the discussions that occur during this time, there was little evidence of this professional development finding its way into teacher lessons or assessments. North High School and East Regional High School have both undertaken recent professional development initiatives that support the development of concepts important to the study of history yet there is minimal evidence of this finding its way into curriculum. North has placed an emphasis on primary document analysis but lessons and assessments revealed no inclusion of this. Likewise, at East Regional there was little evidence of the disciplinary concepts presented in Stephane Levesque’s *Thinking Historically* present in the classroom.

It should be noted, that although tangible evidence does not reveal the inclusion of professional development in the classroom it could nonetheless help to inform the decisions and thought processes of the teachers. It is entirely possible that the teachers have included some of
the ideas gained from professional development in other lessons or assessments. What is important is that teachers are having these discussions. As more time is spent talking about things that can help students better understand history the likelihood of these things finding their way into classes increases. Another important consideration is that these professional development experiences may eventually find their way into classrooms after teachers have more time to process the information and adjust their teaching.

**Mentor relationships and supportive departments are strong influences on how teachers approach their craft.** Another finding that presented itself was the influence of significant individuals and supportive departments on teachers. Eight out of ten teachers commented at length on how role models have impacted them in their professional life. In addition six teachers mentioned the positive impact of relationships with department members. Collectively, these influential relationships shape how teachers think about and practice their craft.

For the most part the mentor relationships that teachers developed were more grassroots in nature than prescribed by a district-based mentoring program. The natural formation of these relationships helps to explain their impact on teachers. Young teachers and their mentors formed a bond that was not dictated to them but was based on a willingness from both parties to share with one another. The mentor teacher became a role model in many ways for these young teachers. For many, the mentor teacher modeled the professionalism and passion they wished to emulate. Ted commented that his mentor was the kind of teacher he wanted to be while Lucy noted that her mentors where women whose aura evoked professionalism. Other teachers similarly commented that there were traits in their mentors that drew them toward them. For some it could be the impeccable organization of their lessons or the passion they had for teaching
history. Regardless of the reason, the importance of the mentoring relationships as evidenced by the teachers reveals that the mentors were significant to them. That the teachers could easily identify, with detail, the impact these individuals had on them supports that their lessons still resonate in their mentees.

Also important to the teachers in this study are the supportive relationships found within each respective history department. Many teachers noted they truly enjoy working and sharing with their department members as they all have a love of history that binds them together. Teachers at each of the three high schools in this study shared similar stories. Department time is cherished by them as this is an opportunity to share about something they are passionate about: the teaching of history. Another benefit of collegial department relationships is the positive modeling that takes place. Doug’s comment that his department members set a standard of excellence that others want emulate resonates within this study. Other teachers have also commented that their peers have helped them in innumerable ways through the years whether it is by example or working together to overcome an obstacle.

**Despite differing work contexts teachers employ similar pedagogical methods.** Although many teachers identified their work context as influencing their pedagogical choices, particularly with respect to the skills and concepts needed for historical thinking and understanding, their practice did not support this claim.

Seven teachers in this study identified that the socio-economic make-up of the communities they work in had an impact on their teaching. For the more affluent communities teachers noted that there was a high level of parental oversight that required the teachers to be overly attentive to the details in their work. It was also noted that students at more affluent schools struggled with mental health issues due to increased expectations. Working class and
urban school teachers feel that they have little parental involvement and that the communities themselves are not heavily invested in education. The impact of this, as identified by the teachers, is a large number of students that come to school with limited skill and concept understanding, as they have not spent time outside of school practicing these skills. Nick noted that this results in more time being spent developing basic skills instead of more advanced concepts.

Observation and documentary analysis revealed something different from the teachers’ perceptions. Observations showed that there was a blend of teacher-centered instruction followed by a student activity in each classroom. Observations also showed that students, in similar classes at each school, were being asked to do similar things as far as conceptual thought was concerned. In fact, the basic structure of classes at each school and the presence of historical concepts were largely similar. The researcher felt that any one of the teachers could have easily gone to one of the other schools and fit in seamlessly with the lesson they were teaching at their actual school.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the conclusions drawn relative to the impact of school culture and the teaching of historical understanding skills and concepts should be tempered somewhat to allow for the inclusion of a wider range of teachers at each school and an examination of other variables connected to the workplace environment. Included in this is the relative importance of student culture and teacher expectation as it impacts teaching and decision making. That being said, the data from this study does not reveal that the teachers at any of the three schools is any more impacted by the work place environment when it comes to the teaching of disciplinary concepts and skills associated with historical understanding.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework
This study was informed by constructivist learning theory, most notably Lev Vygotsky’s socio-cultural perspective. Vygotsky’s advocacy for the importance of social interaction as being central to one’s development is critical to the examination of the extent to which teachers understand and support the development of the disciplinary concepts and thinking skills associated with historical thinking and understanding as defined by current thinking and research, and the degree to which their professional development and the context in which they work impacts their own understanding and teaching of historical thinking and understanding.

Constructivist learning theory is appropriate as a frame for this study on two levels. From the student perspective the pedagogical decisions made by the teacher have a direct impact on student learning. Also significant is the application of the constructivist position to the teacher as a learner. Although intended for use with children, Vygotsky’s theories have adult application as well. Specifically, Vygotsky’s theory can help us better examine the decisions that teachers make and why they may have made them.

**Constructivist Learning Theory.** Caprio (1994) notes that constructivist learning theory has the child at the center of learning. This means that the child’s interests drive learning and that learning is an active endeavor where the child constructs knowledge. In this scenario the teacher’s role is to assist the child in the development of new knowledge.

Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural perspective focuses on the relationship between the child’s internal developmental processes and the child’s interactions with others. He felt that social learning went hand in hand with biological development. An important aspect of the socio-cultural model is the belief that student/teacher relationships are important to one’s development (Cole, 1985). It is within this discussion that Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development is significant. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is described as the
distance between the child’s current developmental level and a higher level of development that comes with adult guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). In the ZPD the teacher becomes more like a coach that helps the student achieve a higher level of awareness as opposed to a deliverer of information (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003).

In practice, Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory finds application as students are required to reconceptualize their understandings as they advance in their studies. Doing so requires the guidance of experienced teachers and time being spent on the development of basic historical concepts (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens, 2003).

**Pedagogical decisions made by the teacher have a direct impact on student learning.**

The findings of this study reveal that teachers are introducing students to some of the concepts necessary for historical understanding but are not doing so in a systematic way. As Paul noted, history teachers are more or less free to focus on the skills and concepts that they feel are appropriate. In doing so a number of issues arise.

One is that some teachers emphasize one or two concepts instead of giving equal consideration to the range of skills and concepts that contribute to greater historical understanding. For example, Ned and Pam mention in their interviews a wide spectrum of disciplinary concepts that they introduce to their students. Among the concepts they cover throughout the year are causation, significance, empathy, progress and decline, and continuity and change. On the other hand, James comments that he “hammers” the students with causation and significance. While this is critical to the development of historical thinking and understanding, so too are the other skills and concepts. Lucy and Ted also provide insight to this discussion as they comment on the heavy emphasis they place on the analysis of evidence. Their focus on evidence indicates that they value it more than the other concepts associated with
historical thinking and understanding. The examples provided here are revealing of the freedom history teachers have to emphasize the skills and concepts that they perceive and understand to be important. The issue is that other skills and concepts are either ignored or limited by the pedagogical choices of the teachers. This concern is shared by Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt (2005) who posit that historical concepts can help students organize and think about the extensive amount of data that exists in history.

Another problem that arises from the lack of a systematic approach to teaching the skills and concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding is that there is no evidence found in the data indicating the use of any defined criteria to frame discussions on the disciplinary skills and concepts. Paul commented that, at no time, has he heard the words profundity, relevance, or frequency mentioned when discussing significance as a concept. The failure of teachers to frame the teaching of concepts using the criteria defined by current research indicates that each teacher explains the skills and concepts as they understand them. Doing so is problematic as each teacher may bring a different understanding to the students and the students are left to sort through the various explanations of concepts. The issue with this is that each student is exposed to different concepts with varying expectations depending on which teacher they have.

Within the context of Vygotsky’s ZPD the teacher is scaffolding learning for the students relative to historical thinking and understanding. The teachers are attempting to guide their students toward a higher conceptual understanding for the concepts they are focusing on but the failure to do so in a way that is supported by other teachers limits the effectiveness of this. One limitation presented in this study is that, depending on the teacher, some concepts are left
unattended. The second limitation presented is that concepts and skills that are introduced lack a uniform framework.

**Application of the constructivist position to the teacher as a learner.** Vygotsky’s ZPD is not limited to younger learners alone (Gergam, 1995; Werstsch, 2004; Levesque, 2008). Fenwick (2000) identifies that people learn when they are part of a community of learning where they are interacting with other more experienced members of that learning community. The findings brought forth in this study confirm this. Teachers in this study commented on the influence that more experienced mentors had on shaping them as educators. For Lucy, her mentors modeled a professional approach to teaching through a focus on preparation that she has used throughout her 37-year career. For Pam, her mentors taught her the importance of preparing detailed lesson plans and of teaching content as well as skills and concepts. For both Lucy and Pam their classroom lessons supported the effect that their mentors had on them. This is the case for many of the other teachers in this study and supports Vygotsky’s ZPD.

Teacher support of PLCs is also supportive of Vygotsky’s ZPD, despite the fact that there is little evidence of activities from PLCs finding their way into classrooms. In the PLC, as described by teachers in this study, department members gather together and to work on different aspects of what they do. At North this included the sharing of best practices. At Central time was spent designing common assessments and at East Regional a book study on historical concepts was undertaken. In PLCs the sharing of ideas allows all teachers, more experienced and less, to influence one another. In this environment the spirit of Vygotsky’s ZPD is alive. Each teacher may have experience to offer the others.

**Limitations of the theoretical framework.** Though there are many connections to the theoretical framework described above, the study also reveals shortcomings. For one, and more
specific to Vygotsky’s ZPD, the study’s findings reveal that even though teachers largely favor the use of PLCs there is not much evidence to support that the activities presented in them have found their way into the classrooms. North High School, for example, has spent time working on the analysis of primary source evidence yet there was no indication of this through the examination of observations and documentary data. Likewise, there is little evidence that the information on concepts related to historical understanding presented during the book study at East Regional has found its way into the teacher’s lessons.

On a more general level, the socio-culture context of Vygotsky’s theory promotes that in addition to the role played by more experienced peers in shaping one’s development that there are other influences such as the influence of the dominant culture of the school or community (Cole, 1985; Hansman, 2001). The findings of this study raise questions about this. Teachers in this study are somewhat split with respect to this. Some say the school and community culture impacts how they teach. Others comment the work environment had little to no impact on how they approached their teaching. Paul’s comment that kids are kids wherever they are resonates strongly with the latter view. In practice, however, there is strong evidence that the socio-cultural differences and varying value systems regarding education that separate the schools has little impact on how teachers teach and what concepts they introduce to their students. As noted in Chapter 4 of this study, teachers at each of the schools employ similar pedagogical methods. It seems that Paul’s belief that kids are kids is accurate. This, then, has to make us look more carefully at the impact of school and community culture on how and what teachers teach.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The findings of this study evidence many connections to the research put forth in Chapter Two. Within this discussion, however, there is a level of complexity that presents itself.
Namely, connections between the findings and the existing literature are strong on one level but are limited on another. In short, teachers in this study evidence many connections to the scholarly literature on historical thinking and understanding but also have shortcomings in these same areas as well.

**Emphasis on specific skills and concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding varies from teacher to teacher.** Although teachers in this study touch upon many of the skills and concepts identified in the scholarly literature on historical understanding there is little evidence that supports a systematic approach to this. Instead, what is found is a “shotgun” approach, as Paul refers to it, where teachers emphasize skills and concepts that they understand or are familiar with. In doing so, the teachers are presenting two problems. One is that some concepts necessary for historical thinking and understanding are minimized or neglected completely. The other is that the concepts that are introduced to the students are not grounded in current research. A contributing factor to this dilemma stems from the lens teachers use in examining the past. Another factor that contributes to this is the lack of preparation teachers had in college with respect to teaching history as a discipline.

**Epistemological concerns are largely ignored.** One of the dominant themes found in the scholarly literature is the importance of epistemology to the study of history as it underlies how individuals come to understand the past. Both Wineburg (2001) and VanSledright (2011) place great importance on being aware that each student is unique and has past experiences that shape how they understand history. Failure to understand the epistemological background of the students or failing to probe preconceived notions of the past makes the development of historical understanding all the more difficult. While some of the teachers acknowledge a general understanding of the backgrounds of their students there was little evidence of this impacting
pedagogical decisions. Students were grouped together as being either from an affluent background as was the case at East Regional or “city kids” as was the case at North High School. At no point in time was there evidence to indicate that the teachers probed the students, as individuals for their understanding. It should be noted that probing the students for prior understanding could have occurred at a time when the researcher was not present.

Another epistemological connection can be found with how teachers approach and practice their craft. As noted in Chapter Four, many teachers emphasize skills that reflect their understanding of history. This was exemplified by Chris’ focus on the dialectic nature of the past and Pam’s desire that her students exhibit empathy when exploring the past. What is important for teachers to consider is what is lost when their epistemological orientation dominates what and how they teach. An emphasis on one concept or topic means that other concepts and topics will be left out.

Many concepts necessary for historical thinking and understanding are evidenced in classrooms but with limits. A variety of concepts and skills necessary for historical thinking and understanding come up in discussions with teachers and are apparent in teachers’ classrooms. The problem with this, as mentioned earlier, is the absence of criteria to help define, explain, and frame these concepts as well as teachers developing only a few of the concepts while leaving others out. The failure of teachers to attend to epistemological concerns also limits the conceptual development of students as many of the disciplinary concepts are rooted in how students view the world (VanSledright, 2002).

Each teacher in this study evidenced at least one of the disciplinary concepts found in the scholarly literature. In doing so, however, data reveals the teachers are not grounding their presentation of disciplinary concepts in the scholarly literature. For example, in the teaching of
significance none of the teachers framed their discussion around the five criteria of significance as defined by Levesque (2008). The failure of the teachers to establish criteria to explain significance leaves the students without scaffolding that would help them better understand and judge the relative significance an event.

Another commonly taught concept is causation, which is often grouped together with significance and called cause and effect. Data from this study shows that causation is often presented in a linear fashion of one thing led to another thing. Levesque (2008) warns against this as it supports the oversimplification of causation. Evidence from class activities and assessments reveal that some teachers ask students to identify only one or two causes of an event. The effect of this is that students come to see that an event can be acted upon by only one or two causes instead of a multitude of causes that vary in significance to the event. In doing so these teachers risk missing important nuances that add meaning to the past and contribute to greater historical understanding.

The analysis of evidence is also identified as a point of emphasis by some teachers. Scholarly literature discusses the need to engage in both internal and external criticism of evidence for greater historical understanding (Levesque, 2008). Yet, in the classes where primary source evidence was observed there was little discussion, for example, of an author’s bias (external criticism) or evaluation of the sources reliability (internal criticism). Analysis of evidence as often used to transmit information not as a way to develop the concepts needed for historical understanding (Barton, 2001). One of the participants acknowledged that until recently he completely ignored discussions on topics such as when a document was written or to whom it was written and how these may factor into the documents meaning. Failure to discuss these
factors not only limits historical thinking and understanding but it can also cause students to question the validity of any interpretation of the past (Lee, 2005).

As with significance, causation, and evidence the disciplinary concepts of continuity and change, progress and decline, and empathy are present at times in different classrooms. Also like significance, causation, and evidence these concepts are not grounded in the criteria identified in the scholarly literature. For example, one of the teachers discussed how continuity and change was a regular part of his course. In doing so he focused on the relevance of the past to the present. While this touched upon the colligatory nature of seeing an event within the larger context of history this teacher limited his students understanding to a degree. Students were introduced to viewing change in history as a series of singular events that had some effects instead of a state of affairs that was ongoing (Lee, 2005). Progress and decline as well as empathy witnessed similar treatment. The topics were part of some teachers’ lessons but were not explained or used with criteria to frame the discussion. The impact of this is multiple explanations of a given concept from different teachers. In the end the student may be left wondering how to evaluate and interpret the past.

In addition to the lack of criteria to understand disciplinary concepts another problem area is the fact that some teachers covered a broad range of the concepts and skills identified in the scholarly literature in their classes while others limited their coverage. Those that introduced their students to more concepts gave their students a greater opportunity to understand the past. Five of the teachers in this study, however, limited the breadth of their concept development by emphasizing only one or two concepts in their courses. By narrowing student exposure to important disciplinary concepts these teachers are limiting the ability of their students to develop second order thinking skills and historical understanding (Gardner & Boix-Mansilla, 2006).
The essential takeaway from this study, relative to the scholarly literature, is that although the teachers touched upon some of the disciplinary concepts needed for historical thinking and understanding they did so without a systematic approach. The result of this is teachers making decisions on what concepts to emphasize based on how they understand history. To further compound this, when teachers did discuss disciplinary concepts they often did not frame their discussions around current research that provides criteria to guide these discussions.

**Disciplinary approach versus content recall.** As presented in Chapter Four there were differences amongst the participants with respect to the importance of teaching history as a disciplinary science or letting content coverage dominate pedagogical decisions. Eight of the teachers saw content and conceptual development as intricately linked. A couple of teachers commented that it would be difficult to teach history, and have the students understand anything, if content and concepts were not brought together. Two other teachers believed that, when push came to shove, they would forgo skill and conceptual development to cover the content the curriculum requires. The view held by these teachers supports the concerns voiced by VanSledright (2011) when he laments that there are a large number of teachers that focus on fact-based teaching with little attention paid to the concepts that lead to greater historical understanding. Stoskopf and Bermudez (2008) identify that content only coverage will not develop in the students the skills and concepts needed to apply learning beyond the immediate lesson. Ultimately, the findings of this study evidence that most teachers are intent on blending content with concepts and skills as called for by current scholarly research while others are more concerned with content coverage.

**Mentor relationships and supportive departments are strong influences on how teachers approach their craft.** One of the key findings from this study highlights the positive
impact of both mentor and departmental influences on the passion and professionalism that teachers exhibit. Eight out of the ten teachers interviewed for this study commented at length on how they had influential mentors that have helped shape them as educators. The impact these people had on the participants was evident from the detail provided by the participants as well as the enthusiasm in their voices when recalling the impact of these people. Among the most commonly identified themes noted by the participants was the modeling of professionalism and displaying a passion for teaching that was motivating.

In practice, the participants evidenced the lessons taken from their mentors. This data supports Hansman’s (2001) emphasis on the importance of peer interaction to a teacher’s development. It was quite apparent from teacher interviews and observation that the influence of the participant’s mentors was significant. All of the teachers that participated in this study were well organized, energetic, and concerned about the students in their classes. The scholarly literature also supports the importance of the passion and energy of the participants as being critical to good teaching (Stoskopf, 2001). The researcher’s observations support that the students in these classes were largely engaged in the learning process and that the participants obvious passion for the teaching was an influencing factor in keeping the students attentive to the learning process.

Another critical connection to the scholarly literature can be found in the importance of “communities of practice” to the development of good teaching (Hansman, 2001). Though Hansman describes these as self-organized groups made up of like-minded individuals the PLCs in each of the schools participating in this study largely fit this description, save for the self-organized aspect. The PLCs, though created by administrative decree, bring together a group of high school teachers that share a desire for teaching history. A large number of participants
commented positively on their history department’s PLC and on their departments in general. Within the PLCs, and the departments in general, teachers noted the support they have received over their careers from their peers and the positive relationships they formed. One teacher noted that his peers high expectations for themselves rub off on other department members and lead to better teaching throughout the department. The department members motivate one another through their example and professionalism.

**Though teachers value professional development that focuses on the teaching of history little of it is evidenced in practice.** This finding offers some complexity to the previous discussion on “communities of practice” as described by Hansman (2001). A large number of participants noted that they found professional development time spent discussing history and the teaching of history most rewarding. The participants highlighted conceptual discussions and the sharing of best practices as positive outcomes of PLC or professional development time. Additionally, the participants acknowledged the benefits gained from external seminars that were content focused. These seminars provided the teachers with additional content that they could use to enliven their courses and share with their peers. The complexity within this finding is the fact that, although the teachers commented on the benefits of these activities, the evidence does not support that the things gained from these “communities of practice” are making their way into the classrooms. Teachers at both East Regional and North have been exposed to professional development that is drawn from current literature and research in the historical community yet evidence of this in the classroom is not apparent.

**Despite differing work contexts teachers employ similar pedagogical methods.** Hansman (2001) comments that the established culture of a school can impact the pedagogical decisions that teachers make. When questioned about this many of the participants felt that they
were different teachers due to the environment they worked in. Those that worked in urban environments and lower middle class communities commented how the lack of parental involvement impacted not only how they approach teaching but also the level of student engagement. One teacher noted that it was difficult to reach the student whose career ambitions were to work on a fishing boat or in a warehouse and whose parents supported that choice. The more affluent upper middle class community teachers also felt their environment impacted their teaching. With more parental involvement these teachers felt they were more attentive to smaller details as the parents are more likely to question them and their decisions.

What was observed, however, differed from the teachers’ views and from the conclusion found in Hansman’s (2001) work. In practice almost all of the teachers employed similar methods regardless of the school they were at. The researcher felt that any of the teachers could seamlessly transition to any of the other schools in this study and teach how they had been teaching when observed. The data indicates that when the bell rings the decisions made by the teachers in this study are remarkably similar. As one of the participants commented, “Kids are kids wherever they are.”

**Summary.** While there are many connections made to the literature by this study there are also a number of limitations revealed. With respect to the participants’ understanding of disciplinary concepts and their inclusion of those concepts in class, the study shows that the participants understand the concepts to some degree but without an awareness of the criteria that help define the concepts themselves. What results are limited conceptual understandings for students.

Another connection made between the literature and the findings of this study relates to the impact of mentors and departmental peers. Once again, the study’s findings reveal the
complex nature of human interactions. The study supports current research connected to the positive influence a mentor can have on a peer. This is seen through the participants professionalism and passion. The study diverges slightly from current scholarship when it comes to the role played by departmental relations. Participants commented that they benefited from time spent in departmental PLCs but the observational and assessment data indicates that the topics developed during these times have not been employed in the classrooms. Practice and perception don’t seem to align.

Each of the findings summarized above may be viewed and understood through the framework of socio-cultural theory. Notably, the work of Lev Vygotsky and his work on the Zone of Proximal Distance was significant. In each instance learning and understanding is socially situated. Influential peers are dominant components of how the adult teachers interact with one another and grow. Likewise, the teacher is the influential peer for the students.

Finally, the findings of the study diverge from the scholarly literature when it comes to the impact of the work environment on how teachers teach. As mentioned above, the teachers felt one thing but the data showed another. Teachers believed that different work contexts impacted the pedagogical decisions they made, but data showed that the pedagogical methods used at each school were remarkably similar. As has already been mentioned, further exploration of this area is warranted as other variables could impact these conclusions.

**Significance**

In a global sense the development of historical thinking and understanding in students is significant not only for the individual student but also for the collective good of the nation and the global community. The skills that comprise historical thinking and understanding are skills that are essential for productive membership in a pluralistic, democratic society (Barton and
Levstik, 2004; Wineburg, 2001). Understanding causality, continuity and change, and evidence are important if citizens are to think critically about the decisions they are encouraged to partake in. The focus of this study on teachers and their understandings results from the view that teachers have a significant impact on student outcomes (Barton and Levstik, 2003; Koppich, Humphrey, & Hough, 2006; VanSledright, 2011). Wineburg (2001) notes that teachers spend very little time engaged in the study of how to teach students the disciplinary skills and concepts that underlay historical thinking and understanding. When this happens, teachers tend to revert to teaching how they experienced it or how it is being modeled by their peers. What follows are students who are passive learners and not thinkers that construct their own narratives about the past (Levesque, 2008). Further motivation for this study was found in Grant’s (2001) statement that more studies are needed that explore the intersection between teacher methodology and student learning.

With this in mind the purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which teachers understand and support the development of the core disciplinary concepts and thinking skills associated with historical thinking and understanding as defined by current thinking and research in the area of historical understanding. To further understand this topic the study also examined the degree to which teacher’s professional development and the context in which they work impacted their own understanding and teaching of historical understanding.

The study has shown, through interviews, observation, and documentary artifacts that teachers of history while introducing students to the core disciplinary concepts and thinking skills necessary for historical understanding are not doing so in a systematic fashion. The failure to provide a systematic exploration of the past is problematic for two reasons. First, teachers tend to introduce students to core concepts and skills that frame their understanding of history.
This leaves out other concepts and skills that are important to historical thinking and understanding. The second issue is that in teaching students about the core concepts teachers fail to develop an understanding of the concepts that is based on the criteria identified by the scholarly community. As such, the students are limited in their ability to apply the concept beyond the current lesson.

To shed light on the above findings this study also explored the impact of professional development and the work environment on the pedagogical decisions the teachers made. What is revealed in this analysis may be of particular value in remedying the concerns mentioned in the previous paragraph. One important finding is that while teachers value the opportunity to work together in Professional Learning Communities with other history teachers they have yet to apply the knowledge gained in their classrooms. This evidenced at both East Regional High School and North High School where PLC time has been dedicated to discussing centered some skills and concepts associated with historical thinking and understanding. East Regional engaged in a book study that focused on the disciplinary skills and concepts while North High School has emphasized the analysis of evidence. What is needed is more professional development in this setting on how to teach history with an outcome that can be used in classrooms. It seems that the schools in this study are in fact moving this direction but have not quite reached the application stage. Also of value, is the role that influential peers can have on teachers. Each teacher identified one or more influential individuals that helped shape them as educators. With this in mind, what is needed in the immediate future are mentors within a shared discipline that will model teaching that is based on current scholarship.

This study can be beneficial in helping school districts design a professional development plan that can better prepare high school history teachers to teach students the disciplinary
concepts and thinking skills needed for historical understanding. The findings show that teachers enjoy professional development that focuses on what they do in the classroom. If this is important to them and helps them to better prepare their students for life beyond high school it is imperative that professional development respond to their needs. An additional benefit of this study is that it can help inform districts and history departments how to approach revisions to history curriculums. With an increased emphasis on disciplinary concepts and core thinking skills revised curriculums could provide a map for new and experienced teachers alike.

**Limitations**

The small sample size of this study limits the transferability of this study’s findings beyond the three participating schools and possibly beyond the participants themselves. At each of the participating schools the sample size represented less than half of the potential participants. This was ratio was more pronounced at North High School as it has 20 history teachers on staff with only four teachers participating in this study. Having an increased sample size from each of these schools would provide a clearer view of what disciplinary concepts are taught, how they are taught, the impact of professional development on the teachers, and the effect of the work environment on the teachers and their pedagogical decisions with each of the schools.

Another limitation is the limited time the researcher had to observe the participants. Due to professional obligations on the researcher’s part, he was not able to make multiple visits to the participant’s classes to observe their teaching. More time in observation could have added more data that would have either further confirmed the findings found in this study or allowed them to be modified to some degree.
Conclusion

This qualitative study of ten high school history teachers from three different high schools has shed light on what the participants know relative to historical understanding and how they implement their knowledge. What has been revealed is that teachers have shown a limited understanding of the core disciplinary concepts and skills needed for historical thinking and understanding. This lack of understanding results largely from the epistemological orientation of each teacher as they tend to develop concepts that reflect their understanding of the past. Potential remedies for this include a professional development program that cultivates the development and implementation of disciplinary concepts. Much of this could be accomplished within the confines of the Professional Learning Community that received much positive feedback from the teachers in this study. Another remedy is the development of a peer-mentoring program that emphasizes the teaching of history based on current scholarship.

Future Research

The implications for further research abound in this study. One that is significant is the need for a more in depth examination of why teachers teach the way they do. Within this discussion the role of mentors, college course work, professional development in the work environment, and the impact of departmental culture can be further explored. The scope of this study begins to shed light on these important areas but much more is needed. More schools and teachers would help paint a more complete picture of why teachers make the pedagogical decisions they do. Topics that grow from this include the extent to which a mentor teacher or department interactions can truly influence the way a novice teacher develops concepts and skills. Data from this study has shown that passion and professionalism were passed from mentor to mentee but nothing was revealed about the teaching of concepts and skills. Another
topic that would be helpful is a more longitudinal study of the impact of professional
development that is focused on the inclusion of core concepts and thinking skills. At root, these
topics touch upon the epistemological foundations of the teachers and, in a larger context, the
epistemological basis of how history has been taught in this country for years.

**Final Reflection**

This study is near and dear to my heart, as I truly love teaching history. For years I have
struggled with the issue of content coverage versus skills development, never feeling that I have
come to a satisfactory solution on how to balance the two. I previously felt that if I spend more
time on concept development I may be leaving out significant details. Through this study I have
found that I don’t need to sacrifice content to cover a concept. The two are intricately connected.
One learns content by understanding concepts and greater conceptual understanding can lead to
increased content awareness. Beyond my new found peace with respect to content coverage and
conceptual development I am also far more aware of the relationships between the various
disciplinary concepts and aware of the criteria that define them.

Another major take-away from this study is my appreciation and awareness of the
importance of theoretical frameworks. I struggled in the early stages of this project to identify a
theoretical framework that would provide a lens through which I would explore this study.
Ultimately, I came to Vygotsky and socio-cultural theory. I identified with the socially situated
nature of learning that socio-cultural theorists support. I found that for the greater part of my
professional life I have been aligned with a constructivist view of learning and saw teachers as
“influential others” that could guide students to higher levels of understanding. While immersed
in this study the socio-cultural perspective was dominant. I saw it evidenced in teacher-to-
teacher relationships as well as student-to-teacher interactions. I also found the socio-cultural
perspective in the fact that teachers, including myself, often taught history as they had come to understand it and that their lens was influenced by “influential others”. While I feel that I have always held this worldview my research and work in this study has helped me better define and understand my own views and thoughts.

In addition to an increased awareness and knowledge of historical understanding this study has also revealed to me the large number of committed and passionate professionals that work in the three high schools that participated in this study. Each of the teachers that participated brought an energy to their teaching that was palpable. Their students, for the most part, were engaged and on task and their lessons interesting. I have also realized the need for improved professional development opportunities for history teachers in our schools. The shortcomings brought forth from this study are not the fault of the individual teacher. They have shown themselves to be caring, professional educators that want what is best for their students. What is to blame is weak professional development, beginning in college, that does not focus on how to teach history as a discipline. This problem is then exacerbated in our schools with professional development that fails to address disciplinary concepts. On a positive note, the professional development future has potential for improvement with the creation of Professional Learning Communities provided that the departments focus on developing conceptual awareness in their members.
References


University Press.


*Human Development*. (38) 332-337.


Appendix A

Permission Letter Superintendent of Schools/Building Principal

September 2012

Dear [Superintendent of Schools] and [Building Principal],

My name is Erich Carroll. I am a social studies teacher at Old Rochester Regional High School and am currently working on my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern University. I am conducting a study regarding the extent to which social studies teacher’s belief’s and practices reflect current research regarding the development of historical understanding in high school students. This study requires data to be collected at school, and I am requesting permission to elicit participation from teachers and conduct the study at your school during the school day.

As mentioned above, I plan to explore not only the beliefs that high school history teachers with respect to current research in historical understanding but also the extent to which those beliefs are reflected in their pedagogical practices. I am most interested in teacher awareness of current thinking in the field of teaching history and the degree to which this thinking is being shared with students.

It is my hope that this study will help schools and teachers engage in constructive dialogue about meaningful teaching of history. Many of the concepts that compose historical understanding are necessary for the successful functioning of a democratic society and are, therefore, essential to for our students.

Should you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me directly at school (508-758-3745), at home (508-997-1213) or the chairperson of my committee, Dr. Christopher Unger at Northeastern University, (617) 909-1360. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Erich Carroll
High School Social Studies Teacher
Old Rochester Regional High School, Mattapoisett Massachusetts
Doctoral Candidate, College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University, Boston
Appendix B

Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name: Erich Carroll

Title of Project: Extent to which Teacher Beliefs and Practices Reflect Current Research on Historical Understanding

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
I am inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a social studies teacher at one of three public high schools selected for this study.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which social studies teacher’s beliefs and practices reflect current knowledge about historical understanding.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to participate in this study, the researcher will ask for your participation in an audio-taped interview that focuses on the values and beliefs inform your teaching of history and how those beliefs are reflected in the classroom. Additionally, the researcher will ask to observe your teaching for one period/block and/or examine your lesson plans/assignments to gather more data pertinent to the study. After data has been gathered each participant will be offered the opportunity to review the data from sessions to check for accuracy. As with all other parts of this study, this is voluntary.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?
Interviews will take place at a school during a convenient time and place for the participant and in a private office. Interviews will not exceed a one-hour each. Observations will take place during a time that convenient for the participant and will last the length of a class period.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks involved in take part in this study. All responses will be kept confidential and the research will be destroyed after the project is completed.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help schools develop more appropriate professional development opportunities for history teachers.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in the study will be held in a confidential manner. Only the researcher of this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way. All audiotapes, observation forms, and documents will be destroyed upon completion of the study. All email links will be broken and documentation obtained from those links will be destroyed.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
You are not required to participate in this study. Stopping your participation will not affect your professional standing. At any time during the study, you may refuse to answer questions or end your participation. If you chose not to participate, ignore this form.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Erich Carroll  
Old Rochester Regional High School  
Work # (508) 758-3745  
Email ecarroll@orr.mec.edu

Chris Unger, Ed.D  
Principal Investigator –Overseeing Study  
Northeastern University, Boston  
Campus # 617-373-2400  
Email: c.unger@neu.edu

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is not cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. Should I be selected, I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.
Research Participant (Printed Name)

Research Participant (Signature)  Date
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Participants in Exploration of Teacher Beliefs and Practices in Historical Understanding

1. Please tell me about yourself as an educator?
   a. Tell me about the journey you took to get here- teaching at history at this school today?
      i. What influenced you to become a history teacher? Have you always wanted to be a teacher? Is/Was there an influential individual or experience that influenced your direction?
      ii. Why did you decide to teach at your current school? Do you have a connection with this town/school before becoming employed here?
      iii. What was your college experience like? What were the strengths and weaknesses of your preparation to become an educator? Did your program prepare you to teach history or to teach?
      iv. Could you describe the history teacher’s you have had from your past? Which ones were most influential? Why?

2. What are your values/beliefs with respect to the teaching of history?
   a. What does the ideal classroom/lesson look like?
      i. What drives/motivates the design of your course/lessons?
      ii. How did you come to develop this vision of the perfect classroom?
         1. Was it experience, workshops, peer observation, etc.?
      iii. Does your classroom resemble the one you described?
   b. How do you deal with content versus skill development? Is this a struggle?
      i. Are there skills that you believe to be essential? Please explain.
   c. To what degree, if any, does the context of your work environment influence or impact your thinking about the teaching of history? (Your context can be broad and/or narrow).
   d. Has your outlook on teaching history changed over time? Why?
## Appendix D

### Observation Form

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<td>Time at end of observation:</td>
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<td>Location:</td>
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<td>Participants:</td>
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<th>Descriptions</th>
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Appendix E

Study Participation Request (email)

Dear Teachers (name to be filled in),

I am soliciting your input as part of research study I am conducting on teacher beliefs and practices relative to historical understanding. To this end, I would like you to participate in an interview with me where we can discuss your views with respect to the teaching of history and how those views find life in your classroom practice. The interview should take no more than one-hour to complete and can scheduled at your convenience. Additionally, I would like the opportunity to observe you teach a lesson and/or examine a lesson plan. The observation will be as non-intrusive as you desire and will provide me with broad picture of your teaching style and beliefs.

I have asked you to take part in this study because your experience as a social studies educator will provide valuable perspectives and insights into the teaching of history. The data you provide will help to paint a picture of how history educators think about and practice their work. Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the interview, you can stop at any time.

Your decision to take part in this study is completely confidential. The research report will not identify you in any way.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at 508-997-1213 or at carroll.eri@neu.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Thank you,

Erich Carroll.
Doctoral Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix F

Thank You Email and Interview Scheduling

Dear Teacher (name to be filled in),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your insights and input is greatly appreciated and will add significantly to this study. To this end, I would like to schedule a time and location for us to conduct an interview about your beliefs relative to the teaching of history and how those beliefs find their way into your classroom activities. I am flexible as to when and where we meet and want to find a time and place that is comfortable for you. If you could respond to this email with a time and place to meet I will be happy to meet you. I can come to your school at some point in the day, meet you at a neutral site (say a library), or you can come to my school.

If you would like to set this up over the phone I can call you or you can call me at 508-961-8274.

Thank you again and look forward to meeting you.

Erich Carroll
Doctoral Student
Northeastern University